# SKILLS SEGREGATION VERSUS SKILLS INTEGRATION IN FLT

**[1]Rajmonda Këçira, [2]Angjelina Shllaku**

[1]Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Shkodra, Albania
E mail: rajmonda_kecira@yahoo.com
[2]Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Shkodra, Albania
E mail: ashllaku2000@yahoo.it

## Abstract

This paper treats the issue of skills segregation versus skills integration in foreign language teaching. Traditionally, English language teaching has focused on developing separate language skills, probably, because teaching was considered easier if syllabuses were organized around one skill than focused on more than one at one time. The main objective of the paper is to prove that on a general English course, teaching instruction should focus on the development of the four skills equally. Practically, whatever the focus of instruction, students integrate skills. If the focus of instruction were that of developing the skill of reading, students integrate skills, they read, discuss what has already been the point of their readings, employing in this way speaking and listening skills as well as many associated skills, such as pronunciation, grammar, and use. This paper will provide a) reasons why people learn languages, reasons which condition the organization of the teaching syllabus, b) definition of skills, and c) arguments in favor of skills integration versus isolated skills development. This paper will show that nowadays, the current trend is biased towards instruction with a focus on skills integration. The teacher's approach must address the learner's reasons of learning, the learner's motivation, and learning resources and values that support foreign language teaching because in an age of globalization, pragmatic objectives of language learning place an increased value on integrated and dynamic multiskill instructional models with a focus on meaningful communication and the development of learners' communicative competence (Hinkel). In conclusion, this paper argues in favor of skills integration instruction. It will show that skills integration in FLT will improve teaching for English language learners.

*Keywords*: *foreign language teaching, reading, writing, listening, speaking, skills segregation, skills integration.*

## Introduction

This paper is perceived from two perspectives, the perspective of foreign language teaching in multicultural Europe and the differentiated perspective of foreign language teaching in pre-university (general English) and university education (ESP) in Albania with regard to skills development. It addresses pre-university foreign language teachers and lecturers of ESP by making a modest contribution to the development and integration of language skills in their classes. In this view, this paper will provide:
   a) a descriptions of skills,
   b) integration of skills,
   c) reasons behind skills development and skills integration,

The 2 nd International Conference on Research and Educatıon – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

  d) skills segregation versus skills integration in general education,
  e) skills segregation versus skills integration in university education.

One of the three basic principles set down in the preamble to Recommendation R (82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which language teachers and learners are to seriously consider is that "it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination" (CRF, 2006, 2). Nowadays, in order that they could promote international co-operation in the field of modern languages, teachers and the learners resort to the Common European Framework which describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn with the purpose of using a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively (CRF, 2006, 1). In this view, the development of skills assumes special significance because they involve both language reception and language production, in other words, they incite communication.

- **Language skills**

All people as language users have certain abilities. They may listen and speak. Besides, if they are literate, they may read and write. Briefly, depending on the channel of communication, it can be said that they listen, speak, read and write, thus they have four language skills: *speaking, writing, listening* and *reading*. Harmer (1999, 16) makes the following definition with respect to language skills: "Speaking and writing involve language production, and are therefore, often referred to *as productive skills.* Listening and reading, on the other hand, involve receiving messages and are therefore often referred to as *receptive skills"*. What follows is a table drawn by Harmer to illustrate skills.

| MEDIUM / SKILL | SPEECH | WRITTEN WORD |
|---|---|---|
| RECEPTIVE | Listening and understanding | Reading and understanding |
| PRODUCTIVE | Speaking | Writing |

A definition with respect to language skills have also been provided in *The Common European Framework of Languages* which points out that:

> To carry out communicative tasks, users have to engage in communicative language activities and operate communication strategies. Many communicative activities, such as conversation and correspondence, are *interactive,* that is to say, the participants alternate as producers and receivers, often with several turns. In other cases, as when speech is recorded or broadcast or written texts are sent out or published, producers are separated from receivers, whom they may not even know and who are unable to respond. In these cases the communicative event can be regarded as *the speaking, writing, listening* to or *reading* of a text (CRF, 2006, 57).

