

INTEGRATIVE

APPROACH TO TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ENFOQUE INTEGRAL DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays language education must respond to increasingly complex academic and societal demands, and for these reasons the integration of foreign language instruction with other disciplines has become a pedagogical priority. Despite growing interest in interdisciplinary approaches, there remains a lack of comprehensive models that effectively align linguistic development with broader cognitive and curricular goals. This research aims to explore the theoretical foundations, practical implementation, and educational impact of integrative teaching methods in EFL classrooms for non-native speakers. Drawing on elements from innatism, interactionist, and cognitive learning theories, as well as communicative competence and transdisciplinary integration, we demonstrate that integrative instruction not only fosters holistic language acquisition but also cultivates critical thinking and intercultural skills. However, the implementation of such models is constrained by factors such as curricular fragmentation, unequal access to digital resources, institutional inertia, and limited teacher training. Therefore, it is highlighted the necessity of collaborative curricular design, inclusive assessment strategies, and equitable infrastructure to bridge the gap between theory and classroom reality.

Keywords: Integrative teaching, Foreign language education, EFL, Interdisciplinary learning, Curriculum innovation, non-native speakers.

RESUMEN

Hoy en día, la educación de idiomas debe responder a demandas académicas y sociales cada vez más complejas, y por ello, la integración de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras con otras disciplinas se ha convertido en una prioridad pedagógica. A pesar del creciente interés en los enfoques interdisciplinarios, persiste la falta de modelos integrales que alineen eficazmente el desarrollo lingüístico con objetivos cognitivos y curriculares más amplios. Esta investigación busca explorar los fundamentos teóricos, la implementación práctica y el impacto educativo de los métodos de enseñanza integrativos en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para hablantes no nativos. Basándonos en elementos de las teorías inatistas, interaccionistas y cognitivas del aprendizaje, así como en la competencia comunicativa y la integración transdisciplinaria, se demuestra que la instrucción integrativa no solo fomenta la adquisición holística del lenguaje, sino que también cultiva el pensamiento crítico y las habilidades interculturales. Sin embargo, la implementación de estos modelos se ve limitada por factores como la fragmentación curricular, el acceso desigual a los recursos digitales, la inercia institucional y la limitada formación docente. Por lo tanto, se destaca la necesidad de un diseño curricular colaborativo, estrategias de evaluación inclusivas e infraestructura equitativa para reducir la brecha entre la teoría y la realidad del aula.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza integradora, Educación de lenguas extranjeras, EFL, Aprendizaje interdisciplinario, Innovación curricular, Hablantes no nativos.

INTRODUCTION

The term “integration” owes its origin to the Latin word “interatio,” which means replenishment, restoration, unification into a single whole of any parts or elements. The issue of integrating academic subjects has a long history, as evidenced by the rich accumulated experience that requires further study and analysis. By the integrative approach, one means an equal and uniform combination of similar, related topics in academic subjects, “the study of which is mutually intertwined at each stage of education” (Peicu, 2019). According to Krasnoshchekov & Gorodskaya (2021), the organization of foreign language education in a secondary comprehensive school has a number of difficulties, including:

1. lack of continuity in the choice of topics, and sometimes a complete lack of consistency in the transition from class to class;

2. the absence of a system of tasks that require reliance on the intellectual skills of students and are associated with the step-by-step formation of mental actions.

In order to improve the current situation in the field of foreign language education, it seems possible to develop new approaches to solving the problem of subject content. Bezrukova (1994) described a number of rules of pedagogical integration:

1. the need to identify objects of integration;
2. the need to isolate factors that contribute and do not contribute to the integration of the identified objects of integration;
3. the need to formulate the effective expectations of all participants in the educational process.

Boldova (2008) believes that the integrative approach to teaching foreign languages involves “building an educational process with the inclusion of the most suitable materials in this process”. Due to the fact that integration is a fairly complex and multi-level process, there are various domestic and foreign concepts of “integration.” It is important to make a distinction between intra-subject, inter-subject and trans-subject integration. 1. Intra-subject integration is achieved through the unification of common linguistic concepts within the framework of one subject (Gabillon, 2020). In addition, integration can be vertical and horizontal. Vertical integration is based on the principle of concentricity, in a spiral, where the content is gradually enriched with new information, connections and dependencies (Tucker et al., 2008). Horizontal integration is built by enlarging the topic, combining a group of related concepts. In this case, information is mastered by “building up,” moving from one element to another.

