

# THE INFLUENCE OF INTEGRATION OF FOUR SKILLS TO THE PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON TOEFL SAMPLE TEST

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## **Abstract**

Nowadays, there are a number of approaches to teach English. All of them have been used and developed along the time to help the foreign students to reach a better proficiency of English as foreign language. For few years, there have been many opinions that reinforce the idea of integrating four skills to create a real communication atmosphere as authentic as possible. They propose to mix reading and listening comprehension with oral and written expression in teaching English. Hence, this investigation aims to identify whether by including integration of four skills into the lesson can bring significant affects or not to the performance of undergraduate students in doing a TOEFL sample test. To reach this, observation of lessons will be recorded on checklist and the application of a standardized test will be applied in order to establish the relationship between two variables, the integration of four skills in lesson and the affects to the students' performance in doing TOEFL sample test. Finally, it can be properly affirmed that the integration of the four skills of the English language influences the students' performance concerning English as a foreign language.

**Key words:** Integration of four skills, receptive skills, productive skills

## **BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM**

Starting from classic questions from my students, such as “why English is so difficult?” and “why we still cannot use English well, oral and written, though we have studied for more than 10 years?” are dealing with what kind of approaches that the teacher used in the class. There have been many opinions proposing the integration of four skills as the key to create authentic classroom environment in teaching English in a way close to real communicative situation. Some teachers said that combining receptive skills and productive skills directly in the class could be the great method to augment the students’ language ability instead of teaching each skill separately.

Some theories concerning to the integrating of four skills have been widely spread over decades. Brown (Brown, 2000) had identified fundamental aspects of teaching language are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Then, Harmer classify those four skills as receptive skills and productive skills (Harmer, 2007b).. Moreover, Dianne added two supported skills, they are grammar and vocabulary (Wall, 2011), because all four skills are misunderstandable without these two skills in communicative production. It means that the students can enrich their performance by exposure to their experience with the language provided.

From these theories, integrating four skills will encourage the students’ motivation to effectively provoke their language ability. The students tend to learn to speak and to write from what they hear and see or read (Harmer, 2007b). In this case, Brown (2000) stated that a course dealing with reading, will also deal with other skills. It is also supported by Hinkel (2007) that communication will be meaningful when people employ all the basic skills in cycle. It is clearly seen that employing four skills can promote the students’ performance and enrich the teachers to be more creative at the same time (Brown, 2000). In addition, all theories have conducted that it does not make any sense to teach language in separated way instead of using the four skills simultaneously in teaching language, especially for EFL class.

The problem of this study is the teaching method used in the class in which the four skills are implemented separately. In fact, most of the educators teach grammar in most of the time in as much as it is considered as the hardest skill for the students. Whereas, the students also complaint about the monotonous teaching and lesson which they think do not influence well for the students’ performance in the result of *Standardized Test of English Proficiency* (STEP). Therefore, the research problem of this study is

to find out if the integration of four skills affects the students' performance in taking STEP.

There are two variables in this study. The first variable is the integration of four skills in teaching TOEFL preparation course concerning to the methodologies and strategies used during the teaching and learning process. Another variable is the students' result in taking STEP.

Considering to the aim of this study is to identify the integration of the four skills in EFL classroom and how the skills are developed for them. Institute *Pesantren* KH. Abdul Chalim is one of new Islamic private university in Indonesia which fundamentally based on *Pondok Pesantren* – Islamic boarding school. It was founded in 2015 by DR. KH. Asep Saifudin, M.A., the founder of *Amanatul Ummah* Boarding School. The unique thing from this institution that the students have to take five non-credits subjects – English, Arabic, IT, accounting, and *Aswaja*- for the first six semesters. This is done to evoke the students' quality both in soft skills and hard skills. This study chooses the last year of Intensive class in that they are focusing on TOEFL preparation course.

## **THEORITICAL BASIS**

### **The Four Skills**

Basically, there are three sections that are tested in STEP i.e. listening, structures, and reading. However, all of these sections are the application of four skills of language ability. Therefore, this study will highlight the developing of each skill, students' problem, and solutions for each.

