

Exploring Effective Strategies and Activities to Teach English in EFL Classes

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ABSTRACT

This study is going to explore most effective strategies and activities in order to use them in Afghanistan EFL classes to teach English language skills and elements like reading, writing, speaking, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and listening effectively. This study is an experimental design in which the researcher used from the experiences of his participants who are experienced English language instructors in Afghanistan Higher Education. In this study qualitative approach is used and data were gathered by semi-structured interview from four experienced English language instructors. The results indicated that as English language has several skills and elements like Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Vocabulary and Grammar; there are unique or specific strategies and activities for each individual skills and elements to use them in order to teach language effectively in EFL classes.

Keywords- Language Teaching, EFL classes, Effective strategies; Language skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

How to teach language for EFL classes effectively, and what are those effective strategies, techniques and activities to use in Language teaching classes in order to teach all skills of English language effectively? According to Kumar, Roy and Yunus (2022), awareness of one's own cognition can assist EFL learners to better understand their own learning procedure and recognize which strategies are more efficient to use in EFL learning process. Understanding the different teaching strategies and activities definitely help EFL instructors to teach better all skills of English Language in classrooms. English language has many skills and some teachers might have used their strategies and activities that were not enough effective to teach English language effectively. This study is going to explore and discuss about some common and important strategies and activities that language teachers can use them in EFL classes in order to teach EFL classes effectively. Various strategies and techniques have been used by language

teachers in EFL classes, and each particular language skill has its own strategies and techniques to be taught. For instance, strategies and activities in pronunciation are different from strategies and techniques in a grammar class. One essential thing that all language teachers should consider is learners' needs, interests and levels; everything like materials and activities should be according to their needs and interests otherwise learning and teaching process may not proceed good and the teacher and learners might encounter to many challenges. In selecting the strategies and activities in language classes the teacher should take account the learners' intelligences as suggested by Gardner (1993) that different people learn in different ways; some are visual learners who learn better through visual aids, some people are bodily learners that prefer learning by acting out and doing things, especially children are in this category, some learners are interpersonal that they are socialize learners and prefer to be in large groups and learn better in group activities, there are other people that they are intra personal that they don't like to be in large groups and prefer learning with themselves. The main objective of

this study is to help teachers to discover and find the learning styles of their learners and select the most appropriate strategies and activities to teach all English language skills and elements effectively.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Kumar, Roy and Yunus (2022), strategy in teaching language is a combination of techniques which teachers use to teach the language. Teaching strategies are factors that assist EFL instructors to deal well with teaching process. In teaching and learning process in EFL classes, the teaching strategies are vital, help teachers to facilitate students' learning activities, and can also be one of the ways teachers use to make the teaching and learning process more effective and attractive. Therefore, it will have significant impact on students because they are learning by doing it, the activities of the learning process in the classroom will not get bored and the achievement of the learners' goal will be successful (Hayati., et al. 2021).

Technique is implicational that occurs in EFL classroom, it is a special trick that is used to do an instant target (Alem, 2020). In education, teaching may be as representing or helping someone to learn how to do something, give instructions, guide in studying something, and provide knowledge. Acquisition is receiving or obtaining knowledge by studying or doing some activities (Salim & Mohammad, 2023).

X and Gonzalez (2017) stated that learning and teaching strategies refer to a set of tactics that teachers and learners use in order to gain control over their own teaching/learning process. Today, increasing techniques and strategies in EFL classrooms is the teacher's role, while their mission is to facilitate learning and counseling learners in learning process. In order to effectively teach a second language (L2), educators should consider the needs, interests and biographies of each learner, so they can use methods that guide students in using strategies that improve their L2 learning process (Hong, 2008).

