

**Interdisciplinary Approach Within English Language Teaching:
A Case Study**

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Abstract

The interdisciplinary approach to teaching English (ELT) can include incorporating real-life themes into language learning, focusing on English. Themes such as environment, health, technology and social issues are incorporated into the language learning context, rather than being taught as topics in isolation. This is more than the old grammar-based approaches to teaching and focuses on communicative competence through contextual and experiential learning. It builds on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in promoting student involvement, interaction and communication.

The learning and teaching process focus on the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing - LSRW) through tasks and communication tasks. Various tasks can be used to ensure that real-world topics are integrated for learners to draw on their background knowledge and skills. This helps build vocabulary, reading comprehension, speaking fluency, writing skills and promotes critical thinking and autonomy. It also facilitates the shift in approach towards competency-based and learner-centred education as proposed in current educational reforms in India. The impact of this approach was evaluated in the present study by a classroom-based intervention of a few days with secondary school English learners, which led to improved language skills, motivation and self-confidence. The study suggests that the inclusion of interdisciplinary themes in the learning of English provides an interesting context, which makes English learning exciting, relevant and effective.

Keywords: interdisciplinary, LSRW skills, learner-centred, cutting-edge education, language skills, etc.

Introduction

India's secondary school classrooms for English Language Teaching are generally based on exercises in the textbook, monotonous and based on rote, drill and testing. This limits the learners' use of language. Competency-based and experiential learning in the National Education Policy 2020 calls for a change in the classroom. Multidisciplinary approaches to teaching English include introducing language from the environment, health, culture and technology. Here, the subject remains English, but the content is relevant as the students can develop language knowledge, awareness and critical thinking.

The interdisciplinary approach is a teaching method which promotes the exchange of knowledge, skills and ideas from more than one subject to enhance the learning experience. An interdisciplinary approach does not view subject areas as separate, but acknowledges that real issues and experiences are multifaceted and can't be defined from a single perspective. It attempts to connect different disciplines and enhance meaningful and integrated learning (Drake & Burns, 2004). It is based on the notion that knowledge is not segmented in the real world. Students view environmental problems, health promotion and technological advancement as complex issues that require multiple perspectives. Knowledge about the environment may require scientific, social, ethical and communicative knowledge. So, interdisciplinary learning is more genuine to knowledge (Jacobs, 1989).

Learning theorists consider interdisciplinary learning as a means to enhance deeper learning through interdisciplinary connections. By linking new learning to prior knowledge and other ideas, students can learn better and apply learning to other disciplines (Beane, 1997). This approach is consistent with constructivist learning theories, which emphasise that learning is a process of meaning-making, rather than information absorption (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). As such, in school education, interdisciplinary learning also helps develop higher-level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The interdisciplinary content provides students with opportunities to analyse, evaluate, problem-solve and articulate ideas. This helps in the current education system, which emphasises competency-based education and application of knowledge in the real world (National Research Council, 2000).

Recently, India has recognised the need for interdisciplinary learning. The National Education Policy 2020 promotes a multi-disciplinary approach in education by shifting from a fragmented view of the disciplines to an integrated view of learning, similar to the real world (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). This policy calls for classroom experiences to be designed to bring together learning from different domains for language, cognitive and social learning.

In the teaching of English, interdisciplinary does not necessarily mean teaching multi-disciplinary subjects. Rather, language is learned based on themes, ideas and content from different life domains. In this case, English is the discipline, and the interdisciplinary approach is the content for English language learning. This allows students to learn language skills, critical skills and communicative skills, to make English language learning relevant and contextual (Nunan, 2004). So, the interdisciplinary approach moves from discipline-focused and teacher-centred education to integrated and student-centred learning. It helps to bring together knowledge from different fields and to situate the learning in real-life contexts to make it easier to learn. It is very useful in English Language Teaching, as it enables the language to be used not only as a code, but also as a communicative, reflective and investigative tool.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect on English language skills of interdisciplinary themed learning?
2. Does it promote student engagement?
3. Can it be achieved in small classes?
4. Is it easy to put into practice?

