

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS: WHY LITERATURE SHOULD BE A PART OF THE EFL CLASSROOM?

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Annotation: Integrating four language skills in English lessons provides benefits for both teachers and students. This article provides a comprehensive overview of key aspects of interconnectedness of four language skills, examining each of them in detail, significance of integration, and the role of literature in language learning process. The paper examines the benefits of including literary texts in the learning of English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Communicative comprehension, receptive skill, language proficiency, approach, grammar rules, vocabulary acquisition, nuances.

The four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – are not isolated entities, they are intricately interconnected and work together to facilitate effective communication. Understanding this interconnectedness is crucial for language learners and teachers alike. These skills are often interconnected and work together to help learners achieve fluency and proficiency in the language. For example,

reading helps improve writing and vocabulary, listening helps improve speaking and pronunciation. While writing reinforces grammar understanding, speaking provides practice for listening skills. So that reason, many teachers take interaction of four skills into consideration during their lessons. Now, we will talk in detail about these four skills in the following paragraphs.

Listening and speaking is considered receptive and productive oral skills. Listening is the foundation for speaking. We learn how to pronounce words, structure sentences, and use appropriate intonation by listening to others. The more we listen, the better we become at speaking. Listening provides immediate feedback during conversations. We can adjust our speaking based on how our listeners respond. Moreover, it exposes us to new vocabulary and grammatical structures, which we can then incorporate into our own speech. And repeated exposure to spoken language through listening improves our fluency and pronunciation.

When it comes to, reading and writing, they are receptive and productive written skills. Reading exposes us to different writing styles, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. This knowledge is essential for developing effective writing skills. Reading can spark ideas and provide inspiration for writing and significantly expands our vocabulary, which is crucial for effective writing. It provides models of correct grammar and syntax, which we can then apply in our own writing. Furthermore, reading helps us understand how texts are organized and structured, which we can then use as a guide for our own writing.

Our ability to recognize words when listening helps us identify words when reading. We also rely on our knowledge of grammar and context to understand both spoken and written language. The process of formulating our thoughts into spoken language can prepare us to write those same ideas down. Reading can expose us to new expressions and ideas that we can then use in our spoken language. When writing, we mentally 'speak' the words in our head. Similarly, we listen and speak with awareness of grammar and phrasing that we also use in writing.

Reading: Beyond Decoding, Towards Communicative Comprehension

Reading, as a receptive language skill, is far more complex than simply decoding written symbols into sounds. True reading comprehension involves actively constructing meaning within a communicative context. This entails drawing upon a range of competencies, each crucial for effective interpretation. Grammatical competence allows readers to understand the structure and meaning of sentences, as well as the lexical choices within them. A robust vocabulary, paired with a grasp of grammatical rules, permits accurate parsing of sentences. Sociolinguistic competence plays a vital role in recognizing how social factors, like the text's purpose, target audience, and tone, shape its meaning. Readers must use contextual cues, such as register, cultural references, and implied meanings, to accurately grasp the author's message. Moreover, discourse competence enables readers to navigate the way in which ideas are presented and connected within the text, understanding narrative structures, logical flow, and persuasive techniques. Finally, strategic competence is crucial for managing any challenges encountered during the reading process, including using prior knowledge to infer meaning, employing skimming and scanning strategies, and overcoming unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentence structures. Therefore, a reader's competence is closely intertwined with the ability to navigate a text within its communicative framework rather than merely focusing on the literal meaning of its individual components. Effective reading comprehension requires a holistic interaction between language proficiency and its contextualized usage.

The importance of interconnectedness:

Recognizing the connections helps learners approach language learning holistically rather than treating each skill in isolation. Teachers can design activities that integrate multiple skills, maximizing learning opportunities. By focusing on the connections, learners can improve their overall fluency and accuracy in all four skills. Ultimately, understanding the interconnectedness leads to more effective and natural

communication. There are some practical examples of interconnectedness that teachers mostly use in their lessons:

- A presentation: A good presentation involves listening (to audience cues), speaking (delivering the presentation), reading (from notes/slides), and writing (preparing the presentation).
- A group discussion: Requires listening (to others' opinions), speaking (expressing your own), possibly reading (from supporting documents), and writing (taking notes).
- Writing an email: Requires understanding the recipient's needs (listening between the lines), formulating and articulating those ideas (speaking), using written English skills (reading), and writing an appropriate and effective message.

As you see, the four language skills are not separate entities but are deeply interconnected. Developing these skills in an integrated manner, rather than in isolation, is crucial for effective language learning and communication. Understanding how these skills interact enhances our ability to process, produce, and understand language in all its forms.

