

Interactive Approaches to Teaching the Four Core Skills of English at the Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh: A Proposal

Dr. Sukanta Bhattacharjee*

Abstract

When we communicate in diverse real-life situations, we often use more than a single language skill. On the telephone, for instance, we listen and speak simultaneously. We also jot down a host of points and, later, read over what we have written. Thus, we use the four core skills of a language in integration: listening, speaking, reading, and writing for day-to-day societal interactions and purposeful or transactional communications. An efficient English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher should plan and adopt an integrated approach while teaching English, for it engages Bangladeshi EFL learners to learn English in interesting ways and through stimulating activities. This paper intends to shed light on the interactive approaches to teaching the four core skills of English, the lingua franca of today's IT-oriented global village, a crucially important soft skill badly required for 4IR, at the Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh. It is suggested here that all the productive and receptive skills of English be taught in integration with one another as a lesson involves activities that relate listening and speaking to reading and writing. Unfortunately, the majority of our EFL teachers often teach the English skills in isolation, not in conjunction. As a matter of fact, both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skill (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are indispensable in order for our target learners to be well-versed in all the four core skills of English, which may continue to play positive roles in increasing employability and facilitating international mobility (migration, tourism, and studying abroad), and so forth.

* Professor, Department of English, University of Chittagong

Keywords: four core skills, integration, interaction and transaction, soft skills, 4IR, BICS and CALP, employability, international mobility

1 Introduction

The four skills can be referred to as receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Today, linguists of repute are of the prudent view that the easiest and most effective way to start integrating language skills in the class is by combining the receptive and productive skills, which are used across the same medium. In a variety of real-life situations, we listen to others and receive a considerable bulk of comprehensible inputs, which prepare us to unlock our hearts to interlocutors for diverse interactions or transactions. Gradually, we master how to read and write. McDonough and Shaw aptly posit, “If we look around us in our daily lives, we can see that we rarely use language skills in isolation but in conjunction” (2003, p. 171). According to Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985, p.144), an integrated approach is “the teaching of the language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, in conjunction with each other, as when a lesson involves activities that relate listening and speaking to reading and writing.” As a matter of fact, if an EFL learner listens to a recorded or live L2 presentation, and has an efficient EFL teacher’s insightful reflections, s/he can internalize the subtleties or nuances of English much better and gain a deeper understanding of how communication works in real-life situations in the target language. What is more, EFL/ESL learners “become more motivated when they see the value of performing meaningful tasks and activities in the classroom” (1985, p. 174). Ironically, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) began its journey in Bangladesh way back in the 1990s; still the majority of our target learners (i.e., HSC-level students) struggle to be communicatively competent as they fail to use the four core skills of English in integration. In essence, CLT equips L2 learners with communicative competence which includes a set of composite skills as Canale and Swain (cited in Leech and Svartvik, 2000, p. 3) explicitly state:

Communicative competence is composed minimally of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and communication strategies, or what we will refer to as strategic competence. ... The primary goal of communicative approach must be to facilitate the integration of these types of knowledge for the learner.

This paper delineates how the four core skills of the world's lingua franca can be taught in EFL classes at the HSC level interactively and in integration through an array of stimulating and interesting activities designed in line with Task-Based Instruction. In fact, the two receptive skills — listening and reading — facilitate mastery of the two productive skills — speaking and writing. But in the current flow of EFL/ESL pedagogy, communicative competence is nothing but the 'will-o'-the-wisp' because two core skills (listening and speaking) which may be termed 'Cinderella skills' are almost ignored in our existing CLT and testing at the Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh. Pretty naturally, teaching and learning of the two other skills (reading and writing) are also hampered. Apart from providing a real-life flavour, integration of the four skills in a single class is effective for all students in that different students have diverse mindsets, likes, and dislikes. Some may enjoy listening while some others may like speaking; a cohort of our target learners may prefer reading whereas an array of them may have fascination for the writing activities.

2 Exposures to authentic English through listening and IPA

Universal language pedagogy reveals the fact that when learners are exposed to authentic, comprehensible L2 inputs, they, with the timely and useful feedback or facilitations of the ELT experts, can grasp the subtleties, nuances, sub-skills, and skills of a language properly. They need to be introduced to syntactic patterns, semantic levels, collocation, cohesion, coherence, discourse, pronunciation, fluency, articulation, rhythm, stress, intonation, body language, and so on through adequate contextualization with the help of necessary audio-visual aids. For instance, our target learners can gain valuable language inputs through a combination of extensive and intensive listening materials and procedures. According to Nunan, "Listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear. ... Since listeners combine what they hear with their own ideas and experiences, in a very real sense they are "creating the meaning" in their own minds (2003, p. 24). Vivian Cook also states in the similar fashion, "Listening is the crucial skill in providing the key to extracting information from what you hear" (1996, p. 191). In fact, in a well-equipped classroom having audio-visual teaching-learning aids, extensive listening (for pleasure) and intensive listening (for details), as Harmer maintains, is "especially important since it provides perfect opportunity to hear voices other than the

