

Eclectic Method: From Theory to Practice at the Tertiary Level

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ABSTRACT

Twentieth and twenty-first centuries saw number of research on teaching second language to different learners. It tried to answer different issues, which existed in the classroom and persons who handle it with different theories with its specialisation. Since the specialisation of one theory neglected the other theories in textbook preparation and in the teaching process, it paved way for new theories. Hence, the method proposed in the textbook was different from the needs of the learners. In that case, teachers coerced to fulfil the procedures of the method, but not the needs of the students. Such demands forced the teachers and theorists to look for a theory as alternative to all the language issues. One such theory, which gained the attention of the teachers, to answer the multiple issues was eclecticism, which was the combination of different theories in a single domain. This research carried out in a heterogeneous learning environment in a micro level to observe and analyse the relevance and irrelevance of eclectic method in the complex situation.

1. Introduction

Teaching language to the heterogeneous class is a challenging task to teachers. Most of the teachers report that using single method in the heterogeneous classroom becomes a difficult task. They find mismatch between the learning ability of the students and the method used. In such a situation, the teachers focus on fulfilling the procedures of the method given in the textbook, while pay least interest on the needs of the students. Yet, the hunt for an effective and problem solving method is continuous even today. They look for a method, which will bridge the gap between the suggested methodology and the learners' need. To find and to create such an innovative approach, or a method, the teacher needs to spend considerable amount of time and effort. The history of language teaching clearly shows that several attempts have come into the teaching field in the form of theories and methods from theorists, educationalists and teachers to mend the irrelevance of the previous method or theory, down through the ages. One such attempt is, using eclectic method in the heterogeneous classroom. This research article attempts to see how eclecticism can be implemented in a heterogeneous classrooms?, What are its loop poles that exist in doing so? and, how the characteristics of this method do work in the heterogeneous setup?

1.1 Eclectic Method

Theorist proposed one of such gap mending approach in the beginning of 1990's and that become so popular and satisfying for many of the language teachers. Larser freeman (2000) and Mellow (2000) termed that pluralistic, coherent and desirable approach as 'Principle Eclecticism'. The realisation of the strengths and weakness of the each method paved way for this new and fashionable approach in the history of ELT. On accepting the above statements, Brown (2002) supports eclectic method saying, it provides solutions to the issues by giving licence to the teachers to adapt and to select various strategies from other methods in a single lesson. Gilliland, James and Bowman (1994) drew justification for the eclectic approach in

the weakness of the single approach because a single approach was very narrow and rigid in its application in addressing the issues of the dynamic classroom.

Eclectic method is not solely a teaching tool for teachers or learners' technique. It becomes as a bridge between the gap which exist in between (where grammar translation failed to answer a problem of the teachers, there direct method came as a aiding method to solve it) theories. Eclectic method provides a third option for teachers in the difficult situations by inviting different methods that suit the classroom situation. Billah, (2015) notes, this fusion includes content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowerment of competitive aptitudes. To make these changes possible; As Gao (2011) states a biggest challenge, which lies, in the process of teaching with the use of principled eclecticism is that, a teacher is called to possess a thorough and holistic understanding of all the theories, related methodologies and what is teaching? and what is learning? to make a firm decisions about the classroom instructions, choice of textbooks, purpose and context of learning and to use learning activities efficiently. Eclectic method is an integration of traditional and post method teaching theories. Hence, the theorists' advice is that the teachers have to make use of all the advantages of other theories while avoiding the disadvantages of the same. While speaking of the test and evaluation of the learning of the students the proponents of eclectic method say that, test must be the part of the method. It should not be separated from the programme. Since, the educators aim is that their learners should master the foreign language, no matter what approach they adopt.

In eclectic method, the language is viewed as the whole. Freeman (1992) the elements of language such as words, grammar, and pronunciation do not have meaning if used in isolation. The meaning can be derived only when language components are taken as whole. Eclectic theorists are on the belief that language proficiency can be achieved only with the continuous practice and usage of language as whole.

1.1.1 Definition

According to Encyclopaedia of Britannica, the origin of eclecticism dates back to 2nd century BC. Eclecticism is derived from the Greek word *eklektikos*, which means 'selective'. It defines eclecticism as "the practice of selecting doctrines from different systems of thought without adopting the whole parent system for each doctrine." <https://www.britannica.com/topic/eclecticism>.

Kumar (2013:1) defines eclectic method as "a combination of different method of teaching and learning approaches". Gao (2011:1) defines eclectic approach as "not a concrete, single method, but a method, which combines listening, speaking, reading, and writing and includes some practice in the classroom".

