Principles and methods of ESL/EFL teaching

(A Short theoretical Article)

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Abstract:
The present article is a description of basic principles and methods of ESL/EFL teaching. In this article the most recognized and commonly used approaches and methods for teaching ESL/EFL are discussed. Each approach or method has an articulated theoretical orientation and a collection of strategies and learning activities designed to reach the specified goals and achieve the learning outcomes of the teaching and learning processes. There are many ways to approach teaching, and not every possible method is examined here. The absence of a method does not necessarily mean it is ineffective or unsuitable.

Article:
English is the one language which has the distinction of being used at once a foreign language and as a second language. There are numerous, psychological, sociological, pedagogical and biological factors affecting EFL/ESL learning/teaching. Paul Christopherson emphasizes the importance of observing the distinction between foreign language and second language, and its relevance to English language teaching. He says that the distinction is often useful in discussing teaching aims, principles and methods. The learner’s attitude to a foreign language tends to be rather passive and receptive…while to a second language it will be active and creative. ESL/EFL teaching methods have come a long way in the past 60 years. Before the 1950s, the emphasis, at least in the United States, was placed entirely on reading ability and not at all on communicative ability. This was mostly because the American people at that time had little
opportunity or reason to communicate with people of different language backgrounds. It was not until the U.S. entered World War II that the government realized how vital oral and aural abilities were in foreign language education, and it was out of this realization that many of the ESL/EFL teaching methods used today were born.

Teaching EFL/ESL should not only focus on the grammatical features but also the language use as communication tool. Therefore teaching EFL/ESL should be communicative and interactive. Brown (2001) says that “interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other”. In other word, the teacher should be able to make the students comprehend the language use in order to make interaction. In order to help the students learn English, an EFL/ESL teacher must comprehend and apply the principles of EFL/ESL teaching and learning. This paper tries to describe those principles and the problems occur. The main discussion of this paper is the method and principles of EFL/ESL teaching and learning which includes Teaching Language as Interaction among People, Classroom Management, and Culture and the Language Teacher.

The following principles and methods are described in the article:

Grammar-Translation Method

Direct Method

Reading Method

Audio lingual Method

The Natural Method

The Physical Response Method

The Oral Method

The Psychological Method
The Grammar - Translation Method

The Grammar –Translation Method usually consist the explanation of a grammar rule, with example sentences, vocabulary, presented in the form of bilingual list. In this method exercises provide practice on the grammar and vocabulary of the lesson. These exercises emphasize the conscious control of structure and translation in both directions. Grammar is taught inductively--rules are generalized from the practice and experience with the target language. Verbs are used first and systematically conjugated only much later after some oral mastery of the target language.

This method allows the teaching of the target language through the medium of learners’ first language, and assumes that conscious control of grammar is necessary for the mastery of target language. The actual classroom teaching, according to this method, begins with the rules of grammar, vocabulary, items, paradigms and translation. The teaching of pronunciation is either completely ignored or confined to a few introductory classes.

The Direct Method

One of the most widely known methods, the direct method requires the learner to relate a symbol directly with an environmental event rather than indirectly through the association of the equivalent symbol of the first language. It is analogous to coordinate training as the indirect method is to compound training. It is relatively more efficient, at least for vocabulary learning, for the task of associating new language words with referents afford greater distinctiveness of elements to be learnt than does the task of associating new language words with their equivalents in the first language considering the audio lingual method as an offshoot of the direct method. The Direct method with its insistence on the use of target language, provide a great deal of comprehensible input. It also attempts to make the language use in the class room of some interest to the learners. Advanced students read literature for comprehension and pleasure. Literary texts are not analyzed grammatically. The culture associated with the target language is also taught inductively. Culture is considered an important aspect of learning the language.
Reading Method

The method has as its objective only a reading knowledge of the language under consideration. The reading material is within the linguistic range of the pupils at different levels of the language. For this purpose texts are specially written within a precise range, or texts in “full” English are re-written in simplified to “full” English reading. In this process learners are also initiated to use of the English dictionary, followed by an intensive practice in discovering the meanings of words from the content. Finally, a great deal of practice in reading a wide variety of material, both in and out of the class, is done.

