

## **A COHERENT METHOD(S) IN THE 'ESL' CLASS**

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### **Abstract**

With an intention to ensure ESL learners proficient in the four-fold skills of language, the language pedagogy keeps on exploring the ways and means of teaching second language. However, the problem of adopting a convincing method in ELT in the Indian classroom context is always mindboggling given the heterogeneous students ranging in a typical class. Many surveys have been conducted to assess the efficacy of the method being adopted by English teachers. The surveys as to what kind of teaching strategies and methods are applied by them for the development of linguistic abilities of ESL learners at various levels have made the issue more baffling as it made two disturbing trends: those who were trained in the ELT, have failed to draw upon their pedagogical insights and a sizable majority simply blink at the aspect of some approach or method in the Indian class room situation. Divided into three sections, the paper seeks to explore by providing some philosophical underpinnings of adopting methodology in the class room. In the second section, ELT methods will be deliberated upon. The final section is about inferences drawn from the study. The paper thus posits the pressing need to espouse to one method or the other scrupulously in the classroom with an intention to promote, organize and give opportunities for learners' use of language. While doing so, the paper does not recommend any particular method per se. It is travesty of things that everybody speaks high of learner-centred methods but is reluctant to make drastic changes in the examination system, which is one of the root causes that ails the prevailing ELT in India. The best method must needs emerge from the interaction of teachers, students, objectives of the learning materials and the practical aspects of examination system. Therefore, the method can be a learner-centred method or a teacher-centred one. Since its efficacy has to be further critiqued in the academic circles, the teacher should be a reflective practitioner and ELT methods should be open ended.

**Keywords:** methodology, learner's autonomy, teacher/learner-centred, interaction of teachers

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Philosophers have been arguing that babies are born with minds that are essentially blank slates or having no impressions or innate ideas since the days of Aristotle. English speakers have called that initial state of mental blankness *tabula rasa* (a term taken from a Latin phrase that translates as "smooth or erased tablet") since the 16th century. Later, psychologists and theorists of language learning of in contemporary times took the cue. The figurative sense of the term refers to something that exists in its original state and that has yet to be altered by outside forces. The traditional class perceives the student as an empty vessel to be filled with information/knowledge and changed by plethora of information. The learner-centred class on the other hand considers student to have some intrinsic insights into the learning situation which can be

gleaned if he is rightly goaded. Learner centred approaches have gained much credence as new learning being assimilated by existing cognitive mechanisms, which fit themselves into new learning. The learner can be autonomous and he can take decisions bearing on the learning situation. However, any laissez-faire attitude to learning is guarded against lest it should degenerate into anarchy. Whether a teacher dons the role of a good manager of the learning environment, of giving ample opportunities to students to utilize language with appropriate situations in various real-life situations or dons the role of a facilitator who gives choice to learners as to what to study, how to study and when to study. The whole class should traverse the learning situations without the appendage of burdens of theories hung around its neck.

**II**

There are a welter of different theories and methodologies ranging from, for instance, grammar translation method to silent media. Each of the teachers has a predilection for a method of learning and learns better when that particular teaching or learning style is being administered in the classroom. Each learner is unique and is not considered to be a static partner but a dynamic one. It is highly desirable to bear in mind the learning styles of different students: 'the visual-spatial learner who has innate ability to visualize objects and spatial dimensions, and create internal pictures and images; verbal-linguistic learner who is able to use words both orally and written with remarkable felicity; logical-mathematical learner who is endowed with the capacity for inductive and deductive thinking and reasoning and abstract thinking; musical-rhythmic learner who can grasp tonal patterns and sounds and has the sensitivity to capture rhythms and beats; bodily-kinesthetic learner with relatively flawless body language; reflective intrapersonal learner who is able to adapt himself to the learning situation; and interpersonal learner moves along with other as he is capable of assessing others'. An insight into different learning styles help the teacher integrates skill-learning and natural-learning.

A method includes three components – approach, design and procedure. The theories together form approach. Design presupposes the objectives of the course, the syllabus model which the method incorporates, teaching and learning activities and the respective roles of teachers and learners. The last component of a method is procedure which focuses on how learning happens in the actual classroom situation. Different techniques pressed into service, practices and behavior that come into the open in the production, practice and feedback come under procedure. Since many new methods are blowing over ELT the teacher is supposed to acquaint with them and employ them in tune with the learning situation.

Several humanistic teaching methodologies, like suggestopaedia, the silent method, the community counseling method the TPR method keep the learner on the pedestal as viewed by J.C. Richards and T. Rodgers. It is generally held that these methods

alleviate students' anxiety as the methods are activity based concentrating on some outdoor game, music or collaborative learning. Learning together in groups or in pair is more welcome for many a learner. In such vibrant situations, the paradigm of communicative language is largely agreed upon as it is highly learner centred trying to bring out the latent potential innately present as held by some theorists of language learning. The traditional teacher-fronted teaching, on the other hand, is content based and product-oriented emphasizing on grammar and structures. Further, it sees teaching of language as a subject and decisions are made by teacher with top-down orientation.

In the classroom, there are situations in which the language teachers' approach at least, at times, against the canons, is content-based. It can be seen even in Acharya Nagarjuna University examinations, very limited questions kept at the end of each story/essay/poem that demand rote memory as grammatical accuracy is given utmost importance in the evaluation. As such, he is inhibited in using language and is much concerned about committing errors. Autonomous Colleges further strengthen the ingrained practice as they emphasis on jockeying up scores in the semester-end examinations. In the name of internal assessment, marks are generously awarded. All the stakeholders are self-complacent. Hence, it may be desirable to strike a balance between teacher-centred and learner-oriented methods. Care should be taken not to eclipse the learner in the process of learning as he is a pivotal figure in the whole teaching learning situation. There is no gainsaying the fact that a student should be treated as a collaborator of knowledge. However, either of them fails to capture the entire issue threadbare. Neither of the teacher-dominated or learner-dominated methods captures the spectrum of the whole truth. Freedom as privileged by learner-centred methods and discipline as privileged by teacher are obverse of the same coin in ELT prevailing in India. Neither is possible without the other. If they are given and used at an appropriate time, they can be transformative bringing about positive optimal learning outcome. The activities in the much-sought-after learner-centred methods in the hour-long period may at times disorganized and

disparate and may not produce unity of impression. The possibility of incorporating lecture method sparingly in ELT may be considered as lecture if orchestrated well can produce very salutary effect on the learners. The right model, therefore, seems to be a sort of balancing between behaviourist school of psychology and cognitivist school of psychology- in the former the learner is a passive recipient of planned instruction as the teacher plans, presents language items and gives correct language forms and emphasis is on content or form and in the latter the learner is an active processor of learning as the teacher unleashes learning opportunities and is tolerant of student's errors. In the present times, both the learning and teaching styles are in vogue and hence, the need of golden mean till the important stakeholders do not pay lip service to learner-centred methods.

### III

To conclude, it is important that a teacher should adopt appropriate teaching methods in consonance with the learning situation and practical aspects impinging on classroom situation. A mix of teacher-dominated and learner-centred method may be adopted. He need not cling to any of them scrupulously. Further, there should be some space for reflective jottings in his teaching diary. Mike Wallace (1991) talks of the reflective model in teacher education in training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach. It is incumbent on the teachers to reflect on their methods and techniques. It is imperative since the same method employed by different teachers would yield different learning outcomes in the class. Further, the same method used by the teacher teaching the same lesson may turn out to be a success or a failure. It is all the more fruitful if teachers interpret their own teaching during reflection since it is, as posited by Holiday (1994), tantamount to thought and proactive action.

### References

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