Productive activities and strategies include both speaking and writing activities. In *oral production (speaking) activities* the language user produces an oral text which is received by an audience of one or more listeners. In *written production (writing)* activities the language

The 2 $^{nd}$ International Conference on Research and Educatıon – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

user as writer produces a written text which is received by a readership of one or more readers(CRF, 2006, 59).

*Receptive activities and strategies* include listening and reading activities. In *aural reception (listening)* activities the language user as listener receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers (CRF, 2006, 65).

**Skills integration**

The first linguists who promoted the integration of the four language skills was H.G**.** Widdowson (1978: 144), who pointed out that language uses take place in the form of discourse and in specific social contexts, not in discrete "units". For this reason, to become competent language users, learners need to develop receptive and productive skills in both spoken and written discourse. In his proposal for integrated and communicative language teaching in general and in particular in English for Specific Purposes, Widdowson's (1978) strong emphasis on the integration of the four skills.

In view of John Honeyfield, (1988, 25-33), skills integration generally refers to linking two or more of the traditional four skills of language learning: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Others as Richards, Platt, and Weber (1988: 144) define the teaching of integrated skills in the *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*: "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."
In Carols opinion (1990, 72) the integration of skills in the language classroom can be defined quite simply as a series of activities or tasks which use any combination of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing in a continuous and related sequence. She points out that there are certain advantages in providing students with integrated skills. Skills integration allows for:

> a)continuity in teaching learning program, tasks are closely related to each other, b) it helps to ensure that there is input before out, the input ensure the basis, c)it is realistic, it allows for the development of four skills within a realistic communicative framework, it gives learners opportunities to recognize and redeploy the language they are learning in different contexts and modes they provide variety and can be valuable for motivation it allows for the recycling and revision of language which has already been taught, and therefore remedial teaching, it may give confidence to a weaker or less confident learner (Read, Carol 1990, 73-74).

- **Reasons behind skills development and skills integration**

In the process of language teaching skills became practically segregated for convenient utilitarian purposes. Structural segregation of language teaching in the four skill aims at imitating the native speaker.
Keith Morrow (1982,59) writes that in the past, language teaching has been focused on language rather than teaching, which means on the content and the ways to transmit it rather than communication Activities are worth doing but they are worthless if learners cannot communicate. She provides a description of a consistent methodology which is more than just a collection of activities and techniques. One of the principles of communication is *the whole more than the sum of parts*. In this respect, what is needed is the ability to deal with strings of sentences and ideas in the real time (Morrow, Keith. 1982, 61).

The 2 nd International Conference on Research and Educatıon – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

Certain language textbooks promote the development of separate skills, one class may be devoted to practicing the skill of reading, another to speaking or writing. Teacher is responsible for the development of all skills. Harmer suggests that:

> …this position is clearly ridiculous for two reasons. Firstly, it is very often true that one skill cannot be performed without another. It is impossible to speak in a conversation if you do not listen as well, and people seldom write without reading - even if they only read what they have just written. Secondly, though, people use different skills when dealing with the same subject for all sorts of reasons. Someone who listens to a lecture may take notes and then write a report of the lecture.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001: 165), integrated language instruction that engages learners in meaningful communication and enables them to attain their learning objectives can be found in an "unlimited" array of models, teaching materials and techniques. A few examples of such integrated models with a communicative and contextualized focus are: content-based (sometimes also called theme-based), task-based, text-based (also called genre-based), discourse-based, project-based, network-based, technology-based, corpus-based, interaction-based, literature-based, literacy-based, community-based, competency-based, or standards-based.

Hinkel (1999, 2001) writes that in common perspectives on contemporary language curricula, teaching reading is typically connected to instruction on writing and vocabulary, teaching writing can be easily tied to reading and grammar, and speaking skills readily lend themselves to teaching listening, pronunciation, and cross-cultural pragmatics. The essential new feature of the communicative approach in second or foreign language teaching was the Hinkel (2006, 113) also noted that "In an age of globalization, pragmatic objectives of language learning place an increased value on integrated and dynamic multiskill instructional models with a focus on meaningful communication and the development of learners' communicative competence."

In this respect, reference should be made to the intention of saying something… the goal of the individual users of any language, and the language learning needs of specific groups (Leeson, Richard. 1975, 148). The learning needs of learners ask for curricular and methodological work in two novel directions: English for specific purposes for technical and professional learners and English for academic purposes for students.