teacher's, enables students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of the spoken English they absorb, and helps to improve their own pronunciation" (2001, p. 228). As aural and oral skills are interconnected and interdependent, keen listeners usually turn into impressive or fluent speakers, if both the EFL/ESL teachers and learners are enthusiastic and serious. For example, our target listeners need to be exposed to the authentic sounds of strong form *a/ eɪ /* and weak form *a / ə /* in a variety of contexts, such as *I saw a/ə/ magician at 9:00 a /eɪ/ m /əm/*. In the same way, they can be taught the phonemes *o (/əʊ/ or /ou/)*, *j (/dʒeɪ/)*, *k (/keɪ/)*, labio-dentals (*/v/*, */f/*), inter-dentals (*/θ /*, */ ð/*), bi-labials (*/p/*, */b/*, */m/*), palatal plosive (*/z/*), palato-alveolar fricative (*/ʒ/*), alveolar plosives (*/t/*, */d/*) and labio-velar approximant (*/w/*) through effective contextualized drilling and listening. Well-versed in phonetics or pronunciation, an ELT expert can familiarize our target learners with International Phonetic Association/Alphabet (IPA) and teach them 44 phonemes—12 vowel sounds/monophthongs, 08 diphthongs (06 triphthongs) and 24 consonant sounds or phonemes with the aid of the IPA chart (given on page 203) or Google search engine in order that the L2 learners can master articulatory, acoustic, and auditory phonetics and turn into autonomous learners who can rectify, repair, and improve their own pronunciations and understand the utterances made by the model native English speakers. In fact, "... with appropriate scientific techniques, the sounds of English can be mastered. A description of the manner and place of articulations should make a proper impact both in the recognition of mispronunciations and in rectifying them, that is both speech perception and production may be enhanced" (Muzaffar, 1999, p.72).

IPA- International Phonetic Alphabet

Phonetic Symbols

Consonant -24	Vowel - 12
1. p (p^h) Pen /'pen/, happy 2. b (b^h) Bed /'bed/, cab, book 3. t (t^h) Time /'taɪm/, little, watched 4. d (d^h) Dance /'da:ns/, played, advance 5. k (k^h) Cup /'kʌp/, kind, pack 6. g (g^h) Good /'gu:d/, mug, toggle 7. tʃ (tʃ^h) Chin /'tʃɪn/, chatter, arch 8. dʒ (dʒ^h) Jam /'dʒæm/, geometry, judge 9. f (f^h) Fan /'fæn/, life, photograph 10. v (...) Very /'verɪ/, live, advance 11. θ (...) Think /'θɪŋk/, path, thank 12. ð (...) Then /'ðen/, mother, that 13. s (s^h) Sail /'seɪl/, cell, boats 14. z (...) Zoo /'zu:/, lens, lends 15. ʃ (ʃ^h) Shell /'ʃel/, mesh, ship 16. h (h^h) Hymn /'hɪ:m/, hand 17. m (m^h) Meet /'mi:t/, bomb, 18. n (n^h) No /'nəu/(UK),/nou/(US) 19. ŋ (ŋ^h) Ring /'rɪŋ/, singer, playing 20. l (l^h) Let /'let/, sell, lullaby Player 21. r (...) Ring /'rɪŋ/, wring, tomorrow 22. j (...) Yes /'jes/, yacht, opinion 23. w (...) When /'wen/ (UK),/wɛn/ (US) 24. ʒ (...) Pleasure /'pleʒə(r)/, decision	1. ɪ: (ই:) Sheep /'fi: p/, breathe, these 2. ɪ (ই) Ship /'ʃɪp/, bit, started 3. e (এ) Men /'men/, breath, any 4. æ (এক্স) Man /'mæn/, back, marry 5. ɑ: (আ:) Arm /'ɑ:m/, rather, heart 6. ɒ (অ) Clock /'klɒk/, what, because 7. ɔ: (ও:) Floor /'flɔ:(r)/, law, caught 8. ʊ (উ) Wood /'wʊd/, would, woman 9. u: (উ:) Shoe /'ʃu:/, school, July 10. ʌ (আ) Won /'wʌn/, son, rough 11. ɜ: (...) First /'fɜ:st/, journey, earth 12. ə (এ) Again /ə'geɪn/, photograph, teacher
	Diphthong (Two vowel sounds together) : 8
	01. eɪ (এই) Play /'pleɪ/, rage, great 02. əʊ (এক্স/ও) Ago /ə'gəʊ/, /ə'g ou/ 03. aɪ (আই) Tiny /'taɪni/, kite, buy 04. aʊ (আউ) Now /'naʊ/, mouth, clown 05. ɔɪ (ওই) Spoil /'spɔɪl/, boy, enjoy 06. ɪə (ইয়) Cheer /'tʃɪə(r)/, clear, weird 07. eə (এয়) Bear /'beə(r)/, where, their 08. ʊə (উয়) Pure /'pjʊə(r)/, sure, tour
	Triphthong (Three vowel sounds together) : 6
	1. eɪə (এইয়) Player /'pleɪə(r)/, layer 2. aʊə (আউয়) Power /'paʊə(r)/, tower, 3. aɪə (আইয়) Tired /'taɪəd/, science 4. əʊɪ/əʊɪ (এউই) Poet /'pəʊɪt/, 'pouət 5. ɔɪə (ওইয়) Lawyer /'lɔɪə(r)/, employer 6. əʊə (এউয়) Lower /'ləʊə(r)/, /louə(r)/

