

# **OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE TEACHING APPROACHES AND METHODS**

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## **1. Introduction**

Throughout the twentieth century English language teaching methods have passed through tremendous changes. These changes are actually due to various social, economic, and cultural factors.

In fact, the world has changed rapidly and radically in the past few years than at any time since the second world war. In the last four decades the world has become a unique globe, the thing which resulted in political, economic, and industrial exchange and interdependence. Also, English language became the world standard language, since it represents the language of science, technologies, and global transactions as affirmed in the Economist (1996) "English continues to be the world standard language, and there is no major threat to the language or to its global popularity."

Thus English language is closely associated with economic modernization and industrial development.

These factors actually contributed immensely to the spread of English language all over the world and change its traditional role. Since then it has been used to communicate with strangers and becomes, in most of the cases a very necessary tool that opens windows to the world and paves the way to grand opportunities.

## **2. Overview of Language Teaching Approaches and Methods**

Since the appearance of English language as an important vehicle for international exchange and communication, a variety of methods and approaches have seen light to meet the needs and requirements of learners in different fields and institutions.

These approaches are namely, the grammar translation method, the direct approach, the audio-lingual method, the silent way, community language learning, the communicative approach, and total physical response. These approaches of language instruction have evolved through the years and affected each other in a way to make teaching/ learning an effective and successful process.

Recently the world has become in close contact and English language has imposed itself as the only language of international transactions and exchanges, because it was the only vehicle for scientific and technological knowledge.

The widespread use of English as a language of wider communication inevitably affects its role in the world the thing which makes all educational institutions look for the most convenient ways and methods to establish a strong link between learners' professional requirements and their nations' scientific and technological necessities.

On the whole this concern has led to the emergence of various approaches and methods to English language teaching, each of which is attempting to fulfil the demands of the age.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many modern languages, such as French, English and German entered the schools of some European countries. These languages were taught namely as Latin language which was long before a dominant language for knowledge, philosophy, and religion. Text books were based on the same procedures and techniques used in teaching Latin language. Thus, they were merely documents comprising grammar rules, long lists of vocabulary, and fragments for translation. This view of teaching these modern languages does not consider oral aspect practices and speaking as long as these languages are not learnt for real communication or direct contact with their speakers. The objective is to translate and benefit from the philosophical and achievements of the target language. Speaking was limited only to reading aloud some translated sentences and passages. Richards and Rogers (1992:02) affirm that, "As "modern" languages began to enter the curriculum of European school in the 18th century, they were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin."

Throughout the nineteenth century, this Latin-based method was considered the model of teaching foreign languages in European and even other nations' schools. Text books were issued to suit that end. They consist of lessons involving grammar points and rules on its appropriate use supported by some examples and illustrations. As this approach implies, it was eventually labelled: The grammar- Translation Method.

### **2. 1. The Grammar Translation Method**

This Method has a major aim, it is to support and promote the learners intellectually. There was no much room for the oral use of the languages under study. The G.T.M has become the most popular and most-wanted model of language teaching and was implemented all over the world. Richard and Rodgers (ibid) state the principles of the Method.

- 1- Learning a foreign language is to benefit from its mental and intellectual development.
- 2- Reading and writing skills have the overwhelming priority than listening and speaking
- 3- Reading texts is a means to gather and memorize some useful and context-relevant lists of vocabulary.
- 4- The most important studied and analysed unit in the study of language is the sentence.
- 5- Exact translation is the major goal.
- 6- Teaching grammar rules through translation exercises; thus grammar is taught deductively permitting the use of the learners' native language explanation and illustrations.

All in all, G.T.M is a method that dominates the field of teaching foreign languages from the 1840s to the 1940s. Its foremost aim is to train learners to be proficient translators rather than good communicators in the target language since it focuses on transferring literary, philosophical and religious refinements from the target language into the native language.

In the turn of the 19th century however, colossal controversies and oppositions raised to question the utility of this classical method. This eventually resulted in a Reform Movement which looks for launching a more pertinent method of teaching foreign languages in order to respond to the calls and necessities of the age.

### **2. 2. Reform and Innovation in Language Teaching Methods**

Within the 1850's many voices raised against the GTM and questioned its effectiveness in a world that is getting more and more open to opportunities for direct contact and communication among different people from different nations.

The opponents of the G T M sought more oral proficiency in foreign language to enable foreign language learners speak the target language and not only to write it. Marcel,

Prendergast and Gouin (1) are among these voices that did much to promote new approaches to teaching / learning foreign languages, although their ideas did not receive too much attention and support at their present time.

Around the 1880's, however, more experienced and professional linguists like Henry Sweet , Wilhelm Vietor and Paul Passy (2) could revitalize the discipline of linguistics and give reformist ideas more and more Scientific dimension. They focus on speech and phonetics, which led to the foundation of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) in 1886. Among their major revendications, we state the following:

- Much focus on the spoken language.
- Introducing good pronunciation habits.
- Introducing conversations and dialogues in text Books to reinforce the spoken language.
- Grammar must be taught inductively.
- Avoid the use of the mother tongue, but associations within the target language.
- Learners should hear the target language before reading it.
- Words and sentences should be practised in contexts.

In fact, these principles paved the way to the foundations of more scientific and principled approaches to learning foreign languages. This actually urged the appearance of a more scientific and consistent discipline that is of Applied linguistics and excessive research in the field of teaching resulted in emergence of didactics as a branch or speciality (Darian 1972).

