

# *The Miscellaneous Approach to Language Teaching: A Critical Look at the Single-Method Approach Adopted in the Libyan Schools*

Ibrahim Ali Ellabiedi

English Department, College of Education

University of Misrata, Libya



**Abstract** – In spite of all the obstacles and difficulties encountered in the Libyan and similar EFL learning and teaching contexts, teachers are still seeking to find the appropriate approach and methods which may better serve their local contexts. The main problem under investigation is the adoption of the single-method approach, represented in the new teaching methodology (CLT), which the Libyan and many other EFL teachers in different contexts find it difficult to implement in their classrooms. This new paradigm which underpins the new teaching syllabus in the Libyan schools has become a challenge, since the local environment where it is practised does not seem appropriate. Hence, it is worth thinking of another approach which could replace the single-method approach. This paper tries to evaluate current approaches to the methodology of teaching English in the Libyan context. First, I will introduce the context, describing the learners and the classroom, explaining what approaches and methods are followed, throwing some light on the syllabus and the regulations imposed by the ministry of education. Second, I will propose a feasible approach which may better serve the Libyan situation. This approach is based on the assumption that a collection of different methods (the eclectic approach) might help to achieve the goal- finding a more suitable way of teaching which can be useful, more flexible for teachers and, consequently, better serves the Libyan context.

**Keywords** –Eclecticism, Approach/ Method, Libyan Context.

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is no best method because there is something independent in each method which distinguishes it from another method. (Prabhu, 1990) [1]. Moreover, as Richards and Rodgers (1986, cited in Richards 1990) [2] emphasize, common to all methods, teachers' and learners' roles are prescribed. There is a set of prescriptions for what materials should the teacher present, when and how should be presented. In fact, "the teacher's job is to match his or her teaching style as well as the learners' learning style to the method". (Richards 1990: 36) [2].

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Teachers in Libyan schools are struggling from the difficulty of matching their professional ability and experience of teaching English to the new methodology which the imposed syllabus is based on. The problem is represented in the single-method

approach which prescribes the type of class material, the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, and also the type of activity which belongs to the method. (see e.g., Prabhu 1990 [1]; Richards 1990 [2]; Mwanza 2019 [3]; Hiep 2007 [4]; Sakui 2004 [5]; Orafi and Borg 2009 [6]; Li 1998 [7]; Bax 2003 [8]).

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

This paper aims to:

1. Evaluate the Libyan learning/teaching context and the current approach to the methodology of teaching English.
2. Propose a more convenient approach which may replace the current approach.

## **1.3 Research Hypothesis**

The proposed approach which is based on the assumption that a collection of different methods might help to achieve the goal-finding a more suitable way of teaching which can be useful, more flexible for teachers and, consequently, better serves the Libyan context.

This article sheds light on the Libyan context; however, many EFL contexts may share similar characteristics of the Libyan situation. An investigation into the Libyan environment and history, common approaches and methods adopted by Libyan teachers, recent methodology proposed by the ministry of education and curriculum, and analysis of the syllabus, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

## **II. THE LIBYAN CONTEXT**

### **2.1 History and Environment**

The learners begin learning English at the age of 6 (first primary). The schools are usually big and crowded with students, with an average of 30 students in each class. All the learners share Arabic as a mother tongue (the class is monolingual) and they learn English as a foreign language. As for teachers, mostly they hold BA or lower qualification, and all of them are non-native speakers of English. The class is 40 minutes in duration and the teachers have only desks and whiteboards, but no other teaching aids or modern equipment- teachers and books are the major resource. In reference to the educational environment, the English school syllabus has undergone a few modifications which carry a sort of further improvement. The core curriculum has been modified several times in order to follow the modern learning\ teaching system. In the past, children were first taught English when they were in preparatory school. Nowadays, they start learning English when they are in the first year primary. Communication with foreigners is very rare in Libya, but the learners may communicate in English on the internet or they can use the media to enhance their language learning.

### **2.2 The Traditional Adopted Approach**

The implemented methodology which is very common in the Libyan context is *Grammar-Translation Method*. The main focus of this method is to teach explicit rules rather than getting the learners to communicate in English. Grammar is taught deductively, rules presented first then practice comes later. One reason why Libyan teachers follow this method may be the lack of the target language proficiency which English native or native-like teachers have. It seems more appropriate for the Libyan teachers to use the mother tongue when explaining grammatical structures and new items, giving instructions, or when translating into and out of the target language. Another reason for using GTM is the very limited class duration, which does not help to make any communicative activities, and, furthermore, the big number of students in the class which, to some extent, might hinder the learning process. (see Orafi and Borg, 2009 [6], and <http://countrystudies.us/libya/56.htm> [9]). This could be justified by what Stern (1983, cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 5) [10] highlights, "the first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language". Since speaking and listening are paid little or no attention, and reading and writing are the major focal point, accuracy is more emphasized than fluency. This is still used at the collage level where the main focus of learning a foreign language is to understand literally texts rather than the need for speaking knowledge. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) [10].

