

CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS



Language Teaching

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Abstract

This study had tested three research questions: 1. What teachers should teach? 2. What are the aims of teaching?, and 3. How a teacher should teach?. This research is useful for both, the participants since they had the opportunity to show their opinion on the English curriculum, and the teachers since they express their opinion regarding the difficulties they encounter while teaching English as a second language and what do they do to improve the lesson. Besides, the study will be conducted as a way to get the whole picture regarding the methods that are being used by teachers, pay attention to the common mistakes that are being made in the teaching process and try to find their source. Qualitative analyses of the information collected from students and teachers were used in this research with the use of some instruments such as: a questionnaire for students and a questionnaire for teachers. The research is intended only for Albanian-speaking students aged 15-16, class XII, who were attending English lessons at the high school Shaban Hasani in Ferizaj, Republic of Kosovo, and for Albanian-speaking teachers from the same high school aged 33-46. The results from this comparative study shall serve as an opportunity to get a clear vision on what kind of methods do teachers use in the English-language classroom and how well do students perceive them. It will also show the drawbacks of the teaching methods and how creative or not they are and will also serve as a way of proposing few ideas and solutions in order to get teaching to a completely new and more contemporary level that would be of great help to teachers, and also students would benefit a lot from this.

1. Introduction

The aim of methodology is to improve the English language teaching process by upgrading and enabling teachers' capability in order to be more competent in realizing their goals. Teaching includes long-term exploration, gathering and exchanging of experiences, reconsideration of the old and new ways to enhance it.

Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) have been paying attention to investigate their student's needs and their attitudes towards the language they have been studying. They need to inform themselves on the latest trends so that they can play an effective role in the ESL classroom. When teaching a foreign language one of the things that a teacher should have into consideration are the certain qualities which are offered to students who have another native language. So, one should have in mind the problems that students and teachers are facing when learning/teaching a foreign language, such as what teachers have to teach, what the aims of teaching are and how to teach. In order to have a successful teaching, teachers have to motivate students to study, they should help them develop habits through repetition, to keep them interested in, to make a transfer from simple to more complex units in the process of teaching. Also, one should be aware of the following principles (Lado, 1964): 1. Speech before writing; 2. The development of habits by means of pattern practice; 3. The cultural approach.

What is a Teaching Method?

The definition of teaching according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary is explained quite simple as the work of a teacher. And it has really been his/her work to put before the students the subject matter based on his/her knowledge and experience (Oxford Dictionary).

The definition of method also according the Oxford Learner's Dictionary is described as a particular procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, especially a systematic or established one (Oxford Dictionary).

There is a definition on what a teaching method is, such as:

Teaching methods are these forms and procedures through and with which teachers and students acquire their surrounding natural and social reality under institutionalized conditions (Meyer, 1987:45).

Or as Hubbard states:

Methods are between approaches and techniques, just the mediator between theory (the approach) and classroom practice. Some methods can share a number of techniques and, though some techniques have developed autonomously, the most important ones start from the main methods (Hubbard et al., 1983:31).

Methods are presented as part of language knowledge for pedagogical purposes and are part of a paradigm, which means a way of creating theories, doing research and providing classroom activities. Actually, L2 methods are a consequence of the application of new theoretical findings. They are also conditioned by educational philosophy, approaches about language nature and what are the ways of its teaching and learning, and conceptions about interaction in the classroom. When these aspects start to change it can be said that a shift of model is taking place (Alcaraz, 1990:10-14).

Richards and Rodgers have another distinction regarding the overall concept of what a method is. They mention "...an umbrella term for specification and interrelation of theory and practice..." (Richards and Rodgers, 1985:16)

They refer to the terms approach, design and procedure which comprise the concept of method. They give some definitions in order to clarify the terms.

- *Approach* includes the beliefs and theories regarding language, language learning and teaching that is the base of a method.
- *Design* connects the theories of language and learning in order to create and function of teaching materials and activities held in the classroom.
- *Procedure* deals with techniques and practices used in the ESL classroom as a result of certain approaches and designs (Richards and Rodgers, 1985).

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative one and it included two questionnaires, one for the students and the other for the teachers. The questionnaires contained multiple-choice questions for the students in order to provide data, and mainly open-ended questions for the teachers allowing them to answer in their own words, with no influence by any specific alternatives.

Relating to the research questions, the aim was to get an insight into students' and teachers' opinions and feelings on the subject of learning foreign languages and to compare the teaching methods used in the ESL classroom.

Data Analyses

The purpose of the collected data from the questionnaire was to see how students are satisfied from the English class in general and from teacher's presentation of the lesson, to explore do they use some extra materials besides the usual learning resources, and which part of learning the English language is most difficult for them. The questionnaire contained 10 items, all of which were multiple-choice questions.

The results from the questionnaire showed that students generally have a positive stance towards the English language in the classroom, as well as their relationship with their teacher. Here are shown also their stance towards the English lessons and the charts below better represent their answers which are described in details.

In conclusion, it could be assumed that most students agreed that grammar is the most difficult. The grammar is one of the main aspects of learning a foreign language; it is one of the foundations for a fluent English-speaking person, and the difficulties could be overcome with a complete dedication to learning the L2 and with the help from teachers. The second most problematic area for students is speaking. It is also one of the main viewpoints of the language and passing through this gap is possible with commitment from both teacher and student. Exams are the following drawback for students who learn English as a second language; than reading and writing have the same number of students who chose these as their answers; following dictations and listening leaving homework at the last place. Only two students did not give any answer to this question probably they accidentally skipped it or simply did not want to.

Comparison of Results

Comparing the results from the items of the questionnaire for teachers a conclusion can be drawn that all of the four teachers have more than 10 years' experience in teaching English to students. This is an indicator that they also know how to deal in plenty of situations.

