

# Students' Changing Views and the Integrated-Skills Approach in Taiwan's EFL College Classes

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The integrated-skills approach (ISA), which incorporates the four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—has become a dominant trend in FL college instruction in Taiwan. The purpose of the study was to examine how the ISA is being used in Taiwan's EFL college classes, develop an understanding of students' satisfaction with the integrated-skill class and authentic activities, and determine if students' views about separated-skill instruction changed during the year of coursework. Data were collected from a questionnaire survey, interviews of students, and classroom observation. The results indicated that the instructor provided a wide range of authentic materials and class activities, allowing students to interact with texts and each other in a seamless integration of the four language skills. 90% of students recommended continuing to implement the ISA in class for the next academic year. Survey and interview data revealed that under teachers' class structures, students changed their views on EFL instruction.

Key words: English, integrated-skills approach, skill development, foreign language instruction, Taiwan organizations

## Introduction

Impelled by the trend toward economic globalization, English has become a widely disseminated and ubiquitous international language. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) state, "English, a second language for most of the people of the world, has increasingly become the international language for business and commerce, science and technology, and international relations and diplomacy (p. 1)." Crystal (2000) estimates that 1.5 billion (or one in four) of the world

population use English as a first, second, or foreign language. The spread of its usage has led to the current status of English as a global *lingua franca*.

In Taiwan, the government has placed the teaching and learning of English high on its agenda due to the fact that English plays an important role in international business, communication, technology, education, and travel. Improving the population's English competency is seen as a key component in the government's campaign to transform Taiwan into an international business center. Students who learn English as a second language will be able to take part in international affairs and join international organizations (Chen, 1996). To that end, the government has published a series of language policies and school curricula regarding English learning. In 1949, English instruction was begun early in secondary schools with students studying English six hours per week (Zhang, 1992). In 1998, the Ministry of Education announced that the onset of English instruction would move from senior high schools to elementary schools

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starting in 2001. English is also one of the most important subjects for the High School and College National Entrance Examinations.

Moreover, for over 40 years, Taiwan's official college curriculum has required first-year students in all colleges and universities to complete a three-credit-hour English language course with particular emphasis on the development of reading skills (Zhang, 1992). Today, some universities and colleges even require second-year or third-year students to take another two-credit-hour English language course. The main goal of these two-year language courses is to help students improve language competence for workplace and global preparation. This raises the question: Which language approach and teaching strategies are appropriate for enabling college students to learn English in a meaningful and effective way?

### **Problems with the Traditional Approach to Teaching English**

The traditional approach to teaching English as a second or foreign language in Taiwan has been to teach reading, writing, speaking and listening—the four language skills—separately. Chen (1999) states that this common approach stresses skill orientation and rote memorization, where teachers pay a great deal of attention to reading and writing instruction. Class activities focus on word-decoding, phonetic identification, and grammar drills, which isolate the four language components from their use in communicative and authentic contexts. Jones (1995) also indicates that traditional English-as-Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Taiwan and China are teacher-centered and emphasize linguistic over communicative competence. Harvey (1985) stresses that specific teaching approaches frequently used in Taiwan's EFL classrooms include frequent correction of errors, rote learning, and grammatical analysis.

Dai, Chen, and Xiao (2000) indicate that high school and college entrance examinations confound English language teaching objectives. When teachers must prepare students to pass the national exam, the ability to communicate in English in authentic contexts is not a practical objective. Instead, teachers must prioritize reading and writing instruction and focus on grammar, vocabulary acquisition, and linguistic accuracy as the primary skills to be developed. Instruction thus tends to be skill-oriented, emphasizing the acquisition of hierarchically arranged skills, with the teacher acting as the central authority. Students are viewed as passive participants.

They spend much of the time completing workbooks and skill sheets on grammar and vocabulary in order to improve accuracy. Evaluation assumes the form of objective testing for mastery of skills. Yao (1999) demonstrates that there is little or no English listening and speaking instruction in Taiwan's high schools. When students enter colleges and universities, their aural and verbal skills are inadequate. Yao also indicates that in college, as in high school, grammatical and syntactical analysis, text translation, and vocabulary identification are regarded as the major components of learning English as a foreign language. This misleads students into believing that the more English vocabulary and grammar they can recognize, the better their English proficiency will be.

According to Chen (1999), lesson plans used by teachers in most of Taiwan's EFL classrooms at the high school and college levels employ the following format:

- (1) Definition of new words and idioms: Define the meaning of the new words and idioms. Discuss each of the new words using some of the following techniques: synonyms, antonyms, sentences, and comparisons and sounding each word out.
- (2) Grammar analysis: Explain the important grammatical structures in texts.
- (3) Text translation and discussion: Have students read each paragraph individually or together. Then, the teacher translates the text word by word and sentence by sentence. The teacher also analyzes the grammatical structures of difficult sentences.
- (4) Review of target words and other unfamiliar words and grammatical practices.

