



# An Overview of Integrated Skills and Non-english-Major Students' Communicative Competence

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**Abstract.** Teaching English to non-majored students to foster communicative competence and to meet learning outcomes standards is the most considerable concern of lecturers, managers, and universities. Currently, students' ability to use listening, speaking, writing, and speaking to communicate to serve their studies as well as their work is still limited. Among many teaching skills approaches, the integrated skills approach is proposed as the most productive one to satisfy these expectations. This article is a review of literature relating to the integrated skills approach and communicative competence. First, the paper will present the rationale for using an integrated skills approach in an English classroom. Then the paper will synthesize the key concepts and highlight the importance of integrating four skills to boost non-English-major students' communicative competence. In addition, the paper will review previous studies in the field of integrated skills approach and communicative competence to indicate the research gap. Last, the implications for further research will also be discussed.

**Keywords:** Non-English-Major Students · Integrated Skills Approach · Communicative Competence

## 1 Introduction

People in a globalized world need to be connected, and cooperative, so communicative competence in foreign languages is likely to be a requirement. [1]. English is a widely used language in most countries in the world. Communicating in English well is extremely significant because it is considered the ultimate goal of learning English. Teaching English to non-majored students at higher institutions has recently aimed at developing learners' communicative competence.

In reality, teaching English to non-majored students is still following traditional methods, not focusing on learner-centeredness. By contrast, teachers put high emphasis on delivering new knowledge without providing learners with opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other. Although the syllabus is designed to teach four skills, lecturers convey knowledge and skills in isolation. As a result, students graduating from universities are still not confident in using English to communicate with managers, colleagues, or clients. Students are embarrassed to organize the sentences, remember

vocabulary, or pronounce words. They find it difficult to talk or share ideas and opinions in face-to-face meetings with managers or clients.

Daily communication has four ways (skills) to convey information: listening, speaking, reading, and writing by the natural order of language acquisition. Within four skills, listening and speaking are called receptive skills, and speaking and writing as named productive skills. To communicate effectively, learners must first equip input knowledge as much as possible to produce the utterances accurately and comprehensively called output. The integrated skills approach, which involves combining four skills into one lesson, has proven to be effective [2]. The integrated skills approach helps students have more opportunities to communicate and interact with teachers and peers, applying English to daily situations [3]. Therefore, this paper covers the theoretical foundation of the integrated skills approach, then highlights the importance of integrating receptive skills and productive skills to boost students' communicative competence, and finally shows the research gaps based on prior studies.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Definition of Key Terms**

#### **Integrated Skills Approach**

The integrated skills approach links four skills, including Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, into one lesson [4], and these skills are used for communication purposes [5].

The integrated skills approach is a cognitive process in which relevant topics or contents are requested. Learners use receptive skills to systematize the input knowledge to respond to the tasks through productive skills. Besides, learners use critical thinking to compare and contrast, indicate cause and effect, or confirm the relationship between them [6].

From the two aforementioned definitions, it is concluded that integrating four skills in an EFL classroom is the process of merging Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing systematically coupled with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation into one lesson and one curriculum. Learners receive information passively and use critical thinking to produce new knowledge.

#### **Communicative Competence**

Communicative competence is a two-way interaction between people. Therefore, students must be able to solve problems quickly and listen comprehensively to tackle the issues simultaneously. Under time pressure, learners activate their knowledge the brain about knowledge and vocabulary related to topics to make sentences and consistently arrange ideas. Besides, to pronounce correctly, the voice must have a tone and maintain ideas fluency [7].

To examine how successful learners are in communication, it should be investigated about the component of communicative competence.

Stemming from the concept of “competence”, many scholars take turns to deeply comprehend this concept by integrating the new “Communicative competence” concept.

[8] started to claim that “competence” is learners’ linguistic competence. This competence is determined as grammatical knowledge, including vocabulary, word form, morphology, pronunciation, or spelling. Specifically, learners can produce sentences based on linguistic knowledge. [8]’s definition limited learners’ competence in an area of knowledge and using grammar.

