Applying TESOL Methodology Not Only to Business English Classes Within the Learner-centred Approach

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Abstract

The paper discusses TESOL methodology and its application in the Business English classes within a learner-centred approach. The motivation for the paper is the TESOL methodology course the author took through the University of Maryland Baltimore County, USA, run by the OPEN (Open English Professional Network), sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, and administered by FHI 360. The theoretical part of the paper touches on the three topics discussed in the course: 1. Methodology in the New Millenium, 2. Student-centred teaching in large classes with limited resources, and 3. Critical thinking in language teaching. The pedagogical implications are based on the examples from the course with an emphasis on applications in Business English classes.

Introduction

There are various courses for professional development available for educators; however, most of them are financially demanding. Therefore, OPEN courses are provided for passionate educators to enhance their teaching skills. To take to the course, one needs to be nominated by the local U.S. embassy. The TESOL course is an eight-week course was offered by the University of Maryland Baltimore County, USA, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, and administered by FHI 360. The TESOL Methodology course provided participants with current methodologies for teaching English learners (ELs) of different ages in many learning contexts. The course provides opportunities to discuss and practice different strategies and language skills as well as vocabulary and grammar for teaching English (TESOL Methodology Syllabus, UMBC, 2020). This paper is divided into two main parts: the theoretical framework based on methodological predictions in the New Millenium and student-centered teaching in large classes with limited resources to empower students' critical thinking during language classes. This section is followed by the pedagogical implications based on the course, and that is the use of OERs (Open Educational Resources): how to create a more student-centered lesson, the importance of the higher-order thinking skills of Bloom´s Taxonomy (1956), up-to-date activities on language skills, encouragement for using breakout rooms, and the importance of a guest native speaker visitors in a class. The paper ends with final thoughts on the course and what academics can do for more effective classes even they have to juggle between teaching and academic work. One of the most important aims of the paper is to encourage educators to sign up for this or similar courses offered by OPEN to brush up on the theory and practice of teaching a foreign language as well as reflect on what they do or do not and want to do in the future.

Theoretical framework

The 20th century in language teaching is portrayed as an Age of Methods. Grammar-translation, the Direct Method, Audio-Lingualism, and many more strategies were present in language classes (Rogers, 2003; Repka and Halušková, 2005). However, a reaction to the methods arose known as "anti-methods" time or "post-method thinking" at the end of the 20th century (Rogers, 2003). Right at the beginning of the New Millenium, Rogers (2003) made ten methodological predictions to apply in a language classroom that are still valid today. Those are 1. teacher/learner collaboration, 2. methods synergetics, 3. curriculum developmentalism, 4. content-basics, 5. multiple-intelligencia, 6. total functional response, 7. strategopedia, 8. lexical phraseology, 9. o-zone whole language, 10. full-frontal communicativity. For the purpose of this article, the author concentrates on the following first: teacher/learner collaboration, which is understood as using matchmaking techniques to consider the suitability of recommended methods that are both characteristic for a teacher and student. Second, it is method synergetics, which is about crossbreeding and finding the right method to support effective learning. Third, it is multiple-intelligencia based on addressing different talents in learners. Practically, it means finding the strong sides of learners through questionnaires and creating centres in the class. Lastly, it is strategopedia based on teaching strategies to learners so they can learn on their own and become independent learners (Rogers, 2003).

Now, the author will explore a learner-centred teaching (LCT) in language teaching developed by Carl Rogers, further extended into English as a Second Language (ESL) by the work of David Nunan (1998, 2013). The core of LCT in English classes is based on the depiction of the individual needs of a learner. In practice, it means to develop lesson plans that are personalized, motivational, and encouraging to students. Also, encouraging learners to do role plays, work in groups, and facilitate discussions to develop communicative competence are features of LCT. The problem arises when there is a large class (characterized by 50-80 students) where different measures have to come into place. It may sound discouraging for a teacher to address such a large class; however, there are some advantages and solutions. Renauld, Tannebaum, and Stantial (2007) contend that there is plenty of opportunity for interaction with a rich variety of human resources in a large class. One way is to use more proficient learners to help lower-level ones. Therefore, there is a space for peer-teaching and collaboration, thus cooperation. On the other hand, the teacher needs to address the following challenges, and those are managing the classroom to maintain discipline by setting up rules, bringing a variety of activities to address different learning styles and interests, establishing routines, or creating a seating chart to illustrate examples. When it comes to correcting large amounts of written work, students might be put in groups and create a piece of work for one group as well as to include students in the process of self- and peer-editing.

When it comes to developing critical thinking in learners, teachers should observe how students produce knowledge rather than purely reproducing knowledge. Therefore, it includes several thinking skills such as analytical, lateral, problem solving, critical, creative, and reflective thinking (Űstűnlűoglu, 2004). It is highly important to develop the critical thinking skills of students because how information is processed has become more important than given facts. Therefore, students should be encouraged by going deeper behind the meaning than just using basic literacy skills. The teacher should take a directive role in developing students´ critical skills (Űstűnlűoglu, 2004) through various activities for perception (hear, see, taste, feel): exercising students´ assumptions and their justifications; and working with prejudices, values and breaking habits. The teacher should lead students to building a new point of view. Evaluation is a significant element of critical thinking in that students are aware of their values, consider different points of view, and check the limits of their knowledge (Űstűnlűoglu, 2004).

The following part of the article describes the TESOL methodology course, which is the base for pedagogical implications.

