

# ENGLISH TEACHING METHODOLOGY IN LOW SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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## **Abstract**

Despite nowadays opinion that English teaching methodology should be a mutual process between teachers and students and with a students' centred approach, until now this is far from being real in Kosovo. The modern pedagogical aspect of Bologna system installed in Kosovo is supposed to train both students and teachers in the scope of critical thinking skills via analysis of real-life situations, which would enable students become practical learners of the future. As the long-time old teaching approaches, methods and techniques were mainly concentrated on teachers' 'show', unfortunately it has hampered the process of having reflective students who would be able to enquire and assess the perspective of information and knowledge served to them. In theory and on the surface, teachers in some way appear to be reformed; however its execution in practice lags behind. This conclusion does not result from the personal long teaching experience as well, but has directly derived from an intensive research in the region of Gjilan. The study which included direct observations during English lessons in ten city schools, and analysis of questionnaires filled in by respective teachers, have shown that the prevailing English teaching methods are still the traditional teacher-centred ones: the grammar-translational method, to some extent the audio-lingual method, and lately, on very few occasions, the communicative approach. The research resulted with the finding that after four, namely nine years of English learning, majority of Albanian students of respective primary city schools are not able to communicate freely in English.

*Keywords: students, approach, methods, listening, reading, communicative, ninth grade.*

## Introduction

Nowadays, due to big developments and technological changes, communication needs of people have changed as well. In vein of this change, the process of teaching is correspondingly going through stages of adaptation efforts, changes and new representations in the field of pedagogy in many respects. Today, in the so-called "reformed" schools, methods and consequently purposes of learning foreign languages have changed as well. They are not only formal, but also practical, with a view to enable students to use language effectively, namely to assist them to understand both, spoken and written language and at the same time to attract them to be familiar with literature, arts and culture of the targeted country (Kabashi, J (2001)). Starting from this principle, the foreign language learning process, among others, distinguishes two facing trends or approaches: communicative and formal approach. While the first one aims at enabling students to use language effectively, to understand both, spoken and written language in an open way, on the other hand, the formal approach includes "official" teaching and learning based on mechanical reproduction of grammatical and translation rules.

Despite nowadays opinion that English teaching methodology should be a mutual process between teachers and students through a students' centred approach, until now this is far from being real in Kosovo, not because of the methodology solely, but due to a number of other influential components: community language, planning, general school atmosphere, recommended textbooks, training, composition of classes etc., that are not to be qualified as satisfactorily implemented.

Teaching methods have a direct impact on students' motivation, so their proper use should answer many questions: is it an appropriate method for the students' age; does it comply to the concepts of teaching units; does it fulfill concrete technical needs etc. Therefore, if any method or technique is not adequate, (it does not convey expected results), it certainly is a demotivating one, and as such should be excluded. On the other hand, if a method or technique seems to be beneficial and appropriate, it will definitely be motivating. Thus, the proper motivation of students, regardless whether it is via traditional, direct, communicative, learner-centered or any other methods, should be the goal of every teacher, who him/herself is one of the most important factors that influences the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students. Though the role of the teacher is of particular importance, studies or analyzes conducted to date do not provide any clear guiding definition on what a good teacher mean. However, it can be said that there can be a measuring difference between a "good" and a "successful" teacher: as the first one can hardly be defined, on the other hand the successful teacher can be verified. Successful teaching depends on professional and didactic-methodical preparation of the teacher that includes a wide spectrum of planning and implementation of an effective work with student (Zylfiu, 2005). However, based on literature and pedagogical research, it has been accepted that students appreciate more features of the human behavioral aspect a teacher has rather than those more specific tasks to the work they perform as teachers.

Although the above-mentioned conclusion is to be valued and to be taken as true, and despite the fact that teachers read, study, discuss and share with other teachers, there are other component that need be taken into account: reflection on personal experiences during teaching process via analysis; efforts to change and adjust to changes and, the continuous long-life learning/training. In this regard, Kolb's theory elaborates the idea of experience and reflection on experience through four types of learning: a) concrete experience, b) reflective observation, c) abstract conceptualization d) active experimentation (D.A. Kolb, 1984). Kolb is of the opinion that, if we aim to achieve an desirable degree of learning, each of the aforementioned types of learning should be gradually connected.