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the improvement of LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) skills of the students.
2. To evaluate the impact of interdisciplinary themes in teaching English.
3. To boost students' participation in theme-based English learning.
4. To provide a classroom model for high school classrooms in India.

Interdisciplinary Approach in General Education and English Language Teaching

The interdisciplinary approach in general education is an alternative to the traditional approach, where subjects are taught in isolation as independent units of

knowledge. Teaching in the traditional classroom is conducted in isolation, with separate curricula, teaching and assessment approaches in English, Science and Social Studies. This can impede students' understanding of the inter-connections between different subject areas and the real-world applications of the knowledge they gain (Jacobs, 1989; Drake & Burns, 2004). This can result in fragmented, rote and assessment-driven learning (Jacobs, 1989; Drake & Burns, 2004).

But the interdisciplinary approach attempts to overcome these problems by encouraging a holistic approach to a given subject. Rather than being limited to the knowledge contained within these artificial categories, students can learn about a concept through the ideas and knowledge from other disciplines. For instance, the "environment" can be studied not only from a scientific standpoint, but also from a social, ethical and communication standpoint. Such an approach to learning allows students to develop a more integrated knowledge. And it promotes critical thinking skills, because students need to consider the relationship between ideas, link knowledge and apply it to different contexts. This makes learning more integrated, dynamic and meaningful (Beane, 1997; Bransford et al., 2000).

Interdisciplinary approach in English Language Teaching is rather target-oriented. English is still the only subject being taught, and there are no attempts to teach other subjects. But there is the use of real-life issues such as environment, climate, health, technology and social issues within English lessons to support language learning. These are not taught separately but as the content for language use. Therefore, the interdisciplinary approach is effective in the teaching and learning of English through the use of content that does not distract from the language learning (Nunan, 2004).

This is one of the key advantages of this approach, as it focuses on language learning as contextualised and communicative rather than decontextualised and rule-driven. Instead of grammar being taught as a set of rules or vocabulary as a list of words to be memorised, the language is taught through themes that are relevant to students. For example, when students learn language within the topic of "health", they don't just learn vocabulary and sentence patterns; they also talk about things that are relevant to them, express their opinions, and learn useful concepts. This also helps students to understand and retain more information as they have the context to

connect the new language structures to their existing knowledge and experience (Ellis, 2003; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

This is easily illustrated with the topic of "pollution" for English language learners:

Reading Task: Students read a short article about pollution to develop their reading skills and vocabulary.

Vocabulary Practice: Learners learn the words pollution, environment, waste and cleanliness, and create sentences.

Speaking Activity: Students discuss environmental problems in their community, expressing their ideas and opinions in English.

Writing Activity: Learners write a paragraph (How can we reduce pollution in our environment?)

Further Task: Learners create awareness-raising statements or messages.

This approach not only improves language proficiency but also student involvement and active participation. The relevance of the language learning content to their environment and world experiences encourages responsiveness. Moreover, it enables them to think and speak critically, share their ideas, and communicate instead of memorising. Therefore, the interdisciplinary approach in English Language Teaching offers a connection between language and life that enhances the relevance, engagement and efficacy of learning.

Conceptual Framework

The interdisciplinary teaching approach (in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom) is a teaching-learning approach where, in the classroom, English is the main discipline being taught and the knowledge and understanding of other disciplines in the theme (topic) and real life are integrated into the teaching of English. The traditional interdisciplinary teaching approach is teaching a range of disciplines, but not teaching the disciplines of Science, Social Studies and others. This approach involves integrating concepts from various disciplines into English language teaching. While drawing on content from other subject areas, English remains the primary focus, emphasizing its core principles such as language use in context, task-based learning, and real-world themes. This version improves clarity and avoids repetition while preserving the original meaning. This results in a vibrant English class where the language skills are taught in context, communication and interaction.

First, English is the main discipline; this means that the teachers teach while students enhance their learning language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing - LSRW). This is not to say that English is taught in language related parts like vocabulary, grammar and syntax. They learn and practise them through communication. They learn and practise the grammar, they learn the vocabulary, and they learn and practise discourse. This approach does not rely on rote memorization or the mechanical learning of rules from other subjects. Instead, learners engage with content from various disciplines, using English as the medium through which they understand, analyse, evaluate, and communicate ideas. In this context, English is not treated merely as a subject of study, but as a practical tool for comprehension, critical thinking, and effective communication.

