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INTEGRATIVE TEACHING OF ENGLISH SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English at high schools in Indonesia has undergone several changes as reflected in the curriculum used. The changes indicate that there have been a continuous analysis and evaluation on the teaching of English. In addition, they also show that the view about the nature of the process of teaching and learning English has changed. For instance, when people (experts and practitioners) hold a view that learning a language means learning its structure/grammar, the emphasis of teaching English was also on grammar. Then when people believed that learning a language was merely habit formation, repetition, drills, and psychomotor skills were dominant. And when 'functional notional approach' was prominent, the curriculum also focussed on function and notion. Now teaching English that is based on the revised version of the 1994 curriculum is also in line with the current teaching approach used in many countries; that is communicative approach.

There are some things that need to be highlighted in this curriculum when it is compared with the previous curricula. Firstly, it gives a bigger space for the teachers to be more creative. Since the curriculum only provides themes and sub-themes, the teacher can develop them into topics and find suitable and interesting materials in any books. Although 'reading' and the components of the language seem to be the main focus of the curriculum, the other skills (listening, speaking, and writing) are not neglected. In fact, the underpinning principles state that the aims of teaching English is developing students' communication ability which include reading, listening, speaking and writing proportionally. And, the mastery of language components is used on the purpose of increasing the communication skills, both in oral and written forms. Then, meaningful/communicative approach is suggested (Kurikulum 1994).

The notes above indicate that English has to be taught in its entity. In other words, the four language skills have to be integrated and the components of the language (structure and vocabulary) have to be incorporated. This has to be done in term of reaching the final goal; that is communication ability.

To manifest such kind of teaching is not always as easy as someone can think. On one side the teachers feel that they are 'forced', if we may say, to finish all the materials stated in the curriculum in a limited time. On the other side there is a contradiction between what the teachers want to do and the target they have to reach. What they want to do here means what they think and what they believe they have to do in an ideal English teaching. This can be based on their knowledge or experience. While the target they usually want to reach deals with the materials of the final examination which is known as EBTANAS. These problems often lead to the condition where integrative and communicative teaching cannot be completely and well applied.

FORM AND MEANING IN A COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE

In language teaching, function and form are two substantial and inseparable elements. It can be simply explained by stating that there will be no meaning if there is no form, and form will be useless if it does not have any meaning. Littlewood (1981) states that one form can describe a number of meanings. In contrast, one meaning can be described in several different forms. The variations depend on social and situational factors.

Littlewood also affirms that in order to understand meaning someone has to be able to comprehend the form/structure and vocabulary, have knowledge about the communicative functions, and can combine and interpret the functional meaning meant by a speaker. An approach in language teaching that accommodates the unity of form and meaning is well known as Communicative Approach. Jack dan Richards (1986) state that this approach is based on the work of the Council of Europe' and writings of some experts and linguists such as Wilkins, Widdowson, and Candlin.

Howatt in Richards and Rodgers (1986) classifies this approach into two versions, weak and strong versions. The strong version stresses that language is acquired through communication. Because of that, activating the knowledge about the language and developing the language system need to be improved. Unlike the strong version, the weak one suggests the importance of providing opportunities for the learners to use the

language for communication purposes. In short, it can be said that the learners should learn how to use the language appropriately.

The decision to apply one of these two versions is of course influenced by some factors such as supporting environment and needs. Furthermore, the differences in applying it may vary in accordance with how the users (practitioners) interpret it (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Whatever the differences are, the variants have at least one similarity; that is, they pay attention to form and meaning. In other words, this approach holds a principle that language teaching should not be dominated by the explanation about the language (form), but it should not neglect the form itself. This means that those two interwoven elements are equally emphasized in this approach.

When we look over the 1994 curriculum, we will find that both form and meaning also get attention. Forms are explained in relation to their meanings and they are incorporated in such a way. Although the curriculum suggests names it as meaningful approach, principally, they have the same underpinnings. The differences are vague. As a comparison, in the meaningful approach the students are encouraged to think and understand the teaching materials, either to listen, receive the information and memorize it. Instead, they are required to interpret it into a logical acceptance. To reach this aim, the students need to discuss, debate, to do role-play and other learning activities (Depdikbud, 1999).

If the teachers scrutinize the curriculum in order to understand what to teach and how to teach it they will agree with the theories of teaching and learning a language (English) explained above. The next task is applying it in teaching the four language skills.

TEACHING ENGLISH INTEGRATIVELY

Regardless of the possibility of using one language skill in a certain situation for a certain purpose, the four language skills that cover 'listening, speaking, reading, and writing' are hardly separable in daily communication. To illustrate, when Putri has a dialogue with her friend, she may speak, listen to, then speak again. In another occasion,

like in the classroom, she may read, speak, listen, or write. Also, we can notice how this happens when we communicate each other.

Given this fact, English teaching should also consider ways of integrating the skills. In relation to this, Hammer (1989) states that language skills are never completely separated. He stresses that it is impossible that someone speaks without listening or writing without reading. For that reason, these language skills should be integratively taught to students. This suggestion is in line with the application of communicative language teaching.

