OBSERVATION OF TEACHING METHODOLOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CLASSROOM - A CASE STUDY IN FIVE HIGH SCHOOLS IN ALBANIA

Brisida Sefa, PhD Candidate
University "SEEU, Tetovo
brsefa@yahoo.com.au
North Macedonia

ABSTRACT

The acquisition of a Second Language, particularly English, has mainly one purpose, that one of achieving communication skills. Therefore, the need for good communication skills in English, has increased the demand for English language teaching all around the world nowadays. A good communication skill is only achieved when we have an accurate command of the language. There are a lot of people today who want to improve their level of English and there are a lot of ways to learn English. First of all being instructed in school, moreover travelling, study abroad or even through media and internet. There is an increasing demand for English which has created an extremely high demand for quality language teaching, materials as well as resources. As McKay (2002) emphasizes, English is the language of globalization, international communication, commerce, trade, tourism, the media and pop culture and there are different motivations for learning it. Therefore, the demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is as high as ever.

English teaching in the Albanian context was dominated by grammar and translation teaching method in the 1970s. Later, until the 1990s, there was an improvement on English teaching methods. Since the 1990s, Albanians grew a lot of interest in studying English as a foreign language. New methods were introduced in 2000s which included vocabulary, reading, grammar, language functions, and pronunciation practice.

Despite the evolution of the new English curriculum, the state of English teaching in Albania remained based on traditional methods. The aim of this study is to evaluate the English Language Teaching methodology used in the Albanian High Schools as well as it is an attempt to recognize how the modern methodologies develop students' communicative competence, but also to examine the impact of implementation of innovative teaching approach on students' motivation and its effectiveness with regard to how the language is taught.

Keywords: Teaching Methodologies, English as a Foreign Language, Student-centered Method

1. INTRODUCTION

Today English is the most widely studied foreign language, exactly like it was Latin in the past. According to linguists and language specialists, the history of language teaching has been changing throughout of history, depending on the needs of the learners. Kelly (1969) and Howatt (1984) have emphasized that language teaching has always had different issues and language teaching methods have evolved according to the changes in the kind of proficiency learners need.

The place of English is particularly important in all Albanian schools. Firstly, this is because of English examination at the end of the Albanian high schools and secondly, due to the rapid growth of English as well as its widespread in every field. Learning English is important for all citizens in Albania, especially young people, as they must comply with the demand for involvement in the international world. This interest in learning English became even more clear when a lot of language centers were established in Albania and English is taught in all levels. This is because students should have satisfactory level of English to enter to University.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020), (OECD), since the 2000s, Albanian education has improved, and learning outcomes has raised. However, learning levels remain among the lowest in Europe. As a consequence, there is a continuous low funding, unstable governance, and limited capacity. Education system standard can be raised if student learning is placed at the center of Albania's evaluation and assessment process. OECD (2020) emphasizes that despite setting of policy priorities by Pre-University Education Strategy, planning and implementation capacity are relatively weak, because individual agencies develop their own work plans, which undermines sector-wide planning. In addition, indicators and targets found in the strategy are not aligned with each other, which diminishes the strategy's ability to drive system improvement (p. 47).
English, as a foreign language in Albanian public and private schools, starts as a compulsory subject in grade I of elementary education as part of the improvement to the teaching plan in 2004 and revised in 2021, approved by the MoESY.

Since 2012, English is included in the compulsory examination in lower secondary education "Provimet e Lirimit" and high school education "Matura Shteterore", in addition to Albanian and Math. The language level tested in this national examination in lower secondary education is A2 and in high school education is B1. English is also included in the list of elective subjects for the state graduation examination "Matura Shteterore" and the language level is B2. Moreover, since September 2021, unlike previous years when English started in the third grade, from September 13 it will start to be taught in the first grade. The MoESY has approved the English language program for the first grade. English will be the first language for all students, from first grade to 12^{th}.
English teachers at High schools have welcomed the use of modernmethodologies in their curriculum. However, traditional methods are used in our schools and as a result, Albanian students fail to achieve a proficient level in English. Bern (1990) pointed out that even though students have enough knowledge of grammatical structures and forms, this does not fully prepare them for the effective and appropriate use of the second language they are learning. Consequently, Albanian classrooms needs to be shifted from teaching and discussions of different grammatical rules to the use of activities suitable to build students' fluency and ability to communicate.

