The Eclectic Approach to Learning English

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Abstract
The eclectic method allows teachers and students to easily adapt to learning needs so that learning goals or objectives can be achieved. The purpose of this article was to prove the positive impact of using the eclectic method on students' foreign language learning by comparing it to the traditional approach to teaching. This study proposed to integrate the eclectic approach into the educational program of first-year students of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication Institute at Sechenov University. The experimental method and interview method were used to collect the data. Seventy participants were divided into experimental and control groups according to English test results. After one semester of the experiment, the results showed that the academic performance of experimental group students improved by an average of 7.3 points. In the control group, students' academic performance decreased by 4.2 points. The effect of the eclectic method was investigated by analyzing the results of English proficiency test of students in both groups. The study results can be useful for English teachers, as they can improve their teaching methods using the eclectic approach. Further research could focus on a detailed analysis of the eclectic approach and its possible variations and components. Due to the small sample of participants, the study could not determine whether external factors such as students' age, gender, nationality, etc. influenced the results.

Introduction

Students' academic performance depends on their level of motivation to learn (Mohamed, 2013). Thus, foreign language teachers need to be creative and innovative in their teaching in order to capture students' attention and stimulate their positive motivation to learn the language (Pal, Halder, & Guha, 2016). As for the social theory of intrinsic motivation to learn and speak the language being learned, it can be developed through a variety of teacher-led activities (Lam, 2016). Through these classes, students can gain knowledge both inside and outside of the educational environment, learning through methods and materials that are interesting to them, as well as enjoying the environment and the freedom of choice. In addition, the level of motivation and desire to learn a language has a significant impact on how well it is learned (Misbah, Mohamad, Yunus, & Ya'acob, 2017).

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It is also important that learning materials of a foreign language should be interesting and motivating to students. To keep the motivation level high, and deal with difficulties in language learning, it is worth paying attention to the methods of teaching. Such a methodological basis for modern language teaching was established in the early twentieth century when a number of teaching methods and approaches were being continually updated and refined (Mwanza, 2016). In pedagogy, several teaching methods and strategies had been developed by renowned experts and scholars that proved to be more effective than traditional teaching methods (Alsayad, Ali, Hassan, & Alhafian, 2019). At other times, methods based on newer or more appealing ideas and theories have emerged and become widely accepted and popular (Adeyemo & Babajide, 2014). These include the direct method, audio-lingual method, and the situational approach. Some of the well-known methods, such as communicative language teaching, have been accepted almost universally and have reached the status of methodological orthodoxy. At the same time, alternatives to the classical approaches have always found some support in language teaching, although this has often not led to a wider acceptance, use, and diffusion of knowledge (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Discussions about teaching methods often focus on issues such as: the role of grammar in the language curriculum, the choice of curriculum framework, the role of vocabulary learning, communicative skills instruction, student motivation, effective teaching strategies, methods of teaching the four skills and the role of modern technology in them (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021). Additionally, a teacher should carefully select instructional materials in accordance with the subject of instruction - the foreign language - as well as consider the cultural context of learning and teaching.

One such method that serves the purpose is the eclectic approach, wherein the teacher integrates all possible teaching materials (radio, movies, music, media resources, textbooks, magazines, etc.) that are deemed suitable for use (Weidemann, 2001), that is, to engage both visual and linguistic aspects. This means that teachers should not be limited to verbal resources when choosing instructional materials, which confirms the multimodality of the eclectic approach (Mwanza, 2017). The eclectic approach was proposed as a response to too many teaching methods in the 1970s and the static nature often found in their application (Shahadat, 2019). Eclecticism is not originally a pedagogical concept. The totality of all available pedagogical systems and all programs forms the space of pedagogical reality. Different methods and techniques can qualitatively complement and correct each other. The main task of eclectic theorists is to create programs, develop methods, and promote them. In addition, it is always possible to find universal techniques in different systems and programs, and educational eclecticism based on this allows one to create one's own pedagogical style (Suleman & Hussain, 2016).

