

A Review on Effective Methods for Learning English as a Foreign Language

Sayed Shir Aqa Hashemi

Asst. Professor, English, Education, Ghor Institute of Higher Education firouzkoh
Afghanistan (Corresponding Author) hashemi.2024@ghru.edu.af

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Abstract

Background: The most effective methods for learning the English language has become the standard approach in acquiring English as a foreign language today. The Afghanistan Ministry of Higher Education is working to improve the reputation and quality of universities, especially in research activities. So, learning English as a global language in the area of academic researches is essential for researchers and university lecturers. **Objectives:** Identifying the effective methods of English language learning is the central focus of this paper. **Method:** In this research paper, the most significant studies have been reviewed, compared, and summarized as literature reviews. **Result:** By examining previous research, it has been found that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Computer Assisted Learning (CAL), and Mobile Assisted Learning (MAL) are the most effective methods for learning English as a foreign language overall.

Keywords: approaches, effective, method, learning a language

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مروری بر روش‌های مؤثر برای یادگیری زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی

سید شیر آقا هاشمی

پوهنمل، انگلیسی، تعلیم و تربیه، مؤسسه تحصیلات عالی غور، فیروزکوه افغانستان (نویسنده مسئول)

hashemi.2024@ghru.edu.af

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چکیده

پیشینه: امروزه مؤثرترین روش‌های یادگیری زبان انگلیسی به رویکرد استاندارد در کسب زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان یک‌زبان خارجی تبدیل شده است. وزارت تحصیلات عالی افغانستان در تلاش است تا اعتبار و کیفیت دانشگاه‌ها، به‌ویژه فعالیت‌های تحقیقاتی را بهبود بخشد. بنابراین، یادگیری زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان جهانی در حوزه تحقیقات علمی برای محققان و اساتید پوهنتون‌ها ضروری است. **اهداف:** شناسایی روش‌های مؤثر یادگیری زبان انگلیسی محور اصلی این مقاله است. **روش:** در این مقاله تحقیقاتی، مهم‌ترین مطالعات مرور، مقایسه و به‌عنوان مرور ادبیات خلاصه شده‌اند. **نتیجه:** با بررسی تحقیقات پیشین، مشخص شده است که آموزش ارتباطی زبان (CLT)، یادگیری با کمک کامپیوتر (CAL) و یادگیری با کمک تلفن همراه (MAL) به‌طور کلی مؤثرترین روش‌ها برای یادگیری زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان یک‌زبان خارجی هستند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: مؤثر، روش، یادگیری زبان، رویکردها

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1. Introduction

This paper analyzes and discusses “Effective Methods for Learning English Language as a foreign language.” The discussion analyzes language teaching and learning methodology and simplifies learning English as a foreign language. So, the effective methods that are discussed in this paper, will bring a clarification for English learners. It is a great concern to recognize that the teaching and learning of the English language in Afghanistan at present is facing immense challenges. The main problem associated with teaching the English language is the pedagogical approach which is used by most English language teachers who use the traditional method of teaching the language. To improve English language teaching, it is essential to provide teachers with modern training programs that focus on interaction and communication methods. Additionally, access to updated textbooks, digital learning tools, and language labs can greatly enhance the learning experience for students. Investing in these resources will help modify traditional methods and promote a more engaging and effective learning environment. This method often relies heavily on rote memorization and lacks interactive and communication techniques that are essential for mastering a new language. As a result, students may find it difficult to develop practical language skills and confidence in using English in real-world situations. To address these challenges, a shift toward more modern, student-centered teaching methodologies is necessary (Samah et al. 2016).