The second principle, teaching of language through the use of themes using contextual appropriacy, becomes relevant. Themes might be pollution, environment, health and hygiene and technology and society in the context of India, where there can be a disconnect between the language taught at school and the language spoken in the community. Themes can be used to bridge the gap and facilitate learning. Themes are not being taught to teach environmental science, but English. The citizens are not being taught environmental conservation to teach environmental science, but to teach vocabulary related to the environment, to read and talk about conservation related to the environment, pollution or climate in English. This is an intuitive language learning process that provides meaning, involvement and participation.

The third principle of the task-based model and the language practice is classroom-based. Learners learn language through. In the tasks, one or more of the LSRW skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) will be involved, and the task can be conducted in English. For instance, a reading task involves reading and analysing short texts on a topic, a task for writing can involve sharing ideas, describing and solving problems, a task for speaking can involve dialogue, presentations and reflections, and vocabulary can be learnt through sorting and thematic discussions. Tasks can be linked to a series of tasks, which will enable progression. The communication, collaboration and production (also known as "doing language") can be emphasised, and this will allow a language learner to be a language producer.

The teachers can talk about the environment, health/hygiene, technology and issues. For example, the students can discuss the environment, pollution and sustainable environment, and the learners can practise their description and persuasive skills. Health/hygiene themes can be used to talk about health and life. They can talk about the world, critique and give opinions about technology with technology themes. Social themes can be used to reflect on the reflective language skills and social issues, such as education, gender and community. These themes could be practised for language skills.

So, this approach of English language teaching makes it cross-disciplinary, student (and context) centric language learning. It also makes it easier to achieve the current Indian education targets to have a competency and experiential learning program as per the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). The interdisciplinary nature of English teaching and its relation to life make language learning easy and life fulfilling.

Theoretical Support for the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the current study, which enables us to redefine the interdisciplinary approach in English Language Teaching as a theme-based task-oriented approach, is backed by the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Both approaches share a common view on the best way of learning language, not in isolation from rules and forms but in its functional use.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), originally associated with Prabhu and further developed by Ellis, emphasizes that language is best learned when learners engage in meaningful tasks that require communication (Ellis, 2003; Prabhu, 1987). The key principle of TBLT is that language is not just a subject to be learnt and studied, but one that needs to be used for some purpose. This is in line with the first and third principles of the conceptual framework, namely, English as a discipline and task-based language learning. In this study, students learn the grammar and vocabulary not for their own sake, but in the context of performing tasks such as reading texts about environmental concerns, speaking about everyday concerns and writing short paragraphs about personal experiences. By doing so, they learn to use the language structures implicitly to communicate their message. The tasks in real-

life contexts make the learning experience contextualised, authentic and learner-focused, as recommended in TBLT.

Furthermore, TBLT endorses the idea that thematically-oriented content originating from real-life contexts can be a useful tool for language learning. When students engage in tasks that are related to popular themes such as health, technology or news, for instance, they are more likely to engage with the content. This facilitates a more meaningful language processing and retention. Hence, the incorporation of real-life themes in English teaching, as proposed by the conceptual framework, can be justified by TBLT. The other theoretical basis of the framework is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT, associated with language educators such as Dell Hymes, and later extended by Canale and Swain, shifts the focus in language teaching from language competence to communicative competence. It emphasises the ability to appropriately use language in different social settings, which means not only speaking accurately, but also fluently, coherently and pragmatically. This is in line with the second principle of the conceptual framework, which emphasises the importance of themes from real life to facilitate language integration.

Experimental Study in the Present Study

In this study, the themes of environment, health and social issues have created a contextualised classroom communication environment. Students are encouraged to communicate, express their opinions and communicate with others, thus building their communicative skills. CLT has supported the idea that language learning should be communicative and contextualised, and that a focus should be placed on meaning rather than form. This is reflected in the teaching practices used in the study, where speaking and writing activities strive for natural communication rather than on the form of language.