#### **a. Listening Skill**

Listening is one of receptive skills, whose main purpose is to listen to what someone says. Hence, the product of listening itself is a spoken or written response from the students that shows whether they are correct or incorrect during listening process (Brown, 2000, p.118). Furthermore, there are seven essential components of listening – volition, focused attention, perception, interpretation, remembering, response, and the human element – which is an integral part of active listening process (Purdy, 2010). Therefore, listening is considered as critical skill (Richard & Renandiyah, 2002), and it, nowadays, is assuming important in EFL classroom (Nurpahmi, Islam, & Alauddin, 2018).

Because of these issues, some students face some problems in listening comprehension session. The problems basically include unfamiliar sound and similar sound which often lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, they need to listen to a recording for several times, whereas, in TOEFL is recoding played only once. However, sometimes the teacher did not know how to break listening down into understandable materials to increase the listening skill (Wall, 2011, p.6). She added that some of the teachers believe that the students can improve their listening skill through osmosis process, both inside and outside the classroom.

Among the three parts of listening section in TOEFL, part A and part C are considered the most difficult for EFL students. Although part A consists of short dialogues for each number, it scopes various skills to understand. The biggest problems for the students are similar sound and idiom. These skills relate to speaking, especially the way to pronounce the words correctly (Wall, 2011). Thus, to dealing with listening task, students must focus on general context rather than particular sounds (Bastías et al., 2011). Moreover, students can optimize their ability by contextualizing their assumption and using their prior knowledge in this way (Nurpahmi et al., 2018), especially to cope part C in TOEFL test.

#### **b. Reading Skill**

Reading is receptive skill which can develop independently along with listening and speaking skills (A. Aydogan, 2014) because reading is not merely a textual but whatever a person looks at and understands (Homy, 2005). According to Harmer (2007a) there are two types of reading, extensive and intensive reading. Extensive reading refers to reading activity for pleasure. It means the students read whatever they want to read based on their interests. While intensive reading is a focus reading for specific purpose, commonly, for taking test. Reading also relate to grammar and vocabulary (Bastías et al., 2011).

However, in TOEFL, the students are forced to comprehend the text to answer the questions in limited time. Thus the main problems faced by the students are the speed and lack of vocabulary. These problems are related to each other because the speed of the students to read is slow due to lack of vocabulary. Even more, some students with limited vocabulary tend to translate the text textually – looks every word up in a dictionary -which commonly leads to misconception. This condition may block the students' mind to find suitable and effective strategy to comprehend the text.

To overcome the problems above, teachers must know more about the sub-skills of reading, such as skimming, scanning, referencing, and inferring (Wall, 2011). Besides, some strategies can be implemented based on the types of questions in TOEFL such as focusing on idea, direct questions, indirect questions, and vocabulary questions (Phillips, 2001). Each sub-skill and strategy should be applied through simultaneous practice with different topics of the articles to get them used to it.

### **c. Speaking Skill**

Speaking is often related to listening because it is a two-way communication (H. Aydogan, 2014). Wall (2011) emphasizes that it is a bit impossible to develop speaking as separated skill in learning language, and it was the reason why speaking was not tested on TOEFL PBT and CBT. However in IBT, there are two types of tasks in speaking section: independent speaking and four integrated speaking. Independent speaking provides the students some questions about familiar topics and they can use their personal experience and general knowledge to speak out the answer. In the integrated four speaking, the students will listen to the lecture and read a related passage about certain topic, and then they will listen to the questions that require them to respond through speaking (Pamela J. Sharpe, 2007).

Although speaking is a basic product of language learning, it is still considered as the most difficult skill to master, especially for EFL students. First thing is that they feel inhibited to try to speak since they are afraid to make mistakes. Second, they feel nothing to say. It does not mean that they do not have any ideas, but it is just on their tip of tongue and do not know how to express it well. The last and the most common problem exist in the class is when they translate their mother-tongue into English which often lead to misunderstanding.

As a mean to solve these problems, Bastías *et al.* (2011) suggests some strategies. First is to make a small discussion with simple and familiar topics. In this time the students are trained mentally to make short speak – three to five sentences – concerning to the topics given. Second is to review some essential vocabularies and common expressions to minimize the hesitation. Third, the teacher takes important part to keep the students speaking the target language and make them to speak more and more. These strategies are simply to implement in EFL classrooms.

