

IMPEDIMENTS TO INTEGRATING LANGUAGE SKILLS IN YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL CLASSES: WHYS AND A WAY OUT VIA MINI-SAGAS

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ABSTRACT: *It is deeply believed that integrating language skills in English as a foreign language classes can contribute a great deal to the success of the teaching-learning process. But, such a pedagogical strategy at times poses a daunting challenge for a high percentage of non-native teachers, namely those teaching primary school sixth graders. In this setting, relying on a questionnaire that was administered to twenty primary school teachers teaching English to grade-six pupils, this paper aims at laying emphasis on exploring the reasons behind the difficulties those teachers encounter in integrating the four language skills in English as a foreign language classes. The results of the questionnaire have shown that there are a number of objective reasons that lie at the root of the issue, in particular the absence of training sessions, the nature of the syllabus, and the fact that English seems to be viewed and taught merely as a school subject of secondary importance. The paper, therefore, puts forward how those teachers can defy the impediments to using the integrated approach to teaching the language. Pedagogically speaking, it gives an insight into how teachers can get round the issue theoretically through mini-sagas and via a practical example lesson including explanatory notes. The study has revealed that sensitizing those teachers to the benefits of the integrative approach to teaching English, and using mini-sagas effectually as a starting point for the use of such an approach can help them get familiar with it through other diverse pedagogical procedures according to the learning activities intended to be performed and the learning objectives planned to be achieved, which can contribute to the success of the teaching-learning process.*

KEYWORDS: Integrating Language Skills, Sixth Graders, EFL Teachers, English, Foreign Language, Mini-Sagas

INTRODUCTION

As Raimes (1983: 68) argues, "If we want our language learning classes to come as close as possible to real-life communicative situations, then we have to organize activities that let students use all the language skills." This argument could be deemed to be concordant with facts in the sense that communicative competence cannot actually be achieved through focus on only one language skill, but it can be attained via integrating the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Doing so, however, is at times claimed to be difficult for a number of non-native EFL teachers for more scores than one. As a matter of fact, it is my teaching experience that some preparatory school teachers (those teaching 7th, 8th, and 9th graders) and secondary school teachers (those teaching 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th graders) sometimes complain that time is not sufficient for setting learning activities requiring the integration of some or all the language skills in one-hour classes. Indeed, certain activities are occasionally left unfinished, others may be given as homework assignments, and still other ones might not even be initiated at all, which is likely to result in the teacher's inability to

achieve all the desired learning objectives. One reason behind the shortage of time about which those teachers complain might be the fact that certain listening or reading materials are so long that they cannot be exploited for integrating three or four language skills during a one hour-period, because most of the time is usually spent on listening or reading comprehension activities.

The problem relating to integrating language skills is faced much more seriously by sixth graders' teachers of English, especially as they did not major in English, but are appointed by the school headmaster to teach the language, simply because they are claimed to have a respectable level of proficiency in it since there are no graduate EFL teachers employed by the Ministry of Education to teach sixth primary learners. In this context, it could be affirmed that what is at the bottom of these teachers' inability to adopt the integrated approach in their EFL classes or their unawareness of its benefits to the teaching-learning process is woeful lack or total absence of requisite pedagogical knowledge. Being in such a situation, therefore, one way that can help work out the aforementioned problem is using mini-sagas, because they can assist the teacher – by virtue of their advantageous characteristics – in integrating the four communicative skills and a number of sub-skills in one-hour periods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a vast body of literature on the role of integrating language skills in English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) classes in contributing to the success of the teaching-learning process. Richards and Schmidt (2002: 262) refer to the teaching of integrated skills as the integrated approach, which they define as “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.” In a similar frame of reference, Oxford (2001) likens teaching English as a second or foreign language to a tapestry. She makes it clear that the tapestry is woven with the assistance of a number of strands, such as the peculiarities of the teacher, the learner, the context, and the relevant languages, namely English, the mother tongue of the students and that of the teacher. She goes on asserting that apart from the above-mentioned strands, other significant strands exist in the tapestry, one of which comprises the four skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which when interwoven well through the integrated-skill approach during instruction, learners can use English effectively for communication. In the very regard, Nunan (1989) maintains that integrating skills is an important aspect of language learning, which appeals to interaction, the continuity of tasks, focus on the real world and language learning, as well as to the outcomes of tasks. Mohan (1986), in turn, underlines the necessity of integrating skills in language learning since each skill is not normally used separately in real life communication. Hersan (1998: 22) equally demonstrates the role of integrating language skills in contributing to achieving communicative competence pointing out that “[i]n daily life, these skills are seen in integration, for example, after reading a letter, usually an answer to this letter is written. So, in the classroom the activities should be taught in integration in order to arrive at ease in communication.” Harmer (2007) voices a similar view stating that productive skills (writing and speaking) and receptive skills (reading and listening) are two sides of the same coin that cannot be separated by reason of the fact that one skill can reinforce another in a number of ways.

