

AN ECLECTIC APPROACH FOR TEACHING ENGLISH: A KEY TO SOLVE THE TEXTBOOK PUZZLE

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to explicate the trajectory of the term Eclecticism, its origin and objectives, principles and characteristics, merits and demerits, conceptions and misconceptions in the context of second language teachings and learning. This is an approach, which came into second language teaching and learning to argue against the adherence of teachers, material designers and programme developers to a single method in the language teaching and learning scenario. It is not a method in itself but an approach deriving its sources from various other existing methods to build its principles and characteristics to suit the learners' needs. Hence, it can be called a pluralistic approach or a mixed approach in a second language teaching and learning. This paper suggests five simple tips to the teachers to be more eclectic and better understand their understanding of teaching-learning functions and thereby alter their teaching methods in the complex situations.

KEYWORDS: *Eclecticism, Eclectic Approach, Pluralistic Approach, Mixed Approach*

INTRODUCTION

The foundation for the formal teaching of second language or foreign language was laid down at the dawn of the 20th century. A good number of approaches and methods emerged with sound theoretical background with their distinctive principles. Regular changes in the teaching pedagogies proved that the application of one approach suits better in one condition and it does not in the other. Nunan (1991, p. 228) states, "it has been realised that there never was and probably never will be a method for all". Hence, finding a perfect or ideal method was unachievable because each method has its weaknesses and strengths. There are some practical difficulties in achieving all the language objectives and aims of the course with a single method. However, one cannot neglect the role of any method in enhancing the language teaching. As things are getting complex in a heterogeneous classroom, adherence to single method has become a big challenge to the teachers. Hence, teachers, material designers and programme organizers look for an integrated approach to meet the daily challenges in the complex environment called teaching. At this time, Prabhu (1990) and Kumaravadivelu (1994) came out with an argument against the adherence to the single method in a language teaching and learning and suggested to adapt the post method strategies into their teaching method. Kumaravadivelu in his article in 1994 exhorted the language teachers to embrace "post method condition". He further propagated to teachers about the necessity to regain the ability in order to have an instructional decision for their students, which would empower them to learn independently. This concept of mixed methodologies and approaches

were accepted by the theoreticians (Rivers, Prabhu&Kumaravadivelu) and subsequently led them to adapt a new dimension entitled as Eclectic.

ECLECTIC APPROACH IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

This term eclectic is not a new term to be seen in the field of learning. A group of ancient philosophers practised this approach primarily in order to integrate their own philosophies in the classical world. The Oxford English Dictionary while defining the term Eclecticism in a general sense, it refers that, “it borrows or is borrowed from diverse sources; etymologically it means Made up of ‘selection’” (p.56). Eclecticism is driven from a Greek word ‘eklektikos’ which means ‘choosing the best’. With this same philosophy behind its meaning it has been used in many other fields like philosophy, art, music, psychology, medicine, counselling and in second language teaching.

What is eclectic approach? River(1981) states that this approach allows teachers to make use of all the best technique of all well-known language-teaching methods into their classroom procedures. According to Suparman (2017), eclectic approach combines different methods and approaches to teach language depending on the aims of the lessons and the abilities of the learners. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000, p. 180) “when teachers who subscribe to the pluralistic view of methods pick and choose from among methods to create their own blend, their practice is said to be eclectic”. Kumar.C.P., (2013, p. 1) describes that “the eclectic method is a combination of different method of teaching and learning approaches”.

Initially Luo, He & Yang (2001) were the advocates of an eclectic approach to English teaching at the tertiary level in China. They described eclectic approach which combines listening, speaking, reading and writing and may include some practice in the classroom (Gao, 2011). Luo, He & Yang (2001), Suparman (2017) and Pennycook (1989) are in the view that the current teaching approaches are the integration of different approaches and methods from Grammar Translation Method to Communicative Language Teaching. They advise the teachers to take the advantage of all other methods and approaches while avoiding their disadvantages. Different methods are being borrowed and adapted to suit the requirement of the learners at different conditions. Practicing eclectic approach beneficial since in a dull and boring class it breaks the monotony of the teaching and learning procedures. In order to make this approach effective, a teacher should possess a good understanding of students’ experience, goals and their language style etc., Due to the birth of Eclectic approach, the teachers were free to select and choose their own strategies according to the students learning conditions.

