

In adopting a new technology, be it a tape recorder, a VCR, a CD-ROM multimedia, or other network-based communication technology, we should consider the following questions:

- Does the new technology facilitate the attainment of course goals?
- Is it cost-effective? Do the benefits outweigh its cost?
- Are the teachers ready to work with the new technology? Is any training required?
- Does it serve the needs of teachers and students?
- Does it help teachers make more efficient use of class time?

There are other questions to think about, but these are some of the most important questions that need to be addressed before we decide to implement new technologies in the classroom.

The Final Thought

It seems that attributing all problems to language teaching methods in general and to the outdated or most criticized ones in particular is not fair. What seems lacking is a dynamic management and above all commitment to a clearly defined policy for ELT. Treating English classes analogous to Knowledge subjects signifies the ignorance of a basic truth; that as a school subject English has not been treated as a skill-based subject.

Improper distribution of the class hours, which is again related to the educational management, and lack of a general intention in using at least the available teaching aids, are all at work to prevent the language learning from progression. In fact, what seem more crucial to be modified are not the teaching methods rather what require changes is the dominant policy or the educational management prevailing over schools. In so doing, even the unattended effects of the methods and other factors, no matter how trivial they are, can be accounted for and comprehensive solutions are

likely to be provided.

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Student

Indeed, most learners who study language in the centers discussed are the same students studying in public schools. That they benefit from an extra program is by no means deniable. However, class participation in schools, no matter for English or any other subject, is to some extent unavoidable or better to say compulsory. But going to a language center is an intentional, voluntary act, which no doubt results in a higher level of motivation, the importance of which is unquestionable. As Brown (2000:119) asserts "It is easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation since countless studies and experiments in human learning have shown that motivation is a key to learning." The same source further emphasizes the relationship between motivation and attitude, borrowing from Gardner and Lambert (1972:115) who define motivation as a construct made up of certain attitudes. Brown further quotes Oller, Hudson and Liu (1977:120) that positive attitudes enhances proficiency. Thus, one of the most demanding tasks on the part of the language teachers at schools seems to be the provision of the proper level of attraction and motivation for the learners. That is to specify for them how useful and helpful knowing or learning a foreign language would be.

According to Brown (2001:208), language teachers must not underestimate the importance of getting students strategically invested in their language learning process. Perhaps the most powerful principle of learning of all kinds is the intrinsic motivation. One of the best ways of getting students intrinsically involved in their language learning is to offer them the opportunity to develop their own set of strategies for success. Having thus invested their time and effort into the learning of English, they can take responsibility for a good deal of their own learning. This, in turn, generates more motivation as they becomes autonomous learners.

Textbook

As the last but not necessarily the least factor to call attention to, I refer to textbooks used in the two types of English classes. As Celce – Murcia (2001:302) states "no teacher is entirely satisfied with the textbook used, yet very few manage to teach without one". In almost all language centers textbooks prepared by native speakers are used. A teacher book and a work book usually back up the students' textbooks. These supplementary texts are to reinforce and guarantee the success of the teaching process. However, this fact ought not to be considered as a sign of the insufficiency of the Iranian textbooks used in guidance schools or high schools. As a matter of fact in the past twenty years various measures have been taken to design and prepare textbooks for students. The developed materials though lacking teacher book and work book are good enough to be used for the attainment of the intended results. The writer of this article has also evaluated the high school textbooks used in Iran, see References (Ahmadi, 2002).

Teaching aids are not uncommon or inaccessible in public schools, but the lack of an exclusive room or class for English indirectly decreases the possibility of their use. However, the use and the adoption of tape players, films, charts, pictures and similar equipment are a common practice in language centers. Besides the grouping of all equipment in the same place makes their use easier and more liable.

In recent years, the use of technological aids, especially those related to computers, has increasingly become a common feature of the classroom. There is no doubt that computer-based instruction will occupy a more central role in the second language classroom in future. However, as we eagerly explore the potential that this new technology has to offer to language learning, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is the teacher, not the technology, who determines the quality of learning that takes place in the classroom.

teachers' later collaboration or depart from the institute. Fourthly, students in public schools have no role in deciding about teachers. Thus, they are bound to tolerate the assigned teachers. But in language centers students' judgement is a part of the process of teacher evaluation.

In order to keep abreast of changes in the field of foreign language teaching, teacher education programs should be subjected to continuous appraisal in relation to the needs of both the individuals and the society and the means of their realization. Since language teaching today is borrowing extensively from a wide range of disciplines, such as second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, artificial intelligence, cognition, parapsychology, to mention just a few, care must be taken to ensure that the programs offered provide the prospective teacher with the needed skills, knowledge and experience.

