



## TEACHING METHODS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LANGUAGE LEARNERS' PROGRESS

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the development of foreign language teaching methods, focusing on their scientific basis and influence on learners' language acquisition. It provides an overview of the historical progression of teaching approaches, from early linguistic and psychological theories to the establishment of methodology as an independent pedagogical discipline. The study explores the emergence of the direct method, its adaptation in Russia, and the later transition to communicative and integrative approaches. The discussion emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate teaching methods based on learner needs, available resources, and modern educational trends. The paper highlights the ongoing necessity for assessing and refining teaching strategies to enhance language learning outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *Language teaching methods, foreign language education, direct method, communicative approach, language learning, pedagogy, applied linguistics, instructional strategies, TEFL, educational methodology.*

In the current era, marked by profound shifts in teaching methodologies, it is indeed pertinent to revisit the history of foreign language teaching methods and the major trends in their evolution. The consensus now is unequivocal; the methodology of language teaching is regarded as a science. The earliest definition of methodology was given by E.M. Ryt in 1930, stating that the methodology of teaching foreign languages is a practical application of comparative linguistics. A.V. Scherba shared a similar view. The conception of methodology as applied linguistics emerged primarily because the methods of the 1930s were insufficient to



identify the unique characteristics of a foreign language as a subject, and there was no comprehensive system of research methods without which it cannot be classified as a true science. Another perspective linked with B.V. Belyaev posits methodology as applied psychology. However, this definition did not gain wide acceptance since several methodological issues, such as the selection of material and the adaptation of techniques and methods to the audience, cannot be solved solely on the basis of psychology. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, another line of thought emerged that defined methodology as a pedagogical science. Both pedagogy and methodology study the processes of learning, the aims and objectives of education, and the teaching of subjects. They also share similar research methods, and as such, defining methodology as a pedagogical science marked a step forward in recognizing it as an independent discipline. By the late 1940s, methodology had been acknowledged as a science with its own laws and methods. A comprehensive definition of the method states, "Teaching methods are the science exploring the aims and content, pattern, means, methods, techniques, and training systems, and also studying the teaching and training processes of foreign language material."

At the start of the 20th century, another issue arose regarding the teaching method itself. It was a pressing matter since the "new" school system that emerged after the October Revolution in 1917 demanded the application of novel techniques. The direct (natural) method was widely endorsed during this period. This method, which was based on the principle of associating foreign words with the objects they represent, promoted a natural, associative way of learning a foreign language, which was seen as the most economical and fastest way to achieve fluency.

Why was the direct method favored, while the West was contemplating the mixed method? Several factors come into play. First, the grammar-translation and textual-translation methods dominated royal schools, focusing heavily on rote learning. It was crucial to break free from these old practices, and the direct method was more progressive in comparison, as it derived from the living language and prioritized speech training. Secondly, only the direct method aimed for communication. Lastly, other methods that emerged in the West after World War I



were not familiar to educators because the war, followed by civil unrest, severed all connections. Furthermore, for many practitioners and teachers, the direct method was something new and attractive, and everyone sincerely believed in its effectiveness. It's important to note that those who advocated for the direct method of language teaching distinguished it from the conventional Western-style approach. The direct method encouraged comparison with the native language, but not at the initial stages. This difference was incompatible with the orthodox method. There were also suggestions such as: "The study of a foreign language should not neglect grammar. Its main features can be understood better by pointing out similarities and differences with the grammar of the students' native language. This understanding is further cemented by grammar exercises" <sup>1</sup>. There were also recommendations to integrate elements of comparative linguistics into the direct method. All these suggestions, however, did not fully align with the principles of the direct method. These discrepancies led to the gradual formation of a "Russian version" of the direct method, which took its final shape in the methodological benefits of the late 1920s.

