

A Theory of Teaching English Language in Higher Education to Improve English Language Social and Communicative Contexts

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Abstract Language teaching in higher education is sensitive since learners are adult and specific approaches meeting their age and adolescent condition should be applied. Previous teaching approaches were based on conditional and behavioral methods forgetting psychological and cognitive aspects of learning. However, psychological and cognitive approaches are missing theoretical foundation. Incorporating behavioral teaching strategies and metacognitive methods, in this study two general dimensions of teaching as physical and mental patterns are introduced. The physical pattern refers to mechanical approaches such as repetition, memorization and active learning, while mental process emphasizes on teaching and learning patterns and practices in aiming at reducing learning obstacles and developing learners' autonomy in managing the process of learning. This proposed approach using collaborative behavioral and cognitive skills together, ties to manage learners' autonomy in the processes of learning by passing duties from teachers to learners in among EFL higher education students.

Keywords: *higher education, teaching, metacognitive, behavioral approaches, autonomy*

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1. Introduction

Learning the second language has always been associated with learning efforts, while acquisition of the first language is automatic and dynamic. This claim emanated from behaviorist position in which Brown (2007) argued that brain is a tabula rasa or a clean slate ready to be shaped by language and environment. Like chips or disks the mind requires initial program to operate, however addition of parallel programs should not be confused with dominant program. Though currently simulation of mind to physical memory chips is a false analogy, the function of brain is not still completely discovered, but some aspects of learning are indisputable. Scholars believed that learning after formation of first language is not facing psychological obstacles since the age of puberty which is the age of mental consciousness [1,2]. Therefore, elder students over the age of puberty require specific learning strategies suited with their age, psychological and mental conditions. As far as adult foreign language acquisition is discussed numerous learning approaches are introduced in which each lacks consideration of adults condition of learning. Charles Curran [3] influenced by Rogers [4] and Brown [5] initiated his studies on adult learning and argued that to internalize a foreign language adults may encounter communication apprehension, negative feelings and lack of confident. Also, cognitive methods of language learning are recently incorporated into learning approaches which emphasizes on learners' contribution to learning and managing

language and communication intelligence. Taking into account all aspects of leaning and teaching adults, a concise and applicable method bringing together all dimensions of adult learning is required. This paper is a reflection to learning approaches dominant in language acquisition and tries to propose a new and applicable approach to language learning for higher education students. Accordingly, at first previous approaches will be reviewed and their weaknesses and strengths is discussed to propose pervasive approach in adult learning of foreign language.

2. A theoretical Review

Teaching foreign languages has been performed via different methods, especially for adults who are learning language in higher education and require teaching methods proper to their age and educational condition. Brown [6] stipulates that the first step toward developing a principled approach to language teaching will be to turn back the clock about a century in order to learn from the historical cycles and trends that have brought us to the present day. In fact, during the course of development, language teaching has experienced many changes. As different schools of thoughts-psychology, linguistic, and education-have come and vanished, so have language teaching methods waxed in popularity [6].

According to Brown [6] "in the nineteenth century the Classical method came to be known as the Grammar translation method" (p. 18). Richards & Rodgers [7] believed that GTM was first introduced to modern

language teaching in United States as the Prussian Method. The primary purposes of the GTM were to prepare students to be able to study literature and classical materials. Richards & Rodgers [7] argued that language skills were taught deductively through bilingual word lists, dictionary and memorization. According to Coady and Huckin [8] a word was used to illustrate a grammatical rule, they also stated that when vocabulary difficulties were addressed, their explanation were mostly based on Latin and Greek etymologies and these roots were considered the most accurate source of word meaning. GTM method is highly dependent on first language and it means reading foreign language using first language filter and it is not a proper method for higher education.

An alternative method was introduced to GTM and it was a reform movement in 1880s, linguists such as Henry Sweet and Paul Passy were the intellectual leadership to give reformist ideas acceptance. In this approach the sound of foreign language was transcribed accurately, spoken language phonetic system, phonetic training and language fluency were emphasized [8]. Mechanical stage was used to retain grammar and basic words and reformist movement based on Zimmerman [9] departed from the past in the area of vocabulary instruction than with other words and syntactic patterns. Language skills were taught based on their simplicity, familiarity and usefulness. Though this approach emphasized on natural speech production it did not take into account the nature of language learning and teaching cognition and psychology.

