

A Rationale for the Application of Eclecticism in Teaching Literary Texts to EFL Students

Une justification de l'application de l'éclectisme dans l'enseignement des textes littéraires aux étudiants EFL

Mohammed Taha Abdelalim ¹ *, Hind Hanafi ²

Kasdi Merbah University, Ouragla (Algeria), taabdelalim@gmail.com

Kasdi Merbah University, Ouragla (Algeria), hanafihind@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

This research attempts to show the effectiveness of using the eclectic approach in teaching English as a foreign language. It explores the use of different methods and activities in literature classes. This research aimed to explain how the freedom offered by the eclectic approach allow teachers to select the methods and activities that they believe their students need to be more motivated to learn. The research used descriptive and analytical methods to describe the features and activities that teachers may use within the eclectic approach. The two methods were used to examine the students' reaction to the use of eclecticism in teaching literature in the classroom. This research revealed that the use of eclecticism in literature classes to teach English as a foreign language helps the students acquire the language effectively. When students feel more comfortable towards the methods which suit their needs, they are more likely to acquire English.

Keywords: eclecticism, English, teaching, method, literature, learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language has always been a subject for research. Teachers and researchers in the field of teaching and learning English have suggested various theories, approaches, and methods to be

* Corresponding Author. **Mohammed Taha Abdelalim**

used in the classroom. Accordingly, some have focused on the structure of the language, stressing the acquisition of linguistic structures where teachers expose the students to different texts in the target language (English) which students study and attempt to reproduce. This method focused on the form and neglected the content of the texts. Therefore, other researchers give more attention to the connotations of the words, sentences, and texts that the students have in the classroom. Using this method, students do not only focus on the linguistic structures of a given text, but they also try to understand the meaning of the words and text as whole. The variety of methods used in teaching English as a foreign language have been also applied to teaching literature in English as a tool to learn the language. Teachers of English have used literary texts in the classroom to motivate students and improve their skills in learning. When teaching literature as part of learning English, different teachers depend on different methods. However, other teachers tend to depend on more than method in the classroom according to several factors such as the learners' needs and the nature of the learning material. This mixture of methods is referred to eclecticism, which allows teachers to select the appropriate methods and activities that better suit the learners and the learning material. The eclectic approach, and unlike the previous methods, is not restricted to one method or activity, but teachers of English language and literature can use a set of various methods and activities to ensure a successful learning process.

1.1 The Research Problem

in English language and literature classes, teachers face challenges to use an effective teaching method. They are required to help students acquire the language and its features. Therefore, they seek to select the suitable activities inside the classroom. This requires an effective and suitable method to teach English language and literature, which is attainable by the use of eclecticism, as it allows teachers to use a variety of learning materials, methods, activities and tools, for they are not restricted to use only one method. Within eclecticism, the methods and activities used in the

classroom are selected by the teacher freely to motivate the students and allow them to acquire the language more effectively.

1.2 The Hypotheses

- The eclectic approach offers more freedom to the teachers in EFL classes.
- Teaching English language and Literature through eclecticism facilitates the learning process and ensures a better learning environment.
- The various activities used by teachers lead to a more satisfactory results, as students feel more comfortable and motivated to learn English language, literature, and culture.
- Teaching English language and literature using conversations can foster students' communicative skills.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

This research seeks to:

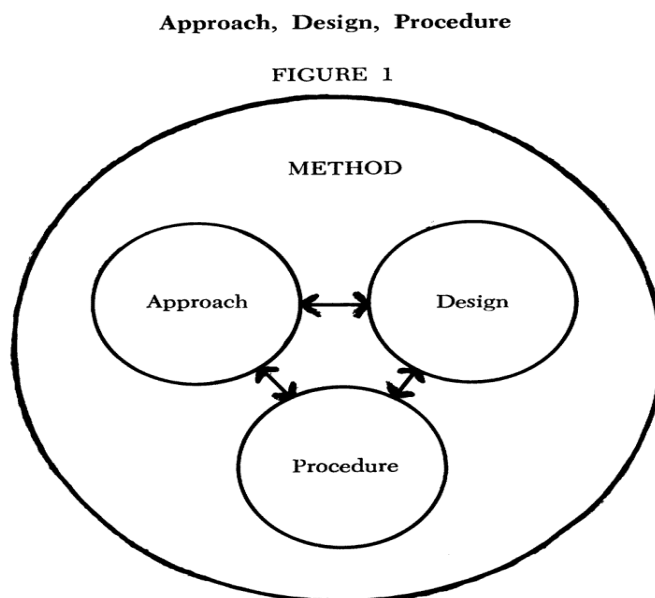
- Show the usefulness of the eclectic approach in EFL classes.
- Explain how eclecticism in literature classes can facilitate learning and provide students with the suitable atmosphere.
- Clarify how the eclectic approach can foster students' communicative skills through conversations.