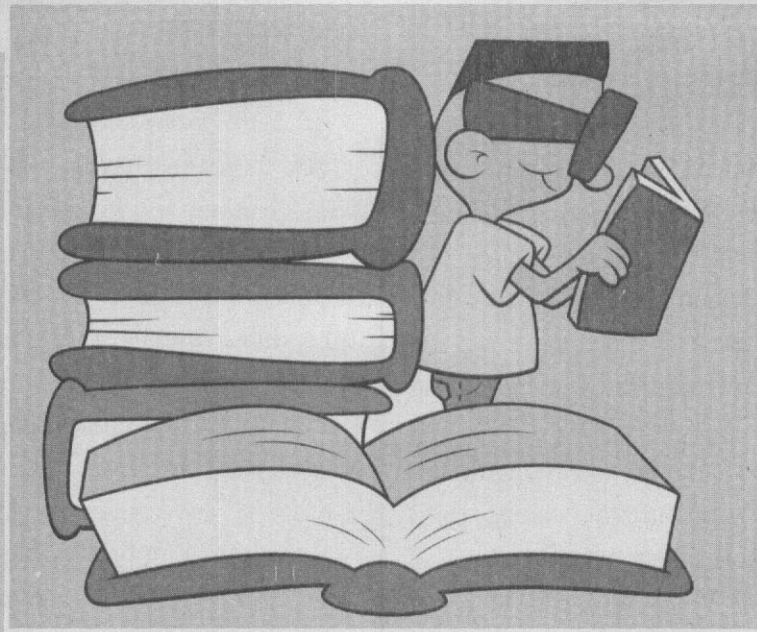
In Iran, in-service training suffers from content deficiency. Whilst in initial teacher training weight is usually given to theories, old and new, for most practicing teachers access to new theories tends to be patchy. A major source of access is the in-service training provided by educational bodies – Ministries and Boards of Education, teacher's associations, foreign cultural institutes etc. – in the form of seminars and conferences. Whilst these types of event are important ways of making teachers aware of new developments in methodology, I believe that the nature of many of these activities, with their concentration on practical "Show – and – tell" sessions, sometimes has the tendency to reduce methodology to a "bag of tricks"; that is to say, as they may illustrate examples of good practice and to an extent certain methodological principles connected with them, a deeper understanding of their underlying theories, which is necessary if teachers are to engage in a critical dialogue with new methods, is sometimes lacking. The "what" and the "how"

of teaching needs to be supported by the critical "why" or "why not".

An ongoing dialogue between theory and practice is an important component of teacher development if teachers are to be open to new theories and, just as important, not to be intimidated by them. Moreover, this aspect is important if teachers are themselves to be formulators rather than consumers of theories and it will feed into activities such as "action research", which is likely to play an ever increasing role in the coming years. Although in some countries, special institutions exist to carry out the role of "theory and research mediation" in my opinion much more has to be done to support the mediation process. I believe that it is short – sighted of educational bodies not to take extensive measures to facilitate the dialogue between theory and practice and that they should devote more resources to the dissemination and discussion of theories and research findings in ways that are accessible and relevant to practitioners.

Class Time

No doubt schools provide better time intervals for all subjects. Since in language centers classes are held at nights in the afternoons when the students are more likely tired and bored. However, the distribution of the class hours in language centers is a point which deserves careful consideration. In schools, English classes are held in either three successive hours a day during the week or in two-week intervals in two sessions. Due to the teachers' involvement in different schools, these classes are usually held with short intervals, in two successive days or so. However, language centers hold classes which are distributed evenly in odd or even days in three sessions during a week. Thus, they not only compensate for the improper class times but also provide better opportunities for practice, learning and progress.



history and other subjects. Therefore, the climate is not and can not be English by any means. In language centers, however, the whole setting serves as a supplementary resource, which backs up teaching and learning. There, the atmosphere in its totality is used for the improvement of learning English. All teaching aids are at hand. The walls are good boards for charts, pictures, drawings and so on, and thus help to maintain peripheral learning. This point has been noted by Larsen – Freeman (2002:77), when she notes "by putting posters containing grammatical information about the target language on classroom walls, students will absorb the necessary facts effortlessly. The teacher may or may not call attention to the posters". She further tries to justify the importance of the peripheral learning through noting the idea that "we perceive much more in our environment than to which we consciously attend." In short, in language centers everything, with minimal difference in degrees, is adjusted to make the process of language learning more natural, favorable and fruitful. And this in turn affects the retrieval, retention and reinforcement of the taught materials positively.