This proposal of choosing from different methods to suit for one’s teaching purposes and situation is not a new phenomenon in teaching field. In 1983, Stern has recommended the Eclectic “compromise method” as a solution to the language teaching method and its issues. Larsen-Freeman and Mellow (2000) called this desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching as principled eclecticism. Eclecticism propagates the use of a variety of language learning activities, each of them varying in its characteristics and motivated by different learning situations(Mellow, 2002).

Even though eclectic approach is built with the existing methods and approaches, it is significant to discuss the important features of Eclectic approach here to better understand its application into second language teaching. Unlike the other methods and approaches, eclectic approach does not function strictly on a few sets of assumptions and principles. Its principles and characteristics are not limited to certain boundaries. As there are multiple teachers, learners and the teaching

context, the characteristics of eclectic approach will take its different forms. Eclectic approach believes that effective teaching will be possible with the different combination of methods and approaches with flexibility. Ali (1981, p. 7) makes an effort to sketch out the major principles of eclecticism:

Teachers are given a chance to choose different kinds of teaching techniques in each class period to reach the aims of the lesson. There is flexibility in choosing any aspect or method that teachers think suitable for teaching inside the classroom. Learners can see different kinds of teaching techniques, using different kinds of teaching aids, that help to make the lessons much more stimulating and ensures a better understanding of the material on the other hand. Solving difficulties that may emerge from the presentation of the textbook materials. Finally, it saves both time and effort in the presentation of language activities.

In most cases the construction of the eclectic approach for a particular class or lesson is built by the teachers, according to their students' needs and abilities. A particular teacher decides the choice of methods or combination of different methods into their teaching. Hence, it is purely a subjective approach to teaching. This is the first characteristic of this pluralistic approach. (Mwanza, 2017). The second characteristic of eclectic approach is that the role of L1 in learning L2 is unavoidable. To motivate the students to participate in the communicative activities the teachers can allow the students who struggle to communicate their ideas by using code switching and code mixing. It provides opportunity to make use of both interlingual and crosslingual approaches into language teaching. The third characteristic of eclectic approach is called situational or context specific. Hence, according to the context of teaching and learning, the understanding and the implementation of the approach should be contextualised or in simple words, it should be localized. Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 198) while referring to the above statements spells out that, "global principles [are] for general guidance, but their implications need to be worked out for local everyday practice". Another important characteristic of Eclectic approach is considering error as a part of the learning process. This does not mean that it admits errors but it advocates error correction at the end of every communicative activity. The teachers and the fellow students involve in correcting the mistakes of the other students will help them to learn from mistakes. (Mwanza, 2017) In teaching of grammar, the eclectic method places importance to approaches inductive and deductive approach. Moreover, it promotes the integration of both in some cases. Another important characteristic of eclectic approach is that it views language as a whole (Mwanza, 2017) (Kumar.C.P.,2013). The components of language do not have any meaning if they are separated from each other. The meaning of the spoken or written words' meaning is expressed only when the language is used as a whole. It should not be separated from the culture either. When a word is learnt in its cultural context, it generates various meanings to the same in the different cultural context. The eclectic approach proposes for a learner centred lesson, but this does not mean that the students have to do all things and the teachers have to monitor them. The role of teachers in eclectic method is to be facilitators while the role of learners is to be an active participant. A teacher should organise the materials, classroom procedures and guide students to performance.