It could, however, be held that integrating skills in English as a foreign or second language

classes is not an easy pedagogical strategy for certain EFL teachers, particularly those who are not experienced enough. Jing (2006) states that integrating skills is very demanding of teachers seeing that it necessitates much time and effort on the part of the teacher since, for instance, s/he has to bear in mind the various needs and abilities of the learners retaining their attention, arousing their motivation, and increasing their participation. Jing (2006) adds that choosing materials and designing tasks are other teacher duties which require the teacher using the integrated approach in a communicative classroom to supply more energy in comparison with traditional English language teaching. As far as sixth graders' EFL teachers are concerned, there are other more objective reasons— besides the ones cited above by Jing (2006) – why these former cannot adopt the integrative approach as will be explored later together with one way out of the issue through mini-sagas.

What is a mini-saga?

Taking into account the fact that grade-six pupils learn English for the first time, the overall proficiency level of the learners' in the language, and the possible time constraints that may not allow the teacher to integrate the four language skills in one-hour periods, one can resort to using mini-sagas as a teaching procedure that could contribute to facilitating the adoption of the integrated approach in young learners EFL classes.

A mini-saga is a fifty-word story; no more, no less; without taking into account the words of the title that must not exceed fifteen words. Rauch (2012) reports that a saga is an Old Norse prose narrative that originated from Iceland or Norway during the Middle Ages. The author adds making it clear that sagas tell stories about fantastic adventures of legendary heroes. In modern time, mini-sagas are said to have been 'invented' by the science fiction writer Brian Aldiss, who thought that it would be fun and challenging to tell a story in very few words (Writing: mini things: 2012). As put by Clandfield (n.d., parag.2), the first mini sagas appeared in the English newspaper *The Sunday Telegraph* in 1982. The newspaper organized a competition for the best ones in that year. (See examples of winners of the mini-saga competition in the Appendices Section).

In view of the actuality that a mini-saga must consist of only fifty words, Brian Aldiss (2001) refers to it with the statement, *Brevity is the soul of wit – and a mini-saga is the soul of brevity*. He adds explaining that it is a story of just fifty words, with a beginning, a middle and an end, and that it instantly captivates the reader with dreams and disasters, fantasies and fears, loves and hates, humor, morality, immorality, the everyday and the extraordinary. As regards the way a mini-saga can be composed, Rauch (2012: 3) notes that “[it is up] to the author to decide how to present the Mini-Saga: it can be written in rhymes or prose, the graphical design can be adapted, as well.”

Advantages of a mini-saga

Should they be exploited effectively in foreign-language classrooms, mini-sagas can really be of benefit to the development of the four communicative skills. For instance, where the reading skill is concerned, Rauch (2012) maintains that using mini-sagas in the language classroom can actually improve such a language skill. As for the writing skill, Cox (2014) states that “[m]ini-sagas are especially useful when working with reluctant writers, who will attempt a story of only 50 words when they would be daunted by a request to write a longer narrative; the next time you could ask for 100 words and so on.” In the same framework, Setty (2008) argues that writing a mini-saga has a number of advantages. One of these is that writing this type of story

expands the learner writer's creativity. Constraints typically expand creativity or induce flight. When the student has to put everything in fifty words, s/he has to 'leave behind' a lot, and that is where the creative juices start flowing. Another advantage is stretching the student's thinking, as long as s/he has to think about topics that will fit in fifty words or squeeze them to fit in fifty words. Doing so puts thinking on overdrive mode. Equally of paramount importance is that such a writing activity enhances the learner's discipline, inasmuch as deciding what to write about, deciding what to leave behind and putting it in the exact number of words, as mentioned above, requires discipline throughout. In a similar regard, according to an electronic article entitled "*Writing a Mini-saga*" (2002), a mini-saga provides an excellent vehicle for a short writing lesson, on the grounds that (a) it is easy to read, (b) it is easy for the learner to understand, (c) writing fifty words is not difficult for the learner (but, not at first!), (d) there is focus on accuracy in the editing stage, and (e) like all creative writing, a mini-saga has the potential to be very motivating.

