



The Use of the Eclectic Method in an English Language Classroom for Learning Specific Skills

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the need to base a teachers classroom activities, tasks and skill learning for English language on not just one approach, model or method, but numerous, to create a whole diverse learning environment. The Eclectic Method allows the teacher to better cover the necessary skills, tasks and activities for students to be able to learn, understand and ultimately gain the knowledge quintessential to becoming competent in speaking, reading, writing and listening in English in a large classroom setting in a shorter amount of time. Following this approach allows for the teacher to teach larger groups more information in the allotted time given. The professor of the class can use various methods, technique's, and activities to relate the necessary information to participates' while motivating them to learn. The students are taught more to their specific needs and learning styles through the use of the Eclectic Method. It was observed through various skills assessments that utilizing this method, students were able to internalize, use and remember the information given to them quicker. This is because it was adapted to their learning styles and needs throughout the activities completed utilizing specific techniques at the disposal of the teacher.

Keywords: eclectic method, English language learning, needs, skills

A. Introduction

While teaching English as a Foreign Language in institutions in Ecuador two reoccurring problems normally encountered are large class sizes and insufficient classroom or face-to-face hours teachers have with English language students. This problem does not allow for students to gain sufficient knowledge or time to practice to move forward in the language learning process. Throughout 7 years of teaching English in Ecuador in various institutions, universities and schools, specifically in Cuenca the professor encountered many students in comparable situations that were expected to learn and ultimately master large amounts of English language in a very short amount of time in a large classroom setting. They have all taken multiple years of English, but are still at a beginner level. To overcome these obstacles in the classroom the Eclectic Method of teaching has been adopted in many situations for reasons, which will be explained in the findings and results. This method allows students to receive the individual attention that they need when there is a large group of students. This method has also allowed

for the input of much more information in a much shorter amount of time to obtain the necessary results to progress in language learning.

This paper specifically looks at an English language class at the Universidad de Educacion (UNAE) in Azogues, Ecuador. This group of teacher trainees is a lower intermediate group in their third semester of university study. The specific topic being taught in the example plan created by the teacher explaining the grammar point; comparatives and superlatives and adjectives to describe and compare personal preferences about food. The article below will discuss the techniques used by the professor of the class incorporated within the Eclectic Method. These techniques are to be taught in face-to-face class time hours in the most direct way possible for students to absorb and learn the large amount of information presented to them in a short amount of time. The multiple methods, activities and tasks used by the teacher and discussed are used to increase the student's knowledge, teach directly to students needs and learning styles and increase the students English language skills in the given environment and time period.

Problems Encountered

One of the difficulties' facing ELT at UNAE is the large class size for learning English. The specific group focused on consists of 30 students. According to the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2010) class sizes should not be large. More than 15 students can impede meaningful learning between the teacher and the student. If the goals for students are to advance and gain the necessary knowledge to understand and speak English authentically other strategies must be utilized in the classroom when ideal class sizes are not realistic.

Another difficulty the teacher encounters is the allotted time in the semester for the group of students. These students only have two or three hours of English a week throughout the semester. They are all expected to be at a B1 level or be able to pass a B1 proficiency exam in the end of the sixth semester of study. The Common European Framework explains that 350-400 guided learning or classroom hours are necessary to learn a language (Desveaux, 2013). This group will receive a maximum of 40 face-to-face hours in the current April to July 2016 cycle. If the schedule for English language classes continues throughout future semesters the students will receive fewer hours of guided English classes necessary to take the B1 exam at the end of the sixth semester. Therefore, another approach has been taken by the professor to assure the students will receive all of the instruction, practice time and understanding to learn the large amount of the information included in the curriculum for the given cycle in fewer hours.

B. Literature review

Li (2012) explains how there is no single method or technique which functions to teach all skills and to the specific needs of the students therefore it is necessary as a teacher to take an Eclectic approach, which uses many activities involving various skills to motivate student learning. This supporter also points out how just following a single method can limit what and how the student learns. This can make it more difficult to teach to the needs of the students and the limits of the given class size and time. ESL students, especially university students, normally do not have a lot of time to learn a foreign language and expect to have the same results even when they invest fewer hours in the language learning process. The curriculum created for the English language groups in UNAE expected the students to learn a large amount of information, retain the information and be able to use the information in an authentic setting in a short amount of time. According to Billah (2015) the use of the Eclectic method allows for this to happen by combining the strengths of different methods, competences and pedagogies. This is a fairly new concept and for it to work in the classroom teachers must be prepared to think in new ways and constantly be open to change. Teachers must also have knowledge of the various methods and approaches to be able to connect the methods together in a form that functions in the classroom. Therefore, it is believed putting the approaches, methods and models together randomly may not provide the necessary results an English language teacher is looking for. The teacher must have sufficient prior knowledge of various methodologies to properly utilize the Eclectic Method. (Billah, 2015)

