TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS IN AN EFL ENVIRONMENT A SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN FOR LIBYAN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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Teaching Young Learners in an EFL Environment

1) OVERVIEW:

Children acquire language differently, so their teaching is, eventually, different. They are different in mood, settlement and motivation. These factors make it hard for the teacher to respond effectively to his young learners' demands, nor is he capable to provide them with what they need. Therefore, the teacher needs to be creative enough in selecting a variety of activities that help attract and stimulate the children's interests (Klein, 2005).

In order to make use of what is being taught, the teacher should be flexible and well trained to incorporate more than one teaching method. Such integration of methods facilitates the teaching/learning process which requires a highly qualified teacher and motivated learner.

Although we focus on communication as a final goal, we should concentrate not only on communicative and on audio-lingual approach but we also encourage teachers to adopt and use, whenever possible, the appropriate cultural features of the total physical response approach.

None of these approaches is sufficient in itself because the number, capabilities and goals of the children are definitely dissimilar. Thus, eclectic integration is inevitable to achieve communicative competence through a particular manner of teaching approaches via audio-lingual features such as drilling and situational activities based on TPR.

2) Introduction:

Well-qualified and experienced teachers are aware of what to do as soon as they step in the classroom. They need no advice or suggestions except for up-dating information and knowledge of the modern trends that have been globally adopted in teaching children taking in account the particular characteristics of their environment.

In Libya, we have not experienced this trend yet either in the past or present. Teachers' Institutes were, and still have been, established to prepare teachers of preparatory schools in which the children's age is no younger than 12 years. Colleges of Education and Higher teachers' Institutes prepare teachers of older students whose ages range between 16 and 19 years. The nowadays higher institutes are equivalent to the past colleges of education. That is, younger learners, the theme of this paper are not, unfortunately, accounted for.

Eventually, the right decision has been made. English as a foreign language (EFL) not only to be but must be formally taught in public primary schools starting with the third grade level. Children's ages do not exceed 9 years, but some are even younger. Such a

new policy demands a new look at the teaching of EFL in our schools to pave the way for further reliable strategies to make use of what we are doing.

In spite of the vows for almost two decades, English has been thought of as a necessary means of updating our mental capabilities to cope with not only the world, but also with our own demands and needs This enhances our thinking and provides us with a great deal of information from its original sources. Why do we wait for the translated version of the language? Who says all translated information is correct and purposeful? Why do we not translate what serves our own interests? Why do we not learn the language and possess a foothold in the universe?

There is no reason to oppose or combat against this new trend. Moreover, such a call might have pinpointed the disadvantages and/or invalidated and underestimated the advantages. Surely, teaching English at this early stage, so to speak, violates neither the identity nor the dignity. We will, always and forever, enjoy and practice them even if we speak all the foreign languages. I do not think that teaching a child a foreign language for 45–minutes a day will jeopardize or even minimize his/her identity.

3) **Nature of Teacher, Learner and School Administration:**

Before we embark on the teaching/learning process, we'd better shed light on the nature of teachers, learners and school administration. Teachers' preparation has fallen short the last two decades. Consequently, most schools, especially those out of the big cities, lack the labor–force to carry out the task. Even these

schools, in which teachers are available, still suffer a more complicated problem: incompetent teachers. I have spoken and discussed the idea of teaching English to third-primary-school pupils with many people both friends and just acquaintanceship. All have welcomed and applauded it but they all ask: have you prepared the teachers well? Learners' attitude is highly respected and considered. In order to help them accept the idea and motivate them, teachers and school staff should make use of the short allotted time.

School administrations have the master key to open every locked door if bona fides is available. Good intentions, cooperation, and hard work are needed to give success to this idea otherwise a teacher alone can not do all the work, can one hand clap?!!!

Understanding all these factors requires certain conditions to meet the needs and achieve the goals. That is why a group of Libyan Teachers of English were entrusted with preparing and authorizing a text book to be taught to the third-year-primary school pupils Libyan teachers, and only they, can understand the Libyan pupils' social, cultural, financial, psychological, moral, emotional, linguistic and mental capabilities as well as identity and dignity. This group has met several times and consulted some experienced local and foreign specialists. All the consultants were, thankfully, enthusiastic to give hand; and highly praised the outcome when they saw the product (course book, work book, teacher's manual, posters and a very well taped material).

Foreign consultants gave hand freely while local consultants, the experts of teaching English (EFL) all over the country, with utmost gratefulness, spent more than 48 hours reviewing, arguing, and amending the book till agreed upon the final copy. The book was taught for one academic year and we, on behalf of all Libyan Teachers of EFL, did and forever do feel proud, Thank God, we have made it. Our identity will not be affected because we are originally genuine Libyans, Arabs, Africans and Muslims. Unfortunately, all the material elements were denied and totally replaced by a foreign publishing company books. We are not sad because of the denial of our books, but, admittedly, we are disappointed and shot at the back.