The naturalistic approach or *Direct Method* was come to prominence and the proponents of this method believed that foreign language acquisition should occur like first language learning [7]. In this method translation is not allowed and teaching was started from simple words and regarding abstract words the learners supposed to learn through association of ideas [10]. Objects or realia were used to learn concrete vocabularies. Brown [6] discussed that the direct method suffers from theoretical foundations so that it is difficult to apply this method in practice. This method needs fine native-speaking teachers and situational language teaching were required. Direct method lead to the most prominent revolution in the era since it was inductive method paved the ways for Audio-Lingual Method.

In Audio-Lingual method language teachings were the acquisition of structural patterns, and vocabulary items were selected according to their simplicity and familiarity, structure was important and vocabulary was to maintain structure. Learning vocabulary and grammar was "strictly limited and learned in context" ([6], p. 74) so that well-known words are included not to distract students from structure. According to Richards and Rodgers, [10] this method of language of teaching sometimes referred to as the informal method since they used a native speaker of the language- the informant- who served as a source of phrases and vocabulary and who provided sentences for imitation. This method is associated to behaviorist approach to language teaching and learning regarding habit formation and repetition. The role of memory and memorization is emphasized but there is no trace of human cognition and creativity. This approach is applicable in many respects but is not a pervasive method for inclusion of the entire aspects of learning.

The focus of Natural Approach was teaching communicative abilities [10]. According to Brown [6] Stephen Krashen's theories considered over-reliance on the role of input than performance and comprehension is directly dependent on the ability to recognize the meaning of key elements or words in an utterance. Richards and Rodgers [10] have taken into account primacy of meaning suggesting the view that language is basically its lexicon and grammar for production of the message. The message however should be used for communication.

In communicative approach interactive processes of communication is emphasized. This methodology emphasizes the uses of language rather than learning rules of language and structure. Language practice in real context is considered in this approach as Widdowson contributed to this approach in distinguishing Hyme's communicative competence from Chomsky's grammatical competence since Chomsky considered cognitive state regarding form and meaning and their relation as properly assigned to the specific subsystem of the human mind relating to representations of forms and meaning in Chomsky [11]. 'Communicative Language Teaching was to develop communicative competence' ([12], p. 129) indicates that competence means ability perform something by using language. Accordingly, language is important but it is not stuffiest for communication and social and communicative competence is required. In communicative approach the problem is that in social content some phrases and chunks are frequently repeated in communication, while language uses more than contextual demands require mastery over language system; therefore, communicative method and total emphasize on language performance is not sufficient for performance in different communication contexts. It reminds applicability of Chomsky's generative grammar in daily communication

A lexica approach is an approach to language teaching and learning that is based on the view that lexicon and lexical chunks plays much more central role in language organization than grammar, functions or other units of organization, however, the principles of the Lexical Approach have been around since Michael Lewis published 10 years ago. It seems, however, that many teachers and researches do not have a clear idea of what the Lexical Approach actually looks like in practice [13]. As Richards and Rodgers [10] stated "a lexical approach in language teaching refers to one: derived from the belief that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, notions, or some other units of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, word and word combinations" (p.132). This approach is based on the idea that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes, o chunks, and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of the lexical approach to second language teaching has received interest in recent years as an alternative to grammar-based approaches.

Communicative approaches are used without real consideration of cognitive strategies in language learning and teaching. This result in the ignorance of mental ability of learners; however, having considered the entire deficiencies of the previous methods of language teaching in this study a framework is introduced trying to cut down

some obstacles of the previous methods and by inclusion of positive aspects in teaching adults in higher education level.

3. A Multidimensional Teaching Approach

Teaching foreign language to adults requires total consideration of psychological methods since adults may face some drawbacks to learning related to their self-image and confidence. However, the use of linguistic and mechanical approaches should be incorporated in some managed ways. As discussed in the previews part behavioral approaches to language teaching failed to come up with students' cognitive and mental ability. While introducing new methods such as communicative approach, lexical approach and inductive methods suffered theoretical foundation. In this proposed approach two general human derives including physical and mental are regarded. By physical, the researcher means the entire physical aspects of learning and teaching that are linguistic oriented methods, teaching instruments and strategies dealing with educational setting. By mental aspect, the researcher means the entire activities related to human mind and its operation. All aspects that one requires to dominate over a specific mental activity.

3.1. Physical Aspects of Language Teaching

Language learning is an activity that requires both physical and mental aspects. In this section the entire physical aspects are introduced. Providing an example can help better understanding of this aspect. It was happened to the researcher asking a retarded person who participated in learning Arabic language to repeat different forms of a simple verb. He repeated the term automatically without thinking, but when he was asked to tell the simple personal past form or any other forms he could not think to provide a proper answer; however, this type of learning is known as parrot-like learning that needs to be connected and associated to mental aspects. The main dimensions of physical approach are as follows:

1. Repetition of colloquial, phrases, and idioms
2. Writing and spelling new term, stems and introducing inflectional endings
3. Introducing pronunciation rules, stress and intonations
4. Familiarizing students with different dialects, and forms of language production through exposing them to different verbal dialects.