As Su (2003) states, this traditional teaching procedure decreases students' motivation and interest in learning English. Students are encouraged to identify a large number of individual words, idioms, and grammatical structures to enhance their language competence rather than use the language for real communicative purposes.

Recently, in response to research that emphasizes the possible benefits of implementing the integrated-skills approach in college, Chen (2002), for example, indicates that, based on her experience as an instructor of EFL college classes, it is impossible to teach reading without the extensive use of writing, speaking, and listening. She believes that students can benefit from practicing all of the language skills in integrated, meaningful and communicative ways. Dai, Chen, and Xiao (2000) interviewed 67 of Taiwan's employers, asking them what language proficiency business-major college students should develop in order to secure prestigious

jobs. These employers stated that, the impact of economic globalization and the spread of English worldwide, English is the most important international language in international and multinational organizations as well as in trade, technology, education, travel, and modern communication. American culture, in particular, movies, TV programs, magazines, and newspapers, has also become highly visible in Taiwanese society. Thus, most employers assert that the purpose of learning English is to communicate effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social, personal, school, and work situations required for daily living in a given society. Teachers, they feel, should help students develop communicative competence in English by providing learning opportunities and resources which integrate the four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Although a number of researchers have stressed the importance of implementing the integrated-skills approach (ISA) into EFL college classes, little work has been done to examine its employment and effectiveness in the classroom. Only Lin (1985) and Lee (1999) in their studies discuss instructors' implementation of the integrated-skill approach along with a series of authentic activities into their EFL classes. The results focused specifically on the instructors' perceptions of the integrated-skill approach and their lesson planning. Lee in his study also included the integrated-skill-based syllabus he developed over 19 weeks. It included the teaching objectives, schedule, and text materials he used in class. He concluded that his students enjoyed reading, writing, and participating in discussions and became active participants in classroom activities.

Recently, the ISA has begun to be incorporated into EFL classes in East Asian countries. Kam and Wong (2004) indicate that the traditional skill-learning model, with an emphasis structural-analytical instruction, has prevailed for some time. Recently, skill integration has become a prevalent concept in Southeast Asian EFL curricula. The Singaporean and Malaysian English curricula, for example, assert that integration of the four skills should be achieved through a thematic approach. Classroom teaching is structured around a series of language tasks in which the four skills are integrated and used.

### **What is the Integrated-skills Approach?**

The philosophy of integrated-skills instruction is based on the concept that in natural, day-to-day experience, oral and written languages are not kept separate and isolated from one

another. Instead, they often occur together, integrated in specific communication events (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). This approach is consistent with the communicative language teaching and whole language as both emphasize meaningful and authentic language use and link oral and written language development. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), Savignon (1991), and Oxford, Lavine and Crookall (1989), the principles of CLT emphasize the importance of using a language to communicate in order to learn it. Hymes (1971) stresses, "Being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence; it requires communicative competence" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 121).

Whole language advocates, such as Brooks-Harper and Shelton (2003), Schwarzer (2001), Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores (1991), Weaver (1990), and Goodman (1986) also state that language (oral and written) functions to serve authentic purposes by facilitating meaningful communication. In the language learning process, listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be treated as integrated, interdependent, and inseparable elements of language. No language process should be separated from the whole teaching task. Weaver (1990) explains that when children engage in the complex processes of reading, writing, discussing, and thinking, they simultaneously develop language and literacy, learning about and through these processes. Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) explain that each time someone reads, writes, speaks, or listens, this language encounter feeds into a common "data pool." In subsequent encounters with language, the person can draw on this pool. Rather than assuming that speaking, listening, reading, and writing should be kept separate, they stress that all expressions of language support growth and development in literacy.

Krashen (1993) found that reading exposure or reading for genuine interest with a focus on meaning provides language learners with written comprehensible input similar to oral comprehensible input. He argues that reading contributes to second language acquisition in the same way as listening does, and proposes that reading contributes to competence in writing just as listening helps develop the ability to speak. Peregoy and Boyle (2001) conclude that the teacher should incorporate opportunities throughout the reading for students to develop their own learning by responding verbally as they read, write, and learn in English, because it is the integrated use of oral and written language for functional and meaningful purposes that best promotes the full development of second language proficiency.

These researchers suggest that reading and writing as well as speaking and listening should be integral parts of all

language classroom activities because all these processes interact with one another. Teachers should provide opportunities and resources for students to engage in authentic speech and literacy activities.

