Advocacy of the Eclectic Approach to ESL/EFL Teaching in Bangladesh

Md. Al-Mamun, *
Jakir **

Abstract
One single method can hardly make different language learners communicatively competent in various real-life situations. Hence, many different approaches and methods have been adopted at different times in language teaching. Perhaps, the quest for more effective methods in language teaching will never end. Following this very view, the current paper advocates using the Eclectic Approach in which all good ideas, principles and practices of various methods are synthesized and harmoniously blended considering the abilities of the learners and the aims of the lesson. Secondly, reviewing different language teaching methods, a good number of principles and techniques are recommended for the ELT practitioners to teach English to the EFL learners in the context of Bangladesh.

Introduction
Since the inception of formal teaching of second or foreign language, a good number of approaches and methods have emerged in the world. The Grammar-Translation Method, The Direct Method, The Audio-lingual Method, The Communicative Method etc. are, for example, some of the most well-known methods, each of which has its own distinctive characteristics. Gradual changes in the methodologies of language teaching make it evident that one approach may be better or more effective than others in a certain situation. Besides, there is no perfect or ideal method since each method has some weaknesses and strengths. In reality, it is seen that no one method can fulfill all language goals and program objectives. Moreover, none can deny that language teaching methods may supplement one another. In the circumstance, what should a language teacher do? Will he strictly adhere to only one single method or follow the required principles of different methods that truly meet his demand and befit the context? Here, the Eclectic Approach in which the teacher gets the opportunity to choose any context befitting methods or techniques, can be a good solution. This very approach has the power to arrest the attention of the language teacher since it provides him/her with

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka.
**Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka.
some distinctive advantages which are almost absent from any single method.

However, this paper first presents a brief overview of some well-known language teaching/learning methods and approaches and then discusses some important aspects of the Eclectic Approach including some of its distinctive advantages. In the end, it advocates the potential applications of the Eclectic Approach in the domain of EFL teaching in the context of Bangladesh.

**An overview of some well-known language teaching methods**

There are varied approaches and methods used for language teaching. Here it is reasonable to present a brief overview of some well-known language teaching/learning methods and approaches to facilitate a teacher to choose from these different methods and approaches.

**The Grammar-translation Method**

It is a method of teaching languages by which students learn grammatical rules and then apply those rules by translating between the target language and the native language. Though the class is easy to organize with this method, its usefulness is highly limited. For example, students cannot learn how to use sentences in communication.

**The Direct Method**

In this method the teacher refrains from using the students' native language. The target language is directly used for teaching all the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is believed that language can be taught through demonstration and action. This method is criticized for its overemphasis on the similarities between first language acquisition and second language learning.

**The Structural-situational Approach**

In this approach, the teacher teaches language through a careful selection, gradation and presentation of vocabulary items and structures through situation based activities. Speech is regarded as the basis of language, and structure is viewed as the heart of speaking ability. Here, accuracy is considered crucial.

**The Audiolingual Method**

In this method, students are taught through a system of reinforcement. Here new words and grammar are directly taught without using the students' native language. This method does not focus on vocabulary.
Instead, the teacher focuses on grammar through drill and practice. Behaviorism manifests itself in this approach. Language is regarded as verbal behavior and habit formation is considered crucial.

**The Bilingual Method**

The word 'bilingual' means two languages. In bilingual method, the teacher teaches the language by giving mother tongue equivalents of the words or sentences.

**The Communicative Language Teaching**

This approach lays emphasis on oral method of teaching. It aims to develop communicative competence in students. It emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Learners' emotions and feelings are valued.

**The Total-Physical Response**

It is based on the theory that memory is enhanced through association with physical response. It takes structuralist views of language. Verbs, especially imperative verbs are considered basic elements of language learning. At the beginning stage, students only have to do imperative drills.

**The Silent Way**

In this method the teacher uses a combination of silence and gestures to focus students' attention. The way the classroom activities are organized is innovative.

**The Eclectic Approach**

**Definition**

Eclecticism is a philosophy of choice. Eclecticism is nothing but a fusion of knowledge from all sources. It is a peculiar type of educational philosophy which harmoniously combines all good ideas and principles from various schools of thought. This approach is not rigidly confined to a single paradigm or set of assumptions, but draws upon multiple theories to gain complementary insights into a subject, or applies different theories in particular cases.

However, in the domain of language education, the Eclectic Approach denotes a desirable, coherent and pluralistic method. It encompasses different approaches and methods based on the abilities of the learners and the aims of the lesson. One of the chief advocates of the Eclectic Approach is Rivers (1981). He says that an eclectic approach
allows language teachers 'to absorb the best techniques of all the well known language teaching methods into their classroom procedures, using them for the purposes for which they are most appropriate'.