Apart from the above-cited benefits of mini-sagas, and taking into account the fact that they are very short material, one can state the following benefits with the object of prompting teachers to make use of them in their EFL classes, and encouraging learners to seek mini-sagas on their own in order to develop their reading skills, and write other ones to better their writing proficiency:

- . A mini-saga is not tiresome and not boring, neither for the students nor for the teacher;
- . Since it is short, using it for integrating language skills is normally not time-consuming, which can allow the teacher to finish all or at least most of the skill-integration activities in a one-hour class;
- . The learners can easily memorize its content, which represents a stimulus for seeking other speaking and writing activities, in that it can help them to exercise their imagination in trying to tell and write other mini-sagas of their own.

Regarding the role of mini-sagas in developing the learners' listening skill, it could be argued that one advantage of listening to such stories is assisting the learner to acquire an important hallmark of an effective listener which consists in his or her ability to anticipate what will come next, especially in case the story includes an element of suspense.

Additionally, working on mini-sagas can aid the development of the learners' lexical repertoire, in particular if the teacher manages to motivate them through such a pedagogical strategy, and asks them to think of and write mini-sagas of their own. In this way, the learners become eager to search for new meanings in the target language, which encourages autonomous and/or cooperative learning. Should a learner fail to find the appropriate English vocabulary items, s/he can consult the teacher, peers, or a bilingual dictionary.

Above all, as Kinovičová (n.d) argues, "The most important role of mini-sagas is to develop and support students' narrative and thinking skills and, apart from that, teach a lesson by their bite-sized wisdom hidden inside mini-sagas" (p. 31).

METHODOLOGY

As alluded to in the Abstract, the purpose of the study is to delve into the obstacles to integrating

the four language skills in grade-six EFL classes. In this regard, such a purpose is to be carried out through answering the following two key questions:

- a. What is at the bottom of grade 6 EFL teachers' inability to use the integrative approach?
- b. What remedial measures could be taken to work out the issue?

Context of the study

As noted earlier, the study explores the reasons behind the obstacles to integrating language skills in primary school sixth graders' EFL classes and propounds a workable remedy for the issue. It has been conducted in a Tunisian context, more precisely in the Governorate of Jendouba notwithstanding the fact that the issue concerns almost the whole country to a great extent.

Participants

The participants of the study were twenty primary school teachers who, as noted above, did not graduate as teachers of English, but were assigned to teach the language, because they were believed to have a respectable proficiency level in it, and in the sense that those who graduate as teachers of English are nominated as secondary school teachers who teach only preparatory or secondary school students. Some features of the participants' profile in relation to the topic of the study are broadly described in the table below.

Table 1: Some features of the participants' profile

University degree	No participant holds a university degree, but all of them have obtained only a baccalaureate certificate, which – many years ago – could allow the holders of such a certificate to be employed as primary school teachers. Two participants did not study at university at all. The rest studied for no more than two years at university having majored in history, geography, Arabic, and French, but dropped out without obtaining any university degree.
Experience in teaching English	The participants' experience in teaching English ranges from 7 to 15 years.
Other subjects taught besides English	Aside from English, each participant has been teaching two other subjects on average such as Arabic, French, Maths, and social studies.
Weekly teaching load	The participants' weekly teaching load ranges from 15 to 20 periods.

It is worth noting that the purpose behind describing some features of the participants' profile is to examine to which extent they represent contributing factors to the teachers' inability to adopt the integrated approach in their grade-six EFL classes.

Research instrument

For the purpose of this paper, and in order to provide a valuable insight into the reasons behind the fact that teachers of English teaching grade-six pupils are unable to integrate communicative skills in their English as a foreign language classes, the author of the paper found it appropriate to use a questionnaire, the most frequently-used quantitative data-collection research tool. The questionnaire was administered to 20 sixth graders' teachers of English working in different schools in the Governorate of Jendouba. The questionnaire was written in English, but while distributing it to each participant, the author explained it orally in Arabic and/or French, so as to guarantee that all the participants understand it and fill it out. The participants were asked to tick the reason(s) behind the aforementioned issue, and jot down other ones if they think there are any.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire are outlined in the table below

Table 2: Possible impediments to integrating language skills in sixth-graders' EFL classes

