

The Necessity for an Eclectic Approach for ELT in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Apart from one's mother tongue, teaching another language always seems quite tricky and time-consuming. But, since English is the most popular Lingua Franca all over the world, acquiring proficiency in this language is more of a necessity than a luxury for Bangladeshi learners. The majority of the students here start learning this semi-official, widely acknowledged foreign language from their primary levels of education, yet, they mostly fail to communicate properly in English. They remain a long way off. Hence, to teach English effectively, various techniques have been applied. Unfortunately, no individual method serves the purpose successfully as each method has weaknesses along with its strengths. So, concerning the capabilities of the students and the objectives of the lesson, this research paper advocates using the Eclectic Approach which is the fusion of all good approaches and different methods. Again, reviewing various language teaching methods, some important techniques and strategies are recommended for TEFL teachers and learners in Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Developing communicative competence in English is a global goal at the present time. Many significant initiatives are taken to fulfill the target as it is the language of forms and functions. There are multiple types of methods for teaching this second or foreign language like the Grammar Translation Method, the Berlitz Method, the Army Method, the Bilingual Method, the Communicative Language Teaching Method, the Situational Language Teaching Approach, the Total Physical Response, etc. Each of these has its characteristic features. At different times, different arguments about the roles of various methods are evident. Gradual changes in the methodologies prove that one approach may be better or more effective than the other in different contexts. Besides, since all the teaching methods have some drawbacks, no individual method seems to be perfect to apply entirely to follow. In reality, it is observed that no single method can equally teach the four basic skills of language such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The methods may only replace one another. In this situation, what can be done? Is it logical to follow one method strictly or use a combined approach? In this regard, adopting the Eclectic Method can be a good solution. However, this paper begins with a detailed overview of some popular language teaching methods, approaches, and techniques and then discusses some major features of the Eclectic Approach. It later advocates the proper use of this method in the area of EFL/ESL teaching in Bangladesh. Towards the end of the article, some recommendations are made for the successful accomplishment of English language teaching in Bangladesh.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been done regarding this topic such as; “Problems of Learning and Teaching English in Bangladesh” by Shaikh Rezanul Haque published in the journal *Daily Sun: True and Impartial*, “Is English a Failed Language in Bangladesh?” By Ekram Kabir published in the *Dhaka Tribune*, etc. Both these researches are concerned with the problems and failures of the implementation of the current methods of ELT in Bangladesh. Moreover, the book titled *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* written by Richards and Rodgers is only concerned with the principles and techniques of different language teaching methods but does not provide any solution to the necessity of an appropriate method according to different learning needs, learning styles, different contexts, and different cultures. Even the modern trend of implementing CLT is not culturally appropriate for Bangladeshi

English language learners. Richards & Rogers (2014) opine that CLT, as a method, includes a varied set of principles and techniques based on interactionism leading to a wide range of classroom cultures. So, teachers' behaviors as well as the methods of ELT need to adapt to the demanding shifts in various teaching and learning contexts.

This article focuses on the necessity for an Eclectic Approach for ELT as the existing methods have failed to fulfill the requirements of ELT in different contexts.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is mainly based on content analysis. The data are taken from both primary and secondary sources, which are simply qualitative in nature. A number of relevant books, research articles, and some websites have been used as secondary sources for collecting data analyzed and presented through logical interpretation.

4. DISCUSSIONS: EXPERTS' OPINIONS ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN BANGLADESH

The Bangladeshis are famous in the world for their Language Movement in 1952. That sensitive historical event has a great influence on the Bengali psyche. There are still some people who feel learning another language may harm the emotional bonding that most Bangladeshis have with their mother tongue. Ekram Kabir, a columnist in *The Dhaka Tribune*, thinks, "Making L1 a priority is one thing, and learning a second or foreign language is another. If we learn the English language properly, it doesn't mean we are disregarding our mother language". Kabir's remark is important to understand the English learning situation in Bangladesh because it deals with the psychological inhibitions confronted by most learners of English in Bangladesh. These inhibitions need to be overcome so that teachers can develop the English skills of L2 teachers in the first place. The students should learn both Bangla and English in a way that will help them respect both languages equally. Bangla indeed preserves the essence of Bangladeshi "nationalism" but English also helps the learners to communicate with different races across the world. Nevertheless, English skills make a person more cosmopolitan than ever. Therefore, effective motivation is needed from ELT teachers to make their students comfortable with using English.

