

Methodologies and Approaches in ELT: A Search for More Effective Ways of Teaching Second/ Foreign Languages

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Abstract— The recurring quest for the best way to teach foreign language leads the language teachers, the researchers and more importantly the applied linguists to introduce new approaches or methods to attain their goals. They often ask what is the most effective method or approach among the existing ones and then they try to launch a new one which is thought to be better than the preceding ones. The study aims to examine the existing methods implemented to teach foreign language and to reach to a proposition that there are some methods or approaches worth implementing in foreign language classrooms. Even when the “best” out of the methods or approaches tends to be inconvenient or impractical for our own teaching situations, I propose pragmatic eclecticism to be applied in teaching foreign language. This article also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the methods or approaches by keeping some certain aims and objectives in mind. I will try to show that some methods or approaches meet these aims or objectives which can help learners achieve the targeted goal whereas the other methods or approaches fail to meet. In this regard, this article provides a critical assessment of the adopted methods and approaches in the field of English language teaching, and claims that we must use every useful element of the methods and approaches rather than obsession with one of them.

Keywords — *ELT, Foreign Languages, Approaches, Methods, Eclecticism*

I. INTRODUCTION

The thinking of adopting some certain methods or approaches in teaching second or foreign languages has always been at the center of discussions of the language teachers, researchers and applied linguists. Changes in language teaching methods or approaches have occurred due to the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study, and more importantly due to the changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning. From the classical Grammar-Translation Method to the latest Dogme Approach to Language Teaching, we have experienced a lot of methods and approaches adopted in second or foreign language teaching. Every method reflected some aims and objectives to be fulfilled or attained. In this paper I will present some common aims and objectives which should be achieved at the end of the teaching/ learning process and keep them as

yardstick while assessing the methods or approaches applied in language teaching and finally reach to a conclusion that any single method or approach is not enough to achieve those aims and objectives. So we need to use the most useful elements of the adopted methods and blend them according to our learners’ need. This blending of useful elements of other methods can be termed as Pragmatic Eclecticism.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper took into account the responses and answers of the Foreign Language Learners who were under-graduate students. The information used here has been gathered from the questionnaire set before them. Some 30 students have been asked some important questions and their responses and remarks are very exciting. We will include the questionnaire here and discuss the results later on.

Questionnaire on Second/ Foreign Language Teaching/ Learning:	
Personal Details	
Gender	
Age	
Nationality	
Numbers of Years Learning English	
Educational Qualifications	
Reasons for Learning English	

1. What seemed to be the best methods or activities to learn English you have had?	
2. What seemed to be the worst methods or activities to learn English you have had?	
3. What are the objectives of language learning?	
4. What areas of language are given emphasis	
5. What kind of activities do you enjoy the most in the classroom and why?	
6. Describe how context is important in learning a language.	
7. Look at the following list of language learning items and say how you can learn them best. a. Vocabulary b. Grammar c. Reading d. Writing e. Speaking d. Listening	
8. Do you think studying Literature is a good way to learn a foreign language?	
9. What do you think about the teacher’s role in teaching a foreign language?	

The students or learners are of undergraduate level. They are from Bangladesh, and their age limit is 18-23. They are learning English for 10-12 years, and they are studying it for academic purpose. Their responses will be discussed in the result section. This article also focuses on the literature or work done on this field.

III. RESULTS

The feedback of the learners is of utmost importance in gathering information and considering the role of methods or approaches in language learning or teaching. Regarding

first two questions about the methods, 80% of the learners gave their opinions for one method or the other. Though they have different opinions regarding the adoption of methods or approaches, they agreed that blending of the useful elements of every method or approach will be better in achieving better command over language. Almost all viewed that communication is the ultimate goal of using a language. Most of the students said that context or situation is very important in language learning, and without context or language learning in isolation is fruitless because we use language in our practical life in context. Most of the

students viewed that they like pair work, group work, use of realia in the classroom, drilling practice, translation of some difficult words in the classroom, contextual reading passage and practice of writing in the classroom. They think that teacher should manage the class, guide the class, interfere a little in their classroom activities so that they can perform their full. They also responded interestingly about the way they learn language items like vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, speaking and listening skills and viewed that memorizing vocabulary does not help learn a language rather learning them in context helps the learners use them while necessary; using grammar deductively helps learner master the grammar item; reading English Literature and other contextual passage to develop reading skill and doing writing practice simultaneously; listening to the text which is recorded in everyday English and proper situation and doing speaking practice simultaneously help learners achieve both linguistic and communicative competence.