Principle eclecticism challenges a teacher to ensure that every decision about learning is based on a detailed and holistic understanding of all learning theories and related pedagogical methods (in terms of purpose and context of teaching, student needs, available materials, etc.) (Gao, 2011). The eclectic approach has gained such widespread acceptance because many teachers and educators actively use it to describe their method of teaching (Weidemann, 2001). This means that, since all students are different and are therefore suited to different ways of learning, it is worth using the eclectic method because it seeks to respond in a variety of ways to the needs that normally exist in a group of students. In this way, learning becomes more effective through the flexibility of using an eclectic approach. The goal of promoting eclectic methods is to combine theory with ideas presented in language learning (Gallardo, Heiser, & Arias McLaughlin, 2017; Kumar, 2013).

The current study was conducted at the Institute of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication of Sechenov University. Analyzing the existing studies, it can be concluded that scientists pay insufficient attention to the practical application of this method. Thus, there is a need for more detailed testing of the eclectic approach to teaching in a real educational environment.

Literature review

In a study conducted in Zambia, teachers were asked to take professional development courses to familiarize them with how the eclectic approach could be interpreted in different learning contexts. In order for teachers to be able to justify their choice of a particular combination of methods, it was deemed essential that they received comprehensive teacher education that should prepare them to know the right approach and how it can be used in learning (Mwanza, 2016). Another study of middle school English teachers in Zambia proved that the eclectic approach was a complex approach that should be seen as one method that combined features of different methods. One misconception some teachers had was that the eclectic approach involved using more than one method not as a package, but one by one (Mwanza, 2017).

A teacher can choose one of the methods to create their own base that takes into account all the characteristics and differences among students (Freeman, 2001). A teacher can be said to have created their own method by combining different aspects in a consistent manner that leads to eclecticism. The choice of this method to be used in the classroom affects a teacher, students, the learning environment, and the broad sociocultural context (Mwanza, 2016). Because the eclectic approach is constructed by a teacher individually, according to the students, their needs, and their learning context, it can also be argued that another characteristic of the approach is subjectivity. Thus, this subjectivity refers to how different teachers

understand and interpret what can be used in curriculum design and materials selection. What is common, however, is that the goal and basis of eclectic learning are that different students should access knowledge without much difficulty (Mwanza, 2017).

In Spanish practice, the competence of schools to fulfill this goal depends largely on how teachers understand their mission to create diverse learning environments to meet the different kinds of demands and interests of all students. Thus, demographic changes have raised awareness of the need for all teachers and professionals not only in language education but also to adapt to linguistic diversity to maximize student learning (Gay, 2018).

Scholars argue that using an eclectic approach offers many benefits that open up new educational opportunities (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). There are a few advantages of this approach, namely: learners find it easier to understand language in its cultural context; it combines listening, speaking, reading, and writing; it is learner-centered; and it creates an effective educational environment for a teacher by building on the strengths of multiple methods, avoiding their weaknesses (Kumar, 2013). Thus, this context addresses not only the theoretical aspects of teaching and learning, but also the real-life experiences of students. It also presents language holistically, it is flexible, and it adapts to the needs of the group during instruction (Mwanza, 2017).

Researchers argue that the preferred teaching methods are a combination of grammatical translation, the structural method, and advise teachers to use all other methods while avoiding their drawbacks. Several features can be identified that make the eclectic method successful in practice (Gao, 2011) such as: (1) the strengths of each method are defined separately; (2) there is a flexible approach to the choice and application of each method; (3) each method is effective in combination with the others; (4) the continuity of the entire learning process is maintained. This attention to each of the methods used raises the question of how teachers should evaluate the effectiveness of different theories. It has been suggested that principled eclecticism should be used, with teachers choosing what works in their own educational context (Brown, 2002).

