

Teaching Philosophy

Language Acquisition

Not all teaching is equally effective. A teacher can cover a lot of material, but students may still not improve.

There is an important difference between *learning* and *acquisition* in the language classroom. Learning means taking in new words and ideas, whether from a book or from a teacher. Acquisition means something more: it means being able to actually use what you learned in real life.

A student can score well on a test but still struggle to use the language in real conversations. This means learning has happened, but acquisition has not. True progress requires both.

The Classroom Plus The World

Students should not limit themselves to only what they learn in the classroom. When students explore the language outside of class and discover new words or expressions, it makes them more curious to learn even more. Students get the most out of their lessons when they combine classroom learning with real-world practice, and then bring what they discover back into the classroom.

The internet is a great place for this kind of exploration. Whether playing games, watching movies, or listening to music in English, students can follow their own interests and see how English is really used. They can then bring new words or phrases back to class to ask about and practice.

Too Fast or Slow? Your Teacher Will Know

A teacher's job is to explain things clearly and help students grow their language skills. One of the most important parts of this job is pacing, how fast or slow a lesson moves. If a class is too difficult, students feel anxious. If it is too easy, they feel bored. Finding the right balance is not automatic; a teacher has to pay close attention to figure out how far to push students without overwhelming them.

The psychologist Lev Vygotsky described three zones of learning: things a student can already do, things a student cannot do yet, and things a student can do with a teacher's help. He called this third zone the "zone of proximal development." This middle zone is the best

place for teaching, because it is challenging enough to stay interesting, but not so hard that students give up.

Teachers have many tools to make lessons more effective. Repetition is one of them, it is a simple but powerful way to help students remember new words and patterns. Interestingly, native speakers usually try to avoid repeating the same words too often in normal conversation. But for language learners, hearing something repeated is often helpful, not annoying, because it gives them more chances to understand and remember it.

Body language is another useful tool. A teacher who acts out a word or a scene from a story helps students understand the meaning without needing a translation.

IQ Makes Everything Easier, Almost

People with strong general intelligence often pick up a new language more easily, all else being equal.

But high intelligence can sometimes work against a student. Smart students are often more self-aware, which can make them more cautious. In language learning, caution is a disadvantage, because real progress requires taking risks and being willing to make mistakes.

The researcher Stephen Krashen used the term "affective filter" to describe the wall of nervousness or fear that can block a student from using a language, even when they technically know it. A teacher's job is to lower this wall so students feel safe taking risks, no matter how intelligent they are. Every student, regardless of ability, needs encouragement to be brave with a new language.

Theories of Language Acquisition

Attention First

It is important to start a lesson with something that grabs students' attention, a story, a question, or a problem to solve.

You can spark interest with a story or a challenge, or you can simply explain clearly why the topic matters to the students.

Before moving into the main part of the lesson, it's worth pausing to think about how you will capture students' attention first. Without their interest, nothing else in the lesson matters as much. Students need to feel engaged before real learning can happen.

Let's Communicate!

The Comprehension Approach focuses on making meaning clear so students understand what they hear or read. Teachers do this through actions, visual aids, objects, or gestures. The goal is for students to connect language directly to meaning, which builds their confidence in using it.

The Communicative Approach focuses more on speaking, since its main goal is helping students communicate with other people. This approach uses real, authentic materials to teach both culture and language, including grammar and pronunciation, as they are actually used.

I prefer using authentic materials, like the Communicative Approach does, because the entire point of learning a language is to communicate with real people. These materials sometimes need to be simplified for a student's level, but that adjustment is easy to make.

I also like using activities that teach students the correct order for expressing ideas. This helps English learners build stronger grammar and sound more natural in conversation.

Cognitive Approach and Affective Humanistic Approach

I agree with the Cognitive Approach's focus on preparing students before reading or listening activities. This preparation helps get students' minds ready to learn. This approach also shaped how lessons are planned, showing teachers the importance of grabbing attention and clearly explaining the lesson's goals. Critics say this approach can feel dry, and that it doesn't pay enough attention to students as people with feelings.

The Affective Humanistic Approach, on the other hand, focuses on students' emotions. It recognizes that students often fear making mistakes when using a new language. One technique from this approach, sometimes called "Multiple Hearings," lets students hear the same dialogue or story more than once. Each time they hear it, they understand a little more.