3. Connected speech

In addition, extensive and intensive exposure to connected speeches, with which our target learners are barely familiar, is indispensable to enable the target L2 listeners to decipher the confusing or baffling assimilations, as are stated below:

ten men ----- /tem men/

right place-----/raɪp pleɪs/

not me-----/nəʊp mi:/

good boy-----/gʊd bɔɪ/

red gate-----/reg geɪt/

(O'Connor, 2005, pp. 102-103)

What are you doing? Whacha doin'? (Richards, 1990, p. 73)

The waiter cut it-----*the way to cut it*

I scream-----*Ice cream*

How strained-----*House trained*

Night rate-----*Nitrate* (Gimson, 1974, pp. 300-301)

One should bear in mind that non-native speakers seldom use connected speeches in naturalistic interactions as native speakers do. But, they ought to have ideas about them so that they can decipher if connected speeches are used. While teaching pronunciation, never should our EFL teachers overemphasize R.P. (Received Pronunciation) or adhere to British and American variants strictly, for modern English is neither British nor American; it is rather 'bad' English, and mutual intelligibility is of paramount importance to become a good communicator. Moreover, learners pick up a foreign language through 'trial and error'. While teaching speaking, fluency should be given more importance than accuracy. Quoting Savignon (1972), Lightbown and Spada prudently view that "... focus on accuracy and form do not give students sufficient opportunity to develop communication abilities in a second language" (2000, p. 121).

4 Teachers' training on phonetics

Ironically enough, quite a few EFL teachers at schools and colleges do not have linguistics or ELT background, nor do they have good command over phonetics and phonology. A vast majority of them are reluctant to take pains of mastering it and familiarizing the target learners with assimilations, primary or secondary stresses, rising,

falling or rise-fall intonations, rhythms of speeches, and paralinguistic features or body languages, which are a dire need in turning the L2 users into competent ones. As a matter of fact, extensive listening can have a dramatic effect on EFL learners' language learning. It is a heartening matter that most of our schools and colleges are now equipped with computer labs. So, EFL teachers can use CDs, audio/video tapes, and/or cell phones in order to teach the model or standard form of American/British pronunciation. Through this receptive skill i.e., listening L2 learners can also improve their grammatical knowledge and enrich their vocabulary, which helps them be fluent, correct, and confident speakers, readers, or writers. When an audio/a video recording is presented in a listening class, an efficient EFL/ESL pedagogue must focus on the essentials of speaking, reading, and writing such as pronunciation, fillers, and backchannels, heads and tails, vocabulary, idioms, syntactic and semantic patterns, cohesion and coherence, sentential and discursal points, and so on. But it should be done in an interesting, stimulating, and hilarious manner.

It is worth pointing out here that our EFL teachers should conduct English immersion classes (where around 95% of the utterances are in English and around 5% are in learners' L1 used for telling refined jokes, quoting texts or interesting lines from prolific writers). Highlighting the significance of judicious use of learners' L1 in EFL classes, Rod Ellis aptly points out:

The learners' L1 can facilitate L2 acquisition. Learners draw on their L1 in forming interlanguage hypotheses. Learners do not construct rules in a vacuum; rather they work with whatever information is at their disposal. This includes knowledge of their L1. The L1 can be viewed as a kind of 'input from the inside'. According to this view, the transfer is not an 'interference' but a cognitive process (2002, p. 52).

5 Importance of English immersion classes

However, the scenario is just diametrically opposed in actuality. Seldom are English-immersion classes conducted by Bangladeshi EFL teachers teaching at the Higher Secondary level, especially in rural areas where English is looked upon as a language of the affluent or urban elites or upstarts, not of the poverty-stricken rural folk. So, extensive

listening, along with efficient teachers' facilitations, provides the L2 learners with adequate comprehensible inputs that prompt them to speak the target language fluently, accurately, and confidently. Rod Ellis has this to say:

... all that is needed is minimal exposure to input in order to trigger acquisition. Interactionist theorists of L2 acquisition acknowledge the importance of both input and internal knowledge processing. Learning takes place as a result of complex interaction between the linguistic environment and the learners' internal mechanisms (2002, p. 44).

Here we realize the importance of juxtaposing both innatism and behaviorism in the complete process of mastering L2.