Since in both guidance schools and high schools different places as laboratories and workshops have been excluded for courses as

physics, chemistry, and other subjects, the allocation of an exclusive room to English classes in these schools does not appear ambitious.

Teachers

In spite of the undeniable difference in results in the majority of cases, the instructors of the private centers are not different from the teachers of public schools. Thus, something beyond the personality of teachers should be at work. Firstly, teaching in public schools is merely seen as the fulfillment of the requirements of the teacher's job, which continues even if the duty is not accomplished satisfactorily. No teacher loses his job due to his bad or weak performance. Secondly, schools have no role in teacher selection. They are not selected by schools but by the departments of education. On the contrary in language centers teachers are usually chosen from among a group of applicants or candidates, a process which makes a good and fair selection more possible. Thirdly, teacher evaluation in schools is defective. It usually deals with teachers' control and class administration not to their ability and skills in language teaching. In language centers, on the other hand, a specialized evaluation and supervision is at work. This policy directly leads to teachers' improvement since it determines the

either. Chastain (1988) notes that the goal of audiolingual method was to have students reach a point at which they could use language automatically and unconsciously as native speakers do. Likewise Rivers (1981:38) suggests "the stated objectives of audiolingual method was the development of mastery, at various levels of competency, in all four language skills." Cited in Richard and Rodgers (2002:53), Brooks (1994) lists training in listening comprehension, accurate pronunciation and recognition of speech symbols in writing as the short – term learning objectives and language as the native speakers use it as the long-term objective.

Finally, Richard and Rodgers (2002:65) admitting the fact that audiolingual method began to fall from favour in the late sixties, considers that audiolingualism and the materials based on audiolingual principles continue to be widely used today. No doubt even the critics of such a method will admit that the present state provides too little to satisfy the demands of this method. Thus, it should not be considered pessimistic at all if one claims that as far as the conditions are concerned, even the highly promising communicative methodologies would not meet a better result. What seems urgent is a radical change or a revolution in our understanding of the concept and demands of methodology, not its label.

Still a third group of critics may relate the unattained objectives to the textbooks adopted in guidance schools and high schools. A comparison between the original English textbooks and those adopted in schools will clarify that this arguments is also far from valid.

Quite the opposite and as a proportionately satisfactory experience, I refer to the relative success of English language teaching institutes in the country. In fact, more convincingly in large cities, people seem to have been convinced that taking advantage of such classes is the only way to help their children learn English.

As a teacher who is acquainted with and has

contacts with both public schools and such institutes I should admit that the teachers and the methods are not that much different in these two centers as they are supposed to be. As a matter of fact you may find numerous cases that a certain teacher or teachers work in both of the above – mentioned centers and possibly similar methods are at work but with different results. A close look at the policies, programs, facilities and the management of these centers may provide good hints. Put it in other words, by comparing schools and language centers in terms of educational settings and facilities, teachers, learners, access to teaching aids, textbooks and the class times, the present paper tries to provide a clear picture of the status quo of language learning in these centers. What is intended is to help making a decision by relying on the strong points and refraining from the weak points.

Classroom Climate

Nobody can ignore the importance of a proper educational setting. The class environment, chairs, tables, blackboard, and other relevant equipment can strongly affect the teaching process. They have the property to make the teaching and the learning process smoother, easier and more pleasant. This point has also been considered notably by Celce – Murcia (2001:261) when she notes "obviously, the bright, clean classroom with relevant pictures on the walls, and moveable comfortable chairs with some support for writing on, is the idea to be striven for."

With almost a full agreement among those who are familiar with the schools and the institutes I can claim that in general, public schools are superior in rank in terms of these factors. In fact, a large portion of language centers are established in places not designed or equipped for educational practices. However, what makes the difference is the way these learning environments are used. In public schools, English classes are held in a place where students study mathematics, physics,

through proposing alternate solutions, it calls for the effective use of time and resources available in our country, Iran. It reviews the contexts in which teaching and learning occur, including the context factors teachers, learners, institutional context, textbooks, instructional aids and classroom time. Also, it compares teaching English as a foreign language both in public schools with such as private institutes to shed light on their success and / or failure in language teaching as a pedagogical enterprise.

Key Words: post-method era, methodology, pedagogical, enterprise, instructional aids, textbooks.