### The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine how the ISA is being used in Taiwan’s EFL college classes, develop an understanding of students’ satisfaction with the integrated-skills class and authentic activities, and determine if students’ views regarding separated-skill instruction changed during the year of coursework.

### Methodology

#### Sites

The study was conducted at a private university, South Taiwan University. Students at this university are required to complete two years of English courses before graduation: “Freshmen English Courses” (three credit hours) with particular emphasis on single-skill training—reading (two credit hours) and listening (one credit hour)—and “Sophomore English Courses” with emphasis on four-language-skill development. In general, teachers take responsibility for developing their own course syllabus and classroom activities and selecting the text materials. They can also decide which course levels they are going to teach before the semester starts.

The course which incorporated the integrated-skills approach into classes for this study encompassed about 36 weeks of the school year. Each lesson was 100 minutes long and took place once a week.

#### Participants

A teacher who taught Sophomore English courses

voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. She chose to participate because she found that most students enrolled in her Sophomore English courses often felt bored and rarely participated actively in class, presumably due to the emphasis on single-skill rote learning and drills. This teaching experience motivated the researcher to conduct a study which examined whether the integrated-skills approach can motivate students to learn English in integrated, communicative, and authentic ways, how students feel about the ISA, and whether students’ attitudes toward English learning change through exposure to the ISA. Before the study, the researcher worked with the instructor to plan the course upon which the study is based, but she was not involved in teaching the course. Instead, she served as a non-participant and thus a potentially less biased researcher in the analytic process.

Sixty-four business-major students (54 females and 11 males) who were enrolled in the instructor’s Sophomore English Courses agreed to serve as subjects. All students enrolled in the instructor’s class were given a pre-post survey in order to determine whether students change their perceptions of and beliefs about integrated-skill instruction as the course progressed. Before the study began, students were asked to complete 6 items regarding their background information, learning experiences, and beliefs about English instruction before taking the sophomore English class (See Appendix A for a pre-survey). In the last two weeks of the second semester, the students completed a questionnaire survey (see Appendix A for a post-survey) which was designed to assess students’ current EFL learning experiences as well as their perceptions of the course design employing the ISA. Because of absences and section enrollment shifts, 86% of participants (n=56) completed both surveys and therefore comprised the final samples. The students’ background information is shown in Table 1.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected from a questionnaire survey and interviews of students and through classroom observation. All proper names referenced throughout this article are

Table 1. *Students’ Background Information from the Pre-survey*

Gender		Major		Years of Study	
Female	54	International		Less than 4	1
Male	11	Business	31	5-7	38
Unknown	0	Finance	34	8-10	24
				More than 11	2

pseudonyms.

### **Survey**

Students were given a pre-post survey. In order to increase content validity and reliability and item clarity, the pre-post surveys were designed using three steps: First, the survey items were modified from Lin's "English Learning Attitudes and Beliefs Survey" (ELABS) (1985) and Horwitz's "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" (FLCAS, 1986), which have been used by a large number of Taiwanese educators to conduct EFL studies. Items 1-4 and 9-12 from the pre-survey were from FLCAS and the remaining items were from ELABS. Second, two college teachers in the field of EFL reviewed and critiqued the draft. Their input was used to prepare a pilot version of the instrument. Third, the preliminary survey items were tested on 100 juniors who have already completed the requirements of the Sophomore English courses. This procedure enabled the researcher to prepare a revised version.

The survey included (1) multiple-choice questions; and (2) 5-point Likert survey items (1=strongly disagree, 2=agree, 3=moderate, 4=disagree or 5=strongly disagree) which could be scored and coded for computer analysis (see Appendixes A for sample survey). The data was analyzed with descriptive statistics (frequencies/percentage) and the *t* test. The *t* test was conducted to determine the same item of the pre-post survey with significant variation by levels of agreement and disagreement. The standardized significance level of  $*p < .05$  was chosen for this study.

### **Interview**

Additional information for the study was elicited through open-ended interviews with ten students. In class, the instructor usually organized students in groups of five or six and assigned group work/discussion and task-based activities (10 groups in total). Two students were selected randomly from each group and asked to be "interviewees; all 20 students (17 females and 3 males) agreed. Two semi-structured interviews of each student were conducted in the researcher's office at the beginning and end of the study. Each lasted thirty to fifty minutes and was audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, which allowed interviewees to express their feelings and ideas more fluently and fully. The rationale for the interview questions was to gather their perceptions of the

integrated-skill class, along with authentic activities and their EFL learning experiences before and after the study.

