
An Evaluative Exploration of English Language Teaching Methods and Approaches

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Abstract:

This research paper explores various methods and approaches used in English language teaching (ELT) and evaluates their effectiveness in enhancing learners' language skills. The study examines traditional approaches, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method, as well as modern communicative and learner-centered approaches, including Task-Based Learning, the Communicative Language Teaching approach, and blended learning techniques. The research highlights how different methods address key language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing and their impact on learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy. Through a critical evaluation, the paper identifies the strengths and limitations of each method and emphasizes the need for a flexible, context-sensitive approach that considers learners' needs, classroom resources, and cultural factors. The findings suggest that combining multiple teaching strategies with innovative approaches can significantly improve learners' overall language proficiency and foster lifelong learning skills.

Keywords: English Language Teaching and Learning, methods, approaches, techniques

Introduction:

There are many books and studies that explain the different methods of language teaching used over the years. According to Brown, a method is a set of specific and well-defined classroom techniques that are based on a shared theoretical idea about how languages should be taught. On the other hand, methodology refers to the overall teaching practices or the general ways in which teachers approach the process of teaching. In simple terms, methodology includes everything that helps answer the question, "How should we teach?" This idea of methodology is similar to what Richards and Rodgers call 'Procedure', meaning the practical steps or actions teachers follow in the classroom.

Every teaching approach is guided by two main things: a theory of language (what language is and how it works) and a theory of learning (how people learn languages). For example, the Audio Lingual Method was influenced by structural linguistics, which sees language as a set of patterns and structures, and by behaviourist psychology, which believes learning happens through repetition and habit formation. This shows that effective teaching methods are not created randomly but are built on both linguistic and psychological principles that explain how people learn and use language.

In the twentieth century, many new language teaching methods appeared one after another. According to Marckwardt (1972), this process followed a cyclical pattern, meaning that methods kept changing like “shifting sands and changing winds.” Each new method tried to move away from the older one but still included some of its useful ideas. For example, a new method might reject old drills but keep the focus on pronunciation or communication.

The Grammar-Translation Method, also known as the Classical Method, has a long history in Western education. It was originally used for teaching classical languages like Latin and Greek, and later extended to the teaching of modern foreign languages. This method mainly focuses on learning grammar rules, word forms, and vocabulary. Students often practice by translating texts, doing written exercises, and memorizing new words. Although new methods of language teaching have developed over time, the Grammar-Translation Method has continued to be popular in many classrooms. Even today, this method is still used in some educational settings. It remains valid in the teaching of classical languages such as Latin, Greek, and Old Irish, where the main goal is to understand old texts. However, its use in modern language teaching is less justified because it does not promote communication or fluency, which are essential in learning a living language. Thus, while the Grammar-Translation Method has historical importance and value in certain contexts, it is often considered less effective for developing practical language skills in modern learners. Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979: 3) listed the major characteristics of Grammar-Translation “In the Grammar-Translation Method, the main focus is on grammar and translation rather than communication. The lessons are usually taught in the students’ mother tongue, and the target language is rarely used for active speaking or interaction. Students mostly learn vocabulary through lists of separate words, rather than through meaningful sentences or real-life contexts.

Teachers often give long and detailed explanations about grammar rules and word forms. The study of grammar is seen as the foundation for learning how to put words together correctly. Students are introduced to complex classical texts very early, even before they have developed the basic skills to understand them easily. The texts are mainly used as exercises for grammatical analysis, with very little focus on understanding the meaning or context of what is being read. Most classroom activities involve translating isolated sentences between the target language and the native

language, rather than learning to communicate naturally. In addition, pronunciation practice is almost ignored, as speaking and listening are not considered central goals. This approach shows that the Grammar-Translation Method emphasizes accuracy and form over communication and fluency, making it effective for developing reading and writing skills, but less helpful for improving speaking and listening abilities.”

The Direct Method is based on the idea that people should learn a new language in the same way they learned their first language as children. This means learning through listening, speaking, and natural communication rather than through memorization or translation. The focus is on oral interaction, where students use the language actively and respond to what they hear. In this method, translation between the native and target languages is avoided, and learners are encouraged to think directly in the new language. Also, grammar is not explained in detail, but is learned naturally through usage and repeated exposure. This approach helps to make learning more practical, enjoyable, and communication-oriented, allowing students to develop confidence in speaking the language fluently and spontaneously.

Richards and Rodgers summarized the principles of the Direct Method as follows (2001: 12): “In the Direct Method, teaching takes place completely in the target language, and the learners are encouraged to think and communicate in that language from the very beginning. Teachers avoid using the students’ mother tongue, making the learning experience more natural and immersive. In this method, only everyday words and useful sentences are taught so that learners can immediately use the language in real-life situations. Speaking and listening skills are developed through a step-by-step process, where the teacher and students engage in question-and-answer sessions. These interactive exchanges help students gain confidence and fluency.

Grammar is learned indirectly, through examples and practice rather than long explanations. The teacher introduces new ideas by modelling correct language use, and students learn through repetition and participation. Concrete words are explained using objects, actions, and pictures, while abstract ideas are taught by connecting them to familiar concepts. Both speaking and listening comprehension are given equal importance, and teachers always stress correct pronunciation and proper grammar. Overall, the Direct Method focuses on natural communication, where learners experience the language as a living tool for interaction, rather than as a subject of memorization.