The problem

Entering university, every Iranian student has at least 450-500 hours background in English. However, a great number of high school graduates are not able to produce or comprehend a single error-free sentence in English. The dominance of such a situation is a good reason to claim that language teaching in Iran has not been able to cope with the demands. In the past twenty years, almost all the factors and elements involved in teaching English as a foreign language in the country have undergone changes. New textbooks have been designed, published and revised over time, and training programs for English teachers have been provided. A notable tendency for using teaching aids has developed among language teachers, and new methodologies have been tried or adopted. Yet, the problem has not been overcome satisfactorily. It is for the reason that the present paper attempts to investigate the factors involved in the failure of English language teaching in our country.

Most of the teachers as a quick answer to the question of failure would attribute that the problem is the use of inappropriate methodologies. When these teachers try to explain this fact, grammar translation, no doubt, would be the most criticized one. In contrast to this view I argue that grammar translation may have never been employed appropriately at all. Rather, the problem may be accounted for in terms of the misapplication of the method. In fact, if grammar translation has been adopted properly, the situation might not be as miserable as it is. There is no sign of the development of skills proposed by grammar

translation method. Chastain (1988:89) remarks that "Grammar translation teaching satisfied the desires of" mental faculties "school of thought and the traditional humanistic orientation, which placed primary emphasis on the belles lettres of the country". She further notes that the primary purpose of the grammar translation approach was to prepare students to be able to study literature. An equally important goal was to improve students' capability of coping with difficult learning situations and materials. Larsen - Freeman's (2002:11) comment on Grammar Translation (GT) is by far more promising. "Grammar translation is supposed to put emphasis on the ability to translate foreign texts, to develop a large range of vocabulary and to have a good ability in teaching literature." However, as was mentioned earlier it is a common experience for professors in universities to encounter too many students who are not able to read a short passage or understand its vocabulary items thoroughly, let alone the highly demanding skill of translating it into Persian.

Another group of teachers, due to their familiarity with new approaches, may criticize the program claiming that English has been thought of as discrete units to be practiced using procedures advocated by the audiolingual method. They may argue that the failure in current EFL teaching in Iran goes back to the unnoticed drawbacks of audiolingual approach.

The same position taken with respect to the GTMI, again, argue for the nonadoption or better to say the misadaptation of this method. Since we have not met skills advocated by audiolingualism

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An Appraisal of Foreign Language Teaching in Iran: The Present State of the Art

چکیده

در ۵۰ سال گذشته، مطالب زیادی درباره‌ی تدریس زبان انگلیسی شنیده و گفته شده است. حتی در دوره‌ی فراروشی (Post method)، تحقیقات فراوانی درباره‌ی روش تدریس موجود است، و روش تدریس، مورد توجه خاصی قرار دارد که از جمله دلایل آن می‌توان به شناخت نقش زبان‌آموزان، مقدم دانستن یادگیری بر تدریس و یا فرغ دانستن تدریس بر یادگیری، شواهدی از مطالعات اجتماعی- روان‌شناختی زبان، و داده‌هایی که نشانگر رفتار متفاوت زبان‌آموزان در موقعیت‌های متفاوت زبانی اشاره کرد. در پاسخ به نیاز روزافزون تغییرات بنیادین در آموزش زبان، این مقاله در صدد جانبداری یا توجیه روش تدریس خاصی نیست، بلکه می‌کوشد، از طریق ارزیابی شرایط نامناسب آموزش زبان، و پیشنهاد راه‌حل‌های مطلوب، راه را برای استفاده‌ی بهینه از وقت و منابع موجود در کشورمان ایران، هموار سازد. در این راستا، به عوامل مؤثر در فرایند آموزش، شامل: معلمین، فراگیران، کتاب‌های درسی، وسایل کمک آموزشی و زمان برگزاری کلاس‌ها توجه خاصی شده است. هم‌چنین مؤسسات دولتی با مراکز خصوصی آموزش زبان مقایسه شده‌اند تا بتوان تفاوت‌های کمی و کیفی در نيل به اهداف آموزشی در این مؤسسات را شناسایی کرد.

کلید واژه‌ها: دوره‌ی فراروشی یا پسامند، روش تدریس، فرایند آموزشی، وسایل کمک آموزشی، کتاب‌های درسی.

Abstract

We have heard and read much about teaching in the past fifty years or so. Even in the post-method era, there has been abundant literature on teaching methodology. This time, however, teaching has received a different type of attention. The recognition of the learner's role; the recognition of the priority of learning over teaching and the fact that teaching is subordinated to learning; the evidence coming from social-psychological studies of language; and the data on how learners perform differently in different contexts of use have provided deeper insights into the working of language learning and teaching. Accordingly, the basic premise of this article would not be to advocate or justify a particular language teaching method, rather via appraising the prevailing conditions in language teaching and