

ENHANCING INTERACTIVE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES WITH THE INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this article is to show teachers how they can reinforce interactive classroom activities by integrating the language skills. This is to say that students should be encouraged by teachers to be active in the classroom during the lesson through different activities assigned to them, and integrate all the four language skills during their interactions.

Keywords: *Enhancing, interactive, classroom activities, integrated language skills.*

RESUME

Cet article vise à montrer aux enseignants comment ils peuvent renforcer les activités interactives dans la classe en y intégrant les quatre sens. Cette situation nécessite l'encouragement des apprenants par les enseignants pour qu'ils soient actifs en classe pendant la leçon, ceci à travers différentes activités leurs assignées tout en y intégrant les quatre sens.

Mots-clés : *Renforcement, interactif, activités de la classe, intégration des sens de la langue*

INTRODUCTION

During this globalization period, English language is gaining more and more the ground all over the world and in all fields. It has become a popular language. According to the Economist (1996), English continues to be the world standard language, and there is no major threat to the language or to its global popularity. For this reason, it has acquired the status of a Lingua Franca as it is spoken worldwide. Seidlhofer (2004) assumes that nowadays, there is a noticeable emergence of the term English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a way of referring to communication in English among speakers with different first languages. Williams (2012) in his turn assumes that it has rapidly become not merely the most wide spoken language and widely taught foreign language worldwide, indeed, it has achieved the status of Lingua Franca in many spheres.

However, it is a vehicle that is used globally and will lead to more opportunities. As said above, English language plays an important role in education, trade, tourism, medicine, diplomacy, research etc. Its growth and use in different domains denotes its supremacy on other languages. Most scientists have recourse to the English language for the publications of the results of their research if they want to be read worldwide. For all these reasons teachers have a great responsibility of teaching their learners how they should communicate easily in the target language. It will be rendered possible through different activities done in the classroom to accustom them with such facilities. Thus, this article aims at showing how a teacher will train his learners to be accustomed in using this language thanks to different activities and the use of all the four language skills.

Indeed, I have divided this article into three points. The first point will deal with the definition of the concept interaction and different activities bounded to it. The second will concern the integrated language skills and its importance in the teaching. The third point will show how different classroom activities will be used by integrating the four language skills. A conclusion will be drawn to end this article.

I. INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

The concept interactive derives from the verb to interact, meaning to communicate with or to react to (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2001). This definition simply means the way one person reacts to the speech of another. Dagarin (2004:127) shows that this concept is made up of two morphemes: inter and action, to mean that it is a mutual or reciprocal action or influence between two participants holding a dialogue on a given topic.

From www.researchgate.net, accessed 13th February, 2023, it is said that interaction is used to maintain conversation, to teach or to interact with the participants involved in the teaching and the learning processes in the classroom. On his turn, Buehl (2013) sustains that interaction:

Contributes to the language acquisition in a way that it makes learners independent and more focused towards on learning .They also enable them to maintain a comfortable pace of learning, build strong research communication skills, enhance their abilities for the better understanding of the lesson in the classroom.

It is clear that from interaction, learners are involved in the process of learning.

In general, the most classroom interaction exchange has three terms:

- Teacher asks,
- Learner answers,
- Learner asks another and that one answers, the teacher evaluates the answers.

This sequence can be repeated many times a day in the classroom. It is quiet exact that this is the model of interaction that can increase learners' motivation in producing their own speech.

According to Morgan and Saxton (2002:75) the classic concept of learning is that it occurs when the teacher asks the questions and the students can answer them, but the reality is that learning does not occur until the learner needs to know and can formulate the question for himself. The advantage of interaction is that it develops learner's fluency, this point of view is sustained by Richards (2006:14) by asserting that fluency is the natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitation in his or her communicative competence.

It should be noted, however that, interaction is one of the activities which cannot be neglected in the classroom. Richards and Rodgers (2001:76) believe that they are those activities which enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage learners in communication, and processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction.

Furthermore, the classroom is considered as a community, its members are students, they have to work in group, share information, guess meanings, debate, dramatize or play all together in small group, large group, dyad, and all these activities need interaction among students.

Indeed, interaction needs to be extended outside the classroom to help learners increase learners exposure time and actual use of the language in their settings. According to Holliday (1994:54), interaction can best develop the communicative skills that learners use in their real life.