Kumar (2013) also supports the use of the Eclectic Method for teaching English. He also recognizes the need to teach language as a whole and the necessity of teachers to have knowledge of many types of methods and approaches. This supports the teaching strategy showing how grammar and vocabulary is taught together in the example of the plan and using

certain other models and methods to connect the various activities. It is also discussed how language should not be separated into parts such as, grammar or vocabulary. He believes it should be taught as a whole or together and the Eclectic Method allows this to happen in the classroom. He states "language should not be separated into chunks like pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary (Kumar, 2013, p.1)." These competences should be taught through various methods and approaches, proving the necessity of using the Eclectic Method. Following this plan will create students who will be able to successfully use English consistently and in authentic everyday settings. They will be able to follow a natural sequence to develop their language skills appropriately inside and outside of the classroom. The use of the Eclectic method was adopted by the author of the paper and utilized in the topic plan through the use of various models, methods, approaches and techniques to help the students learn and understand English language as a whole. (Kumar,2013)

One of the strategies used by the professor of the lesson was the Flipped classroom, which supports the Eclectic approach. It is defined by Bishop & Verleger (2013) as a learning technique where students participate in-group activities in the classroom and utilize computer resources independently outside of the classroom. They make the point that this technique is loosely based on the Constructivism Model, because students must independently find answers and information on their own. In the authors class the students are meant to gain a deeper understanding of how and when to use the grammar point by watching videos and taking time for individual learning outside of the classroom. This technique individualizes the learning process and helps students feel more comfortable participating in the classroom by having students work mostly in groups or pairs to share previously gained knowledge and help each other achieve a higher understanding of the topic.

To learn to speak a language, specifically English the use many activities are essential in the classroom since language is a diverse always-changing theme and students tend to have different learning styles and needs. Therefore, one of the roles of language teachers is to provide various strategies to address all of the skills, grammar and vocabulary necessary to develop the students' language learning in the class and give them the tools to use English independently outside of the class as well. If the teacher does not teach to students needs and include diverse activities to develop students learning styles individually, they may not feel confident to practice or feel motivated to learn. These are important factors and reasons for applying many different strategies and activities in an English language classroom. (Li,2012)

C. Methodology

1. Research Design

Qualitative research using a short-term inductive approach was completed in this study. The research completed for this paper was completed in one semester or 5 months with a group of 30 English language students. This qualitative approach allowed for specific information to be obtained in a short amount of time through the use of action research to find a solution to the problems explained by the author and addressed throughout the article. Action research allowed the teacher to improve the given situation through the use of theory put into practice in the classroom.

2. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 30 students who were supposed to be a lower intermediate university level English language class. They were however a very mixed ability group. Some were advanced while others were at a true beginner level. The investigation was completed in the seventh week of the course so the teacher had a chance to understand the different learning styles and needs of the individual students. This was important, so the teacher could create different activities directed towards those needs and learning styles. All of the students' assessments, worksheets and participation in groups were used as evidence to support the professors' findings.

3. Technique of Data Analysis

In order to get the most consistent data the research was completed in the students' classroom in the university. It was completed over the span of two weeks or 6 face-to-face class hours. Much of the research was completed through observation of the students throughout the lesson. There were also question and answer sessions completed by author at the beginning and the end of the lesson. These sessions allowed the teacher to see how the teaching method functioned and varied from previous methods used with students in the past. Assessment tools

were also used to support the findings of the research. The assessment of the students through speaking activities and worksheets showed how well they were able to learn, use and comprehend the new information gained in the lesson.

4. Instrument

The main instrument used in the question and answer session was two short questionnaires. One questionnaire was used at the beginning of the class session to help the teacher pin point the needs and learning styles through various personal information and answers given by the students. The students completed another questionnaire at the end of the class session to determine the effectiveness of the techniques, activities and methods used by the teacher throughout the lesson. It also contained questions to find out if the students needs and specific learning styles were met by the professor of the class through the teaching techniques administered in class.

5. Technique of Data Analysis

The assessment tools used in the class to measure what the students learned were compared with other groups of students learning the same topics at the same time to verify if the teaching techniques applied were functioning or not. The professor of this group also discussed the success and failures of teaching this information using this approach with other English language professors and academic peers in the university who were teaching the same material using different methods at the same time to similar class sizes.

