

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE REFLECTIONS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES UPON THE TEACHING PROCESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PREPARATORY CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to reveal English language teachers' views on the reflections of language teaching methods and techniques to the teaching process in foreign language preparatory classes. A questionnaire which was prepared by the researcher was given to the teachers who teach state high schools preparatory classes in Mersin in order to collect data. The collected data with closer percentage ratio values indicate that the teachers state that they use almost all the techniques in the teaching process. However, the views reveal that the conceptions of the teachers on language teaching have conflict with their applications in the classroom environment according to the results of the research.

Keywords: English teacher, language teaching, application, classroom environment.

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı İngilizce öğretmenlerinin dil öğretim yöntem ve tekniklerinin yabancı dil hazırlık sınıf la rındaki öğretim sürecine yansımaları üzerine görüşlerini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen anket formu veri toplamak amacıyla Mersin'de lise İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarında görev yapan öğretmenlere uygulanmıştır. Veriler, öğretmenlerin öğretim sürecinde hemen hemen bütün teknikleri birbirlerine yakın yüzde değerleri ile kullandıklarını ifade ettiklerini ortaya koymustur. Herşeye rağmen, öğretmenlerin görüşleri, kendilerinin dil öğretimi üzerine düşüneleriyle sınıf ortamındaki uygulamalarının çeliştiğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İngilizce öğretmeni, dil öğretimi, uygulama, sınıf ortamı.

INTRODUCTION

Since "language is a uniquely human activity which is often characterized as an instrument possessed only by man" (Finocchiaro, 1974), people are in need of using a global language, especially English, to exchange technological and economic developments, to understand political views, and not to let these become hegemony devices.

Particularly in our country, learning English is no longer regarded as a privilege and luxury, it is seen as a "must". For this reason, numerous Anatolian High Schools and some other state high schools which have English preparatory classes implementing language curriculums have been established.

The situation leads the way to two negative results. The first one is making the core English-speaking countries use their language as an effective hegemony device - especially cultural and economic, and the second one is our English teachers cannot apply the necessary methods and techniques because of becoming mediators of the limited content of the textbooks which are selected for the particular intensive courses. In general, those books put the emphasis on structure, often presenting the textbook, whereas the functions of language have to be carried out within a social context (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

The content and structure of a syllabus is relevant to the objectives of the learner or of the society (Corder, 1973). The teachers in our country try to teach English with the syllabi and

contents of the selected textbooks which emerge from the hometowns of English and make our teachers become mediators. Those books are written by foreign authors who cannot actually know the needs of the students and the society in our country. Because of the idea that those books make our teachers mediators of the ready-made syllabi, the existing situation is seen important to be revealed in order to find out the reflections of the language teaching methods and techniques on foreign language preparatory classroom applications for using the particular target language as a medium by the learner via the conceptions of the teachers as instructors of those classes.

Halliday (1975) states the basic functions of language as follows:

1. The "*instrumental*" function; using language to get things.
2. The "*regulatory*" function; using language to control the behaviours of others.
3. The "*interactional*" function; using language to create interaction with others.
4. The "*personal*" function; using language to express personal feelings and meanings.
5. The "*heuristic*" function; using language to learn and to discover.
6. The "*imaginative*" function; using language to create a world of imagination.
7. The "*representational*" function; using language to communicate information.

In order to make the students gain all these functions, the study of teaching methods continues to form a significant component of teacher preparation programs (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Undoubtedly, the teachers in our country are not supposed to be able to make the students acquire all the functions above while teaching the target language, but they should keep the knowledge to use appropriate methods and techniques with appropriate materials to meet the needs of the students and make them use the target language as a medium, instead of ending only in mechanical drills such as "filling in the blanks" and "opening the brackets" of those books.

The common habit of using those books and their character of making the teachers stick to them reveals a curiosity about the reflections of language teaching methods and techniques upon the teaching process in foreign language preparatory classes which also include vital final exams with powerful roles in many people's lives at significant transitional moments in education and beyond (McNamara, 2000). With this aim, the research question below is tried to be answered.

"What are the views of English teachers on the reflections of language teaching methods and techniques upon the teaching process in foreign language preparatory classes?"

METHOD

In order to collect data for the research, a questionnaire (Appendix) had been prepared by the researcher in the first step. This questionnaire had comprised thirty five questions in the first step. Then, interviews with the experts played an important role in forming the last version of the questionnaire. Via the expert judgments, it comprised twenty six questions. The first twenty four questions are in rating format and the last two are in grading format. Fourteen of these questions are for revealing the conceptions of the teachers on language, language teaching, teachers' roles, and the materials used in the classroom environment. The following ten questions comprise the applications of the teachers related to the language teaching methods, roles, activities, and goals in the teaching process. Finally, the last two questions are aimed at teachers' views on thirteen different techniques, features which some techniques should include, and applications, which can be implemented in the classroom environment, and seven different types of drills.

