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

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the need of basing activities, tasks and skill learning in the English language classroom on not just one approach, model or method in order to create a whole diverse learning environment. This method of teaching and creating engaging English language activities is based on the eclectic approach discussed by Kumar (2013) who states how this method allows the students to have less stress while learning, recognize very clear learning points, and complete multiple tasks while participating in a high interactive class with energetic learning experiences and quick necessary results. It will specifically look at how the use of various approaches, theories and models used in the English language classroom in Ecuador can create an environment that intrinsically allows the learner to be more comfortable, learn faster, and gain more out of a class in a shorter amount of time. This is fundamental because the authors personal experience in high school and university level shows classes tend to have many students (30 or more) and curriculum is created with the intent for students to learn large amounts of information, but is normally not allotted enough vital classroom face to face hours. Using the eclectic approach allows the teacher to better cover the necessary skills, tasks and activities for students to be able to learn, understand and ultimately gain the knowledge quintessential to becoming competent in speaking, reading, writing and listening in English in a large classroom setting in a shorter amount of time.

KEYWORDS: Eclectic method/ approach, English language learning, need

**Introduction**

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

This paper specifically looks at an English language class at the Unversidad de Educacion (UNAE) in Azogues, Ecuador. This group of teacher trainees is a lower intermediate group in their third semester of university study. The specific topic being taught in the example plan created by the teacher explains the grammar point; comparatives and superlatives and adjectives to describe and compare personal preferences about food. The article below will discuss the lesson plan which will be taught in 4 face-to face class time hours in the most direct way possible for students to absorb and learn the large amount of information presented to them in a short amount of time. The multiple methods, activities and tasks used by the teacher and discussed are used to increase the student’s knowledge and English language skills in the given environment and time period.

**Methods**

To get results for the problems mentioned in this paper the teacher had a question and answer session with the students at the end of the semester of study to find out if the Eclectic Method used throughout the course and specifically the topic discussed in this paper allowed for more individual attention and absorption of English in a shorter amount of time. At the end of the session 26 out of 30 students explained they received more attention directed towards their individual learning styles and needs. They did not feel as though they were in such a large class, but that it was more personalized to their needs. These students also described how they learned more and are also able to use the skills and information from the English language class when practicing English. The other 4 students felt they needed smaller class sizes and were not able to increase their knowledge of English at the rate they would have wanted. These methods utilized by the author are reflected throughout the results, discussion and conclusion of this paper.

**Problems Encountered**

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

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

**Literature review**

**What is the Eclectic Method and How It Is Necessary?**

The Eclectic method “involves the use of variety of language learning activities, each of which may have very different characteristics and may be motivated by different underlying assumptions (Billah, 2015).” Billah (2015) points out how just following a single method can limit what and how the student learns. This can make it more difficult to teach to the needs of the students and the limits of the given class size and time. ESL students, especially university students, normally do not have a lot of time to learn a foreign language and expect to have the same results even when they invest less hours in the language learning process. The curriculum created for the English language groups in UNAE expect the students to learn a large amount of information, retain the information and be able to use the information in an authentic setting in a short amount of time. The use of the Eclectic method allows for this to happen because “it fuses elements from traditional and cognitive methods to deliver on the strengths of both. It includes content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowerment of competitive aptitudes (Billah,2015).” This is a fairly new concept and for it to work in the classroom teachers must be prepared to think in new ways and constantly be open to change. Teachers must also have knowledge of the various methods and approaches to be able to connect the methods together in a form that functions in the classroom. Therefore, it is believed putting the approaches, methods and models together randomly may not provide the necessary results an English language teacher is looking for. The teacher must have sufficient prior knowledge of various methodologies to properly utilize the Eclectic Method. (Billah,2015)

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

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

**Discussion**

 **The models, methods, approaches and techniques used**

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

To support the arguments and information cited in this paper a topic plan and explanation have been included. The instrument created by the professor is used as evidence to show how the Eclectic Method can be organized for an EFL class. The activities spoken about and focused on were created primarily for large class sizes and groups that have few face-to-face class hours.

The practical approach taken by the author of this paper is to teach English through the Eclectic Method. The Eclectic Method looks at teaching language as a whole and does not believe in separating it. Supporters such as Kumar (2013) and Billah (2015) of this method believe the use of multiply approaches and techniques will give the teacher the best results for their students. This approach is seen being used throughout the topic plan and example activity provided below. Various strategies, methods, models and approaches have been demonstrated to create activities, which will assist the students learning in a large classroom environment and receive more information in order to excel in English language learning in a shorter amount of time. These models, approaches and methods within the Eclectic Method include Constructivism, Communicative learning, The Flipped Classroom and Task-Based Learning.

 The lesson below includes an introduction of the topic where the teacher speaks giving the students a base to build on. To give the introduction the teacher utilizes the idea of the Flipped Classroom, but only after a short introduction of the grammar point that is explained by the teacher. The Flipped classroom is defined by Bishop and Verleger (2013) as a learning technique where students participate in-group activities in the classroom and utilize computer resources independently outside of the classroom. They make the point that this technique is loosely based on the Constructivism Model, because students must independently find answers and information on their own. In the authors class the students are meant to gain a deeper understanding of how and when to use the grammar point by watching videos and taking time for individual learning outside of the classroom. This technique individualizes the learning process and helps students feel more comfortable participating in the classroom by having students work mostly in groups or pairs to share previously gained knowledge and help each other achieve a higher understanding of the topic.