Another author, Penny Ur agrees with Kolb's theory and approach, but says that his idea

should be expanded with additional information from external sources, which will enrich the circle of that pattern or cycle to learning, and proposes other four types: 1) indirect experience, 2) observation of others, 3) result of professional research; 4) experience of others (Ur, 1996).

Both authors complement each other and in a way break the traditional stereotype of our teaching motto "from theory to practice". They somehow bring before the reader the idea "from theory to practice". In light of this, Centre for Democratic Education proposes thirty working techniques, which are considered to be the best source for the development of classroom activities and can be defined as resistance to older methods, especially against the glorification of the teacher's authority. These methods and techniques are in favor of an interactive teaching and learning, and as such can be effectively used in the English language learning process.

Yet, even today among the most typical methods used in our teaching setting are: grammar-translation method (traditional method), to some extent audio-lingual method and direct method, and recently student-centered methods. The level of practice of these methods has been researched and analyzed through questionnaires prepared for this purpose and as well based on our observation and reflection during English lessons in schools of Gjilan region.

### **Analysis of results and research subjects for the skill of listening and reading**

In order to get a clearer picture on the methodology of English teaching process in urban and rural primary schools of Gjilan region, we interviewed a number of respective schools teachers via questionnaires prepared for two target research groups:

- a) the general group of fifty English teachers and
- b) the focused or specific group of twenty teachers

The general group of teachers included primary school teachers in the region of Gjilan including Viti, Kamenica, Novobërdë, Kaçanik and Ferizaj. This group has been researched without any specific criteria, while the focused group consisting of twenty teachers included the following criteria: ♣ qualification ♣ experience in public and private schools ♣ training and direct contact with English.

Through direct observation during English classes we noted that approximately 70-80 per cent (twenty minutes of a lesson, as at that time a teaching hour lasted thirty minutes) of the time was used by the teacher. The lesson was characterized by a knowledge/homework verification done by asking each pupil whether they had done their homework. Few teachers tried to make conversations but without a specific aim, which brought lessons to an end without articulating any specific either objective or any clear additional tasks. In conclusion, the other 20-30 per cent remaining time was not used in achieving a desirable language teaching objective. The previous used lesson structure (intro - to motivate students, or presentation of lesson's purpose), were not at all used, and in this vein, using of lesson's three-phases structure evoke-realize-reflect (ERR) aimed at developing students' critical thinking was not mentioned at all. This makes known that teachers of English classes: a) do not play the role of helper, which, according to the results of new researches and analysis of teaching should be done in order to implement student-centered approach; b) do not use stimulating and inspiring activities c) do not encourage group activities and peer-to peer discussions d) do not use roles and games activities, d) do not use additional material.

Even though most of the teachers were on time informed about the aim of the research and

were asked to possibly concentrate on practicing basic language skills activities, it was discouraging to observe that: *students were one by one invited to read few lines of the respective lesson to the class with the teacher standing next to them; there was no motivating intro to the content of the about- to- be- read- text; students were not given enough time for reading; teachers did not explain any of the procedures of reading; silent reading was not used during any lessons; correction of mistakes was impulsively done, without giving students opportunities to correct themselves by any repetitions or retellings.*

With exception of three teachers, others did not encourage students to think or give any critical hints on upcoming lesson topics. They did not encourage students in finding illustrations or examples in order to compare and confront their ideas. Thus, the possibility of methodical learning stimulation via phases that help processes of listening and reading (reading a selected text, re-reading a more difficult part of a lesson/text, creating graphic organizers, keeping notes during reading etc.) were not carried out. Moreover, teachers asked from students facts-oriented answers and there were no attempts to develop any discussion that will encourage thinking and listening to what others say. In addition, during none of the lessons monitored, techniques of students grouping were used, either in pairs or in small groups known as the group of threes, but instead teachers were reading by standing in front of students, leaving the impression that reading was only a 'cover-up' issue.