### **2.3 Syllabus Analysis**

The syllabus and the texts are compulsory and the teachers do not have any alternatives to choose from. They just try to cope with the requirements and regulations imposed by the ministry of education, and at the same time, try to deal with the obstacles. In general, the syllabus and materials are fairly communicative. There are lots of activities which need more interaction between the teacher and the learner and there are also the need for pair work and participation inside the classroom. Undeniably, it is clearly seen that huge effort has been made in order to develop the curriculum and to enhance the learning process. However, teachers, also, should be well-trained before they teach this communicative syllabus. Given that there is no true communication in classrooms, teachers have to create and initiate activities where learners can participate, and they should not only monitor, rather, play a role of co-communicator. (Medgyes, 1986) [11]. This role can be challenging for non-native speaking teachers working in EFL contexts such as Libya, who may lack the competence to create such activities and play such roles.

Furthermore, as I have mentioned previously, the short time of class duration and the large number of students in the classroom do not help to teach communicatively. Consequently, teachers find themselves in a critical situation that they cannot cope with two contradicted missions; teaching the syllabus communicatively in a short period of time (40 minutes), and with a large number of students. A study of teachers undertaken in Japan by Sakui (2004) [5] revealed that some teachers spent 50% to 60% of their time for English instructions and preparation for communicative activities which was claimed as time consuming.

### **2.4 The Innovative Curriculum-based Approach**

The feasibility in our context is to adapt our situation to the communicative approach which the new curriculum is based on. (see National Report of Libya 2008 [12], Frino et al. 2008 [13]). The theory of language behind this approach is that language is learned through communication. Learning is mainly based on those activities involving real communication, meaningful tasks and language which can lead to learning. (Hiep 2007 [4], Savignon 1991 [14], Savignon 2007 [15]). This approach may promote the learners' communicative and functional skills, but also some contextual obstacles which can hinder any implementation of such an approach should be considered by decision makers, syllabus designers, and teachers. (e.g. see Orafi and Borg 2009 [6]; Sakui 2004 [5]; Li 1998 [7]; Bax 2003 [8]; Harmer 2003 [16]; Gupta 2004 [17]; Swan 1985 [18]; Hu 2005 [19]). The syllabus, as I have mentioned above, is somewhat communicative, but more authentic texts which reflect the local context; where the innovative methodology is to be implemented, need to be included. In fact, it is not essential for the language which is real to native speakers, to be real to non-native speakers. There is a need for a language to be localized within a particular discourse community in order to be authentic for its practical functioning. (Widdowson, 1978) [20].

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

A critical review approach was used as a research method to prove the research hypothesis. A critical/ integrative review usually has the purpose of assessing, criticizing, and synthesizing the literature on a research topic so that it offers a chance for new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge. (Torraco, 2005, cited in Snyder, 2019) [21]. In fact, as Webster & Watson (2002, cited in Snyder, 2019: 333) [21] point out, an effective and well conducted review as a research method creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development". In relation to data analysis of this type of review, the general aim is to critically analyze and examine the literature and the main ideas. Therefore, the critical/ integrative review should lead to the advancement of knowledge and theoretical frameworks, rather than an overview or description of a research topic. (Snyder, 2019) [21]. Accordingly, this paper tries to address a new perspective and framework which is represented in the proposed teaching methodology that could replace the current innovation.

## **IV. A CALL FOR ECLECTICISM**

Looking through the previously addressed approaches, the traditional commonly followed approach (GTA), and the new approach on which the Libyan school curriculum is based (the communicative approach), rethinking about the appropriate approach which takes account of the local context has become a necessity.

### **4.1 Justification**

One assumption which has many advocates in literature is the use of the *eclectic approach*. This approach was born out as a result of the dissatisfaction and drawbacks of the single method approach. In view of the fact that each learning context is different, it is unreasonable for local teachers accept general methodological prescriptions. Consequently, the eclectic approach

emerged to take account of the diversities in the classroom and learning contexts. (Mwanza, 2019) [3]. Moreover; as Gilliland, James and Bowman (1994, cited in Wali 2009) [22] indicate, the single method is inflexible due to the fact that it has a narrow theoretical basis and a specific set of activities. In fact, as Brown (2002, cited in Mwanza, 2017) [23] points out, the eclectic approach enables the teacher to decide and select what works better with their own dynamic contexts. Furthermore; the eclectic approach connects life experiences to classroom activities. According to Kumar (2013, cited in Mwanza, 2019: 5) [3], "the purpose of advocating for eclectic method is to connect life experiences to the ideas presented in learning of the language. The types of learning activities teachers select are often directly related to their experiences in the real world".

