

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

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Abstract: This article examines the strengths and weaknesses of two approaches to language teaching: the traditional method and the communicative (modern) method. It begins by defining each approach, followed by a comparison of their key features. Finally, it suggests a balanced strategy that integrates the benefits of both methods to optimize language learning outcomes.

Key words: approaches, educational settings, knowledge, teaching, critical thinking, colleagues, vocabulary and grammar, rules and structures, components, communicate, real-life situations, challenges, expert, technology, ability.

Introduction

Over the past few years, the communicative approach to language teaching has become increasingly common in various educational settings, including schools, colleges, lyceums, language centers, and universities. Despite this, the traditional method remains relevant due to its unique advantages, even though it has certain limitations. As a prospective English teacher, I aim to examine the benefits and drawbacks of both traditional and communicative teaching methods, compare them, and suggest ways to create a balanced approach for effective language instruction.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Traditional Teaching Methods.

The traditional teaching method, like any educational approach, has both advantages and disadvantages. These pros and cons have been widely discussed by scholars and are based on the teaching dynamics, teacher-student relationships, and the structure of lessons.

Advantages of Traditional Teaching:

- **Teacher-Dominated Structure:** In traditional classrooms, the teacher plays a central role in delivering knowledge. This structure ensures that the teacher is able to convey systematic and organized information in a coherent manner, making the learning process clear for students. The teacher guides the class, focusing on lectures and explanations, which can help students understand complex concepts thoroughly.
- **Direct Control and Supervision:** The teacher supervises the entire learning process, providing detailed information on topics. This allows for structured learning where students are taught step by step, and the teacher can adjust the pace as necessary. If a student struggles, the teacher can intervene promptly, offering personalized support or alternative explanations.
- **Building Cognitive Skills:** Traditional teaching methods are often associated with academic rigor, which can contribute to the development of critical thinking and IQ. The emphasis on learning from textbooks, structured exercises, and rote memorization can build a strong foundation for students in terms of their intellectual capabilities and memory skills.

- **Deep and Broad Knowledge:** A key strength of traditional teaching is that it allows teachers to present broad and in-depth information on a particular topic. Teachers can explore a subject comprehensively, giving students a thorough understanding that might be difficult to achieve with more fragmented or student-led learning styles.
- **Adaptability of Teaching Style:** Teachers in traditional classrooms have the flexibility to adjust their teaching styles according to the needs of their students. Whether the students need more time to grasp certain concepts or need a different approach, the teacher can modify their methods to ensure that the material is accessible.
- **Face-to-Face Interaction:** One of the biggest advantages of the traditional teaching method is the face-to-face interaction it provides. This type of direct contact fosters a more engaging and stimulating learning environment. Students benefit from the energy and enthusiasm of live discussions, and the interpersonal dynamics between teacher and student contribute to the overall learning experience.
- **Effective Problem-Solving:** Traditional teaching allows for more immediate and effective problem-solving when students encounter difficulties. Teachers are readily available to provide clarification, answer questions, and offer solutions in real time. The controlled classroom environment allows the teacher to address issues and resolve conflicts efficiently, ensuring that students stay on track with their learning.
- **Teacher as Role Model:** In traditional teaching, students often look up to their teachers as role models. Teachers' academic knowledge, behavior, and teaching style have a significant influence on students. The teacher's guidance can inspire students to take their studies seriously and to value education, as they are constantly under the teacher's mentorship.

Disadvantages of Traditional Teaching:

- **Teacher-Centered Approach:** While the teacher's central role can be an advantage, it also has its drawbacks. The traditional method often places too much responsibility on the teacher, which can lead to a one-sided learning experience. Students may become passive recipients of knowledge, with limited opportunities for independent thinking or active participation.
- **2. Limited Student Engagement:** In many traditional classrooms, students may find themselves disengaged, especially if the lessons are primarily lecture-based with minimal interaction. The focus on rote memorization and repetitive tasks such as translation exercises can make the learning process feel monotonous, leading to decreased motivation over time.
- **Lack of Critical Thinking Opportunities:** The teacher-led nature of traditional teaching may not always encourage students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The reliance on structured lectures and textbooks can leave little room for students to ask questions, challenge ideas, or explore topics in depth through inquiry-based learning.
- **Potential for Passive Learning:** If students are not actively involved in the learning process, they may become passive learners. The lack of opportunities for hands-on practice or collaborative work can limit the development of practical skills and real-world application of knowledge.

- **Teacher Overload:** Since the teacher is responsible for both managing the classroom and delivering content, the workload can become overwhelming. This can lead to burnout or affect the teacher's ability to engage effectively with each student, especially in larger classes.

Scholarly opinions on traditional teaching methods reflect both the strengths and limitations of this approach. While the method has its place, particularly in structured academic settings, many educators and scholars have pointed out various challenges and drawbacks. Traditional methodologies are generally characterized by their focus on the formal aspects of language, often breaking down the language learning process into discrete components such as grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. These components are taught in isolation rather than being integrated into a holistic approach to language acquisition.