This eventually led to the development of several methods and approaches which include the direct Method, the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching, the Audio-lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, the Physical Response, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, the Natural Approach, and Suggestopedia (Richard and Rodgers 1992)

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(1) Cited in Richard and Rodgers (1992:05)

(2) *ibid*

### **3. Considerations to Teaching English Literature**

Nowadays teaching English literature at university is associated with teaching English language itself (Colie and Slater 2001). Years ago, incorporating English literature in English language syllabus was controversial as long as many linguists and educationists saw that the language of literature was deviant, ornamental and metaphoric the matter which makes it far away from the language that helps foreign language learners acquire and learn the target language.

At present the debate takes another aspect. It is about whether to teach literature focusing on the text as language to help learners acquire more vocabulary, structures, and style or to go beyond the text, i.e., to help the learners appreciate and admire the cultural and artistic components of literary works ( Lazer 200, Collie and Slate 2001, Widdowson 1970)

Obeidat (1979:30) raises the issue and asked the following questions:

Are Arab students actually interested in learning language or literature? And how much literature should be included in the curriculum? What literature is appropriate poetry or prose, modern or non modern? Do we teach its history and cultural background, or do we simply teach the text itself? Do we need to focus on the text as language or go beyond the text?

It seems quite important to draw clear objective for teaching literature in E F L classes before probing into methods and approaches to teaching the subject. These objectives actually should go in accordance with the requirements of learners and should also fit the contemporary methods in order to respond to the changes and innovations that took place in the field of language teaching and by extension of literature teaching.

From the findings of a questionnaire in our M A research, we found out that most teachers reject teaching literature as being too difficult. Also, students claim a lot and are unsatisfied with what they have taken throughout three years studying literature. Eventually we found out that the problem resides in the methods used by teachers and not the content of the programme itself.

Therefore exposing learners to literature, also establishing consistent goals and objectives should be an insistent requirement. These objectives should be carried out through devising and adopting also a reliable method and approach in order to make teaching literature purposeful and methodological.

Widdowson (1983:34) points out that:

At advanced levels, reading literature exposes the learners to language being used in unconventional ways. It informs them about the culture of places where the target language is used. Extensive reading promotes the continuing expansion of lexical Knowledge and develops reading fluency. It also helps to develop the learners' interpretive skills.

Widdowson (ibid) stated the major aims of literature fin E L T classes in a very general way. Clearly literature aims at exposing the learners to the cultural components of the target language, it enlarges their lexical knowledge and develops theirs reading skills by allowing them read long passages and attempting to provide personal interpretation and judgments (Collie and Slater, 2001).

All in all, literature exposes learners to more authentic material and involves them in text reading and interpreting processes, the matter which will increase their personal responses to literary texts.

In classical approaches of teaching literature theorists maintain that literature mirrors social economic, cultural, historical, and philosophical elements of the literary text writer. Thus, its study does not go beyond these limits. Among these theorists and in the Algerian context, Arab (1993) claims that "As a subject of study, it (literature) is perceived as knowledge to be learnt about writers lives, great works and so called authoritative sources, a sort of tradition (or sauna) to be handed down from master to disciple." (132)

Here, Arab refers to literature as it is taught for decades in our universities; it is that classical teacher-centered approach, in which learners get knowledge from a know-all teacher without being involved in text reading and interpreting thus restricting their personal

interpretation and responses to artistic texts. This method focuses on biographical and historical backgrounds to explain and interpret literary texts.

Arab does not actually favour this method since it does not go with the modern calls of teaching languages and any other related subjects mainly literature. He (ibid) affirms that: "Before coming to the point, let me simply single out two of the main causes of the frustrations experienced by both staff and students in the literary pedagogical transaction." (132)

It is clear enough that the situation of literature teaching in our universities proved to be a failure in the last decades on both sides, the learners and teachers, and the experience of teaching literature is a frustration. This could be attributed to two factors, one to the way how literature is conceived and the other to the way literature is handled and taught in our universities. Arab (1993:132)"one has something to do with the conception of literature; the other with the way it is taught"

Actually after numerous interviews with students and a questionnaire analysis, we come to note that literature is still considered as subject that reflects no more than some writers lives, their social and philosophical views and interpretations of their long works passed from teacher to learner and then considered as standards and accepted unquestionably to be given back to teachers in text analysis and exams. This process will inevitably lead to passive learning which is not wanted among most contemporary theorists and educationists (Widdowson 1985, Rosenblatt, Collie and Slater 2001)

On the whole, researchers, pedagogues, educationists and teachers are required to review seriously the methods literature is taught in our universities in order to promote a method that will suit the substantial change in the world and respond to the voices of reform in the EFL field.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It is actually a necessity to take into consideration foreign language teaching approaches and methods in foreign language teaching context and in all other teaching situations such as literature and civilization, and all the other disciplines at university.

In the classical teaching approaches, teaching foreign languages and literature were considered as a vehicle of transmitting thought, experiences, cultures, and philosophies between nations. In the last decades and after the considerable shift of EFL pedagogy from classical approaches to more contemporary ones, many pedagogic implications have been set to reconsider and review these assumptions.

This is why approaches and methods of foreign languages teaching must be known by teachers in order to match them appropriately and then giving their teaching a theoretical framework depending on the situation in which a foreign language is being taught.

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