A study was conducted in China that shaped the importance of conceptualizing eclecticism and principled eclecticism in English teaching (Huang, 2018). The results showed that there was a gap between policy and reality, and between eclecticism and principled eclecticism in the pedagogy of English teaching in higher education institutions in the context of Chinese language. This was because principled eclecticism challenged a teacher to ensure that every decision about instruction in the educational process was based on a detailed and holistic understanding of all learning theories and related pedagogical methods (in terms of purpose and context of teaching, student needs, available materials, etc.) (Gao, 2011).

There are several methodological programs to choose from in modern Spanish foreign language learning practice: content-based learning, bilingual programs, language as the main medium of instruction, game projects, language programs, etc. (Merino & Lasagabaster, 2018a, 2018b). The environment and philosophy of educational processes are changing, especially in higher education, where competency-based learning and student skills are becoming increasingly important (Gil-Lopez, Gonzalez-Villora, & Hortigüela-Alcalá, 2021). These competencies and skills focus on analyzing and synthesizing, organizing and managing information flows, and accessing and using information in decision making. The ultimate goal of these competencies is to enable a student to work autonomously, use appropriate tools interactively, and work effectively in groups (Pinto, Doucet, & Fernández-Ramos, 2008).

Group discussion is one of the key areas of modern learning and facilitates the transition to deep learning using an eclectic approach. It primarily improves communication skills (Zhu, 2012). With the paradigm shift from perceiving learning as an individual process to a socially organized activity inseparable from its sociocultural discourse in time and space, researchers have argued that learning is built on students' reactions to the context (Tsui & Ng, 2010). Comparing such direct, communicative, and eclectic approaches to language teaching, one can conclude that the eclectic approach is the most effective because a teacher is free to use and combine the best techniques from all known methods and approaches (Mahmood, 2012). There have been a number of studies on the effectiveness of different teaching methods, and the results showed that the use of a variety of teaching methods (interactive, verbal, communicative, principles of integration of educational content, problem and modular learning, etc.) has a positive effect on the academic performance of students compared to the traditional method of teaching (Agboghorom, 2014; Sood, 2013).

Problem statement and Research questions

In teaching a foreign language, as in all sciences, there are a number of difficulties that slow down the educational process. A change in methodology or an entirely new approach to using most common approaches can help solve these problems. Research on language teaching methods is characterized by a constant search for more effective ways of teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Willrich, Mittmann, Fileto, & dos Santos, 2020). While much has been done to address these and other important issues, there is a need to explore new possibilities of different instructional strategies and methods (Mwanza, 2017). One of the most important and common language teaching method is the eclectic method. it is a method that combines different teaching

methods and approaches (Kumar, 2013). The eclectic approach combines listening, speaking, reading, and writing and includes direct practice. Within principled eclecticism, a teacher is not limited to the rules of one particular method, but is free to use a wide range of methods and resources to teach a particular topic.

The purpose of this article was to prove the positive impact of using the eclectic method on students' foreign language learning by comparing it to the traditional approach to teaching. The research was motivated by the fact that some teachers did not support the use of the eclectic method in teaching foreign language to students, or their knowledge of this method was erroneous. The following research questions guide this article:

1. What are the advantages of using the eclectic approach compared to traditional methods?
2. How is the eclectic method applied in practice in the educational process in the Russian Federation? How effective is it?
3. What are teachers' opinions on the proposed approach and their attitudes toward its implementation in the classical educational program?

The study also gives theoretical and practical knowledge of eclectic approach used in language learning; the effects of this method on learning in relation to students' language level and academic performance are studied.

Methods and materials

- *Research design*

The subject of the current study required the use of experimentation and methods of inquiry to collect and analyze the relevant data. Hence, the study chose the experimentation research and interview method to analyze the issues of learning English as a foreign language using an eclectic approach. Such an approach is particularly helpful in the absence of a language environment

- *Sampling*

The study was conducted at the Institute of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication of Sechenov University. The participants were a sample of 70 students studying English as a foreign language in the first year. Random sampling technique was used to select the subjects. Seventy students were randomly selected to participate in this study. The sample consisted exclusively of first-year students, since they had just begun their studies. They were naïve and had not yet tried out all methods of teaching, and therefore could ideally contribute to the quality and validity of the results. They were divided into two groups: experimental and control, according to the criterion of test results.