As far as the objectives of interactional activity are concerned, it makes the learner responsible of his own learning and the central element of the teaching learning process. It also provides high motivation, strength, knowledge, team spirit and freedom of expression, and contributes to develop competences.

Let's say that, during interactive activities, the teacher has the following roles: a designer, a programmer, a diagnostician, a researcher, an organiser, a manager, an innovator, a mentor, a motivator, an evaluator, a collaborator and a partner.

According to Xhemajli (2016:32) these roles depends on the types of interaction holds in the classroom, that is between the teacher and the learners and vice-versa, or among the learners themselves. However, the teacher is a motivational speaker in the classroom as he has to control all the activities through this roles where the interactional activity takes place.

In so doing, as drawn from www.academia.edu. Accessed 12th February, 2023 an interactive teacher listens to his students and helps them to solve problems by themselves as well as to mutually exchange good ideas with the way his actions and attitudes may bring participation in the classroom. In his turn, Xhemajli (op.cit:36) sustains that the teacher' job is to convince the learners that education fulfils their needs, he is a learner's partner. It is better to bear in mind that there are some interactive activities that should be used in a lesson. Before tackling them, let's take into account Xhemajli (op.cit) view stating that to improve and develop inductive teaching approach of the two-way communications, experience shows that the teacher should look for a variety of interaction options that focus on the combination of pair-shares, small group work and whole group work discussion, and meet the assumptions that motivation and participation should be required.

From the above quotation, it is clear that the participation of students as a learning process and as such, learning activities involve participation, and practical skills, teachers will need to promote learners' interaction in order to help them succeed and feel part of the teaching learning process. So, some techniques proposed as I drew them from www.nearpod.com accessed 10th February, 2023 are:

- A) *The use of gamified interactive activities*: It means that students should interact when they are given educational games. These games can increase their social and emotional learning skills such as problem solving collaborating with peers, behaviour management and more. The role of the teacher in this activity is to check how students are doing.
- B) *Demonstrate steps, labels, and sorting with interactive diagrams*: with such activities, students are involved in problem solving and critical thinking activities. They may be given diagrams to interpret by showing their understanding of the concept being taught.
- C) *Provide opportunities for creative expression*: students can express themselves creatively through drawings. The **Draw it** activities as it is called can provide interactive tools for students to represent problem situations and working space which teacher can see in real-time the progression of student thinking as they write.
- D) *Prioritize classroom discussions*: the teacher should encourage classroom discussions to create a rich dialogue, facilitate discussions for all students and give students multiple opportunities to see how their peers solve problems and hear the language they use to describe representations.
- E) *Matching activities for students to self-assessment*: students should assess themselves to see how they are understanding the lesson.
- F) *Keep students focused by launching activities on-the-fly*: it means that teachers can add activities to drive adaptive teaching and differentiating personalized instructional decision making the accelerate learning for all.

According to Bygate (1987) teachers are often searching for activities to make their classroom more interactive and promote the target language use. These interaction activities are considered as classroom activities. Harmer (1993:45-46) sustains that these students are somehow involved in activities that give them both the desire to communicate and a purpose which involves them in a varied use of language. Such activities are vital in the classroom since here students can do their best to use the language as individuals, arriving of a degree of language autonomy. For Allen (1984:152) classroom activities frequently encourage creative use of the language by students. Among these activities I can enumerate: information gap, problem solving, role play and simulations.

1) Information gap activities

These activities push learners to ask each other questions and help to make the classroom language more meaningful and authentic. They take place among students. The teacher is a facilitator. For Harmer (1993:3) these activities are those in which students are given different bits of information and then asked to share separate information in order to complete task. In her turn, Littlewood (1984:85) considers these activities as communicative ones. She assumes that the learner has to activate and integrate his pre-communicative knowledge and skills, in order to use them for the communication of meanings. As proposed by Bygate (idem), the two learners involved in the task will be asking each other questions to which they do not know the answers. They are referential questions different from display questions. Learners are involved in the learning. Dagarin (2004:135) says that one may argue that the more the initiative comes from the students in the classroom interaction, the more learning is taking place. Here students fetch out certain information which are by all means interactive and therefore must find a way in which to fill the gap. To ask for this information gap activities are:

- Twenty questions which contain close questions and open questions.
- Guessing: a learner work with his partner, he has an object chosen for the task. His partner is going to guess through questions asked.
- Finding partners: in this activity, students are given a card with an image. To picture this information gap students must circulate and try to find the person with the same image by asking yes-no questions. These questions must be more descriptive so that learners may discover the needed information easily or at once.
- Words on back: in this activity, students work in large group or as a whole class. Each student has a word attached to his back, the students must circulate asking each other yes-no questions to determine what word is on the back.