There is not a sample group determined by any technique from a particular population because the research is a fundamental one. The participants for the study were randomly determined by the researcher from ten state high

schools which has English preparatory classes in Mersin city center under possible conditions. Five of the schools were Anatolian High Schools and the others had English preparatory classes implementing intensive English teaching programmes. Moreover, each participant had been working as the instructor of at least one foreign language preparatory class in one of those schools. Another feature of the participants chosen is that they have at least three years' experience.

The questionnaire was answered by fifty one participants from sixty, nine of them refused to answer the questionnaire, and interviews were made with the participants during the answering process.

In the analyses of the data, the SPSS statistics and Microsoft Office Excel programmes were used to compute the percentage ratio values.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The answers given to the first group of questions reveal that fifty percent of the teachers state they agree with the idea that language is always an interaction and interpersonal activity. Sixty three of them say they can teach best through the process of which the students will struggle to communicate. However, they say that the books they use usually do not let them teach in a communication and interaction environment in personal interviews. Besides, forty nine of the teachers state they can teach best through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system. Via the findings, this shows that approximately ten percent of the teachers have conflict about their conceptions on the best teaching process.

Eighty five percent of the teachers state they try to increase the motivation of the students with communicative tasks and they say that they do not use the tasks employing the structure of language. Thirty five percent of the teachers express they make organizations in which the students can work together in the classroom environment. Forty two percent of them say they can rarely make this kind of organizations. Twenty three percent of the teachers state they always take part in group work or pair work activities, sixty one percent of them say they do so occasionally. Moreover, thirty seven percent of the teachers state they sometimes create situations in which the students choose the language structures by themselves for interactive activities. Two percent of the teachers say they never do so.

Eighty percent of the teachers state they agree with the idea that the culture is an important part of language teaching. This can also mean that they act as mediators of the textbooks in the classroom environment. Fifty eight percent of the teachers say they use activities including deductive application of the grammar rules; therefore, an expression like "they can create meaningful contexts or real life situations to teach" may be doubtful.

Seventy four percent of the teachers state they use tape recorders and audiovisual equipment. In

addition, thirty five percent of the teachers say they prefer realia and communication practice materials as a way of increasing the quality of classroom interaction and language use.

The percentage ratio values are given in Table 1 below:

Table 1.
The Percentage Ratio Values of Group 1.

Item Nr	a	B	c	d
1	58	17	23	2
2	36	37	38	0
3	21	28	45	7
4	37	48	16	0
5	19	35	42	0
6	23	17	61	0
7	16	45	37	2
8	66	14	19	2
9	37	41	23	0
10	9	37	53	2
11	38	37	25	0
12	22	36	42	0
13	52	22	17	10
14	35	33	25	8

The next group of questions comprises the applications of the teachers related to the language teaching methods, roles, activities, and goals in the teaching process.

The teachers say they advocate applying the audio-lingual method, the communicative approach, the grammar translation method, and the total physical response with closer percents. Moreover, they mostly state teaching should pay systematic attention to functional and structural aspects of language. Twenty eight percent of the teachers express they prefer activities which enable the students to interact with each other. Activities which enable the students to interact with the teacher come next before the activities which need answering the questions and writing on a paper.

Contextualization and meaning are more important than mastery of grammatical forms and meaning combinations in the teachers' views. Thirty one percent of the teachers state that they determine sequencing of the units by any consideration of content, function, or meaning maintaining interest. Only twenty three percent of them say that they determine the sequencing by the controlled materials presented in the textbook. In these conditions, a conflict occurs that the teachers should follow the content of the selected textbooks but they do not say so, and it is not obvious in what ways they determine the sequencing free from the controlled materials presented in the textbooks.

They say they prefer activities which promote communication but the books do not include as much as they want. They state the books mostly include grammatical and structural features. Finally, the main goal in their view is communicative competence with twenty nine percent, discourse competence with twenty eight percent, structural competence with twenty two percent, and grammatical competence with twenty percent. The goals of the teachers do not seem to be in harmony with the goals of the books.

The percentage ratio values can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2.
The Percentage Ratio Values of Group 2.