Al Hamash 1985: Larsen-freeman 2000: and Mellow 2002 noted that this method adapts variety of language learning activities, which are different from their nature and principles and yet can be made use in the different language-teaching context. Wali (2009:40) summarises the premises of eclectic approach as:

...one of the premises of eclecticism is that teaching should serve learners not methods. Thus, teachers should feel free in choosing techniques and procedures inside the classroom. There is no ideal approach in language learning. Each one has its merits and demerits. There is no royalty to certain methods. Teachers should know that they have the right to choose the best methods and techniques in any method according to learners' needs and learning situation. Teachers can adopt a flexible method and technique so, as to achieve their goals. They may choose whatever works best at a particular time in a particular situation.

Teaching should serve learners not methods means the teacher should try to help learners to learn and not merely trying to fulfil the procedures of the methods. The ultimate goal of teaching is to learn and the learners should grasp the content of the lesson.

Kumaravivelu (2006) cautions the teachers who rely on the specification of a particular method, since those specifications will address the problems, which come under its principles and features. If not they cannot address the problems. He insisted to follow a post-methodic approach to teach language. As stated above a teacher is not confined to follow a specific method instead, they can draw support and ideas from various theories and resource in teaching content to the learners. Weidemann (2001:2) makes a concrete statement that the eclectic approach is so widely accepted, that many teachers use it today very "proudly as a tag to describe their teaching, wearing it almost like a badge of honour". This means as there are different kind of learners in a classroom who are learning with a different learning methods followed by different teachers. Therefore, there exist waves of confusions and diversity. To eradicate those confusions and diversity the eclectic approach comes as an aiding tool to the teachers.

Hence, the believers of eclectic approach believe an effective teaching will take place in the flexibility of teachers' use of different approaches in a single lesson.

As Kumar (2013) noted that, the purpose of propagating the use of eclectic approach is to link the life experiences of the ideas presented in the leaning methods. In this method, the types of language activities are connected with the real world. Therefore, as the result, the students do not view the classroom and the textbooks as a threat, but it becomes a mere extension on home environment and makes the learning easy for the students. Primarily one should understand that eclectic approach is not a rigid approach. Its strength lies in its flexibility in adapting different methods as time and content requires in a single lesson. With this in mind let us move into view the characteristics of it.

1.1.2 Research Respondents And Method Used

This micro research has been scheduled to the 1st year B.sc students who stepped into the tertiary level of learning very fresh from different learning environments. To bring them under one umbrella the college provides 75 hours of English program for them initially to bridge their 12 years of learning English with the tertiary level learning where the language of instruction will be in English. The researcher took an attempt to spell out the observation of his and his fellow teachers who involved in this teaching process and analysis the questions asked to the teachers in the informal interview. The researcher confined his respondents only to 18 teachers because all of them were novice teachers. The methods used here to collect responses for the questions are informal interviews and discussion. They were conducted before and after the classes from all the 18 teachers.

1.1.3 The Characteristics of Eclecticism

The characteristics of eclectic method were taken from Mwanza's work (2017).

1.1.3.1 Eclectic Method is a Subjective Approach

As a Chinese proverb which says, "A thousand teachers, a thousand methods". In eclectic method every teacher has their own way of teaching and they become the author and the master of their method. According to the learning and teaching context, a teacher builds the eclectic approach on their own by adapting borrowing and following the relevance of the other methods. They take the full responsibility of the method by being subjective.

1.1.3.2 Eclecticism Accommodates Interlingua and Cross Lingual Approaches

The connection between L1 and L2 is unavoidable in the teaching and learning of English as the second language. L1 paves a way or becomes a Gateway to facilitate our L2. Stern (1992) says that in learning L2, L1 becomes the yardstick for all our learning. The eclectic approach incorporates both intralingua and cross lingual approaches. As Stern (1992) states, the decision to adapt intralingua or cross lingual should be on the goals of the learners, their previous experience in the L2, the context in which the programme takes place and ability

of the teachers to integrate languages for the better understanding of the students.