According to Hong (2008), There are several strategies for improvement of target language in EFL classes; 1) Recognizing the level of L2 learners, mostly in speaking because students are usually different in their speaking competence. 2) Teachers should accept learner differences in their classes and apply strategies based upon individual's characteristics, and train different language learners according to their specific characteristics and provide an individual quality education or modify different teaching methods according to the specific needs of EFL learners; learners in different English classes may have different characteristics, which is good because the point is that there is a sense of trust and responsibility shared between the teacher and students. 3) Signing classroom contracts between teacher and learners to create students' expectations towards independence. The class contract includes an agreement between the teacher and the learners or students about

how each one classroom participates and behave in classroom. Traditionally, teachers had many responsibilities for learning in EFL classrooms. In an EFL classroom the teacher and students should share responsibilities and work together. In cooperative teaching/learning, students and teacher work together in groups in order to do so some tasks. However, participatory learning goes beyond placing students in groups and giving them something to do (Jacobs and Hall, 2002). Afghan students have a positive attitude towards participatory learning strategies, and these strategies are considered as useful teaching and learning techniques that increase class participations from students' perspective (Katawazai and Saidalvi, 2020). Finney (2002) stated that it is no longer enough to teach the structure and rules of a language, the language is communication, and teachers must develop the ability to communicate effectively in a wide range of professional and social contexts in their learners. It is not possible to teach and learn language in the the four walls of classroom, teachers should also help the learners to learn how to learn and keep going on learning. According to Rogers (1983), the only individual who is has been trained is someone who has learned how to learn, the one who has learned how to adapt and change.

Teachers should create learner-centered environment in EFL classes, in this situation students are active learners they participate in class activities and there is a student centered environment that teachers are advisors, guiders, facilitators and motivators; they just motivate learners, create supportive environment, and empower students to take ownership of their learning and develop their own understanding and teacher acts as process manager (Freire, 1970). Learning EFL is like playing a game in a team, the teacher should be as a coach and students are those who play in the ground and the teacher just facilitates the play, present the materials, answer the questions and advise them. A student-centered classroom is an environment that makes independent learners who understand their learning process and can take control of their learning (Cotterall, 2008). Building motivation to EFL learners is very essential for all types of learning. Motivation is an inner drive or a concept that encourages someone to do things, it can come through inside and outside of individuals (Deci and Flaste, 1995). Tavoozy and Jelveh (2019), Conducted a research and stated some techniques to use them in EFL classes in order to develop target language: 1) Asking open and closed questions; Closed questions appeared to be used during lessons to identify what students knew and were usually asked in a quick and successive manner. It would also seem that these questions were used when the teacher had a particular idea or answer that they wanted the students to come up with. 2) Asking a specific student; ask individual learners specific questions to have detailed response rather short answers, learning would be better if there are more extended answers are sought. 3) Response to students answers; the teacher should response to

learners' performance by words, such as, yes and okay, this may cause to motivate students and keep them on their target language. 4) Error correction; learners' correcting is very important in EFL classes and ways of correcting is important as well; the teacher should correct learners in a soft and gentle way and they should not become demotivated. According to Hayati, Afriani and Akbarjono (2021), there are several types of English language teaching strategies that can be used in the language teaching process: *Direct instruction*; in which the class is highly teacher-centered, and involves the direct transfer of knowledge from the teacher to students. *Discussion*; in this situation the students are discussing and talking to each other, the teacher is as a facilitator who facilitates the discussion and in case of deviation, direct the discussion in the right direction. *Small-group work*; it is an activity in which students are divided into many small groups, and the main goal of this activity is to make students talk and produce their understandings, these activities can include small group discussion, completing worksheets and solving problems. *Collaborative learning*; collaborative learning can be done in small groups or between two students who work together. Students learn from each other and the teacher must pair students who work together effectively. *Problem Solving*; in this activity students are autonomous and independent; it is widely used in classroom that students have to solve the problem using previous knowledge to guide them towards the solution. *Research*; Research can be used as an education strategy to promote self-learning, allowing the students to discover new information on their own. Research can take the form of an investigation or guided research using materials such as books or the internet. *Role play*; This helps learners to solve problems and use their knowledge that have acquired in situation that resemble real life situation. Role playing can help learners understand and appreciate information and practice better their productive skill of their language. *Case study*; A case study can be combined with research, small-group work or cooperative learning. This strategy can be used to collect data in real-life situations and to analyze the data using problem-solving methods. This can help the students apply knowledge from the classroom and analyze data to provide useful information. Wah (2019) stated that listening is the most important skill in learning and teaching language. Listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact with spoken language. According to Nurdianingsih (2021), Teaching reading by using effective strategies is very essential in teaching EFL classes. He suggested some strategies as: *Scaffolding*; it is a lesson that helps learners in the early stages of learning and then reducing the aid and providing opportunities for the students to do the homework and become autonomous. *Think-aloud*; it is a strategy that helps learners on learning activities. The ability of teachers to convey their creativity and control the students in completing each step of the way think alouds strategy in

