



Eclectic Approaches to Teaching English: Teachers' Role

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Abstract: Scholars have suggested various teaching approaches at different times only to prove that no approach is sufficient and complete. So, a fruitful combination of the useful parts of these approaches needs to be implemented in the class, where teachers must play a very important role to combine and apply them appropriately. Teachers should use the opportunity of multiple approaches judiciously and without prejudice so that the eclectic principle may help teachers improve the teaching style and ensure better outcome of the learners. It is expected that the hybrid nature of the eclectic approach will certainly make learning and teaching English more dynamic and effective. It is the teacher who can choose, blend and apply the better aspects of the best and approved methods in a language class according to the demand and level of the learners. This paper will discuss the roles of teachers in an eclectic environment.

Keywords: *Eclectic; Language; Communication, Approach; Method*

Introduction: When L1 learners want to learn another language, methods are required. Many methods and approaches at different times have been designed and used to teach English but no method is proved self-sufficient and universal because language learning is qualitatively different from other types of learning. Some well-known methods (e.g. grammar-translation, audio-lingual and communicative) which were once popular have proved to be less effective nowadays. Moreover, some approaches and methods were considered better or more effective than others. It is true that every method and approach has both weaknesses and strengths. Since no method is able to fulfil all language goals and programme objectives, it is very usual that methods will supplement one another. As the use of a limited number of techniques is mechanical and incomplete in nature, a combination of different approaches is now suggested and accepted by many. This blending of various methods and approaches or their parts is technically called an eclectic approach to teaching language, and it is true that the use of eclecticism does not mean to mix up different approaches randomly; it is rather a kind of logically and judiciously mixed approach with communicative use of language. It is true that the language which is spoken must not be seen as an isolated entity. It has a strong connection with the culture, thoughts, emotions, economy, interpersonal bond and so on of that particular language. Unfortunately, in most cases language is taught in a mechanical and isolated way, often treating it as a laboratory issue thinking that there is no connection of language with emotion, and no influence of culture on it. This attitude of treating language as a non-practical entity is the biggest reason why students fail to learn and use English in the practical arena. At the same time, language should not be divided into its component parts like pronunciation

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grammar, vocabulary and so on. All these things should be like a complete package. And during teaching, every item should be given equal importance. Since there is a tendency to see English as a subject just to pass the examination, teachers as well as students put emphasis on only those aspects which are important for the examination according to the question pattern set by the education boards. But it should not be forgotten that there are some meta-dimensions of language that must be addressed giving equal importance. Canale and Swain have rightly said that all four dimensions of communicative competence are equally important: grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence [2]. All these dimensions cannot be taught applying only one specific approach. Here we see the bold entry of the eclectic approach. It may eradicate the problems of teaching and learning English for the non-English learners. And since teachers are to guide learners, they have to move away from one specific methodology and decide what combination of methods should be used depending on the aims of the lesson and the learners in the class. According to British Council, “The eclectic approach is the label given to a teacher's use of techniques and activities from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies” [7]. It is good that almost all modern course books have a mixture of approaches and methodologies.

Eclectic Approach: Traditionally, a particular approach is suggested for a language class. When it fails, a new one is experimented and then advocated. But it is seen that no particular approach or method of teaching language is sufficient and complete. Now it has become necessary for experts to think of amalgamating all or some approaches (according to the demand of the intended class) logically so that maximum benefits are ensured. As a result of this, a pluralistic approach is necessary where some select approaches will be used simultaneously in a single class. This is known as the eclectic approach. Because of the frequent shift of methodology teachers are considering it better to have a combination of beneficial elements from all of the teaching methods. This judicious combination known as eclectic approach involves procedures and techniques drawn from various methods. It is not wise to expect that all students will respond in the same way in a particular situation. So, teachers must try different techniques from different approaches. Eclecticism is defined as a type of methodology that makes use of the different language learning approaches instead of sticking to only one standard approach. Eclectic approach is not altogether a new one. It began with the work of British applied linguists in the 1920s and 1930s. It was made popular by both Larsen-Freeman and Mellow in 2000. They used this term (eclecticism) to describe a desirable approach to language teaching. They developed an approach or methodology that involved systematic principles of selection [17]. Eclecticism involves the use of a variety of language learning activities. It works better with less pressure on learners for it is the careful combination of all easy and effective approaches and/or methods of teaching a language.

According to Ali [1], the Eclectic method contains some six principles:

1. Giving teachers a chance to choose different kinds of teaching techniques in each class period to reach the aims of the lesson.

2. Flexibility in choosing any aspect or method that teachers find suitable for teaching in the classroom.
3. Giving a chance to pupils to see different kinds of teaching techniques that break monotony on one hand and ensure better understanding of the materials on the other.
4. Overcoming difficulties concerning presenting the language material in the pupil's textbook.
5. Using different kinds of teaching aids which lead to better understanding; and
6. Saving time and effort in presenting language activities.