### **Class Observation**

The class was observed for six class sessions: two at the beginning, two in the middle, and two near the end of the study. Each observation lasted 1 1/2 to 2 hours. The researcher recorded observations of and personal reflections on classroom practices. The rationale of classroom observation was to develop an understanding of how student learning attitudes and classroom interaction changed over the course of the year. Observation particularly focused on students' responses to the course (e.g., students' eagerness or reluctance to take part in class activities).

### **Data Analysis**

The study was a case study of one EFL college class employing the integrated-skills approach. A single case study could provide insight into students' language learning experiences, opinions, behaviors and attitudes in an integrated-skill classroom context. It also facilitated a deeper understanding of how the integrated-skill approach was fully implemented. Data were collected and analyzed by the researcher. The method of constant comparison described by Glaser & Strauss (1967) was used. Four phases were conducted: First, all observation notes and interview data were transcribed. Second, the collected data were organized into three analytic files based on the aforementioned purpose of the study: (1) lesson development; (2) students' perceptions of the integrated-skill class, and their opinions about EFL instruction before and after the study. These data were further sorted and organized by data types (e.g., students' pre-post survey, transcribed interviews, and field notes from observation). Second, the data were reread a number of times. Key words were annotated in the margins of the survey, transcripts, and field notes. These annotations became the basis for codes and sub-codes with major codes colored by easy comparison across subsets of the data. Third, after interpreting, naming and coding the data, these codes and sub-codes were incorporated into larger categories, resulting in themes. The data were examined to insure that the themes represented the variety and complexity of perspectives. Finally, several code themes were placed into a meaning sequence that formed the sections of the study.

## Results

### Course Procedures Employing the ISA

**Text Materials and Class Activities:** The results of classroom observation and document analysis showed that two commercially-produced materials, *Rethinking America I* and *Impact Values*, were chosen as the textbooks. The topics cover universal and real-life text materials, such as friendship, lifestyles (e.g., food, holidays/ celebrations), family (e.g., family values, changing family structures), the environment, and technology (e.g. the internet). The instructor used topics from the assigned readings to incorporate listening and speaking. The lists of texts are as follows:

Day, R. R., Yamanaka, J., & Shaules, J. (2003). *Impact Values*. Hong Kong: Pearson Education North Asia Limited.

Sokolik. M. E. (1999). *Rethinking America I*. Boston: Heinle & Helinle Publishers.

In addition to textbooks, the instructor used a variety of authentic supplementary materials including newspapers (such as *China Post*, *The New York Times*) and magazines (such as *Time* or *Classroom Studio*) to achieve the teaching objectives of integrating the four language-learning processes. Audio-visual materials (videotapes, cassettes, CDs and DVDs) were also used in class. TV series with English subtitles, like *Friends*, was commonly shown in class.

More than 50% of students indicated that the instructor

provided a wide range of authentic class activities (e.g., songs, tapes, movies, reading analysis, plays, writing tasks, brainstorming) to achieve the teaching objective of integrating the four language skills. Authentic classroom activities along with text materials—those using cassettes, CDs, and videos/films/DVDs and small-group activities—and group discussion were used most commonly (see items 1 on Table 2). In four of six class sessions that were observed, the instructor frequently used topic-related TV series, such as *Friends*, with English subtitles and had students listen to a cassette, engaging with the text and discussing it. She also provided different types of tasks requiring students to work in pairs or small groups to share information, as well as complete an assigned task such as discussing materials as a group, brainstorming, role-playing a certain situation, and expressing opposing viewpoints on controversial topics.

### Teaching Procedures

In observing teaching procedures, there were usually three steps in each unit (1) warm-up activities; (2) follow-up activities; and (3) extension activities:

**Phrase 1: Warm-up activities.** The lesson usually started with communicative activities, which involved group discussion, role-play, or listening to songs. For example:

- (1) Four or five students met together to discuss pre-reading questions in English related to their prior

Table 2. *Opinions about Classroom Activities*

Types of Classroom Activities (n/p)								
Listen to Cassette	Video Film	Songs	Play	Group Discussion	Role Play	Written Tasks	Reading Analysis	Others
1. What classroom activities does your teacher use frequently in class?								
47	43	31	34	38	29	31	45	0
83.92%	76.79%	55.36%	60.71%	67.86%	51.79%	55.36%	80.36%	0
2. Which class activity does you like the most?								
40	51	21	46	33	22	18	27	0
71.4 %	91.1%	37.5%	82.1%	58.9%	39.3%	32.1%	48.2%	0
3. Which class activity do you think is the most challenging?								
6	11	1	13	4	3	18	8	0
10.7%	19.6%	1.8%	23.2%	7.1%	5.4%	3.2%	14.3%	0

Note. N=65

knowledge, which would be helpful to them as they read to expand their knowledge about a topic. Students then shared their opinions with classmates.