2. Historical Background

The historical background of effective methods for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is rich and multifaceted, reflecting shifts in linguistic theory, educational psychology, and cultural attitudes toward language learning. The Grammar-Translation Method was prevalent in the 19th century, particularly in Europe, concentrating on the explicit instruction of grammar rules and vocabulary through translation exercises. This method prioritized reading and writing over listening and speaking, often resulting in a limited ability to use the language in conversation (Howatt, 1984). The Direct Method (Late 19th Century to Early 20th Century) emerged in response to the shortcomings of the Grammar-Translation Method, focusing on immersion in the language. It aimed to teach vocabulary and grammar in context, utilizing visual aids and realia (materials) to enhance understanding without relying on translation (Cook, 2016). The Audiolingual Method (1940s-1960s), developed during the World War II, was shaped by behaviorist psychology. It emphasized repetitive drills, listening, and speaking while placing less focus

on reading and writing. The method sought to establish habits through practice, frequently employing dialogues to reinforce structural patterns (Brown, 2007). Communicative Language Teaching (1970s-present) emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to previous methods, emphasizing interaction and real-life communication. CLT promotes the use of authentic materials and concentrates on developing communicative competence the ability to communicate effectively in diverse contexts (Savignon, 2001). Task-Based Language Teaching (1980s-present) has evolved from the communicative approach and emphasizes the use of authentic tasks to enhance learning. Students participate in meaningful activities that necessitate communication, promoting practical language use and problem-solving skills (Ellis, 2003). Content-Based Instruction (CBI) combines language learning with subject matter instruction, enabling language learners to attain proficiency through engagement with academic content. This method is particularly effective in an educational environment where learners prepare for specific academic or professional fields (Snow & Brinton, 1988). Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (2000s-present) has seen significant advancements, with various methods and tools like language learning apps, online courses, and multimedia resources gaining prominence. These resources offer flexible, personalized learning experiences and promote independent study (Chapelle, 2003).

To sum up, the evolution of methods for learning English as a foreign language has been significantly formed by shifting educational paradigms, cultural changes, and technological advancements. Effective approaches now strike a balance between theory and practice, aiming to equip learners with the skills essential for real-world communication. This historical perspective highlights the continuous effort to enhance language teaching and learning methodologies.

3. Research Objectives

This paper seeks to identify the most effective method for teaching English as a foreign language that would benefit university instructors.

4. Research Method

In this research paper, the study was conducted using the library, and the most relevant papers were reviewed to identify the best and most effective methods for learning English as a foreign language. The paper also emphasized the challenge of discovering effective approaches to learning English.

5. The Definition of Relevant Terms

The term "approach" refers to theories regarding the nature of language and language learning that provide the foundation for practices and principles in language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p.16). An approach is a method for addressing something or resolving a problem (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 5th ed.). It is also a way of considering or engaging with someone or something in relation to a problem or task (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th ed.).

Method refers to the level at which theory is applied and where decisions are made regarding the specific skills to be taught, the content to be covered, and the sequence in which the content will be presented (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 15). As Nunan (1991) states, "There has been a tendency historically to equate methodology with method" (p. 3).

We all know that English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, and learning it has become increasingly common. Recently, it has gained significant popularity in educational institutes in Afghanistan, particularly among knowledgeable individuals entering the modern realms of research, innovation, and technology. As the global lingua franca, English is becoming increasingly important for international cooperation and communication, making English language learning essential in a country like Afghanistan. Methods play a crucial role in acquiring a foreign language; therefore, they promote, guide, and sustain learning activities that have been structured as an internal strength and mechanism.

1. Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a traditional approach to language teaching that emphasizes the study of grammar rules, vocabulary, and the translation of sentences between the target language and the native language. This method is often employed in teaching classical languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek, but it can also be applied to modern languages. The Grammar Translation Method primarily focuses on written language and prioritizes reading and writing skills over speaking and listening. A significant amount of time is dedicated to teaching grammatical structures and vocabulary through explicit instruction. Students frequently translate sentences or texts from the target language to their native language and vice versa, with an emphasis on learning vocabulary lists and grammatical paradigms. In this method, the teacher typically assumes a dominant role in the classroom, explaining rules and correcting students' translations. The Grammar Translation Method has faced criticism for its lack of focus on speaking and listening skills and its limited ability to foster communicative competence.