Sheikh Rezanul Haque, another columnist in one of the leading English newspapers in Bangladesh-*The Daily Sun: True and Impartial*, writes, “One can’t learn English or any L2 until he/she is motivated to do so. Most learners of Bangladesh feel the scarcity of motivation in their English courses, as well as in their subjects in general” (n.p.). He believes if ESL teachers put equal concentration on the major language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing and make their classes interactive and fun to improve the English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh (n.p.), Vivian Cook, a renowned British linguist, mentions in his book that effective language learning requires effective teaching methods. He then discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different methods like the Grammar-Translation method, the Army Method, task-based language teaching, CLT, etc. (238-256). Cook believes language learning will be effective when the teacher-student rapport is effective. The teachers will first identify their students’ problems and then they will guide their students to follow some significant methods inside and outside the classrooms (240-242).

Nonetheless, it is not only the teachers who should take the initiative in this matter but the students also need to constantly practice communicating in the language to fulfill their learning objectives. Martin Sketchley, the famous British Council English blogger shares five strategies for the students in his article: set realistic goals, record new vocabulary, review self-study notes, be active and make watching, reading & listening as interesting as possible. Sketchley’s strategies are indeed amazing. Bangladeshi ELT teachers can simply implement those strategies along with other methods to make the English language teaching process more fun and effective.

Now, let us see why the traditional methods individually do not fulfill the requirements of English language teaching and why Eclectic Approach is considered more effective in ELT in Bangladesh:

5. THE PRESENT SCENARIO OF USING SEVERAL METHODS FOR ELT IN BANGLADESH

The Grammar Translation Method (GMT) is the earliest method of ELT in Bangladesh. The method prioritizes reading, writing, translation, and the explicit learning of grammatical rules. Its primary objective is to gain literary mastery over the second language. By this method, students can learn grammar rules and then apply those rules to the target language and the native language. Memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules in learning the language rather than using it is the main learning strategy and students spend their time talking about

the language instead of talking in the language. According to this method, English words, phrases, and sentences are taught through translation from L1 and L2 and vice versa.

It is easy to conduct the class with this method but it has some limitations. This method surpasses the natural way of teaching and learning the language and focuses on passive mastery over the language. It limits the language within the grammar rules and makes the learners passive listeners. Sadly, enough, in this method, students are not able to use sentences in communication.

Depressed with the drawbacks of the GT Method in terms of the lack of communicative competence in the students, teachers began to experiment with a new method like the Berlitz Method. The method appeared as a reaction against the GT Method. This method is based on the way children learn L1. That's why it is also called the Natural Method. This method is called 'direct' as well because meaning should be associated with the target language and translation is allowed. There is no option of using the learners 'or L1 learners' language in any activity. The Direct Method does not teach explicit grammar rules at the outset. The target language is directly and exclusively applied to the classroom while teaching all the macro skills of language. First, speaking is taught and then reading and writing. This method targets providing language learners with a practically oriented use and knowledge of the language. Thus, learners can induce grammar rules implicitly, not through explanation or translation. This method believes in using language to learn it. Memorizing is discouraged here. Vocabulary is learned by its effective use in sentences. Self-correction facilitates language learning. The learners should be actively engaged in using L2 in real-life situations. This method is used for intensive oral interaction in the target language. Even teachers motivate the students to think in the target language. The method promises to teach the language and not about the language.