1.4 Methodology of the Research

This research used descriptive and analytical methods to investigate the its subject matter. The descriptive method was used to define and describe the most important methods and theories used in the article such as the eclectic method. In addition, the analytical method was implemented to compare and analyze the different viewpoints about English language and literature learning by exploring the various attitudes towards that. The two methods were used interchangeably according to the content of the research in order to illustrate the significance of the methods.

2. Elements of the Teaching- Learning Practice

Figure 1. Language teaching elements



Source: (Rogers, Richards 2001, p. 154)

Three interrelated elements of language teaching have been proposed. These elements on which Language teaching is believed to be founded are: approach, design, and procedure. The first element is the approach. It consists of the various theories of language and language learning. Accordingly, they believe:

Theories at the level of approach relate directly to the level of design since they provide the basis for determining the goals and content of a language syllabus. They also relate to the level of procedure since they provide the linguistic and psycholinguistic rationale for selection of particular teaching techniques and activities. (p. 154)

The approach, therefore, is the umbrella under which the other two components are found.

In addition to the approach, design is the second element of teaching process according to. The design in the teaching process includes some aspects and materials that are crucial in the any learning environment. Design, for (Rogers, Richards 2001), is concerned with:

how the views of language and learning identified in a particular approach are linked to a design for language teaching. Such a design includes specifications of 1) the content of instruction, i.e., the syllabus, 2) learner roles in the system, 3) teacher roles in the system, 4) instructional materials types and functions.' Different approaches to language teaching manifest themselves in different design elements in language teaching systems. (154)

The third element of language learning theory according to (Rogers, Richards 2001) is procedure. This element is concerned with the practical part of learning. Thus, in this part:

the focus is on actual moment-to-moment techniques, practices, and activities that operate in teaching and learning a language according to a particular method. Many contemporary methods are characterized primarily by techniques and practices. When we ask for impressions of these methods we customarily get responses dealing with procedure rather than approach or design. Free association to Silent Way elicits descriptions "manipulating colored rods;" to Total Physical Response, "jumping up down;" to Suggestopedia, "lying in a chaise lounge listening to soothing music;" to Counseling Learning, "sitting in a conversation circle," and forth. All of these responses deal with the procedural element of particular method. (163)

As discussed above, the third element deals with the how the techniques and activities implemented by the teacher, depending on the method used. Also, the use of methods is not necessarily rigid; the teacher can rely on more than one method according to the learner's needs and the teaching environment.

Commenting on the current theoretical views of language and methods of teaching, (Rogers, Richards 2001) argue that:

At least three different theoretical views of language explicitly or implicitly underlie currently popular language teaching methods. The first, and the most traditional of the three, is the structural view, the view that language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The target of language learning is seen to be the acquisition of the elements of this system, which are generally defined in terms of grammatical units (clause, phrase, sentence) and grammatical operations (adding, shifting, joining elements). (155)

As pointed out above, the first method, which is the structural view of language, focuses on the surface of the language. Accordingly, language is perceived as a system of interrelated elements. This view seems to focus more on the form rather than the content. Thus, other aspects of the language are dismissed. In addition, the second view, according to (Richard and Rogers, 2001), is concerned with the content of function of the language. Since Language in this view is seen as a tool, which conveys meaning, and the content becomes more important than the form (155).