Some distinctive characteristics of CLT pointed by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) indicate that teaching and learning the four skills are insinuated. For instance, students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings. Another characteristic says that teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language. Certainly, to interact and to work with the language means to use the language in its wholeness.

Brown (1994) also highlights the reasons of why the skills have to be integrated. He states that “the integration is the only plausible approach to take within a communicative, interactive framework. Then, he adds that

- 1) Production and reception are quite simply two sides of the same coin; one cannot split the coin in two.
- 2) Interaction means sending and , receiving messages.
- 3) Written and spoken languages often (but not always) bear a relationship to each other; to ignore that relationship is to ignore the richness of language.
- 4) For literate learners, the interrelationship of written and spoken language is an intrinsically motivating reflection of language and culture and society.
- 5) By attending primarily to what learners can do with language, and only, secondarily to the forms of language, we invite any or all of the four skills that are relevant into the classroom arena.
- 6) Often one skill will reinforce another; we learn to speak, for example, in part by modeling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read.

In teaching and learning, integrating the skills is not only brought about by the nature of acquiring and using them in communication, but also by the positive effects it can produce. First, a skill can be reinforcement of another one. Second, integrating the skills give the students more opportunities to test their ability. Next, by integration,

teachers can be more creative in making the class lively. Finally, integrative teaching can make the students become more motivated since the class is more interesting.

Since curriculum 1994 suggests a theme-based teaching, integrating the four skills is apparently reasonable. The theme-based instruction deals with current topics that can serve the students' multiple interests. Topic variation will enable the teacher to create some activities by which the four language skills can be applied. For a certain theme, for example, the students may read a written conversation for a view minutes, then practice the conversation (speak), listen to the teacher's explanation, read an article, and write the summary of the article.

In spite of the recognition on the virtue of the integration, manifesting it in the creative and interesting classroom activities seems to be quite difficult for some reasons. Some teachers state that they run out of time when they try to create activities that include the four skills. Some think that they do not need to teach the four skills since the focus is on reading. Others say that the final examination will not deal with all skills, so it is not important to make efforts to apply the four skills. The following samples of application may help the teachers to cope with the problems in integrating the skills in the classroom or stimulate them to create some other more interesting ways.

1. Integrating Two Language Skills

There are various activities that can be done through integrating speaking and listening skills with the components of the language. Listening or speaking activity can start the activities.

a. Listening and Speaking

If the initiation step is listening, it may serve as a prespeaking activity or as listening for information. The teacher can ask the students to listen to a text that she/he reads or listen to a tape recorder. If the text read by the teacher exists in the students' textbook, the teacher must remember to ask the students to close their books. A sample procedure of conducting the instruction can be as follows.

- In the listening step, the students are required to listen to a short text read or played (once or twice). The students may be allowed to take notes or just listen. If

they are to take notes, the teacher has to give a model first, how to take a note efficiently and effectively. In addition, the teacher has to tell the students what they have to do after they the teacher reads the text.

- The students are required to answer some questions related to the text. The questions can center on the content of the text or certain words or phrases.
Or certain students might be asked to ask questions about the text to their friend(s). The choice depends on the level of the students and their English background knowledge.
- Then, the students can be required to report the content of the text. This can be done individually or in groups. If it is done in groups, the students have more opportunity to have a discussion in their groups. By this way, the students can practice their speaking skill.
- As a follow up activity, the students can pick up a certain sub topic from the text and discuss it with friends and the teacher. If the students are beginners, the teacher can elicit the discussion by giving certain questions or comments.
- At the end, the teacher and the students can focus on the components of the language related to the text.

b. Speaking and Listening

Speaking activity can take place before listening, especially if the textbook serves a dialogue in the first part. An alternative procedure suggested below can be followed.

- The students practice the dialogue in groups or in pairs. The teacher can ask the students some questions about the dialogue first in order to make sure that the students understand it.
- When a group or a pair of students practice the dialogue, the others listen and pay attention.
- Then the teacher can ask the students to give comments on their friends' performance. She/he also can ask the students ask some questions about what the content of the dialogue.
- Last, a certain aspect of grammar and vocabulary may be highlighted and discussed.

c. Reading and Writing

Some studies have shown that reading and writing are closely related. Perhaps because of that integrating those skills can be practiced quite easily. As the main focus of teaching English is reading skill, reading texts are available in all textbooks. On top of that, the teachers are sure that they have to teach this skill. Not only that, enjoyable activities can result in the integration. In practice, reading may precede writing or vice versa. In order to integrate it with writing, the following steps can be taken.