But, the method has also some disadvantages. In spite of its achievements, this method has animadverted for its excessive focus on the similarities between L1 acquisition and L2 learning. It falls short of fulfilling the demands of the learners' needs. Despite its usefulness in the early stages, it does not apply to higher classes as it requires well-skilled teachers to handle the language materials. The method is difficult to apply because of the limitations of budget, classroom size, time, and teachers' backgrounds. Though it was popular for a short period, later it lost appeal because of these drawbacks.

The Audio Lingual Method is based on behaviorist theory which advocates that certain traits of living things could be trained through a system of

positive and negative reinforcement. It is believed that foreign language learning is a process of mechanical habit formation. Structured sentences and repetitive drills are the roots of this method. This method is similar to the Direct Method in the sense that the lesson is conducted fully in L2. The macro skills of language are taught more efficiently as the presentation of teaching items proceeds in spoken forms followed by written forms. This method does not emphasize vocabulary. Rather, the teacher focuses on sentence drills. Set phrases are represented for memorization and practice. The teacher monitors and corrects the learners' performances. Behaviorism manifests itself in this approach. Language is regarded as the acquisition of verbal behavior and habit formation.

However, like each language teaching method, this method has some weaknesses too. The Audio-lingual method is teacher-oriented. This leads to quick learning. The learner has little control over the teaching process.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method predominantly aims at developing language learners' communicative competence. The method emphasizes both the means and the ultimate goal of language learning. It does not only indicate the development of speaking skills but also integrates the macro skills of language that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. In CLT, meaning surpasses forms but it does not exclude grammar. Teachers should dress grammar with communicative functions. In this way, grammar is not presented merely as a set of rules but also as natural patterns that students gather from the learning context. Communicative language teaching develops and improves knowledge and skills facilitating the learners for effective and successful use of the target language. The main target of communication is the successful transfer of information, not accuracy. CLT uses real-life situations that necessitate communication. The approach focuses on language use, students' engagement, fluency of speech, cooperative tasks, etc. to help the learners develop their English communicative competence, the CLT method was introduced in Bangladesh. However, there is a huge gap between the theory and the application of this method.

It has been recently observed that in Bangladesh, CLT cannot be used properly for varied limitations, such as large class culture, insufficiency of logistic supports, the mismatch between curriculum and assessment, teachers' preference for traditional teaching methods, poor socio-economic condition, cultural dissimilarities and many more. Even, average teachers with limited language skills cannot make this approach a success. So, it now seems that CLT cannot provide any satisfactory solution to ELT in Bangladesh.

Besides, these methods, some other language teaching approaches are being used in Bangladesh from time to time such as:

The situational approach is learner-centered. Here, the four skills of language (LSRM) can be developed. Here, teachers make the language easy, by teaching natural and realistic patterns of form of vocabulary based on real life situations. Here, learning takes place as acquisition. Students are active participants in the classroom. They can associate meanings with new words. Verbal communication and structure are viewed accordingly.

However, it has its drawbacks like the teachers struggle to figure out appropriate situations through which they can teach the language effectively. Only some selected words and sentences may be taught. In this approach, it is prohibited to teach grammar, prose, poetry, and composition. Technology is also needed which is not available all the time. Extra repetition and drills are boring for some learners.

6. THE CURRENT ESSENTIALITY OF AN ECLECTIC APPROACH FOR ELT IN BANGLADESH

Eclecticism is a philosophy of choice. The idea of choosing different approaches for one's teaching purposes is nothing new. Henry Sweet (1845-1922), a prominent figure in the language teaching profession, believed that a proper method must be comprehensive and eclectic (Rivers, 1886). Again, Palmer in his book *The Principles of Language Study* published in 1921 talked about the multiple approaches embodying the eclectic principles allowing us to choose logically.

Stern (1983) also remarks that the *Memorandum on the Teaching of Modern Languages* published in 1929 based on a British study recommended the eclectic 'Compromise Method' as a solution to the debate. Even, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Eclectic Method was raised as a proposal to the profusion.