Researchers and critics argue that it can render language learning tedious and overly centered on repetition and memorization (Harmer, 2001).

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) emerged as a traditional approach to teaching foreign languages, particularly Latin and Greek, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its goals were to elevate native language proficiency, cultivate logical thinking and intellectual capacity, and help students read and appreciate foreign literature. It was believed that studying grammar in the target language would foster intellectual growth, improve writing and speaking abilities, and deepen understanding of grammar in the native language (Wali & Zafir, 2022).

2. The Direct Method

The Direct Method, often linked with language teaching, emphasizes speaking and listening skills as essential to the learning process. In this approach, students are encouraged to communicate in the target language from the outset, with minimal focus on grammar rules. The goal is to foster conversational fluency through immersive practice. A significant aspect of the direct method is that vocabulary and grammar are taught contextually rather than through explicit instruction. For instance, teachers utilize real-life situations, visual aids, and demonstrations to convey meaning, promoting natural acquisition akin to first language learning. According to Maxom (2009), "The Direct Method creates an environment for learners to engage actively with the language, making speaking and thinking in the target language a priority." Moreover, research shows that involvement and practical application significantly enhance language retention and fluency (Spada & Lightbown, 2019).

3. Audio-lingualism: The first modern methodology

In the 20th century, especially during the 1940s and 1950s, it was significantly influenced by behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics, concentrating on the use of repetition, drills, and patterns to assist learners in developing their speaking and listening skills. This approach highlighted the significance of oral skills over reading and writing in the early stages of language acquisition. One important text that explores the principles and practices of audio-lingualism is McDonough and Shaw (2013), "Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide." In this work, the authors elucidate audio-lingualism's reliance on habit formation and the application of contrastive analysis to bridge the gaps between a learner's native language and the target language.

Contrastive analysis plays a crucial role in this methodology, as it entails comparing the learner's native language with the target language to pinpoint potential areas of difficulty. By emphasizing differences between the two languages, teachers can foresee common errors and customize their instruction to address these gaps, thereby facilitating a more effective learning experience. Overall, the authors advocate for the incorporation of these concepts into teaching practices to improve language learning outcomes (McDonough & Shaw, 2013).

4. Humanistic Approaches: Holistic methods applied to language learning

According to Savignon (2002), humanistic approaches to language learning emphasize the whole person, acknowledging the emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions of learning. These methods often prioritize learner autonomy, personal connection, and the relevance of content to the learner's life. Several holistic methods commonly employed in humanistic language education include the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which encourages interaction as the primary means of language acquisition. It underscores the importance of real communication and meaningful language use over rote memorization of grammar and vocabulary. The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method centers on utilizing meaningful tasks as the fundamental unit of planning and instruction. This approach enables learners to engage in realistic language use, enhancing both language and social skills (Ellis, 2003). The Experiential Learning approach, based on the work of David Kolb, posits that learning is a process through which knowledge is created by transforming experience. In language learning, this may involve role-plays, simulations, or activities set in real-life contexts (Kolb, 1984).

5. Communicative Language Teaching: The modern standard method

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a widely recognized approach to language instruction that emphasizes interaction as the primary means of language acquisition. This method focuses on enabling students to communicate effectively and fluently in real-life situations rather than merely learning grammatical rules and vocabulary. According to Richards and Rogers (2001), CLT places a strong emphasis on the functional aspects of language, promoting activities that allow learners to practice and use the language in meaningful contexts. The method encourages collaboration among students through pair and group work, fostering a social aspect of language learning that reflects how language is used in daily interactions. The approach

prioritizes communication activities that should promote genuine communication, helping students become more proficient in using the language in practical settings. This theory also advocates for the use of authentic materials, including genuine texts and resources that learners may encounter outside the classroom, to enhance the relevance of learning.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) represents a notable shift in language education, emphasizing interaction and practical language use over rote memorization of grammatical structures. By fostering meaningful communication and collaboration among students, CLT effectively prepares learners for real-world language application. The inclusion of authentic materials further enhances this approach, ensuring that learners are equipped to engage with genuine texts and situations they may encounter beyond the classroom.