This paper focuses on modern methodologies, such as Communicative Language Teaching or Task-based language teaching, as being the most successful recent techniques in teaching a foreign language. According to these approaches, learning a foreign language successfully comes through

having to communicate real meaning in a real context. The real communication teaches students to learn to use the language and the classroom changes from a teacher-centered classroom into a student-centered classroom.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

European schools started to welcome the "modern languages" in the eighteenth century, and their textbooks had a lot of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary and a lot of sentences to translate, whereas oral practices were limited. Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out that during the eighteenth and nineteenth century the goal of foreign language study was to read literature and Grammar translation was a method which was widely used, where grammatical system of the language had not connection with the language of real communication. Students used their native language to explain new concepts and a comparison was made between the foreign language and the native language. This method created a lot of frustration for students, but it did not require a lot of demand for teachers.

In the late nineteenth century, there is a movement in language teaching. Grammar Translation method was rejected and there was a demand for oral proficiency in foreign language studies.L. Sauveur (1826-1907) in his language school in Boston used the Natural Approach as a Second Language Teaching Method and he was among those language specialists who considered that using natural principles to language classes was the best method to learn a language. Richards & Rodgers (2006) emphasized that the linguists who supported the Natural Method agreed that the foreign languages should be taught using the spontaneous and direct use of the foreign language in the classroom rather than analytical procedures focusing explanation of grammar rules. The natural language learning principles were the basics of the Direct Method which was the result of the reaction of the language specialists against the grammar translation method.

In the 1920s, British applied linguists developed some different procedures and general principles which they were referred to as the Oral Approach to language teaching which was accepted to English Language Teaching by 1950s. An advocate of the Oral Approach was the Australian George Pittman who developed some teaching materials based on the Situational Approach. It was Pittman and his colleagues who developed sets of teaching materials based on the Situational Approach. One of the principles of the Situational Language Teaching is "new language points are introduced and practiced situationally" (Richards & Rodgers, 2006).
In between the Situational Language Teaching and Communicative Language Teaching approach was developed the Audiolingual Method, which according to Richards & Rodgers (2001) was created toward the end of 1950s, due to a lot of attention which was given to foreign language teaching in the United States.

The years from 1970's to 1980's is marked by a changed in language teaching. So, the language teaching shifted from grammar-base approaches and methods to different directions. Therefore, the language teaching took a direction to more communicative approaches. According to Richards & Rodgers (2001) the communicative movement developed a different view of the language, as well as of language learning, of teachers and learners at the same time. This movement focused on the language as communication and also had a different perspective of the classroom, which was considered as "an environment for authentic communication" (p. 71).

The innovative methods considered as alternative approaches and methods of 1970's and 1980's was Total Physical Response, Silent way, Counselling learning, Suggestopedia, Neurolinguistics Programming and Multiple Intelligences, which are more recent methods.
The Silent Way is a language learning method developed in 1963 by Caleb Gattegno, which is based on the thesis that the teacher should be silent most of the time in the classroom, and on the other hand the learners should be encouraged to talk more in the classroom.

By the end of the 60s it was clear that the situational approach had its course. British applied linguists underlined another function of the language which was not observed in approaches to language teaching until then, which was the functional and communicative view of the language.The CLT, which dates back from the late 1960's, first started as a British invention. However, during the 1970's the CLT has developed outside Britain.