Teachers usually use both English and Albanian language in their classes because there are students with poor knowledge of the language who cannot understand their assignments and tasks. So there are situations where they use both languages interchangeably.

Most of the times they include students to take part in the lesson and even activate someone who does not want to be involved. Certainly, they use other resources beside the common ones to enrich the class and make it more interactive. But they also encounter cases where students cannot manage with the grammar, speaking, or reading skills. In order to help their students and themselves they generally attend workshops or seminars, as well as exchange ideas with colleagues regarding the new methods and teaching techniques. They certainly have problems with unmotivated and uninterested students who have some speaking issues and do not want to use the English language due to embarrassing themselves. To surpass these obstacles, teachers usually make students repeat new vocabulary, they encourage and motivate them to participate in classes, not correct their mistakes each time they make one because that will have a negative influence on students, etc.

If we consider both types of questionnaires we can answer the three research questions. The answer to the first research question which is: “*What teachers should teach?*” could be found in the 1st item of the students’ questionnaire (SQ), “*Do you think that the English classes are interesting?*” where students answered positively. Having in mind this, classes supposed to be exciting, entertaining and at the same time educative. Classes should be student-oriented, and the students themselves have to focus on learning the English language. Another part of the answer lies in the 8th item of the teachers’ questionnaire (TQ), “*What are the remedies to overcome these difficulties?*” where teachers offered couple of solutions regarding the difficulties they encounter while teaching in the ESL classroom. The solutions included repetition of the new vocabulary, keeping students interested in the subject, encouraging them to participate in class, etc. which again leads us to another TQ item, i.e. the 3rd item, “*Do you use other resources to teach ESL?*” They used dictionaries, additional books, Internet, etc. It should be noted that today’s technology has made a major advance in comparison to the last 50 years, so the Internet represents a source of various interesting and fun materials which teachers could use. So they should teach according the expected curriculum implementing additional resources from Internet which would attract student’s attention and improve his/her knowledge.

As for the second research question, “*What are the aims of teaching?*”, the answer can be found in the 5th item from SQ, “*How would you grade the quality of the English subject?*”, where students rated classes as of good quality. Teachers should try to keep the quality of classes and even raise the level higher in order to provide abundant and educative classes. Another question from the questionnaires meets the requirement to the second research question, that is “*What do you find most difficult while learning English?*”, the 10th item of the SQ. Students argued that the four basic skills grammar, reading, speaking, and writing cause them many problems, so considering this it can be concluded that teachers beside keeping the quality of English classes,

they should also try to ease these issues and implement some exercises which students will find beneficial in order to surpass their flaws.

The third research question, “*How a teacher should teach?*”, is generally answered in the TQ. The 5th item of TQ, “Do you attend seminars, conferences, etc., in order to improve your experience and knowledge?”, gives a clear indication that teachers should never stop improving their knowledge, putting aside their experience years as teachers, because the technologies are moving forward with a fast pace, on everyday basis there are new even more creative methods than before, therefore they will learn something different and they will refresh their own approaches. Another item of TQ, the 6th one, “Do you exchange ideas with your working colleagues regarding using new methods and teaching techniques?”, also accentuates the importance of teaching methods and techniques which teachers could find from their colleagues, and not only that, but maybe they will alter something in their way they approach students. Therefore, communication with colleagues is also very important. Another item of the same questionnaire, the 10th, “*According to you what are the most difficult parts for a student while learning English?*”, teachers should also have in mind the areas were students have most weaknesses and work on those issues so as to achieve better results.

Conclusion

Some important conclusions are made regarding this research study. This part answers the three hypotheses and shows their relation to the answers from the questionnaires from the students and the teachers.

The results from the questionnaires show that different students lack different skills. If they are good at one skill, they fail other. They have difficulties with grammar, listening, speaking, etc. So it is up to teachers to try and find the best way to address all problematic areas in the class and at the same time try to be inventive and refreshing not adhering to the conventional teaching. Contemporary teachers must create instructional styles that work well in diverse classrooms. Efficient and effective methods of teaching work well with students who are good in English, as well as slow-learning students. This is where various instruction and a balanced combination of teaching methods can help reach all students in one certain ESL classroom, and not just those few students who respond well to one exact teaching method. This is the answer of the first hypothesis on the different teaching methods. The miracle of teaching happens when some of the students will understand the point of the lesson, and nothing can be more rewarding for a teacher than that priceless moment. The transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student is an art style and a skill. Knowing how to make students cooperate starts with choosing the methods of teaching. Even though teacher might prefer certain teaching method, he/she must find the right ones that will best work for the students in the ESL classroom. He/She has to try different methods to meet different objectives and always put challenges in front of him/her and try to reach each student in the ESL class.

This research provided the researcher with sufficient data so as to conclude that language learning is a complex process. Any method which creates conditions for learning is a good one. It should enable the student to acquire a learning strategy and what is more important for the teacher to find out what method will provide him/her to realize a certain goal.

Teachers have an important role in an efficient teaching and learning process, actively participating from planning to realization. Having this in mind, teacher's strategies, methods and approaches become important. Methods of teaching encompass teacher's use of assignments to realize the purposes. In other words, methods signify implementing materials and techniques and their organization. Plenty of approaches and methods for instruction of the foreign language have been proposed and created over time. The new approaches and methods are created as a reaction to the noticed issues with or disadvantages in an existing approach or method.

Finally, the research elaborated in detail the three research hypotheses. It proved that there are a lot of differences between the teaching methods and that teacher should combine different methods so there is a success in the ESL classroom. One of teacher's aims is to know what he/she is teaching. To serve as role models to their students, to inspire and motivate them to give their best try and acquire the foreign language. And least but not last, teachers should have some principles to follow that will guarantee their effective work.

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