The Eclectic Approach is, in fact, a conceptual approach which is constituted from several theories, styles and ideas. Supporting this view Al-Hamash (1985) says that eclecticism makes use of the different language learning approaches instead of sticking to one standard approach.

In a word, to meet the needs of the learners, various teaching methods are taken into consideration and adapted in the Eclectic Approach.

**Theoretical background**

The idea of choosing from different methods for one's teaching purposes and one's teaching situations is not a new one. Henry Sweet (1845-1922), a leading figure in language teaching profession, believed that a good method must be comprehensive and eclectic (Rivers, 1886).

Palmer in his book *the Principles of Language Study* published in 1921 talked about 'the multiple line of approach' that embodies the eclectic principles giving us the opportunity to choose judiciously.

Stern (1983) notes that *Memorandum on the Teaching of Modern Languages* published in 1929 on the basis of a British study recommended the eclectic 'Compromise Method' as a solution to language teaching method debate.

Even in the 1970s and 1980s, the Eclectic Method was proposed as a reaction to the profusion of language teaching methods.

**Principles**

Like other approaches and methods of language education, the Eclectic Approach has some inherent principles. Perhaps, the main principle of this approach is that the language teacher can choose any suitable methods or techniques befitting the needs of the learners and learning situation. The following principles as presented by Al-khuli M. Ali (1981:7) may be considered:

- Giving teachers a chance to choose different kinds of teaching techniques in each class period to reach the aims of the lesson;
- Flexibility in choosing any aspect or method that teachers think suitable for teaching inside the classroom;
- Giving a chance to pupils to see different kinds of teaching techniques that break monotony and dullness on one hand and ensure better understanding for the material on the other hand;
Advocacy of the Eclectic Approach to ESL/EFL Teaching in Bangladesh

- Solving difficulties concerning presenting the language material in the pupils' textbook;
- Using different kinds of teaching aids which leads to better understanding;
- Saving a lot of time and efforts in presenting language activities.

Advantages

The Eclectic Approach allows the language teacher to use the techniques and activities drawn from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies. It is the teacher who decides what method or approach to use depending on the aims of the lesson and the learners in the group. Now it is seen that most modern course books have a mixture of approaches and methodologies. A language teacher may be tempted to apply the Eclectic Approach by considering its advantages that follow.

More flexibility

Of all educational styles, the Eclectic Approach is considered a most flexible one. Here, the teacher can enjoy immense flexibility in making decisions based on learners' performance and feedback from a variety of sources. Flexible teaching strategy is needed for the teacher to tailor the lesson addressing each learner's individual tastes and needs. It also serves the needs of a wide range of language learners i.e. overseas, on/off campus, second language students. In fact, the Eclectic Approach facilitates the teacher to incorporate the best options into his lesson so that learners can become competent communicators in a wide range of situations.

Covering every aspect of language skills

The Eclectic Approach is broad and may include almost every kind of learning activity. It blends the practices of four macro skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing into an organic whole. In reality, students need to learn a wide variety of skills, and different approaches are useful for teaching various aspects of language skills. It is obvious that any one method does not serve the right purpose of teaching all the language skills. Therefore, teaching English by combination of various methods and approaches will help the teacher to teach English effectively.

Variety in the classroom

In the language classroom, the teacher has to provide multiple opportunities for learners so that they can learn effectively. In such a situation eclecticism encourages the use of a variety of language learning
activities, each of which may have very different characteristics and objectives and underlying assumptions. The teacher can use a variety of strategies to make language comprehensible, monitor student comprehension, and make adjustments as necessary.

**Dynamic classroom atmosphere**

In language classrooms where creativity is fostered, the teacher has to constantly adjust the lesson and activities according to the learners and classroom dynamics. It is the nature of man that he likes change. He wants new and novel ways in every field of work. The same is the case with learning process. Learners always like something new and exciting. The Eclectic Approach may include almost every kind of learning activity and saves learner from monotony. In the true sense, he discovers and masters good ways of learning. Above all, this approach gives a chance to the teacher to mould and shape his method according to the circumstances and available teaching materials.

Since the Eclectic approach facilitates multiple tasks, high interaction, lively learning, objective correlative, and fast results, it may be advocated with great confidence.

