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BEYOND GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The application of holistic approach in EFL classroom has been approved due to its advantage to improve speaking and listening skills as well as learning real life skills. This study explores the limitations of linguistically focused approach and promotes a more comprehensive viewpoint that takes communicative competence, cultural sensitivity, and practical applications into account. The participants of the study included 50 Uzbek EFL pre-intermediate students selected through testing in accordance with International English Language Testing System (IELTS) criteria. They were divided into two groups (25 students for each) according to their test results: experimental and control group. The holistic approach has been applied for the first group, while the latter group of students continued with traditional teaching methods. The experiment continued for two months and Reading, listening, speaking, writing and real-life skills have been checked by comprehensive tests and interviews at the end of the period, which once more demonstrated the outperformance of the former group who were exposed to holistic teaching procedures. This study has also showed that teachers can encourage learners to become confident and effective communicators in English, both within and beyond the classroom.

KEYWORDS

Holistic approach, International English Language Testing System (IELTS), cultural awareness, critical thinking, experiment, traditional teaching methods, oral skills, self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ameneh Nejabat, Massoud Tajadini and Neda Fatehi Rad (2021), “In Iran, language learning is situated predominantly within the traditional approach, with teachers as agents to deliver knowledge based on a behaviorist transmission model. In such an environment, learning means working hard to master the information on the learners’ side. The course objectives are limited to proving a measurable knowledge about different aspects of the language and assessment is carried out accordingly. At the same time, little or no attention is paid to guiding the students in handling stress, anxiety, or embarrassment, which they will face during the real acts of speaking and listening” .

Similarly, in Uzbekistan the same traditional method (mostly includes teaching English grammar rules and vocabulary) has been applied in majority EFL classrooms, which leads to the inactiveness or unawareness of students when it comes to using their knowledge in practice in real-life situations. While these factors also play an important role in learning English, it may create restrictions for improving self-efficacy that can be learnt only through social activities. The problem with the conventional education system students are exposed to is, it assesses the students according to their ability to store information and retell it. Learners memorize grammar rules and new vocabulary; do not focus on other more important elements which results in the lack of socially

grounded and listening skills. Consequently, students are unable to use those rules and new words in real-life contexts: for instance while socializing with foreigners. Followings are the main potential consequences of teaching only grammar and vocabulary instead of preparing students for real-life contexts:

- Although they might be able to describe terms and recognize grammatical structures, learners often find it difficult to use these skills in written or conversational contexts. As a result, students are likely to lose interest and enthusiasm for learning English language if they have barriers while speaking or listening in this language and cannot use their knowledge outside of the classroom.
- Ignorance of cultural context: Language and culture are closely related, and a linguistic approach alone may fail to capture the subtleties and complexity of cultural comprehension.
- Students may become less motivated and interested in learning and using the language because of the traditional method's boring and uninspired approach.
- A strong emphasis on accuracy may foster a fear of making mistakes, which will reduce pupils' desire to practice and speak the language freely.
- The rote learning that comes with traditional approaches frequently takes precedence over critical

thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial for using language in a variety of contexts.

Therefore, introducing holistic approach to English learning classrooms has a solid role in forming students' language skills. The holistic method to teaching English places an emphasis on the connections between different language learning components and promotes the growth of the whole person as opposed to the acquisition of discrete abilities. This approach makes learning more fun and efficient by fusing language proficiency with social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Holistic education first appeared in the early 20th century as a reaction to conventional teaching strategies that frequently placed an emphasis on academic compartmentalization and rote memorization. Philosophers such as John Dewey promoted the idea that education should be relevant to students' lives and experiential learning. 1930s–1960s: Dewey's influence on the progressive education movement led to an emphasis on the whole child approach, which saw social and emotional development as equally important to academic advancement. Since then, holistic approach is believed to be one of the most important stages of progress in education system of many countries.

Majority EFL students struggle with productive skills, which involves speaking and writing. While receptive skills, reading and listening require the students to

receive the given knowledge and act upon it, producing language is the key factor of productive skills, writing and speaking. Holistic approach focuses on the productive skills by fostering learner autonomy, promoting critical thinking, and integrating technology to enhance the learning experience. Here are the key components of the holistic approach:

1. Instruction in Communicative Language (CLT)

Communication is emphasized as the main objective of language learning in CLT. It focuses on helping students become more adept at using language for everyday tasks including exchanging ideas, exchanging information, and interacting with others. Among the core ideas of CLT are:

- Learners take responsibility of their education, actively participate in the process, and work together with peers in a learner-centered approach.
- Authentic materials: Learners are exposed to real-world resources, like songs, movies, and news articles, to provide them an authentic language experience.
- Communication-focused activities: Rather than just focusing on grammatical practice, these activities aim to motivate students to utilize the language for meaningful communication.

