

INTEGRATIVE TASKS FOR TEACHING AND TESTING LANGUAGE SKILLS



Abstract

The aim of the article is to justify the feasibility of using integrative tasks developed with the help of electronic educational resources (EER), in order to develop communicative competence of students of the 10th grade (high school) at the English language classes. The novelty of the work is to describe the current authorial methodology for teaching English in schools using EER which is aimed at achieving the main goal of learning English: developing the communicative competence. During the pedagogical experiment students of grade 10 (24) were involved, diagnostic and final tests were carried out. According to their results positive changes in the development of communicative competence of students were observed. The study analyzes experimental lessons with integrative tasks using EER. As a result of the research it was statistically proved that the described methodology provides the significant progress of all language skills of students at English classes. Research results presented in the article are of practical value for language teachers.



Аннотация

ИНТЕГРАТИВНЫЕ ЗАДАНИЯ ДЛЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ И ТЕСТИРОВАНИЯ ИНОЯЗЫЧНОЙ РЕЧЕВОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ

Целью статьи является обоснование целесообразности использования интегративных заданий, разработанных с помощью электронных образовательных ресурсов (ЭОР), для развития коммуникативной компетенции учащихся 10-х классов (старшей школы) на уроках английского языка. Новизна работы заключается в описании действующей авторской методики преподавания английского языка в школах с использованием ЭОР, которая направлена на достижение главной цели: развитие коммуникативной компетенции. В ходе педагогического эксперимента были задействованы учащиеся 10 класса (24 человека), проведены диагностические и итоговые тесты. По их результатам наблюдались положительные изменения в развитии коммуникативной компетентности учащихся. В исследовании анализируются экспериментальные уроки с интегративными заданиями с использованием ЭОР. Результаты исследования, представленные в статье, имеют практическую ценность для преподавателей иностранных языков.



Keywords

integrative tasks, language skills, electronic educational resource (EER), foreign language teaching, communicative competence



Ключевые слова

интегративные задания, языковые навыки, электронный образовательный ресурс (ЭОР), обучение иностранному языку, коммуникативная компетентность

Introduction. Integrative learning of language skills is based on the integrity of speech functions. The division of language into phonetic, lexical, grammatical strata (classical paradigm) or listening, speaking, reading, writing skills (communicative paradigm) as well as production, reception, interaction and mediation activities

paradigm suggested by The CEFR Companion Volume in 2018¹ is inevitably artificial. In real life language functions as a holistic entity [8]. Memory work, probabilistic prediction, understanding mechanisms, analyzer interaction and internal speech combine all kinds of speech activities. Linguists divide language into skills, activities, functions, etc. only for the sake of better understanding of it and easier teaching and learning, although it is a complex, holistic phenomenon [Pavlovskaya, 2001].

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>

With this respect we claim that successful speech communication implies reconciliation of linguistic phenomena through the cognitive functions of a person. The psycholinguistic model of relationship between receptive and productive skills is most clearly manifested in oral interaction, although it may be observed within reading-writing intercourse as well. Integrative training (testing included) is aimed at overcoming problems of misunderstanding and negotiation of meaning through integrated skills tasks [Pavlovskaya, 2001].

A speech act involves three levels: motivational, analytical, and productive [13]. The motivational level, triggered by an event, prompts a verbal response through cognitive processing, delivered orally or in writing. This natural, teaching-friendly scheme suits language learning and assessment.

If language skills are seldom used in isolation, why should they be tested in isolation? Eli Hinkel in the paper *Integrating the Four Skills: Current and Historical Perspectives* [Hinkel, 2010], claims that retrospectively the separation of the four skills in the highly idiosyncratic and limited designs of major English language tests, lead to the indelible effect on teaching and learning. But since then the situation has changed significantly.

The term 'integrated skills approach' is described as a language training combining receptive and productive speech activities in one task [Richard & Rogers, 2001]. This approach has gained popularity in foreign language teaching, as it is considered an effective approach to developing the communicative competence of students and their ability to use a foreign language in social, professional and educational areas [10].

