

Effective Methods of Teaching English as a Second Language in the Classroom

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Abstract: *This paper is based on my experience of teaching English as a second language to the IGCSE students in an English medium school in Dubai, UAE. It was not difficult to realise that English served not only as a target language but also a medium of instruction in an English medium school. No matter whatever the age and the cultural background of the students, teaching methods become crucial to make the learning of the lesson fruitful. Teachers play an important role in designing teaching techniques through years of teaching experience and training. A language classroom is totally different from a typical lecture-style classroom where a teacher indulges in a one-way lecture and students take down notes. This paper aims at pointing out some effective teaching methodology focussing attention on the characteristic features, teacher-student role and example of a lesson in an ESL classroom.*

Keywords: Techniques, Methodology, Interaction, Incorporate, Approach, Sentiments, Drawback, Linguist, Memorizing, Initiator.

1. Introduction

In more than a decade years of teaching experience, I have found English language classroom, a great challenge. Countries like Peru, China, Japan etc incorporate English as a foreign language in their school educational system because English is not required much outside the classroom. On the other hand, English is taught as a second language in countries like Sri Lanka, India, United Arab Emirates, etc in an English medium school where students- young and adult are prepared to use English outside the classroom as essential to succeed. English teachers deal with a number of issues such as students' age, sex, race, attitude, intelligence factor, confidence level and motivation. Teachers have to handle the language classroom carefully without hurting the sentiments and the shortcomings that may make a student feel low in front of others. Thus teachers have to work out a teaching methodology that may bring out the maximum for students to grasp the contents easily and make the teaching-learning sessions meaningful. In recent years, language teachers and researchers have focussed their attention in observing and developing approaches and strategies that leads to an effective learning process in acquiring English as a SL. In order to make learning process smooth and effective, language teachers have to design various teaching methods out of their personal teaching experience and training. There are various language teaching techniques that help students to understand more clearly and participate in the learning process more actively. Sometimes more than one technique is combined to make an ESL classroom meaningful.

2. Types of Language Teaching Methods

As a language teacher it is very important to know yourself and your students. Not only your subject matter is important but also your students' cultural background and other personal factors- emotional and psychological are equally important. Language teachers have experimented with certain language teaching methods in isolation or combination and found one or more than one method effective and worth using. I hope this paper will help ESL teachers to gain an insight into developing an appropriate teaching material and selecting an effective, suitable teaching method that can practically be implemented in the classroom.

The Grammar-Translation Method had been used by the language teachers for many years. It was also known as the Classical method as it was used to teach the classical Latin and Greek literature (Chastain 1988). It was believed that this method would help students to read and appreciate the foreign literature. It was also thought that by studying the grammar of the target language students will be able to understand the grammar of their native language and learn to speak and write the native language in a much better way. Though students may not develop communicative fluency in the target language but would become mentally sharp in the process of using target language to understand the native language through some similarities between the two. Let us understand the technique of Grammar-Translation method through an example of a classroom where students are asked to translate a piece of literature from English (the target language) to Arabic (the native language). This method is used in the language classrooms with an intention of helping students use their brain intellectually. In this method students are given grammar rules, asked to memorize it and then apply it to the other examples.

Example

A class of students studying IGCSE syllabus are asked to read a passage from Shakespeare's book, 'As You Like It', in English and then few lines are selected by the English teacher and given to the students to translate into Arabic. Then, they are provided with a list of vocabulary such as villain, throat, crown, worship etc and are instructed to give Arabic equivalent. Students are able to give the equivalent words of almost all English vocabulary successfully. Very few students those who could not provide the Arabic equivalent to the English vocabulary asked the teacher and the teacher provided them with the correct answer directly. While translating the lines from English to Arabic, students found difficult to write the sentence correctly. They were familiar with few words and some were new to them. Students who were able to translate English into Arabic were considered successful language learners. Learning was facilitated through attention to similarities between the target language and the native language. In the process of doing so, students were encouraged to learn grammar rules, memorizing long lists of vocabulary without preparing them to communicate in a given situation. This method ignored developing communication skills and created a teacher-

centric classroom discouraging student initiation or student-student interaction. The teacher alone plays the role of an initiator during the whole process of learning. Only grammar and vocabulary is emphasised giving less importance to speaking, listening and pronunciation. In this method, students' native language is used more rather than the target language. Students are encouraged to understand the target language by translating it into their native language. This drawback of paying attention to the development of communication skills gave rise to using another method of teaching English as a SL in the classroom.

The Direct Method became popular when students failed to communicate effectively using The Grammar-Translation Method. It allowed no translation of any kind. Students were helped directly to pick up the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids without seeking any help from the native language. Let us understand this method through an example.