Teachers' Role: Since all approaches and methods of teaching English have both good and bad sides, teachers have to adopt only the good ideas of them and put them together judiciously. At the same time they should leave the door open for further development. They can also reject useless and harmful types of work. Thus, teachers need to try to absorb the best techniques of all well-known language-learning methods into their classroom procedures using them for the purpose for which they are most appropriate. Experienced teachers are very sensitive to the limitations of any established methods and do not think it wise to stick to a particular approach. So, they use other concepts and procedures from other theories and methods. They are always ready to reject the weak points of each approach and accept and use those aspects that are applicable in the particular learning situation. The aims of teachers must always be to help learners develop their language skills and to do this, they have to adopt any part of any method or approach in the class. An effective way to meeting the needs of different learning styles is to utilize a variety of appealing activities in a language class. Brown [3] insists that teachers should use an approach that includes most, if not all, of the principles they have resolved. Teachers ought to take all the principles of cognitive, affective and linguistic theories into consideration at the time of teaching students in the class. It is true that in implementing the eclectic approach, teachers play an active and direct role. They can be compared with the directors of a stage while students are the actors. Using the positive aspects of different approaches helps teachers achieve their aim with their learners in different learning situations when presenting their materials.

It is also true that teachers have the most challenging role in implementing the eclectic teaching in the class. They have to design the pedagogical structure considering the level, environment and culture of the learners. They need to study the learners as well as the approaches. They should ensure a rich combination of all the suitable activities. If they want a successful learning outcome, they must prepare appropriate devices (such as multimedia slides, drawings, audio scripts, video clips, stories, role-cards and so on) that will match the target and the method. According to Kumar [2], there are three salient features of the eclectic approach: participatory approach, communicative approach and situational approach. While making plans for the language class, teachers should keep these approaches in mind. They need to make plans in a way which can involve and/or blend all four skills of language as an organic whole. While teaching a language class, language teachers can consider the following things:

Helping the Learners: A teacher should not ‘teach’ a book, rather he will ‘help’ the learners learn things from the book or outside it [11]. So, students need to be given space and scope to grow as individuals and independent learners. According to Stuttridge [11], teachers are helpers and facilitators of the learners rather than instillers of knowledge.

Minimizing Differences: Tumposky [11] suggested ‘fraternal permissive’ model in which he said that the differences between teachers and students should be minimised. According to this view, teachers are facilitators rather than arbiters of classroom activities. They are ‘concerned with [their] own sensitivity to the learners and to their individual differences in learning styles and rate of learning’ (op. cit.).

Selection of Topics: Teachers’ topics will be contemporary. Students can be asked to read any English Daily and then to say and share what they have read, why these pieces of news attracted them, why they are important and so on.

Studying Students: Teachers should study and know what the learners already know; and they should study and decide on the level of the learners before making plans. The class should be considered as an orchestra where different types of students with different levels and intelligences are present. Every student should be treated differently giving equal importance. Ramani [14] also advocates that learners’ day-to-day problems should be studied scientifically so that practical solutions can be found out easily. Thus teaching and learning of the language will improve. Again, studying students also means to observe the reaction of the learners to see whether they understand the lesson or not, or whether they get bored. This study is necessary to continue the lesson or to change the course and nature of the activities.

Authentic Interaction: To raise students’ awareness of the setting (in the shop, at the university), mode of communication (face to face, online), participant role (teacher, student, shop assistant, customer) and purpose of communication (making a complaint, asking for an extension), and authentic interaction can play a very positive role [16]. Role-plays can be a very good plan for this purpose. Action chain can be another fruitful device for a better outcome in the class. This activity works through the continuous utterance of the same pattern of sentences. In this regard Euler [15] has suggested a lesson sequence which has three major phases: talking about people, discovering one’s own personality profile and getting along. However, students need to be free from any pressure from teachers’ side in selecting topics and partners.

Prompting: Teachers should play the role of a prompter in the class. Whenever a student mumbles or tries to express something but cannot find the right word or phrase, teachers should come forward to help them with the appropriate expressions. This will free the learners from unexpected pressures.

Learner Autonomy: Metri [6] and Livingston [8] in separate articles suggested learner autonomy. This means that teachers should encourage learners to take decisions concerning learning. According to Defai [4], it is “defining the objectives, defining the constraints and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedures of applications; evaluating what was to be acquired.” Now, teachers’ role in this regard is to ensure such environment where learners will get individual interest in learning.

Learners’ Needs: Teachers need to consider the learners’ needs when they take preparation for a language class.

Collaboration and Cooperation: As a part of the participatory technique, teachers can arrange group discussion and monitor it giving maximum space for the learners. Metri [6] said that he “make[s] groups of heterogeneous learners, preferring one English medium student in each group’. He does this so that the active learners can ‘support slower learners and those who can afford the study materials share them in the group”. At the same time, teachers need to sit with groups and monitor students’ communicative activities.