1.1.3.3 Localisation of the Content

Eclectic approach sees every teaching and learning context as a unique and different endeavour and therefore it requires a different method or strategies to suit the existing issues in the teacher, students, materials and the learning environment. Hence, localizing and contextualizing should be done. This process of localising the teaching and learning should not underestimate the global principles of language teaching but their useful teaching principles and characteristics should be appreciated and adapted in to be teaching context. As Kumaravadivelu states, (2006) global theories of language teaching are to be taken as the guiding tool for our everyday language practices. It should be implemented in the teaching and learning context according to the learners' and teachers' capacity, topic, aims of the programme, culture of the learner, school and where the language teaching and learning takes place. While commenting on the localization of methods, Larsen-freemann (2000: V) notes that;

a method is decontextualised. How a method is implemented in the classroom is going to be affected not only by who the teacher is, but by who the students are, their and the teachers' expectations, of appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demand, and factors connected to the wider socio-cultural context in which instruction takes place.

Kumar (2013) goes one-step higher and says language should not be isolated from its culture. Bring the culture in to the classroom will make the students to learn the equal word or sentence construction of their real use of language. One cannot rule out rules to localise content to the learners because rules helps us to communicate meaningfully with a good grammatical construction of a sentence without any error of miscommunication.

1.1.3.4 Error Correction as Part of Learning

The other important thing about the eclectic approach is that errors are viewed as the part of learning process. The teachers are advised not to correct them instantly but they are asked to do it at the end of the communicative activity. By correcting the learners errors the teacher erases the wrong contraction of students earlier knowledge and teach the correct version. On speaking of the vital role of error correction, Krashen (1982: 117) explains:

When error correction works, it does so by helping the learner change his/her conscious mental representation of a rule. In other words, it affects learned competence by informing the learner that his/her current version of a conscious rule is wrong. Thus, second language acquisition theory implies that when the goal is learning, errors should indeed be corrected.

Error correcting is not only the duty of the teachers but the fellow students can also make. In the processes of correcting the peers, the students also test their own learning by helping others. This helps them to learn from their own mistakes. The involvement of peers in this process proves that they are also capable of identifying the mistakes of the others. This activity helps them to be more creative and critical. They become the active participants of the class.

1.1.3.5 Integration of Inductive and Deductive Method

Another characteristic of eclectic method is that the teacher and the learner make use of the both inductive and deductive approach in their teaching process. This two sided approach is done to enhance both the slow learners who needs teachers' assistance and the fast learners who don't need one. This is the reason the teacher makes use of both inductive and deductive methods in a single lesson. Hence, as Krashen (1982) suggests that, there is no need to insist on to follow one and leave the other. Both are correct according to the needs of the learners. Hence, integration of strategies like inductive and deductive method in a single class and unit is allowed in the eclectic approach.

1.1.3.6 Eclectic Materials are Learner Centred

The eclectic approach advocates the learner centred lessons. This does not mean that learners have to do everything on their own. Gao (2011) states that, there should be three stages of learning process. 1. Input stage where teacher gives input, 2. Practice stage where the learner practices what he/she has learnt from the input of the teacher. 3. Productive stage where the learners create their own construction based on the above two stages.

Wali (2009:36) speaking about the more effective way of implementing the eclectic approach is that;

Teachers to provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of the different learning style so that all students will have at least some activities that appeal to them... teachers need techniques that work in their particular situations with specific objectives that are meaningful for the kind of students they have in their classes.

To make the learners centred classrooms the teachers should not neglect their duties as teachers like guiding, correcting, evaluating the students. Under eclectic approach, the role of the teacher and the learner are well defined. The teacher plays the role of the facilitator and the student plays the role of active participant. The teacher has to take the available resources to the students and manage them well. Li (2012) notes that teacher as the organiser and guide in the classroom leads the process of learning. During which he facilitates learning, organises the materials and assess the programme of the students with written and spoken activities. They also give feedback at the end of the lesson or activity on the purpose of the learning. To be an organiser in the class Wali (2009) advises the teachers to prepare well for the smooth flow of the learning process. Kumaravadivelu (2006) adds that, teacher should make sure that the topic is to be taught should be

socially relevant to the learner. The topic and activities should be relevant to the culture of the learner.

2. Analysis of the characteristics of Eclecticism

Here are the questions based on the characteristic of eclecticism to which the responses of teachers who adapted eclectic method in the heterogeneous classroom at the tertiary level were collected and presented as follows:

Question – 1. What were teachers' opinion on using eclecticism in a heterogeneous classroom?

All the 18 teachers were positive about using eclecticism in their heterogeneous classrooms. They said that monotony was broken and active classes were built with this method since it provided a variety of choice to deal with a single problem. They added that, this was not a rigid approach, its success remained in its flexibility.

Question – 2. How did subjectivity help the teachers in teaching?