6 Teaching listening and speaking with the aid of audio-visuals

In order to have an interactive session to teach all the four skills in integration, for instance, EFL teachers of Bangladesh teaching at the Higher Secondary level can play the English audio-version of Bangabandhu's 7th March historic speech and discuss the salient syntactic, semantic, and idiomatic features of the discourse. Then the students might be asked to describe the picture given in the textbook in pairs or groups as the situations allow, pose a variety of questions to their peers, groups, or teacher regarding the topic, and take some relevant notes provided by the teacher. Later, the target learners can be asked to read the epoch-making speech closely, summarize it, and make the historic speech individually in a nutshell. Role-play/simulation, pair, and group or project work can play an effective role in helping our reticent or shy L2 speakers come out of their cocoons and take part in English interactions because students hardly feel shy or experience affective filters (anxiety, fear, nervousness, etc.) when they converse with their peers in the L2. Of course, there should be some incentives or rewards for the best speaker as well as for all participants. On some other occasions, Blake's poem, "The School Boy", can be used as an interesting topic for teaching listening, speaking, reading, and writing altogether. Listening to the poem being recited by efficient teachers or students who pronounce accurately, maintain appropriate rhyme and rhythm, intonation, pauses and body language motivates almost all L2 learners to do the same. Before the students begin to speak, they ought to be instructed to use fillers like *well, like, um, er,*

you know, and the interlocutors or listeners should be trained to use backchannels such as, *Really? How come? That sounds great! Right, O my God! O dear me!* and so forth. Proper turn-taking techniques (e.g., *I agree with the point just made. But may I add some novel ones? etc.*) need to be highlighted and elaborated. What is more, a range of formulaic languages, automatic speeches or embolalia, or fixed verbal expressions — “You’ve got to be kidding,” “Excuse me?” or “Hang on a minute” — should be presented to the inquisitive EFL learners through interesting contextualization as comprehensible inputs.

7 Formal and informal English

While integrating listening (receptive skill) and speaking (productive skill), skillful EFL teachers must show the distinctive differences between contracted spoken and elaborated written grammar, elision (omission), colloquial language, formal, semi-formal and informal utterances and make the target group understand when to use, where to use, how to use and what to use:

Informal (with friends): I wanna go.

I’m gonna start a new business.

I gotta go.

Semi-formal (with family members or close ones): I want to go.

Formal (with superiors or unknown people): I’d like to go.

I’m going to start a new business.

I got to go.

Informal	Formal
Kinda	Kind of
Congrats!	Congratulations!
Thanks a lot.	Thank you so much.
Hi friends!	Hello Sir/ Madam!
What’s your name?	May I know/have your name, please?
Yeah/Yeh/Yep	Yes

Not	Nope
Give me some money.	Would you give me some money?
	Would you mind giving me some money?
	May I have some money, please?

John and Soars also present an array of formal and informal linguistic components:

Informal

Dear Jack
Thanks for your letter

I'm sorry.
Can you let me know...?

See you soon.

Thanks a lot.
Love
Jack

Formal

Dear Mr. Higgins
Thank you for your letter.
I would like to thank you
for your letter.

I am afraid.
Would/Could you please
inform me ...?

We look forward to
hearing from you soon.

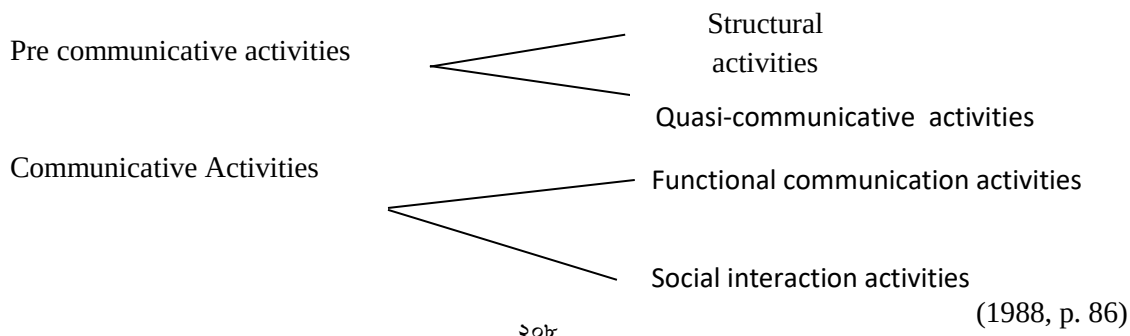
Thank you so much.

Yours sincerely

Jack Higgins
(2000, p. 57)

8 Pre-communicative and communicative activities

The researcher's personal experiences reveal the fact that in order to construct rock-solid footing or building block of English of the target groups, EFL teachers need to go for a range of pre-communicative activities as are presented by Littlewood:



Both transactional (official or purposeful) and interactional (social) modes of communications can facilitate mastering speaking. It is mentionable here that when a speaker goes for bottom-up communications, s/he must be more polite or formal whereas top-down communication necessitates less polite, less formal, or semi-formal language. It should be borne in mind that full-length expressions or grammatically well-constructed sentences sound awkward in spoken English, which prefers somewhat colloquial or semi-formal utterances:

Example 1:

A: Well, in this job we do er a lot of cradle work you see, and er on different tower blocks in Birmingham.

B: A lot of what did you say?

A: Cradle work. That's ou, outside work, on the er blocks of flats, where you can see the outside cradles up the outside of the tower blocks.

B: Oh, I'm with you now, you sort of sta, hang in a basket to clean the windows then?