understanding reading passages. The teachers make their thinking explicit by verbalizing their thoughts while reading orally. *Mutual-education*; cross-curricular instruction is a guided reading comprehension strategy that encourage students to develop the skills that effective readers and learners do automatically. SQ3R; it is a systematic reading strategy to helps you organize the reading process into manageable units. It consists of five steps, which are: surveying, questioning, reading, reciting, and reviewing. In this strategy the reader firstly should have an overlook to all the reading passage like the titles and sub-titles, then provide some critical synopsis questions like why should I read this passage and how it is important for me. After that the reader should read the text thoroughly with all details to get the whole idea, then recite in mind with him/herself, and at the end there should be a review again to understand better the text.

III. METHOD

Participants

Respondents of researcher in this study are four experienced EFL instructors that the researcher interviewed them in order to collect a valid data about various effective techniques, strategies and activities to teach EFL classes. The participants were selected randomly among several instructors that the researcher had in his list of participants. The researcher interviewed four people in this study, in collecting the data he interviewed two of the respondents in-person by sitting face to face and pose his prepared questions, and two of the participant are instructors in other cities, so the researcher interviewed them through mobile phone and collected the date.

Instrument

In this study the researcher used semi-structured interview as suggested by Nunan and Baily (2009), because his participants were experienced language teachers and he wanted them to feel relax in sharing the ideas and thoughts based on a pre-arranged questions. In semi-structured interviews researcher are allowed to generate some new questions based on prepared questions in order to elicit a broad data.

Data collection

The participants were told about the importance of studying techniques, strategies and activities in order to develop the target language in EFL classes. The author asked questions such as what kind of techniques and activities are most effective in EFL classes to develop target language, they suggested some effective activities and strategies to use them in EFL classes, and how they considered that those techniques, strategies and activities could develop the target language in EFL classes. The interview process is done in three sessions, first there was some few first questions that the researcher told the interviewees about importance of this study and became familiar to each other, second the researcher posed the content questions to elicit the information based on his

prepared questions, in third phase researcher paved ground to interviewees that if there is anything left they could share as closing questions.

Data analysis

In this study the thematic data analysis is used to analyze the data. Firstly, the researcher carefully listened to the interviewees' ideas and thoughts that already recorded about effective teaching strategies, techniques and activities in EFL classes and transcribe them into written form. After familiarizing with the data he used the 'card sort technique' that is suggested by Nunan and Baily (2009), first the researcher chose the important parts of data and copied them into small cards; put all of them in one pile and read the cards one after another, while he was reading the cards he considered whether it is similar to the previous one or not; if it was similar he put that the same pile as previous, but if it seemed different the researcher started a new pile and put that there. Continued this until the cards finished and found the most common ideas and thoughts regarding the research questions.

IV. FINDINGS

Vocabulary teaching strategies

Different strategies were used by the participants in this study for teaching vocabulary. Cognitive strategies were the most common used strategies reported by all participants which involves making learner consulting with a dictionary under the specific strategy of using resources to receive messages. Successful EFL learners mostly prefer awareness, memorization, and compensation strategies in learning vocabulary (Mulyani. 2020). Using new words to write in a memo and social media status was mentioned by the participants as well. All participants also ask their learners to practice English words by watching movies and listening to English speeches in order to enhance their vocabulary. Good language teachers promote cognitive abilities of their learners. One of the participants in this study used memory strategies to enhance his learners' vocabulary; The participant asked students to memorize the list of new words that received from teacher, and it would improve their mental exercise as well. In addition, all participants utilized teaching vocabulary in context, students should read the text and guess the meaning of words they don't know by words that surrounded the particular word, and use the words with their own sentences and ideas.