Example

The teacher shows a picture to the language classroom and entitles it as 'an Indian fair'. She asks them to observe this picture minutely for some time and then starts asking question to get feedback from the class. The teacher asks questions such as what do you see in the picture? Prepare a list of different items seen in the picture? Is it a fair or a market place? Describe the balloon stall in the centre of the tent? What do you see on the left and the right side of the balloon stall? etc. Students give response to each question in a different way. They use their imagination and knowledge of vocabulary and sentence pattern while answering the questions. In return the students also asked questions to the teacher such as Have you ever been to a fair in your childhood? Can we go to see a fair some day? Can red and yellow be mixed to prepare orange colour? etc. Wherever students responded using a single word, the teacher instructed to answer using a complete sentence, for example instead of saying 'toy', students were supposed to say, 'I see a toy stall beside the balloon stall' etc.

Students learned new words in situations. A teacher focuses attention on helping students to think in the target language in order to facilitate communication. Grammar is taught indirectly unlike The Grammar-Translation Method. Attention is given on the spoken not written. Students are motivated to speak in the target language and discuss the history, geography and the culture of the target language people. They are helped with all the four major skills of the target language-Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking. This method gives an opportunity for two-way interaction between a teacher and students. They are like partners in the teaching-learning process.

The Audio-Lingual Method is orally based just like The Direct Method. However it does not focus on picking up a vocabulary by using it in a situation like the Direct Method but drills students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns. Teacher wants students to use the target language communicatively and in order to do so want students to over learn the target language. The teacher provides with models for the students to imitate accurately and as quickly as possible. This way the students form new habits in the target

language overcoming the old habits of the native language. Teachers provide with tapes of model speakers and students imitate the teacher's models.

Example

ESL classroom uses Audio-Lingual method to teach the target language directly using four different elements such as Repetition, Inflection, Replacement and Restatement. A teacher drills students in the use of grammar by asking them to repeat a sentence word to word:

Teacher- I want to go to the market.

Students- I want to go to the market.

The teacher uses a word or a sentence and the students change the form:

Teacher- I am feeling hungry.

Students: I was feeling hungry.

The teacher says a sentence and students replace a word in the sentence:

Teacher- I am tired of reading.

Students- I am tired of playing.

The teacher says a sentence and the students rephrase the sentence:

Teacher- Ask me to read loudly.

Students- Read louder.

New vocabulary and structural patterns are presented through dialogues and these dialogues are learned through imitation and repetition. Grammar rules are not provided directly, it is induced through the examples given. Students learn the language patterns the way it is presented in the dialogue. There is student to student interaction but mostly it is teacher directed. He/She is the controlling authority. Although Audio-Lingual Method is still practised by the language teachers, one problem with this is that students are unable to transfer the habits they have mastered in the classroom to communicative use outside it.

The Silent-Way Method came into existence when the idea of learning a language by forming a set of habits was seriously challenged in the early 1960s. Linguist like Caleb Gattegno looked at language learning from a learner's point of view by studying the way babies and young children picked up the language. Gattegno's Silent- Way method is similar in certain aspects with Chomsky's Cognitive Approach proposing that speakers have knowledge of underlying abstract rules, which allow them to understand and create novel utterances. In other words, students are responsible for their own learning. They are initiators of learning and capable of independently acquiring language. This method gave importance to the learning process and not teaching. Students were expected to express their thoughts, perceptions and feelings and for this they were expected to develop independence from the teacher and develop own inner criteria for correctness. Teacher should give students only that what requires in promoting the learning. Students are expected to utilise what they already have and actively engage in exploring the new areas of the target language.

Gattegno designed specialized teaching materials such as the Sound-color chart, Word charts, Cuisenaire rods and Fidel charts for beginners in school to learn sounds, intonation, stress pattern, pronunciation, vocabulary, spellings and sentence structure. Some charts have been revised and new

ones developed for intermediate and advanced level students. Students begin their study of the language through its basic building blocks, its sound which is introduced through a language-specific sound-color chart.

The Sound-Color chart:



This sound-color chart helped the teacher to teach pronunciation and word stress. Each small, coloured rectangular block represented one English sound- vowels and consonants. The teacher first elicits sounds that are already present in the students' native language, and then progresses to the development of sounds that are new to them. These sound-color associations are later used to help the students with spelling, reading, and pronunciation.

The first Word chart:



Color-coding enables the teacher to remain silent because the students can work out the pronunciation from the colors. The Word charts contain the functional vocabulary of the target language, and use the same color scheme as the sound-color chart. Each letter is colored in a way that indicates its pronunciation.

A set of Cuisenaire rods:



The rods are used in a wide variety of situations in the classroom practicing colors and numbers, and later to be used in more complex grammar. If a teacher intends teaching preposition, she could use the statement "The blue rod is between the green one and the yellow one". Sometimes these coloured rods are used to visually represent parts of words or sentences. When students begin to understand more of the language, these rods are used as props to teach them stories.