IV. DISCUSSION

Every teacher has a different combination and priority of objectives in mind. He has to employ different techniques and procedures to achieve these objectives. They are the teacher's objectives which determine the way he approaches the organization of his language lesson. It is a useful exercise for teachers or researchers to set down in some order of priority their long- range objectives in the teaching of a foreign language. In this regard Wilge M. Rivers in his book titled *Teaching Foreign-Language Skills* states -

“The six classes of objectives are as follows: to develop the student's intellectual powers through foreign language study; to increase the student's personal culture through the study of the great literature and philosophy to which it is the key; to increase the student's understanding of how language functions and to bring him, through the study of a foreign language, to a greater awareness of the functioning of his own language; to teach the student to read the foreign language with comprehension so that he may keep abreast of modern writing, research, and information; to bring the student to a greater understanding of people across national barriers by giving him a sympathetic insight into the ways of life and ways of thinking of the people who speak the language he is learning; to provide the student with skills which will enable him to communicate orally, and to some degree in writing, with the speakers of another language and with people of other nationalities who have learned this language. (Rivers, 1968)”

These goals and objectives are the prime concerns of the language teachers when they teach language learners. I will evaluate the existing methods and approaches by scrutinizing them and finding these common objectives in them.

Section 1:

Let us start with Grammar-Translation Method which was the dominant foreign language teaching method in Europe from the 1840s to the 1940s and a version of it continues to be widely used in some parts of the world, even today. As stated by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers in their book titled *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* includes-

“The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study. Grammar-Translation is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. It hence views language learning as consisting of little more than memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)”

Though this method helps learners acquire reading and writing skills, vocabulary and grammar of that language, literature and culture of the target language, and the knowledge of translation into and out of the target language, it does not promote oral proficiency and communication skill. So Grammar Translation Method failed to fulfill the growing demand of the modern language learners and increased opportunities for communication among Europeans created a demand for oral proficiency in foreign languages.

Section 2:

Language teaching specialists and educators admitted the need for speaking proficiency rather than reading comprehension, grammar, or literary appreciation as the goal for foreign language programs and interest in the ways of child language learning developed. Linguists emphasized on the study of spoken language; establishing good pronunciation habits; the inductive approach to the teaching of grammar; the use of conversation texts. Henry Sweet of England, Wilhelm Vietor of Germany, and Paul Passy of France believed that language teaching should be based on

scientific knowledge about language, that it should begin with speaking and expand to other skills, that words and sentences should be presented in context, that grammar should be taught inductively, that translation should be avoided. These ideas spread and were consolidated in what became known as the Direct Method, the first of the “natural methods.” This method appeared as an answer to the shortcomings of the Grammar Translation Method. In this method of teaching, classroom instruction is conducted in the target language; everyday vocabulary and sentences are taught; oral communication skill is built up in small, intensive classes; correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasized. Though the Direct Method has some advantages like using the target language; contextualized learning; emphasizing on spoken proficiency; and using realia for introducing the teaching of vocabulary, it is also criticized severely for its shortcomings. Richards and Rodgers in *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* states -

“Although the Direct Method enjoyed popularity in Europe, not everyone embraced it enthusiastically. The British applied linguist Henry Sweet recognized its limitations. It offered innovations at the level of teaching procedures but lacked a thorough methodological basis. Its main focus was on the exclusive use of target language in the classroom, but it failed to address many issues that Sweet thought more basic. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)”

In spite of its achievements, the Direct Method fell short from fulfilling the needs of educational systems. One of its major shortcomings is that it was hard for public schools to integrate it. As Brown (1994:56) points out, the Direct Method “did not take well in public education where the constraints of budget, classroom size, time, and teacher background made such a method difficult to use” After a short popularity in the beginning of the 20th century, it soon began to lose its appeal because of these constraints. It then paved the way to the Audio-lingual Method.

