

Assessing English Language Teaching Methods and Approaches on Iraqi

EFL Students at Open Educational College

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Abstract:

English language teaching (ELT) is an important requirement in today's perspective of global education, this is particularly true in countries like Iraq, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the different teaching methods that are adopted by the Open Educational College in teaching English as a second language, the study aims to fulfill this aim by focusing on the impact of these teaching strategies on Iraqi EFL students. This study also seeks to identify the practical insights and recommendations that can enhance English language education within this context by analyzing a wide range of teaching methods adopted by the Open College. This study is interested in the two categories of teaching methods: the communicative and the lexical ones, with recognizing that communicative teaching methods –such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Content-Based Instruction (CBI)– focus on the practical use of English through real-life communication and task-oriented learning. The study also recognizes that all the communicative methods of teaching English prioritize interaction, encouraging students to engage in meaningful communication, which fosters language competence. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and limitations of each group of the teaching methods, and this will be done by exploring the theoretical frameworks that are behind devising these methods in the first

place, the ultimate purpose of this study is to offer some actionable recommendations for the implementation of appropriate teaching strategies, potentially leading to improved outcomes for EFL students at the college.

Key Words: (ELT Methods, ELT Approaches, EFL, Iraqi context, promote students' proficiency).

1. Background of the Study

English language teaching (ELT) is an important requirement in today's perspective of global education, this is particularly true in countries like Iraq, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). The Open Educational College has become one of the most important players in the field of ELT in Iraq, as it focuses on improving the English proficiency of Iraqi students. It goes without saying that the particular methods and approaches that are used to teach English language are critical in determining the success of students in mastering the language, and this underscores the need to evaluate their effectiveness. Teaching a foreign language is not an easy task for educators nor is it so for the researchers, because the success in this endeavor depends on the pedagogical approaches adopted, and how they align with the specific learning environment, this is because teachers rely heavily on their knowledge of effective teaching strategies to support language learning as was highlighted by Larsen–Freeman and Anderson (2011).

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the different teaching methods that are adopted by the Open Educational College in teaching English as a second language, the study aims to fulfill this aim by focusing on the impact of these teaching strategies on Iraqi EFL students. This study also seeks to identify the practical insights and recommendations that can enhance English language education within this context by analyzing a wide range of teaching methods adopted by the Open College. This study is interested in the two categories of teaching methods: the communicative and the lexical ones, with recognizing that communicative teaching methods – such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Content-Based Instruction (CBI)– focus on the practical use of English through real-life communication and task-oriented learning. The study also recognizes that all the communicative methods of teaching English prioritize interaction, encouraging students to engage in meaningful communication, which fosters language competence.

Lexical methods are different from the communicative ones because the later emphasizes the importance of acquiring vocabulary as the most important requirement for language proficiency, these methods focus on particular activities such as vocabulary games, word associations, and the use of vocabulary journals to help the students to develop a robust vocabulary base. Having the desired skills of speaking and writing in a

second language requires a lot of intensive efforts that exceed the amount of efforts required to have the skills of listening and reading a second language, this necessitates a balanced approach in teaching (Prabu, 1990), however, Prabu (1990) points out that there is no one-size-fits-all method in teaching EFL, as the context heavily influences the effectiveness of any given approach (p. 162).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and limitations of each group of the teaching methods, and this will be done by exploring the theoretical frameworks that are behind devising these methods in the first place, the ultimate purpose of this study is to offer some actionable recommendations for the implementation of appropriate teaching strategies, potentially leading to improved outcomes for EFL students at the college.

2. The Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the efforts of improving teaching English language in the Iraqi context, particularly at the Open Educational College because this study tries to evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching methods and explore the learning environment, and thus, addresses a key aspect of language education that significantly impacts the proficiency of the students and the overall educational achievement.

The findings of this research are expected to provide the teachers and the curriculum developers with the most needed guidance to enhance the learning process and the educational outcomes, this study will also provide the policymakers with accurate insights to devise the curricula in a way that best suits the needs of Iraqi EFL learners.

This study is also significant because it tries to bridge that gap between the theoretical research about teaching English language and between the practices of the classrooms because it aims to offer evidence-based recommendations that can be directly applied to enhance pedagogical approaches, by doing so, this research has the potential to improve the quality of English language education in Iraq, benefiting both students and educators alike because it focuses on effective teaching strategies and fostering a positive learning environment.

