FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER: METHODS, APPROACHES AND THE ADOPTED METHODOLOGY

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Abstract

This is a research and investigating study which aims to observe and evaluate the general education of foreign language teachers of the pre-university system in the Albanian context, regarding the acknowledgment and usage of glotto didactic traditional and alternative methods and approaches, and also the methodology they adapt in the teaching context for a more productive and effective class. Also, this study highlights the strong and weak areas such methods and approaches present from the teachers' point of view and what they propose to improve their application while teaching a foreign language. The purpose of this study is to identify the methodology a foreign language teacher uses to achieve the required results and where is he based for this use. There has been done a survey in the high schools of Tirana, where 30 different foreign languages teachers participated. After collecting the surveys, there was done a data processing and a detailed analysis, where there were identified many issues, not only in the lack of knowledge or no knowledge at all for some glottodidactic methods or approaches, but there were also identified gaps in the methodology these teachers applied while teaching. As a conclusion, there is emphasized the need for a continuous update of the foreign language teachers, and the improvement of their knowledge through different trainings, not just theoretical, but also practical, so, despite their level of knowledge, they have the opportunity to enrich them, in order to be a more efficient and productive teacher.

Keywords: Teacher, Method, Approach, Methodology.

Introduction

"I consider the education of our teachers a mistake ..... basing it only in a defined method. Each method is good and we can learn something from each of them. That's why it is necessary that teachers get familiar, if possible, with all the methods in order to identify and get the best of each." (Weber W. 1994, p.113)

Weber would claim it loud and clear that teaching a language cannot be confined in the usage of a method, while reducing the importance of one and increasing the importance of another. Therefore, the education of a language teacher must be thorough. He should know not only the methods and approaches of the trend, but also those which initiated the actual methods and approaches.

I. What is a method or approach and how is it defined?

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It would be interested to go through some definitions that are provided for the concept *method*, because, as it is noted, many researchers provide different definitions, but their essence remains the same.

Stern claims that a true definition of what a foreign language teaching method is has never been achieved (Stern H., H. 1983, 452). He notes that the concept is very vague. Also, Rogers and Richard (Richards. J.C, Rodgers T.S, 2001, pp. 5-6), do not agree on same conclusions with regards to what is widely accepted on what a *method* stands for.

Let's deal with some definitions provided from different researchers:

Balboni: A method is the general operating plan of an approach. The method includes all the selection criteria of a corpus, the options that support some operating patterns, guidelines on the usage and role of glotto-technologies. (Balboni, E., P. 1991, pp. 6-7)

1. *Balboni:* A method is a level which enables the passage from glottodidactics to language learning. *(*Balboni, E P. 1998, p.3)
2. *Porcelli:* The term *method* has been used to show*:*
    a) A unit of integrated didactic materials which constitute the course of a language (student's book, teacher's book, audio cassette, slides or short movies, tests, etc.); this has been verified in the France of 60s-70s with famous courses, such as: *La Méthode Orange, La méthode Capelle* and many more.
    b) An operating modality in the presentation of course contents, such as the expression *audiovisual method (hearing-visual);* It was not a rare thing in the last years to hear the saying that "*television is a method*", whereas it would be correct to say that: it is just a technical support, which helps and supports teaching.
    c) A general strategy of glottodidactic intervention, which, based on pedagogic, psychological and linguistic data tries to attune and make them coherent, to serve not just as an interpreting tool of a very complex and multilayered reality, but also as a didactic operating tool, conscious and on strong basis. (Porcelli F., 1994, p. 41)
3. *Borneto:* A method is something more than teaching technique or strategy, because it refers to a teaching theory, a vision, of teaching a language in the whole meaning of the word, a series of hypothesis on the student and learning. (Borneto S. C, 2010, p. 17)
4. *Danes*i: The term method includes a closed repertoire of criteria, procedures and actions, which are respected while teaching a language. (Danesi M., 1998 p.21)

In the reality, there cannot exist a perfect method for all the situations that are encountered during the teaching process, because the needs and the participating parties differ.

I. *General features of the methods and approaches.*

Which are the features of a method, what is its role and how can we define it? These are some of the questions that are often presented not only from people of glottodidactics, but also from teachers and other people dealing with teaching and studying languages.