Possible impediments to integrating language skills in sixth graders' EFL classes	Number of responses out of 20	Percentage
1. The nature of syllabus does not allow the integration of skills	14	70%
2. One hour is not enough for integrating all or some of the language skills	18	90%
3. The majority of students are slow or weak learners	16	80%
4. Lack or absence of training sessions	20	100%
5. I do not have a clear idea about how to integrate language skills	10	50%

With reference to the features of the participants' profile described in Table 1, it could be held that the fact that all the participants did not graduate as teachers of English could be claimed to present a major impediment not only to adopting the integrated approach, but also to using any other approach to teaching the language. This contention could really be indubitable simply on the grounds that one can never succeed in doing a job requiring previous formal instruction however long they keep doing it without such instruction and sans any pre-service and in-service professional training. A conclusive proof of such an assertion is that all the participants have been teaching English for a period ranging from 7 to 15 years, as indicated in Table 1 above, but forasmuch as they lack the essential prerequisites for professional success, no real such success can be alleged to be achieved.

What could be affirmed to add spice to the situation is that besides English, the participants teach other school subjects whose coefficient and weekly hourly volume are higher than those of English, which may make the teacher regard English as an insignificant subject. Another

factor which is likely to render the situation rather worse is that the participants' weekly teaching load is somewhat high as it varies between 15 and 20 periods, which might cause the teacher to be unable or reluctant to devote the necessary physical effort and psychological readiness to teach English as effectively as s/he should.

In the matter of the questionnaire, its results – as shown in Table 2 above – reveal that all the participants ticked the absence of training sessions as one among the obstacles to integrating language skills in grade-six EFL classes, and when they returned the questionnaire, the majority of them confirmed that such a factor is the major impediment to teaching English successfully. They also made it clear reporting that they were attending training sessions under the guidance of a teacher trainer, but these sessions have been stopped for two years due to certain teacher-union demands on the part of teacher trainers that have not yet been satisfied by the Ministry of Education.

The absence of teacher-training sessions is more than likely that it has a really adverse impact on the professional performance of teachers, especially those who do not usually seek teacher development on their own. It can equally demotivate teachers seriously, and make one deduce that the language seems to be of no real importance, particularly in comparison to other school subjects. What would aggravate the situation is that, as mentioned above, no participant graduated as an English teacher. This fact together with the absence of training sessions makes one wonder how effective teaching and successful learning can be achieved without those two requisites.

The reason behind the issue that ranked second (18 out of 20) is that it is difficult to integrate language skills in one-hour English classes. This means that 90% of the participants believe that one hour is not enough for them to be able to carry out learning activities integrating three or four language skills. Objectively speaking, however, it could be maintained that what actually lies at the root of the issue is not time constraint, but teacher experience. Plainly, in other words, if a teacher were sufficiently trained and experienced enough in integrating language skills, s/he could actually so do even in less than a one-hour period.

The impediment to adopting the integrated approach that ranked third (16 out of 20), and which is related to the previous one considering that it necessitates enough time, is that the majority of the participants' pupils are slow learners. Definitely, performing skill-integrated learning activities in a class where the number of underachievers is more or much more than the number of brilliant learners often requires more time and effort of the teacher, especially in case of a large class, and if s/he makes everybody take part in lessons. Nevertheless, it could be contented that even in a class where there is a high percentage of weak learners, the teacher can make use of the integrated approach efficiently if s/he manages to motivate the learners through various ways. One way of so doing is engaging the class in easy learning activities that can be done successfully by all the learners bearing in mind the necessity of giving the lion's share of participation to weak learners without frustrating brilliant ones. Such a pedagogical strategy can really motivate underachievers, make them more interested in the subject matter, and build or improve their self-confidence in good learning performance.

Another factor which 14 participants ticked as being one among the reasons which have made it difficult for them to adopt the integrated approach in their sixth-graders' EFL classes is that the nature of the syllabus does not allow the use of such an approach. This could be reckoned to be justifiable as a result of the fact that the syllabus seems to be designed according to the audio-lingual method in the sense that the overwhelming majority of lessons consist mainly of

grammatical structures and lexical terms. One possible reason behind this fact may be the syllabus designer's belief that since learners are novices, they ought to start learning the language through the mastery of sets of vocabulary items and syntactic structures. Nonetheless, syllabus designers should always bear in mind the necessity of designing syllabi that can help learners use language communicatively as a crucial requisite for learning it efficaciously, and that concentrating merely on mastering grammatical structures and lexical items cannot actually assist in successful language learning. Similarly, as far as the teacher is concerned, s/he ought not to get stuck solely to the textbook activities. It is highly recommended that s/he devise other activities that can help the learners with using the language in real-life communicative situations, and hence contribute to the achievement of the desired learning objectives.