CLT has advocated for learner-centred teaching, whereby students are engaged in the process of meaning-making, rather than merely receiving information. This is realised through the task-based activities in the conceptual framework where learners have engaged in conversations, collaborative projects and creative activities. As such, the classroom has become a communicative space where language is used to communicate and express meaning.

The approaches of Task-Based Language Teaching and Communicative Language Teaching have provided a theoretical framework for the interdisciplinary

teaching of English described in this study. TBLT has provided a rationale for how language is learned using tasks and activities, while CLT has emphasised the importance of communication and context in language learning. Both theories point to the idea that language learning should occur through its use in real-world contexts. Therefore, themes and tasks are not only pedagogically justified in the teaching of English, but they are also well-theorised.

Activities (Student Centred)

1. Listening Skill Activity

The listening activity was conducted in a task-based manner in which students listened to a narration of pollution in their neighbourhood. The researcher narrated a short story with waste management, air pollution and plastic waste issues. They also made notes about the words and main ideas. Then they answered the comprehension questions. This listening task was in line with Task-Based Language Teaching, as students completed a meaningful listening task. This activity also showed the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, as students discussed their answers with their peers. Hence, students demonstrated improved comprehension of listening and inferencing in a situation.

2. Speaking Skill Activity

The speaking practice was done as a whole-class discussion of "How to Keep Our Area Clean". They were put into small groups, and they were asked to discuss how to keep their area clean. Students expressed their ideas with a few sentences. It was more important to talk than to be correct. This activity was an example of Task-Based Language Teaching because students were engaged in a task. It was also an example of Communicative Language Teaching with students talking to each other, sharing information and communicating. It also helped the students to become more confident, fluent and capable in speaking English.

3. Reading Skill Activity

The reading task was a short passage discussing pollution to be read out loud. This simply stated what caused and what resulted from pollution. After reading the passage, they had to identify the main idea, details and vocabulary. They also answered comprehension questions to demonstrate their understanding. The task-related activity involved active, rather than passive, reading. In line with the Communicative Language Teaching approach, students also collaborated with others

and justified their answers. This task improved students' reading comprehension and vocabulary.

4. Writing Skill Activity

The writing task was an activity in which students wrote a paragraph about "My Role in Keeping My Environment Clean". They were invited to express their ideas and their experiences in English. The teacher provided them with some cues, but they were asked to share their own thoughts. They then had a chance to share their work. It reflected Task-Based Language Teaching as students were engaged in a writing task with a product. It also embodied Communicative Language Teaching as students were able to communicate their ideas in a meaningful manner and share them with others. This task helped the students to develop their writing clarity, cohesion and structure.

The above activities demonstrated the interdisciplinary approach while teaching English Language to the students by using a contextual approach to a real-life theme. With the help of communicative and task-based approaches, the students have done listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks in a holistic way.

The table below shows the sample of 5 students of class IX of a private school in Hyderabad who were provided with intervention for a week. They have been involved in language activities that involved all the LSRW skills.

Table 1: Sample Population Profile

Student Code	Class	Gender	Background	English Proficiency Level
S1	IX	Female	Urban	Low
S2	IX	Male	Semi-Urban	Moderate
S3	IX	Female	Urban	Low
S4	IX	Male	Urban	High
S5	IX	Female	Semi-Urban	Moderate

Five English-medium students from Class IX were the focus of the current study. They were a mix of both genders and socio-spatial (urban and semi-urban) backgrounds. The students' English proficiency ranged from low to high. Two students (S1 and S3) had low proficiency, indicating a limited vocabulary, unclear

sentences and low self-esteem. Two (S2 and S5) were moderately proficient, meaning an elementary understanding of the language with the ability to communicate, but with some errors. The other student (S4) had high proficiency with better organisation, fluency and language control. This provided us with a small group where we could observe the impact of an interdisciplinary, task-based and communicative approach to language learning in a small group of varying levels of proficiency.

The table below illustrates the comparison of the levels of the five students who took part in this intervention.