Selecting and choosing principles and strategies at random from different methods and approach will not make him/her an eclectic teacher. Then, what makes a teacher to become an eclectic? To be an eclectic teacher one must possess comprehensive knowledge of the various methods and approaches. From the above statement, it is clear that one cannot randomly choose between methods and approaches to address the needs of the students. As Kumar (2013), Billah (2015),

Brown (2002), Gao (2011)Mwanza (2017) state that, a teacher must have sufficient prior comprehensive knowledge of different methods and approaches to properly exercise the eclectic approach in the language classroom. Luo, He & Yang (2001) give five suggestions to be an effective eclectic teacher. They are; a) Understand the purposes of each individual method; b) Be flexible in choosing and implication of each method; c) Make each method effective; d) Consider the correctness of each method; e) Maintain the continuity of the whole teaching process, and divide its functions into three different stages such as, 1) Teacher-centred at the input state; 2) Learner-centred at the practice stage, and 3) Learner-centred at the production stage.

By being an eclectic teacher one can make any prescribed material eclectic according to the needs and capability of the learners. It is important that teaching and learning materials have to be interesting and motivating for both teachers to teach and learners to learn. A teacher should select a teaching content or a text by keeping in mind the learners' cultural and linguistic background, their needs, capability and learning style. Weidemann (2001) rightly said that effective language teachers spend a lot of time in gathering interesting, motivating, and attractive materials to make their class livelier. A teacher should not fall back to the old traditional method where the teacher's talk is dominant. In eclectic way of teaching, a teacher should include all possible tools of the 21st century like; music, videos, pictures, and computer and its related technologies. A trained teacher should be able to change and alter any prescribed materials useful and productive for the learners. Being creative to the learners' needs and teaching objectives will make the teacher more eclectic. One should not confine oneself only to the use of the blackboard and textbook, but need to go beyond and make use of every bit and piece available in the campus for effective teaching.

Every new and innovative method in the language-teaching field has been appreciated and criticized in the every field. Eclectic method is not exempted from such phenomenon. As Stern (1983) states that, the main criticism of the use of eclectic approach is that it does not give any parameters as to on what basis and by what principles the elements of different methods can be selected and combined into language teaching. The only parameter that is kept before the language teacher is "the needs of the students". The irony in the formulation of eclectic approach is that it is based on the weakness and strengths of other methods. This approach does not offer anything new other than giving licence to the teacher to choose the elements to construct their own teaching method to address their students' needs. Weidemann (2001) presents the disadvantage of the eclectic approach in the following manner: the freedom of choosing from different methods discourages the teachers to counter check their own teaching methods, they make up their mind to use whatever works better for them. Doing such activities leads them to be in confusions and conflicts. Sometimes in integrating these methods in haste, the teachers forget the rationale behind their choice altogether. There are also problems such as the best and innovative methods look very normal when used with the other methods. Mwanza (2017) says that teachers who are not trained well in the use of different methods and who has the poor understanding of the same, will end up in facing such disadvantages of this method. The only solution to all these disadvantages is that the teachers should have a sound theoretical and practical knowledge of all the existing methods in language teaching.

With a good number of positive concepts behind this approach, Mwanza (2017) presents three misconceptions commonly held by the language teachers. He says that the teachers understood the eclectic approach as the use of several methods within the lesson one after the other. The second misconception he presents is that the eclectic approach will work only if

students are fluent in the target language, and the final misconception he presents is that, practicing of eclectic approach is timeconsuming and therefore it is difficult or impossible to use them in the language class.

Eclectic approach is popular because of its effectiveness in producing good results without putting much pressure on the learner. Since, the learners are given a clear vision on what they are learning; they are able to produce fast and best results possible. (Kumar.C.P., 2013)The salient features of this approach includes, multiple tasks, high interaction among teachers and students, lively learning (Billah, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