TESOL methodology

It is an eight-week course in which participants discuss:

- the significance of teaching English as an international language;
- traditional and modern language teaching methods;
- current instructional strategies for ways to provide active, student-centered learning to support learners' self-efficacy and life-learning;
- learning styles and the needs of diverse learners;
- principles and strategies for teaching integrated language skills;
- lesson activities that promote critical thinking and problem-solving (TESOL Methodology Syllabus, UMBC, 2020)

Participants are required to log into the course each week, spend 5-10 hours on course work each week, post to the discussion board and react to their peers' work, and review all material in the module. Assessment is in the form of course discussions (30%), reflective essays (10%), unit activities (30%), and assignments: learner-centered lesson plan, peer observation, and reflection, action plan (30%) (TESOL Methodology Syllabus, UMBC, 2020).

Pedagogical implications

There are plenty of pedagogical implications possible from this course; however, for the purpose of this article, the author concentrates on the following:

1. *Creating OERs license (Open Educational Resources)*

   OERs offer access to free resources and information for those who may not be able to pay for them. By creating a license (https://chooser-beta.creativecommons.org) or having a source with a license (e.g. CCBY4.0), it means one can reuse, remix and redistribute (share) the document as long as one gives attribution to the source (https://www.oercommons.org/). An example of the activity licensed by CCBY4.0 is

   A 5-minute speaking activity: Chinese Guanxi in the West? by Katarina Zamborova is licensed under CC BY 4.0

2. *Presenting three levels of cultures*

3 Types of Cultural Materials

Source Culture Materials
- uses learners' own culture as content

In my culture we value knowledge and guidance from our elders

Target Culture Materials
- uses the culture of a country where English is spoken as an L1

International Cultural Materials
- uses a variety of cultures in English and non-English speaking countries around the world
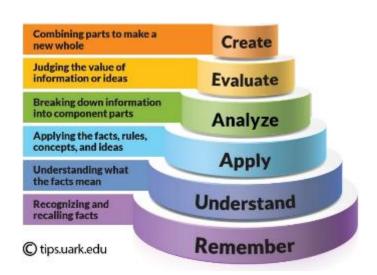
EFL class requires the presentation of all three levels of culture materials. Those are source culture materials depicting learners' own cultures, target culture materials that take into consideration the culture of the country in which English is spoken as L1, and international culture materials referring to cultures of English and non-English speaking countries around the world.

3. *Creating a learner-centered classroom*

It is highly important to address all proficiency levels in the class through differentiated instruction. It means bringing resources for all proficiency levels into the class. Emphasis should focus on equal participation of students (not just concentrate on the active ones). Interestingly, students in a class might be "living resources" for materials based on their own interests (e.g. articles, videos). It means students should be encouraged in active participation also in preparing the lesson content. Their confidence is strengthened. Importantly, different learning styles should be taken into consideration (visual, auditory, tactile).

4. *Addressing Higher-order thinking skills*

Create — Combining parts to make a new whole
Evaluate — Judging the value of information or ideas
Analyze — Breaking down information into component parts
Apply — Applying the facts, rules, concepts, and ideas
Understand — Understanding what the facts mean
Remember — Recognizing and recalling facts

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Based on Bloom´s Taxonomy (1956), language teachers should develop higher-order thinking skills (HOT) in students, and those are *to analyze, evaluate, create*. An example can be a study by Zamborova (2021) on Blinkist, the reading app when students summarized, analyzed the pros and cons and created a story based on the new words learned by reading a short book summary.

5. *Up-to-date activities on the language skills*

There are plenty of ideas for developing language skills in learners through the course; however, for the purpose of this paper, the author will concentrate on the ones that fit 21st-century students´ needs. Those are

Listening: podcasts/audioblogs due to their omnipresence and popularity by digital

native students (pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening)

Speaking: a think-pair-share activity in which students first think/brainstorm ideas,

then they are put in pairs, and finally, they share their findings (category:

discussion).

Reading: graphic organizers, which is a great way to remember key ideas from

reading

Writing: emphasizes the stages of writing to learners: developing ideas, drafting,

revising, editing, sharing/publishing (appropriate for thesis students mainly);

self-journaling as a way to promote students´ uniqueness and reflections

6. *Breakout rooms adjustments*

In general, Slovak students are reluctant to speak in a whole-class discussion. Therefore, breakout rooms come as a suitable solution because students are more engaged, they are personalized, and students get a chance to socialize. However, it is important to have rules for the breakout rooms such as 1. complete the task, 2. speak in English, 3. socialize in English once students are done with the task. Teachers can monitor the rooms and join any room randomly to see if students are really using English. Importantly, it is recommended to assign roles such as the group leader, group reporter, time-keeper so students feel empowered and more confident.

7. *Native guest visitors*

There is an ongoing discussion about the choice between a native and a non-native language teacher (Zamborova, 2021). The fact is that a native teacher brings culture and life stories to the class and can talk about the business aspect in his/her country more authentically. The U.S. Embassy in Bratislava runs a U.S. Speaker program in which a teacher can get a speaker for one class during the semester. It is a valuable way to connect the course material with hands-on experiences in the business field.

Conclusion

The TESOL methodology course is an excellent source of reviewing theory and applying it to the teaching right away. Reflection brings new perspectives in that teachers can realize what they do and what they do not do and what they want to change in their classroom in the near future. As academics, we have to juggle between teaching and scholarly work; however, we cannot diminish our role in making a difference in students´ lives. We need to realize that we need to meet the students´ needs who are digital natives and bring up-to-date activities to the class, which were discussed in each module in the course. As the Peace Corps (1992, p.11) said, "We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails"; we have to do the same in teaching. Despite current ongoing problems in the Slovak educational system regarding politics, we still have a chance to do the most important thing and that is to bring the best out of us for our students.

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https://chooser-beta.creativecommons.org

https://www.oercommons.org/

Pictures:

Bloom´s Taxonomy: https://tips.uark.edu/using-blooms-taxonomy/

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