Since they basically learned the grammar out side of the classroom the students can then move on to completing a Communicative Learning discussed by Richards (2006) to complete tasks in groups to activate previous knowledge in a communication activity. The students are given the tools through the Flipped Classroom to complete an activity using authentic communication in a real life context. The communicative approach emphasizes group work and the use of real life vocabulary and situations in the classroom.Throughout the follow up activities the teacher takes the role as a guide or support system for the students to have the opportunity to activate prior knowledge and learn through doing. They are then given an activity based on Tasked-Based Instruction or TBI, which Richards (2006) explains is closely connected to CLT to ultimately reinforce the knowledge they gained through the flipped classroom. This activity is also completed in groups using realia to create authentic connections to real life situations. The students eat and compare the food they are eating. Using TBI allows for more authentic learning, strongly engaging the students on the action being done and not the grammar being taught. This way the students learn how to naturally use the grammar point previously taught without the primary focus being the grammar itself. The students are assessed at the end of each activity in ways to gage the students learning and knowledge about the topic, such as completed written work and group discussions.

**Results**

To demonstrate the processes, methods, tasks, activities and evaluations used throughout this paper a lesson plan is provide below following TESOL guidelines for English language teaching created by the professor. The topic is evaluated through different learning and teaching styles. The teacher assesses following the guidelines of the communicative approach by listening to group discussions and grading physical creations of the students group work. The teacher also checks the activity produced by the Flipped Classroom to assess what new knowledge was learned independently from the students at home. They are then graded by their written work finished at the end of the task-based activity. Through all of these different activities and tasks the teacher is able to accurately teach and communicate with the students who are given the tools necessary to learn new vocabulary, topics and grammar in a shorter amount of time with a large group through the Eclectic Method. The example of the instrument created by the teacher incorporating the Eclectic method is the lesson plan shown below.

**Lesson Plan:** Elementary School degree teacher training group level 3

**Foreign language Cambridge proficiency level:** Lower Intermediate or A2

**Language skill focus:** Comparing and Contrasting Using Adjectives in Comparative and Superlative Form to Describe Food

**Time:** Four face-to-face classroom hours/ four independent learning hours

**1) TEFL language objectives:**

**a.** **Listening:** classroom discussions, conversations, presentations and videos

**b.** **Speaking**: pair and group discussions

**c.** **Reading:** PowerPoint presentations, worksheets and peer work

**d.** **Writing:** questionnaires, worksheets, individual work and class exercises

**2) Strategies and methods to be used:**

**a.** Group and pair work

**b**. YouTube videos

**c.** Pictures

**d.** Realia

**e.** Guided conversations

**f.** Computer/PowerPoint presentations

g. Worksheets

**3) Approaches, Models and Theories:**

**Eclectic approach:**

 >Communicative learning theory

 >Behaviorism

 >Tasked based learning

 >Constructivism

 >The flipped classroom

**4) Teacher input:** Introduce topic, grammar point, provide video links, realia and all activities. Also guide students through the learning process, control class behavior and give directions to all activities. Provide new vocabulary. Introduce comparative and superlative adjectives structure and form. Creation of PowerPoint with images and information to guide the students through the learning process.

**5) Guided student practice:**

**1**: Listen and actively participate in teacher introduction of the topic through listening to the teacher, providing new information to specific questions asked by the teacher, asking questions about new material and providing personal information when necessary. Writing down pertinent information needed for later activities.

**2:** Use power point to understand and use new vocabulary

**3:** Watch videos explaining the grammar points at home to be able to gain a more in depth understanding of the task.

**4:** Complete activity to show understanding of how to use food adjectives in comparative and superlative form.

**6) Group practice activity:**

**1:** discuss and utilize previously gained knowledge of new food vocabulary

**2:** Pair activity completing a worksheet discussing and using the learned grammar point to show new knowledge gained.

**3**: Having real life conversations with various peers utilizing the new vocabulary, structure and grammar.

**4**: Taste Test Comparison. Students taste 3 different potato chips to authentically use comparatives and superlatives in a comparison worksheet, which contains lists of new vocabulary.

**7) Assessment:**

**1:** Work created through interactive image comparison.

**2:** Group discussions and notes.

**3:** Questionnaire completed in pairs for a classwork grade.

**4:** Information shared with groups and then the class about the video to show understanding of the grammar points. Sentences written using structure and vocabulary learned from the videos and power points.

**5:** Listening to group conversations and correcting grammar and structure when necessary.

**6:** Discussion about potato chip comparisons in groups and the creation of a written sample of these comparisons.

7: Completion culmination activity showing understanding of grammar and vocabulary.

**8) Closing review and follow up:**

**1:** Review of written work, group discussions and written piece about what they now know, what they learned and what they still need to work on.

**2:** End of the year project will show an aspect of student’s knowledge of comparison adjectives.

**Conclusion**

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

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