

Instructional Approaches for Teaching English to Non-Native Speakers Based on Second Language Acquisition Theories

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Abstract: Teaching English to non-native speakers has become an increasingly significant area of study due to globalization and the growing role of English as an international language. Researchers and educators have developed various instructional approaches grounded in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories to enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching. This paper examines key SLA theories and their influence on instructional practices for teaching English to non-native speakers. It explores major theoretical frameworks including behaviorism, innatism, cognitive approaches, sociocultural theory, and interactionist perspectives. Additionally, the study analyzes instructional approaches derived from these theories, such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, the Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, and Sheltered Instruction. The paper discusses the strengths and limitations of each approach and highlights the importance of integrating multiple methodologies to address diverse learner needs. The findings suggest that effective English instruction should combine communicative, cognitive, and sociocultural elements to promote meaningful language acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

English has become the most widely used international language in education, business, and communication. As a result, millions of learners around the world study English as a second or foreign language. Teaching English to non-native speakers requires effective instructional strategies that facilitate language acquisition and support learners' linguistic development. Second Language

Acquisition (SLA) theories provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how learners acquire a new language and how teachers can design effective instructional approaches (Al-Amir, 2017; Altunay, 2014).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the process through which individuals learn a language that is different from their native or first language. This process occurs when learners are exposed to and interact with a new linguistic system in various contexts, such as classrooms, social environments, or through media and communication. Unlike first language acquisition, which typically occurs naturally during early childhood, second language acquisition often takes place later in life and may involve both natural exposure and formal instruction. As a result, the process of acquiring a second language is influenced by a wide range of factors, including the learner's age, motivation, educational background, and the amount of exposure to the target language (Ali & Pathan, 2017).

The acquisition of a second language is not a simple or linear process; rather, it involves a set of complex cognitive, psychological, and social mechanisms. From a cognitive perspective, learners must develop new mental representations of linguistic structures such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and sentence patterns. They also need to process and store linguistic information in memory and gradually develop the ability to use the language automatically in real communication. Psychologically, factors such as motivation, attitudes toward the language, self-confidence, and anxiety play an important role in determining how successful learners acquire a second language. Learners who are motivated and confident are generally more willing to participate in communication and practice the language, which facilitates their learning process (Alhaisoni, 2012).

In addition to cognitive and psychological factors, social and cultural aspects significantly influence second language acquisition. Language learning often occurs within a social context where interaction with teachers, peers, and native speakers provides opportunities for communication and feedback. Through social interaction, learners negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and gradually improve their language skills. Cultural awareness and the learning environment also shape the way learners approach the target language and influence their level of engagement in the learning process (Altunay, 2014).

Due to the complexity of second language learning, researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition have developed a variety of theories and models to explain how languages are learned and what factors contribute to successful acquisition. These theories attempt to describe the mental processes involved in language learning and to identify the conditions that facilitate or hinder the acquisition process. Some theories emphasize the role of habit formation and repetition, while others focus on cognitive processing, exposure to meaningful input, or the importance of social interaction and collaboration (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019).

Modern language teaching methodologies increasingly rely on SLA theories to design instructional approaches that promote meaningful communication and language use. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching emphasize authentic interaction, while Task-Based Language Teaching focuses on learning through meaningful tasks. These approaches are influenced by theoretical concepts such as comprehensible input, interaction, and social learning. According to SLA research, language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language input slightly above their current level of proficiency, often referred to as comprehensible input (Ayu, 2018).

This research paper aims to explore the relationship between SLA theories and instructional approaches used in teaching English to non-native speakers. It discusses major SLA theories and examines how they inform various teaching methodologies used in English language classrooms.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine instructional approaches for teaching English to non-native speakers based on major Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. The purpose of this methodology is to analyze and synthesize existing theoretical and empirical literature to understand how SLA theories influence modern English language teaching practices. Rather than collecting primary data from participants, the study relies on a systematic review and analysis of relevant academic sources related to SLA theories and instructional approaches in English language teaching.

Study Design: The study follows theoretical and analytical research design. It focuses on reviewing and interpreting key SLA theories and examining their implications for instructional practices used in teaching English to non-native speakers. Research design allows for an in-depth understanding of how theoretical perspectives such as behaviorism, cognitive theory, interactionism, and sociocultural theory have influenced various teaching methodologies. Through this design, the study identifies relationships between theoretical principles and practical classroom strategies. It also evaluates the strengths and limitations of different instructional approaches derived from SLA theories.