The evolution of the direct method was closely tied to progressive ideas in Russian pedagogy. Over time, a comparative method for teaching foreign languages was developed, named so because learning a foreign language was based on its comparison with the native language. Scherba is credited with the inception of this method. The combination of the direct and comparative methods gave rise to a mixed method. Depending on the dominant principles, it could be closer to either the direct or the comparative method.

Over time, the objectives of learning a foreign language and the expectations of mastery have changed. As a result, the methods of teaching foreign languages were challenged. Such a crisis often necessitates radical changes. Hence, there was a shift to communicative teaching, replacing less productive ideas. This crisis also sparked a renewed, methodical search, contributing to the development of modern

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<sup>1</sup> Armstrong, T. (2009). Multiple intelligences in the classroom (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.  
Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (2010). Language assessment in practice





teaching concepts in foreign language instruction, such as the Communicative (I.L. Beem, E. I. Passov<sup>2</sup>, Intensive (G.A. Kitaygorodskaya <sup>3</sup>), Activity (Ilyasov), and others. Currently, techniques focused on communication and student creativity play a crucial role. The process of teaching foreign languages, such as English, should constantly evolve, given the dynamic nature of any scientific discipline. Stagnation can be detrimental to progress. It is thus essential to regularly evaluate and compare current teaching methodologies, as these form the basis for the emergence of innovative techniques. The objective is to ensure that these newly developed methods overcome the limitations observed in existing ones. This comparative analysis empowers educators with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions about their teaching strategies. Given the plethora of methodologies, understanding the nuances and specificities of each can pose a challenge. However, in this stage of the development of foreign language instruction, the selection of an appropriate teaching approach must account for various factors. These include the collective characteristics of the group, individual learner attributes such as age, interests, and readiness level, the duration allocated for training, and the available technical resources at the educational institution.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is indeed a scientific endeavor. Unlike tangible sciences such as biology, chemistry, or physics, TEFL is not purely objective or equation-driven. Similar to psychology or sociology, TEFL harnesses a degree of subjectivity in defining its principles. These principles map out the relationships between teachers and students, and amongst students themselves. To facilitate effective English learning, a TEFL teacher must align with one or more prevalent approaches to teaching English as a foreign language, integrating respective language-learning strategies and techniques within each session. Presented here are descriptions of nine key approaches to teaching English as a foreign or second language. It is quite likely that your personal learning

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<sup>2</sup> Chinnery, G. M. (2006). Emerging Technologies Going to the MALL: Mobile Assisted Language Learning. Language Learning & Technology

<sup>3</sup> Bulman, G., & Fairlie, R. W. (2016). Technology and education: Computers, software, and the internet. Handbook of the Economics of Education



experiences have included one or more of these methodologies. While there isn't a singular 'right' approach, educators often find themselves more at ease with a specific method. It's crucial to remember, though, that students are diverse not only in age but also in thinking styles. Consequently, their responses to a particular teaching approach may differ. Given this array of learning styles, effective teachers must be willing and prepared to modify their instructional strategies to meet the needs and preferences of each class. It is encouraged to 'find your niche' within the approaches delineated here, while remaining open to experimentation and adaptation. It's possible that the most effective approach incorporates aspects from several methodologies, creating a well-rounded, eclectic blend. To aid your comprehension of how the landscape of language teaching methodologies has evolved and diversified over time, we've put together a comprehensive rundown of these methodological approaches.

Originally designed for studying classical "dead" languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek, the Grammar Translation Method emphasizes the analysis of classic texts and a thorough understanding of grammatical structures. Remarkably, this method has maintained its relevance in teaching "living" languages, notwithstanding a certain level of criticism and learner dissatisfaction.

The Direct Method, which arose in the late 19th century, brought a revolutionary shift towards communicative competence in language teaching. It sought to replicate natural language acquisition by accentuating oral interaction, spontaneous language usage, and the capacity to "think" in the language being learned. This approach, however, faced obstacles in public education due to constraints such as budget, class size, and time limitations. Despite experiencing a brief decline and a return to the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method has remained popular in private language institutions and served as a precursor to the Audio-lingual Method.

