Application of Teaching Method to Improve English Language Skills in Bangladesh

Hossain Al Mamun[1]

Abstract: In Bangladesh, school and college students are taught English through Grammar Translation Method (GTM) or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Method. These students enter the universities passing the SSC, and HSC examinations and in most cases, they are still very weak in English. They cannot speak or write English without mistakes which prove that neither of these methods are perfect for Bangladeshi context. So, to suit Bangladesh context, it is better to redesign these methods and develop an eclectic method that may help our teachers to develop four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of school and college students. This study will analyse and focus the relevant aspects to create an eclectic approach to improve English Language skills in Bangladesh.

Introduction:

The history of English Language Teaching (ELT) shows that the emergence of different methods like Grammar Translation (GTM), Direct Method (DM), Audio Lingual Method (ALM), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Method etc. to teach English as a foreign language was actually the response of the linguists and language teaching specialists to different learners need and their goal in different countries during different periods of time. For example, GTM was applied in European countries to improve reading skill from 1840s to the 1940s. DM was used to improve speaking skill from 1860s to 1920s emerged in USA after World War-ll for oral training in target language which declined in 1970s and CLT was the British contribution to ELT which emerged in late 1960s that again is inappropriate in some Asian Countries. Specially, after the decline of DM, people discovered that no specific method can guarantee success in ELT. Therefore, it is better to incorporate suitable aspects from these four methods into one method and develop an eclectic approach to teach English in Bangladesh.

---

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh; & PhD Fellow, Institute of Bangladesh Studies (IBS), Rajshahi University, Rajshahi

Analysis:

First of all, we can take a look at the definitions of method, approach, and technique because these terms are closely related to each other. American Applied linguist Edward Anthony defines them in this way- an approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning.[2] He said, "Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material.........all of which is based upon the reelected approach."[3] And according to him-a technique is implementation that which actually takes place in a classroom.[4] With the implementation of these aspects, it is needed to analyse the theories, design, characteristics of teaching/learning activities, role of teachers, role of the Learners, nature of student-teacher interaction, nature of student-student interaction, role of the instructional material and procedure.

1. Theory:

Two things obviously influence the way a teacher implements a method in a classroom, his notion of:

   a) Theory of language, and

   b) Theory of language learning

1.1 Theory of language

Teachers should try to keep in mind that language can be seen from:

   i)   Structural point of view (from ALM):

        Every language has a structure consisting of phonological units, grammatical units, grammatical operations and lexical items. This view will help a teacher to focus on linguistic competence of the students to develop their writing and reading skill.

   ii) Functional point of view (from CLT):

        We use language as an instrument to express our feelings, emotions, needs etc. So, language performs different functions

---

[2]   Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 2nd Edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.19.

[3]   Ibid.

[4]   Ibid.

in different situations. From this point of view, listening and speaking are of utmost importance in language learning and teaching as far as the development of communicative competence is concerned.

1.2 Theory of language learning

It is better to remember as a teacher:

a) Krashen's Monitor Model theory: Acquisition is better than learning.

b) Acquisition takes place when the learner receives comprehensible input that is one step beyond his current level of competence.

c) ALM suggests that learners can learn more easily if materials are first presented in spoken form rather than in written form.

d) ALM also advocates the presentation of material in cultural context of the target language rather than in isolated forms.

2.0 Design

Design is the level of method analysis in which we incorporate-objectives, syllabus model, learning activates, roles of teachers and learners, interaction between them in classroom, role of instructional materials and evaluation system.

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of a Bangladeshi college teacher of ELT is to improve the students' four basic skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

2.2 Syllabus Model

a) Elements taken from CLT

i) We should focus on goals of the students, that is, learners' need.

ii) Situations in which students may need to use the target language.[5]

iii) Functions for which they may use the language.[6]

iv) Notions which they may communicate.

---

[5]   Ibid, p. 24.

[6]   Ibid, p.163.

b) Elements taken from ALM

i)   The language skills should be taught in the order of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

ii) The language may be presented entirely orally at first, then comes the written presentation.

iii) We can conduct a contrastive analysis of the differences between the native language and the target language, since these differences may cause the major difficulties that the learners may encounter.