- Fill in the blank: students work in partners, they are both given tables with missing information. What is missing in one partner table and vice-versa. Students must ask each other questions to discover their tables.

2) Problem solving activities

According to Elmore et al. (1996) problem solving is a technique in which learning and teaching are done by involving a certain problem. To solve it, it needs student's cooperativeness in small or large group. It makes student have self confidence in learning. As assumed by Canale and Swain (1980) the problem solving activities are the focuses of the communicative interaction strategies.

3) Role playing activities

For Harmer (1993) the importance of the role play in the theory of education is that it feeds the teaching-learning process as they are fun and motivating students express themselves in a more forth-right manner, they include the world of the classroom in a whole, and they help to develop the vocabulary. Needless to say, role-play brings classroom situations to new life, and things like relia, journey entertainment, club, cinemas, videos, storytelling in which students play the role of characters make bring the learners in all process which is more interactive and funning.

4) Simulation activities

As far as these activities are concerned, Rod (1999:173) shows that like any meaningful game, simulation for English Language Teaching is a stress and a need that emphasizes the cooperative group approaches to communication based, problem solving and communicative interaction in language learning process. Let's say that simulation activities take place of fluency goals in language teaching and as said, simulations provides an enjoyable classroom methodology. Bygate (idem) sustains that simulations promote concept attainment through experiential practiced the use of simulation activities in the classroom engage the students so more than other activities.

II. LANGUAGE INTEGRATED SKILLS

This concept implies the integration of the four language skills in the teaching of English language to learners. From www.geos.net retrieved 30th January, 2023, it is assumed that integrated language skills focuses on the four main skills reading-writing, speaking and listening through a communicative language teaching methodology. New grammar patterns are learned in the concept of a conversation or real-life situation. These skills are grouped in two sets:

- Receptive skills: listening and Reading
- Productive skills: speaking and writing

They are charted as follows:

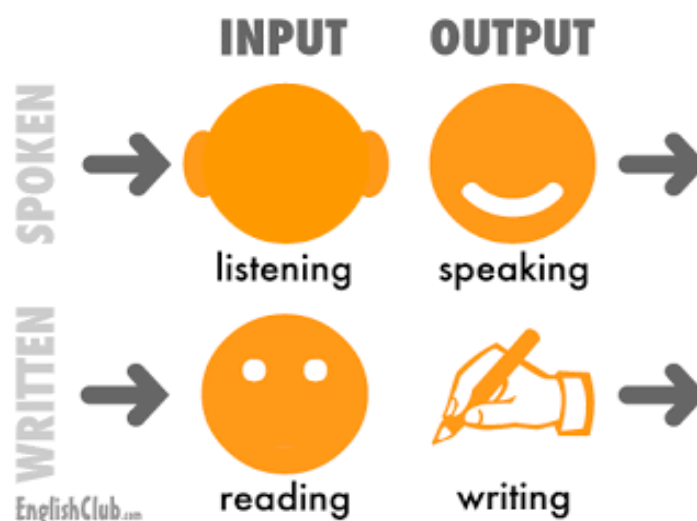


DIAGRAM 1.1 Adapted from Widdowson (1983:57)

As it can be seen, to integrate the language skills in ESL/EFL instruction, teachers should consider the following steps as suggested in www.geos.net accessed 1st April, 2021.

↔ Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom, (content based, task-based, or combination). It means that during a lesson the teacher can base his teaching on the content, but mainly in integrating all the skills, or even if he assigned a task to learners, this task should comprise all the skills.

↔ Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated.

↔ Choose instructional materials, text books and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking and writing as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary, and so on.

↔ Even if a given course is labelled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate tasks.

↔ Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills.

In brief, a teacher is the responsible of the success of the integration of language skills in his teaching or in the way he will assign tasks to his learners. What is more important is to integrate all the skills in any activity for

facilitating their uses by the students. I can assume that integrating skills allows to build in more variety into the lessons because the range of activities will be wider.