- (2) Students listened to cassettes related to the topic of the assigned reading. Conversation partners were assigned to discuss what they heard and to share their opinions with each other.

**Phrase 2: Follow-up Activities.** A series of comprehension-based reading and discussion activities were provided to help students increase their comprehension skills:

- (1) Students worked in a pair or group to discuss the main idea of each paragraph. Students were encouraged to construct the meaning of the sentences rather than discuss the definitions of new vocabulary words or analyze the sentence structure.
- (2) The teacher and students discussed and reviewed the assigned reading together. Sometimes, students in a group would role-play the plot or specific events from the reading in order to enhance reading comprehension.
- (3) When encountering new vocabulary and difficult sentences, students were encouraged to use the context and linguistic cues to guess the meaning.

**Phrase 3: Extension Activities.** The teachers encouraged students to express their opinions, feelings and thoughts related to the assigned readings; for example:

- (1) Students were asked to explain from the author's point of view why the article was written. Or, students were asked to write down their favorite parts of the assigned
- (2) reading.
- (3) The teacher showed videotapes related to the assigned reading and instructed students to discuss the content and new vocabulary.

**Phrase 4: Homework and other assignments.** Students were usually given some homework such as writing a personal reflective response related to the topic of the assigned reading and movie-watching. They were also required to work in a group of four or five to complete one after-class assignment per semester; for example:

Each group had to select one American movie related to the theme of the assigned reading, such as *Pocahontas* or *My Best Friend's Wedding*, then watch it with English subtitles, write a new version, and play it at the assigned time. Each group also needed to have a brief introduction of the movie in

English and to explain aspects such as why they chose the movie, who the cast members and directors were, what the group members' impressions of the movie were, and soon.

### ***Student Opinions about the Integrated-Skills Course Planning and Activities***

90% agreed that the instructor provided opportunities and time for students to use English in real communication in class. 90% felt that the class was successful and appropriate for their FL learning and recommended the continued use of the ISA in class for the next academic year (see items 1, 2, and 3 on Table 3). 90% marked that they enjoyed reading, writing, speaking, and listening in class. Less than 15% indicated that they were afraid of speaking English (see items 4 and 5 on Table 3).

When asked what their favorite activities were, 80% of the students marked "watching and discussing movies or films with English subtitles" (51) and "writing a play to perform" (46) (see item 2 on Table 2). All twenty interviewees commented that these activities increased their motivation to learn and facilitated interactions among peers. Class observation found that students were motivated to read English subtitles to understand the story. They were eager to initiate questions and comments about the story:

When reading the selected reading, most students looked tired and paid little attention to what the instructor said. Some of them even lowered their heads, felt sleepy or looked around. When the instructor told the students that she was going to show them the TV series *Friends* with English subtitles, students suddenly became alive and looked excited and eager to watch. They became interested in what she was saying. . . . While watching, they paid close attention and wrote down unknown words they saw on the screen and recited them spontaneously several times. After watching, the instructor asked them to get in small groups and discuss the story in English. Students became more willing to talk about the story. They even actively raised their hands to ask questions about the plot and unknown words (Field note 4).

In addition to TV series, the interviewees mentioned that "preparing a short play based on an American movie" was their other favorite class activity. All twenty interviewees felt similarly, stating that it was a good opportunity to practice all four language skills in English as well as increase active learning and interaction. They were motivated to work

Table 3. *Students' Response to the Class Employing the ISA*

Agreements (n/p)				
SA	A	M	D	SD
1. The teacher provided opportunities and time for me to use English for real communication rather than skill practice in class.				
1 (1.8%)	23 (41.1%)	27 (48.2%)	5 (8.9%)	0
2. The class is successful and appropriate for my FL learning.				
2 (3.6%)	26 (47.3%)	25 (45.6%)	2 (3.6%)	1 (1.8%)
3. I recommend the continued use of the ISA in class for the next academic year.				
8 (12.1%)	29 (37.9%)	25 (37.9%)	3 (4.5%)	1 (1.5%)
4. I enjoy reading, writing, speaking, and listening in class.				
2 (3.7%)	19 (35.2%)	29 (53.7%)	3 (5.6%)	1 (1.9%)
5. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak.				
1 (1.8%)	6 (10.7%)	35 (62.5%)	13 (23.2%)	1(1.8%)

Note. SA=strongly agree, A=agree, M=moderate, D=disagree, and SD=strongly disagree. N=65

Table 4. *Students' perceptions of English language learning and teaching before and after the study*