#### **d. Writing Skill**

Writing involves in productive skill which is considered the most difficult skill for either native speakers, second-language speakers, or foreign-language speakers (H. Aydogan, 2014) since it does not merely write letters or numbers (Hornby, 2005) but need to generate the ideas and organize them into readable text (Richard & Renandiyah, 2002). Beside the ideas, there are so many aspects that must be considered such as spelling, diction, punctuation, and organization that help the readers easy to understand the writing (Hinkel, 2017; Bastías *et al.*, 2011) and it also involves either graphic or the development and presentation of thought in a structural way (H. Aydogan, 2014).

Writing is of daily activities in learning, but composing good writing is very difficult for everyone, especially for EFL students. First thing is generating ideas. Although the students are provided certain topics, they expand the ideas in jumping way or just write whatever in their mind without considering the organization. Second is structure. Some of them cannot realize when to use present verb, past verb, conjunction, adjective, and adverb in sentences. It brings confusion for those who read it. Third, so many “repetition” words occur in a paragraph due to lack of dictions they have.

The best solutions for these problems are varied. First, the students must focus on the structure of essays and pay less attention to the content (Wall, 2011). Second, after the students understand the structure of essay, guide them to map their ideas, thus, their writing will be clear, concise, and well organized (Phillips, 2001). Third, remind the student to make supporting statement every time they make any general statements (Phillips, 2001). The last, give the basic and simple structure to use in their writing, hence, it will be readable (Bastías *et al.*, 2011).

#### **The approach of Integrated-skills**

All theories of language strongly imply that all aspects of language are interrelated and intertwined. They further claims that students must be given concurrently an opportunity to use all language skills (H. Aydogan, 2014) in meaningful, functional, and cooperative activities (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, Oxford (2001) stated that there are four essential strands – teachers, learners, setting, and relevant language – each of which consists of four primary skills of language that associate with supported skills – vocabulary, syntax, meaning, structure, and usage – can form good communication if all of them are correctly interwoven.

Although there are three sections in TOEFL, but all of them are correlated to one another. To understand the listening section, the students must be familiar with the expressions and phrases used in the dialogues. Hence, this approach is effective to make the lesson more dynamic engaging for the students (Josephine Hungyo and Jimmy Kijai, 2009). In addition, Barbuza *et al.* (2001) in (Bastías *et al.*, 2011) that emphasizing what the learners can do in language can combine any or all language skills which are relevant into classroom.

There are some types of integrating four-skill instruction: Content-Based Instruction (CBI), Task-Based Instruction ((TBI), and Project-Based Instruction (PBI) (Oxford, 2001) that each of that has different focus on. CBI focuses on basic social and interpersonal communication in the beginner level, and academic and complex topic in advance level. TBI and PBI are basically group work that increases the students' interaction and collaboration. Through this approach the students are actively work by participating in project work which involves researching, writing, and presenting (Harmer, 2007b).

## **METHODOLOGY**

There are two variables used in this study. They are the third year students – Class A, the high grade class, and the result of STEP, TOEFL like for local institution. There are 30 students in the class which consists of 23 girls and 7 boys. This study use non-experimental class where the data is gathered through observation in at least 8 meetings, each of which duration is 90 minutes.

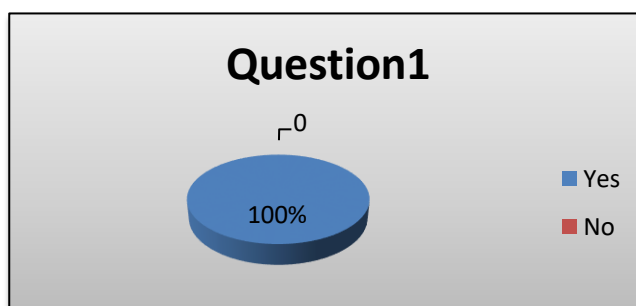
This study uses two instruments to collecting the data. First is checklist and questionnaires which are designed by a researcher considering the aspect mention in previous theories. The second is Standardized Test of English Proficiency (STEP) which is composed from TOEFL test preparation guide published by Longman and Rutledge.