The Eclectic Approach has some fundamental principles as seen in many other methods and approaches of language education. Perhaps, the key features of this approach are that the language teacher can choose any suitable approach to meet the learning needs. The following principles as presented by Al-khuli M. Ali (1981:7) may be considered:

- Giving teachers opportunities to choose various kinds of teaching methods in each class to achieve the objective of the teaching program;
- Flexibility for the teachers to choose any method or approach they think is suitable for teaching inside the classroom;

- Giving a chance to learners to see different teaching methods that break monotony and boredom in the class;
- Saving a lot of time and effort in presenting language tasks;
- Using different teaching aids leading to better understanding.

The Eclectic Approach allows the language teacher to use various techniques and strategies from a variety of language teaching methods. The teacher will decide what method or approach he will use to serve the objectives of the language teaching program. Now, it is observed that most modern course books have a combination of different methods. To apply the Eclectic Approach, a language teacher may consider the following advantages.

The Eclectic Approach combines the practices of four basic skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing into an organic whole. In reality, we see that various approaches and techniques are useful for teaching the various aspects of language skills. No individual method is sufficient to teach all the language skills. So, teaching English by blending different methods and approaches will help the teacher a lot to teach English effectively.

Of all language teaching methods and approaches, the Eclectic Approach is considered the most flexible one. Here, the teacher can enjoy flexibility in making decisions as on learners' tastes, needs, performance, and feedback. Flexible teaching technique also serves the needs of a wide variety of language learners i.e. overseas, on/off campus, and second language students. The Eclectic Approach helps the teacher to incorporate the best options and plans into his lesson to enable the learners to communicate properly in different contexts and situations of communication.

As expected, in the Eclectic Approach, the teacher provides learners with multiple opportunities in the language classroom to make a suitable learning environment for the students. In such a situation, eclecticism encourages the use of various language learning activities, each of which may have very distinctive features and objectives, and underlying suppositions. The teacher can apply different types of techniques and strategies to make language comprehensible, monitor student comprehension, and make adjustments as necessary.

As usual, learners always desire something new and exciting in the learning process. The Eclectic Approach includes almost every kind of learning activity that imparts them with that type of exciting learning experience and saves them from boredom. In the true sense, the teacher discovers and masters good ways of learning. Above all, this approach allows the teacher to form his method according to the circumstances and available teaching materials. The classroom is made interactive by employing various techniques like role-play,

group discussion, buzz group activity, debates, elocution, etc. which involve the students in the English study and unconsciously remove the stage fright and make the students more articulate.

Since the Eclectic Method facilitates manifold tasks, high interaction, active learning, and quick results, it may be advocated with great confidence and enthusiasm.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations that can be considered to increase the standard of the teaching of the English language in Bangladesh.

I. Focusing on the core language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking

The ELT teachers in Bangladesh should concentrate on developing the learners' language skills and should emphasize the communicative aspect more than the grammatical elements of English. In this country, most of the students or learners are afraid of speaking or communicating in English properly because they are not taught to use the language as a system of communication, rather the language is presented to them as something that measures their intelligence level and personality. As a consequence, most of the students focus on accuracy rather than fluency meaning that their knowledge of English grammar supersedes their communicative abilities. Similarly, the other groups of students know how to communicate, though their number is not remarkable in our country, they do not know how to use the grammatical aspects properly. The situation is never balanced. This is why ELT teachers should focus on teaching the four macro skills and maintaining the balance within.

II. Developing reading and writing skills

From the primary level, the students start learning how to read and write things in English. Most of the time, the trainers do not follow any proper method for this, and therefore, the students or learners cannot pronounce words, cannot infer when they read and they mostly produce meaningless or incorrect sentences when they write. The English language trainers should have proper training in which they will learn different methods of teaching these language skills. They need to know how to do inference, how a student should skim and scan a text to understand its key elements, how they should brainstorm to present

an organized write-up, and how they should use proper transition words or cohesive devices to make their writing more strategic and meaningful.