2.1. Suggestions to Solve the Textbook Puzzle

In most second language teaching, learning conditions the textbook plays a vital role. For most of the teachers, it is a guiding map for all their classroom activities. Even though the textbook is framed with all the instructional procedures, teachers say that they follow their own teaching strategies whenever required to meet the students' needs. The teachers make use of videos, power point presentations, pictures and newspaper cuttings etc., to make the class lively and interesting. Adhering strictly to the textbook and its procedures in the second language classroom in recent time is very less among tertiary level teachers. They consciously or unconsciously use mixed methods to make the class interesting and lively. On the other hand, when teachers choose without knowing the pros and cons of other methods the idea of plurality is itself at question. Without knowing, the rationale behind the chosen method or approach to teach a lesson or part of a lesson will not give any productive results at the end of the day. To be an effective teacher, they should know the principles and characteristics of each method. A few teachers practice eclectic approach without knowing its principles and even without knowing such an approach exist in the second language-teaching arena. Strengthening their understanding about different theories and their principles would make the teaching effective and in turn, a textbook into an eclectic one. The yesteryears' results and feedback, today's needs and tomorrow's demand will force the teachers to adapt mixed method or eclectic approach in their teaching. It is the responsibility of the programme organiser to give good input on different methods to teacher and make them know that they are ignorant about usage and the existence of few methods and approaches. As a result, the teaching standard will improve and they will be ripe good and produce results from the students.

Being an eclectic teacher in today's teaching condition is essential irrespective of the textbook prescribed and the (nature of college and students) context given, a teacher must be professionally equipped to help the students acquire language effectively. Primarily the teacher has to prepare to take a class with meticulous plans and know their rationale behind for their choice of method with their alternative. They should also keep in mind about the learners' linguistic background and learning style. Secondly, if the teachers are not familiar with certain methods and their principles they are to be given orientations about the different methods and their procedures. In addition, Teachers and students are to be exposed to new information and learning items with good input now and then. Thirdly, a constructive sharing of feedback and ideas should take place among teachers occasionally. Fourthly, the teachers should keep the needs, culture, learning style and capacity of the students in mind while selecting activities and teaching materials for the class. More importantly, teachers and their teaching style should grab the attention of each student and motivate them to participate actively in the class. Fifthly, the content and the language elements should not alienate the learners from their life and society; it should resemble their daily life. In the 21st century, it is unusual to see a textbook, which is prepared to a single approach, and it is found that a textbook based on a single approach

or method did not bear much fruit. However, most textbooks are just the mixture of different methods and approaches and it is necessary to make them eclectic by giving good rationale for all the lessons used and approaches suggested to get them across the students.

The purpose of recommending eclectic approach is to connect real life experiences to the ideas presented in the learning and teaching of the language (Kumar.C.P., 2013). The type of activities and interactions are directly connected to their real life experiences. Li (2012) states that there are no single method or technique which acts to resolve all the language skills and therefore, the teachers are asked to embrace the eclectic approach which uses many activities to motivate students' learning. Today most of the teachers use eclectic approach so proudly "as a tag to describe their teaching, wearing it almost like a badge of honour" (Weideman, 2001, p. 2). In diverse and pressured situations in the language classroom, this approach attempts to respond effectively. As Tarone&Yule (1989, p.10) while saying about the advantages of this approach comment that, "it involves a philosophy of local solutions to local problems".

CONCLUSIONS

Eclecticism is an approach of choices from the existing methods. In the recent time, the need and reasons to learn English as a second language are multiple. The integration of the four language skills has been highlighted in this approach unlike other methods. As an answer to all these needs and reasons, eclectic approach gives an effective result with its own principles and features. It is a peculiar kind of educational approach, which harmoniously blends all the good and effective strategies to bring better results to all the language issues. From the above study, it is clear that one single method can hardly make a difference in the language teaching and learning. A good number of features, advantages are highlighted and recommended to the language teaching in this work in order to arrive at a better understanding of this approach. Finally, it is very vivid that teacher with no theoretical understanding of the advantages and the drawbacks of each approach cannot use it effectively in the language classroom. The details presented here in this study are not the complete profile of an eclectic approach in language teaching, but an attempt to sketch out the essence of it. As it is a subjective approach, its boundaries are not confined to a limit.

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