The third and last view of language is called the "interactional view". Language, according to this viewpoint, is perceived as a tool of communication that is used among people to transmit their ideas and to maintain social relations. Therefore, "the areas of language inquiry which are being drawn on in the development of interactional language teaching

include studies in interaction, discourse analysis, ethnomethodology, and second language acquisition” (155).

Based on the three views of language, it can be noted that language may be seen as a set of tools which consists of various elements. These elements are related to one another to form a comprehensive system. However, this view neglects the other aspect of language which is meaning. The second view focuses on the connotations of the elements. Thus, language becomes “the vehicle for the expression of meaning”.

Accordingly, this viewpoint stresses “the semantic rather than the grammatical potential of language and leads to specification and organization of language teaching content by categories of function rather than by categories of form”. Similarly, the interactional view also focuses on the functional aspect of the language. Accordingly, “Language teaching content, according to this view, may be specified and organized by patterns of exchange or may be left unspecified-to be shaped by the inclination of the learners as interactors” (155-156).

Furthermore, it is often recommended that teachers focus on the meaning of language rather than the form. Even if the students are leaning the grammar of the target language, they can learn also the meaning simultaneously. Because, as Rod points out, teaching of grammar valid only if the students are given the opportunity to the forms which they have learned in “communicative tasks” (Ellis 2006, p. 102).

3. Eclecticism in Foreign Language Learning

Foreign language teachers of English need to have a variety of skills which they can use in the classroom. In order to achieve the learning goals, teachers may rely on a number of approaches and methods, depending on the students’ needs and capacities. According to (Rogers, Richards 2001, p 50), some approaches, such as the grammar translation method, focus on the grammar and memorization of the target language. In addition, the audiolingual method was adopted as an alternative to grammar translation method. In the former, teachers are encouraged to use a variety of reading comprehension texts. The aim was to get the students to read short passages silently and then discuss it with the teacher.

Several methods were used when teaching foreign languages and literature, but each one lacked some qualities, which gave way to a search for a new approach that would cover all the students' needs and allow for a thorough and effective teaching- learning process. Because an effective learning requires getting the students involved and interested in the subjects that are taught, teachers may implement a variety of practices and tools to make the learning topics accessible to the students.

An efficient teaching method is the one which targets the different skills: Reading, listening, speaking, and writing because it will cover the various needs of the learners, allowing them to freely practice what they learn in a friendly environment. So, educators around the world resorted to the eclectic method, which is, according to (Kumar 2013) a "combination" of various means and procedures (2). Because the eclectic method is not only one method, using it means that the teachers are free to employ diverse techniques that they see as helpful with their students, which could result in a well-structured and more meaningful learning process.

4. Rationalization for Using the Eclectic Method

The eclectic method has gained a great popularity due to many reasons. It allows the teachers to implement a set of activities and techniques in the classroom, which is a great advantage of this method. Therefore, it is argued that using only one method, as opposed to the eclectic method, will limit the teachers' capacities and restrict their capability of adapting and updating the resources used with the students, as they will be less room for creation from the part of the teachers and the learners as well (Gilliland, B. E., James, R. K., & Bowman, J. T 1994, p. 455) Besides, Lynn Della Pietra argues that because using the eclectic method means that the learning process is learner-centered, students are more comfortable. When the students are motivated by the teachers' creative activities, they will feel more

involved in the leaning material. Thus, they will be more willing to participate in the making and achieving the learning goals (2009).

If the eclectic method is used properly, it can make the learning experience more personal. Accordingly, in *Eclecticism and Language Learning*, it is argued that one of the assumptions of the eclectic method is that it should target and suite the learners in the first place. Thus, the teachers must focus on what the student need rather than concerning themselves with what method they should be using. The goal of eclecticism is to allow for a more flexible method. So, the perfect method is the one which is composed of a variety of techniques and methods that suit the learner's interests and serves their needs (Wali 2009, p. 40).