3. The Research Questions

1. To what extent do communicative methods, such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, and Content-Based Instruction, promote Iraqi EFL students' language proficiency at the Open Educational College?
2. How effective is the Lexical Approach method in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and usage among Iraqi EFL students at the Open Educational College?

3. How well do the available teaching resources support the English language learning process in the classes at the Open Educational College?
4. How effectively do English language teachers at the Open Educational College provide feedback and support to students to help them improve their language skills?
5. To what extent do English language teachers at the Open Educational College promote a positive and supportive learning environment in their classrooms?

4. Literature Review

During the last few decades, several teaching methods were designed and applied. Consequently, some of those methods were accepted or rejected in the domain of English teaching practice.

The most known teaching methods can be briefly described as follows:

4.1. Communicative Approaches

Bloomfield (1914) stresses the fact that language teaching process must consist of "building up in the pupil those associative habits which constitute the language to be learned", (p. 294).

The implementation of Communicative Approach CA in Iraqi universities aims to address the challenge of English language proficiency among students. In many university settings, English language instruction may not have yielded satisfactory outcomes. Despite the introduction of CA, students

often lack sufficient opportunities to use English in the classroom, for this reason, some teachers may often prioritize grammar instruction over the use of various Communicative Approach (CA) strategies that foster skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. These teachers share the same point of view as do Chiyembekezo et al. (2019), who stress the need for language teaching approaches that allow learners to develop effective communication skills in English, they also argue that language activities must be dedicated the sufficient amount of time so that they can simulate real-life communication scenarios outside the classroom (p. 4).

This study aims to provide an acceptable answer to this issue, this is why it will examine how CA strategies are implemented by teachers in Iraqi universities and on how successful are these strategies in facilitating language learning and helping student to gain confidence in speaking, writing, and reading English, ultimately improving their overall proficiency. The language skills that will be developed by different students through the use of CA methods should enable them to communicate effectively across various contexts, including academic, social, and professional environments.

It is of grave importance for English learners to reach a high proficiency in English language, because this proficiency opens up new opportunities for students to participate more fully in global academic and professional arenas, this is why this study is interested in contributing to the

advancement of English language education in Iraqi universities, and this is done by focusing on the promotion of communicative competence of learners.

Celce–Murcia (2007) warned language teachers of losing the sight of the ultimate goal of the whole process of language teaching, because if reaching the sufficient level of communicative competence is the final goal of the learning process, then it must be paired with integrated cultural and cross–cultural instruction because simply acquiring linguistic knowledge is not enough as learners must also develop an awareness of the cultural beliefs that shape language use to communicate with other people in an effective manner.

This position of Celce–Murcia (2007) means that it is important to address both the linguistic and the cultural aspects in the process of teaching English as a second language, because communicative competence extends beyond mastering grammar and vocabulary and requires an understanding of the cultural details that are usually embedded in the language, and this is why teachers and learners must be sensitive to cultural appropriateness and possess the skills needed to navigate these nuances for meaningful and successful interactions.

English teachers must focus on this mixed cultural and cross–cultural instruction in their practice of teaching language, they must prepare learners

properly to engage in diverse cultural contexts in order to enhance their intercultural understanding and effective communication. This method recognizes that language and culture are strongly tied together, consequently this recognition ensures that learners not only speak the language fluently but also with cultural insight and awareness, leading to more authentic and impactful communication.

4.2. Task-Based Learning in Language Education

Prabhu (2017) argues that it is important to engage language learners in meaningful activities that rely on the use of the second language, he asserted that this learning method which is based on fulfilling different tasks is an effective and reliable approach, and that reading activities are one of the most valuable methods for language acquisition. Prabhu also asserts that teachers should heavily use various texts in the teaching process because these texts offer a rich and organized form of meaning that goes beyond the individual sentences, this is why texts are effective in enabling learners to engage with language on a deeper level. Prabhu further points out that task-based activities that rely on utilizing reading comprehension approach are effective in encouraging students to focus more on the meaning rather than focusing only on the form, and that this makes the reading process more immersive and impactful compared to oral communication (p. 42). The bottom line is that teachers can benefit from

incorporating task-based learning into language education to create rich and meaningful learning experiences that enhance proficiency of their students in different activities of the second language, this approach does not only focus on comprehension but also on the practical application of language skills in real-life situations, and this aids in providing deeper engagement with the target language.