Section 3:

The objectives of the Audio-lingual Method are accurate pronunciation and grammar, the ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations and knowledge of sufficient vocabulary to use with grammar patterns. Particular emphasis was laid on mastering the building blocks of language and learning the rules for combining them. This method considers language learning as habit-formation. Noam Chomsky rejected the structuralist approach to language description as well as the behaviorist

theory of language learning. “Language is not a habit-structure. Ordinary linguistic behavior characteristically involves innovation, formation of new sentences and patterns in accordance with rules of great abstractness and intricacy. (Chomsky 1966:153)” Audiolingualism was affected by behaviorism and structural patterns were taught by using drills and successful responses were reinforced. Students become unable to transfer skills acquired to real communication outside the classroom and the procedures are boring and unsatisfying and eventually it lost its reputation.

Section 4:

Some innovative methods and approaches have emerged during the period from the 1970s through the 1980s. Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Suggestopedia and Lexical Approach are the methods or approaches which offer particular insights that have attracted the attention of some teachers and educators, but they have each seen their popularity rise and wane since the 1970s. These methods or approaches have a relatively slight literature.

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method which is based on the assumption that the coordination of speech and action will boost language learning. Richards and Rodgers set the objectives of TPR in their book *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* “The general objectives of Total Physical Response are to teach oral proficiency at a beginning level. Comprehension is a means to an end, and the ultimate aim is to teach basic speaking skills. A TPR course aims to produce learners who are capable of an uninhibited communication that is intelligible to a native speaker. Specific instructional objectives are not elaborated, for these will depend on the particular needs of the learners. Whatever goals are set, however, must be attainable through the use of action-based drills in the imperative form. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)” As TPR represents a useful set of techniques and is compatible with other approaches to language teaching, draws attention on comprehension, reduces stress, it helps language learners learn language effectively.

Diane Larsen-Freeman in her book titled *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* explores the idea about the emergence of the Silent Way- “Cognitive psychologists and transformational-generative linguists argued that learning does not take place through mimicry; since people can create utterances they have never heard before, they therefore cannot learn a language simply by repeating what they hear spoken around them (D. Larsen-Freeman, 1986).”

One principal feature of the Silent Way is the behavior of the teacher who does not enter into the conversation and speaks as little as possible. In this method student progress is accomplished little by little, with a lot of imperfection expected in the beginning. All four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are worked on from the beginning, and meaning is thought to be at least as important as form. The Silent Way is often criticized of being a harsh method. The learner works in isolation and communication is lacking badly in a Silent Way classroom. The material used in this method will certainly fail to introduce all aspects of language.

The objectives of Suggestopedia are to deliver advanced conversational proficiency quickly. It bases its learning claims on student mastery of prodigious lists of vocabulary pairs and suggests to the students that it is appropriate that set such goals for themselves. The most important feature of Suggestopedia is the centrality of music and musical rhythm to learning. Vocabulary and spoken proficiency are emphasized. To many linguists, it is not a practical method as teachers face the problem of the availability of music and comfortable chairs.

The Lexical Approach in language teaching refers to one derived from the idea that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, notions or some other unit of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, words and word combinations. Jeremy Harmer in the book titled *The Practice of English Language Teaching* states - "The Lexical Approach, discussed by Dave Willis (Willis 1990) and popularized by the writer Michael Lewis (1993, 1997), is based on the assertion that language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks. (Lewis 1997:3), (J. Harmer, 2003)"

Lewis suggests that exposure to enough suitable input, not formal teaching, is the 'key to increasing the learner's lexicon' and that most vocabulary is acquired, not taught. The problems of this approach are the lack of explanation of how the learning of fixed and semi-fixed phrases can be incorporated into the understanding of a language system and the lack of sets of procedures to exemplify an approach to language learning.

Section 5:

As an approach Communicative Language Teaching gained its popularity for many reasons such as-its first aim to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching; its second aim to develop procedures for the teaching of the

four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. Its comprehensiveness thus makes it different in scope and status from any of the other approaches or methods discussed in this article.

Littlewood (1981:1) in his book *Communicative Language Teaching* states- "One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language." Hymes, Chomsky and Halliday are the principal thinkers in this field. Where Hymes' view of 'competence' deals with the speakers' knowledge of being communicatively competent in a speech community, Chomsky's view of 'competence' deals with abstract grammatical knowledge. Halliday's theory of the functions of language is similar to that of Hymes. In the book *Teaching Language as Communication* (1978), Widdowson describes that there are relationships between linguistic systems and their communicative values in texts and discourse. As stated by Richards and Rodgers in their book *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* -"At the level of language theory, Communicative Language Teaching has a rich, if somewhat eclectic, theoretical base. Some of the characteristics of this communicative view of language follow: language is a system for the expression of meaning; the primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication; the structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses; the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse. (Richards and Rodgers,1986)" In Communicative Language Teaching learners learn a language through using it to communicate. Fluency and accuracy is equally addressed here and communication involves the integration of different language skills. Though Communicative Language Teaching sees some criticism, it gained widespread acceptance in the world of language study.