## **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

### **A. Checklist**

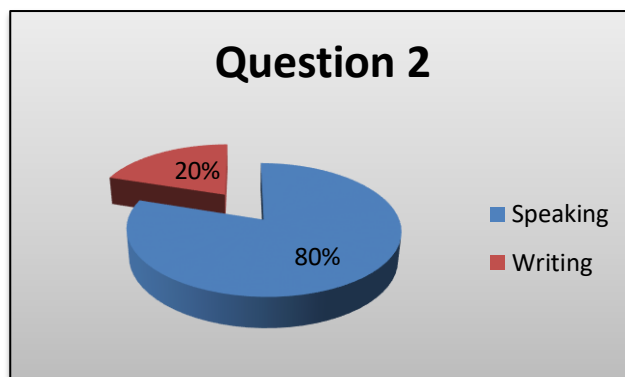
The students' responds to the checklist are presented in graphics. Each graphic will be completed with the description.

a. *Does the lecturer teach all language skill in the class?*



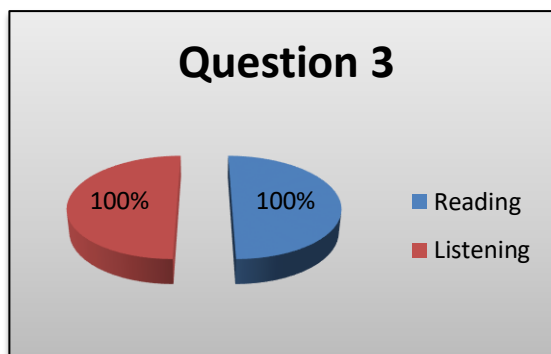
The graphic shows that the lesson is presented in coherent sequence to develop the topic. From the class observation notify that the class is started by presenting the topic and explaining the contents, and then giving the opportunities to the class to ask more details and asking them to provide some questions based on their personal and general knowledge.

b. Which productive skills does the lecturer teach most?



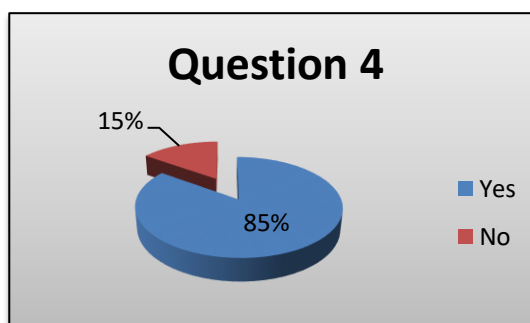
The graphic above shows that speaking is a skill that mostly taught rather than writing. This data is supported by the observation that speaking is conducted more because it can help the students to understand the expressions used in listening section test and to recognize the pronunciation of the similar words used there. However, during the speaking class, the students also do writing activity to compose the dialogue or text they are going to present. However, the writing is not mainly involved in learning process because it is not tested particularly in STEP.

c. Which receptive skill does the lecturer teach most?



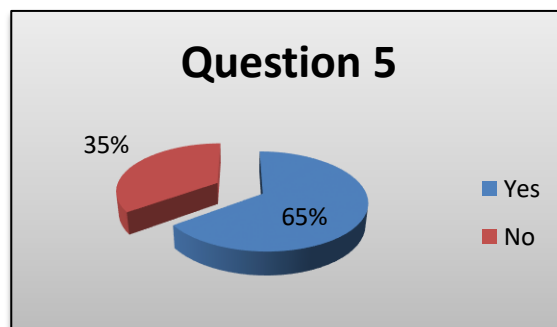
From the graphic above, both reading and listening are completely taught. It is because both reading and listening are included in STEP test sample. The class observation shows the student are mostly independent study by doing some listening and reading practices and discuss the strategies to answer the questions.

d. Does the lecturer provide an appropriate material supporting the learning process?



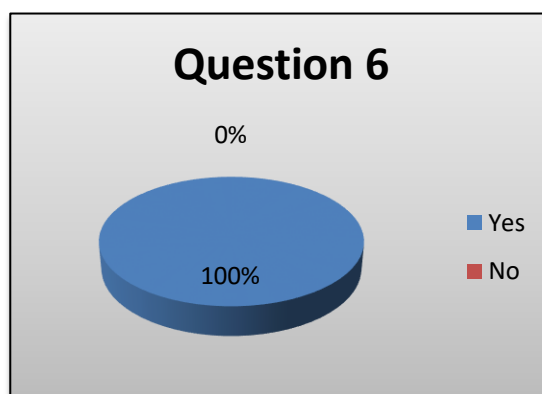
85% materials are provided by the lecturer based on the topics and skills. The 15% materials are taken from the students' textbook which is composed from the TOEFL handbook test preparation published by Longman and Rutledge.

e. Does the lecturer associate the student's previous knowledge with the content of the topic?