Data Collection: Data for this study were collected through secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, and scholarly publications related to Second Language Acquisition and English language teaching methodologies. These sources were selected from reputable academic databases and educational publications in the fields of applied linguistics and language education.

The selection of literature focused on key topics such as:

- Major theories of Second Language Acquisition
- Instructional approaches in English language teaching

- The relationship between SLA theories and classroom practices
- Methods and strategies used for teaching English to non-native speakers

The collected literature provided theoretical explanations and practical examples that supported the analysis of instructional approaches.

Importance Second Language Acquisition:

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the process through which individuals learn and develop proficiency in a language other than their native or first language. This process involves acquiring the ability to understand, speak, read, and write in the target language. Unlike first language acquisition, which typically occurs naturally during early childhood, second language acquisition often takes place after the learner has already developed a linguistic system in their first language. Consequently, learners rely on their existing linguistic knowledge, cognitive abilities, and learning strategies when acquiring a new language (Ayu et al., 2017).

Second language acquisition differs from first language acquisition in several important ways. In first language acquisition, children learn their native language primarily through natural interaction with caregivers and their surrounding environment without formal instruction. In contrast, second language learners often acquire the new language through a combination of natural exposure and formal education. Because learners already possess knowledge of their native language, this prior knowledge can influence the process of learning a second language. In some cases, similarities between the two languages may facilitate learning, while differences may cause interference or errors in language use (Ballinger, 2013).

Research in the field of Second Language Acquisition seeks to understand how learners acquire different components of language proficiency. These components include grammatical structures, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. One of the central goals of second language learning is the development of communicative competence, which refers to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various social contexts. Communicative competence includes several dimensions, such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Ellis, 1994; Er & Mirici, 2015).

In addition to examining linguistic development, SLA research also investigates the various factors that influence the success of language learning. One of the most widely studied factors is age. Many researchers suggest that younger learners may have advantages in acquiring pronunciation and developing native-like fluency, particularly when they are exposed to the target language at an early stage of development. However, adult learners often possess stronger cognitive abilities and learning strategies that allow them to understand complex grammatical rules and abstract linguistic concepts (Ikhtiyorovna, 2023).

Major Theories of Second Language Acquisition:

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been studied extensively by linguists, psychologists, and educators to understand how individuals learn languages beyond their first language. Over time, several theoretical perspectives have emerged to explain the processes involved in acquiring a second language. These theories provide valuable insights into the cognitive, social, and environmental factors that influence language learning and help educators develop effective instructional approaches. Among the most influential theories of SLA are behaviorist theory, innatist theory, cognitive theory, interactionist theory, and sociocultural theory (Khalilova, 2023).

Therefore, in the following sections, several major theories of Second Language Acquisition will be presented and discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the foundations that guide modern approaches to teaching English to non-native speakers.

Behaviorist Theory:

Behaviorist theory was one of the earliest perspectives used to explain language learning. It is based on principles of behavioral psychology, particularly those who argue that learning occurs through stimulus, response, and reinforcement. According to this view, language learning is essentially a process of habit formation. Learners acquire language by imitating models provided by teachers or native speakers and by practicing language patterns repeatedly until they become automatic (LaForett et al., 2023).

In the context of second language acquisition, behaviorists believe that learners form correct language habits through repetition, drilling, and reinforcement. When learners produce correct language forms, they receive positive reinforcement, which strengthens those habits. Conversely, incorrect responses are discouraged or corrected to prevent the formation of incorrect habits (Littlewood, 2014). This theoretical perspective strongly influenced early language teaching methods, particularly the Audio-Lingual Method. In this approach, students practice dialogues, sentence patterns, and grammatical structures through repetition and memorization. Although behaviorism contributed significantly to early language teaching practices, many researchers later criticized the theory for oversimplifying the language learning process and ignoring the role of cognitive and creative aspects of language use (Lyster, 2015).

Innatist Theory

Innatist theory emerged as a response to the limitations of behaviorism. This perspective was strongly influenced by the work of linguists, who argued that humans possess an innate ability to acquire language. The human brain contains a built-in mechanism known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which enables individuals to understand and produce language based on limited input (Lyster, 2015).