Let's see how Borneto has cleared them all by wrapping them up as follows (Borneto S.C., 2010, p10):

1) Method deals with the specification of general and specific objectives in the learning of a certain language
2) It deals with the principles it is based on
3) It deals with the theoretical basis it is based on
4) It deals with the definition of the teacher's role during language teaching

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5) It deals with the definition of the student's role and the impact it has on the teaching process
6) It deals with the definition of culture and the role it plays on the language learning
7) It deals with linguistic context and its organizational criteria
8) It deals with the definition of the role and the importance of didactic materials and the criteria of building them
9) It provides suggestions and technical descriptions which are suitable to the specific implementation of the method

Therefore, the method is closely related to many factors which impact the teaching and learning process. If all these factors are taken into consideration, only in a more correct reference framework, we can refer to a method in the whole meaning. If we deal with a more general and flexible orientation, even though it is based on general principles, then we are dealing with an approach, not a method. (Borneto S.C., 2010)

II. Method/Approach dichotomy

The discussion of what will be called a method and what an approach has been and always will be one of the not so clear points in the global didactics.
Initially, after it was used to define specific working modes within a method in the mid of the 70s, the term method was used, because it was perceived as a more flexible notion. Still, the line between both concepts was not clearly drawn (Porcelli G., 1994, p.41).
Anthony highlights the need for a terminology clarity (Anthony E., 1972, Balboni 1994), followed by Krashen, who demands the same thing and proposes an epistemology of two levels. (Krashen S.D., 1985, Balboni 1994)
Balboni is the one who proposes the below model (Balboni P.E., 1994, p. 47):

EPISTEMOLOGIC LEVEL	EVALUATION CRITERIA
Theory	True/ false
Approach Based on Capable to create one or more	Right /Wrong in its purpose Based/ not based on true theories
Method In coherence with And capable to be realized in	Coherent/Incoherent Appropriate/inappropriate to realize the approach Efficient/ inefficient in achieving the target
Technique Coherent with	Efficient/ inefficient in realizing the method and approach

Tab. Nr. 6 Epistemological levels of glottodidactics (fig. P.E. Balboni, 1994 p.47)

As far as we can see, the approach can be defined as: (Balboni P.E., 1992, pp. 7-9)
a) Organizational models of the materials that needs to be taught
b) Operating models of the student's work on these materials. (Balboni P.E., 1992, pp. 7-9)
Besides all, the approach is a level where scientific coordinates can be defined, on the basis of which there are proposed methods that can achieve the objectives and fulfill the approach purpose.

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An approach is evaluated based on:
- Scientific basis and theories where there have been taken into consideration the basic principles
- Internal coherence
- The ability to generate methods that are able to realize the approach by themselves (Balboni E.P., 1994, p. 49).

Still, the concept of approach remains vague as there is still place for further discussion.

III.   *Methods and linguistic framework*

It is clear that in the teaching of foreign languages, language is important, but naturally the question is which language will be taught and how.

Actually, it is important within the method framework to ask such questions and answer them on the language it will teach and how it will be taught, as well.

The questions a method has to answer deal with: (Borneto C.S., 2010, pp. 12-28)

1) Will there be used the everyday communication language, the written one or both?
2) Will it deal with formal language, informal one or both?
3) Which are the linguistic abilities that will be achieved and how?
4) Which are the theoretical theories which it refers?
5) Which will be the role of the grammar and how much will it occupy?
6) Which ability will be mostly highlighted and why?
7) Will there be a general linguistic, communicative, affective humanist or psychological orientation?
8) During the class, will it always be the same or will it change?
9) Is it going to respect the quantity and quality of the offered language with regards to the student level and will it be gradual and escalated taking into consideration the students' needs?
10) Which will be the role of Gj1 with regards to GjH? (Borneto C.S., 2010)?

If a method takes into consideration and provides the correct answer to these questions, it can be considered as such and be put into practice; and if its parameters are efficient in practice, it will survive and prove efficient.

IV.   *Method and pedagogic framework*

1) As a pedagogic framework we understand three important elements (Borneto C.S,2010):
a) Teacher
a) Teaching
b) Student

Let's check them briefly:
A. Teacher

Every method provides a specific role and function for the teacher. The two most common roles in different methods are:

1) *Leading* teacher, who undertakes a very central role in the class, he organizes and coordinates the actions and defined the roles of everyone participating in the class
2) *Facilitating* teacher, who has a more flexible role, provides freedom to the students, follows the needs and interprets them
B. Teaching

A language, but not just that, can be taught in three ways:
2) *Deductive,*

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3) *Inductive,*
4) *Constructive* (Borneto C.S,2010)
C. Student

Every method defines the role of the student and the functions he plays within the teaching framework. In different methods, this role differs, as well.