4.3. The Lexical Method

This method focuses on utilizing the literature and grammar of the target language in language instruction practice and this means that the teachers must incorporate translated passages between the target language and the mother tongue of the language learners, Mart (2013). This approach places a significant emphasis on vocabulary and the use of lexical chunks, which are fixed and commonly used word combinations.

However, it is worth noting that the Lexical Method is considered a highly teacher-centered approach and is now less preferred in many developed countries. In this method, the classroom environment is highly structured, and the teacher assumes an authoritative role who controls all activities and directing the learning process (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

4.4. Previous Studies

A comprehensive study conducted by Nagy and Scott (2000) shed light on the crucial role of English education in academic institutions, this study

focused on 357 secondary school students from the United Arab Emirates, who participated in a questionnaire survey. The study found that 75 percent of the students expressed their enthusiasm for studying English, and this motivation emerged from recognizing English as a powerful international medium of communication and thus it is essential across various domains such as business, media, and the economy. The participants in this study were well aware of the fact that mastering English would not only give them a competitive advantage in their academic and career occupations but would also allow them to engage with a higher-status culture, and this cultural connection held particular significance for the students, as it offered opportunities for personal development and a sense of prestige.

Zygadlo (2007) conducted a study to understand the impact of mixed methods learning on vocabulary acquisition and on the language development of the participants, the study recruited 46 students from a school in Izabelin, Warsaw, Poland, and used both pretests and posttests to assess the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching English language. The researcher divided the participants into two groups; the control group and the experimental group which was introduced to a blended learning environment that combined self-study, the use of computer tools, and traditional face-to-face instruction. The aim of the researcher was to

find out whether this method is better than the traditional face-to-face model in encouraging the autonomy of the students.

The findings showed that this blended learning method was better than the traditional learning methods because it led to better outcomes in the learning process than other methods that only rely on in-person instruction. The participants in the experimental group were given the opportunity to direct their study and interactive tools by themselves, and this enabled them to perform better in vocabulary acquisition than those in the control group who experienced only face-to-face instruction with limited autonomy. The study asserted that this improvement in vocabulary acquisition was a direct result of the dynamic nature of this approach and its focus on the students, this aspect enabled this learning approach to provide the participants with a more engaging and personalized educational experience.

The study also found out that blended learning approach resulted in fostering the autonomy of the participants and boosted their motivation, and this is the result of integrating self-study components and digital resources which provided the students with more control over their learning process and allowed them to move at their own pace and explore materials independently, and as a final result, this increase in the autonomy of the students contributed to a heightened sense of engagement and motivation, as students felt more in charge of their educational journey.

Although the results of Zygadlo's study and other studies agreed that there are diverse motivations that can encourage students to learn English, these studies do not fully address the overall effectiveness of different teaching methods, and this is why there remains a need for more comprehensive research that evaluates how these methods impact long-term learning success.

5. Methodology

The participants in this study were all taken from two centers affiliated with the Open Educational College: Al-Karkh Study Center and Al-Rusafa Study Center, both centers are located in the province of Baghdad. The sample included fourth and third-grade students in the English Language Department.

In Al-Karkh Study Center, there were a total of 65 students in both grades, and 58 students participated in the test. In Al-Rusafa Study Center, there were a total of 53 students in both grades, and 44 students participated in the test.

The total number of participants in the study was 102. The questionnaire covers the three methods of teaching English as described in the literature Review, and it was presented to a number of experts who confirmed its validity and reliability. Some of them suggested some modifications, which

were implemented before presenting the questionnaire to the sample participants.

6. Results and Discussion

No.	The Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1A	How effective do you think Communicative Language Teaching (e.g., role-plays, discussions) are in promoting students' language proficiency?	48%	27%	25%	-	-
1B	How effective do you think Task-Based Language Teaching (e.g., problem-solving tasks, projects) are in promoting students' language proficiency?	60%	14%	22%	4%	-
1C	How effective do you think Content-Based Instruction (e.g., integrating language learning with other subjects) are in promoting students' language proficiency?	45%	15%	30%	10%	-
1D	How effective do you think Lexical Approach (e.g., teaching vocabulary chunks and collocations) are in promoting students' language proficiency?	46%	17%	30%	8%	~1%
2	How well do the available teaching resources support the English language learning process in your class?	52%	17%	30%	2%	~1%
3	To what extent do the teaching	46%	25%	29%	~1%	~1%

	methods in your class promote active student engagement and participation in English language classes?					
4	How effectively do the current teaching methods in your class encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students?	44%	16%	37%	5%	~1%
5	How much do you believe using English language in role-plays and discussions in your classes helps students improve their English?	40%	37%	20%	3%	2%
6	How effectively do you incorporate technology in your instructional practices?	36%	28%	33%	4%	~1%
7	How much do you think studying and memorizing grammatical structures and vocabulary through written exercises help students improve their English?	53%	27%	20%	~1%	~1%
8	How accurately do the assessment methods used in English language classes represent students' language proficiency?	43%	19%	35%	4%	~1%
9	How effectively do you provide feedback and support to students to help them improve their language skills?	52%	25%	25%	-	-
10	How well do you promote a positive and supportive learning environment in your	55%	27%	19%	~1%	-