Task-Based Learning Teaching (TBLT) is an approach where tasks are in the center of unit planning and language learning instructions. TLBT is a movement from the 1980s as it is introduced as a logical development of CLT. According to Nunan the communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than on form (1989, p.10 as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.224). The learners assume various roles in a TBLT sch as the role of a group participant, a monitor and a risk-taker or innovator. The teacher's role is to develop tasks that are as close to real-world as possible, creating activities that are meaningful and relevant to students.
Several linguists have stated that implementing a certain teaching method from one curriculum to another one, may cause difficulties in the context of language teaching. (Holliday, 1994). Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) stated that:

> "Revising authentic methodology has therefore often meant buying into the symbolic capital associated with ELT rhetoric but retaining the local conditions of the practice. Appropriate communicative language teaching in Hanoi, for example, might use the same pedagogic nomenclature as in London, but look very different in classroom practice. English language is already made to serve individual and social needs in local areas. What is authentic in these local areas is not necessarily the material presented in the text, but the interactions between classroom participants—interactions that are based on broader social, historical, and cultural issues, such as the purpose of education in that society or the ideal of a good citizen" (p.200).

1.2. An Overview of Albanian Education System

Early childhood education
According to the OECD (2020) the majority of Albanian children attend pre-school. Pre-school in Albania is not obligatory and is composed by kindergarten and preparatory classes for children aged three to six. Kindergartens has 3 age groups: 3-4-year-olds, 4-5-year-olds, and 5-6-year-olds, while preparatory classes take place in basic education schools and includes five-year-old children who may or may not have previously attended pre-school.
Despite the efforts of the ministry of education to increase the quality of pre-school over the last years, challenges still exist in delivering a good quality pre-school education. However, the quality of teaching staff and the physical condition of pre-schools remain key challenges.

Primary and secondary education

The present challenges in primary and secondary education are variability of class size and student to teacher ratios. About 49% of enrolment in basic education in 2016-2017 was in rural areas, as compared to 54% in 2006-2007 (MoESY, 2018, p.42 as cited in OECD, 2020, pg. 55). In rural areas, there are about 17 students per class in public basic education, as compared to about 21 students per class on average across all Albanian basic education public schools. However, about 27% of classrooms in Albania had over 30 students in 2015-2016, and overcrowding is of particular concern in urban centres (UNESCO, 2017:24). Some teachers have reported class sizes of over 40 students, beyond the legal limit. In OECD countries, the average class size is about 21 and 23 for primary and lower secondary schools respectively (OECD, 2018:43). The student to teacher ratio in public basic education is smaller in rural areas, about 11, as compared to a national average of about 14 (MoESY, 2018:42). At the upper secondary level, the student per teacher ratio in public schools is also lower in rural areas (about 13) than on average in Albania (about 14). In OECD countries, the ratio of students to teaching staff is 15 across all primary schools, 13 in public lower secondary schools and 13 overall (OECD, 2018, p.43 as cited in OECD, 2020, pg. 55).
All students at the end of 9th grade they take the National Basic Education Examination. The pass rate for all tests taken in 2017 was 99.2%, which indicates the National Basic Education Examination is not a barrier for entry into upper secondary education (MoESY, 2017:45) (as cited in OECD, 2020, pg. 59). At the upper secondary level, students can choose to enter general (gymnasium), "oriented" such as arts or vocational programs. At the end of upper secondary education all students undergo through the state Matura Examination, which marks the completion of the upper secondary education and also it is the tertiary entry instrument since 2006.

1.3. ELT in Albanian Context

According to the Albanian Ministry of Education Sport and Youth (MoESY) Report (2016) before year 1990, English language learning and teaching in Albania, like the entire education system, was influenced by the political class in power. During that time children began to learn English in Class V at the age of 11 along with other foreign languages like French, Russian and Italian. Priorities in foreign language education were subject to change on political and ideological grounds. Students from 14 to 18 years' old who were attending high schools in the big cities studied one foreign language, whereas many schools in rural areas did not offer a foreign language at all.

From September 2021, the English language has started to be taught in all schools of the country from the first grade. The news was announced by the MoESY early August 2021. Over the years, the interest in learning English among Albanian children has been high, given the fact that many parents pay for learning this language by sending their children to private courses. Early learning of English is seen as closely linked to knowledge and the use of technology. However, many sociologists and psychologists are opposedto this decision many schools' infrastructure. According to many sociologists, introduction of English into the first grade has been accelerated as it should at least have been introduced as a pilot program before being extended to all schools in the country.