**Appropriate principles of different language teaching methods in the context of Bangladesh**

Once, the Grammar-translation method with huge limitations dominated the teaching and learning English in Bangladesh. However, because of the world-wide acceptance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an effective method of language education, the government of Bangladesh, too, introduced CLT in 2001 from grade six to grade twelve with a view to helping the learners develop their English communicative competence. Not only this, English syllabus at school and college levels was designed according to the principles of CLT. However, there was a huge gap between the introduction and implementation of this method as teachers at school and college levels had almost no training on Communicative language Teaching. In reality, it is seen that many students cannot communicate in English properly in real life situations even after completing twelve years of education. In many researchers conducted recently in Bangladesh, it is seen that CLT in our country cannot be implemented properly due to varied constraints, such as enormous class size, inadequacy of logistic supports, teachers' preference of traditional teaching methods, mismatch between curriculum and assessment, poor socio-economic condition, cultural differences and the like. Therefore, now it seems that CLT is not the final answer for ELT in
Advocacy of the Eclectic Approach to ESL/EFL Teaching in Bangladesh

In this situation the implications of the Eclectic Approach to ELT may be justified. Chaudhury and Karim (2014) conclude one of their papers making a sensible remark, "Possibly the implementation of more eclectic approaches or combinations of methods may be appropriate in Bangladesh context."

Therefore, now we will see which principles as well as techniques of which methods may be appropriate for ELT in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, though English has been being taught at school, college and university levels for the last fifteen years or so mainly following the principles of Communicative language Teaching, the goal of introducing CLT has not been achieved due to varied reasons. Consequently, in recent years, the focus again has shifted to one of the basic principles of the Grammar Translation Method, that is, grammar has been reintroduced in school and college curriculum. In fact, this very principle of the Grammar Translation Method, that is, providing explicit grammar rules to the learners is very significant for teaching English as a foreign language in our country. Furthermore, translation from the target language into the native language and vice versa, another important principle of the Grammar Translation Method, should be reintroduced in school and college curriculum immediately because it is the most powerful tool for teaching a foreign language.

Apart from these two principles of the Grammar Translation Method, some aspects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), such as role play activities, pair work, group work, etc. which are likely to generate communicative competence, can be very useful for the teachers to teach English to the learners of Bangladesh. Again, teachers should redefine their roles and they should consider themselves the facilitators of the learning situations rather than the authorities in the class. Likewise, learners should play an active role in the learning situations rather than a passive one.

Although in the language teaching history of Bangladesh, only two methods, namely, the Grammar Translation Method and Communicative language Teaching (CLT), were used, there are many other methods for language teaching which are not less important in the context of Bangladesh. One of these methods is the Direct Method where language input (everyday vocabulary) is taught through demonstration, realia, concrete objects, pantomime etc., and this principle can be very useful for language teaching in Bangladesh. On the other hand, in the Audio-lingual Method, emphasis on accurate pronunciation from the very beginning, practicing the language contextually again and again, training in listening skills are very useful principles that ELT teachers in
Bangladesh can manipulate to teach English to their learners. Again, some principles of Suggestopedia such as emphasis on learners' mental aspects, that is, removing psychological barriers (i.e., fear, nervousness, tension, frustration etc.) that they bring with them to the learning situations from their mind by offering a cheerful, bright, colorful and non-threatening classroom environment can be much helpful for the ELT teachers in Bangladesh.

Conclusion
Since all methods of language education have limitations, no method is perfect to follow entirely. It is also undeniable that one single philosophical thought or tendency in language education is not sufficient. Clearly, the principles and practices in the domain of current language education are the result of the cumulative experiences of past generations. Besides, reliance upon a single theory of teaching is often criticized because the use of a limited number of techniques can become mechanic. Logically, an eclectic blending of instructional approaches can prove most effective because students need to learn a wide variety of language skills, and different approaches are useful for teaching various aspects of these skills. Therefore, the Eclectic Approach that combines the best features of each approach to produce an optimal overall result and helps students achieve worthy language education goals can be strongly advocated.

The main criticism of the eclecticism is that "it does not offer any guidance on what basis and by what principles aspects of different methods can be selected and combined" (Stern, 1983). But it should be remembered that the use of eclecticism does not mean to mix up different approaches randomly. There must have some philosophical backgrounds and some systematic relation among different activities. Besides, the principles or aspects from different methods have to be selected not randomly, but on the basis of proper analysis of the suitability of these principles or aspects in view of the contextual realities, students' preferences and other considerations. Again, some critics say only well-trained teachers can become eclectic: teachers with no theoretical thinking about the advantages and drawbacks of any approach cannot use it. This problem can be solved if it is kept in mind that eclectic teaching is not prescribed for all teachers in a program but rather as an option freely accepted.

References