Although there is a strong likelihood that it is embarrassing to include the possibility that some teachers do not have a clear idea about the integration of skills in the questionnaire as one reason behind the issue, ten teachers admitted it. This is normally no surprise on account of the actuality that – as stated above – those who teach grade-six pupils did not graduate as teachers of English, and what complicates the matter further is that there are no training sessions which can help them do their teaching job as successfully as they should. On the other hand, one can infer that some participants' confession that they have no idea about how to integrate language skills in their EFL classes may reflect their awareness of the indispensability of the training sessions, which may imply that they are badly in need of them, and hence they request them urgently.

Practical Sample Lesson Using a Mini-Saga For Skill-Integration Activities

In order to make the work on mini-sagas more effective, and to motivate students further, teachers may select stories deriving from the young learners' cultural background. We suggest below an example of a mini-saga that is normally familiar to all young learners, and on its basis, we propose skill-integration activities that can suit sixth graders' proficiency level in English as a foreign language.

Material

The rabbit and the tortoise

A rabbit and a tortoise decided to race to a well. The rabbit was sure of winning. On the way, he even took some rest under a tree. But, the tortoise was running without stopping. Finally, the rabbit was surprised. He found the tortoise waiting for him beside the well.

Exploitation of material

The above mini-saga can be exploited for the following skill-integrated activities:

Pre-listening phase activity: the teacher may introduce this activity by telling the students they are going to listen to a short story whose main characters are a rabbit and a tortoise, and ask them to guess what the story may be about. As the pupils are familiar with the story through having read or having been told it in their native language, they can recognize its gist by simply relying on its characters mentioned by the teacher. Such familiarity is likely to entice their speaking ability by making them search for meaning in English to say something about the story.

Should the teacher think that there are some unfamiliar lexical items to the students, and which

are necessary for comprehension, s/he ought to explain them to the students before moving to the while-listening stage.

While-listening phase activities: this stage can include listening, speaking and writing activities.

The teacher has the students listen to the story taped by a native speaker, and asks them again to say what it is about. Another activity in the while-listening phase may consist in the teacher's dividing the class into two groups, A and B. S/He plays the first part of the story, and asks group A to write down three questions, and asks group B to imagine what the questions group A may write down, and then write down three answers to these questions. After they have finished with this activity, students from both groups are to interact through questions and answers. Examples of such questions and answers may be:

. *What did the rabbit and the tortoise decide to do?* → *The rabbit and the tortoise decided to race to a well.*

. *Why did the rabbit take some rest under a tree?* → *The rabbit took some rest under a tree, because he was sure he would win the race.*

The teacher plays the second part of the story, and asks the students to change turns: group A pupils are to write answers, and group B pupils are to write questions. As they did previously, they are to proceed with interaction.

For the sake of including a speaking activity in the while-listening phase, the teacher can ask the learners to listen to the story again, and then asks individual learners to tell it to their classmates.

Post-listening phase activities: this phase may include a reading activity, a cloze exercise, a pronunciation activity, and a spelling activity.

The pupils are given handouts on which the story is printed, but with ten missing words. The teacher asks them to read it, and then write down the missing words in the blanks. Here is the cloze exercise:

A rabbit and a decided to to a well. The rabbit was of winning. On the, he even took some rest a tree. But, the tortoise was without stopping., the rabbit was surprised. He the tortoise waiting for him beside the well.

Taking into account the crucial role of efficient, good memory in contributing to successful learning, this exercise can be a good tool to strengthen the learners' memory, and also to improve certain sub-skills of theirs, namely pronunciation and spelling. Where both sub-skills are concerned, the teacher may, as described below, lay the focus on five of the missing words whose spelling and pronunciation may present some difficulty for the learners.

a. tortoise. The teacher drills the pronunciation of this word, and draws the learners' attention that the two letters 'oi' in this word are pronounced a schwa /ə/, but not /ɔɪ/ like in *noise*.

b. race. Taking into consideration that the pupils learn French as the first foreign language, and that it may influence their learning of English by one way or another, the teacher should make it clear for them that the English word *race* is not pronounced like the French word *race*.

c. way. The students' attention should be drawn to the necessity of not confusing the pronunciation and the spelling of this word with those of *why*.

d. finally. For the same reason mentioned in (b) above, the teacher should show the learners that the 'i' of this word is pronounced /aɪ/, and not like that of its French cognate '*finalement*'.

e. found. The students should be recommended not to confuse this word with '*fond*' in terms of part of speech, pronunciation, and spelling.