Developed by [8, 9] adjusted and expanded the concept of “competence” to “communicative competence” to describe the learners’ competence not only in using knowledge about grammar accurately but also in making use of grammatical knowledge to interact with others, applying it into daily life situations. Such principles are applied to both written and spoken language, but [9] highly emphasizes the ability to interact orally. In [9]’s perspective, communicative competence is coupled with achieving grammatical knowledge, and learners are required to perform sociolinguistic competence well.

Influenced by [8] and [9, 10] proposed the third branch of communicative competence; that is, strategic competence. That is referred to the learners’ ability to change themselves to solve unexpected situations like an interruption in communication or misunderstanding. This competence requires students’ flexibility to address the situations to communicate effectively.

[11] continually developed the definition of communicative competence by adding one component, namely discourse competence. It is the coherence and cohesion in developing ideas.

[12] later combined and adjusted the component of communicative competence. They considered discourse competence as the key area of communicative competence and the three other components, sociolinguistic competence, linguistic competence, and actional competence, are the circle around to support strategic competence.

In the last version of [13], sociolinguistic, linguistic, and discourse competence are added to formulaic competence. Formulaic competence pays more attention to the flexibility of conversation and pair-up activities, and other factors like phrases, sentences, and vocabulary. The actional competence is transferred to interactional competence. This competence requires learners to understand to respond to the tasks, say sorry to someone, give a suggestion, or exchange information. In addition, interactional competence is related to conversation competence, such as how to start a dialogue, delay a dialogue, or take turns interacting with partners.

To conclude, to measure how learners communicate successfully, it is required that they achieve six components, namely linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, discourse competence, formulaic competence, and interactional competence. Figure 1 represents the components of communicative competence.

## **2.2 The Role of Integrating Receptive Skills and Productive Skills on Developing Students’ Communicative Competence**

Language, in general, and English, in particular, are divided into receptive and productive skills. Learners should accumulate knowledge about certain topics through reading and listening to have the plan to address information. The two receptive skills are the base–input knowledge for students to have enough ability to produce language, which is

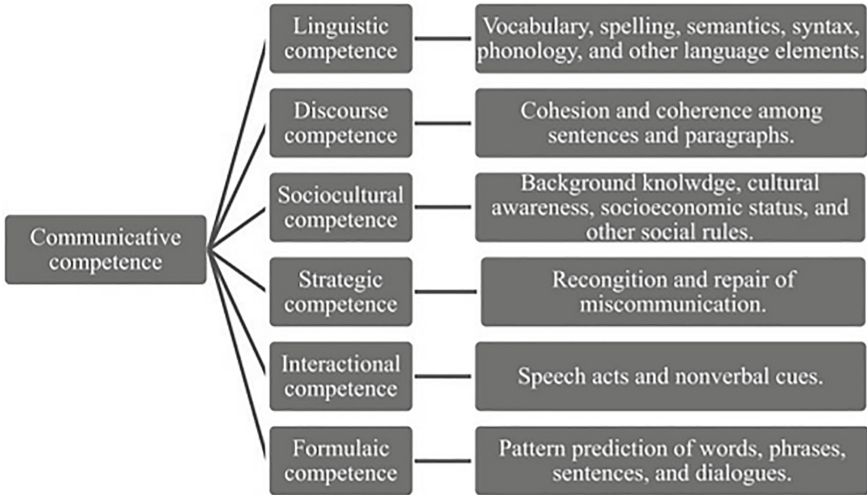


Fig. 1. Components of communicative competence. Note. Source: [14].

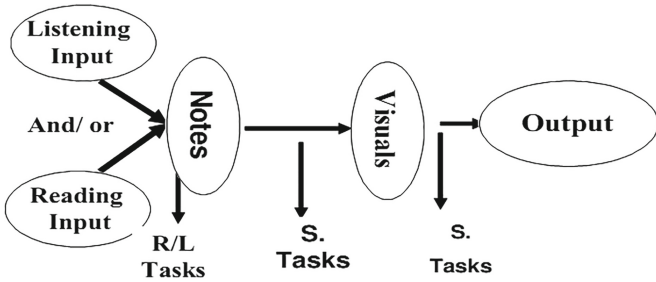


Fig. 2. A model for integrating the four language skills. Note. Source: [18].