6. Computer Assisted Learning (CAL)

Computer-assisted learning (CAL) utilizes technology to improve the educational experience by delivering instructional materials and activities through computers. This method includes various formats, such as software applications, online courses, simulations, and interactive tutorials. By enabling personalized learning paths and providing immediate feedback, CAL enhances the learning process, addressing individual student needs and fostering more effective engagement with the material (Gulbahar & Guven, 2008).

Furthermore, Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) has undergone a remarkable transformation since its inception, shaped by technological advancements, evolving educational theories, and innovative pedagogical practices. Initially emerging in the 1960s, CAL began with simplistic programmed instruction systems that utilized basic computer technology to facilitate learning (Skinner, 1968). As the decades progressed, enhancements in hardware and software led to more sophisticated interactive learning environments, incorporating multimedia and adaptive learning pathways, thereby boosting engagement and personalization (Collins & Halverson, 2009). The shift towards constructivist approaches in education has further promoted the integration of CAL, enabling learners to actively construct knowledge through exploration and collaboration (Papert, 1980). Today, CAL continues to evolve, utilizing artificial intelligence and data analytics to customize educational experiences, highlighting its essential role in contemporary education (Luckin et al., 2016). These advancements emphasize the significance and potential of CAL in facilitating effective learning outcomes across diverse educational contexts (Turing, 1950).

7. Mobile Assisted Learning

Mobile Assisted Learning (MAL) refers to the utilization of mobile devices and technologies to enhance learning. This approach capitalizes on the portability and accessibility of mobile devices to offer learners educational resources, tools, and platforms that support their learning processes in both formal and informal contexts. MAL enables learners to access educational content anytime and anywhere, which is especially advantageous for those facing constraints related to time or location (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

8. Principled Eclecticism

Principled eclecticism is an approach in language teaching that emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching methods and techniques to fit the specific needs of learners, rather than sticking precisely to a single methodology. This approach acknowledges that learners are diverse in their backgrounds, motivations, and learning styles, and therefore, teachers should select and blend various strategies and practices that best support individual or group learning outcomes. A significant aspect of principled eclecticism is the idea of having a theoretical framework that guides the selection of methods. This framework allows educators to make informed decisions about which techniques to use in different contexts. According to the principles of principled eclecticism, teachers should take into account the context of learning, the characteristics of the learners, and the specific goals of the instruction (Nunan, 1991).

According to Brown (2007), principled eclecticism is a language teaching method that highlights the necessity of adapting instructional approaches to meet the unique needs and contexts of learners. By integrating elements from diverse teaching methodologies, this approach prioritizes the selection of effective techniques based on their underlying principles, rather than adherence to a single method. The flexibility of the method provides the opportunity for teachers to choose from a range of strategies, tools, and techniques, allowing for a customizable curriculum that addresses the specific context and challenges faced by learners.

The contextual adaptation of educational methods highlights the importance of considering various factors such as learner age, proficiency level, cultural background, and the learning environment. These elements significantly influence the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches, necessitating a tailored selection of methods to address the unique needs of each learner. By recognizing the diversity within educational contexts,

educators can implement strategies that enhance engagement and facilitate optimal learning outcomes.