Following elt.dinternal.com, ua product retrieved 1st February, 2023 it is said that, instead of just having listening, the students can have speaking, reading and writing practice. This can raise their motivation to learn English.

However, students will be engaged in various activities to practice English including listening tasks, role playing and stimulating discussions. All basic needs will be developed through these skills. Practicing language in the class and out of the class will be easier instead.

In his turn, Hunter (2009) assumes that according to many theorists and practioners, learning a language consists of acquiring the four skills i.e. reading, listening, speaking and writing, and four sets of enabling knowledge-grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and cultural understanding. The four skills are needed to develop the communicative competence, in other words, the ability to use the language for communication in authentic situations. 'knowing when and how to say what to say what to whom' said Larsen – Freeman (2011:121).I can consider that the four sets of knowledge are the building blocks needed for gaining proficiency in any of the skills.

According to Widdowson (1983:57) the aims of language teaching courses are very commonly defined in terms of four skills: speaking, understanding speech(or listening),reading and writing. These four skills are very important in the language teaching. I can say that speaking and listening are related to language expressed through aural medium and reading and writing related to language expressed through visual medium. As it can be seen, Widdowson (op.cit) ascertains that speaking and writing are said to be active or productive skills, whereas listening and reading are said to be passive, or receptive skills.

It should be noted, however, that while teaching in the classroom the teacher is bounded to use all the four kills so as to facilitate the use of the language as a tool of communication. He cannot stick to one skill, but integrate all in his lesson. Smith and Walker (2014) confirm that one of the traits of any language is that it provides a system that can convey meaning. This is very crucial in the sense that after their studies learners should use the four skills in their everyday life. Wilson (2014) ascertains that if students are to leave school armed with knowledge and skill necessary to participate as citizens and thinkers, they need to learn about the ideas, theories, facts and procedures of a discipline. They need to become fluent with the linguistic systems of a field, developing the four skills and knowledge associated with inquiry in that field. In short one should know that the teaching and the learning of a language should be based on the mastery of all the four skills.

III. ENHANCING INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES WITH LANGUAGE SKILLS INTEGRATED: SUGGESTIONS

Integrating language skills with interactive classroom activities is not an easy task for teachers. It should be noted that making decisions on what to teach and how to do it is a great challenge for most teachers. However, the degree of difficulty to succeed is real in the teaching of these activities. Hemingway (1986:18) notes that teachers face a range of problems such as:

- a) How to plan a lesson to meet the different needs of all the students with the four skills
- b) How to give all students equal attention, preventing the more advanced learners from feeling bored and the less able feeling lost or left out.
- c) How to work through a given syllabus or textbooks.

Moreover, to introduce the four skills on the teaching with interactive activities, teachers should pay attention at learners' interests, purposes and needs. The importance of communication, both oral and written should be taken into account.

For instance, for listening (cd) or tape, the teacher reads first the text aloud or says something, here he intervenes two skills at the same time; reading and listening, and then he requires his students to read silently and give answers to the assigned questions. While reading and giving answers, students are submitted to two skills; reading and speaking, meanwhile others are introduced to listening and speaking because they may react to what others say. At the end the teacher may ask to his learners to tell briefly what they have listened in their own words to seek if learners may use the speaking skill. After his speech, others are to give their contribution by appreciating or giving their point of views.

Unquestionably, the teacher may start with speaking skill activities in the classroom to introduce others later. one should know that speaking tasks are always used as complement to another task, for example listening or reading comprehension. In speaking skill students should work in pair or in group depending on their level. As it is known that all students have not the same level, it is appropriate to mix them that is lower level students with high level students. This combination will help low ones to make an effort in both listening and speaking. Maddalena (2002:5) considers that combining lower level students with the advanced ones is the most appropriate way of grouping learners. According to him, this combination incites low ones to make an effort of speaking the target language.

Furthermore, once students are given a speaking task, the teacher should multiply different tasks which will favour learners to integrate other skills in their speech, which is listening, reading and writing. He may ask to one of his

learners to say something about a given matter, ask him to write the central idea on the board and read it loudly. All these exercises will entail them to the correct use of the language skills under the teacher supervision. By working in this way, the pair work or group work will be encouraged in the classroom.