Item Nr	a	b	c	d
15	26	30	25	19
16	25	25	29	21
17	28	23	25	22
18	20	29	22	29
19	24	31	23	22
20	22	31	24	23
21	22	29	22	27
22	27	24	29	19
23	28	22	22	28
24	20	22	28	29

The results are very close to each other for nearly all of the questions. The situation emerging from the teachers' views shows that many of the applications with different conceptions are tried to be included in the teaching process.

The last two questions include thirteen different language teaching techniques, features which some techniques should include, applications, which can be implemented in the classroom environment, and seven different types of drills.

The percentage ratio values of the twenty-fifth question are given in Table 3:

Table 3.
The Percentage Ratio Values of Question 25.

Item Nr	Applications	%
25	A Translation	9.8
	B Memorization	8
	C Dictation	11.5
	D Demonstration	5.3
	E Dialog	8
	F Memorization	
	G Repetition	5.1
	H Peer Correction	7.5
	I Peripheral Learning	8.5
	J Human Computer	9.1
	K Role Reversal	7
	L Action Sequence	6.9
	M Feedback	7.9
	N Role Play	6.4

In Table 3, the percentage values of the applications which are said to be used by the teachers in the classroom environment are between 5.1% and 11.5%. Dictation and translation are the popular ones among the others. Human computer follows them with 9.1%. Peripheral learning (8.5%) is the next because the textbooks have supplementary materials, pictures, and posters by the teachers' saying. Memorization and dialog memorization have the same ratios (8%). Feedback is closer to them with 7.9%. Peer correction comes next with 7.5% and role reversal follows it with 7%. Action sequence (6.9%) has nearly the same ratio with role reversal. Role play (6.4%), demonstration (5.3%), and repetition (5.1%) have the lowest ratios among the other techniques. Table 3 shows that the teachers state they use all the techniques in the teaching process but none of the techniques have extremely higher or lower ratio among the others. This can mean that any technique or application can be used according to the sequences of the textbooks including four skills simultaneously.

The answers of the last question reveal the teachers' views on drill applications of the teachers in the classroom environment. The percentage ratio values of the twenty-sixth question are given in Table 4:

Table 4.
The Percentage Ratio Values of Question 26.

Item Nr	Drills	%
26	A Mechanical	17.8
	B Meaningful	11.2
	C Communicative	7.8
	D Discrimination	14.8
	E Repetition	16.7
	F Substitution	12.3
	G Syntactic	20.4

Table 4 indicates that syntactic drills have the highest value among the others and the communicative drills have the lowest value according to the teachers' views. This situation creates a conflict about the conceptions of the teachers on success because seventy five percent of the teachers state they determine the success of their students by fluency and accuracy together. The mechanical drills follow syntactic drills with 17.8%. After then, repetition drills take 16.7% of the teachers' views which is so far from the value of the repetition technique. The following drills are discrimination (14.8%), substitution (12.3%), and meaningful drills (11.2%) which have

higher values than communicative drills in order.

The values at the bottom may reveal that a strictly controlled process can be seen in the teaching process because the drills which depend on conscious choices or which require more than one way of responding are said to be used rarely by the teachers.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the reflections of language teaching methods and techniques to the teaching process in foreign language preparatory classes applications are tried to be put into consideration via the views of the teachers who instruct those classes. In order to collect data, a questionnaire had been prepared by the researcher and it was given to the teachers who taught English preparatory classes of ten different high schools in Mersin. The results indicate that the teachers state they use almost all the techniques in their clasroom environment during the teaching process. Any language teaching act related to any specific approach does not seem to be used for any certain teaching environment according to the teachers' views. It seems that they say any application can be used according to the sequence of the selected textbooks. Besides, the percentage ratio values of the data are close to each question in the questionnaire in a supporting manner of the situation.

The results may pave the way to consider that the teachers can continue to use those techniques without conscious choices for necessary teaching situations as long as they do not state any opposite view. Moreover, the views of the teachers participating the study reveal that there are conflicts between the conceptions and the applications for language preparatory classes. A gap between theory and practice seems to occur according to the existing situation emerging from the teachers' views.

As long as language teaching is defined as the activities which are intended to bring about language learning (Stern, 1983), "what to teach" and "how to teach" questions of the content and method (Corder, 1973) are worth to be examined in details. In case the teachers who know the needs of their students write their own materials according to the needs of their students, they may not have to be tied up with the content of the selected textbooks; therefore, the necessary opportunities for using their knowledge and ability to teach in an effective way can be created in those conditions.