A: Yeah, that's right, I do, yeah! Good job we're well insured isn't!
(from *Listeners*, Underwood and Barr, 1980.)

Example 2:

John: Hello, how are you?

Tom: I'm fine, thank you, how are you?

John: I'm also fine, thank you.

Tom: How's your wife?

John: She's very well, thank you.

How's your wife?

Tom: She's also very well, thank you.

If we make a comparative and contrastive analysis of the two conversations shown above, we discover the fact that the first example is a natural conversation where there is an information gap whereas the second example is "rather artificial as conversation and sounds more like a script than a piece of spontaneous language" (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p. 141). In essence, pair or group discussion, role-play/simulation, recitation, extempore speeches and English debates can play an instrumental role in making/producing fluent, confident and articulate speakers. Euphemistic, useful, non-

threatening and encouraging teacher or peer feedback can also boost speaking. On top of this, our monolingual or 'Bengali-only' society should change its frowning attitude towards our EFL speakers for, as D. A. Wilkins aptly points out, "Society creates the context of learning and within this we try to meet the needs of the individual" (1972, p. 150).

9 Teaching language through literature and elaborating famous quotes

After conducting a sizable number of interactive classes through integrating listening and speaking, reading and writing can be blended to brush up our target learners' English. Language experts are of the view that "Reading is one of the four basic skills which is important for students of all levels. Students' success in an academic programme often depends on their reading proficiency" (Bashir, 2020, p. 134). While teaching reading as an integrated skill at the HSC level, an EFL teacher can have his/her target students read Bangabandhu's epoch-making 7th March speech or Blake's poem, "The School Boy" in part or full. Through a host of effective and interesting pre-, while-, and post-reading activities conducted by efficient EFL teachers (following Presentation, Practice, and Production or PPP approach), almost all students will be able to learn new vocabulary, structure, spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and text/discourse in stimulating ways, rather than in a tedious manner. A variety of literary pieces or write-ups from different genres can enthuse our EFL learners to brush up their English through an internalization of new phrases, idioms, collocations, syntactic and semantic patterns, figurative expressions, and so forth. Teaching language through literature is a very popular concept of the day because renowned writers or poets are the best users of a language. It is they who coin new words (neologism) that enrich our languages. Furthermore, famous, thought-provoking quotes prompt avid readers to reflect, speak, or write elaborately on them. A range of oft-quoted extracts from English literature include:

"All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;" (William Shakespeare)

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." (William Shakespeare)

"Sweet are the uses of adversity." (William Shakespeare)

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.”
(Francis Bacon)

“Knowledge is power.” (Francis Bacon)

“Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts.” (P. B. Shelley)

“Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.” (Thomas Gray)

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” (John Keats)

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.” (Robert Frost)

“A man can be destroyed, but not defeated.” (Ernest Hemingway)

“The child is father of the Man.” (William Wordsworth)

“What is this life if, full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare.” (W.H. Davies)

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” (Jane Austen)

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, ... it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” (Charles Dickens)

“Fortune favors the bold.” (Virgil)

“I think, therefore I am.” (Descartes)

“There is no Frigate like a Book

To take us Lands away

...

How frugal is the Chariot

That bears the Human Soul.” (Emily Dickinson)

If efficient EFL teachers having impressive command over language and literature read out these types of sparkling and stimulating quotes to our target EFL learners, illustrate them, and engage the learners in diverse pair or group work, such as debate, discussion, extempore speech, and recitation, they will be able to brush up their listening, speaking, reading, and writing in lively and interesting ways.

10 Amalgamating bottom-up and top-down reading

Two common strategies or approaches to reading that facilitate EFL learning — bottom-up and top-down models — help highly, moderately, and low proficient target students to pick up English. To elaborate explicitly, the bottom-up model is a text-based approach in which readers focus on individual components of a text, such as phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, and grammatical ingredients in order to comprehend the text or discourse. This process moves from letters to words to meaning (Anderson, 1999; Nuttall, 2005). In Alderson's in-depth analysis, "the reader begins with the printed word, recognizes graphic stimuli, decodes them to sound, recognizes words and decodes meaning (2000, p. 307). In contrast, in the top-down approach to reading known as "a psycholinguistic approach", readers use their schemata with a view to deciphering the overall semanticity of the text. Interestingly enough, a novel and effective approach to reading called "interactive model" (Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007) cropped up in the early 1980s, which refers to an interaction between information obtained through bottom-up processing and top-down analysis. An avid reader usually uses strategies of both bottom-up and top-down models and shifts from one to the other depending on the purposes of reading. The striking techniques of reading include:

1. Skimming: reading to get at the gist of the text
2. Scanning: reading to look for specific piece of information
3. Extensive reading: reading for pleasure
4. Intensive reading: reading for detail

Initially, students can be encouraged to read aloud, but it divides their time between speaking and reading. So, L2 readers need to be prompted to opt for silent reading and quick reading. Guessing the meaning from the context and using background knowledge or schemata also facilitate reading. Through quick reading techniques, the target readers should read around 187 words per minute, which give them the status of standard readers. In essence, a well-designed EFL lesson plan incorporates adequate stimulating pre-, while- and post- reading activities that help our target L2 learners grasp all the core skills of English.