Similarly, Larsen-Freeman notes that teacher is free to adjust his teaching methods according to the circumstances around him. Thus, the selection of the appropriate method and the way a certain method is going to be applied depend on both the teacher and the students. In doing so, and in Larsen-Freeman words, a method can be "decontextualized", depending on the learning situations. This indicates that for the learning process to be effective, it must be more personal and stimulating for the learners (Larsen-Freeman 2000, p. v). So, it is the teacher's responsibility to be aware of the methods they are using and work on updating them regularly so that they are as appropriate as possible to the learning situations in the classroom. The flexible attitudes of the teachers when using the eclectic method contributed to its wider use around the world (Weideman 2001)It is argued that teachers consider this method as a badge of honour" due to its diversity of choices and effectiveness (p. 2).

Language teachers are supposed to help students develop their various skills. Accordingly, the use of the eclectic method, with the teacher's freedom to implement the techniques and activities, allows them to target student's skills and involve them in the learning process. Accordingly, Widdowson argues that in order to teach

communicative language skills, teachers are required to use different methods, to develop their learners' linguistic and communicative abilities (1978, p. 144). In addition, for (Nunan 1991), teachers are supposed to nourish the creativity within their students, and to do that, they need to use the appropriate methods according to each learning situation (p. 228). Thus, the suitable method for this propose is the eclectic method.

5. Principles of Eclecticism and Literature Classes

Since the eclectic method consists of a diversity of techniques, different methods can be applied within it. Thus, for (Ali, A.M. 1981), the eclectic method is based on several principles which can be listed as follows: to fulfill the lesson's aims the teachers are free to shift between various activities which they see as suitable for each class. Second, the choice of the suitable teaching technique is open to the teacher in order to come up with the right activities which he sees as appropriate. Next, the correct choice of the teaching techniques by the teacher will ensure an effective learning experience in which the students are engaged and from which they will greatly benefit and enjoy at the time. The fourth principle of the eclectic method is to facilitate the material in hand and help the students solve any complexities that may occur during the learning process. The fifth and last principle is believing that the use of the eclectic method will allow for a better utilization of both 'time' and 'effort' (p. 7).

It can be concluded from Ali's principles above that teachers who use the eclectic method have more freedom in the classroom. They can choose the best techniques, which they believe are appropriate to each learning situation and subject. Also, the correct use of the means and activities would make the learning process more valuable and enjoyable to both the teacher and the learner because the students will be willingly engaged in the leaning martials, which will lead to a better understanding of the subjects.

Furthermore, teachers who implement a variety of methods and techniques practice what is called principled eclecticism, especially in teaching literature. It is the use of a set of techniques and activities from

various methods, depending on the learning situations (Larsen-Freeman 2000). In doing so, teachers will have their own teaching styles, which may vary from one teacher to another according to the learners' needs. Thus, the most appropriate method of teaching is the one which gets the students attention and involve them in the learning experience (p. 281). As long as the students are motivated and thoroughly engaged, they will acquire the learning material more easily and more effectively. Furthermore, the nature of the literary texts requires the teachers to depend on more than one method or activity, which makes the eclectic method crucial in the understanding of literary texts, as it allows teachers to use a variety of methods and activities.

Literature is considered one of the useful learning materials to EFL students. Duff and Maley stated that literary texts have been increasingly gaining more interest in the EFL classes, and they are regarded as an authentic teaching material. The texts used by the teachers allow them to expose the students to carefully structured pieces of writing that they can benefit from both its form and content, especially if the texts they study are written by native speakers of the language (Duff, A. & Maley, A 1990). Similarly, (Lazar 1993) argues that the goal behind implementing literary texts in the classroom is to allow the learners to discover various connotations of the same text. However, to do so, they probably need assistance from the teacher who may use a variety of activities to reach the learning objectives (p. 3). In addition, literature is considered as "legitimate and valuable resource for language teaching" (Carter, R.A. & Long, M.N 1991). the value of literature in the teaching English stems from the variety of language structures that the students may reproduce after they get more and more familiar with. Also, the different layers of meaning in literary texts permit the students to delve into their deeper levels for better understanding of their messages (p. 9).

As argued above, one literary text may have more than one meaning, which calls for a suitable method to be used when teaching it. (Lazar 1993) believes that "learning situation[s]" differ from one another, which requires the teacher to use a set of tools and utilize different methods that suitable and relevant to the learners according to the texts which they study (p. 1).