Fidel chart to teach spelling:



The Fidel also uses the same color-coding, and lists the various ways that sounds can be spelled. It summarizes the spellings of all the different sounds in English.

Example:

This example is an intermediate lesson based on Donald Freeman's lesson in the United States Information Agency's Language Teaching Methods video. The teacher uses rods to construct a floor plan of a 'typical' house. He asks students to label the 'front' and 'back' doors. He points each of four rooms and gets response from the students: 'living room', 'dining room', 'kitchen' and 'bedroom'. On pointing out the walls of each room, a need arises to distinguish between the inner wall and the outer wall. By simply pointing out at the walls students started producing various phrase such as 'the front wall of the living room', 'the outside wall of the dining room' etc. Then the teacher picks up a rod and says 'table'. He uses his gesture asking students where to place the table. A student responds, 'dining room'. On indicating that the teacher needs more specifications, the student says, 'Put the table in the middle of the dining room'. The teacher does this. He picks up another smaller rod and a student responds that it is a 'chair'. The teacher asks where to place it and works with the student using the charts to introduce new words until the student can say, 'Put the chair in the dining room at the head of the table'. The lesson continues in this way, with the teacher saying very little, and the students

practicing a great deal with complex sentences such as, 'Put the table at the end of the sofa near the outside wall of the living room'. (From Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching by Diane Larsen-Freeman, 2000, Chp- 5, The Silent Way, Pg. 59)

In the student-teacher interaction, though the teacher is silent, he actively participates in setting up situations to bring awareness, listens attentively to student's speech and silently works with them in the production through the use of nonverbal gestures and other tools available. The teacher prefers to remain silent to promote student-student interaction. The teacher works with the students while the students work on the language. Learning involves transferring what one knows to new context. The elements of the language are introduced step-by-step in a logical manner, expanding upon what students already know. Student attention is a key to learning the skills of speaking, reading, and writing that reinforce one another. Silent method of teaching is complex and it requires teachers to have extensive training in the use of this methodology. In any classroom, a teacher requires to speak for most of the time, making silent method of teaching ESL less popular among language teachers.

The Communicative Approach came into lime light in 1970s when Linguists realised that students may know the linguistic usage but are unable to use the language. It became very clear that students should learn to perform certain functions such as inviting, declining, praising etc in a social context. It means being able to communicate students did not require linguistic competence but communicative competence that taught them what to say, when to say, how to say and whom to say. In this method the teacher's role is to establish situations to promote communication. Students interact a great deal with one another in a given context.

Example:

Grade eight students are divided into two groups- 'Group A' and 'Group B'. Group A is being asked to conduct an interview for a specific vacancy in a company. Group B is told to enact a situation where few people are lost in a jungle, trying to find a way out. Both the groups are given 15 minutes time to decide who will act as what, what to say, when to say, how to say and why to say. They are allowed to jot down their points in their note books to use it as their expressions while communicating. The purpose of giving situations to the two groups is to help students use language as it is used in a real situation outside the classroom. English as a target language is a vehicle for classroom communication. After certain discussion over the given situations, both the groups performed their level best in utilising the situations appropriately and understanding the communicative purpose of the lesson by speaking for a long time without a break and making the classroom a meaningful success.

The purpose of this communicative method of teaching was to make students speak confidently, apt to a given situation rather than just mastering the language forms. Students were expected to learn beyond sentence construction and understand the linguistic properties of cohesion and coherence that helps binding the sentences together. This

communicative interaction gave an opportunity to build cooperative relationship among students making negotiation more meaningful. The given situation helped in providing meaning to the speech of each group. The teacher played her best as a facilitator and an advisor whenever required during the communicative activity. This activity helped students with lot of improvement into listening, speaking and comprehension strategies.

There are yet other approaches making communication as central. These are content-based, task-based and Participatory approach to teaching English as a SL.

Content-Based approach teaches something new using language as a medium. It focuses on what is being taught. Students are able to indulge in advance thinking while learning new information focussing less on the structure of the language. This approach is very student-centred as it depends entirely on the students' ability to use the language. Basically, it produces motivation in students.

Example:

A Geography class is shown a picture of a cold region covered with ice with the title, 'Tundra' on it. The teacher intends to find out what the students about this title on the chart. She starts jotting down the response of different students on the blackboard. Later on the teacher gives a list of vocabulary such as vegetation, shrubs, soggy, precipitation etc and asks them to check out the spellings. She then plays a tape that provided information on the Tundra region and asked the students to look for the appearance of the given vocabulary and guess its meanings. She also provided with a passage sheet and asked the students to fill in the blanks with suitable preposition.

The teacher tries to teach the various aspects of the target language through a content that acts as a medium to convey some information that is of interest to the students. Students work with a meaningful language and the content within the context of authentic material and task. Communicative competence involves more than using language conversationally, it encourages the ability to read, discuss and write about the content from a given field.