In this approach vocabulary and grammar are learned through repetition in chunks, idioms and phrases are unchanged expressions that should be fostered and internalized through memorizing. Understanding vocabulary and stems as well as inflections including suffixed, prefixes and infinitives to construct words are physical activities that require habit formation and understanding rules governing these structures. Generative Transformational Grammar of Chomsky as a theoretical method is contributed in teaching of grammar and syntax. Pronunciations, stress, and intonations are mechanical patterns in learning in which teachers have to use them in contribution to other aspects of learning. Different forms

of language production should be introduced and students are required to be familiar with different dialects.

In language syllabus each of the four above discussed activities should be managed in specific patterns and practices. A specific text with proper and relevant topic containing terms, colloquial, and idioms should be used in the proposed lesson so that the text must be broken down to the four patterns that were introduced. Before starting to teach each pattern mental and psychological aspects should be taken into consideration by teachers and some mental patters and practices should be proposed in the lesson curriculum. These patterns are types that are introduced in the next subheading.

3.2. Mental and Psychological Approach

Mental and psychological patterns are two types. One is related to teaching process in which requires teachers to include them into their teaching activity, the other is related to learners and students' contribution to learning that are introduced as follows.

3.2.1. Teaching Mental Patterns

Teaching mental patterns refers to the entire mental and psychological requirements for teaching based on adult learners' needs. Kolfshoten et al. [14] emphasized on learners as "flexible problem solvers in a dynamic world" (p. 562), while reading this aim developing such cognitive skills without teachers mediation in the process of learning is not possible. To reduce the obstacles associated with learners' self-image, teachers should avoid direct correction of mistakes, rebuking learners' inability and failure and every system of scoring should be removed from the process of teaching. The following patterns should be regulated by teachers.

1. Providing a teaching setting based on pictures, books and figures relevant to the lesson every session.
2. Providing a process of peer-scaffolding in learning mistakes instead of teacher's direct correction of mistakes. Peer-scaffolding refers to attempts by Barnard [15] and De Guerrero and Villamil [16] for considering a new trend of peer in addition to interactions between a teacher and classroom [17] as scaffolding. Therefore peer-scaffolding is a student to student scaffolding under this condition that one student should have better knowledge of the courses, so that this process reduces students apprehension and maintains their self-esteem.
3. Introducing the curriculum text using up-down method; in this method the general topic is introduced and debated among teacher and students. Students' ideas toward the topic should not be suppressed while providing incorrect statements both in using language accuracy and relevant ideas. In order to understand their mistakes they should come up with their mistakes themselves so that they think the teacher is not aware of their mistakes. By narrowing down step by step into the details, students move from a general discourse to detail lexical and grammatical usages like Halliday's [18] model of language and discourse. In his model, Halliday [18] introduced sociocultural environment

and then deep downed into genre, register, discourse semantics and lexicogrammar. These teaching-oriented patterns are up-down strategies that can be practiced by answering practices discussed in the physical patterns.

4. Metacognitive strategies of teaching should be incorporated by teachers. Metacognitive strategies are actions taken by learners to coordinate their own learning process, going beyond purely cognitive devices. These strategies are essential to successfully learning language [19], but such strategies should be introduced and applied by teachers as well. They should reveal the philosophy and logic of learning processes to students and provide practices that require learners' autonomy in managing their learning.

3.2.2. Learning Mental Practices, Activities and Thinking

Learning mental practices are introduced because students need to be autonomous learners and in this process teachers should pursued learners to master self-automation learning strategies. This is possible since students in higher education are engaged in learning teaching strategies. By application of such strategies the can manage their own learning. The following patterns as learning patterns should be managed by teachers:

1. Learners should manage their learning as the teacher runs the process of learning.

2. Students should use problem-solving skills by referring to reference books, dictionaries and peers.
3. Students are required to participate in communicative situations using their mental ability and phrasal roles to produce correct and fluent utterances. They should manage their own learning practices.
4. Students should use think aloud skills, and record their speech, transcript their language performance and pinpoint their mistakes.
5. Students in higher education should learn using jargons and dialects in appropriate conditions.
6. All these skills should be educated by the teachers. Also they should consider their teaching framework as a dynamic framework by scoring the most useful aspects of the framework using students' performance.