One of the key features of traditional language teaching is its strong association with teaching language for specific purposes. As Geoffrey Broughton and his colleagues explain in *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, the realization that learners often need a foreign language for particular professional or academic purposes led to the development of specialized language courses. This approach, known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is designed to teach vocabulary and grammar that is directly related to a student's field of work or study, such as medicine, law, agriculture, or engineering. While these courses cater to the specific needs of learners, they often restrict exposure to broader language usage. Students who take these specialized courses might gain fluency in terms related to their specific field, but they may struggle when required to communicate in general contexts, outside of their specialized areas.

Traditional methods are also often teacher-centered, with the instructor taking on the role of the primary knowledge provider. In these classrooms, the teacher is seen as the expert, and students are passive recipients of information. This teacher-dominated model, as described by Assistant Professor Dr. Abdullah Kuzu, is rooted in the traditional view of education, where the teacher serves as the source of knowledge, and the students absorb this information. This interaction is often likened to the "jug and mug" metaphor by Jim Scrivener, where knowledge is poured from the teacher (the jug) into the students (the mugs). This method assumes that merely being present in class and listening attentively to the teacher will be sufficient for students to learn. As a result, the students' active participation and engagement are often minimal.

Moreover, in traditional teaching, the teacher is responsible for directing the flow of lessons, offering explanations, and presenting examples, with the expectation that students will passively absorb the material. Jack C. Richards, in his work *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, emphasizes that in traditional methodologies, learning was seen as being under the strict control of the teacher. This hierarchical structure puts the responsibility for teaching and learning primarily on the teacher, with students expected to follow instructions and absorb knowledge without much interaction or input from them.

Furthermore, traditional language teaching tends to prioritize grammatical accuracy and the memorization of vocabulary, often treating language as a collection of rules and isolated items. As Broughton and his colleagues note, in traditional language learning, the focus is often on learning grammatical structures and vocabulary, with the assumption that knowing the rules and vocabulary is enough for students to understand and communicate in the target language. This emphasis on form over function means that students might learn how to construct grammatically correct sentences but may not always know how to use language effectively in real-world communication situations.

The method, as Ronald V. White points out in *The ELT Curriculum*, also tends to view language as an intellectual pursuit, emphasizing the mastery of rules and structures over their practical application. While this approach can result in a deep understanding of grammar and vocabulary, it often fails to present language as a tool for communication. In traditional classrooms, language is frequently taught as a set of abstract principles rather than as a means for students to express ideas, interact with others, and engage in real-world conversations.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also known as the communicative approach, is an innovative language teaching methodology that emphasizes interaction as both the primary means and ultimate goal of language learning. Unlike traditional methods that prioritize grammar and vocabulary acquisition, CLT focuses on developing learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. The method encourages language learners to engage in meaningful interactions with their peers and instructors, using the target language for real communication rather than just memorizing rules.

In environments that adopt CLT techniques, learners practice the language through conversations, role-plays, and discussions on various topics that go beyond traditional grammatical instruction. One key aspect of CLT is the use of “authentic texts”—materials written for purposes other than language learning (such as newspapers, advertisements, or novels)—to expose students to real-world language usage. This ensures that learners encounter practical, functional language rather than just theoretical knowledge.

Additionally, CLT encourages students to incorporate their personal experiences into their language learning, making the process more relevant and engaging. Learners are motivated to practice the language both inside and outside the classroom, which helps them develop the skills necessary for genuine communication. The goal of this approach is fluency and communicative competence, focusing on how well students can use the language in everyday situation.

In CLT classrooms, teachers take on the role of facilitators rather than traditional instructors. Instead of being the sole source of knowledge, teachers guide the learning process by creating opportunities for students to interact, discuss, and practice. The use of multimedia, such as videos, recordings, and interactive platforms, is also common in CLT settings, making lessons more engaging and dynamic. This approach aims to make learning enjoyable and active, with a focus on speaking and listening skills before reading and writing.

However, one of the challenges of CLT is finding the right balance between using multimedia and ensuring that academic goals are met. In some cases, excessive focus on activities or multimedia can overshadow the core language learning objectives, resulting in a lack of attention to grammar, vocabulary, or other academic aspects of the language.

Balancing Traditional and Communicative Language Teaching Methods

As a future teacher, I plan to combine the strengths of both traditional and communicative language teaching methods. Having experienced both approaches as a student, I recognize that each has its advantages and limitations. Traditional methods, with their structured focus on grammar and vocabulary, provided me with a solid foundation in language. Many individuals who were taught using traditional methods have achieved fluency and proficiency, demonstrating that this approach can still be highly effective.

On the other hand, CLT has its own merits, especially in terms of fostering active learning, interaction, and real-world communication. However, I have also observed that not all CLT lessons are equally successful. Some lessons, due to a lack of experience or poor understanding by the teacher, can become ineffective or confusing. Technology, multimedia, and student interaction are essential in modern teaching, but it is important to remember that human, face-to-face instruction cannot be replaced entirely by these tools.

To achieve a balance, I believe that the teacher's role is critical. Experienced educators bring invaluable expertise to the classroom, and their ability to guide students through both structured lessons and interactive, communicative activities is essential. By integrating both traditional and communicative methods, I aim to create a learning environment where students not only develop practical language skills but also gain a deeper understanding of the language's rules and structure. The goal is to create a well-rounded educational experience that combines the best aspects of both approaches.

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