D. Discussion

Through the authors' experience in teaching EFL to students in Ecuador, the necessity to use various teaching techniques, methods and skills to teach English directly to the needs of the students has been proven over and over again in English language classrooms. The research shows combining these methods can be very helpful for the language learning process. There have been various discussions and research completed by many professionals to show a correlation to this point. The examples in this paper of the teachers' experience in EFL for utilizing the Eclectic method shows how it is the most effective method in Ecuador, but could be proven to function in other countries to combat the given problems that arise.

The first activity the students completed was using a combination of the technique of The Flipped classroom and Constructivism. This idea is based on the contexts of constructivism as it allows students to activate prior knowledge as discussed in the website called Learning Theories (ACTFL, 2010) to create new ideas from what the students learned the night before independently from videos and then use this new knowledge to expand their learning experience through class discussions about the topic in the videos. This technique therefore combines direct instruction with constructivist learning to allow the students to get the most out of the few class hours allotted to them. The flipped classroom is an important part of the teachers' method of teaching, because it is a way to increase interaction outside of the classroom and create personal connections between the students and the teachers when there is not a lot of face-to-face classroom time. The teacher goes on to use another technique as part of the Eclectic method to further the students learning (Bergmann, Overmyer & Wilie, 2014).

To utilize the knowledge learned in the Flipped Classroom activity the teacher utilizes a different approach of teaching called Communicative Learning or CLT. Richards (2006) explains how student interaction, feedback and language experimentation play important roles in this approach. Therefore, this approach was chosen for one of the communication activities to practice the grammar and vocabulary together to help the students become more comfortable communicating while using the new knowledge previously learned. This approach was effective to develop fluency, which in turn is one of the goals mentioned by Richards (2006) in Communicative Learning. While students were working in the communicative activities they were in small groups, so they had the chance to produce more language and it was a motivating factor in helping them become more fluent in a shorter amount of time. Another reason CLT was chosen by the author to use as part of the Eclectic Method plan is to promote authentic or individualized learning when there are larger class sizes and to teach various skills together. When students work in groups or pairs they are able to be more comfortable learning the grammar and vocabulary previously taught and the teacher can teach the skills simultaneously (Belchamber, 2007)".

To further the students learning they went on to use a task-based activity. Nunan (2006) explains that using the tasked based technique allows for teaching to students needs (i.e.

individualized attention), space for authentic materials, and connecting the activities to real life situations and language. This task-based activity was meant to reinforce previously learned knowledge, allow for communication in small groups to promote fluency and complete an authentic activity, so students can connect the language and grammar to real life situations. Tasks are defined as “a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. (Nunan,2006, p.5)”.The task-based activity in the plan was used to promote authentic learning in the classroom and ultimately use the written instrument as an assessment tool of what the students learned throughout the lesson driven by the Eclectic Method.

E. Findings

To support the arguments and information cited in this paper. Three tables have been included below to show how the teacher obtained the results and completed the investigation to support the conclusion. The instrument created by the professor of this lesson is used as evidence to show how the success of the Eclectic Method was measured in this class.

Table 1 shows how the teacher of the topic, grammar and vocabulary of the lesson used the students’ assessment of speaking as results of what the students learned and how well the Eclectic method worked or did not work in the classroom.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the post questionnaire to validate the results of the paper and show how well the Eclectic Method, specifically the activities, techniques and approaches chosen by the teacher of the group functioned within this class.