4) A Brief Look on the Suggested Teaching Methods:

This section was meant to serve the original local authorized material to explain the underlining method adopted for teaching the books.

No doubt the teacher's manual was designed to assist the teacher apply the suggested methods in using and teaching the material in an appropriate way–Most teachers were invited to intensive training course during the summer of 2005. Senior teachers and inspectors of English should certainly have been motivated and have contributed in preparing and updating the teachers with the most useful teaching methods. Although teaching young learners, like our case, is not an easy thing to do, the need for the language stimulates both learners and teachers to exploit all the possibilities.

Teachers whose background is not sufficient may find it useful when briefly provided with some teaching methods i.e. communicative, audio-lingual and total physical response.

4.1- The Audio-lingual Method Approach:

Immediately after the Second World War, the American Army were assigned to rapidly learn foreign languages to achieve military goals. Similarly, the rapid technology advances enforce and force us to learn so many languages like English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese and Chinese but not at the expense of our native language. We are urged to double efforts and facilities otherwise we can not catch the train of development.

Some teaching methods, e.g. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) neither fulfills the learners' needs for communication nor dose it help in meaningfully using the target language. Others might help learners to communicate in the target language but not explicitly enough for some linguistic and psychological reasons as in the Direct Method (DM). This method is derived from the behavioral psychology principles. Many principles and procedures of the (DM) were adapted and used by the components of the Audio-Lingual Approach (ALA).

In this approach, teachers present new material in form of a dialogue. They feel that language learning is habit formation, so this approach fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of phrases and over-learning. Teachers sequence the structures and teach them once at a time. It is also clear in this approach that teachers give special attention to structural patterns by using repetitive drills.

Drilling is very basic technique in this approach. Grammar is more likely neglected; and if taught, it is always taught inductively. Language learning skills must be sequenced as well i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Vocabulary, mainly at earlier stages, is quite limited and taught in context in order to make use of it and not to be a burden on the learners' memorization ability. Qualified teachers adopt contrastive analysis between $L1$ and $L2$ in determining which points to be taught and focused on. Language laboratories, tapes, and visual aids are extremely and extensively used to help learners command the language. There is an extended pre–reading period at the beginning of the course. Teachers must have been highly qualified to be able to give special attention to native–like pronunciation. Although teachers are permitted to use $L1$ whenever necessary but in a very limited scale, learners should not be allowed to use $L1$. Teachers are advised to reinforce correct answers and bear in mind that their learners will commit errors that need correction and prevention. This approach tends to focus on manipulation of $L2$ with disregarding of content and meaning.

$4.1.1$– **What teachers should do with the drills in $L2$ teaching：**

Since this approach is based on drilling as a teaching technique, teachers need to apply the following steps：

- – Teachers must insure all utterances of the learners to be within the practiced pattern.
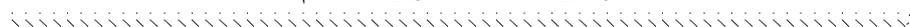
‐ Teacher must conduct drills as rapidly as possible to ensure

automat city and system establishment.

‐ They should ignore all but gross errors of pronunciation.

‐They should use normal English stress, intonation, and juncture

patterns.

‐They should always select meaningful drill materials.

‐They should give short period drills with very brief alternative

activities.

‐ They should introduce the drills in this way (Focus, Exemplify,

Explain and   Drill).

‐Teachers must stand in one place but move about to be closer

to all learners.

‐They should use the "backward buildup" technique for long

patterns e.g.

(Tonight At home tonight Will be watching a new film at

home tonight

These teachers will be watching a new film at home tonight).

‐ They must arrange to present drill in the order of complexity of

the learners response.

4.2‐ Total Physical Response Approach (TPR):

Asher (1979), the godfather of this approach, defines TPR as a combination of information and skills through the use of the kinesthetic sensory system. (learning by body parts movement) Such a combination of skills helps the learners assimilate information and skills at a very short time. It is also called "the Comprehension Approach" because of the importance it gives to

listening comprehension. The longer the learner listens, the better s/he speaks. Consequently, learners feel highly motivated when succeed in grasping and commanding the language rapidly.

4.2.1- The Basic Tenets of TPR:

-The teacher produces the command and performs the action.

-The teacher produces the command but s/he and the learners perform the action.

-The teacher produces the command and only the learners do the action.

-The teacher asks one learner at a time to produce commands.

-Roles must be reversed i.e. learners give commands to teachers/other learners.