I. *Survey*

- Target: Teachers of 9-year and high schools
- Number of teacher for 9-years school: 12
- Number of public high school teachers: 18

Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR 9-YEAR AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Global didactics acknowledges a great number of methods and approaches separated into two groups: traditional and alternative.

1. Traditional approach methods: For every following questions, mark with X the right box.

Question: How much do you know the method/approach	Knowledge level				
	Not at all	A little	Enough	Well	Very well
Grammatical – interpreter			1	3	26
Direct method (Berlitz)		1	3	4	22
Audiolingustic	2	4	2	3	19
Oral - Situational	1	3	4	7	15
Cognitive approach		1	2	6	21

1.1 Do you think it is necessary to know the traditional methods and approaches in teaching a foreign language, despite the percentage of their usage and the employment of new methods and approaches?

Yes / No / Partially

1.1. a If yes, provide your argumentation _____

 1.1. b If no, provide your argumentation: _____

  1.1. c How much do you think the knowledge of such methods and approaches has affected your education as a teacher?

a) Not at all   b) a little   c) enough   d) too much

1.1. d Which of these methods have you used mostly and in which teaching aspect?

_____

1.1. e Do you think that aspects of these methods and approaches can be valid even today in the teaching of foreign language?

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a) Not at all   b) a little   c) maybe   d) yes   e) don't know

➢ If   yes,   which   aspects?   Write   them   down
_____

Results for the questions 1.1 - 1.1e	
Question 1.1	Yes No Partial No answer 22 5 1 2
Question 1.1a	Positive response 4 Irrelevant response 10 No answer 16
Question 1.1b	No answer 30
Question 1.1.c	a) 0 b) 0 c) 16 d) 14
Question 1.1.d	a) 0 b) 1 c) 22 d) 1 e)6
Question 1.1.e	a) 0 b) 7 c) 6 d) 14 e) 3

2. **Alternative methods / approaches: For every question, please mark X in the appropriate box.**

Question: How familiar are you with the method?	Level of knowledge				
	Not at all	A little	Enough	Well	Very well
Community Language Learning	1	2	2	7	18
Total physical response	2	2	6	8	10
Suggestopedia	10	7	8	3	2
Silent way	15	8	2	4	1
Communicative approach	0	1	1	3	25
Lexical approach	2	2	3	22	1
Natural approach	1	3	5	18	3
Project work	0	2	4	8	16
Intercultural approach	2	3	15	8	2

2.1 *Which of the above methods/approaches have you used and how do you evaluate it?*
_____
2.2 *Which of the aspects have you evaluated the most in the method/approach you have used?*
a) _____b)_____ c)_____ etj.

Results of the questions on alternative methods and approaches from 2.1-2.2
2.1   According to the teachers' answers according to usage, the results are as below: -   Communicative approach -   Project work -   Natural approach, etc

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2.2. **29 teachers** gave no answer
1 teacher gave a very general answer

3. How much do you know and use the below methodologies in your work?

Question: How well do you know:	Usage			Level of knowledge			
	Yes	No	Not at all	A little	Enough	Well	Very well
Ludic methodology	15			2	5	18	5
Andragogy		0	30				

3.1 Which target groups have you used the above-mentioned methodologies? Circle one or more options according to the usage:
a) Children b) Teenagers c) Adults d)...........

3.2 Within the teaching framework, what is the methodology you use?
a) Inductive B) Deductive C) Constructive D) All three e) None

Results of the questions on alternative methods and approaches from 3- 3.2

Question nr. 3 – Ludic methodology is better known than andragogy
Clarification: In most of the cases when we asked this question, we had to explain the terms

Question 3.1 – **12 teachers** - only for 3.1 a
5 teachers - only for 3.1. b
4 teachers - only for 3.1.a., 3.1.
9 teachers - no answer
Question 3.2 - **23 teachers** chose **d)**
4 teachers chose **C)**

II. *Analysis of survey results*

Based on the results derived from the above survey, it is concluded that the level of knowledge with regards to traditional and alternative methods and approaches is an average one. If we translate it into percentages, the results are as below:

Knowledge level of methods and approaches in percentage					
	Not at all	A little	Enough	Well	Very well
1. Grammatical-interpretive method	0	0	3.3%	10 %	86.6 %
2. Communicative method	0	3.3%	3.3.%	10 %	83.3 %
3. Cognitive Approach	0	3.3%	6.6.%	20 %	70%
4. Direct method	0	3.3	10%	14.2 %	63.3%
5. Audio-lingual	6.6.%	13.3%	6.6.%	10 %	63.3%
6. Counselling Group	3.3.%	6.6.%	6.6.%	23. 3%	60 %
7. Project work	0	3.3%	6.6%	26.6%	53.2%
8. Oral-situational	3.3%	10%	13.3%	23.3.%	50 %
9. Intercultural approach	3.3%	10%	50%	26.6%	3.3%
10. TPR	6.6%	6.6%	20%	26.6.%	33.3 %
11. Natural approach	10%	3,3,%	16.6.%	60%	10 %