2. Encouraging Critical Thinking

Teaching English in a comprehensive way goes beyond just helping students learn the language. It seeks to enhance students' critical thinking skills so they can assess arguments, analyze data, and create their own ideas. This can be accomplished by:

- Motivating students to challenge presumptions: Encourage students to analyze information critically and to take into account many viewpoints.
- Giving students the chance to participate in discussions and debates: Encourage students to voice their thoughts and provide evidence to back up their claims.
- Including critical thinking abilities across the curriculum in all its forms: Motivate students to consider critically about the words they use, the data they take in, and the environment they live in.

3. Encouraging Student Self-Growth

A comprehensive strategy places a strong emphasis on learner autonomy, giving students the tools they need to take charge of their education and develop into self-sufficient language learners. This can be accomplished by:

- Giving students the chance to choose their own learning objectives: Motivate students to evaluate their advantages and disadvantages and to make reasonable progress targets.

- Motivating students to utilize self-evaluation instruments: Give students the chance to evaluate their development and pinpoint areas in which they still need to improve.
- Encouraging students to investigate materials outside of the classroom, such books, podcasts, and online learning environments, is one way to support self-directed learning.

Based on the above, this study aimed exploring the effect of embracing a holistic approach in EFL Classroom on the productive and receptive skills of Uzbek EFL learners. In addition, the study investigated the role of holistic approach in the improvement of self-efficacy of Uzbek EFL learners. The following research questions were addressed:

- Q1: How does the introduction of holistic approach in classroom influence the receptive skills of Uzbek EFL learners?
- Q2: How does the application of holistic approach influence the productive skills of Uzbek EFL learners?
- Q3: How does the application of holistic approach influence the self-efficacy of Uzbek EFL learners?
- Q4: What is the Uzbek EFL learners' attitude towards the implementation of holistic approach in conventional education system of Uzbekistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cummins (2000) asserts that comprehensive approaches to bilingual education take into account the cognitive and cultural dimensions of language acquisition. His research highlights the importance of taking students' experiences and backgrounds into account when teaching English. This point of view advocates for a more comprehensive educational experience by encouraging the blending of language proficiency with cultural awareness. Adrian Holliday (2005) talks about how "cultural awareness" is important for language learning. He contends that teaching pupils to think holistically makes it easier for them to relate language acquisition to their own lives and cultures. According to his studies, language learning and effective communication depend on an awareness of cultural settings. In her work on holistic education, Patricia C. Broderick (2007) highlights the need of integrating social, emotional, and cognitive development in language learning. She is in favor of teaching strategies that take learners' experiences into account rather than concentrating just on vocabulary and grammar. The work of James Paul Gee (2015) is primarily concerned with discourse analysis and the various social settings in which language is used. He promotes a comprehensive understanding of language in use, especially in relation to identity and culture, by advocating for instruction that goes beyond merely teaching linguistic structures.

METHOD

Design of the study. The experiment was conducted using numerical data collection while examining the progress of 25 upper-intermediate students under holistic approach in English learning classroom during two months. Besides, the latter group of students who continued with traditional teaching methods kept under control and checked if there are any improvements during the given period. The reliability consideration for all of the employed tools was also observed.

PROCEDURES

The experiment commenced with introducing the whole two months agenda to the treatment group, which included five stages:

Stage 1: Focusing on reading skills using holistic method: by working on enticing articles about various topics and English novels. Students were also expected to discuss all these tasks with each other by doing quiz tests, inclusive games that aimed improving their team working skills.

Stage 2: Encouraging students to approach specific class activities that serve as a catalyst to improve their listening skills: Listening to BBC podcasts, watching interesting English movies and hosting events on the discussion of those movies.

Stage 3: Creating a "space" for learners to express themselves freely by hosting gigantic events, projects

and student-driven discussions where everybody is included and engaged. For this stage, Swap-up, Book exchange, and Speech events were conducted to form the social skills of the experimental group.

Stage 4: Paying attention to language strategies.

Stage 5: Guiding students to act upon the given knowledge and reinvent ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part gives information about the results of the study and answers to the above-mentioned questions.

The pretest and posttest were taken from both Experimental and Control groups. According to the results of English language proficiency test aimed assessing the receptive skills of the selected students, there was noticeable progress for both groups, however the Experiment group's learning speed was found to be faster than the other group who were exposed to the traditional teaching method. The same results have been taken from productive skills and self-efficacy as well.

CONCLUSION

For students to have the confidence and skills necessary to communicate effectively in the twenty-first century, a comprehensive approach to English instruction is required. Teachers can design engaging and fulfilling learning experiences that equip students

for success in a globalized society by eschewing a language concentration and adopting a broader viewpoint that includes communicative ability, cultural awareness, and real-world applications. The results of the current study demonstrated nearly the same results of other scientists done by Burke and Woodward (1982), Alashhab, W (2000), Azzitawi (2005) and others. However, one important and different feature of the current experiment is, it investigated the impact of holistic approach on all receptive and productive skills of the learners, including self-efficacy, while other professors focused on one particular skill.

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