Task-based Approach Task-based learning focuses on the use of authentic language through meaningful tasks such as visiting the doctor or making a telephone call. This method encourages meaningful communication and is student-centred. It encourages problem solving, creativity and spontaneity. Meaning is central to this approach.

Example

As an English language teacher, I divided my ESL classroom of 25 students into five groups, each group comprising of five students. I decided to give a single task to all the five groups and see how differently each group works upon with the same given task. I asked each group to prepare a schedule of study and leisure time that each student in the classroom spends each day at home after school hours. They were given sufficient time until the next English class to discuss among their respective group the ways they might adopt to find out the required information, collect the data and prepare the schedule. For example, a group might decide

how to approach the students in the classroom, ways of collecting information- using a questionnaire or conducting an interview, what data to utilise and what to discard and finally what method- a pie chart, a bar graph, a table or some kind of visual tool is to be used to present the schedule depicting how much time each student spend at home for studying and other leisurely activities each day. The intention behind giving the same task to different groups was to observe how five different groups present the given task in different ways with probably different results.

Before getting involved in carrying out the task, students were asked if they were clear with the purpose of the given task. Students were given the opportunity of playing with the language that they were going to use in completing the task. They got involved into logical thinking. They had to listen to different parts of the same set of information they needed to complete the task, giving them an opportunity to engage in authentic speaking and listening and provide them with tools to improve their speaking and comprehension skills. Student-student interaction became meaningful.

This approach is student-centred with some weaknesses. Students are not able to acquire new forms of language or vocabulary features. Everything is left to the teacher. Students translate and use a lot of native language features rather than the target language in completing the tasks.

Participatory Approach In 1980s, the Participatory Approach started being discussed widely in the language teaching literature. In the early 1960s, the Brazilian language educator Paulo Freire developed a native-language literacy programme for slum dwellers and peasants in Brazil. Freire made the students speak about the problems in their lives. These dialogues not only became the basis for the literacy development, but also for reflection and action to improve students' lives. Freire believed that education becomes meaningful only when learners engage in reflecting on their relationship to the world they live in and provides them with means to shape their world (Freire and Macedo 1987 in Auerbach 1992). This approach aims at helping students to understand the social, cultural and historical forces that affects their lives and helps to empower them in to take action and make decisions in order to gain control over their lives (Wallerstein 1983).

Participatory approach adds new dimension to the teaching of ESL by encouraging in students the criteria of problem solving and improving their perspective towards the world. It helps students in shaping their views and motivates in finding out a solution about the approaching problems and promotes a better understanding into the process of proper decision making. Many times we teachers teaching English as a second language follow Participatory Approach in either isolation or in combination with the above mentioned teaching methods. Participatory Approach is considered to be an effective tool in teaching ESL in the classroom.

Example

As an ESL teacher, I am stating below an example of a classroom lesson where Participatory Approach is applied.

Students of grade 6 is asked to describe a picture of a road accident and respond to the following questions:

Teacher: What do you see in the picture?
Student A: Someone is hit by a car.
Teacher: Who are running towards him for help?
Student B: Some men.
Student C: Also one lady.
Student D: Lot of people.
Teacher: Why is one man touching the boy hit by a car?
Student E: Man is trying to help the boy to get up.
Teacher: If you children would see an accident, what would you first do?
Student F: Help the person by taking him to the hospital.
Student G: Call an ambulance or ask some having phone to call an ambulance.

The lesson started with a simple description of a picture and students related the content of the picture to the world around them. They discussed their feelings and emotions about the incident depicted in the picture. They could easily grasp the relationship between the classroom lesson and the real life. Further, they were able understand the problem and apply strategy to solve it in different ways. They were able to add a new dimension to the English language classroom. Through sharing of their experience they recognised themselves as a social and political being. The goal of Participatory Approach is to help students evaluate their own learning and increasingly direct themselves without much interference from the teacher.

3. Conclusion

It is actually difficult to say which teaching method is effective unless used in a classroom of students with different need, learning experience, intellectual levels, cultural background and attitude towards learning English as a Second Language. Sometimes more than one method is used to bring out the desired results in the language classroom where communication becomes the key factor of teaching-learning process. Unless students learn to utilise the classroom method to express thoughts and feelings outside into the real world situations, the learning cannot be successful no matter whatever teaching method is applied in English as a SL classroom. Teacher- student role becomes the centre in bringing out the maximum within the limited time in a classroom.

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Dr. Fatima Sultan Shaikh received her PhD (in English Literature) from Barkatullah University in 2014 and her B.A and M.A in English from University of Mumbai in 1998 and 2000 respectively. She has worked in India and in Middle East in various roles like Lecturer, Acting Principal, Head of the Department etc. She has more than a decade of rich teaching experience.