Parental Participation: Metri [6] suggested that parents be involved in the learning process. According to him, parents can be involved through messages written to them by their children in the margins of their notebooks. It may be a direct method of communication with the parents and “the ensuing rapport proves the best collaboration in equipping the learners”.

Comparative Correspondences: Teachers should not neglect the mother tongue of the learners. Ignoring their mother tongue may cause some students think that the teacher does not respect them. So, if possible, teachers can use the L1 periodically as part of the lesson. Moreover, they can help learners understand and analyze the differences and similarities between L1 and L2. This may help learners make few or no mistakes.

The Seven Cs: Kirkham [5] suggests seven Cs of language learning and teaching: Content, Context, Co-text, Cultural engagement, Correction and feedback, Curiosity and Creativity. Teachers can actively think of all these crucial aspects of teaching English in the class in designing and implementing their plans. After selecting appropriate content for a class, teachers are supposed to relate the contents with the context. Then they can mention other texts that go with the selected contents. They also need to discuss the contents in the relevant cultural contexts. Feedback from the students’ needs to be ensured at the next stage. Thus the curiosity of the learners should be aroused, which ultimately will direct the learners towards creativity.

Repetitive Drilling: Drilling is certainly a very effective way of ensuring positive learning. Teachers can arrange groups and then ask the groups to repeat theme-based or grammar-based lessons/sentences which are relevant and simple. If the instruction is given in a meaningful context, it will make recalling easy for their short memories.

Using Literature (Stories): If the thematic design is based on story-telling and other activities, it may offer meaningful and contextualized input with which to engage learners in communicative situations [9]. This can integrate the four skills through authentic and challenging language. But the literary topics should be relevant, appealing, thought-provoking, experience-oriented, realistic and target-friendly. At the same time, students can be asked to write/complete short stories (based on a given picture, for example). Teachers need to provide learners with the reasonable and necessary clues and guidelines after they have brainstormed. This will let students use their minds and provide linguistic output in desired forms.

Conversation Analysis: Conversation analysis can be a valuable teaching resource for teachers. Conversations from CA data and findings can provide input and socio-pragmatic strategies that can be brought to students' attention and practised through role-plays [16].

Using Technology: Multimedia projection (such as multimedia slides, videos etc.) can ensure a productive class. According to Chliaras [13], in the technology-enhanced flipped classroom, students' and teachers' roles change, the teaching and learning process is accelerated and students learn to work independently. All areas of language- vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation- should be taught using technological support.

Games and/or Competitions: There are some teaching aspects (for example, vocabulary, writing etc.) that can be taught through fun and play, or activities with a competitive angle. This will surely boost up learners making learning easy and interesting for them.

Variations in Activities: Sometimes the teachers' lesson plan can be a jungle path or rag bag. This type of lesson plan can release learners from monotony and boredom. Since teachers are following an eclectic approach, it is not necessary to stick to a particular method rather they can choose and offer a variety of interesting topics and activities. Moreover, cultural aspects can also be incorporated since culture and language are inseparable.

Clear Goal: Students should not be kept in the darkness of not knowing anything about the lesson or activities ahead. If it is not a jungle path lesson, learners need to know what they are going to do and why.

Free Communication: Students need to come forward with their own thoughts and interests. They should practise all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) freely. According to Metri [6], "For speaking this would mean allowing time for free conversation, for writing doing free-writing, for reading allowing time for extensive pleasure reading, and for listening, listening for entertainment".

Integrating Syllabuses: Syllabus experts are now thinking that the best syllabus is one which is based on eclecticism, which emerges from a combination of approaches. But it is not so easy a task. So, teachers need to integrate, according to Swan, eight or so syllabuses (functional,

notional, situational, topic, phonological, lexical, structural etc.) into a sensible teaching programme [10]. For example, an eclectic syllabus based on the structural, functional and communicative approaches to language teaching could keep a balance between accuracy and fluency [10].

Conclusion: A teacher knows the level of the learner's best. So it is the teachers who can ensure such an eclectic approach that will work best leaving less pressure on the learners. To implement the eclectic approach successfully in the class, teachers need to be imaginative, energetic and willing to experiment making lessons varied and interesting for the learners. Students' cognition level and teachers' linguistic objectives should be balanced properly. For this reason, teachers need to be very much calculative, selective and technical in using all the principles of language teaching. Teachers should use techniques that work in the particular situations with specific objectives and meanings for the kind of students they have in the language class. Moreover, teachers need that style or approach which will stimulate and encourage learners to participate in various class activities. For this reason, special qualifications and training are required for the English language teachers. It should be kept in mind that the eclectic approach does not mean that it will make things complicated by blending multiple activities, rather the target of the eclectic approach is to make learning simple and easy, that is, simplicity is the main principle of the eclectic approach. If a teacher can put all the useful aspects of the major methods and approaches together and apply them in the class fruitfully and judiciously, learning goals will certainly be achieved.

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