All the 18 teachers said that being subjective enhanced their confidence.

Here the problem was, out of 18 teachers 15 teachers felt that, only teachers who had a sound knowledge in other methods could build an eclectic method if not, eclectic method would become a two edged sword that would ruin the principles of eclecticism and the learning of the students. When the users did not understand eclecticism properly, it became a challenging method for them. Since all were novice teachers, they found that initial classes needed much preparation. Teachers suggested that before planning their lesson for a class; they should understand the needs and moods of the students. For example, teaching a theory in the last hour made the students passive and boring because their mind became dry and tired.

Question – 3. Did intralingua and cross lingual approaches enhance your teaching?

All said yes and yet with some hesitations and discomfort. Being intralingua became the habit for teachers that limited the teachers' fluency.

Out of 18 teachers, 10 teachers felt that being intralingua or cross lingual made, the class interesting and other eight remarked that sometimes it was boring. For many it became an obstacle since students from other states were also present. (from Andhra and Orissa) All the 18 teachers knew only two languages (Tamil and English). Being intralingua became the habit for teachers since a few students demanded translation, every now and then. Few students took it as an advantage and used intralingua in the group discussions and as the result the failed to build their vocabulary and sentence structure.

Question – 4. How did localising the content and activity help in teaching?

Teaching and learning made the teachers and students to feel at home by localising the learning context with their own society in which they live. That linked their daily life with their learning.

All the 18 teachers felt that, Localising the content made the class live and active, students became the active participants in the class. For instance, there was an activity given, to learn the phrases of sequencing the students were asked to prepare a recipe using them. All the students prepared the recipes of their own culture. By doing so, they learnt the new vocabulary from grocery, which they use at home daily. Through this learning became easy task for students.

Question – 5. What was the role of error corrections in eclectic method?

All the 18 teachers felt that the role of error correction played an important role in teaching L2. It helped the students to correct their mistakes immediately to avoid fossilisation.

Error correction helped the learners to correct their mistake very easily that prevented them from fossilisation of wrong spelling, and other components of language. But, correcting seemed to be a tedious job for all the 18 teachers with the large number of students in a class. Within a given hour, it was very difficult for teacher to cover lesson, to practice what they learnt and to test and to correct them was a herculean task, correction was always incomplete within the given time.

Question – 6. How did the inductive and deductive methods integrate for teaching-learning purposes?

Not much discussion made on this characteristic because the teachers were on the opinion that they made use of this integration when there was necessity. Since, it varied content-to-content and context-to-context.

Question – 7. To what extent the learner centred-material was successful in heterogeneous classrooms?

Yes, all the 18 teachers were very positive on the learner centred- material since it was successful to them.

The assigned textbook was open-ended so that, it helped the teachers to build a method based on the eclectic principles. Both the teacher and the students had to do their duties as teachers and learners. For example, when reading passage was given to students to be read for the next class at home for further activity to be done in the class. Some students failed to go through it at home, so, the teacher felt discomfort to carry on with the next task. Completion of one's duty formed a lobe to join the other lesson to the previous one in a chain of learning or else, it broke the chain of learning. To affirm the about said the researcher noted the view of Weidemann (2001) that a good and an effective teacher spend a lot of time in searching for the interesting and attractive teaching aids and materials for his/her learners.

3. Conclusion

This method has been fashionable in its approach, pluralistic in its choice of adapting methods as the situation demanded and it has been coherent in joining hands with the relevant pedagogy of different theories. The vast majority of teachers have chosen for this micro level study has given the opinion that the use of eclectic method for given material has helped them to reach out the aim of the program within the

stipulated time. Eclectic method has refuted the rigidity of all the previous theories and their devotion towards their specifications and has adapted the new vestment of flexibility to its principles and philosophy. Eclectic method with its huge arms has embraced all the relevant principles and ideas from different theories when the situation demanded. Eclecticism has aimed to extent its service to teachers by borrowing, lending, adapting, avoiding, different theories by keeping only one principle that has emphasized on the idea that 'teaching is not for fulfilling the procedures of the textbook or methods, but to meet the needs

of the learners'. The principles and characteristic of eclecticism can be best assigned with this English idiom 'dancing to different tunes' since it is flexible, as there are different situations, trainers and audience. Eclecticism can also be called as "methods' method" as it encompassed all the strengths of all the other methods from traditional methods to the post methods. Hence, this microanalysis on eclectic method at tertiary level has proved that it could be an effective method in a heterogeneous classroom context.

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