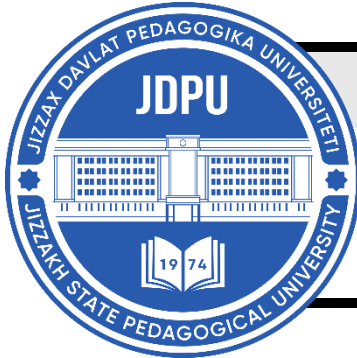


## MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL



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### THE EFFICIENCY OF LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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#### ABOUT ARTICLE

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**Abstract:** This article describes a learner-centered approach as an effective solution to the problem of teaching a foreign language, the method of projects, work in collaboration. The personality-oriented approach has become possible due to the socio-political, economic, social transformations that have taken place in our country in the last decade. Value orientations have changed, and in accordance with the proclaimed principles of humanization and democratization of society, a free, developed and educated person is recognized as the greatest value, capable of living and creating in a constantly changing world.

The West-developed and Asian countries invented methodologies and teaching materials are compared. This paper also touches upon other services rendered as applicable to delivering classes in a foreign language, the services are mostly related to the translation of academic forms to English and including international norms and standards in the academic courses of studies delivered.

#### INTRODUCTION

While making a decision on a methodological approach which would fit the objective of the project to the greatest extent possible, we had to consider it by its national, or geographical, origin first. That meant making a choice between two potential options, the one used in the West against that used by Asian Countries. To minimize a risk of failure, the decision was made by comparative

assessment of the average teaching approach effectiveness reached to date in each of the two geographical and educational areas.

Initially, a reason for focusing first on the teaching experience gained by the West rather than that possessed by non-native educators was understanding that results reached by the Western educators have proved to be much more sound than those of their non-native colleagues historically reached to date, as the learning outcome. While making the choice, we took into account the fact that ESL education had first been launched by the British Empire in the 15th century. It was aimed at establishing communication in English with their non-English speaking colonies for functional purposes by making the English language a common tool for their communication [3]. Being no evidence of anybody's good will, but initiated by British government for exceptionally functional purposes, ESL education could in no way fail in getting the government-set goal reached.

Since that time, English has been spreading worldwide used as a second language. As a follow-up to the above language development, a new generation of ESL learners was formed by the mid-19th century as more and more Europeans were leaving for the United States. Flocking to the U.S.A. in millions, immigrants sought a working knowledge of the English language to survive. At that time, bilingual and non-native instruction of English popped up in schools across the United States.

As compared to the above, after gaining independence, Uzbekistan also began to learn English as the second language over the secondary schools, colleges as well as, universities. In terms of teaching in primary schools, government confirmed the policy concerned to learning English from age 7 in 2014. Moreover, all teachers were trained and instructed by UZTEA organization. Another methodology of foreign language teaching had been built and used throughout the nation. The foreign language teaching methods and methodologies, which had been developed and were still in use in Uzbekistan.

The first step to get prepared for teaching the Pedagogical University's teachers (hereinafter referred to as the learners) was choosing a methodological approach. As stated by Bukharkina M. Yu., "knowing an L2 may be considered as having linguistic knowledge/ability and pragmatic knowledge/ability required to use the language with grammatical accuracy and communicative appropriacy", the main goal to be reached by teaching the learner English shall be looked at in terms of what (knowledge and/or skills) he/she has acquired rather than what and how well the teacher has been teaching him/her the language [4, p. 25].

In other words, the learner outcome/output is to be a main concern of those who provide the teaching, with the final result measured not only by quality and amount of knowledge of the language theory. It should also be measured by prior development of the learner's ability to communicate by understanding someone else's speech and by being understood when heard or listened to by someone else [4]. Another main concern is of psychological origin which is hard to be understood and therefore

focused upon by native speakers. By that, the learner's ability to preserve and maintain the skills acquired in a non-English setting of his/her everyday life and living was meant. Native-speaking teachers of English as well as those of any other language they teach as foreign or second are very likely to pay no special attention to that problem due to their permanent stay within English-speaking environment. But non-native learners do not.

On the basis of the above, a choice was supposed to be made among the three methodological approaches to teaching English known by British and some other native educators rather than those developed and currently used by their non-native counterparts. The three approaches included: language-centered methods, learner-centered methods, and learning-centered methods.