#### **4.2 Methods and Context**

Context is a priority when thinking about adopting any methods/approaches. Larsen-Freeman (2000, cited in Mwanza, 2019) [3] states that a method is decontextualised. The implementation of a particular method is influenced by a number of factors, such as teacher's characteristics, learners' characteristics, teacher's and learners' expectations of appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demands, and other factors related to the wider socio-cultural context in which the innovation takes place. Besides, Kumaravadivelu (2006, cited in Mwanza, 2019) [3] advises teachers not to depend on specifications of certain methods, and proposes a *post-method approach* which pays more attention to particularity, practicality and possibility as its pedagogic indicators. She suggests that the teacher should adopt a context-sensitive pedagogic framework which can deal with special characteristics of a particular context. This can be mainly emphasized by Bax (2003: 278) [8] who argues that "the dominance of CLT has led to the neglect of one crucial aspect of language pedagogy, namely the context in which that pedagogy takes place.. It is time to replace CLT as the central paradigm in language teaching with a Context Approach which places context at the heart of the profession".

#### **4.3 Eclectic Teacher**

An eclectic teacher, as Brown (1994, cited in Wali, 2009) [22] emphasizes, should adopt an approach which follows all the principles that consider cognition, affection and linguistics at the same time. In fact, in order to be successful, "an eclectic teacher needs to be imaginative, energetic, and willing to experiment for the purpose of keeping lessons varied and interesting". (Wali, 2009: 38) [22]. Indeed, effective teachers should spend enough time collecting interesting and attractive material to make their teaching more inspiring. The eclectic teacher should use the material which fits the learning environment. They can use, for example, text books, newspapers, magazines, radio, videos, maps, pictures, etc. (Weidemann 2001, cited in Mwanza, 2017) [23].

### **V. THE PROPOSED APPROACH: A COMBINATION OF METHODS**

In reference to the approaches and methods explained in Celce-Murcia (2007) [24], one principle deserves to be included in the proposed approach is the one of the *Affective-Humanistic Approach: before being teachers or students, we are humans*. There should be a mutual respect between the teacher and the learners which could result a good response by the learners reflecting their strong desire for learning. Many teachers follow certain methods and techniques ignoring any respect between them and their learners. The theory of learning behind this approach is the self-realization and relating to other people when learning a foreign language. This approach has produced the learner-generated syllabus designed for the learners' needs which effectively can lead to learning. (see also Khatib et al 2013) [25]. Moreover; in relation to teacher proficiency, as identified by Mercia, *the teacher should have a command of the target language as well as the learners' mother tongue since translation could be used heavily in the early stages of learning*. This can explicitly describe the Libyan teacher. While s/he is aware of both languages- the target language (maybe not proficient) and the student's native language, translation (while explanation) is commonly used in the initial stages of language learning. The Libyan teacher has tried to adapt the methodology into the Libyan learning\teaching situation. For instance, when they teach new vocabulary, they do not spend enough time to teach them in context or do practical exercises to show how they are used in real English situations; they just give a direct meaning of the word using the mother tongue. Thus, it could be illustrated that " humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the learner and places the individual's thought, emotions and feelings at the forefront of all human development" (Lei 2007, cited in Khatib et al 2013: 45) [25].

Another important element taken from the *Oral-Situational Approach* is: *selecting appropriate and useful lexical items which learners can use in different situations in real life communication, e.g. in the street, in the supermarket, and so on*. In fact, not all the topics and activities involved in the current syllabus in Libya seem important and suitable for the Libyan context. (see Orafi and Borg 2009) [6]. Consequently, as one main principle of this approach emphasizes, *efforts are made to ensure that only the*

*most general and useful lexical items are presented.* (Celce-Murcia, 2007) [24]. The language theory of this approach regards speech as the basis of the language and structure is at the heart of speaking ability. Its learning theory is a type of behaviorist habit-learning formation. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) [10].

Learners could feel more confident when their teachers encourage and push them to talk disregarding their mistakes. Student talk in the classroom should be encouraged and the teacher should not always act as the hero who has complete knowledge. The teacher should play his/her role as a facilitator, an enabler, a councilor, a seeker, and a problem solver. Learners should enjoy some agency in the classroom, not always being in a receptive mode waiting for what the teacher orders. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) [10]. As for error correction, the *Comprehension-Based Approach* which stands on the assumption of the similarity between SLL or FLL and first language acquisition, *discourages paying much attention to correcting learners' errors and consider it even counterproductive, since the focal point of this approach is that the learners can understand and make themselves understood.* The Comprehension-Based Approach also offers good strategies and techniques for teachers- if they are non native-speakers. For example, the teachers can use audiotapes and videotapes, which can help them to provide the appropriate input for their learners. (Celce-Murcia, 2007) [24].