Pronunciation teaching strategies

To teach pronunciation, the participants used cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Imitation and repetition of how the words are pronounced among cognitive strategies used by the participants to teach pronunciation. The participants ask their learners to have access to exposure to new words and the pronunciations from their teachers/lecturers, friends, and native speakers (if available). They also teach learners pronunciation by creating natural practice such as watching English movies and listening to English songs. In addition, all of the

participants required their students to apply metacognitive strategy, in which the students should pay attention to the ways the native speakers pronounce English words. Metacognitive strategies supply a way for learners to organize their learning process (Oxford, 1990). Metacognitive strategies consist of two modes: directed attention and selective attention. In this study, the participants mostly ask their learners to directed attention by focusing on the way the words were pronounced by the native speakers. Furthermore, all participants also confirmed that they usually encourage their students to check dictionaries for phonetic symbols and auditory clues to learn pronunciation.

Strategies in teaching speaking

Improving speaking skill is one of the most important phenomenon in learning English language. In term of teaching speaking to language learners several techniques, strategies and activities are existed that teachers are using to teach speaking skill. This study is going to explore and present the most effective strategies in teaching this skill. The participants of this study suggested many effective strategies. Firstly, they stated that role playing is one of the best strategies, it can encourage learners to act out different scenarios and conversations, allowing them to practice speaking in a variety of situations. For instance, they can act out the roles of teachers or doctors and it can help them to understand how to behave with different social positions. The second strategy that they emphasized is debates, the teacher should organize debates on relevant topic that all students should talk and present their ideas and opinions in order to enhance their speaking skill. Another strategy that the participants commonly suggested is public speaking exercise, this strategy can provide opportunities for students to present speeches or presentations in front of class and help them build confidence and fluency speaking. They also have suggested many other strategies like, pair work and group works; pronunciation drills; vocabulary games; story-telling, and these strategies depend on learners' interests as well.

Strategies in teaching grammar

In term of teaching grammar, participants presented plenty of various ideas and there were some common themes and strategies and they depend on learners' levels; for higher levels they suggested contextualize grammar, teaching grammar in the context of reading or listening passage, so learners will be able to see how it is used in real life situations. Successful EFL learners utilize cognitive and social strategies by practicing naturalistically where they learn grammar by reading texts (Mulyani. 2020). For the lower levels the participants suggested classic or traditional strategy that is deductive way of teaching; here the teacher should start from specific to general, first the teacher should explain some grammatical roles and points to the students and then use the structures to make some sentences in target language, and then give chance to students to practice with themselves (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson. 2013).

The participants also emphasized on grammatical exercises and practices, if learners practice more they will learn more.

Strategies in teaching writing

In teaching writing in EFL students the participants suggested many several strategies as they experienced; they mostly suggested practicing writing regularly, in here the teacher gives students frequent opportunities to practice writing in English, whatever if it is through sentences, paragraphs or creative writing exercises. The other strategy that participants focused most is to provide feedback, the teacher should give students constructive and positive feedbacks in order to correct them and motivate them to perform better. Another strategy that they suggested is to encourage students in creativity, allow students to have free writing or brainstorming about a particular issue, and it helps to promote their thinking ability as well.

Strategies in teaching reading

As reading is one of the most important receptive skills in language and there are several strategies and techniques in order to develop this skill in language learners. The participants in this study also suggested plenty of strategies based on their teaching experiences, to develop the reading skill teachers first should consider the pronunciation competence of learners, because to read better first teacher should tell the students how to say and pronounce different words and they have to be familiar with different words in order to read well. To improve reading skill students should be taught the punctuations as well, because it helps them to read and understand the text better, they help them where to go fast, where go slow and where should stop or pause. The participants in this study also focused on scaffolding reading in order to improve reading skill, in this strategy the teacher is going to gradually increase the complexity of the texts and support the students if needed. This may involve starting with simpler texts and gradually moving to more challenging materials, as well as providing guidance and support to help students understand and comprehend texts.