9. Cooperative Learning Model

Collaborative learning is the educational approach of using groups to enhance learning through working together. Groups of two or more learners work together to solve problems, complete tasks, or learn new concepts. This approach actively engages learners to process and synthesize information and concepts, rather than using rote memorization of facts and figures (Andreev, 2024). The Cooperative Learning Model is a contemporary teaching approach that encourages active student participation in the learning environment through face-to-face interaction. It focuses on raising awareness about personal responsibility, information access, and perseverance. The method emphasizes positive affiliation, face-to-face interaction, individual evaluability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group process evaluation principles. It encourages collaboration and accountability among students, fostering a work-and-support environment for a product (Zorlu & Sezek, 2019). CL method also refers to flexible, group instructional innovations in education, such as CL models, strategies, and methods. These innovations aim to teach students human relationship skills, focusing on cognitive development in social contexts. They also extend social skills and individuals' capabilities for effective interpersonal relationships, extending academic development and enhancing social skills in today's academic environment (Levi, 2018).

Moreover, cooperative learning also focuses on the interaction between the teachers and the students and among the students themselves in the process of teaching emphasizing the interactive cooperation among the students in the teaching and learning activities. Interactive cooperation among students is a common characteristic of cooperative learning. According to Song and Yu (2012), cooperative learning mainly consists of five basic elements, including (1) positive interdependence. The team members depend on and help each other to complete the task successfully; (2) The face-to-face interaction. Team members directly communicate within the team and actively participate in activities to contribute themselves to the maximum; (3) individual accountability. Team members must develop their responsibility in cooperative learning; (4) The development of social skills within the small group. The social skills in cooperative learning mainly refer to the necessary organizational ability, communicative ability, collaborative ability, respectful attitudes towards each other, etc. In the group cooperative learning; (5) The group processing.

1.1. Learning Together

Learning Together is often associated with educational theories and practices promoting collaboration and joint learning. This approach emphasizes cooperative learning, where students engage in group activities that promote interaction and teamwork, leading to enhanced understanding and retention of knowledge. Learning Together Multilingual Initiative often focuses on inclusivity in education for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

1.2. Jigsaw

The Jigsaw Learning method is an instructional strategy designed to promote cooperative learning among students. It involves breaking down a lesson into segments, where each student becomes an "expert" on one portion of the lesson and then teaches that portion to their peers. This method encourages collaboration, communication, and accountability within the group. Jigsaw can also refer to multiple subjects, including a type of puzzle, a tool for cutting shapes in wood or other materials, or a fictional character from the "Saw" horror film series. Jigsaw Puzzle is a covering puzzle that requires the assembly of many interlocking pieces, typically made of cardboard or wood. The objective is to piece together a picture or image. Jigsaw puzzles are popular for developing cognitive skills, problem-solving skills, and hand-eye coordination.

Studies indicate that the Jigsaw method can lead to higher achievement levels, improved interpersonal skills, and increased motivation among students. For instance, a meta-analysis by Johnson and Johnson (2009) highlights the effectiveness of cooperative learning methods like Jigsaw in enhancing student outcomes.

The development of Jigsaw was done by Aronson, et al (1978). The key to implementing Jigsaw is creating a gap in students' information and using this gap as a motivator for their further involvement in the learning process. To implement Jigsaw, the key is to create a gap in students' information and use this gap as a motivator for them to participate further in the learning process. A genuine communicative context for authentic language use is created by the information gap, which is crucial for language acquisition in particular and learning in general. To create a gap in the participants' existing knowledge, they are not given sufficient information to solve the problem or complete the assignment in question. Therefore, students have no other option but to cooperate to fill their gaps in information and meet their interests. Group members enthusiastically listen to their peers because they feel a need for it,

which enhances positive interdependence and encourages them to take an active part in their learning (Aronson & et al. 1978).