Since the language-centered methods are those mainly concerned with linguistic forms they are looking on the language development to be provided more on an intentional than incidental basis, with learners concentrated mainly on linguistic features. As for the learner-centered methods, they "are those that are principally concerned with learner needs, wants, and situations" [4, p. 91]. Thus, these methods were found to be designed mostly to enable the learner to practice communicative notions/functions by participating in meaning-focused classroom activities. By this, the learners were allowed to make use of both their formal knowledge and functional skills to fill their communicative wants occurring in a non-classroom setting.

Lastly, the learning-centered methods of teaching/learning English were recognized to be aimed at creating opportunities for "open-ended meaningful interactions" between the learners "through problem-solving tasks in class" [4, p. 92]. These methods assume that "a preoccupation with meaning-making will ultimately lead to target language mastery" [4, p. 92]. Unlike the other two types of methods, the learning-centered methods are more incidental than intentional. Therefore, the latter was decided to be the approach of our choice.

### **DECIDING ON THE METHOD AND METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING**

With the decision on the methodological approach we arrived at in the Choosing a Methodological Approach section, our next step was to choose between both teaching methods and methodologies.

Since, as discussed earlier, that no L1 should be used during the entire process, an L2-based method had to be used. Therefore, the Direct Method (also called the Natural Method) was supposed to be applied, primarily because of its following features: (a) only target language is used; (b) meanings are communicated directly by associating speech forms with actions, objects, mime, gestures, and situations; (c) reading and writing are taught only after listening and speaking; (d) grammar is only taught inductively, i.e. without the learners being exposed to grammar rules as such. Thus, the Direct Method refrains from the way the learner's mother tongue was used. Anyway, there was one thing to be taken into account regarding the language of instruction to be chosen, which

means that since receiving a feedback from the learner during the whole process is crucial, it should be made in L1 before each particular class session has begun. The procedure was supposed to be limited by a brief discussion based on exchanging views with the learner(s), aiming at understanding his/her current mood and status, and answering yes/no questions at once, with “longer” problems he/she raised to be helped the learner with later. After a few minutes of such a discussion, the teacher has to get the class started by to switching to the target (L2) language.

When chosen, the Direct Method was to be implemented in both classroom and outside-classroom areas by using appropriate techniques and procedures. A core classroom technique had to deal with pattern practice which also includes imitation activities. Another area to be covered by the Method, which usually appear to be missed by the Western educators, should fall within intervals between the classroom hours and, or days where the target language was supposed to be used for relaxation purposes, after the home assignment had been done. The reason why this self-learning-for-pleasure component of L2 learning process was usually missed or at least not considered to be of importance by native teachers turned out to be their being unable to put themselves into the non-native learners’ shoes. Feeling no real need to artificially maintain their language knowledge and skills outside the classes due to their permanent stay in the native setting, the native educators happen not to be consciously aware that their learners had to build and continuously maintain the target language immediate environment on their own. This is a psychological part of the process which had to be treated as a native teachers’ negative side.

There is always discrepancy between method as a construct and methodology as a conduct, caused by method’s being an expert’s notion derived from an understanding of the following theories: a theory of target language, as well as ones of its learning, and of its teaching. Being reflected in syllabus design and textbook production, method also contained recommended classroom procedures, and very rarely – self-learning approach giving birth to appropriate textbook-contained guidelines. As mentioned before, not those outside-the-classroom activities were meant by the latter, which were supposed to be limited to the textbook-based homework assignment. By the latter, an everyday self-learning activity-based program was meant, intended for pleasure-based bringing the learner and the target language together. With this aim in mind, the language would be used in the learner’s everyday life as the gateway to a cultural context within his/her area of a personal, sometimes even passionate, interest [3], [5].

A reason for getting the target language spread beyond the classroom physically and outside the teaching/learning process psychologically is to make English-language based learning a leisure part of the learner’s everyday life. The activities may include reading fiction books, watching videos, listening to the broadcast and TV programs, Internet chatting, and the like, held in a relaxed setting.

Following this psychology-based methodological approach was thought to be nearly the only way for the learner to keep his/her English alive between the classroom hours and in the post-training future.