3.0 Characteristics of teaching/learning activities

3.1 Aspects taken from DM:

i)   Grammar should be thought inductively, that is, the examples should be presented first from which the students can induce grammar rules.[7]

ii) Input should be presented in different situations (shopping mall, bank) with reference to specific topics like money, weather or geography.

iii) Students should practice new words in complete sentences.

3.2 Aspects taken from ALM

Written works and reading should be based on the oral work they did earlier which will improve their listening.

3.3 Elements taken from CLT

i) To develop speaking skill, students should use the target language a great deal through communicative activities, such as role plays, games, problem solving tasks.

ii) We should use an authentic material that is not produced specifically for language learning, such as newspaper articles, novels etc.

---

[7]   Diane Larsen Freeman, Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), P.29.

4.0 Role of the Teacher:

4.1 Elements taken from CLT

i)   The teacher should try to facilitate stress free interaction among students to improve their speaking skill.

ii) He should act like an advisor, answering students' questions.[8]

iii) Sometimes the teacher should participate in students' activities to boost up their enthusiasm.

4.2 Elements taken from DM

The teacher and the students are more like partners in teaching / learning activities.[9]

5.0 Role of the Learners

5.1 Aspects of CLT:

i)   Students should be active in classroom.

ii) Students communicate a great deal in target language.

iii) They should try to co-operate with each other, to understand others and make them understood.[10]

6. Nature of Student-Teacher Interaction:

6.1 Elements of CLT

i)   When the teacher works with linguistic accuracy he presents the material to the students.

ii) Sometimes the teacher engages in students' activities but he does not interact with the students always.

iii) The teacher mainly establishes situations that prompt interaction among students.

---

[8]   Ibid, p.128.

[9]   Ibid, p. 28.

[10]   Ibid, p.130.

6.2 Elements of DM

The initiation of the interaction should go both ways, from teacher to students and from students to the teacher, the latter may be teacher directed.[11]

7.0 Nature of Student-Student Interaction

7.1 Elements of CLT

Students should interact a great deal with one another in various configurations, pairs, triads, small groups, whole group etc.[12]

7.2 Elements of GTM

The students do as the teacher says. So, they can learn what he/she knows.

8.0 Role of the Instructional Material

8.1 Aspects of ALM

i) Instructional material will assist the teacher to develop mastery in the learners.[13]

ii) A teacher's book should contain the structured sequence of lessons that is to be followed.

iii) Tape recorders / audiovisual equipments can be used in the classroom. If the teacher is not a native speaker of the target language, the tape recorder provides accurate models for classroom exercise.

8.2 Aspects of CLT

i) Students should practice target language in the classroom from the textbooks which contain a kind of grading and sequencing of language practice.

ii) Various materials can be used for classroom activities, such as- exercise handbooks, activity cards, pair communication practice, practice materials, and student interaction practice booklets.

---

[11] Ibid, p.29.

[12] Ibid, p.130.

[13] Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 2nd Edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2001), p.63.

iii) Authentic or real life materials should be used, such as magazines, advertisements, newspapers, maps, pictures, symbols, graphs, charts etc.

9.0 Procedure

Procedure refers to the actual moment to moment techniques, practices, and behaviours that operate in teaching a language according to a particular method.[14]

9.1 Listening skill

To develop listening skill of the students, the following techniques can be implemented:

9.1.1 Techniques of DM

i)   Reading aloud:

Students can read different passages aloud from novels or plays so that other students can hear different tones of target language at different situations.

ii) Dictation:

When the teacher dictates some target language elements at different speeds it obviously improves students listening skill.

9.1.2 Techniques of CLT

i)   Role Play:

When students play roles of different characters in role play activity, other students have a good opportunity to listen to the communicative language in different social contexts and in different social roles.

ii) Homework:

The teacher may assign students homework to listen to a live radio or television broadcast.

---

[14]   Ibid, p.31.

9.2 Speaking skill

9.2.1 Techniques Taken from CLT

i)   Language games:

In this activity, students have to guess and communicate their ideas to other students correctly which improves their speaking skill.

ii)   Picture strip story:

One student can show a picture of a story to other students of his group who have to guess the next picture and then get the feedback immediately.