Cognitive Approach: I like to give students direct feedback on their mistakes instead of ignoring them. Mistakes are actually helpful to teachers, they show exactly which grammar points a student is struggling with.

Affective Humanistic Approach: I appreciate how this approach brings music and creativity into the classroom. It's important for students to enjoy what they're learning, and to feel safe facing their fears. Part of a teacher's job is helping students push through obstacles, including emotional ones, not just language ones.

Authentic is Best: My Case for the Reading Approach

The Reading Approach focuses mainly on reading skills, like skimming for the general idea or scanning for specific details. Its core method is extensive reading, reading a large amount of material. This works well because it exposes students to language in real context, with a wide variety of vocabulary and grammar. One downside is that this approach spends less time on other skills, like listening, speaking, or writing.

The Audio-Lingual Approach takes a different path. Students repeat words and phrases until they master them. Through memorization and practice dialogues, students get to try out new sentence patterns in a structured way. Two common techniques, the substitution drill and the transformation drill, push students to respond quickly using their new language. These drills help even beginner students produce accurate sentences right away.

My own teaching style borrows from both approaches. Extensive reading helps students build a strong vocabulary and get comfortable with different writing styles. But I also value the repetition used in the Audio-Lingual method, since it helps important patterns stick. Overall, I lean toward the Reading Approach because it is grounded in authentic, real-world language.

Grammar Translation Approach or Direct Approach?

The Grammar Translation Approach teaches vocabulary and grammar by having students translate text from English into their native language, and then back into English again.

The Direct Approach works differently, closer to how a young child naturally learns a language, through direct interaction with the world around them. Acting out a dialogue, for example, lets students experience a real situation, helping them understand not just the words but also the culture behind them.

I use techniques from both approaches, but I lean toward the Grammar Translation Approach. With this method, students benefit from learning cognates, words that look and sound similar in their native language and in English. Studying word lists and synonyms this way is also a helpful technique for building long-term vocabulary memory.

Precision Matters: Vocabulary and Collocation

Knowing a word and knowing how to use it correctly are two different skills. A student can memorize hundreds of vocabulary words and still sound unnatural. That's because real fluency depends just as much on *collocation*, which words naturally go together, as it does on the number of words a student knows.

Take the verbs "make" and "do." This is a classic problem area for English learners, and it comes up constantly in travel vocabulary. In English, we "make a reservation," "make a trip," and "make arrangements" for a flight. But once we arrive, we "do some sightseeing," "do a tour," and "do some exploring." There is no logical rule that explains this pattern, a learner simply has to know it. If a student gets it backwards, saying "do a reservation" or "make some sightseeing," the sentence is still understandable, but it immediately sounds non-native to a listener or an exam grader.

This kind of detail matters more than it might seem. Native speakers rarely think about these word pairings consciously. We simply know that you "make a decision" but "do your homework," or that you "make plans" but "do some research" before a trip. These pairings are not based on logic, they are based on convention. And convention is exactly the kind of knowledge that stays invisible until someone points it out directly.

This is why I treat vocabulary teaching and correct usage as one and the same skill, not two separate ones. Teaching a word's definition is only half the job. The other half is teaching students which words it commonly appears with, in which situations, and with what tone. A student preparing for the IELTS exam who can use not just a wide vocabulary, but the *precisely correct word combination*, will sound noticeably more natural to an examiner. This precision is directly rewarded in the exam's scoring for vocabulary use.

In my lessons, I make a point of teaching these patterns directly, rather than hoping students will notice them on their own. When a student makes a collocation mistake, I don't just correct the word, I explain the pattern behind it, often using travel examples like the ones above. This way, the correction helps them in many future sentences, not just the one they got wrong.

Closing Thoughts

No single teaching method has all the answers, and I don't think any serious teacher should follow just one theory completely. My own approach borrows from several traditions: the balance and challenge found in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, the realism of the Reading and Communicative Approaches, the structure of the Grammar Translation method, and a constant focus on vocabulary and collocation as the glue that makes it all sound natural.

What ties these ideas together is one simple goal: not just helping students *learn* English, but helping them truly *acquire* it, so what happens in the classroom shows up in real conversations, in exams, and in the confidence to use the language as their own.