### **PROGRESS AND EFFICIENCY CONTROL OVER THE TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS**

To find effective ways to have the learner's outcome expectancies met we first had to consider the target language as a communication tool rather than just an academic discipline, with the latter approach being typical for the USSR's (formerly) and for the NIS's (currently) systems of education. In the meantime, to achieve the goal intended by our language-training project we had to enable the learners to master first skills and just then – knowledge of a fluent and competent English language user. To continuously be confident of that we keep going the right way, certain data of the teaching process shall be monitored on the basis of intermediate learning results, with alterations or modifications made to it in a proper time and manner. Building a closed control system would suit the idea, with its operation being monitored and automatically corrected on a three-loop negative/positive stimulus-activated feedback basis.

The feedback loops were intended to present psychological, pedagogic, and linguistic component parts of the teaching/learning process, with the data coming via each particular loop to be obtained from different sources. Among them were teacher-to-student pre-class discussions, the data withdrawn from appropriate questionnaire forms filled by students at least on a quarterly basis, various test work assessment, some indirect data obtained via casual and/or intended observations, and the like. The results collected had to be processed and analyzed in order to be further turned into a following impulse of methodological correction applied to the system input. All the above required a team-based regularity, with not only the teacher and learners but also teacher trainer and analysts involved.

The team approach in doing the above procedures seems to be unusual for English-speaking educators who typically consider the teacher as both the only decision maker and teaching resource. Following that one-man-show way might have put us at risk of losing control over the process due to be too much dependent upon the teacher's individual features, views and qualities, unaware of the work progress, thus being unable to make necessary altering interventions in the process. As a result, failure to arrive at a proper learner's output might be very likely to occur.

Use of the closed control system allowed us to monitor, maintain and improve quality of the teaching process, with the feedback helping to make required adjustments to the teacher's activities, exercised on the basis of the learning outcome analysis.

While having a much better command of the English language than that of an average non-native teacher, the native speakers nevertheless would not be involved in textbook-based activities and teaching grammar, each preferred to be responsibilities of the non-native teachers whose

knowledge of the language grammar proves sufficient for that purpose. Still other area which falls within the non-native teacher's responsibility is the emotional part of the language learning, which would not be directly based on the teaching process and classroom material input. That area refers to filling time gaps between any neighboring classroom classes by getting the learner encouraged to learn through the English language whatever information he/she likes or wishes to, in a relaxed setting.

Since that type of activity has nothing to do with any mandatory elements of the teaching-based learning process, such as the classroom activities and doing relevant home assignments, a special emotional mood should be developed with the learner to make him/her encouraged to willingly stay with English by using it as a means of access to the information of personal interest rather than being treated as a subject to study. Being both a very important and sensitive part of the whole learning process, this component is believed to be within a better reach for a non-native teacher who previously practiced learning things of his interest through English as a second language.

To be successful in his endeavor to develop with a new role of English in the learner's everyday life, the non-native teacher can ultimately manage to succeed in persuading him/her to start doing it on a regular, everyday basis, by using additional means of explanation, including the mother tongue. It would allow the teacher to persuasively share with the learner cases of his own excitement, with the learner's target language being too weak to help him fully understand the teacher's feelings and pleasure. While considering teaching roles of native and non-native speakers we had to keep in mind that an average native speaker/teacher used to use the English language as the only means of oral and written communication in his/her everyday life, including their teaching practice.

In the meantime, the language teachers to whom English is a second language always have to purposely, or intentionally, create the English-language based setting around oneself or intentionally enter any English-based information area which exists outside his/her everyday life and living. For that reason, it was highly likely that the non-native teachers were mainly weaker foreign-language users than those to whom the language is the mother tongue. Therefore, the above had been taken into account while distributing pedagogic responsibilities between the two teaching parties: natives and non-natives. Since, in our case, the learner outcome mainly consists of unconscious acquisition and conscious learning of the English language, we arrived at the following scheme of the teaching labour division.

## CONCLUSION

1. No single language teacher shall be a decision maker in teaching and kept responsible for the learning output. It is supposed to be exercised on a team basis, with each single teacher being a tool of putting into action of the methodic approach, method and methodological techniques to be designed monitored on a term-basis.

2. During the teaching process, its quality shall be monitored, modified, if necessary, and maintained on a feedback-based control system.

3. The core principle of language learning is one of psychological nature and focuses on the learner's acquiring full autonomy in the target language use for professional purposes through making habitual its regular use for pleasure.

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