Assessment of integrated skills has become more and more popular and in TOEFL it is represented in 4 integrated tasks in Speaking section based on reading and listening input and one integrated task in Writing section also based on reading a text and listening to a passage. There are integrated skills tasks in Pearson and ISE (Integrated Skills in English) — test from Trinity College London, as well as tests of other languages, TestDAF Deutsch als Fremdsprache, for instance.

Integrated skills approach is based on Krashen's ideas of natural sequence of skills which in his opinion reflects the sequence of native tongue acquisition: Listening — Speaking — Reading — Writing. Different types of speech activities can serve both as a purpose and as a means of learning; for example, learning to extract information from text (reading as the purpose of learning) can be combined with subsequent discussion of what has been read (reading as a means of learning to speak) [8].

Within this study the integrative approach involves linking receptive and productive skills within the same task. It is important to emphasize that the combination of skills is not random. It should follow the natural scheme of speech behavior. A text presented in audio and/or written form serves as the stimulus and implies reception, while the reaction is given by the learner (or test-taker) in the form of oral or written production.

The hypothesis that integrative approach will enhance the effectiveness of ELT at high school classes was tested in the empirical study.

Since the modern requirements of the educational process imply to use certain EER, we offer to use integrative tasks developed with the help of EER materials. Such tasks are able to develop harmoniously productive and receptive language skills. Lessons with EER's should include tasks for the development of listening, reading, speaking and writing skills.

Psycholinguistic studies indicate that motivation, emotion and cognition are crucial for language learning [Wei, Li, 2020]. These factors are influenced by the learning environment, teaching methods, curriculum implemented at school. It is believed that more interactive learning methods such as real-world-based learning tasks have proven to be more effective than teaching methods based on traditional vocabulary and grammar learning [7].

With this regard we suppose that the method of teaching based on an integrative approach and EER will increase the motivation and interest of students to learn the English language.

One of the principles of the integrative approach is that the entire educational process should be oriented to real communicative tasks and situations — CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning — subject-language integrated learning) [4]. This model of education, which combines the study of subject content (e.g., mathematics, science, history) with a foreign language. The basic idea of CLIL is that students learn a foreign language in the context of another subject, which contributes to a deeper understanding of both the language and the content. This allows students to practice the language in real situations and develop skills that they will need in the future. Although teachers face difficulties in effectively implementing CLIL because this approach requires a high level of proficiency in various subject areas [9]. At the same time, teachers are expected to devote more time and effort to preparing materials suitable for integrative learning.

In many parts of the world, especially in developing countries where teachers are required to teach very large classes, such teaching may not be a practical option [5].

EERs will help to overcome the above difficulties, as they contain numerous ready-made materials which are regularly updated. Electronic resources create favourable conditions for the implementation of an integrative approach both in teaching and in assessing students' foreign language communicative competences. They make it possible to compact and visually provide both the supply of material for the reception and the fixation of productive speech activity with simultaneous criteria evaluation of the result obtained in large groups of students.

Some studies have made a significant contribution to the modernization of education, but the problem of designing integrative assignments for the classes of English using EER is still relevant because there are no clear instructions on how to create them.

In this paper, the term 'integrative approach' is understood as the use of an interrelated chain of tasks in which the receptive and productive types of speech are combined to solve a communicative task with the help of electronic educational resources.

Method. Methodologists discuss two approaches to constructing an integrative task: 1) starting with the oral form of activity (listening, speaking) to be followed by a transition to reading and writing [Richards & Rodgers, 2001]; 2) starting with the written form (reading, writing) to be followed by spoken [Pardede, 2019]. In this study we start with receptive activities (reading, listening) that are followed by productive ones (speaking or writing).

The main principles for selecting texts for reading and listening tasks are: a) authenticity, b) correspondence of language material to the syllabus, c) the language should be actively used in all kinds of activities, d) the subject matter of the texts used should be relevant to the social, socio-cultural and business spheres of communication [12].

Integrative tasks should have parallelism and balance of skills with one another. Skills in learning written language should correlate with different types of reading activities (extensive, intensive) [2; 3; 15].