	English language classroom?					
11	How often do you use a variety of teaching strategies to enhance students' language learning experience?	57%	12%	30%	~2%	~1%
12	To what extent do you believe using English language in all in-class communications helps students improve their English?	52%	23%	24%	3%	-
13	How frequently do you incorporate interview activities in your English language classes, where students interact and exchange information with each other or guest speakers?	43%	16%	34%	9%	-
14	How well do you explicitly teach and practice language functions (e.g., agreeing, disagreeing, requesting clarification) in your English language classes?	50%	10%	36%	6%	-
15	How often do you incorporate vocabulary-focused activities, such as vocabulary games, word associations, or vocabulary journals, in your English language classes?	35%	33%	28%	3%	3%
16	How effective do you find lexical methods in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition and usage in real-life contexts?	48%	17%	29%	5%	3%

- For the Communicative Language Teaching method (1a), the majority of participants (77%) either agreed or strongly agreed that it is effective in promoting students' language proficiency.
- Similarly, for the Task-Based Language Teaching method (1b), a significant majority (77%) agreed or strongly agreed with its effectiveness.
- Regarding the Content-Based Instruction method (1c), a slight majority (56%) agreed or strongly agreed with its effectiveness.
- Using English language in role-plays and discussions (5) was considered beneficial by the majority (78%) who agreed or strongly agreed with its effectiveness.
- Incorporating interview activities (13) received mixed responses, with 59% expressing agreement or strong agreement, while 43% were neutral.
- For the Lexical Approach method (1d), a majority (66%) agreed or strongly agreed with its effectiveness in promoting students' language proficiency.
- Explicitly teaching and practicing language functions (14) received positive responses, with 75% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with its effectiveness.
- Vocabulary-focused activities (15) were generally favored, with 68% expressing agreement or strong agreement with their incorporation.

- Regarding the effectiveness of lexical methods (16) in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and usage, 65% agreed or strongly agreed, while 25% were neutral.
- Regarding the availability of teaching resources (2), a majority (71%) agreed or strongly agreed that they support the English language learning process.
- The teaching methods' ability to promote active student engagement and participation (3) received positive responses, with 71% of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills (4): a majority of the participants (60%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the current teaching methods are effective in encouraging these skills.
- The incorporation of technology in instructional practices (6) received mixed responses, with 53% expressing agreement or strong agreement, while 37% were neutral.
- Assessment and Feedback:
 - Participants generally expressed confidence in the assessment methods (8), with 62% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they accurately represent students' language proficiency.

- Providing feedback and support to students (9) received positive responses, as all participants who responded agreed or strongly agreed with its effectiveness.
- A majority (82%) agreed or strongly agreed that a positive and supportive learning environment (10) is promoted in their English language classrooms.
- The majority of the participants (81%) favored using a variety of teaching strategies, they all agreed or strongly agreed that it enhances their experience of language learning.

The overall results indicate that there is generally a positive perception of communicative and lexical teaching methods. The results also showed that the majority of the participants agreed on the importance of the supportive teaching environment, because a large number of the participants expressed confidence in the assessment methods used and the provision of feedback and support to students. Anyhow, there was no agreement on the issue of incorporating technology in the learning process, for this reason, it is important to consider these findings when evaluating the effectiveness of English language teaching methods and approaches at Open Educational College and to further analyze the implications for the English language learning process among Iraqi EFL students.

7. Findings of the Study

The findings of this study indicate that although communicative approach is widely introduced in English language teaching in Iraqi universities, there is a need for greater emphasis on providing students with more opportunities to use English in the classroom, because the results showed that teachers often prioritize grammar instruction over the utilization of CA strategies that promote listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. This aligns with the idea that language teaching should focus on building associative habits and on providing learners with the proper opportunities to communicate with others using English language (Bloomfield, 1914; Chiyembekezo et al., 2019).