As far as reading comprehension tasks are concerned, they go along with other skills in the way that in the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, and even pronunciation, the teacher uses this skill to have access to other skills. He can correct pronunciation, he can ask him to write on the sheet of paper what he has read on his own words or read loudly what he has written. The challenge in the use of the integrated language skills in the teaching concern first of all what to teach? The teacher should select the materials in which he will include all the four skills in the teaching of his lessons. This situation deals with the syllabus, the materials and the topics.

Secondly, he should know how to teach. This assumption means that he plans his lessons and prepare them well. He thinks about the classroom management, about the participation of his learners to different tasks he will assign to them including the four skills, organizing pair work, unified group, dyad, small group and large group.

Lastly, he should bear in mind to whom he teaches, is it low level students? High level? Materials adapted to their levels? Accordingly, if the teacher has a good disposition with some effort and reflection, the use of the integrated language skills in the classroom will not be impossible, despite some difficulties he will face.

It should be noted, however, that the procedures given in different examples above can be called **Focal skills**. This term means as it is drawn in www.geos.net accessed 1st February, 2023 that they integrate **skills in particularly** effective way by exploiting certain skills as tools for developing others.

Integrating language skills in the teaching is foremost the mastery of the language, as it includes all the skills of the language with the accelerative globalization and digitalization in the 21st century. Drawn from eric.ed.gov. accessed 12th January, 2023 it is said that the way people live, interact, work, learn and thrive in different domains, students should also be equipped with what is called the 4Cs (communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity)

Indeed, 4Cs focus on the development of the learning process. Integrating the skills is beneficial as it allows the teacher to build the variety of activities into the lesson. Reading from elt.dinternalcm.ua accessed 12th January, 2023, it is confirmed that integrated approach helps to build new knowledge and skills on what students already know and can do. I can assume that from the above

assumption the importance of integrated language skills works at the level of realistic communication, which provides the development of the language in all its facets, and helps students to develop their competence in the target language.

It should be noted however, that this integration of skills is mainly useful for learners as they are able to transfer what they learn to new and adapted situations. As I read it in elt.dinternal.co.ua retrieved 12th January, 2023 stating that the type of learning that occurs through integration also fosters the development of lifelong skills such as self-directness, organization, problem solving, communication and self-assessment.

Moreover, it is obvious that this integration will enable students to learn English fluently and accurately. People use all language skills in a normal situation to communicate. From eltguide.com accessed 12th January, 2023 some reasons for integrating the four main language skills are given.

↔First of all by integrating the four skills ,the students experiment and take risks with learning the foreign language which makes learning more lovely .It is quite clear that learners will be pleased to combine the four skills even though it seems too very difficult at the beginning.

↔Secondly, by integrating the four skills, we are providing a certain input that becomes a basis for further intake, which in turn will become a new output. This is to say that learners acquire new materials that they will use in their speech.

↔Thirdly, production and reception are two sides of the same coin. Students will interact with others because he possesses he capacity to apply the four skills.

↔Fourthly, this integration will reflect the interrelationship between language, culture and society.

However, all these reasons show how learners can do with the language in their real life. As assumed in eltguide.com retrieved 12th January, 2023 the use of integrated language skills leads to the 'PPP' (present, practice, and produce) approach. It is to show that what learners have learned, will be practiced and produced in a communicative activity in their environment.

In short, I can say that the importance of integrated language skills is to develop and encourage the use of language in real life communication. This is to say that student will be provided with authentic materials which will facilitate the fluency and accuracy in the use of language thanks to different activities.

CONCLUSION

In brief, this article has shown to teachers how they should reinforce interactive activities in the classroom with the language integrated skills. I have first of all defined the concept interaction as a way of exchange in the classroom either by two learners, a group of learners among themselves or the teacher with his learners. The advantage is that students are involved in their learning by communicating. I have pointed out some activities that can be used with interactive activities such as: information gap, problem solving, role play and simulation.

Secondly, I have tackled the integrated language skills as the manner of using all the skills during a lesson in the classroom. These skills are grouped in two: receptive skills that are listening and reading, and productive skills that are speaking and writing. The teacher should integrate these skills in a lesson by using different interactive classroom activities. Such integration with the combination of activities will facilitate the use of the target language during the training and will be used in life by students after their studies. It should be noted that such teaching should be a continuum in all the lessons.

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