Audio lingual Method

This method is based on the principles of behavior psychology. It adapted many of the principles and procedures of the Direct Method, in part as a reaction to the lack of speaking skills of the Reading Approach.

New material is presented in the form of a dialogue. Based on the principle that language learning is habit formation, the method fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases and over-learning. Structures are sequenced and taught one at a time. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills. Little or no grammatical explanations are provided; grammar is taught inductively. Skills are sequenced: Listening, speaking, reading and writing are developed in order. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context. Teaching points are determined by contrastive analysis between L1 and L2. There is abundant use of language laboratories, tapes and visual aids. There is an extended pre-reading period at the beginning of the course. Great importance is given to precise native-like pronunciation. Use of the mother tongue by the teacher is permitted, but discouraged among and by the students. Successful responses are reinforced; great care is taken to prevent learner errors. There is a tendency to focus on manipulation of the target language and to disregard content and meaning.

The Natural Method

The natural method is based on an empirically grounded theory of second language learning and supported by a large number of scientific studies in a wide variety of language learning contexts.
The central hypothesis of this theory is that language learning takes place by ‘understanding messages’. Learning is based primarily on what we hear and understand, not what we say. The goal of elementary languages classes, according to this view, is to supply ‘comprehensible input’ and to bring the learner to the point where he can understand language outside the classroom. The method is relatively simple to use and can be easily adapted to a variety of situations and modified to deal with different types of learners with different cognitive style.

The Physical Response Method

The total physical response method, which was developed by James Asher, consists basically of obeying commands given by the teacher that involve an overt physical response. These commands gradually become more complex. In the first few months of teaching through this method, the lessons would consist of 70% of listening comprehension, 20% of speaking, and 10% of reading and writing. Asher lists the three principles of TPR system:

1) Delay speech from students until understanding of spoken language has been extensively internalized.
2) Achieve understanding of spoken language through utterances by the instructor in the imperative.
3) Except that, at some point in the understanding of spoken language, students will indicate a readiness to talk.

This method assumes that student will work out the correct, form of the rule during the class activity. The use of this method, thus, ensures the active participation of students, helps the teacher know when utterances are understood, and also provides contexts to help students understand the language they hear.

The Oral Method

The oral method of teaching EFL/ ESL aims at training students to select and produce orally the amount of language required for any of the meaning situations covered by what he has studied.
The first stage covers a limited range of situations, but represents still a considerable control of the language. The basic pattern and limited vocabulary must be learnt so well that they can be produced orally with the normal speed of speech. The oral method classes are very largely devoted to oral exercises. In order to attain the goal of oral production, learner are supposed to have much oral practice. They are expected to learn the basic material so well they can use the language orally with the normal speed and freedom of speech. However, for the success of this method, there must be proper materials for the learner to practice and learn. These materials further must be embedded in dialogues that provide a continuity of meaning situations as the frames in which to practice and use the amount of language that is being learnt.

The Psychological Method

The Psychological method of teaching ESL/EFL, which too is related to the direct method is based on mental visualization and the association of ideas. Audio visual aids are employed to create a sort of mental image which is subsequently connected with the specific word. Simple vocabulary items and short sentences are preferred and these too connected with the idea. The total teaching plan is divided into series, chapters, and lessons. But for the casual use of the first language, the instruction which is initially oral, is imparted in the target language. The teaching of composition and grammar begins earlier than that of reading skill.

Conclusion

After analyzing the brief survey of the basic principles and methods we can understand that all these methods confine themselves to a single aspect of the vast panorama of language teaching. Any teaching method, more so a language teaching methods, must include the principles of gradation, presentation and repetition, for it is only in the light of these principles that one can decide what to teach, how to teach, and such other policies. As W.F. Mackey said “All language-teaching methods by their nature, are necessarily made up of certain selection, gradation, presentation and repetition of the material. “It is therefore through these four inherent characteristics that one may discover how one method differs from another.”
References:


Fliottop, cit., pp.282-8 and Fries (New York: Holt 1963) Linguistics and Reading