After the above activity is over, individual learners may be asked to read out the text for the sake of further correct pronunciation practice.

Speaking activity: The teacher may ask the pupils about the moral lesson they can draw from the story, and engage them in class discussion. The learners can be led to refer to such a moral lesson through a proverb or a saying. An example of a moral lesson may be one implying that continual hard work can finally lead to the desired aim. Another example may be one that stimulates the necessity of believing in one's own abilities however weak they may seem to others and however many and serious the difficulties they may encounter are. Such a moral lesson may be an incentive for students, especially underachievers, to work harder and harder, so as to improve their level of proficiency in English and also in the other school subjects.

Production writing exercise: Pupils may be asked to write a dialogue between the rabbit and the tortoise before the race starts and/or another one after the race is over relying on their imagination. The teacher may help them with providing the beginning of such dialogues. Here is an example of the beginning of a dialogue before the race starts:

Rabbit: (mocking) Hello, 'slow'!

Tortoise: 'slow'!

Here is an example of the beginning of a dialogue after the race is over:

Tortoise: Here I am. I'm the winner!

Rabbit:

Role-playing activity: After the learners are finished with writing the dialogue, and after peer-editing, pairs of pupils may be asked to act it out. In order to introduce some fun in the activity, the actors can try to imagine how the rabbit and the tortoise may converse in the situation in terms of tone and intonation, and attempt to imitate their voices.

Writing a mini-saga: The pupils may be asked to write their own mini-sagas in pairs or in small groups in class, or they can be assigned this activity as homework, so that they can have enough time to think over a story and write it. In order not to exert stress on the learners having to write exactly fifty words right from the beginning, the teacher can allow them to write more than fifty words, then ask them to edit what they have written down to the required number. While editing their written material down to fifty words, the students should bear in mind that each time they eliminate a word, the text must make sense and be grammatically correct (Writing: mini things: 2012). Cox (2014) suggests the following procedures to help learners write fifty-word mini-sagas:

- . eliminating redundant words (especially adjectives and adverbs);
- . using shorter synonyms (e.g. single instead of phrasal verbs);
- . using active not passive verbs;
- . using hyphens (correctly!) to form single words;
- . using subject pronouns (e.g. 'they' instead of 'the family');
- . using elisions/abbreviations (e.g. would've);
- . creating one complex sentence to replace several simple sentences;
- . using semi-colons instead of connectives (there is no need for 'and').

Using pictures for writing and speaking activities: As it may not be often easy for all learners to be able to write their own mini-sagas, especially in class for one reason or another, such as shortage of time, the teacher can resort to illustrating the plot of a mini-saga with a series of pictures, so as to help the students write it. To make the task somewhat challenging for the learners, the teacher may present the first picture to the pupils, and stick the rest of the pictures on the board in wrong order. The learners try to identify the correct order of pictures, and engage in writing the mini-saga.

The same procedure can be followed for a speaking activity. The students may be asked to account for the correct order of each picture, and then individual learners tell the story.

How to deal with the learners' mistakes in speaking activities

It is worthy of note that the teacher ought to be aware of the necessity of how to deal with students' mistakes during speaking activities. In point of fact, overcorrection of students' mistakes should be avoided on the part of the teacher and peers, so that the learner speaker will not be intimidated and discouraged, and the flow of his or her oral performance will not be interrupted. Nonetheless, overtolerance of the learners' mistakes is strictly inadvisable, so that they will not end up becoming fossilized errors. In this regard, one effective way of dealing with students' mistakes during speaking activities may consist in pointing to such mistakes in a previously-agreed upon organized way by individual learners using special gestures or tapping on their desks to draw the speaker's attention that s/he has made a mistake and allow him or her to correct it himself or herself. If a mistake is made without the learners' noticing it, the teacher can refer to it in the same way. In case a learner speaker fails to correct himself or herself, the teacher asks him or her to carry on his or her performance, and after s/he has finished, error correction should be carried out adopting a three-agent principle of preference residing in self-correction, peer-correction, or teacher correction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of what has been examined above, the following conclusions have been drawn and the following recommendations have been made:

Using the integrated approach to teaching English as a foreign language to learners of whatever academic level is of paramount importance to the success of the teaching-learning process, in the sense that a language cannot be used effectively for communication unless the four skills are taught, and hence learned interdependently. Hence, as Oxford (2001) observes, this approach underscores that English is not just a subject of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; it is rather a means of interaction and sharing among people. In the context of this study, therefore, teacher trainers, school administrators, and the relevant

ministry ought to collaborate to help EFL teachers, especially those teaching sixth graders to be familiar with the use of such an approach.