Section 6:

The Natural Approach developed by Tracy Terrell and supported by Stephen Krashen, is a language teaching approach which claims that language learning is a reproduction of the way humans naturally acquire their mother tongue. The approach adheres to a communicative approach to language teaching and rejects earlier methods such as audio-lingual method and the situational language teaching approach which Krashen and Terrell (1983)

believe are not based on “actual theories of language acquisition but theories of the structure of language.”

They view communication as the primary function of language and vocabulary is of paramount importance as language is essentially its lexicon. What really distinguishes the Natural Approach from other methods and approaches are its premises concerning the use of language and the importance of vocabulary. Krashen’s Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis are of great importance in acquiring second language.

Evaluation

Finding a suitable method or approach is like a brainstorming of language teaching history. After all of these searches for the best method, some questions like why we are always bound to only a method have aroused. It seems to me that as long as we caught up in the web of method, we would continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution. A scientist called Kumaravadivelu suggests that we must find “alternative to method, rather than finding an alternative method.” To conclude about the best way of teaching foreign or second language, Pragmatic Eclecticism can be considered to be the best way to adopt. It claims that we must use every useful element of the methods and approaches rather than obsession with one of them. Among the above discussed methods and approaches, some of them are more useful and practicable than others but every method or approach is important to understand the difficulties and problems of teaching another language. It can be said that it is better to benefit from every method, approach, and technique when it is necessary rather than being stuck on to one of them. More flexible we are, more efficient is our teaching.

Implications for Further Research

If we look into the matter that language teaching history has undergone a thorough change during the past hundred years, we will find that new methods are employed in replacement of the previous one and that period can be characterized by a search for more effective ways of teaching second/ foreign languages. If the previous method fails to attain the goal of teaching second/ foreign language, another new method is being adopted. This continuous search in the field of ELT leads to newer discovery in the area of the theory of language. The Direct Method came into existence when Grammar Translation Method fails to achieve the goals of language learners and practitioners;

with the improvement of the theories of linguistics and psychology Audiolingualism was launched; later a variety of guru-led methods emerged to fill the vacuum created by the discrediting of Audiolingualism, such as the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and Suggestopedia; finally emerges the Communicative Language Teaching and it continues to be considered the most plausible basis for language teaching today. But Pragmatic Eclecticism is the most useful of all individual methods or approaches. Eclecticism includes some important issues to address, such as exposure to language, comprehensible input, communicative activities, affective variable, discovery and eagerness to learn, grammar and lexis, all language skills etc. Students need constant exposure to language since this is a key component of language acquisition. Learners should be provided with comprehensible input and their anxiety needs to be lowered for learning to take place. Communicative activities and task- based teaching offer real learning benefits, though neither tasks nor communicative activities on their own are sufficient for a whole language program. Lexis is as important as grammar. Showing how words combine together and behave both semantically and grammatically is an important part of any language learning program.

In eclecticism all four skills will be given importance as these skills are the keys to language learning process. What seems to work in Eclecticism depends on the age and character-type of learners, their cultural backgrounds, the level they are studying at and the beliefs and preferences of the teachers. Teachers’ practices should be constantly scrutinized to see if they are working or not. If the teachers and students keep monitoring our classes and adjust what we do accordingly, there is really a good chance that the methods and techniques we use will be the best for the classes we teach. Will the linguists and researchers be content with this eclectic method of teaching or they will search for another novel method or approach? Certainly, with the passage of time theorists and practitioners will find some other ways of teaching second or foreign language.

V. CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to draw a conclusion about which method or approach is the best for our own teaching situation, but in a new situation we may be approached with a new method or approach. In my article I have shown that all methods and approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages and learners are benefitted more or less, but each movement contributed to the field of ELT a lot. Unless

these movements took place, present research on ELT would not go far. So the search for the best way of teaching second or foreign language is a continuous process and up to present the method or approach considered to be the best is Pragmatic Eclecticism which is the blend of the most useful elements of some mainstream language teaching methodologies.

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