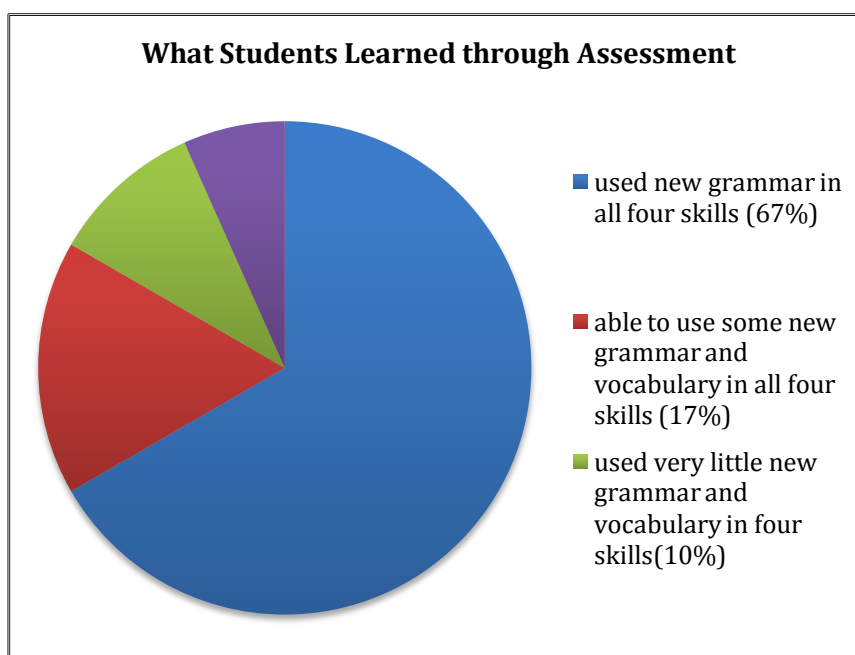


Figure 1. Students’ Learning through Assessment

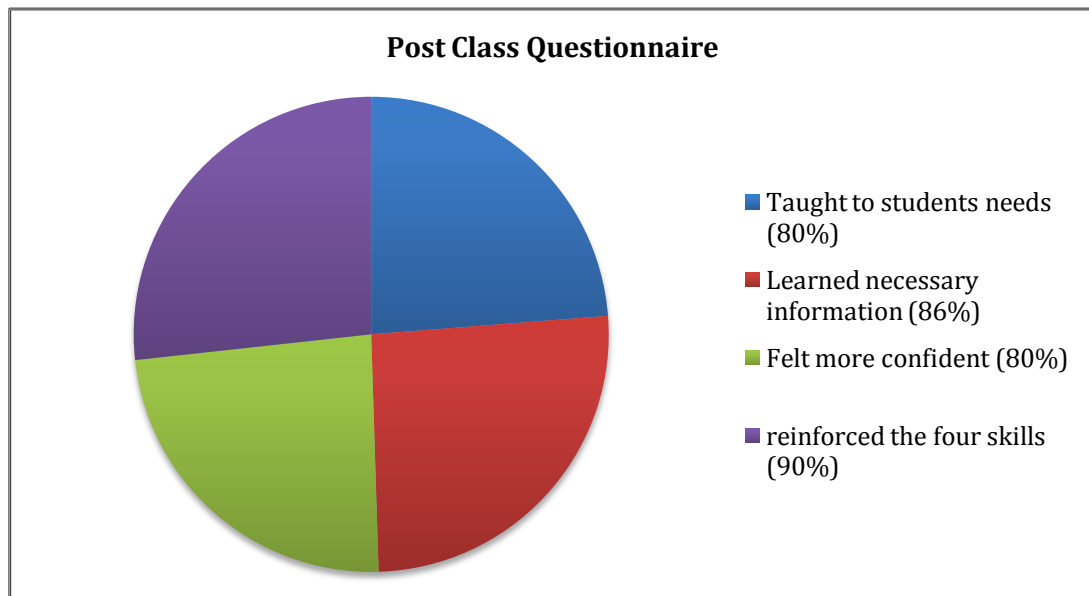


Figure 2. The Function of the Eclectic Method

F. Result

Through the findings of the research completed during and after the lesson it can be seen in Table 1 that the teacher was able to improve the English language skills of the students. More than half of the students were able to demonstrate through simple assessment and observation that they were able to naturally use the vocabulary and grammar when speaking and writing. Observation also showed that they understood the new information when listening to their team use this information. It was also seen through the peer editing process that many students were able to read the newly learned information correctly. These results allowed the professor to see that 87% of the class was actually able to utilize the new information in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in an authentic manner. There was only 17% of the group that used some of the new information, 10% a little information and 7% that did not move forward in the language learning process. Over 80% of the group of students felt they learned all four skills, were more confident, learned and internalized the new vocabulary and grammar. The post class findings represent the participant's conclusions of what was taught, what they learned and what was remembered throughout the class. It also displays clear results for the effectiveness of the teaching approach utilized by the professor of this class. As a result of the different activities and tasks the teacher is able to accurately teach and communicate with the students who are given the tools necessary to learn new vocabulary, topics and grammar in a shorter amount of time with a large group through the Eclectic Method.

G. Conclusion

It can clearly be seen that through the research, findings, results and examples given in the paper that the use of the Eclectic Method in English Language classes, specifically in UNAE can be a very useful approach to teaching. This approach allows for teachers to be able to overcome two common obstacles presented in this paper. It has clearly been shown that the use of various methods, models and techniques will give the teacher the ability to teach to large class sizes in fewer hours while covering the four skills and personalizing the lessons to the students needs. The students will in return be more fluent, comfortable and gain the necessary knowledge to move forward in English language competency. The author of this article used a combination of various teaching techniques, but others could use a combination of different techniques, models and approaches, which would function for their class depending on the needs of the students. The most positive aspect of the Eclectic method is that it can be changed and morphed depending on the teacher and students needs.

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