5.1 Developing Communicative Competence Through Conversation in Literature Classes

One of the effective learning strategies is conversation. (Head, K. and P. Taylor 1997) point out that an effective learning requires an appropriate interaction between the teacher and the learners, which will ensure that the learners are involved to a great extent in the learning process. This sense of belonging and involvement triggers the students' use of their skills and abilities and help them feel comfortable and build meaningful relationships among them and with the teacher (36).

Similarly, it is believed that for an effective learning of a language to take place, it must be based on the student's ability to make and maintain meaningful conversations. It can be noted from these arguments that they stress the communicative aspect of the language. Language here is perceived as a medium for building meaningful relations inside the classroom so that the students are involved and have the capacity and the freedom to express themselves using their communicative skills (Hatch 1978). So, an effective learning implies that the teacher succeeds in establishing the appropriate connections and a comfortable atmosphere between him and the learners and among the learners themselves (p. 448).

Likewise, it is argued that the capacity to make and maintain a conversation does not necessarily require grammatical skills or competence (Schmidt, R. and Frota 1986). Despite the fact that students may make grammatical mistakes when speaking, they may be able to keep a meaningful conversation. Thus, the teacher may focus more on the students' ability to establish a communicative situation rather than the students' grammatical mistakes which may occur (p. 286).

To illustrate that, (Schmidt 1983) have conducted a pivotal study to show how people can develop communicative skills without learning grammar. He attempts to illustrate how foreign language learners can acquire the target language and be able to communicate without learning the grammar.

The subject of the study, was a Japanese native speaker named Wes, who was 33 years old. Wes moved from Japan to live in the United States for three years. After this period, where he was interacting with native speakers of English and without any lessons of grammar, Wes could speak fluently and was able to maintain a conversation. During the three years, Wes was exposed to a comfortable environment with native speakers, and decreased his contact with his native language and friends because “his professional life required steadily increasing interaction with English speakers in a variety of situations” (p. 140).

This friendly environment in which Wes lived, in the United States among native speakers, allows his to develop a communicative competence in English language. Furthermore, Schmidt asserts that “while the creation of art may be a solitary act, the promotion of an artist’s career is not and in fact depends nearly as much on personal and communicative qualities as on innate talent, imagination, and developed technique” (p. 140). Therefore, Wes’s “confidence, his willingness to communicate, and especially his persistence in communicating what he has in his mind and understanding what his interlocutors have in their minds go a long way towards compensating for his grammatical inaccuracies” (p. 161).

6. Teaching Cultural Backgrounds Through Literature

Since we cannot separate language from culture, students often find difficulties not in understanding the language structures of literary texts, but rather they have issues with the culture that underlies the texts, and it is the teacher’s role to facilitate the cultural features of literary texts to them. This process will facilitate the acquisition of the target language (Lazar 1993). An eclectic teacher can teach culture through conversations among the students in the target language. By doing so, they will learn the linguistic structures along with the cultural features of the literary texts.

In addition, Literary texts may be used to teach not only the language but also other subjects. For instance, when teachers choose a certain novel to be studied, they can introduce it to the students from many angles including its historical, political, and cultural features as well (Violetta-

Irene 2015). This would make the students aware of relevance of the text and the events that take place in a certain novel. By learning the different backgrounds of the literary text, its comprehension becomes more accessible.

Literature has been used in EFL classes for a variety of reasons. It enables the students to learn the skills they need in their daily life. For example, a carefully chosen literary texts that is relevant to the students' needs and interests allow them to "change attitudes, and to help eradicate prejudice while fostering empathy, tolerance, and an awareness of global problems" (Violetta-Irene 2015).

Conclusion

This research investigated the effectiveness of using the eclectic method in teaching English language and literature. It revealed that the freedom, that eclecticism in English language teaching offers, can facilitate to a great degree the acquisition of English. The variety of methods that teachers may use in the classroom allow them to select carefully whatever suits their learners in order to make sure that they are motivated, hence, they can learn more effectively. Besides, the integration of the cultural aspects of the literary texts can improve the acquisition of the language since they cannot be separated from one another. This research also concluded that the use of conversations inside the classroom allows students to improve their communicative skills.

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