The paper has suggested using mini-sagas in young learners' foreign-language classes as a pedagogical strategy that can assist teachers in adopting the integrated approach. It has been demonstrated that such a pedagogical strategy embodies a number of characteristic benefits that can help achieve effective teaching and successful learning. As far as the teacher is concerned, a mini-saga may be utilized as a sound ground for integrating the four language skills in a variety of systematic classroom activities. On the part of the learner, it can stimulate him or her to search for reading other min-sagas and various types of stories on his or her own, and attempt to write others. Those individual reading and writing activities, providing they are practiced constantly and refined by some teacher assistance if need be, can assist the learner a great deal in being an effective user of the target language in its oral and written forms.

Equally for the sake of achieving the expected learning objectives, it is strongly recommended that the teachers who are assigned to teach sixth graders should be ones who graduated in English, especially as those learners are beginners who need to be taught by proficient teachers. In this regard, it is also necessary, as Mezrigui (2012: 332 - 333) suggests, for those teachers to attend obligatory extensive pre-service and occasional in-service teacher training sessions in the English language teaching under the guidance of ELT inspectors and experienced teacher trainers, and ought to be given various opportunities and encouraged to seek diverse ways on their own to develop their teaching methodology in parallel with keeping up with the innovative approaches to teaching English as a foreign or second language.

An ultimate recommendation, as Mezrigui (2012: 331- 332) roughly proposes, would be the necessity of sensitizing both teachers and learners implicitly and explicitly to the fact that English – as alluded to above – should not be taught and learned as a mere school subject of secondary significance, but in lieu a language of international communication, which these latter need for their current and future life. One simple, but important indirect way of such sensitization is allocating English, as a curricular subject, a high coefficient and increasing the learners' exposure to the language in class (e.g., four one-hour periods a week, instead of only two), as well as outside class through various ways.

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APPENDICES**Appendix 1: Questionnaire administered to 20 sixth graders' EFL teachers**

Please, tick the possible reason(s) behind the teachers' inability to integrate language skills in their sixth graders' EFL classes, and jot down other ones if you think there are any.

Possible impediments to integrating language skills in sixth graders' EFL classes	Please, tick the appropriate box(es) below
1. The nature of syllabus does not allow the integration of skills	
2. One hour is not enough for integrating all or some of the language skills	
3. The majority of students are slow or weak learners	
4. Lack or absence of training sessions	
5. I do not have a clear idea about how to integrate language skills	

Appendix 2: Prize-winning mini-saga samples

a) The first mini-saga competition was held by *The Sunday Telegraph* in 1982. The first prize-winner was the following:

Title: The beauty

Author: Finja Staabs

He looked at her as she walked slowly towards him.

He thought that he'd never seen anything comparably fascinating.

Her elegant figure was slender with long legs.

The sun let her black hair shine.

'Jonathan,' his mother said angrily.

'I told you to kick this spider out. I hate them.'

b) As reported by *The Telegraph* on August 14, 1999, the first and second prize winners of the mini-saga competition in that year were the following:

First Prize winner:

Title of mini-saga: *War and Pieces* by

Author: Mary Ann Slater

“Edge pieces first,” he decrees.

All others are rounded up, segregated.

“Blues into the blue pile, browns into the brown. Do not mix them.”

My moves are restricted (a tree here, a cloud there), while he attacks the castle.

I smuggle a piece into my pocket: the revolution has begun.

Second Prize winner:

Title of mini-saga: *The Price of Freedom* by K C Holt

“I accept,” he whispered.

“Good,” said the General, “then you are reprieved.”

“Executions begin at dawn; your job is to fit the nooses and push the condemned off the scaffold edge.”

“Will I wear a hood?”

“No,” said the General gently, “but your father and your brother will be blindfolded.”