11 Familiarizing the target learners with diverse templates through reading for mastering writing

Interestingly, if EFL teachers motivate our target students to read letters, letters of application, stories, CVs, precis, reports, memoranda, posters, paragraphs, and essays on a wide range of topics, get them to discuss these through well-designed pair or group work, L2 learners will have the necessary components (e.g., vocabulary, collocation, structures, spelling, idioms, etc.) at their disposal for writing on those genres maintaining proper structures or lay-outs. Thus, reading and writing can be taught as integrated skills. A productive skill, i.e., writing is crucially important because “human memory is short-lived and the brain’s storage capacity is limited” (Fromkin et al, 2004, p.546). There is a Chinese proverb regarding the significance of writing, “The palest ink is better than the sharpest memory” (cited in Fromkin et al, 2004, p. 545). With a view to facilitating teaching-learning writing, EFL teachers can familiarize the target L2 learners with the acronym CODER, which means the following:

C= Collecting Ideas

O= Organizing

D= Drafting

E= Editing

R= Redrafting

12 How to write a well-knit paragraph and essay

Before asking the target L2 learners to write a well-knit paragraph, a proficient EFL teacher needs to motivate them to go for brainstorming or group discussion, which generates a host of novel ideas among the budding writers, who ought to be encouraged to practise both ‘free’ and ‘guided’ or ‘controlled’ writing. Neophyte writers are instructed that in addition to sentential accuracy, cohesion and coherence must be maintained; and, both the useful teacher and peer feedback (both formative and summative) can contribute significantly to the improvement of writing. To ensure peer feedback, L2 students can be asked to write on a topic and swap their papers with each other. Then they provide constructive feedback on the write-ups and have a one-on-one conversation to understand the points clearly and discuss further questions and issues.

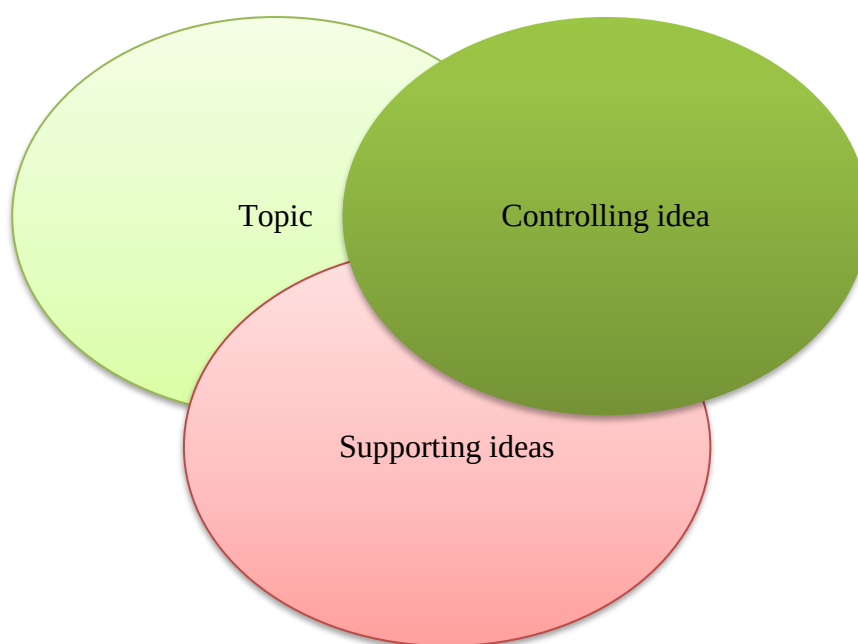


Figure 2 A well-knit paragraph

A well-knit paragraph has an introducer, developer, and terminator; and, there is an inalienable connection among topic, controlling ideas and supporting ideas. It should be mentioned here that cohesion (syntactic unity) and coherence (semantic unity) must be maintained in a paragraph.

13 How to draft a standard piece of writing/composition

The web-diagram shows the key features which good writers can deal with for producing a standard piece of writing/essay:



Figure 3 An organized composition (Adapted from Aslam, 2003, p. 90)

14 Picking up writing through a host of stimulating in-class activities and corrective feedback

The target learners can also be encouraged to write letters or emails to their classmates on diverse topics after their liking and send SMS to their peers on a variety of topics, asked to read them loudly, and give corrective feedback. Then the teacher can take close looks at some of them and offer common corrective feedback so that no writer feels offended. There is no denying the fact that “feedback is an essential component of writing classes, as polished writing and improved writing skills are products of multiple revisions” (Yol, 2019, p. 26). In fact, efficient, euphemistic, non-threatening, and useful feedback can help L2 learners improve all the four skills remarkably.

15 Teaching the four skills in conjunction

In order to teach the four core skills of English interactively and in integration to our target students, efficient EFL teachers can select a topic from *English for Today Classes XI-XII and Alim* and teach listening, speaking, reading and writing altogether. The easiest form of integration is within the same medium (either oral or written), from receptive to productive skills.