The advent of World War II necessitated the development of the "Army Method" in the U.S. to cater to specific linguistic needs. This method encouraged communicative competence via intensive language courses focused on auditory and



oral skills. This, in turn, paved the way for the Audio-lingual Method (ALM), which combined linguistic patterning and habit-formation teaching. Despite its initial popularity due to its fast results achieved through imitation and memorization, it eventually faced criticism for its limited success in long-term communicative abilities. Linguistic studies advanced, emphasizing emotional and interpersonal aspects in language learning, thus questioning the ALM's habit-focused approach. In the 1960s, new ideas like the "Cognitive Code" and "Discovery Learning" began to challenge the ALM, proposing that language learning involved more than just imitation and habits. These concepts advocated for learner autonomy in formulating language rules, leading to a discovery-based learning approach akin to native language acquisition. Caleb Gattegno introduced "The Silent Way" in the early 70s, incorporating these theories. This method is unique for its predominantly silent teacher, promoting student-led language learning. It also introduced colored rods and color-coded word charts. The Silent Way was the pioneer in emphasizing cognitive principles in language learning.

In the late 19th century, Francois Gouin, a Latin teacher from France, introduced the Series Method. This technique simulated the natural language learning process in children by associating physical actions with language through a series of interconnected sentences reflecting the speaker's current actions. Drawing inspiration from Gouin's method, James Asher developed the Total Physical Response (TPR) technique in the 1960s. The TPR method married motor activity with memory retention, emphasizing listening, comprehension, and physical responses as crucial elements of language learning. Asher promoted a fun, engaging, and stress-free learning environment, championing an initial phase of right-brained learning that linked physical movements with language cognition. Today, the TPR method is widely recognized for its effectiveness and simplicity, particularly for young and beginner learners.

In the early 1970s, Charles Curran established the "Counseling-Learning" model that emphasized emotional considerations and learner-focused teaching. Curran perceived students as clients and teachers as counselors, fostering a





supportive learning community to alleviate anxieties associated with learning. This model was transformed into Community Language Learning (CLL) for language teaching. CLL propounds a comprehensive approach, acknowledging learners' emotions, intellect, relationships, and protective responses. In a CLL setting, learners initiate conversations in their native language, which the teacher then translates into the desired language. This cycle continues until learners' transition from relying on the teacher to independent usage of the new language.

Over the last century, language teaching has seen numerous methods emerge, influence, and then give way to new strategies. By the mid-1980s, a shift occurred towards a more encompassing approach, taking into account various methods, motivations, teacher types, and student needs. The Communicative Language Teaching Approach has since become the accepted standard in this field. CLT expands on the objective of fostering 'communicative competence' by emphasizing not just language learning, but also its practical application. It champions "real-life" communication, fluency over mere accuracy, lifelong language learning, and a cooperative classroom environment. Despite its broad applicability, CLT may sometimes lack specificity concerning systematic classroom practices. The interpretation and application of CLT can vary, leading to a range of specific methods under its umbrella.

Developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in the early 80s, the "Natural Approach" draws on Krashen's theories about second language acquisition. It emphasizes a 'silent phase' and a relaxed learning environment similar to Asher's Total Physical Response method. It prioritizes language "acquisition" over "processing", and focuses on "comprehensible input" from the teacher. Vocabulary is placed at the heart of language, with meaning as its essence. In the Natural Approach, learners are allowed to use their native language alongside the target language. The focus lies on meaning rather than form, especially during the early stages. The approach is segmented into three stages - preproduction, early production, and extended production - each with a different focus and set of objectives. Despite its benefits, the Natural Approach has faced criticism,



particularly for its recommendation of a 'silent period' and 'comprehensible input'. Critics argue that the timing of a student's transition to oral production can be unpredictable and managing comprehensible input can be challenging. Despite these criticisms, the Natural Approach was an innovative step towards a comprehensive language teaching approach and paved the way for Communicative Language Teaching.

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