The role of literature in language learning:

Literature, in the most general sense, refers to “written artistic works, especially those with a high and lasting artistic value” and the word “literary” is defined as the one “connected with literature” [1]. In connection with this definition, short stories, novels, poems and plays are specified as the examples of ‘literary texts’ [2]. Inclusion of literature, more specifically literary texts, in second and foreign language classes has been a topic of study for many years. With the emergence of different language teaching methods and approaches, the use of literature for foreign language teaching purposes has gone through ups and downs. For instance, during the period where the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was popular, literature was at the core of language teaching, and translation was a common classroom technique where students

were asked to translate literary texts from a foreign language to the students' mother tongue and vice versa

However, with the emergence of other language teaching methods that emphasize the importance of communication in the target language (e.g. the Direct Method, the Audiolingual Method), GTM began to fall out of favour, and so did the use of literature in language classes. It was not until around the 1980s that interest in the use of literature in foreign language classes revived again. It was then the idea began to spread that literature, different from its' role in GTM, can contribute to the development of language skills and communicative competence. Since that time, many researchers have emphasized the multidimensional benefits literature can bring to second and foreign language classes [3].

Using literary texts to enhance language learning is a powerful approach that can engage students of all levels and provide authentic contexts for language acquisition. Literary texts offer authentic language, showcasing how native speakers use the language in real-world contexts. They provide rich context, making vocabulary and grammar learning more meaningful and memorable. Good stories are captivating and can spark students' interest, making learning more enjoyable and motivating. They offer insights into different cultures, values, and perspectives. Literary texts can be adapted and used in various ways to suit different learning styles and goals. Books and stories can be used effectively for different levels of language learners.

Literature, by its very nature, serves as a potent catalyst for developing communicative competence in language learners. Literary texts are not merely repositories of language; they are reflections of human experiences, cultures, and perspectives presented in rich and varied linguistic styles. Unlike simplified textbook passages, literature exposes students to a wider spectrum of language use, including authentic registers, idioms, and colloquialisms. This exposure significantly enhances grammatical competence by showcasing the diverse ways in which grammar and vocabulary can be utilized for effect, moving beyond prescriptive rules to embrace the nuances of language. Furthermore, literature provides a lens through which students

can understand different cultural contexts and social dynamics, thus cultivating sociolinguistic competence. By encountering texts that represent different viewpoints and settings, learners develop a deeper appreciation for the socio-cultural factors that shape communication. Literature also excels in demonstrating complex discourse structures, including narrative techniques, rhetorical devices, and different patterns of organization, enhancing the reader's capacity to make sense of complex and varied language organization. Finally, the inherent ambiguity and open-endedness of many literary texts provide opportunities for learners to develop their strategic competence, learning to infer meaning, navigate unclear passages, and engage with the text actively. Thus, literature's authentic language use and exploration of complex ideas position it as an ideal resource for developing all four aspects of communicative competence.

Literature plays a multifaceted and valuable role in language learning, going beyond just grammar rules and vocabulary lists. It offers a rich and engaging context for acquiring a language, fostering both linguistic and cultural understanding. Here's a breakdown of its key contributions:

1. Vocabulary Enrichment and Contextualization:

- **Natural Vocabulary Acquisition:** Unlike lists or flashcards, literature exposes learners to vocabulary in natural, meaningful contexts. They learn how words are used in real-life situations, not just in isolated definitions.
- **Collocations and Idioms:** Literature is rich in collocations (words that frequently go together) and idioms (expressions with figurative meanings). Exposure to these enhances fluency and natural language use.
- **Nuances and Connotations:** Literature allows learners to grasp subtle nuances and connotations of words, which is crucial for effective communication and understanding the author's intent.

2. Grammar and Syntax Reinforcement:

- **Implicit Grammar Learning:** While not explicitly teaching grammar rules, literature provides numerous examples of correct sentence structure, verb tenses, and grammatical patterns. Learners internalize these rules through repeated exposure and observation.

- **Understanding Different Structures:** Literature exposes learners to a variety of sentence structures and stylistic devices, broadening their grammatical understanding and repertoire.

- **Contextual Application of Rules:** Learners see grammar rules in action, helping them understand how they function within a larger communicative context.

3. Improvement of Reading Comprehension:

- **Active Reading Practice:** Reading literature requires active engagement and critical thinking. Learners develop the ability to extract meaning, interpret subtext, and make inferences.

- **Exposure to Different Genres and Styles:** Different genres of literature (poetry, prose, drama) expose learners to diverse writing styles and perspectives, enhancing their adaptability in understanding varied texts.

- **Building Stamina:** Longer works of literature help learners build reading stamina and improve their ability to focus and concentrate for extended periods.

4. Development of Writing Skills:

- **Modeling Effective Writing:** Literature provides models of good writing, showcasing techniques like descriptive language, narrative structure, and persuasive argumentation.

- Expanding Rhetorical Devices: Learners can analyze how authors use rhetorical devices like metaphors, similes, and personification, and then incorporate them into their own writing.

- Inspiring Creative Writing: Literature can inspire creativity and encourage learners to explore their own writing styles and voices.

5. Cultural Understanding and Empathy:

- Glimpses into Different Cultures: Literature often reflects the culture, values, and beliefs of a particular society. Learners gain insights into the cultural context of the language they are learning.

- Understanding Human Experiences: Literature explores universal themes and human experiences, fostering empathy and understanding across cultures.

- Expanding Worldviews: Exposure to different perspectives and cultures can broaden learners' worldviews and challenge their preconceived notions.