Task-Based Learning approach was proven to be an effective approach in the process of language teaching because the incorporation of Task-Based Learning in language education helped the participants to create meaningful learning experiences and enhance language proficiency. This goes in line with the notes of Prabhu (2017) who argued that task-based reading comprehension is an effective approach in language teaching practice because it mainly focuses on understanding the meaning and facilitates immersive interaction with the language. The findings of this study support the notion that Task-Based learning can contribute to the development of language skills and provide students with learning

experiences that utilize more engagement with the second language in real-time activities.

Furthermore, the study noted that the Lexical Method is considered a highly teacher-centered approach and is less preferred in many developed countries, because it entails a structured classroom environment where the teacher assumes an authoritative role (Mart, 2013; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This study has also found that the majority of the participants agreed with the effectiveness of the Lexical Method in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and understanding the terms of use in in real-life contexts, still, it is crucial to consider the evolving preferences and trends in language instruction.

8. Conclusion

This study found that there is a grave need for greater emphasis on providing students with the proper and sufficient opportunities to use English in the classroom, as well as the importance of task-based learning and vocabulary-focused activities. This study has also found that Lexical teaching methods are effective in enhancing the ability of the students to acquire the important vocabularies, but it is essential to consider evolving preferences in language instruction, this can be done by incorporating CA strategies, task-based learning, and creating a balanced approach, English language education in Iraqi universities can be improved, fostering students'

communicative competence and preparing them for global academic and professional success.

9. Recommendations for Future Research

This study offers the following recommendations for future research:

1. Conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of using communicative approaches on the proficiency of second language learners in using the target language and their ability to communicate effectively in academic and professional contexts. Longitudinal studies will help in the precise identification of the effectiveness of CA strategies over an extended period of time.
2. Investigating the effectiveness of teacher training programs that focus on equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively implement teaching methods. Such investigation can provide accurate insights about the impact of teachers' training on their instructional practices and student outcomes.
3. Examining the integration of technology in English language instruction. Investigating the impact of digital tools, online resources, and virtual communication platforms on students' language acquisition and communicative competence can enhance the learning process and students' outcomes.

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Appendix

The Questionnaire

Kindly fill out this survey in each item as you see fit by putting a check mark () in the appropriate place. This survey is implemented to conduct a study entitled “Assessing English Language Teaching Methods and Approaches on Iraqi EFL Students at Open Educational College”. Please take note that all of the data will be handled with confidentiality and will not be used for any purposes other than that of this research.

The Survey:

A. Demographic Information:

1. Age:

18-24

25-31

32-38

39 and more

2. Gender:

Male

Female

3. Nationality:

No.	The Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1A	How effective do you think Communicative Language Teaching (e.g., role-plays, discussions) are in promoting students' language proficiency?					
1B	How effective do you think Task-Based Language Teaching (e.g., problem-solving tasks, projects) are in promoting students' language proficiency?					
1C	How effective do you think Content-Based Instruction (e.g., integrating language learning with other subjects) are in promoting students' language proficiency?					

1D	How effective do you think Lexical Approach (e.g., teaching vocabulary chunks and collocations are in promoting students' language proficiency?					
2	How well do the available teaching resources support the English language learning process in your class?					
3	To what extent do the teaching methods in your class promote active student engagement and participation in English language classes?					
4	How effectively do the current teaching methods in your class encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students?					
5	How much do you believe using English language in role-plays and discussions in your classes helps students improve their English?					
6	How effectively do you incorporate technology in your instructional practices?					
7	How much do you think studying and memorizing grammatical structures and vocabulary through written exercises help students improve their English?					
8	How accurately do the assessment methods used in English language classes represent students' language proficiency?					
9	How effectively do you provide feedback and support to students to help them improve their language skills?					
10	How well do you promote a positive and supportive learning environment in your English language classroom?					
11	How often do you use a variety of teaching strategies to enhance students' language learning experience?					
12	To what extent do you believe using English language in all in-class communications helps students improve their English?					
13	How frequently do you incorporate interview activities in your English language classes, where students interact and exchange information with each other or guest speakers?					

14	How well do you explicitly teach and practice language functions (e.g., agreeing, disagreeing, requesting clarification) in your English language classes?					
15	How often do you incorporate vocabulary-focused activities, such as vocabulary games, word associations, or vocabulary journals, in your English language classes?					
16	How effective do you find lexical methods in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition and usage in real-life contexts?					