- The students read a certain reading text after pre-reading activity (es). What and how the students should read, of course, have to be based on the purpose of reading itself (i.e. reading for main ideas, specific information or details).
- The writing task is also based on what the students have done in relation to the purpose set. If the students read for details, they can be required to write a paragraph as the summary of the text. If the students have to find the main ideas, they can be required to develop a paragraph based on the main ideas. Or, they may be assigned to write some sentences dealing with the specific information they get from the text. If the teacher thinks that the students are not yet able to write without guidance, she/he may introduce guided writing.
- Discussing or explaining the language components may take place after reading or writing activity. If it is done after reading, the teacher can pick a certain aspect of grammar or/and vocabulary from the text to be explained or discussed.

d. Writing and Reading

Writing can be used as prereading activity. Instead of asking questions as a common way of relating the students' schemata to the new topic, asking them to write anything related to the topic of the reading text as depicted in the following steps can be applied.

- The teacher writes a sub-theme or a topic on the board.

- The students are asked to write some sentences about the theme. The time given should be limited because this is only the prereading activity. The teacher can also help the students by giving guided questions.
- The teacher can ask some questions about the students' writing in order to help the students relate what they have known and what they are going to read later.
- The students then read the text and compare it with their writing.
- The language components can be discussed after that.

2. Integrating Three Language Skills

Integrating three of the four language skills and incorporating the components of the language is also possible. The sequence of presenting the skills can be varied.

a. Listening, Speaking and Reading

After doing the activities as explained in 'point 1 a' above, the students can continue it to reading activity. The text provided has to be related to the topic of listening and speaking.

b. Listening, Reading, and Speaking

Starting the activities from listening can also be amusing. The procedure can include the following steps.

- The teacher reads a paragraph from a text and asks the students to answer some questions about it.
- The students read the next paragraph (s).
- The students retell briefly the text orally. This can be done individually or in groups. If it is possible, the teacher may ask the students to create a short dialogue about the topic raised in the text and practice it in front of the class.
- The grammar and vocabulary can be discussed after reading or speaking activity.

c. Reading, Speaking and Listening

Reading can precede Speaking and Listening like the following steps.

- The students are required to read a text .

- Then, they talk about the text either in groups or in class discussion. The teacher can also ask the students to create a dialogue based on text or about the topic discussed in the text.
- As the listening activity, the teacher can ask the students to pay attention to the dialogue performed by their fellows and ask them some questions related to the dialogue.

d. Speaking, Reading, and Writing

This variation can be applied by combining the steps mentioned in the previous variations. For instance, the procedure can cover the following steps.

- The students are required to convey their opinion about a sub-theme written on the board orally. The teacher can stimulate the students by giving some related questions.
- The students read a text with the theme that has been discussed beforehand.
- The students are asked to write the summary of the text.

3. Integrating Four Language Skills

The four language skills and the components of the language can be integrated, especially if the time available is long enough. As in the previous variations, the classroom activity can be started from any skill. To illustrate the two examples below may be used.

a. Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing

To conduct an instruction by pursuing this sequence can cover the activities below.

- The teacher mentions a word or phrase denoting the theme or the sub-theme of the lesson. Then, she/he can ask the students to state their opinion about the word/phrase. If the students get difficulty in stating their ideas, the teacher should elicit them through questions.
- The students are then required to listen to a recorded text discussing the topic related to the sub-theme.
- After that, the students are asked to answer some questions about the text.

- Next, the teacher distributes a text (the text that has been listened to) and asks the students to read.
- The teacher and the students discuss a certain aspect of grammar and vocabulary
- Last, the students are assigned to write the summary of the text.

a. **Writing, Listening, Reading, and Speaking**

If the teacher wants to integrate the four skills and the components of the language in this way, the following steps might be helpful.

- The teacher provides a topic to write. She/he may help the students with ideas through brainstorming.
- After that, the students write a paragraph in accordance with the teacher's instruction.
- The teacher chooses certain students to read their writings in front of the class, while the rest listen to them.
- Then, the teacher asks ^{the} students to read a text about the same topic. And the students are required to compare the text with their writing.
- The teacher picks a certain aspect of grammar from the text and explains or discusses with the students. She/he has to give exercises about the grammar and the vocabulary.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The importance of teaching English as a whole is supported by theories of how a language should be taught. In 1994 curriculum this is also explicitly stated. In fact, one of the underpinnings principles held state that teaching English is aimed at developing students' communication ability which include reading, listening, speaking. This means that the students have to get an opportunity to develop their oral and written communication ability.

In order to reach the goal, the four English skills have to be integratively taught and the components of the language (grammar and vocabulary) have to be incorporated. And the process of teaching and learning has to be based on the principles of communicative

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language teaching. The samples provided in the previous part of this paper may help the teachers in applying the integrative English teaching in the classroom.

Although some may think this can be done easily, others may complain for some reasons. For those who argue that the time available is rather limited might be able to overcome their problem by pursuing the curriculum and selecting the suitable materials from the textbook(s) used. In other words, the teachers are suggested not to merely follow what the textbook says: they have to be selective. Then, for those who feel that they do not have sufficient techniques of integrative teaching and competence are suggested to work collaboratively with their fellows. In fact, through collaborative teaching the teachers can learn each other and this will help them to improve their teaching. In addition, they also can discuss with certain people that they think are more knowledgeable.

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