- *Instruments and procedure*

The instruments of the study comprised questionnaires used in a pretest and a posttest. The pretest was conducted to determine the students' level of English. The test consisted of 40 questions with one or more correct answers and was conducted on the online platform "Coursera". The content of the test included 10 questions each on grammar, vocabulary, listening skills, and reading and comprehension skills. The responses of the questionnaire were processed automatically on the platform. The validity of the test was also verified by three educational experts with doctoral degrees.

The results of the pre-test showed that 40 of the 70 participants had an upper-intermediate level of English (B2) and 30 of them had a proficient level (C1). Based on these data, students were divided into two groups: the experimental group consisting of 40 students and the control group consisting of 30 students. Those with a lower level formed the basis of the experimental group and those with a C1 level formed the control group. In addition, two faculty members with the same qualifications and experience were assigned to the groups to successfully conduct the study. Before starting, appropriate permission was requested from the university administration to make changes in teaching methodology for one semester, to collect and process the data. Experimental group students studied English through an eclectic teaching approach, while control group students were taught through the classical teaching approach presented in the educational program of the university.

The next stage was a live interview with 10 university professors, conducted by representatives of the administration. They also participated in drafting the questions, focusing on the research problems posed. Program statements and teachers' responses were studied and recorded on a tape recorder in audio format. The purpose of this stage was to establish contact with the teachers, to find out their understanding and opinion about the proposed method of language learning.

- *Data analyses*

In the experiment, it was recommended that English language learning be interpreted using an eclectic method, which included a communicative approach and a textual approach. As the communicative approach itself is eclectic, it confirms that this method is relevant to this study. For example, it can be considered as a

set of traditional and new approaches based on the principle of developing students' communication skills in the language under study. After the successful completion of the experiment, the third phase of the study was conducted, which consisted of another control test, through which changes in the level of performance and knowledge of students were investigated. The test consisted of 40 questions with one or more correct answers. The maximum final score could be 100 points. The results of the interview were processed by qualitative analysis and statistical reporting in Microsoft Excel.

Due to the small sample of participants, the study could not determine whether external factors such as students' age, gender, nationality, etc. influenced the results. It was also impossible in the study to prove what effect the use of the proposed method alone created on learning, because the results could be influenced by extra-linguistic factors, such as personal (on the part of teachers). The study was approved by the ethical committee of Sechenov University protocol #9632LR. All processes performed in the study with human participants complied with the ethical standards of institutional research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study. Ethical issues were not violated in the course of the study.

Results

A survey of teachers showed that 7 out of 15 considered the eclectic approach to teaching to be a failure that should be removed from the list of effective methods. Their arguments were that the eclectic approach took a long time to be effective and was therefore difficult or impossible to use. One of the participants stated: *"The eclectic approach is chaotic and thereby disrupts students."* Another commented, *"Instructors may appear overly demanding because this approach involves the use of several different classes in one academic hour"*. Participants explained that students easily understood the desired material when a teacher used only one method.

However, if a teacher switched from one method to another within the same class, students might think that a teacher was introducing a different concept and they would stop following the material due to inattention. One participant held the opinion: *"Students may need a variety of methodologies in their education, but the combination of many different approaches and materials will on the contrary complicate the education process and distract from the mainstream. I don't think they are ready to use that approach in their first year.* In short, a participant concluded: *"This approach is too engaging and unsuitable for students, as their attention may be distracted."*

Analyzing these responses, it was felt that teachers believed the eclectic approach implied the use of different isolated methods within one. This led to the misconception of irrational use of time during the class, as they tried to use different methods, instead of eclecticism as one approach that is implemented in several activities. These responses also indicate a lack of practical knowledge of the eclectic method on the part of the teachers or a misunderstanding of this approach.