The Audio Lingual or Audio Visual Method developed from what was called “The Army Method.” It was first used by the U.S. Army after World War II to help soldiers learn foreign languages quickly and accurately. The main idea behind this method came from behaviourist psychology, which says that learning takes place through habit formation, and from structural linguistics, which studies language patterns and sentence structures. In this method, students learn by listening, repeating,

and memorizing dialogues or sentence patterns. They practice language through pattern drills and repetition exercises, aiming to speak correctly and without mistakes. The focus was mainly on accuracy in grammar and pronunciation, rather than on expressing one's own thoughts or using language creatively in real-life situations. While this method was useful in helping learners develop strong language habits and improve pronunciation, it had some limitations. It did not encourage free communication, imagination, or the ability to use the language naturally. Over time, educators realized that language learning should not only train accuracy but also help learners communicate meaningfully and confidently in different real-life contexts.

In the Audio Lingual or Audio Visual Method, new lessons are usually introduced through dialogues so that students can learn how language is used in real situations. Learners are encouraged to imitate and memorize these dialogues, repeating the sentences many times to form correct language habits. The method focuses on one structure at a time, often chosen through contrastive analysis, a comparison between the learner's native language and the target language to avoid common mistakes. Students practice these structures through repetitive drills, such as substitution or transformation exercises, which help them learn by habit rather than by rules. Grammar is not directly explained; instead, learners are expected to understand patterns through examples (an inductive approach). Vocabulary is kept limited and taught only in meaningful contexts, not through word lists.

The Oral-Situational Approach is similar to the Audio Lingual approach because it also follows a structural syllabus, meaning that language is taught through sentence patterns and grammar structures. However, it goes a step further by focusing not only on the forms of language but also on the meanings they express and the situations or contexts in which they are used. This approach was popular in the 1970s, but later, it was criticized because it did not produce the expected improvement in learners' communication skills. Both the Audio Lingual and Oral-Situational approaches were influenced by behaviourist psychology, which focused on repetition and habit formation. However, they did not give enough importance to cognitive learning, which involves understanding, thinking, and using knowledge creatively. Because of this limitation, these methods helped students repeat correct forms but did not encourage them to think or use the language meaningfully. Later, this drill-based practice appeared again in early Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs. At first, these programs mainly repeated the same drills used in the classroom, helping learners practice and study independently. Over time, CALL technology became more advanced and interactive, supporting not only repetition but also cognitive learning, where students can understand, analyze, and apply language in meaningful ways.

If the term 'Method' refers to a fixed set of rules and steps to be followed like a perfect solution for all teaching problems, then today we can say that we are living in a 'Post-Method' era. In this period, teachers no longer depend on one single method

as the best way to teach. Instead, the focus has shifted to a more flexible idea called an 'Approach.' An Approach begins with a few basic principles or beliefs about how languages are learned and taught. These principles then guide the planning, design, and classroom practices in a way that suits different learning situations. This allows teachers to use their creativity and judgment to adapt lessons according to students' needs, interests, and classroom conditions. In this context, the well-known Richards and Rodgers (1982) model of language teaching, which originally included Method as its outer framework, can be simplified or restructured by removing that strict layer of 'Method.' What remains is a more open and adaptable structure that focuses on approach, design, and procedure, encouraging teachers to mix useful ideas from various methods rather than follow one rigid system.

The Natural Approach, which was developed by Krashen and Terrell (1983), is somewhat similar to the Direct Method because it also stresses the natural way of learning a language. This method is based on the idea that people learn languages best when they understand what they hear, a concept known as "Comprehensible Input." Krashen and Terrell made an important distinction between 'acquisition' and 'learning.' According to them, acquisition happens naturally and unconsciously, just like how children pick up their first language through exposure and interaction. On the other hand, learning is a conscious process, where students study rules and grammar. They argued that simply learning grammar rules does not automatically lead to true language acquisition.

The Natural Approach focuses more on meaning rather than form, that is, on understanding and communication rather than memorizing grammar and structures. The main aim is to help learners communicate effectively with speakers of the target language in real-life situations. This approach encourages a stress-free environment, where learners can listen, understand, and speak naturally without fear of making mistakes, making the learning experience both enjoyable and effective.

During the 1980s and 1990s, new language teaching approaches appeared that were influenced by Krashen. These approaches focused mainly on the communicative use of language, rather than just grammar or sentence patterns. In such classrooms, teachers tried to use authentic materials, real texts, conversations, and media, and meaningful tasks that reflected real-life situations, so that students could practice language naturally.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became the standard approach for teaching second languages and in immersion programs. CLT is a broad approach, so there are many ways it has been defined and applied. However, Brown (2001: 43) identifies several key characteristics that are closely connected and give a clear picture of CLT. These include focusing on real communication, meaningful interaction, and practical use of language, rather than just memorizing rules. This shift shows that language teaching moved from form-focused drills to helping learners

communicate effectively in real-life situations. The main aim in the classroom is to help students develop all parts of communication—grammar, sentence structure, meaning, social use, and learning strategies. This means students should not only know the rules of language but also be able to use them in real-life situations.

This study has examined various methods and approaches used in English language teaching, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and practical implications. It is clear that no single method works perfectly for all learners or contexts. Traditional methods, like the Grammar-Translation Method, emphasize accuracy and structure but may limit communicative ability. On the other hand, modern approaches, such as the Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning, focus on real-life communication and learner engagement, though they may sometimes neglect formal accuracy. The research shows that effective language teaching requires a balanced integration of methods, combining structural knowledge with practical communication skills. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators, guiding students to become independent learners and active users of the language. Additionally, adapting methods to learners' needs, backgrounds, and learning styles enhances motivation and learning outcomes.

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