	Agreements (n/P)					* <i>p</i>
	SA	A	M	D	SD	
1. I believe that nearly all of class time should be devoted to practicing linguistic forms (i.e. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax) rather than meaning.						
Pretest	7 (10.9%)	32 (50.0%)	22 (34.4%)	3 (4.7%)	0	<0.001
Post-test	0	0	1 (1.8%)	28 (50.0%)	27 (48.2%)	
2. My understanding of English language learning is to focus on memorizing new vocabulary and grammar rules.						
Pre-test	6 (9.2%)	24 (36.9%)	31 (47.7%)	3 (4.6%)	1 (1.5%)	<0.001
Post-test	0	2 (3.6%)	31 (55.4%)	20 (35.7%)	3 (5.4%)	
3. My English language teacher should translate word-by-word from English from help me comprehend the text.						
Pre-test	9 (13.8%)	34 (52.3%)	18 (27.7%)	4 (6.2%)	0	<0.001
Post-test	0	0	30 (53.6%)	19 (33.9%)	7 (12.5%)	
4. Based on my understanding of learning English, my English teacher should teach reading, writing, speaking, and listening separately.						
Pre-test	11 (16.9%)	29 (44.6%)	16 (24.6%)	9 (13.8%)	0	<0.001
Post-test	1 (1.8%)	5 (8.9%)	10 (17.9%)	31 (55.4%)	9 (16.1%)	

Note. N of the pretest survey is 65 and N of the post-test survey is 56.

together to organize, rewrite, discuss, and perform the play in English. Virginia describes the experience: "I liked this

activity, because we learned to cooperate with others and developed group skills while practicing our reading, writing,

and listening skills in English. Our classmates could also practice their listening skills” (Interview 2).

In terms of the most challenging activity, 50% marked “writing a play to perform” (13) (see item 3 on Table 2). Seven interviewees reflected on the problems they encountered during production and performance. As Cindy responded, “During production we had some difficult times, such as deciding the roles, assigning each other’s jobs, and rewriting the plot development in English” (Interview 2). Anna echoed, “When it was ready to perform, we still felt scared because we were afraid of speaking English in front of the class” (Interview 2). All of the interviewees agreed that, although it was not an easy assignment, they learned actively while acquiring positive experiences. Students’ positive experiences of the play activity were also evident in the following excerpt of classroom observation:

When the instructor announced in English that a group was going to perform, students looked excited and gave them a big round of applause. During the performance, when characters said something interesting and acted funny, students laughed loudly. Most classmates were attracted to the plot, interesting costumes, hand-painted scenes, and background music. . . . After the performance, the audience gave them another big round of applause. When the instructor asked students to work in a group to discuss their reflection, most students gave them some feedback. Each group actively expressed in English why they liked the play. . . . The class atmosphere was filled with joy, ease, and laughter (field note 4).

### ***Student’s Views about EFL Instruction before and after the Study***

The survey data found that students changed their views about the EFL instruction throughout the course of the study. Beforehand, more than 95 percent agreed that language instruction should focus on practicing linguistic form (e.g. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax) rather than meaning. Afterwards, no students marked this survey item with “agree” or “strongly agree” (see item 1 on Table 4). At the beginning of the study, 92 percent thought that the emphasis in English language teaching and learning should be placed on the recognition of vocabulary and grammar, and translation of texts; this is in comparison to 7.5 percent or less who believed this after the study (see items 2-3 on Table 4). The result of the independent *t* test ( $*p < .05$ ) also shows that

each item of the pre- and post-surveys differed significantly. Initially, more than half of the students viewed reading, writing, speaking and listening as separate and independent language processes; this is in comparison to 28 percent who believed this after this study. In contrast, after the study, 98 percent believed that reading, writing, speaking and listening should be taught as interrelated skills. At a  $p < .05$  level of confidence, students’ beliefs about separated-skills instruction differed significantly before and after the study (see item 4 on Table 4).

When asked to compare their EFL experiences in high school and the first and second years of college, the majority of the interviewees indicated that the instruction differed from what they had learned before. The following statements provide an example:

In my prior high school and the first year of college, most English instruction focused on reading and writing. I rarely spoke English. Besides, in order to pass exams, I had to memorize numerous difficult words which are not relevant to our daily lives. This kind of experience made me feel bored and frustrated. . . . On the other hand, Miss Liu (the instructor) provided numerous authentic opportunities and an efficient use of time for us to experiment in reading, writing, and absorbing English without being afraid of making mistakes. . . . She also provided cooperative and communicative activities which allowed us to use English to speak and perform (Cindy, Interview 2).