A few other responses by the remaining 8 participants implied that the eclectic method was student-centered, and had a positive effect. For example, one teacher commented: *"Using eclectic approach in foreign language teaching improves students' knowledge, increases their academic performance, and brings creativity to the educational process."* Another opined: *"Traditional methods were effective in their time. Now it's worth trying new approaches and not being afraid to do so. Students are in favor of diversifying their monotonous language learning with test solutions and essay writing."* Lastly, one participant concluded: *"Eclecticism has long been used in educational programs around the world. It is worth introducing into domestic practice as well."*

Thus, there was a general trend among the responses collected. Eclecticism was underestimated in the context of this university, although it could bring improvements in student outcomes and the educational process in general. This led us to conclude that there was a need for a more detailed study in the Russian Federation and also introduce it into the Russian education system. Eclecticism involved the use of a variety of language learning activities, each of which can have a variety of characteristics and purposes.

Components of language such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, etc. are irrelevant when they are studied separately from each other. Therefore, language should not be compartmentalized. For this approach, the eclectic method is the most appropriate and often used because all other theories have their own divisions and limitations. This method is suitable for any type of learner, regardless of their age and skills) The positive thing is that all participants-teachers knew about this method and it was not new for them. One participant which opposed the eclectic approach stated: *"I've studied this approach a lot, and I don't dispute that, for example, students' vocabulary can be enhanced in this kind of learning, but we can also run into a number of problems with the eclectic approach: lack of time and learning materials, distraction, and chaotic state."*

Teaching a foreign language should be simplified, using in practice the best way to learn - to create real-life situations. Such situations encourage students to easily understand all the language features. It is also important that the situations created are appropriate to the students' level of language proficiency and their cultural context. Although the eclectic approach is applicable in current practice, much remains to be done, especially in the area of teacher training, to give teachers the necessary knowledge and skills to use this

method qualitatively. Thus, 47% of the teachers who participated in the experiment opposed the use of the eclectic approach in the existing university educational program, 52% supported its use, and 1% abstained from answering (Figure 1).
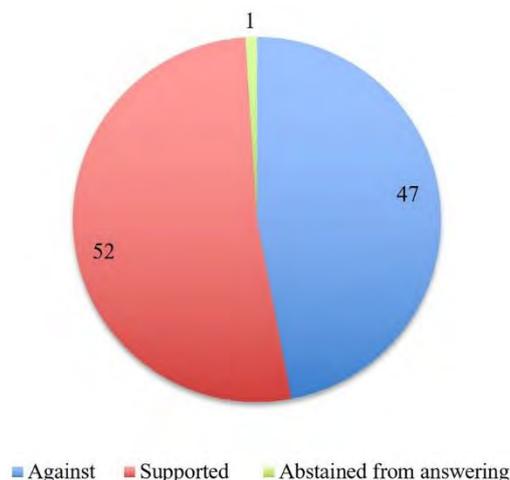

■ Against   ■ Supported   ■ Abstained from answering

Figure 1. *Teacher survey results*

In order to investigate the effect of the eclectic method on students' academic performance and English proficiency, an analysis was conducted which showed that at the end of the experiment (at the end of the semester), the level of English in the experimental group had improved (Table 1).

Table 1. *Results of the control test*

Knowledge level	Experimental group	Control group
Pretest	B2- 40 students	B2 - 0 students
(Before experiment	C1 - 0 students	C1 - 30 students
Post test	B2 - 19 students	B2 - 4 students
(After experiment	C1 - 21 students	C1 - 26 students

It was found that the eclectic teaching approach was more effective in terms of student achievement compared to the traditional post-test approach (Table 2).