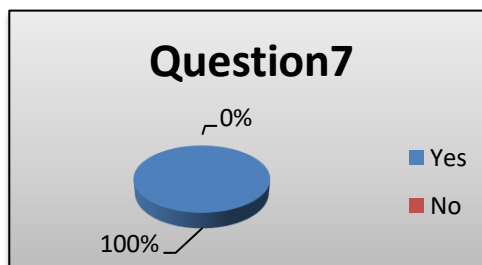
The 65% materials are familiar with the students' prior knowledge, which are about the expressions used in English – in speaking and listening activities – and general articles such as news, history, economy, and so on in reading activity. The 35% materials are less known by the students. Therefore, the role of lecturer is maximized to help the students understand the contents.

f. Does the lecturer encourage the students to interact in group?



This graphic shows that interaction and collaboration study among the students are developed well. Although this group work or pair work does not occur on every meeting, this helps the students to actively participate in either classical discussion or group discussion.

g. Does the lecturer interject supported skills, grammar and vocabulary, in learning process?

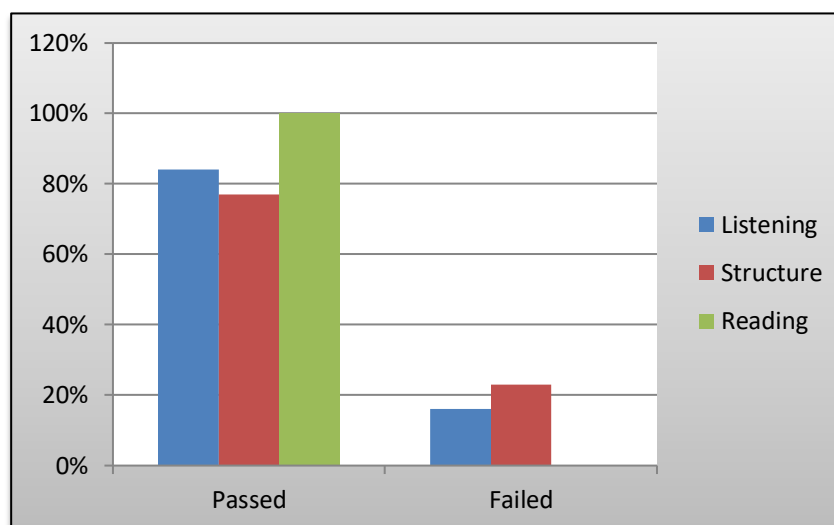


This chart shows that grammar and vocabulary are always presented in every topic. This study also notices from the observation that grammar may take half of meeting because it is tested separately on STEP. In addition, grammar and vocabulary are usually involved in reading activity.

### B. Analysis of results for STEP sample

The following graphic shows the result for the sample of STEP applied for the final exam. There are three sections tested in STEP, they are listening, structure, and reading. The total passing grade for STEP for this class is 400 which will be described in details. In listening section, there are 50 item questions which are divided into three parts. To pass this section every student must get minimum 17 points which converted into 42 based on TOEFL score conversion. The section 2 consists of two parts, *i.e.* 15 items for structure, and 25 items for written expression. To pass this section, the students must get at least 17 items which is later converted to 41. The last section is reading which consists of 50 items. The student must answer 17 questions to pass the section. This score is the same as 37 as TOEFL conversion score.

## ***The Influence of Integration of Four Skills to the Performance of Undergraduate Students on TOEFL Sample Test***



This graphic expresses the level of achievement of the students for every section of test. It is clearly shown that reading comprehension put the highest percentage because 100% students passed. Although there are two sections which the students failed, the percentage of the passed ones is still higher than the failed ones. It shows that this approach works well for the third students of intensive class, especially class A. However, grammar section is still considered the most difficult skill to comprehend. It is proven that the graphic of this section is the shortest among the others. It seems that there should be a separated meeting for discussing grammar.

### **CONCLUSION**

The main purpose of this study is to identify the integration of the four language skills affect positively the students' performance on STEP sample test. From the description above, it can be said that integrating four skills influence the students' result on STEP with over 75 percent students pass STEP sample test well. However, it is actually not merely combining four language skills in learning process, but how to integrate them in a lesson to make the students to actively participate in real communication. Moreover, the strategies given by the lecturer also ease the students to answer the questions well.

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***The Influence of Integration of Four Skills to the Performance of Undergraduate Students on TOEFL Sample Test***

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