9.2.2 Techniques Taken from ALM

i)   Repetition drill:

When students repeat what the teacher says, it improves their pronunciation.

ii)   Chain drill:

Students greet or ask questions each other in chain drill correctly.

9.2.3 Techniques Taken from DM

i)   Question / Answer exercise:

Students question and answer to each other in target language spontaneously.

ii)   Conversation practice:

The teacher asks students questions with particular grammar structure and students have to answer that with correct pronunciation.

9.3 Reading Skill

9.3.1 Techniques of GTM

i)   Reading Comprehension Questions:

When students write answers to comprehension questions, they have to understand their meanings first which develop their reading skill.

ii) Fill in the blanks:

Students have to understand the sentence structure to fill the missing words in the blanks of the sentences.

9.3.2 Techniques of CLT

i)   Authentic materials:

Novels, newspaper articles present various situations to students, which help them developing their reading skill.

ii) Scrambled sentences:

When students unscramble the scrambled sentences of a passage or article they learn about cohesive devices which bind one sentence to another.

9.4 Writing Skill

9.4.1 Techniques of GTM

i)   Use words in sentences:

This activity helps students to use words in sentences of a particular context rather than using them isolated from each other.

ii) Composition:

Students can practice to develop their writing skill by composing a paragraph on a particular topic.

9.4.2 Techniques of DM

i)   Dictation:

Students have to write correctly what the teacher dictates following the reading / speaking speed of the teacher.

ii) Paragraph Writing:

Writing a paragraph on a particular subject also improves students' writing skill.

9.4.3 Techniques of ALM

i) Transformation drill:

When students transform affirmative sentences to negatives or change the tense, mood, voice of given sentences, it develops their knowledge of structure of sentences.

ii) Complete the dialogue:

Students fill the blanks of missing words of particular dialogues and thus develop their writing skill.

9.4.4 Techniques of CLT

Scramble sentence: Students learn cohesive devices by unscrambling the scrambled sentences of a passage or article.

Advantages:

There are some advantages of this eclectic method which make it suitable in Bangladesh context, such as:

i) Multidimensional activities will increase students' interest and keep them motivated.

ii) Grammar is taught inductively and no memorization will lessen students' burden.

iii) There are good textbooks and other accessories which do not demand native like proficiency from teacher. Since we do not have enough proficient teachers and teacher training programs, this method is appropriate for our context.

iv) Question / Answer exercise, student conversation, and chain drills ensure active student participation in the classroom which makes proper feedback session possible.

v) Teachers are more like partners which encourages students to speak freely in the classroom which is rare in our country.

vi) Since they have to practice different activities, they develop all four skills.

vii) Meanings, situation, function, grammar, vocabulary- all aspects of language are taught to students which improve their linguistic

and communicative competence. So, it is an all embracing eclectic method.

Disadvantages:

i)   Some accessories like television, tape recorder are costly and may not be available in rural areas.

ii) If the teacher does not take-absolute authority in class, that is, if he is a partner, students may think him impotent and become motivated.

iii) Some students are totally reluctant to participate in class.

iv) Big classroom may create problems in listening and speaking activities.

v)   There is little freedom for students to choose materials for themselves.

vi) Most of the times, students feelings are not taken into consideration by the teacher.

10.0 Conclusion

The reason for the emergence of various methods during different periods is some inherent drawbacks of almost all methods which made them inappropriate for new demands of new age and various necessities in different countries. That is why no particular method is enough to teach English as a foreign language successfully. For this reason, it is best to develop an eclectic method by taking relevant and necessary aspects and issues from direct, audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching method that is suitable for our Bangladesh context.

References:

C. J. Brumfit, Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Diane Larsen Freeman, Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Eli. Hinkel (ed.), Culture in Second Language Teaching and Learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

H. Douglas Brown, Principals of Language Learning and Teaching. 3rd ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994.

H. H. Stern, Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Jack C. Richards, The Context of Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

J. Munby, Communicative Syllabus Design. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Tony. Wright, Roles of Teachers and Learners. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

V.J. Cook, Second Language Learning and Language Teaching. London: Edward Arnold, 1991.