	Receptive skills	Productive skills
Oral Medium	listening	speaking
Written Medium	reading	writing

As a matter of fact, the process of integrating skills involves using some or all of the core skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) to practise new materials such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, text/discourse and the like. In order to ensure interaction in the EFL classes, all four skills must be practised in every lesson. As listening and speaking go together naturally, it is always desirable to integrate these two skills in a single class. In fact, the sequence — hear-speak-read-write — is the most appropriate one for integrated skills work. A common, interesting or stimulating topic like *Describe yourself or Your favourite food, hobby, sport, personality, season, pet*, “is a device linking the separate activities in integrated skills lessons” (Lubelska and Matthews, 1997, p.174).

16 Linguistic competence versus communicative competence

Both efficient, well-trained, committed EFL/ESL teachers and enthusiastic learners need to have a good understanding of a discourse and be able to use text books flexibly. This is also time-consuming. Besides, selecting or designing suitable materials is also a gigantic job, which should suit age, ability and aptitude of the target learners. In essence, the process of integrating the four skills enhances the focus on realistic or naturalistic communication involving “the knowledge (linguistic competence) and its practice (communicative competence)” (Norman et al., 1989, p. 154), which is inevitable for developing EFL learners’ overall competence in English. In general, “Linguistic competence is a part of communicative competence” (Brumfit and Johnson, 1985, p. 168). The following diagram will make the point clear:

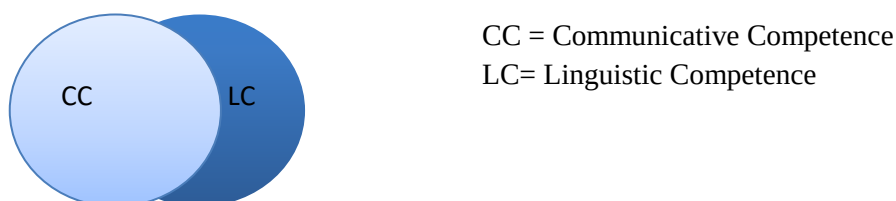


Figure 4 Linguistic and Communicative Competence (Adapted from Brumfit and Johnson, 1985, p. 168)

17 Simple and complex integration

Interestingly, there are two ways of integrating skills: simple integration, whereby a receptive skill serves as a model for a productive skill, and complex integration, which is an amalgamation of multifarious activities involving different skills linked thematically. What is worth pointing out here is that integrated language learning can be more motivating as the learners are using the language for a real purpose, instead of just cramming or practicing the grammar points, which is nothing but a drudgery. Integration requires skillful teaching, and it can bring worthwhile results. To ensure interaction and integration, our EFL teachers need to be trained both at home and abroad adequately as was done through the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) and

English in Action (EIA). Furthermore, the teacher-student ratio should be around 1:30, and class time should be extended to ninety minutes in place of forty-five minutes. Listening and speaking must be included in the formal assessment process because washback effect matters a lot in teaching and learning. On top of that, proper teacher development and adequate incentives are a must with a view to ensuring quality teaching-learning. Highlighting the significance of integrated skills approach to L2 teaching, Nunan is of the prudent view:

Rather than isolated skills in skill-specific classes (e.g., “English Grammar,” “Writing,” “Listening and Speaking”), CBI (Content-Based Instruction) practitioners use an integrated skills approach to language teaching, covering all four language skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. ...a lesson may begin with any skill, or alternatively, with focus on grammar and vocabulary (2003, p. 306).

18 Pair and group work for teaching and learning four skills in integration

By giving the target L2 learners tasks, McDonough and Shaw (2003) assert, that expose them to the four core skills in conjunction, it is very much possible that they will gain a deeper understanding of how communication works in the foreign language as well as becoming more motivated when they see the value of performing tasks and activities in the classroom. Morrow (1981, p. 61) wisely but wryly comments on teaching language skills in isolation:

One of the significant features of communication is that it is a dynamic and developing phenomenon. In other words, it cannot easily be analysed into component features without its nature being destroyed in the process. It is of course possible to identify various formal features of the way language is used communicatively, and these can be studied individually. But the ability to handle these elements in isolation is no indication of ability to communicate.

19 Salient causes of low proficiency of Bangladeshi EFL learners

Referring to the state of low proficiency of Bangladeshi L2 learners and sorry state of English education here, Kirkpatrick (2016, p. 11) quotes an array of linguists (Hamid and Erling; Hamid and Baldauf) and points out that “English occupies a significant place in the Bangladeshi curriculum and is a compulsory subject from grade 1, yet results are unimpressive countrywide and even worse in rural areas”. He goes on to say that “Part of this can be explained by a lack of teacher training, minimal resources, and low expenditure on education” (p.11).