Interdisciplinary integration synthesizes information from different sciences to reveal a particular issue (Renn, 2021). Here, two or more disciplines can be combined. There is also horizontal and vertical interdisciplinary integration. Horizontal integration has a linear structure. The general substantive unit in it is the topic, which can be related to the topics of other academic disciplines. Vertical integration combines several school subjects in order to organize a dialogue on the chosen topic. The general discussion can be about the specific content, image, emotional state, moral and aesthetic meaning of the phenomenon under study, etc.

Transdisciplinary integration is a synthesis of the components of the basic and additional educational content (Pohl et al., 2021). It refers to horizontal integration, where the content of the educational areas of primary education, organized according to the second level of integration, is combined into a single whole with the content of additional

education. The subject of analysis is multifaceted objects, information about the essence of which is contained in various basic and additional educational subjects. Also, all analyzers (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, tactile-motor) are included in the process of cognition. Such integration ensures the strength of the formation of conditional connections in the student's cognition of the surrounding reality.

Considering the above, this research aims to critically examine the concept of "integration" within educational environments, with particular attention to the features and pedagogical potential of integrated foreign language teaching as a means to foster students' compensatory skills. The study seeks to analyze the practical challenges and systemic barriers that hinder the implementation of the integrative approach in real classroom settings—such as curricular fragmentation, lack of institutional coordination, teacher preparedness, and technological inequalities. Through this lens, the research explores how these limitations impact the transition from traditional models to holistic, skill-synthesizing educational practices.

DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Foundations of the Integrative Approach in language teaching

In spite of several research on the integrative approach in foreign language education, the concept of an integrative program has not yet been fully implemented worldwide and there are topics in which the scientific community doesn't fully agree. But there is a consensus that in order to implement a program like this, all aspects of language learning must be included in the teaching process. The integrative approach in language teaching can be broadly defined as the process of teaching several skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking together, rather than in isolation (Tikhomirova, 2024; Watts & Forder, 2013). This approach recognizes that, in real-life communication, language skills are rarely used separately. For example, a person may read an email, respond to it in writing, and then discuss its main content in a meeting, therefore integrating multiple skills. This approach is a vital technique for efficient learning as it allows the combination of multiple skills into a single lesson or assignment, which promotes holistic learning. Thus, the integrative learning is also associated with concepts such as the whole language approach (Razaq & Noor, 2024) where all skills are taught in parallel and mutually reinforcing.

The integrative approach is underpinned by several language learning theories that have shaped modern language pedagogy. These theories provide a solid foundation

for understanding why skill integration is effective and how it can be implemented in the classroom. For example, innatist theory, proposed by Noam Chomsky, argues that humans possess an innate capacity to learn languages, known as the "language acquisition device" (Chomsky, 2006). This theory suggests that language is a complex system that cannot be reduced to simple stimuli and responses, as proposed by behaviorist theories. The integrative approach aligns with this perspective by teaching language skills in conjunction, activating students' innate ability to process and use language in an integrated way. Thus, by integrating various skills in parallel, students can leverage this capacity to build linguistic knowledge more naturally.

On the other hand, interactionist theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning. Students learn best when they have opportunities to interact with other speakers, whether in the classroom or in real-life contexts (Alharbi, 2023; Rudd & Lambert, 2011). The integrative approach encourages this interaction by requiring students to use multiple skills simultaneously. For example, an activity that combines listening to a podcast and discussing its content in groups promotes interaction between students, facilitating learning through communicative exchange. Furthermore, from a cognitive perspective, language learning involves the construction of knowledge through experience and reflection. Therefore, in cognitive theory it is argued that students learn best when material is presented in meaningful contexts that require the use of several skills at once. The integrative approach can facilitate this process by presenting language in authentic situations that combine reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Finally, one of the most influential theoretical foundations of the integrative approach is the theory of communicative competence. This theory defines communicative competence as the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts, encompassing not only grammatical and lexical knowledge, but also the ability to interact effectively (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Current situation of teaching English

Teaching of English as a foreign language has undergone a notable transformation in recent years, driven by technological advances, the changes in student needs but also global trends. Since English continues to be the language par excellence for international communication, educational systems around the world seek to adapt to these dynamics (Maguire, 2024). From today onward, innovative technologies are widely used in educational systems. Of course, although technologies cannot play a significant role in a teacher's work, they can be used as an additional tool to improve teaching methods in the classroom. Since

the traditional teaching method with chalk and chat seems monotonous and boring to today's students, teachers are turning to the latest technologies in foreign language teaching. Therefore, various software tools and modern technologies are used to facilitate students' access to lessons. There are many books on every subject and in many languages on the Internet. In an environment where the Internet is everywhere, it is quite difficult to choose the right information at the right time without having basic knowledge in any field. Modern foreign language teachers and students use tools such as video conferencing, communication laboratories, video libraries, various blogs, etc. Therefore, English language teaching today is characterized by a combination of interactive methodologies. Among the most notable approaches, although this list is not exhaustive, are:

- **Technology-Driven Methods:** Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) are revolutionizing classrooms. Platforms such as Duolingo and Babbel use AI to offer personalized learning experiences, adapting content to each student's pace and level. Meanwhile, VR and AR generate immersive environments that allow students to practice English in simulated real-life situations, particularly improving speaking and listening skills (Egunjobi & Adeyeye, 2024; Martin, 2023).
- **Gamification:** Turning lessons into interactive games with rewards and challenges has been shown to increase student motivation and retention. This strategy is especially effective for young learners and has become popular in language learning apps (Shen et al., 2024).
- **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):** This approach, focused on real-life interaction and communication, remains fundamental to EFL teaching. It is integrated into both modern curricula and applications, prioritizing practical use of the language (Qasserras, 2023).
- **Task-Based Teaching (TBL):** This involves solving real-world activities that require the use of English, fostering fluency and contextual understanding (British Council, 2025).

These methods reflect a shift toward a more student-centered education, moving away from traditional teacher-oriented models (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). However, their effectiveness depends largely on teachers' ability to implement them and to address the diverse needs of learners/students. This requires not only pedagogical adaptation but also a constant evolution of teaching strategies, given that students demand flexibility in learning which includes asynchronous modalities and personalized pacing (Müller et al., 2023). In this context, finding a balance

between traditional curricular expectations and objectives represents a significant challenge. Likewise, the accelerated pace of technological innovation is forcing teachers to continually update their skills to appropriately integrate innovative and evolving tools. This transition can be overwhelming, especially for educators with limited access to training or technological resources. Furthermore, the digital division between institutions and/or regions further exacerbates the problem (Mhlongo et al., 2023).

But beyond language proficiency students need to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural competence to excel in increasingly competitive environments. Therefore, encouraging students to take charge of their own learning is essential, but this also presents some challenges. For example, classrooms are increasingly multicultural and multilingual that demand from teachers to assume the role of facilitators rather than the sole transmitters of knowledge. Fostering an inclusive and collaborative environment involves the adaptation of methodologies and, in many cases, overcoming cultural barriers. Added to this is the lack of support from institutions or supervisors, a factor that increases the risk of dropping out of school. Specifically, at the institutional level, implementing this approach requires meticulous coordination among educators and curricular reorganization, processes that often encounter resistance because misconceptions about disciplines and administrative rigidities reinforce academic isolation and hinder educational modernization.

Therefore, these challenges underscore the need for:

- **Collaborative planning:** To encourage the dialogue among teachers to design curricula focused on student needs, integrating educational standards and cross-cutting themes.
- **Multidimensional assessment:** Employ diverse methods—essays, interdisciplinary projects, presentations—along with formal (exams) and informal (observations) tools to assess learning.
- **Innovative dynamics:** Leverage peer learning in small groups (3-5 students) and the use of digital tools, since the speed at which knowledge acquisition is required undoubtedly makes classroom action alone insufficient.
- **Equitable distribution of resources to reduce technological gaps:** Ensuring all students have fair access to digital technologies is essential to foster inclusive and adequate learning environments. This involves not only to provide schools with adequate infrastruc-

ture—such as high-speed internet, computers, tablets, and software—but also to address disparities among students based on their socio-economic background, geographical location, or disabilities. In this sense, bridging these technological divides requires coordinated efforts from governments, educational institutions, and/or private sectors to promote policies that prioritize equity in resource allocation.

But although the challenges are complex, we believe that a combination of teacher collaboration, active methodologies, and adaptive assessment can drive the success of this educational model.

CONCLUSIONS

The integrative approach to foreign language teaching is not merely a methodological preference; it has established itself as a systemic educational paradigm that fosters comprehensive and holistic learning, to the point that it has transcended the field of language teaching. By promoting the interconnection of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural competencies, this approach facilitates more meaningful and contextualized language acquisition. However, its successful implementation requires overcoming significant challenges such as curricular rigidity, sometimes limited teacher preparation, unprecedentedly rapid technological development, resource disparities, and institutional inertia. Therefore, integration must be understood not only as the unification of content but also as a comprehensive process that requires coordinated planning, inclusive pedagogical strategies, and ongoing research to achieve successful implementation. Its success depends on resolving tensions between idealism and pragmatism, investing in teacher training and innovative policies, and although it is not the only valid or attractive approach, its potential to foster learning makes it a relevant model worthy of further improvement.

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