III. Developing listening and speaking skills

For these skills, the trainers should motivate the students to listen and watch things in English. They can do a movie screening in the classroom and ask the students effective questions to comprehend how much they have learned from that movie. Students should be frequently exposed to good English plays, and good English programs through video sessions in the classrooms. They can also listen to recorded conversations on different topics and can try to identify words, sentences, themes, etc. from those conversations. In terms of teaching speaking skills, presentation is a very useful tool. It makes students eloquent speakers. Besides this, the students themselves can give speeches in the classroom and then the teacher can give them feedback to facilitate their English language learning. In the same way, speaking can be practiced in the classroom. Students can do group discussions; can act on some realistic topics to improve their speaking or oral communication skills. Since all the skills are interconnected, when some students perform in the classroom, the other groups can listen and provide necessary advice to the performers under the guidance of the teacher. In every session, the trainers or teachers should focus on the students' English language fluency and should correct them when they make any grammatical mistakes. In this manner, both grammar and language skills will be taught and the learning process will be pretty balanced or organized.

IV. Ensuring classroom facilities

To make 'Digital Bangladesh', the government has launched many projects in the educational sector as well. The multimedia-equipped classroom is one of them. Classrooms should be well equipped with digital multimedia and sound systems for listening practices. Other facilities should also be ensured to enhance proficiency in English.

V. Doing a self-aptitude test

It is well known that in almost every institute the authority takes an aptitude test to distinguish the learner's language level. One can simply do this aptitude test at home before appearing at any institutional examination by downloading various materials online. After taking this aptitude test, the learner

can easily identify his strengths and weaknesses in English and can work accordingly to enhance his skills.

VI. Translating stories, essays, etc. from Bangla to English

Translating is another effective way of teaching the target language. Students can read a text in their mother tongue first, and then they can get help from their teachers, from different online sources, from dictionaries to translate a significant portion of that text, and can observe the linguistic transformations.

VII. Having self-talks in English

It has already been mentioned that there is a psychological barrier that restricts the learners from thinking in their target language first, in this case, to thinking in English. Learners are motivated to practice giving self-commands like “Good morning”, “you should do this for your betterment”, “let’s have a nice cup of coffee” etc. to activate their thinking ability solely in English.

VIII. Reading aloud and recitation

For Bangladeshi learners, reading aloud and recitation can be another very effective way of learning English. In this way, interesting passages from English writings, essays, articles, and newspaper editorials can help the students increase their competence. Students can easily do these at home for their overall development.

IX. Cultural exchanges

If the students are encouraged to meet people from different cultures, they will be able to gain new knowledge and experience that will help them learn English profusely.

X. Regular pair work and group work

Teaching English in groups is much better for Bangladeshi learners. So students should be strongly motivated to be involved in pair work and group work inside the classroom which can improve the all-around English skills of the students.

8. CONCLUSION

Considering the above critical analysis, it may be said that this research paper culminates with a proposition that it is not perfect to follow a single method fully because all methods of ELT have some drawbacks. It cannot but be agreed that a particular philosophical thought or propensity in ELT cannot fulfill the requirements. Besides, dependence on a particular theory of teaching is often criticized for the application of a few techniques of a single method can become mechanical and monotonous. Reasonably, a combined approach of instruction for ELT can turn out to be the most effective because students need to learn a wide range of language skills, and different approaches are useful for teaching different aspects of these skills. Therefore, the Eclectic Approach encompassing the best aspects of each method to produce an optimal overall result helps students reach quality language education targets. However, if we all emphasized cohesion and coordination among the government, different teaching-oriented organizations, teachers, students, trainers, and authorities of the educational institutions, the applications of language teaching methods can remarkably raise the language proficiency level of the learners and users of the English language in Bangladesh.

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