Strategies in teaching listening

According to participants who are experienced English language instructors, the listening is one of the most important skills which is needed for EFL learners in any levels especially in intermediate level. However, the students have been studying these skills, and still they face with difficulties in listening. According to respondents they believe that students are fair in the listening skill and most are weak in it. It is noticed that they think it is needed to use effective strategies to teach listening and develop learners' listening skill. The participants were using many different strategies in listening classes. They mainly suggested listening for the main idea, in which the students are listening to the audio player or reader and understand the main idea of the text; Listening for details, in this term the learners should listen to reader or audio player and understand the text with all details; listening for specific information, this strategy is

like the scanning in reading skill, in which the learners are listening and try to find the specific information that they are supposed to. Beside these strategies the participants mostly focused in bottom-up process of teaching listening, the listening skill and all other skills should be taught from easy levels to hard or high levels, in listening the teachers, firstly should start from single pronunciations and words that make learners familiar with different words and then go to sentences and conversations and students would be able to understand well the texts or speeches.

V. DISCUSSION

This research paper hopes that using effective strategies and new techniques for teaching English in EFL classes will be very helpful for language learners and they would learn all skills and elements of language and use them. Teaching is a process of transferring knowledge and experiences to other people and it needs time, materials and effective strategies and activities to proceed this process usefully. In teaching EFL, teachers should accept that students have different learning styles as Gardner (1993) suggested seven learning styles such as: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, and bodily. The learners' awareness of their learning style definitely helps them to learn easier and better in EFL classes (Kumar, Roy, and Yunus, 2022). Besides the activities and strategies there are some other factors that affect teaching and learning process that is the classroom environment and learners' motivation. To make students learn better, the teacher should always motivate them and create a positive environment, as Deci and Flaste (1995) said that intrinsic motivation is almost spiritual and each individual have it in different levels and teachers can promote that. Teachers should consider the holistic teaching that develop all aspects of learners rather just their knowledge of language. In term of teaching students effectively, the teachers, especially the novice instructors should use from experiences of experts to teach English effectively. As English has many skills and elements, the instructors should use different strategies and activities to teach each individual skill and element of English language. This study covers some of the most effective strategies and techniques to use them in teaching EFL classes. As this research explored the effective strategies and activities to use in EFL classes, it is very important for teachers to consider the useful strategies and activities in order to teach effectively.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that if teachers want their pupils or learners understand and learn the English language as their second or foreign language they should provide the effective and useful strategies and activities for all language skills and elements to teach well. if they don't use such effective and useful strategies or techniques they just waste the time and learning might not take place.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study attempted to explore the most effective strategies and activities within the context of Afghanistan. According to the results, teaching English in EFL classes needs to understand various effective strategies and techniques in order to teach language effectively. In this research paper, the researcher has explored several effective strategies and techniques to use them in EFL classes. The participants claimed that there are different techniques and strategies for each skill of language. Furthermore, strategies in teaching one skill is different from teaching another skill. In teaching vocabulary, in context or students should contextualize the new words; teaching pronunciation by imitations and repetition. For teaching grammar, inductively from specific to general or teach grammar in use. In teaching speaking, they stated that role playing is one of the best strategies, it can encourage learners to act out different scenarios and conversations, allowing them to practice speaking in a variety of situations. For teaching writing, gradually by providing constructive feedbacks and let them to feel free in writing about issues. In teaching reading, by focusing on pronunciation and punctuations and start from easy texts go toward harder texts, the teachers first should consider the pronunciation competence of learners, because to read better first teacher should tell the students how to say and pronounce different words and they have to be familiar with different words in order to read well. For teaching listening, They mainly suggested listening for the main idea, in which the students are listening to the audio player or reader and understand the main idea of the text; Listening for details, in this term the learners should listen to reader or audio player and understand the text with all details; listening for specific information, this strategy is like the scanning in reading skill, in which the learners are listening and try to find the specific information that they are supposed to. EFL teachers can use from the mentioned techniques and strategies to teach all these language skills effectively.

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