The work of the teacher includes the following stages:

- 1) Choosing the topic to be studied taking into account age, interests, study profile, language level, and/or other characteristics of learners.
- 2) Selecting active language material for the topic studied, which should be included in all speech activities and correspond to the level of English language proficiency of students.
- 3) Looking for suitable audio, video or text on the page of EER. This material should correlate with items 1 and 2. The selected materials serve as a basis for the development of all speech activities.
- 4) Preparing questions on the topic studied as a lead-in associated to the content of texts, audio and videos.
- 5) Developing tasks based on selected materials. Some EERs offer ready-made tasks that can be performed and checked on the site immediately after listening, viewing or reading. Selected or self-developed tasks should be connected by a common theme and language material, which contributes to the formation of meaningful and logical monologue expression in oral or written form, as well as in dialogues.
- 6) Finding materials on the topic studied on EERs. The material should complement the students' answers.
- 7) Providing students with reliable resources to obtain accurate educational information. The students' file contains assignments and links to selected materials. Given that the time of the lesson is limited, each link leads directly to the desired content, excluding additional steps on the selected EER page [1].

The design of the project. The experimental syllabus design includes 15 units to be used in a computer classroom. The number of students per computer depend on the purpose of the lesson. If the purpose of the lesson is to develop dialogue skills - students worked in pairs. If the goal is the development of monologue skills, each student worked independently. For each lesson, a special file was prepared and uploaded to the classroom computers. Each file contained clear instructions and links to EERs. To adhere to the curriculum, lesson topics were primarily selected from the course book chosen by the institution, but also by taking into account the interests of modern high school students. The experimental training continued for 4 months with the regularity one class per week.

A sample of an integrative task with the use of EER is shown in Fig.1.

In the first part of the task students click on the link, read the text and, do the fill in the gaps, then write their answers to the questions in their notebooks. This is reading+writing combination.

Fig. 1
An example of integrative tasks with the use of EER

Example of integrative tasks with EER

Topic: Teens' life: socializing, free time

1. Click on the link, read the text, do the task and write answers by the questions. (5 min)
<https://resh.edu.ru/subject/lesson/5420/train/270087/>
 1) Do you have much free time?
 2) What free time activities do you prefer?
 3) Have you ever wanted to try bungee jumping or parachuting?
2. Click on the link, watch the video and answer to the questions. (10 min)
<https://learnenglishteenso.britishcouncil.org/vocabulary/b2-c1-vocabulary/family>
 1) Why Izzy can't to go out with her friends on Saturday?
 2) What are Izzy's feelings to her little sister?
 3) What solution did her friends suggest to Izzy?
 4) Who do Izzy and Georgie take after?
 5) Did Georgie enjoy spending time with Izzy's friends?
3. Make up a dialogue. (10 min)
 One of you wants to spend time with friends on Saturday (choose an activity), but you need to look after your little brother/old grandmother/pet. What solution can a friend offer? What feelings and emotions can all participants of the situation have? What is the end of your idea?

In the second part of the task pupils click on the link, watch the video with subtitles (it is listening+reading combination) and then, working together with a teacher, answer the questions based on the video (reading+speaking combination).

In the third part of the task students make up a dialogue according to the information they have received from the previous tasks. They may write their dialogues in the notebooks.

All parts are linked to one topic. All information is accumulated in students' final texts (oral and written).

The students work in pairs and at the end of the lesson present their work as dialogues, or hand over their notebooks with the written answer.

To show the effectiveness of the methodology the subjects were divided into two groups — experimental (14) and control (12). In the experimental group integrated approach was applied during 4 months. In the control group students worked according to the syllabus of the course book. Before the training, a diagnostic test was carried out in both groups. After the training, the final test was carried out in the experimental and control groups.

In the tests, which had integrated task format, the last part of the task (written performance) was considered to be most informative.

The idea is that in order to successfully perform a task testing productive skills (in this case, written speech), the subject needs to extract information from digitally presented texts (written and audio) in sufficient volume and with sufficient comprehension accuracy. Thus, the product of written speech of the subject is not only a test of the skills and abilities of written speech itself, but also of the information presented in all test tasks and comprehended by the test-taker cumulatively, according to the developed receptive skills.

The task was evaluated according to the three criteria:

Criterion 1 — The solution of a communicative problem, which aims to determine the understanding and adequate use of information from all test tasks.