20 Conclusion

As a matter of fact, a host of remarkable pedagogical changes — a range of novel and stimulating warm-ups and a wide variety of interesting and stimulating activity-based, more or less student-centred and teacher-facilitated classes (in which teacher–student ratio is around 1:30) conducted by efficient and thoroughly trained EFL teachers or ELT experts with adequate audio-visual aids, moveable seating arrangements conducive to adequate pair and group work, formative assessments along with summative ones of all the four skills and command over BICS and CALP — can guarantee the effective and desired teaching-learning of listening, speaking (two Cinderella skills) as well as reading and writing through interaction and in integration. In essence, authority over the four core skills of the world’s lingua franca can enable our target EFL/ESL learners to tie up with 4IR and be turned into skilled and efficient workforce. By mastering one of the essential soft skills of the 21st century, they will be able to pursue higher/vocational education at home and abroad and contribute significantly to our economic emancipation. Attaching enormous importance to our EFL/ESL learners’ mastering all the four core skills of English in conjunction, Bangladesh National Curriculum explicitly states (2012b, p. 2):

The curriculum focuses on teaching-learning English as a skill-based subject so that learners can use English in their real-life situations by acquiring necessary language skills as well as knowledge, learning about cultures and values, developing positive attitudes, pursuing higher education and having better access to local and global employment.

An eminent ELT practitioner of Bangladesh, Professor Hamidur Rahman (2021, p. 57), also refers to the heartening matter that the government policy with regard to ELT in Bangladesh has undergone changes at different times. Curricula have been revised, new textbooks have been written, and novel approaches and methods have been advocated. Teachers have been asked to move away from the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and veer towards CLT. There also exists a negative attitude among the Bangladeshi teachers towards CLT because demands have been made on them to change their habitual practices and acquire new techniques to teach all four skills in integration. It would not be possible to discard age-old Grammar-Translation Method (GTM); rather, a synthesis of GTM and CLT can facilitate teaching-learning of the four core skills in conjunction, which can turn our linguistically unequipped, conceptually barren, and communicatively underprepared target EFL learners into linguistically sound, conceptually rich, and communicatively competent human resources.

References

- Alderson, J. C. (2000). *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, N. J. (1999). *Exploring second language reading: Issues and strategies*. Heinle & Heinle.
- Aslam, M. 2003. *Teaching of English*. Foundation Books.
- Bashir, A. (2018-19). English language learners' level of reading proficiency and their use of reading strategies. *Spectrum, 14-15*, 134–153.
- Billah, Q. M., Alam, F., Shahidullah, M., Mortuza, S., Haider, Z., & Roy, G. (2012). *English for today: Classes XI-XII* (S. M. Islam & S. M. Kabir, Eds.). National Curriculum and Textbook Board.
- Brumfit, C., & Johnson, K. (1985). *The communicative approach to language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Cook, V. (1996). *Second language learning and language teaching*. Arnold.
- Ellis, R. (2002). *Second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Erler, L., & Finkbeiner, C. (2007). A review of reading strategies: Focus on the impact of first language. In A. D. Cohen & E. Macaro (Eds.), *Language Learner Strategies* (Vol. 30, pp. 187–206). Oxford University Press.

- Fromkin, V., Roadman, R., & Hyams, N. 2004. *An Introduction to Language*. Thomson Asia Pte. Ltd.
- Gimson, A. C. (1974). *Pronunciation of English*. Edward Arnold.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching*. Pearson Education Limited.
- John, & Soars, L. (2000). *Pre-intermediate new headway*. Oxford University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, R. (Ed.). 2016. *English language education policy in Asia*. Springer.
- Leech, G. N., & Svartvik, J. (2000). *A communicative grammar of English*. Longman.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. 2000. *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (1988). *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lubelska, D., & Matthews, M. (1997). *Looking at language classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
- McDonough, J., & Shaw, C. (2003). *Materials and Methods in ELT*. Blackwell Publishing Limited.
- Morrow, K. (1981). Principles of communicative methodology. In K. Johnson & K. Morrow (Eds.), *Communication in the classroom: Applications and methods for a communicative approach* (pp. 59–66). Longman.
- Muzaffar, T. B. (1999). On gees and zeas: A comparative phonological study towards better English pronunciation. In *Collected papers of the international conference on national and regional issues in English language teaching: International perspectives* (pp. 69–72).
- Norman, D., Levihn, U., & Hedenquist, J. A. (1989). Communicative ideas: An approach with classroom activities. *ELT Journal*, 43(2), 154.
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English language teaching*. Contemporary.
- Nuttall, C. (2005). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. Macmillan Education.
- O'Connor, J. D. (2005). *Better English Pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rahman, A. M. M. H. (2021). Confluence of influences shaping ELT in Bangladesh. In S. Sultana, M. M. Rashid, Md. Z. Haider, M. Md. N. Kabir, & M. H. Khan (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Education in Bangladesh* (pp. 46–59). Routledge.
- Richards, J. C. (1990). *The Language Teaching Matrix*. Cambridge University Press.

- Richards, J., Platt, J., & Weber, H. (1995). *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. Longman.
- Wilkins, D. A. (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. Athenaeum Press Ltd.
- Yol, Ö. (2019). Peer feedback in second-language writing classes: “Dear My Friend....” *English Teaching Forum*, 57(3), 26–29.