On a separate note, the issue of controlling-, measuring the planned time within a lesson presented an issue, as the lesson usually started and ended without a set goal. Most of the lessons ended while students were reading, and, consequently, the homework were given in a pretty chaotic atmosphere. The floor was given to the most active students while others remained totally passive. Encouraging techniques were not used with the exception of three teachers who somewhat used brainstorming technique but none used KWL technique in reading nor in writing. Upon completion of the reading, teachers did not ask questions to encourage students' responses. In fact, some of the teachers read the questions in the text and asked for answer by hand-rise based on accuracy of the text only. This made students passive recipients, who considered reading as a routine-process and not as an important skill to be used in life. Therefore, we can conclude that, for most of the students, reading for understanding and apprehending meaningful information remained at the initiation phase bearing as well in mind the extensive classroom noise for most of the lessons monitored. The issue of class discipline was well addressed only by one teacher, who despite not using advanced techniques, managed to attract interest through questions or associations appropriate for their age. She also managed to handle 'unpleasant behaviors', because her way of communication could direct the class both in content and technical related matters. By this, we can say that teachers are the dominant factor in teaching as they are an irreplaceable source of classroom teaching management. It tells that being a good teacher does not mean being qualified or trained only. It means that teachers should possess emotional intelligence (*Goleman, 2009*), in order to act according to the specific circumstances of each classroom and individual because it directly has a direct impact on the overall well-being of students.

Except the monitoring process, in order to have more valid findings we based our research on a survey as well, which was carried out with fifty English teachers mentioned at the beginning of the research. Besides the permission approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the teachers' survey group of urban and rural primary schools in the region of Gjilan, was made with prior approval of the relevant primary school-directors. Also, most of the teachers were individually informed about the purpose of the research, though all explanations and instructions were clearly stated in the questionnaire. After a few days we managed to collect all the questionnaires completed by respective teachers.

After systematization of analysis of data, it was interesting to see results of the survey responses on one hand and on the spot observations on the other hand. Despite our theory and conviction taken from monitoring that the main reason why students have low level of written and oral English language communication is because of the low professional preparation and, consequently, lack of proper teaching methodology and techniques by respective teachers, the answers to the survey of the fifty (50) teachers of general group showed the contrary. Most of them are pretty well informed about the approaches, methods and techniques to be used in the teaching process. Out of fifty, forty teachers think that, it is not the method and approach that affect the poor level of English language proficiency, but large numbers of students and overload are the main causing factorst.

As stated above, their responses differ from our direct observation in schools. This is due to the fact that teachers have subjectively responded based on what they have heard on new teaching trends. This strengthens our belief even more by the fact that in such situations, when there is uncertainty, then, respondents inclineto circle option of average. In light of this, teachers have mostly circled the option of average in the questionnaire. On the second question as well,teachers indicate to work more with student-centered approach and to them students word is crucial (30% of teachers give priority to student-centered methods, while only 6% to traditional methods), which unfortunately was not observed on the scene, as teachers addressed the process to all students, and not in groups, pairs or individuals. Students were not encouraged to work in teams, or to present on behalf of groups, neither to lead any activity.

Consequently, we facedincompatiblefacts. On one hand,based on the real monitored situationit was noticed thatEnglish language learning was not a process but rather a product based on traditional methods where memorization of facts was important and teachers centeredon themselves. However, teachers claimedto be aware and to use new methodologies of teaching. In order to verify the controversyof these findings, we believe that more researches need to be carried out.

On the other hand, the results obtained from the questionnaire submitted to teachers of the target group and from the direct monitoring during their English classes, we found out that this group of teachers is quite familiar with the new methodology and contemporary trendsof teaching. Their answers convince us that theyread and implement modern teaching literature. To the question on what is their preferred approach, all prefer students-centered approach, and when asked what is the most used method, most of them (sixteen of them) have not mentioned one, but several methods<sup>1</sup> in which they use diverse means of concretizing, even contemporary ones. Also answers on the definition of listening and reading were interesting and original by qualifying them as core skills to further progress which should not be taught isolated but related with other two skills.To the questions whether mother tongue should be used while learning the foreign language learning and whether it is important to practice skills in an integrated way, eighteen of twenty responded that it should be used a little, which is consistent to the recommendations of modern literature regarding the use of mother tongue in language learning. Re to question on what is the best way to acquire language skills, four of them preferred the communicative approach, focusing on communication and the needs of students in real-life situations, not only based on linguistic criteria. Others have responded that it is very important to use several types of methods and techniques (they did not specify

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<sup>1</sup>12 favor direct method by using English exclusively; four use communicative one; others critical thinking method;

which ones), because all skills should be practiced in conjunction with each other. This result shows and strengthens the conviction that communication methods and practice of relatedness mentioned by them provide students with pragmatic knowledge on rules under which communication is carried out, and this is combination of linguistic and communicative elements.