During the period 2005-2013, English language learning became a priority for the MoESY. "In the school year 2007-2008, 76% of all students who were studying foreign languages in pre-university education were learning English" (p. 49). Since English became an elective subject in the State Graduation Examination, with the highest coefficient for admission to higher education, a lot of importance was given to ELT. MoESY encouraged financially English language teachers all over the country in order to meet the desired teaching standards and to discourage teachers of English from leaving the teaching profession, which was contested by the teachers' associations. The MoES has

continuously cooperated with the English Language Teachers' Association of Albania (ELTA) to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.2. Purpose of the research

The purpose of classroom observation, as a qualitative data collection instrument in this study is mainly to examine the teaching methodologies used in the Albanian classroom as well as to recognize how the modern methodologies, such as CLT approach develops students' communicative competence.
The use of this data collection instrument helped find out if the modern methodologiesare used in the classroom by teachers. Moreover, this data collection is chosen because it is thought as effective with the aim to explore classroom practices used by English language teachers.

2.3. Subjects

The participants in this study were 5 high school teachers. Classroom observations were carried out with 5 teachers from high schools in Tirana and Durrës who teach English as a Foreign Language for more than 5 years. After having obtained the approval from the School Principal and from the teachers observed, an observation checklist was used to collect data. The classroom observation checklist investigates the teaching techniques used in ELT classrooms as well as teachers and student's role and behavior, activities and materials used in the classroom.

2.4. Method and Data collection:

The data collected for this study comes from classroom observations of 5 High School teachers as well as their teaching practices. The observations were according to the observation checklist as well as from notes taken during the observation procedure about teacher's instruction as well as their practices and also about teacher-students interaction during the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, the questions were designed to encourage participants to explain their teaching experiences, which were as follows:

(i) What are the teaching methodologies used in the Albanian classrooms?
(ii) How are the teaching methodologies used in the classroom?
(iii) Do the teaching techniques used in the classroom during English learning process affect students' attitude towards English?

3. RESULTS

3.1. Observation Process

The data collected for this study comes from classroom observations of 5 High School teachers as well as their teaching practices. After having obtained the approval from the School Principal and from the teachers observed, an observation checklist was used to collect data. Despite the differences in the types of lessons they taught and teaching materials they used it is worth mentioning that all participants were extremely similar in the way they gave instructions as well as in their procedures. When they gave instructions, their focus was on the structure of the language and the grammar too. In addition, they followed the textbook very carefully. Students were controlled by the teacher; they

followed all the exercises of the text as well as all the questions related to the text too. Furthermore, the instructions the teacher gave were according to the textbook students used in class, which emphasizes the teachers rely heavily on teaching materials.

3.2. Discussions and results

The findings and results will focus on teachers' role and student'sbehavior, activities, and materials used in theclassroom as well as the teaching - learning process as explained in the classroom observation checklist.
The table below shows teachers' observation checklist.

Table 1 classroom observation checklist

Classroom observation checklist	V.P.	E.D.	G.B.	N.G.	T.GJ.
Student centered environment			√		
Student participation is evident during class			√		√
Teacher acts as negotiator			√		
Small group discussion			√		
Role-play activities			√		
Use of authentic material from the target language					
Textbooks used in the classroom are not grammar-based			√		√
Target language is used during all class time	√	√	√	√	√
Minimal use of native language during the class	√	√	√	√	√
Directions for exercises and activities are given in TL	√	√	√	√	√
Choral repetition and drills					
Oral expression of opinions by students					
Students give each other feedback			√		
Correction is minimal from teacher			√		
Tolerates learners' errors			√		√
Teacher lectures to class	√	√		√	
Provides learners with activities that have to be carried out in pairs or groups			√		
Encourages learners to correct each other's errors			√		
Encourages learners to self-correct themselves					
Dominates classroom situations	√	√		√	
Monitors classroom situations			√		