*Translation and the use of students' native language; which are among the main principles of the Grammar Translation Approach (GTA), should once again be considered.* Koletnik, M. (2012) [26] advocates the focus on vocabulary, natural expression and translation through the use of carefully selected exercises. Moreover, he emphasized the use of authentic language and situations which similarly endorse some key principles of communicative language teaching, specifically authenticity and genuine context. Koletnik invites to the re-evaluation of the role of translation in second/foreign language teaching, since GTA was banned from the language classrooms. In addition, as Stern (1992, cited in Mart, 2013) [27] emphasizes, translation plays an important role in language learning. It helps students realize difficulties in language learning, and works as a resource by which students can see the similarities and differences between L1 and L2, and they can understand the language system better. The use of translation can also promote motivation. As Zulprianto (2012: 69) [28] points out, "people can think or process meaning/information better with the language they know best.. Translation can be used by the language learners to negotiate the meaning at their convenience". Research found that learners felt less anxious and were more motivated when they used their native language in the classroom. (Levine 2003, cited in Navidinia, et al 2019) [29].

Another crucial point which needs highlighting and more discussion is the deductive vs. inductive way of grammar teaching. *Many students protest their teacher's pure deductive way of grammar teaching- too many rules, but not enough practice.* Undeniably, some students complain that they are fed up being taught explicit rules and grammatical structures- standing unable to communicate when they are exposed to real English, in particular situations, outside the classroom. Current research (see Nassaji and Fotos, 2004) [30] advocates a balance for encountering and producing structures either explicitly, through a grammar lesson, or implicitly, through exposure. Nunan (1998) [31] believes in teaching grammar in context and suggests that we need an approach through which learners can learn how to form structures and at the same time how to use these structures to communicate meaning.

While some learners are well- confident to come to the front of the class in order to do some practice, *working in pairs or groups gives more opportunity to learners to participate and to engage in the lesson.* When students work together, they share information and aid each other in a more *cooperative environment.* In small groups, students talk more and they use a wider range of speech acts. (Long and Porter, 1985) [32]. Although students tend to use their mother tongue when they work in groups, what they do is still communicative. Some advantages of cooperative learning, as shown by research, are promoting intrinsic motivation, creating altruistic relationships, and lowering anxiety. (Brown, 2007) [33]. As for the teacher, s/he plays a facilitating role; moving round the class, assisting students, and conducting feedback when needed. Teachers are less demanded to talk than in class-fronted classes; they prepare students to the tasks, assisting them, and giving few commands and less disciplinary control. (Harel, 1992, cited in Brown 2007) [33].

Similar to cooperative learning, *interactive learning* is also important. This learning style focuses mainly on *negotiation and creating genuine interaction in the classroom (give and take).* Long (1985, 1996, cited in Brown 2007) [33] points out, in his interaction hypotheses, that interaction between learners enhances their abilities to communicate. Prabhu (2001) [1] also suggests the sense of plausibility. It is when the teacher interacts genuinely with the learners. When the sense of plausibility is engaged in the teaching operation and the teacher is involved, the activity is productive.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, as I have mentioned above, there is no best method to be followed all the time and in every learning context. The teacher should adapt the method to the learning situation, selecting the appropriate principles which fit the local context where the method/s is/are to be implemented. Richards and Rodgers (2001) [10] criticizes the prescribed principles and techniques of the method where the role of the teacher is only to apply its main beliefs and for the learners to receive and to cope with the exercises and activities proposed by the method. Teaching methods should be flexible and adaptive to the learners' needs, and should take into account the teacher's own personal teaching style. Besides, as Zulprianto (2012) [28] indicates, all teaching methods are complementary to each other and, hence, a better teaching methodology could be drawn from the different methods, which is more likely to enhance the teaching/ learning process. From this belief, the teacher's personal methodology could be started out, which is a mixture of different approaches and methods, taking into consideration the nature of the local context/ environment. To sum up, a brief summary of eclecticism could be stated as Wali (2009:40) [22] summarises,

One of the premises of eclecticism is that teaching should serve learners not methods. Thus, teachers should feel free in choosing techniques and procedures inside the classroom. There is no ideal approach in language learning. Each one has its merits and demerits. There is no royalty to certain methods. Teachers should know that they have the right to choose the best methods and techniques in any method according to learners' needs and learning situation. Teachers can adopt a flexible method and technique so as to achieve their goals. They may choose whatever works best at a particular time in a particular situation.

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