This suggestive approach takes brings together the linguistic and physical practices and mental and psychological aspects of adults. Incorporating language practice and psychology of learning students experience no damaging stressful condition in the process of mastering their own learning. Besides, they learn how to foster language, language skills, and teaching strategies. Though the present approach is to some extent relied on previous ideas, it is innovative in this respect that the teaching methodology progresses in this way that students are alternative to teachers in the process of language learning so that they are autonomous learners. The theoretical framework can be depicted as follows.

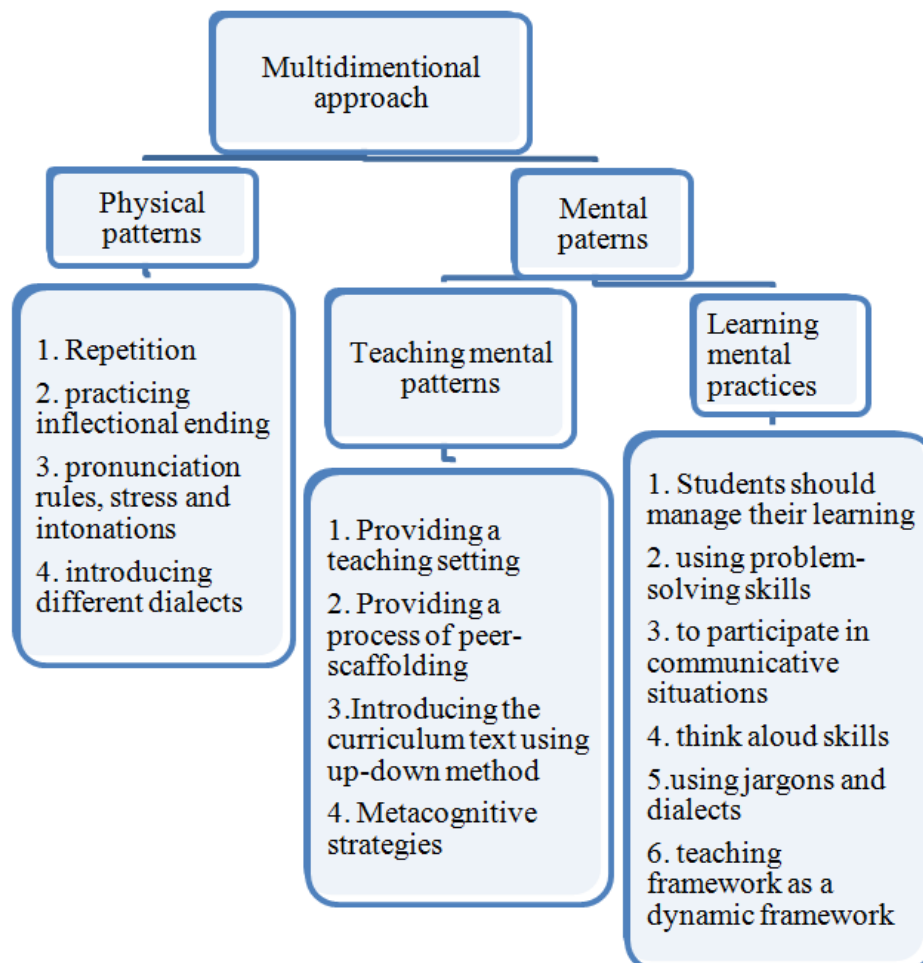


Figure 1. Theoretical framework (source: researcher finding)

4. Conclusion

Students in higher education are adults who require being proficient in language. They need to manage their own learning process. And this is possible through teacher's consideration of teaching methods appropriate for them. The present study tried to pinpoint the deficiencies of previous methods and privileged the requirements of language learners in higher education. Accordingly, the researcher used some aspects of the previous methods most relevant to learner's requirements. To this aim, the researcher introduced two general aspects of language learning namely physical and mental patterns. Physical patterns were defined as practices that cognitive thinking is not activated enough and they are practiced through repetition, writing skill, pronunciation and exposure to listening conditions. Mental patterns that are psychological in nature are divided into two main sections of teaching patterns and learning practices. Teaching patterns referred to providing a teaching setting and process of peer-scaffolding, introducing the curriculum text using up-down method and metacognitive strategies to enable learners to manage their own learning. On the other hand, learning oriented skills are controlled by teachers and teaching process as students managing their own learning, problem-solving skills, participating in communicative situations, using think aloud skills and using jargons and dialects. However this process of teaching framework as a dynamic framework required to be measures and remain in the process of changing and alternation of some parts with relevant options. This suggestive approach is proposed to collaborate behavioral and cognitive skills together, to manage learners' autonomy in the processes of learning by passing duties from teachers to know-how learners.

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