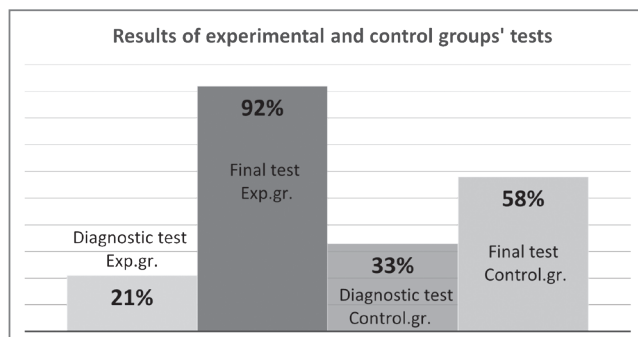
Criterion 2 — Organization of the text: the logic of the presentation, the correct use of cohesive elements, the division of the text into paragraphs, etc.

Criterion 3 — The linguistic design of the text, including the use of vocabulary and grammatical structures, spelling and punctuation.

Fig. 2

Results of diagnostic and final tests of experimental and control groups

Results. According to the results of the diagnostic test, 10 students in the experimental group failed the task and only one student received the maximum score. In the control group, 5 students failed the task and 2 got the maximum score.



According to the results of the final test in the experimental group there were no students who failed the task and 6 people managed to get the maximum score. In the control group, the results were almost the same, 5 people failed the task and 1 person got the maximum score (Fig. 2).

In order to test the key hypothesis of the study and prove the effectiveness of the developed set of integrative tasks, the validity of the data was checked by the t-criterion.

For two related samples (experimental group before and after training), the obtained t-value (6.7) significantly exceeds the critical value (2.776), it can be concluded that the difference between the results of diagnostic and final testing is statistically significant.

For the control group, comparing the diagnostic and final test results vertically shows that the obtained value of the t-criterion (2.2) is in a zone of insignificance.

For two unrelated samples (experimental and control groups, final test) the value obtained for t (2.9) and is in the zone of significance.

Discussion. The reliability of the increase in performance in the experimental group compared to the control group is statistically confirmed; the value of t-criterion (2.9) is in the zone of significance.

Thus, it has been proven that integrative tasks, where the receptive and productive skills are combined and EER are used, have a number of advantages:

- 1) self-learning activity is organized: each student independently performs tasks by navigating through the links in the study file and working at his/her own pace;
- 2) the complex of materials in the integrative task becomes a support in writing and allows students to avoid gross lexical and grammatical errors;
- 3) integrative tasks contribute to the effective development of all types of students' language skills;
- 4) computer work is interesting and motivating for modern high school students.

The article offers a practical solution to the problem of efficiently acquiring English language learning materials in schools. Special attention is given to optimizing the use of EER, providing students with direct access to the necessary content and clear instructions for independent work.

Conclusion. The result of the research, confirmed by the diagnostic and final testing, is a demonstration of the effectiveness of the proposed author's methodology for the formation of communicative competence of high school students. The experimental training showed that the targeted use of integrative tasks, developed on the basis of selected EER and related to a single topic, provides a progress in all language skills. At the end of the training period students of the experimental group demonstrated the ability to produce meaningful and logical oral and written communication.

EERs offer extensive possibilities for developing integrative tasks:

- allow to provide individual approach in the learning process, as students can work independently at their own pace and mode;
- develop all 4 types of language skills, as they contain information in written, audio and audio-visual formats;
- facilitate continuous learning process, which is a prerequisite for mastering the foreign language, students can continue to work with EER outside the walls of the educational institution.
- the potential of EER creates pedagogical conditions for implementing an integrative approach. On one site teachers can find audio, video and text materials, which reduces the time for preparation for classes.



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**Сведения
об авторах**

Павловская Ирина Юрьевна, доктор филол. наук, профессор, профессор кафедры иностранных языков и лингводидактики филологического факультета Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета.
pavlovskayairina2@yandex.ru

Кубацкая Виктория Сергеевна, аспирант-соискатель кафедры иностранных языков и лингводидактики филологического факультета Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета.
lusta_vika@mail.ru