-Only teachers allow for command expansion or produce new patterns

(More, 2000).

4.3- The Communicative Approach:

The goal of this approach is to make learners communicatively competent. Communicative competence involves using the language properly in a social context. This requires providing learners with linguistic forms, meanings and functions. Learners should be taught all these in various forms to be able to use them competently and meaningfully. When they command all these forms, they could negotiate with their interlocutors.

The teacher's assistance can be seen in facilitating all the above and makes use of them successfully. One of the teacher's major roles is to create situations likely to promote communication. So a

teacher needs to be an advisor replying to learners' inquiry, and monitoring their utterances when necessary. At times, the teacher can function as a flexible communicator addressed by the learners (Little wood, 1981).

Learners should also play the role of communicators to practice negotiation and make themselves understood. This might not be easy at a time but by learning and practicing the learners would find it beneficial and meaningful as well as possible to do even if their TL knowledge is incomplete. This helps them learner communicate through communicating. Learners' responsibility is even more. That is, they take over the teacher's role and try to manage teaching themselves rather than being taught by the teacher.

What characterizes this approach is that everything should be done with a communicative intent through games, role-plays and problem solving tasks. However, these activities are not displayed randomly but require certain conditions such as: information gap, choice, feedback and authentic materials (Morrow, 1981). This can be applicable through dividing learners into small groups to facilitate interaction between them, on the one hand, and the teacher, and the other hand.

This approach imposes certain student-student/student-teacher interaction. Although the teacher always initiates activities, s/he sometimes lacks interaction with learners. Learners prefer to communicate with each other more than they do with teachers. But if teachers pay attention to the learners' feeling and personalities, it would be very motivating to have them share ideas and opinions by

"integrating the foreign language with their own personality and thus feel more emotionally secure with it" (Littlewood 1981, 94).

This approach views language as communication. "Linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and meanings is, however, just one part of communicative competence" (Freeman, 1985). Learners are encouraged to learn these forms and well-trained to apply them in any social situation they get involved in. Teachers should also bear in mind that language is a means of conveying culture.

In order to achieve the goal of this approach, teachers must focus on language functions rather then on forms. Functions can be introduced through various forms, simple and/or complicated. Qualified, well prepared and competent, teachers reinforce the simple forms to make use of functions at the early stages of language learning.

The learner's $L1$ should not be given chance to take any role, unless it is a must. All communication activities should be exercised via the TL. This enhances the learners' ideas and beliefs that the TL is a vehicle for communication.

With regard to evaluation, teachers must assess not only the learner's accuracy but also their fluency. Command of vocabulary and/or grammatical structures do not mean, of necessity, the learners can communicate properly. In order to evaluate the learners fairly, the teachers play the role of co–communicators.

Error feedback has not been neglected by this approach. Teachers are advised to tolerate the learners' errors and deal with

them as developmental ones. Errors of form are not so serious and can be simply skipped to help learners speak fluently. This kind of errors is highly expected because of the lack of the linguistic knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to interfere if the errors affect the content or being unaware of by the learners.

5) A SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN:

The main goal of this tentative lesson plan is to draw the underlines for teachers in general. Teachers are advised to follow the teacher's manual step by step and encouraged to use their experience whenever necessary. The given approaches are thought the most likely applicable at this stage. However, teachers can adopt whatever they think is suitable for addressing their learners in class.

5.1- Warm Up:

This is an essential step even for the first-day activities. Teachers, in L1, can warm their learners up by introducing the significance of the target language and why are teaching it at this early stage. Such an introduction stimulates the learners to learn the language and deal with it desirably and seriously.

Songs and pictures are mainly used to enthusiastically attract learners' attention and open up their minds to generate even immature ideas about what they are going to learn. Our experience emphasizes that young learners respond to songs and welcome them as a warm-up activity. Such songs, according to Garcia-Saez (1984), create a positive feeling for language learning. They also awaken learners' interest and stimulate them to greater

participation. Moreover, songs break the monotony of the day. Using the first song, for instance, opens a new window of the learners' world. They will listen to a new musical tone and new alphabets. Most sounds exist in their L1 but have a special intonation, sound and rhythm. Isn't that interesting enough?!

5.2– Introduction:

The goal of the next step is to familiarize the learners with the target topic that we want them to learn. Teachers should introduce relevant topics in a practical way. That is, the idea behind the topic and how helps the learners grasp it accurately and due time.

Putting learners on alert this moment leads to quick learning and emphasizes the right acquisition. Teachers may talk informally to the learners and make the communication as simple which paves the way to the following step.