Eight interviewees also indicated that the instructor’s class plan made them believe that the purpose of EFL learning should be authentic communication. As Ross illustrated:

The separated-skill instruction in high school and the first year of college led me to believe that the four language skills should be taught separately. However, I found that although I could understand the meaning of each sentence and vocabulary item, I could not grasp the main idea of the text. Conversely, Miss Lin (the instructor) minimized word-to-word translation and grammar analysis of sentences. We tried to convey meanings rather than mechanical practices. This way of teaching made me believe that the purpose of learning English is not passing the exam, but authentic communication (Interview 2).

Based on their positive experiences, all twenty interviewees recommended the continued integration of the ISA, class activities, and text materials in future EFL classes.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In Taiwan's EFL classes at secondary and high school levels, most teachers still prefer skills-oriented instruction and practice because they think that it enables students to learn language logically as well as pass the national entrance exams. However, the trends of economic globalization and the growing recognition of English as a means of international communication have impacted on Taiwanese attitudes toward English instruction. Students and parents have begun to regard English proficiency as important not just for passing the national entrance exams but for meeting their future needs in trade, commerce, banking, tourism, education, technology, and scientific research. This trend has prompted criticisms of the traditional approach which have led teachers and educators to reevaluate classroom practices and instruction methods. In 1999, the Ministry of Education even shifted the existing middle and secondary English curriculum from skills-oriented to communication-oriented instruction. The objective of the revised curriculum stresses improving students' communicative competence in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The new curriculum suggests that teachers should look for alternative classroom practices by incorporating the four language skills to help students learn English in interesting, authentic, and communicative ways.

This paper provides a valuable perspective by investigating how an EFL instructor helped Taiwanese college students learn English using a new approach to course planning that incorporated whole, integrated, communicative and authentic processes. The present study also provides insight into how students perceived this integrated-skills course and the authentic activities it utilized, and how their views on EFL instruction changed as a result of the study. Classroom observation, document analysis, and interview feedback indicated that the instructor provided a wide range of real-life and authentic materials and small-group tasks, allowing students to interact with texts and each other in a seamless integration of the four language skills. Survey data found that 90% marked small-group and communication-based tasks—watching and discussing films with English subtitles and writing a play to perform—as their favorite activities. Although some interviewees mentioned the difficulties in preparing for the play, they all agreed that this activity was beneficial in that it required reading, discussion, performance, critical thinking, interpretation, and interaction.

The findings also affirmed an approach to language instruction that is based on a view of language as a means of communication for authentic and real-life purposes, both

written and oral. Language is a social tool that learners use to interact with others and make meaning distinct from their ability to recite dialogue and perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge (Berns, 1990). Byrnes (1998) also demonstrates that language learning does not merely center on producing responses in the first and second language, but also requires the creation of meaning in thinking, interpreting and analyzing in the first or second language as well as interaction with the text through a process which involves integration of the four language skills. By integrating these skills, students' learning moves from comprehensible input to comprehensible output.

The result of the pre-post survey found that students altered their views of English instruction over the course of the year. Less than 5 percent believed that the four language skills should be taught separately. Instead, the majority of students strongly believed that all four language skills should be integral components of EFL courses. The interviewees also expressed the fact that they changed their views about separated-skills instruction over the course of the study. Moreover, they responded that the instructor's course made them realize that "language is the key to communication" (p. 15) and that "language is learned best when the focus is not on the language form but on the meaning and context being communicated" (Goodman, 1986, p. 10). The prevailing thought is that foreign language learning (English language instruction) is not accomplished mainly through vocabulary memorization, pronunciation accuracy, grammatical analysis and translation, but through the integration of the four language skills in real communicative and authentic settings. As Brown (2001) emphasizes, "second or foreign language instruction should attend to what learners can do with language, and only secondarily to the forms of language" (p.23). Successful word-to-word translation, word recognition, and grammatical analysis do not guarantee comprehension, nor do accurate answers based on mechanical clues reflect comprehension. If meaningfulness and comprehension are the keys to language learning, then language learning must be understood as the construction of meaning (Swaffler, Arens & Byrnes, 1991).

## Implications for Teachers

The results of the study indicate a positive change in students' learning attitudes which suggests that future students would welcome the application of these techniques in intermediate levels of instruction in Taiwan and other East

Asian countries. The study offers the following suggestions for teaching English as a foreign language:

First, teachers should provide authentically-based and interesting resources and opportunities through classroom activities materials, and teaching strategies which utilize multiple skills to express meaning and interact with others (Oxford, 2001). Oxford (2001) gives a specific example of the classroom application of the integrated-skill approach:

In a course on intermediate reading, the teacher probably gives all of the directions orally in English, thus causing students to use their listening ability to understand the assignment. In this course, students might discuss their readings, thus employing speaking and listening skills and certain associated skills, such as pronunciation, syntax, and social usage. Students might be asked to summarize or analyze reading in written form, thus activating their writing skills. In a real sense, then, some courses that are labeled according to specific skill might actually reflect in the integrated-skills approach after all (p. 3).