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APPENDIX

1. Do you agree with the idea that language is interaction and interpersonal activity?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
2. Do you believe that you can teach best through the process of which the students will struggle to communicate?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
3. Do you believe that you can teach best through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
4. Do you try to increase the motivation of your students more with communicative tasks rather than the tasks employing the structure of language?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
5. Do you make organizations in which the students can work together in your classes?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
6. Do you take part in learners' communicative activities?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
7. Do you create situations in which students choose the language structures by themselves for their own communicative purposes?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
8. Do you agree with the idea that culture is an important part of language teaching?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
9. Do you create situations in which your students share information in the classroom?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
10. Should a speaker receive immediate feedback from the listener to boost success in your activities?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
11. Do you determine the success of your students as much by their fluency as it is by their accuracy?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
12. Do your activities include deductive application of the grammar rules?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
13. Do you use tape recorders and audiovisual equipment to make students gain a nativelike pronunciation?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never
14. Do you prefer realia and communication practice materials as a way of increasing the quality of classroom interaction and language use?
a. Always b. Frequently c. Sometimes d. Never

Please answer the following questions by ranking according to their frequency between 1 (less frequent) and 4 (most frequent) considering your classroom environment.

15. Which method do you advocate to apply in your classroom environment?

- a. The Audio-Lingual Method
- b. The Communicative Approach
- c. The Grammar Translation Method
- d. The Total Physical Response

16. Which aspects should language teaching pay systematic attention to?
 - a. Functional aspects of language.
 - b. Structural aspects of language.
 - c. Both functional and structural aspects of language.
 - d. Notional aspects of language.
17. What kind of activities do you prefer in the classroom?
 - a. Activities which the students noisily interact with each other.
 - b. Activities which the students answer the questions.
 - c. Activities which the students interact with the teacher.
 - d. Activities which the students write on the paper.
18. Which of the following has the greatest importance in your classroom?
 - a. Structure and form.
 - b. Contextualization and meaning.
 - c. Memorization of the structure.
 - d. Mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meaning.
19. How do you determine sequencing of the units in the classroom?
 - a. By principles of linguistic complexity.
 - b. By any consideration of content, function, or meaning maintaining interest.
 - c. By the controlled materials which are presented in textbook.
 - d. By the theoretical supports presented for language teaching.
20. How should be the activities you prefer in the classroom?
 - a. They should be tightly controlled.
 - b. They should promote communication.
 - c. They should aim at habit formation.
 - d. They should include continual drills and exercises.
21. What is the main role you prefer to carry out in the classroom?
 - a. The director of the students' behaviour.
 - b. The counselor and supporter of the students' struggle with the target language.
 - c. The authority to make the students do what you say.
 - d. The guide and facilitator of the communication process among the students.
22. What is the most important point you look for in your activities?
 - a. To create cooperative interaction in the target language.
 - b. To take answers to your questions.
 - c. To teach grammatical and structural features.
 - d. To control the students and catch errors.
23. Which instruction do you prefer to use in a writing activity?
 - a. Write a paragraph beginning with the sentence "A beach vacation is always relaxing".
 - b. Write a composition about a relaxing beach vacation (80-100 words).
 - c. Tell about a beach vacation for two weeks.
 - d. Write an advertisement for a beach resort and try to convince people to take a beach vacation instead of traveling abroad.

24. What is the main goal for you in the teaching process?

- a. Grammatical competence, the dominance on grammatical rules. ~
- b. Structural competence, the dominance on organization of the grammatical items. —
- c. Discourse competence, the dominance on combination of the grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres. ~~
- d. Communicative competence, the dominance on the abilities, the skills, and the knowledge in order to communicate. *—

25. Please give a grade to the following applications between 1 and 13 according to your applications in the classroom environment.

- a. Translation _____
- b. Memorization _____
- c. Dictation _____
- d. Demonstration _____
- e. Dialog memorization _____
- f. Repetition _____
- g. Peer Correction _____
- h. Peripheral Learning _____
- i. Human Computer _____
- j. Role Reversal _____
- k. Action Sequence _____
- l. Feedback _____
- m. Role-Play _____

26. Please give a grade to the following activities between 1 and 7 according to your applications in the classroom environment.

- a. Mechanical drill which there is one way of responding. _____
- b. Meaningful drills which there is more than one way of responding. _____
- c. Communicative drills which there is a free transfer of learned language patterns. _____
- d. Discrimination drills which the correct answer depends on conscious choice. _____
- e. Repetition drills which there is a plain repetition of the cues. _____
- f. Substitution drills which there is a replacement of the morphological structure or lexical items in the same order. _____
- g. Syntactic drills which there is a manipulation of either the number or the order of the constituents in the cue. _____