called productive competence (output) through speaking and writing. [15] laid a high emphasis on the importance of input knowledge in developing students' communicative competence. The author stated that in teaching languages, the combination of reading and listening is a basic and essential factor contributing to increasing communicative competence for all learners. Teachers should equip learners with enough input knowledge to be ready to participate in reading, listening, speaking, and writing activities in the classroom. [16] also highlighted the role of three factors, including input, interaction, and output, in developing students' communicative competence. They are interrelated to support students in gaining oral fluency in communication. In 2018, [17] reconfirmed the impact of receptive skills on productive skills. Without listening, no speaking takes place. Similarly, with reading, no writing happens. Hence, four skills are connected to support learners to communicate effectively. Figure 2 illustrates the importance of listening and reading skills in developing speaking skills.

### 2.3 Related Studies

In 1991, [19] argued that attention to three components, including listening, speaking, and pronunciation, is essential to any coherent curriculum design. The author emphasizes that focusing solely on one aspect of oral communication is insufficient. As a result, teachers should incorporate various skills and activities to provide diverse opportunities for developing oral language proficiency for English second language learners.

In 2009, [20] investigated methods for improving learners' ability to speak English. The study discovered that implementing an interrelated skills approach could improve the effectiveness of oral English instruction. Integrating skills gives students the confidence to participate in classroom activities. Furthermore, the article focused on teachers who should conduct group and pair work with more than two skills at the same time. This allows students to increase interaction and practice speaking.

In 2010, [21] conducted a study to examine whether combining listening and speaking skills could improve students' oral communicative competence. This study included 180 students. To collect data, a pre-post test, and various tasks were used. The results showed that the group practicing the skills in integration outperformed the group practicing the skills separately. Furthermore, practicing the skills via information-gap tasks increases student involvement and motivation.

In 2011, [22] examined to what extent students improve speaking skills when participating in integrated skills approach implementation in the classroom. 500 Saudi English major students took part in the event. Data was collected through observations, questionnaires, and discussions with students and professors and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings revealed that linking skills together in the classroom enabled most students to develop speaking skills effectively. This approach may allow students to interact with teachers and peers more frequently. The amount and length of the students' speech contributions naturally varied. This study suggested that the implementation of this approach could be tested at other universities. Furthermore, more research should be conducted to determine why some students talk more, some less, and some very little.

In 2015, [23] conducted a study to address the process of implementing teaching stages covering skills for integration. The study recommended that teachers balance receptive and productive skills and vary teaching activities in order to teach interactively. Students developed oral communication after completing the following teaching stages: eliciting ideas, highlighting lexis and their meanings, predicting text, ordering jumbled paragraphs, listening, reading comprehension, and acting out the story/speaking in an integrated manner.

In 2018, [24]'s study aimed at analyzing the importance of integrating four skills to enhance students' English skills. The study indicated that skills could not be taught in isolation. They must be closely linked, along with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. It necessitated proper planning, implementation, post-analysis, and practice based on learner performance. The study also highlights some issues for teachers to consider when implementing an integrated skills approach in the classroom. First, large classroom sizes make it difficult for teachers to pay attention to each learner and organize teaching activities. Second, time management is also well-controlled because four skills are taught in one lesson.

Recently, [25] investigated learners' and teachers' perceptions of the integrated-skill approach and investigated the potential impact of this approach on learners' communicative competence. The study included thirteen English majors and four teachers. The data was gathered through group discussions and interviews. This study's findings revealed some integration of listening and speaking skills, and this integration was beneficial in improving learners' ability to use English properly. The presence of skills integration in classrooms has a significant positive effect on learners' communicative competence.

### 3 Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, to enhance students' communicative competence, implementing an integrated skills approach in English lessons proves its effectiveness. Teaching by linking skills together helps students build up their input knowledge to communicate confidently. They can express ideas, collaborate, and interact with peers inside and outside the classroom. However, teaching English to non-majored students in Vietnam has currently taught skills in isolation. The integrated skills approach has not still commonly applied in a Vietnamese classroom. Furthermore, most of the international and national research was conducted with English-majored students who showed good performance in learning English. A study investigating integrated skills approach implementation with non-English majored students to improve communicative competence is still a gap in the context of Vietnam. Therefore, further research should be conducted to explore to what extent this approach can help students enhance their English communicative competence.

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