The seventh question on what are the reasons that students even after 4 or 8 years of English learning fail to communicate, brought interesting answer, but very different at the same time. Eleven (11) of them thought that lack of direct access to the English-speaking environment and a late contact with English hinders the proper learning and mastering of English. Others (nine of them) were of the opinion that use of inappropriate methods and techniques and the big number of pupils per class impedes the process.

For the eighth question, on how do they base students' evaluation, all answered that it is important to have a continuous assessment and pay attention to communication level, which also applies to the fact that language should serve as a mean of communication, and its evaluation must continuously take place and not only through a test or at the end of the period. Based on such responses, teachers know how to avoid summative evaluation, which, according to Guide number 6, can identify standards of achievement of standards only at the end of a certain period of teaching (Guide No 6, 1998). Instead, they prefer to evaluate through different means: various tests, essays, systematic observation, the level of communicative competence etc., which makes us conclude that these teachers possess knowledge regarding evaluation techniques.

Question (10), in our opinion, has been somewhat challenging, as they were asked to give their opinion on what do they understand by classroom discipline. Our teaching understanding still qualifies classroom discipline, with classes where silence is the first, where the teacher is the most important person and student speaks only when invited. Such concepts have changed, and today classrooms silence does not mean keeping silence without any intention of learning. This was confirmed in the answers to that question as most teachers described discipline as practice of a proper methodology which includes stimulation and motivation; proper planning; teachers' capability to maintain discipline etc.. It is interesting to note that none of them thought that 'authority' is a factor that affects classroom discipline. This term leaves room for discussion and further explanations which can be very relative.

As a result of this work, and based on the personal teaching experience we have obtained the following conclusions:

With the social, economic and technological changes, Kosovo has as well started to make changes, even though quite small as modernization of the teaching, remains as an effort only.

Language skills are closely related to each other, thus exclusion of any of skills in the overall process would be unrealistic and contra productive, as to achieve realistic goals within the context of a lesson there should be a harmonious combination of all language skills.

Teachers should practice communicative approach through appropriate teaching methods and techniques in order for students to be able to learn how to integrate all skills through real concentration as learning foreign languages asks for double concentration and attention in order to properly understand the message. Therefore, proper practice of listening, reading, writing and speaking will enable students to efficiently acquire spoken and written language. Simultaneously, they would be able to adopt spelling, reading fluency and writing process. With this in mind, they will also develop audio memory as an important element in teaching and learning a foreign language.

Teaching is, primarily a goal-oriented process. Achieving that goal, is undoubtedly a complex process that depends on many factors, ranging from the relationship between teachers and students, depending from the blackboard and chalk to computers. This

combination will enable students to receive more meaningful information and ideas, which can then be transformed into practical skills.

In order for students to obtain a fluent and accurate English, and if they want to ensure competent teaching, teachers must themselves be those who master the English language. In this way, they should be able to tailor teaching process based on prior knowledge, physical and psychological abilities of the students, in order to crystalize the transmitted message at all levels, in particular for beginning grades of primary school. Since third grade onwards the teaching of English is characterized by a miscellaneous continuity that depends on many factors, especially by the adequate professional preparation and didactic-methodical level of teachers of English as an undivided integral part of the learning process.

From the results obtained through teachers general group survey and through on scene monitoring it is clearly shown that lack of the above factors is an obstacle to a proper mastering of the English language by students of ninth grade of Gjilan region urban and rural schools. The same situation can be assumed to prevail in other regions of Kosovo, given the fact that Gjilan region is known as one of the largest Kosovo wide.

We believe that the results of this study will serve as useful material not only for teachers of English of respective schools of the region where the research took place, but also to other relevant educational institutions.

Finally, it can be concluded that, for a faster economic, technological, and cultural development of the country, English learning is a pre-condition 'sine qua non' for Kosovo's integration in European institutions and beyond.

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