As indicated in Figure 4.2, a Jigsaw class should follow the following five-step process:



Figure 1. Main Components of Jigsaw

In a real classroom situation, after the material to be learned is divided into separate units, it is presented in ‘base groups’ or ‘home groups’ of four to six heterogeneous (in abilities) members assembled by the teacher. The academic textual material is divided into separate parts (mini-topics) for each member of the base groups. Each member of the home group is responsible for a specific aspect of the problem in question. Having learned something about their parts in an adequate time in their home groups, group members who have the same parts for learning come together in ‘expert groups’ or ‘study groups’ to study, discuss, and refine their understandings of their shared parts and decide how best to teach it to their peers in their original or base groups. After assuring themselves that everyone has understood the material, they return to their base groups and take turns teaching their group members what they have learned. Additionally, during this phase, they are given the chance to learn from their group members what they have learned and mastered in their expert groups. As a result, they all fill their knowledge gaps in communicative environments and ultimately complete the puzzle. Afterward, the groups share their findings with the entire class through a class discussion, a graphic or dramatic production, or a question-and-answer session. Each unit ends with students taking a test on the information they have learned (Aronson,1978).

1.3. The Student Team-Achievement Divisions (STAD)

The Student Team-Achievement Divisions (STAD) method is a collaborative learning strategy developed by Robert Slavin and his colleagues in the 1980s. It focuses on grouping students in diverse teams to promote cooperative learning while addressing individual accountability and encouraging peer teaching. Team Formation feature, students are grouped into small, different teams based on their performance, allowing for mixed ability levels. This diversity is designed to promote peer assistance and support. Assignments and Quizzes provide the opportunity that students to receive instruction on a topic, often followed by practice activities. After the practice phase, each student takes a quiz on the material. Quiz scores are not just individual but also

contribute to the team's overall performance. Individual Accountability feature makes clear that the student's score on the quiz contributes to their team's success, motivating students to ensure that they understand the material well enough to help their teammates. Feedback and Improvement are essential and after quizzes, teams are encouraged to discuss answers, providing an opportunity for students to learn from their mistakes and reinforce their understanding. This method (STAD) has three kinds of benefits such as (1), Enhanced Engagement which Collaborative learning tends to increase student motivation and engagement. Secondly, Improved Academic Achievement studies have shown that STAD can lead to higher academic performance compared to traditional teaching methods and the final is Social Skills Development which students working in teams help them develop critical social and communication skills (Slavin, 1995).

10. Results and Discussion

A variety of papers examining different methods are reviewed to identify the most effective approaches for learning a foreign language. It is found that among the various methods, the CLT, CAL, and MAL are the most effective ones which are explained in detail. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a fundamental approach in language education that emphasizes interaction as the primary means of language learning. It aims to enable students to communicate effectively and fluently in real-life situations, rather than merely memorizing grammar and vocabulary. According to Richards and Rogers (2001), CLT concentrates on the functional use of language, encouraging activities that allow learners to practice and apply language in meaningful contexts. Computer-assisted learning (CAL) improves the learning experience by catering to the specific needs of students and promoting better engagement with the educational material (Gulbahar & Guven, 2008). According to the analysis of various methods, CAL improves the learning process by addressing individual student needs and promoting more effective engagement with the material (Gulbahar & Guven, 2008). Meanwhile, MAL allows learners to access educational content anytime and anywhere, which is particularly beneficial for those facing constraints related to time or location (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

11. Conclusion

Learning English as a foreign language can be highly effective when employing diverse methods personalized to individual preferences and contexts. Immersive experiences, such as studying abroad or engaging with native speakers, significantly enhance language acquisition. Structured

classroom instruction lays a solid foundation in grammar and vocabulary, while online resources and language learning apps provide flexibility for self-paced study. Incorporating multimedia tools like podcasts, videos, and interactive games makes learning more engaging. Techniques such as extensive reading, regular writing, practicing listening and speaking skills contribute to comprehensive language development. Ultimately, a combination of these approaches adapted to the learner's goals and proficiency level, fosters a deeper understanding and mastery of English, allowing individuals to find pathways to fluency that align with their unique styles and needs.

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- Slavin, R. E. (1990). "Cooperative Learning: A Guide to Research" in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 15(1), 63-78. This article discusses the research findings related to various cooperative learning methods, including STAD.