Table 2: Performance Comparison (Pre- and Post-Intervention)

Student Code	Pre-Test Score (10)	Post-Test Score (10)	Improvement	Observation
S1	4	7	+3	Improved sentence formation and vocabulary
S2	5	8	+3	Better coherence and clarity in writing
S3	3	6	+3	Increased confidence in speaking
S4	7	9	+2	Enhanced organisation and expression
S5	5	8	+3	Active participation and improved fluency

The table below (Table 1) shows the improvement in students' performance from the pre- and post-tests. There were significant improvements in vocabulary, sentence structure, and confidence in speaking (three marks improvement for each) for the low-proficiency students (S1 and S3). Moderate-proficiency students (S2 and S5) also made a three-mark improvement, with improvement in terms of coherence, clarity and fluency of speech. The high proficiency student (S4) improved by two marks; however, there were also improvements in terms of organisation and clarity of speech. Thus, the results indicate that the interdisciplinary nature of the study, coupled with task-based and communicative approaches, has assisted in improving the language performance of all students, regardless of their proficiency levels.

The table below illustrates the initial proficiency level and improvement after the post-test.

Table 3: Student Involvement and Participation

Student Code	Participation Level	Speaking Confidence	Task Completion	Overall Involvement
S1	Moderate	Low to Moderate	Completed	Improved
S2	High	Moderate to High	Completed	Strong
S3	Moderate	Low to Moderate	Completed	Improved
S4	High	High	Completed	Excellent
S5	High	Moderate to High	Completed	Strong

Students' involvement shows that the interdisciplinary theme and the use of Task-Based Language Teaching and Communicative Language Teaching were effective in promoting students' participation and speaking confidence. Students who had low to moderate initial involvement (S1 and S3) improved their involvement and speaking confidence, from low to higher levels in tasks. Students who had higher levels of involvement initially, such as S2, S4 and S5, were actively involved in the classes (good to excellent), with high levels of fluency and confidence. All students completed tasks, demonstrating the effectiveness of tasks in keeping students interested and engaged. Also, the communicative tasks encouraged students to communicate, exchange ideas and to be creative with the language. Thus, the findings demonstrate the success of including interdisciplinary themes in TBLT and CLT in improving language proficiency, but also promoting motivation, engagement and positive classroom atmosphere.

This study showed that the use of interdisciplinary themes for English Language Teaching, incorporating Task-Based Language Teaching and Communicative Language Teaching, can lead to better language learning outcomes for high school students. By maintaining English as the core curriculum and introducing thematic areas such as the environment in the classroom, a real-life context was offered. The tasks that concentrated on listening, speaking, reading and writing enabled students to practice the language.

The findings of the study demonstrated students' improvement in performance, participation and confidence. This strategy was successful for students at different levels, with students at lower levels becoming more confident, and those at higher levels becoming better at expressing and composing. The time-on-task and increased involvement also indicate that the thematic, task-based and communicative approaches resulted in a more engaging classroom. Thus, the study states that thematic and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching English can be implemented in Indian high schools. It aligns with the change in the emphasis on competency- and experience-based learning mentioned in the recent policies. It not only improves language skills but also encourages critical thinking, application and communication skills, making the learning of English more relevant, interesting and effective.

Conclusion

An interdisciplinary approach in English Language Teaching, with an authentic integration of themes and supported by Task-Based Language Teaching and Communicative Language Teaching, is an effective approach for teaching the English language in Indian high schools. By maintaining English as the main subject and employing themes such as environment, health, technology, and social issues as learning contexts, the approach transforms the learning of a language from a pure grammatical and routine teaching strategy to a contextualised and experiential one.

The task-based and communicative tasks are used in order to involve the students in language use, which improves their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills holistically. By moving away from the formal grammar teaching method, the approach encourages language development through use, which enhances language proficiency, comprehension, and communication abilities. The contextual approach also facilitates the learners' ability to relate the language to their own experiences and environments, making learning more meaningful and long-lasting. Further, this approach promotes critical thinking, interest, and confidence, and addresses the needs of a diverse classroom in a multilingual environment. The interdisciplinary teaching of English offers a practical and adaptable approach to improving secondary language learning. It not only enhances language learning skills but also communication and development skills, making language learning contextual, practical, and holistic.

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