6. Motivation and Engagement:

- Intrinsic Motivation: Engaging with interesting stories and characters can make language learning more enjoyable and intrinsically motivating.

- Personal Connection: Readers often form personal connections with characters and narratives, creating a deeper level of engagement and fostering a love for the language.

- Meaningful Practice: Literature provides a meaningful context for practicing language skills, making the learning process more relevant and engaging.

7. Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills:

- Analyzing Authorial Intent: Learners develop critical thinking skills by analyzing the author's purpose, message, and use of literary devices.

- Interpretation and Synthesis: Literature encourages learners to interpret complex ideas, synthesize information, and formulate their own opinions.
- Discussion and Debate: Literary works often prompt discussions and debates, enhancing communication and critical thinking skills.

Reasons for integrating literature in EFL classroom:

The integration of literature into the EFL classroom is not merely a desirable addition but a crucial step in enhancing students' communicative competence in reading. Unlike simplified language materials, literary texts offer a natural context for the development of all four key components. Firstly, literary texts' use of authentic and varied language is particularly effective for developing grammatical competence, as it allows students to see language used creatively and with intention. Second, literature facilitates a deeper understanding of the nuances of culture, greatly contributing to the reader's sociolinguistic competence. The diverse contexts presented in literature allow students to understand the ways in which language use differs across various contexts. Third, literary narratives, with their varied structures and the different narrative devices, offer unique opportunities for developing discourse competence. Students become accustomed to understanding the varied techniques that writers use to shape the text, fostering their ability to analyse structure and meaning. Fourth, the often layered and nuanced nature of literary texts encourages the use of reading strategies, thereby developing strategic competence, making students actively engage with the text and develop critical reading skills to navigate through complex text. Ultimately, the integration of literature within the EFL classroom is essential because it provides a robust, authentic, and engaging context for the holistic development of reading comprehension as a communicative process, rather than a mere act of decoding. By strategically incorporating literary texts into language instruction, we create opportunities to enhance all four components of communicative competence, leading to more effective and meaningful language learning.

Repeated observations have proved the fact that language learning has always been considered as a difficult process for many EFL learners, and that is why they normally postpone it. Therefore, there is a high demand for a challenging and enjoyable atmosphere cultivated by the teacher, so that via touching the learners' motivation and attitude towards language learning, the teacher can easily pave the way for the learners to go through the process of language learning smoothly. Arguably, only three conditions are absolutely essential for language learning to occur, in other words, without any one of these three conditions it is fairly clear that language learning will not occur [4]. These are: "exposure" to the target language, "motivation" to learn the language, and opportunities to "use" the language. Telling learners stories in English, which is a way to increase the 'exposure', can be motivating and can initiate a learning sequence leading to meaningful use of language [5].

To achieve this, integrating literature into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom can be one of the best examples. Because it offers a multitude of benefits that enhance the learning experience and contribute to the holistic development of students. There are some compelling reasons why literature should be an integral part of EFL instruction. Firstly, it is authentic language exposure, as literature provides authentic examples of language used in context, reflecting real-life situations and conversations. This is in contrast to often simplified textbook dialogues. Students are exposed to a wide range of language registers (formal, informal) and writing styles (narrative, persuasive, descriptive), expanding their linguistic repertoire. And literature often includes colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions that are not typically found in textbooks, enriching students' understanding of natural English. Secondly, with the integration of literature, it is possible to have enhanced vocabulary acquisition. Because, vocabulary is learned within a meaningful context, making it easier to understand and remember. Students can deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words from the surrounding text. Literature exposes learners to a broader range of vocabulary than typical learning materials, enriching their lexical knowledge. Students learn subtle nuances and connotations of words, enabling them to use language more

precisely and effectively. Thirdly, improved grammar and syntax can be achieved. Through exposure to well-constructed sentences, learners internalize grammatical patterns and syntactic rules implicitly. Students see how grammar is used in real-life situations, reinforcing their understanding of its practical application. Literature presents a variety of sentence structures, helping students develop flexibility and sophistication in their own writing. Development of reading skills is again one of the reasons why literature should be integrated during lessons. It's obvious that literature requires active engagement and critical thinking, developing students' ability to extract meaning, make inferences, and interpret subtext. Through exposure to diverse texts and genres, students develop improved reading comprehension skills, becoming more confident and proficient readers. Repeated exposure to authentic English text helps students develop reading fluency and speed.

All in all, integrating literature into the EFL classroom provides a wealth of benefits that contribute to the holistic development of language learners. From authentic language exposure to cultural understanding and critical thinking, literature offers a rich and engaging context for language acquisition and personal growth. By embracing literature as a valuable tool, EFL educators can create a more meaningful, enjoyable, and effective learning experience for their students.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening reflects the organic nature of language itself. When these skills are carefully integrated, learners benefit from a more holistic and contextualized learning experience, fostering a deeper and more intuitive grasp of communication. Therefore, educators should prioritize the seamless integration of these core skills in every lesson, promoting a natural and effective journey toward language proficiency.

References:

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