From my observation, it can be seen that in G.D' class the students were more actively engaged in communicative activities than those in the rest of the classes observed. It looked like they enjoyed the

communicative group activities in the class. Students felt good and enjoyed speaking English in small groups.G.D's class was more communicatively in nature than the other classes. The classroom observations revealed the weakness of the English teaching methods in Albanian schools. However, it was encouraging to sit in the G.D' class, whose observation revealed that students were engaged in communicative actives and the teacher did not rely exclusively on student' textbook but she used other teaching materials and she emphasized that choosing and using materials is important, especially in improving communication and student engagement in the activities. Moreover, students were engaged in group work and the teacher planned well her lesson in order to grab students' attention. In addition, she focused on fluency rather than accuracy as well as tolerated students' errors while they gave their opinion throughout the lesson. Finally, the teacher' role was a facilitator and a participant in the learning-teaching process which shows that the classroom is a student - centered one. As also emphasized by Breen and Candlin (1980) "the implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way" (p.110).

On the other hand, the other observations indicated that the teachers used only the prescribed textbooks and the whiteboards in their classrooms. They followed strictly all the exercises of the textbook without linking any of the exercises with the real-life situations. Moreover, every time students made mistakes, the teachers interrupted and corrected them. The activities provided by the teachers did not leave students much choice with their answers, even though they might have been correct. Finally, the teachers interrupted often students to correct their mistakes and did not tolerate them even for their pronunciation.

3.3. Teacher's role and student's behavior

The findings revealed that the classes observed were mostly focused on included explicit grammar teaching, reading comprehension, and book focus. Students, with the exception of G.B 's class, did not have opportunities to interact with one other in the target language. Furthermore, the data indicated that teachers planned their lessons addressing questions to students, whereas students should provide correct answers to the teacher. According to Breen and Candlin (1980) the teacher assumes different roles in a CLT classroom, such as that one of a facilitator, a guidance, an independent participant, an observer and a researcher. Students, on the other hand, act like active participants in the classroom and should be given several communicative activities and opportunities for interaction and communication.
In the first observation, students, demonstrated some behavioral issues and caused an interruption of the lesson. Gardner (2001) pointed out that if the lesson was not interesting and not well-planned by the teacher, the learners will reflect it in their behaviour throughout the learning situation.

3.4. Activities and materials used in the classroom

Classroom observations indicated that teachers did not include various activities or materials in their classroom in order to encourage communication and interaction between the students. Apart from observation 3, all the other ones demonstrated that the teachers followed strictly not only student's textbook, but also all the exercises on it. Supplementary or authentic materials were not a priority for the teachers, so students did not have the chance to experience a communicative classroom, or communicative interactions. They were focused only on final exam of "matura shtetërore" which was revealed also by the observation of N. G's class, who instead of using the textbook "Life" designed by National Geographic Learning, decided to use the textbook "Towards Matura" designed by Filara Botime Shkollore, an Albanian publishing house, which consists of only exercises about grammar and

reading comprehension texts similar to the final exam. It seemed that the only concern of the teachers is students' final exam result rather than students' abilities to communicate in English. If teachers were more careful in planning classroom activities, students would be more challenged, and the classroom would be more engaging. It was clear that all the teachers who were observed in this study did not succeed in doing that.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that teachers, with one exception, were focused on preparing their students for the final exam of "matura shtetërore". This was even more emphasized by the third observation when the teacher instead of using the textbook "Life" designed by National Geographic Learning, decided to use the textbook "Towards Matura" designed by Filara Botime Shkollore, an Albanian publishing house, designed especially for the Matura and approved by the Ministry of Education Sport and Youth which consists of only exercises about grammar and reading comprehension texts similar to the final exam.

Furthermore, it appeared that teachers believed that all speaking activities related to textbook exercises were communicative activities, but on the opposite, they showed that the classroom was a teacher-centered one and the students, chosen by the teachers, only answered the questions of the textbook without expressing freely their opinion.

Finally, it can be concluded that, even though the traditional methods were used almost by all the teachers observed, this study reveals that modern methodologies can promote students' communicative abilities and students consider it as an appropriate attitude towards an effective learning environment. The teacher G.B. was a light at the end of the tunnel, as her classroom observation revealed that she did her best in providing students with extra materials in order for them to practice the target language, as well as givetheir opinions and be part of communicative interactions.

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