Table 2. *Performance of students before and after the experiment*

Average score	Experimental group	Control group
Pretest	79.5	90.3
(Before experiment)		
Posttest	86.8	86.1
(After experiment)		

The data show that the academic performance of experimental group students improved by an average of 7.3 points. In the control group, the academic performance decreased by 4.2. Thus, it was proved that the eclectic method improved academic performance. The results of the experiment suggested that eclecticism could offer a solution to the problems of language teaching because with it teachers could choose what would work in their own dynamic educational context and what would not.

Discussion

The teachers' responses received during the interviews can be seen as strong recommendations in favor of eclecticism. They stated that since the effectiveness of this method is confirmed by the improvement in the results of students, it is worth introducing this approach into the educational programs of universities in the Russian Federation. A number of scholars (Brown, 2002; Gao, 2011; Kumar, 2013) have written about the organizational, methodological, and applied aspects that make up the eclectic method, but few have addressed the conceptualization of eclecticism as an independent method. Therefore, some view it as a method similar to the audio-lingual and cognitive code approach (Mwanza, 2017).

The results of the study also confirm that language should not be divided into pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The electric theory indicates that learning a foreign language occurs through constant practice of using it as a whole. In the pedagogical approach to language learning, language is related to learning and teaching based on perception, which eclectically bridges the gap between learning and

instructional models. However, the theoretical roots of language learning can be more accurately linked to natural and linguistic movements. There is no single method that fits all types of learners and all learning contexts (Allford & Pachler, 2007). On the other hand, it was found that not all students are suitable for this method. This can also be seen from the test results. Academic performance has not improved for all students and not by 100%. It is likely that different approaches will be appropriate for different activities and stages of development (Edlin, 2016).

Unlike other educational theories, the eclectic methodology has provoked resonance in many studies of foreign language teaching (Gao, 2011; Kumar, 2013; Mwanza, 2016; Suleman & Hussain, 2016). At the same time, more positive aspects of this method are highlighted in academic practice. First, with this theory, it becomes easier and more possible for students to understand language in the context of culture. It has already been mentioned above that it combines the practices of listening, speaking, reading, and writing into one (Kumar, 2013).

Conclusion

This paper proposed the use of an eclectic teaching approach to investigate its effectiveness and impact on students' academic performance, their knowledge of English, and changes in attitude toward the language learning process itself. After one semester of such teaching, the results showed that the academic performance of experimental group students improved by an average of 7.3 points. Control group students' academic performance decreased by 4.2 points. The impact of the eclectic method was investigated by analyzing the results of English proficiency test in both groups. It was proved that experimental group students were able to improve their level of English (especially communication skills). The number of students with B2 level decreased from 40 to 19, and 21 students out of 40 reached C1 level. In the control group, there were 4 students with B2 level, when there were none before the experiment. Consequently, 26 of the 30 students remained with C1 level.

Thus, the effectiveness in using the eclectic method of language teaching in the context of students' mastering the material and improving their results was confirmed. At the same time, in interviews with teachers, the majority responded that this method is not so effective and progressive for modern students. 47% of the teachers who participated in the experiment opposed the use of the eclectic approach in the existing educational program of the university, 52% supported its use, and 1% abstained from responding.

The study also revealed that the eclectic method of teaching was about a free choice of methods based on students' level of knowledge. Nevertheless, the basic principle of teaching was seen as simplicity, which made the eclectic method of teaching an integral part of the overall learning process. The advantages of eclecticism are evident in the discussion of the types of knowledge required in the study of not only language, but also of various fields, since new forms of knowledge have yet to be discovered through the connections between interdisciplinary concepts.

The study had a few limitations. Due to the small sample of participants, the study could not determine whether external factors such as students' age, gender, nationality, etc. influenced the results. It was also impossible in the study to prove what effect the use of the proposed method alone creates on learning, because the results can be influenced by extra-linguistic factors, such as personal (on the part of teachers). This article has significance for further research in the field of education and linguistics, as it contributes to the development and popularization of a new methodology that can be effective in the educational process. Similar research could focus on a detailed analysis of the eclectic approach and its possible variations and components.

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Conflict of interests

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

Data availability

Data will be available on request.

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