Second, in order to develop a real and authentic purpose for foreign language instruction, the instructor should develop units which emphasize the communication of real meaning and the interactive use of all four skills instead of linguistic forms. Oxford (2001) suggests that integrated-skills language learning is promoted through the use of small group tasks, such as generating a list of questions for research, responding to first drafts of writing, discussing the meaning of stories, deciding how to prepare a group report and acting in a readers' theater, which can help students learn language from each other.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The study served as a starting point for conducting further research regarding the appropriateness of implementing the ISA in Taiwan and other Asian countries where English is taught as a foreign language. However, the design of the current study imposed certain limitations. First, the study focuses specifically on one teacher using the ISA in one class. The sample is thus relatively small. Future studies should include more Taiwanese students from a variety of FL proficiency levels and departments to determine the effect of the ISA on a wider range of students. Second, students who did not participate in the ISA study might have different perceptions of and beliefs about EFL learning than do those

who participated in the present study. Future studies should utilize a control group which does not use the ISA in order to compare whether there are differences in perceptions and outcomes between the control group and experimental group. Third, national entrance exams still affect EFL instruction in Taiwan and some East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, Korea, and Singapore. Future studies should examine how the ISA compares to the traditional skills-oriented approach in terms of improving students' performance both in the classroom and on national entrance exams.

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## Appendix

### Sample Survey

#### Pre-Survey (S1)

This survey is designed to gather information about your EFL classroom experiences before you take Sophomore English courses. Please mark multiple responses at Q1 and make the response (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Moderate, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) from Q2 to Q5.

#### I. Students' views about EFL Instruction based on their prior learning experiences in Freshmen English Courses

1. I believe that nearly all of class time should be devoted to practicing linguistic forms (i.e. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and syntax) rather than meaning.  

1	2	3	4	5
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2. My understanding of English language learning is to focus on memorizing new vocabulary and grammar rules.  

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
3. My English language teachers should translate word-by-word from English to help me comprehend the text.  

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
4. Based on my understanding of learning English, my teacher should teach reading, writing, speaking and listening separately.  

1	2	3	4	5
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#### II Background Information

6. Gender:                     Male                                     Female
  7. Major:                     International Business     Financial                     Accounting
  8. Years of Study:         4 years and under         5-7 years                     8-10 years  
 over 11 years
- 

#### Post-Survey (S2)

The survey is designed to gather information on how you feel about the integrated-skill class. 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=moderate, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

#### I. Opinions about Class Activities

1. What classroom activities does your teacher frequently use in classes? (Multiple Responses)

<input type="checkbox"/> Listening tapes	<input type="checkbox"/> video and film	<input type="checkbox"/> song	<input type="checkbox"/> play
<input type="checkbox"/> group discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> games	<input type="checkbox"/> role play	<input type="checkbox"/> written exercises
<input type="checkbox"/> reading	<input type="checkbox"/> others _____		
2. Which class activity does you like the most?

<input type="checkbox"/> Listening tapes	<input type="checkbox"/> video and film	<input type="checkbox"/> song	<input type="checkbox"/> play based on American movies
<input type="checkbox"/> group discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> debate	<input type="checkbox"/> role play	<input type="checkbox"/> writing tasks
<input type="checkbox"/> reading analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> others _____		
3. Which class activity do you think is the most challenging?

<input type="checkbox"/> Listening tapes	<input type="checkbox"/> video and film	<input type="checkbox"/> song	<input type="checkbox"/> play based on American movies
<input type="checkbox"/> group discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> debate	<input type="checkbox"/> role play	<input type="checkbox"/> writing tasks
<input type="checkbox"/> reading analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> others _____		

**II. Perceptions about the Integrated-Skill Class**

- 4. The teacher provided opportunities and time for you to use English for real communication rather than skill practice in class.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 5. This class is successful and appropriate for my FL learning.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 6. I recommend the continued use of the ISA in class for the next academic year.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 7. I enjoy reading, writing, speaking, and listening in class.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 8. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5

**III Students' views about EFL Instruction**

- 9. I believe that nearly all of class time should be devoted to practicing linguistic forms (i.e. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and syntax) rather than meaning.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 10. My understanding of English language learning is to focus on memorizing new vocabulary and grammar rules.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 11. My English language teachers should translate word-by-word from English to help me comprehend the text.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5
- 12. Based on my understanding of learning English, my teacher should teach reading, writing, speaking and listening separately.  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5

**Part III. Background Information**

- 13. Gender:  Male                     Female
- 8. Major: \_\_\_\_\_