According to Harmer (1999 cf. 11) people learn language for practical reasons. Children and students mainly learn it because it is in the school curriculum. Some think it offers a chance for advancement in their professional lives, others are attracted to the culture of one of the TLCs. Some want to know more about the people who speak it, the places where it is spoken and the writings which it has produced, some others learn it for fun. Some want to be tourists in a country, others learn it *for Special* or *Specific Purposes,* that is *for academic, or occupational purposes or for science and technology.* It is learners' reasons of learning a foreign language that involves teachers in writing certain foreign language teaching curricula.

- **Skills segregation versus skills integration in general education**

As mentioned above, teachers need to know why their students are learning the foreign language they are teaching. On the basis of this knowledge, they will have to prepare their curricula. Students who study English because it is on the curriculum need to be handled in a different way from those who are interested in one of the forms of ESP (Harmer. 1999, 3). In

The 2 nd International Conference on Research and Education – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

Harmer's opinion, competent users of a language are proficient in a range of language skills, it is the teachers' responsibility to see that the students' language skills are transferred to the use of the foreign language. Teachers do not have to teach their students to read, but they are teaching them to read in a foreign language, which means teachers should help them with the skills that they are already (subconsciously) familiar with.

Harmer (1999, 25) suggests that when students are not proficient at all the skills in their own languages it is the teachers' responsibility to equip them with hitherto unknown skills in either their own mother tongue or English. At lower levels teaching of skills will be general, becoming more refined as the students become more advanced.

Language users employ a combination of skills at the same time. Speaking and listening usually happen simultaneously, and people may well read and write at the same time when they make notes or write something based on what they are reading. (Harmer, 1999, 2). Ann Raimes (1983, 68) mentions certain techniques which might make language learning classes come close to real-life communicative situations where students should use all learning skills. For this purpose students should speak not only to the teacher but also to each other, that means that's students will listen to each other. The listener can react by writing down for a reader his version for the information he has just heard. Ann Raimes (1983, cf. 69) suggests that brainstorming, guided discussion, interviews, skits (students acting in an assigned role), dictation, storytelling, note taking are some of the techniques that give students the opportunity to use all their linguistic skills to help them explore and get started with their ideas on a given topic or allow the topic of a piece of writing to emerge out of classroom activities.

Harmer (1999, cf. 52) suggests a way a teacher can proceed with the development of separate skills followed by skills integration in the teaching stages that follow. The same person might describe the lecture to friends or colleagues, and follow it up by reading an article that the lecturer suggested. Another case would be that of a person who reads about a concert or play in the paper and invites a friend to go to it. The same person will probably read the programme for the concert/play and talk with his or her guest. Later he or she may write a letter to someone telling of the experience. In these cases, the same experience or topic leads to the use of many different skills, and teaching should reflect this. Where students practice reading teachers will use that reading as the basis for practicing other skills. Students involved in an oral communicative activity will have to do some writing or reading in order to accomplish the task which the activity asks them to perform. Students will be asked to write, but on the basis of reading, listening or discussing. Often activities will have a focus on one particular skill, so that at a certain stage the students will concentrate on reading abilities. But the focus can later shift to one or more of the other skills.

- **Skills segregation versus skills integration in university education**

Currently, at a time when teaching/learning of foreign languages is assumed to begin in primary schools, teaching at the university tends to be organized towards specific purposes. ESP students are usually grown-ups who are already familiar with English. They are learning the language in order to communicate certain professional skills and to perform certain job-related functions.

The term *English for Specific Purpose* has been applied to situations where students have some specific reason for wanting to learn the language. It is an alternative of possible educational perspective for language teaching. It provides a break with the long tradition of

The 2 nd International Conference on Research and Education – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

English as part of general education. ESP is the name given to the course and it is used in circumstances in which the kind of English being imparted relates to a specific job, or subject or purpose (Strevens, Peter 1985, 89).The aims and course are not determined by the criteria of general education but by functional and practical English language requirement of the learners (Strevens, Peter 1985, 90). ESP may be occupational and educational. They incorporate a great extent of scientific English. To design a ESP course, teachers need to consider the diversity of the courses that condition course preparation, the content of the course and the principle of the communicative purpose of the learner.