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12. Suggestopedia	33.3%	23.6.%	26.6.%	10 %	6.6%
13. Lexical approach	6.6.%	6.6%	10%	73.3 %	3.3 %
14. Silent Way	50%	26.6.%	6.6.%	14.2%	3.3 %

Based on these data, it is clear that teachers are in need of more deep knowledge of traditional methods more than alternative ones. It would be right to say that in many of them teachers had doubts and question, which is a clear indicator that they do not know such methods good enough, or they do not put such methods into practice or they have no information of their existence.

> ➢ Among the methods that were questioned the most were: TPR, Suggestopedia and Silent Way
> ➢ Also, it has to paid attention to the fact that the traditional methods are more widely used, such as the grammatical-interpreting one. But this can be considered as something of the past, because nowadays the foreign language texts have passed this method, that's why teachers adapt to new ones.

During the method survey, we faced some questions ourselves, as well. This has to do with the lack of response, especially in those areas where we had to show to the teachers which methods or approaches they had used and where did they practice them.
- The only given answer was a very general one, which did not represent any concrete example of the used method or approach.

From all these, the below questions arise:
1) Should we have structured differently this question, in order to get the necessary information?
- *Answer*: The question was designed in order to enable teachers to decide by themselves which aspect of the method or the approach they have used, where and how.
2) Is the teacher hesitating in presenting this aspect of the method or approach, because he fears it not the right one for a harmonized process of teaching and learning?
- *Answer:* The survey was anonymous and its purpose was not to identify gaps in order to punish, but to identify them in order to improve the knowledge.
3) Are we dealing with the case when, due to lack of knowledge, teacher chooses to apply a method or an approach from intuition and experience?
- *Answer:* Maybe this is true for a part of the teachers who, because of their age or their education, could not attend schools which included such knowledge. The lack of a continuous update, training or knowledge refresh could be a not so satisfactory answer.

III.   *Conclusions*

As a conclusion, we can say that:
1. The learning of a foreign language highlights the need for a more appropriate method, which takes into consideration all the parameters which include two important actors: student and teacher. Every method should take into consideration not language as a subject, but the fact that both actors should feel good and motivated, in order for each of them to fulfil their purpose, so that teaching and learning can be both productive. Moreover, the method should focus on the person as a human being, both in the emotional and personal framework. It should highlight the communication, not only as a human and social act, but as a mutual reporting act, as well.

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2. The acknowledgment of new methods does not mean to abandon the traditional ones, because they are the basis which built and developed the coming methods and approaches. Of course, everyone of them presents issues and handicaps, but a better knowledge of them is necessary not only for a general personal education, but it serves to get what is best and transform it so that it can serve our job.

3. With regards to the survey performed with the teachers in Tirana schools on the practice of traditional or alternative methods, there comes the need for a deeper knowledge and wider use of traditional methods, because, according to us, many factors depend on it:

- Teachers with traditional education, which find it difficult to embrace new methods
- New teachers eager to embrace and practice new methods and approaches
- Incomplete education with regards to knowledge of new methods and approaches
- Teachers that feel closer to the students in time and psychology, so that they can understand them better
- Difficulties in changing a deeply-rooted method in psychology and everyday teaching practice
- Not so adequate technical conditions for the application of new techniques
- High number of students in classes, which makes it difficult to use different techniques, evens those methods that include games, role-plays and dialogues. It is difficult for the teacher to include the whole class in an activity or ask for the same productivity from everyone

But what makes us happy is that there is a high number of:

- Teachers with a somehow contemporary education
- Open-minded teachers who tend to embrace and apply innovations
- Teachers closer to technology and glottodidactic progress

This was clear also in the survey, where showed positive desire to be trained, in order to refresh their knowledge and get familiar with the innovations that global glottodidactics has brought forth in the teaching of foreign languages.

We feel the need to say that our duty as mentors of new generations of foreign languages' teachers is to offer them all the necessary theoretical and practical basis and all the possible tools to enable thus the creation of new generations of teachers who are prepared and possess the most of the knowledge, which will be necessary in the quality of their progress in the difficult but wonderful professional journey as teachers of the future.

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