5.3– Goal Setting:

Whatever teachers do in class should be goal target. They must be aware of what they are doing and purposeful it is. What they want to teach and where they are heading should be clear in the teachers' minds in an organized form. Meyer and Sugg (1980) put it metaphorically as "there is an old rule in theater that, when the house lights go down, the audience is never to be left in the dark for more than a brief moment. A ray of light is shown on the curtain even before it opens" (p: 33). In other words, teachers must have a clear idea of the goals. Goal setting helps teachers feel certain, confident, satisfied and motivated. It has been confirmed, through

research, that learners become more attentive when they know the goal of the lesson.

At this stage, we do not emphasize any grammatical rules because we are still at the beginning. Communicative competence is the first thing we try to establish. Once we feel we have done that successfully, we get back to language rules and practice them communicatively.

The Natural Approach holds that acquired information of rules applies to monitoring language output (Krashen and Terrel, 1983). Learners feel motivated to utilize the structures subconsciously. Littlewood (1981) divides activities into pre-communicative and communicative. That is, teachers can introduce lessons in formal and informal drills.

Formally, teachers should introduce new lessons in a simple way with enough repetition in numerous varieties to help the learners grasp the new structures successfully. Informally, it is preferred that teachers use the TPR approach to facilitate the goal behind each activity through physical movements which, in turn, enhance the learners' memory.

Integration of both formal and informal activities is highly emphasized at this stage. It increases the teacher's stimuli and learners' response in a way that is so effective and positive. It also lessens the tension and panic of learning the TL. (21/4/2009)

In order to obtain successful results, teachers should practice types of work: pair and group work. Pair work encourages to participate rather than to receive. They get involved in the learning

process more effectively and grasp more knowledge. The learning process moves a further forward step and becomes more than teacher–centred to learner–centred. The learners rely on each other with a higher self– confidence. This type of pair work activity is derived from the pre–communicative activity.

Group work is an advanced stage aiming to help learners behave freely and independently. It means that learners are capable to deal with the introduced topic and can manage applying it accurately. At this stage, learners not only can verbally produce what they have learnt, but they are also eager to write it down. And this is one of the goals that teachers should emphasize to teach. Writing is a needed skill should be given enough opportunity to be practiced.

5.4– **Writing**：

Informal structuring and friendly teacher/learner talk inspire learners' response. Learners can exchange experience, thinking, recalling, talking, reading, taking notes and reacting to each other as well as the teacher.

Learners should be asked to participate in choosing the writing topic relevant to what they have learnt. They should be encouraged to use the blackboard and their notebooks. The teacher's role is to carefully follow and observe how they write, correct the errors in a friendly way that positively affects the learner.

It might be too early for writing stage but we advise our teachers to be aware of it and always consider it as a necessary, if not the most important, skill needs teachers' attention.

6) **Conclusion**：

It is hard to believe that a 45- minute crowded class could manage to cover all the items of the lesson. Owing the fact, teachers should assign the learners to complete the work at home. Such homework could be used as another way of the Warm Up for the next lesson. In order to keep the learning process smooth and effective teachers are suggested to consider the following steps:

- Learners should not be corrected all the time when make mistakes.

  Errors and mistakes are developmental process not merely a defection.

- Teachers can use the mother tongue at this early stage to help the learners acquire

  proper TL. They can mix both languages whenever

  necessary.

- Learners need enough time to think and use their mental capabilities about what they are going to say.

- Enough opportunity should be allowed to help the learners

practice what they learn.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN		
Time Allotted Stage	Teacher's Activity	Learners' Activity

2–5 min. Warm Up	Review of previous activities and playing new songs.	Answer questions and sing with the tape.
5–7 min. Introducing new activities	Show and present pictures. Of things or objects in the class. This is a/an…Repeat.	Repeat after the teacher. Answer questions .
2–4 min. goal setting	Use the picture that provides the goal. Look, This is a/an ………..	Allowed to ask if have difficulties and encouraged to repeat and give answers .
5–8 min. presentation	Ask questions about the picture. Correct serious errors.	Answer questions and repeat the answers .
3–5 min. formal drills	Introduce the song and conduct the chorus.	Speak and perform the chant .
3–5 min. informal drills	Ask learners to do the same drills . Encourage as many .	Do the actions, Repeat and answer .
3–5 min. pair work	Define the tasks, give examples and monitor the performance.	Work in pairs. Active learners together.
4–6 min. group work	Similar to previous step .	Use as many pictures as possible with a big number of learners.
3–5 min. evaluation	Provide feedback .	Listen carefully and

		repeat correctly .
5-10 min. writing	Write the new items on the BB. Learners copy/read.	Let talk ask and comment when they like .

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