An ESP program, may promote the development of reading skills in students who are preparing for graduate work in business administration; or spoken skills in students who are studying English in order to become tourist guides.

ESP focuses on language in context rather than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism, business management, nursing, technology and so on. What makes ESP special is that English is taught in conformity with students' preferences. A foreign language teacher should make use of her experience in language teaching to adapt her teaching skills to the teaching of English for Specific Purposes.

In conclusion, it is to be pointed out that teaching general English differs from ESP both in the nature of the learner and the aim of instruction. In ESL all four language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are stressed equally, in ESP language skills most needed by the students are carefully determined always in view of the students purpose of learning the language. Upon this basis language teachers should write their curricula.

## References

Council of Europe (2001). Common European framework reference of languages (CEFR). Retrieved May, 2014, from:
hhtp:/www.coe-int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Source/Framework.EN.pdf.
"Diagnosis, Treatment and Assessment" in: Richards, J.C. and W. A. Renandya (Eds) ...
Richards, J., J. Platt and H. Weber. (1986) ... 125-144). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
White, R.V. (1988)
Harmer, Jeremy. The Practice of English Language Teaching New Edition - Longman Group UK Limited, Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow.
H.G. Widdowson (1978) Teaching Language As Communication. H. G. Widdowson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978
Hinkel, E. (2006). Current perspectives on teaching the four skills. Tesol Quarterly, 40(1), 109-131
Honeyfield, John (1988). Guidelines: A Periodical for Classroom Language Teachers, v10 n2 25-33
Leeson, Richard (1975). Fluency and Language Teaching, Longman Group Limited, London.
Morrow, Kate (1982). Communication in the classroom. Longman Group UK Limited, Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow.
Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2001). Approaches and methods in language teaching (2nded.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Raimes, Ann (1983). Techniques in Teaching Writing. Oxford University Press
Read, Carol (1990). At the Chalkface: Practical Techniques in Language Teaching ELT Methodology: Amazon.co.uk: Alan Matthews, Mary Spratt, Les Dangerfield (Eds): Longman

The 2 nd International Conference on Research and Education – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

Nelson Hodder Edward Arnold ELT;

**Appendix**

In *oral production (speaking)* activities the language user produces an oral text which is received by an audience of one or more listeners.
Examples of speaking activities include:
• public address (information, instructions, etc.)
• addressing audiences (speeches at public meetings, university lectures, sermons, entertainment, sports commentaries, sales presentations, etc.).
They may involve, for example:
• reading a written text aloud;
• speaking from notes, or from a written text or visual aids (diagrams, pictures, charts, etc.);
• acting out a rehearsed role;
• speaking spontaneously;
• singing.
Illustrative scales are provided for:
• Overall spoken production;
• Sustained monologue: describing experience;
• Sustained monologue: putting a case (e.g. in debate);
• Public announcements;
• Addressing audiences.
In *written production (writing)* activities the language user as writer produces a written text which is received by a readership of one or more readers.
Examples of writing activities include:
• completing forms and questionnaires;
• writing articles for magazines, newspapers, newsletters, etc.;
• producing posters for display;
• writing reports, memoranda, etc.;
• making notes for future reference;
• taking down messages from dictation, etc.;
• creative and imaginative writing;
• writing personal or business letters, etc.
Illustrative scales are provided for:
• Overall written production;
• Creative writing;
• Reports and essays.
*Receptive activities and strategies 65*
These include listening and reading activities.
4.4.2.1 In *aural reception (listening)* activities the language user as listener receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers. Listening activities include:
• listening to public announcements (information, instructions, warnings, etc.);
• listening to media (radio, TV, recordings, cinema);
• listening as a member of a live audience (theatre, public meetings, public lectures, entertainments, etc.);
• listening to overheard conversations, etc.
In each case the user may be listening:
• for gist;
• for specific information;

The 2  nd International Conference on Research and Educatıon – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania

• for detailed understanding;
• for implications, etc.
Illustrative scales are provided for:
• Overall listening comprehension;
• Understanding interaction between native speakers;
• Listening as a member of a live audience;
• Listening to announcements and instructions;
• ListeningListening to audio media and recordings

The 2 nd International Conference on Research and Educatıon – "Challenges Toward the Future" (ICRAE2014), 30-31 May 2014,

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkodra, Albania