In the field of second language acquisition, innates perspectives emphasize the importance of exposure to meaningful language input. One of the most influential theories related to this perspective is Stephen Krashen's Monitor

Model, particularly the Input Hypothesis. proposed that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level of proficiency, learners acquire language naturally when they understand messages in the target language rather than when they focus primarily on grammar rules. also distinguished between language acquisition and language learning. Acquisition is described as a subconscious process like the way children learn their first language, while learning refers to the conscious study of grammatical rules. According to this theory, acquisition plays a more important role in developing language fluency than formal learning (Macaro, 2018).

Although theory has been highly influential in language teaching, some researchers argue that it underestimates the role of interaction, feedback, and output in language learning.

Cognitive Theory:

Cognitive theories view language acquisition as a mental process involving information processing, memory, and problem-solving. From this perspective, language learning is like other types of learning in which learners actively construct knowledge through experience and practice. Cognitive theorists emphasize the role of mental processes such as attention, perception, and memory in acquiring a second language (Maftunabonu, 2023).

According to cognitive theory, learners gradually develop linguistic competence through stages of skill development. At the initial stage, learners consciously focus on learning grammatical rules and vocabulary. With repeated practice and exposure, these language skills become more automatic and require less conscious effort (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018).

Another important concept in cognitive approaches to SLA is the idea of interlanguage, proposed by Selinker (1972). Interlanguage refers to the evolving linguistic system that learners develop as they progress in learning a second language. This system is influenced by the learner's native language, exposure to the target language, and the learner's own hypotheses about language structure.

Cognitive theories have contributed to the development of teaching approaches that emphasize meaningful practice, problem-solving tasks, and active learner engagement. These approaches encourage learners to process language deeply and use it in meaningful contexts (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018).

Interactionist Theory:

Interactionist theory emphasizes the role of communication and social interaction in the process of language acquisition. According to this perspective, language learning occurs most effectively when learners engage in meaningful interactions with others. Through communication, learners receive input, produce output, and negotiate meaning with their interlocutors. One of the key contributions to this theory is Interaction Hypothesis. that interaction facilitates language acquisition because it provides opportunities for learners to clarify misunderstandings, receive feedback, and modify their language use. When learners encounter communication difficulties, they may ask for clarification or repeat their message in different ways. These processes help learners notice gaps

in their language knowledge and improve their linguistic competence (Noprival, 2024).

Another important concept related to interactionist theory is Output Hypothesis. suggested that producing language is an essential part of language learning. When learners attempt to express their ideas in the target language, they become aware of the limitations of their language knowledge and are motivated to improve their accuracy and fluency. Interactionist theory has influenced communicative language teaching approaches that emphasize pair work, group discussions, and collaborative tasks. These activities encourage learners to actively participate in communication and develop their language skills through interaction (Puspitasari, 2018).

Sociocultural Theory:

Sociocultural theory, based on the work of Lev Vygotsky, highlights the importance of social context and cultural interaction in learning. According to this perspective, language learning occurs through collaboration with others and through participation in socially meaningful activities (Qurbonova & Ikhtiyorovna, 2023).

A key concept in sociocultural theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher or a more proficient peer. Through interaction and support, learners gradually develop new skills and internalize knowledge. Another important concept in this theory is scaffolding, which refers to the support provided by teachers or peers to help learners complete tasks that they would not be able to perform independently. As learners gain more experience and confidence, this support is gradually reduced (Noprival, 2014).

Sociocultural theory has significant implications for language teaching because it emphasizes collaborative learning, peer interaction, and guided instruction. Classroom activities such as group projects, cooperative learning, and teacher-led discussions provide opportunities for learners to develop language skills through social interaction (Shahbaz & Khan, 2017).

Structional Approaches Based on SLA Theories

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

Communicative Language Teaching is one of the most widely used approaches in modern language education. It emphasizes the use of language for meaningful communication rather than memorization of grammatical rules. In CLT classrooms, learners participate in activities such as role plays, discussions, and problem-solving tasks. The teacher acts as a facilitator who guides communication rather than dominating classroom instruction. This approach focuses on developing communicative competence, which includes grammatical knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness, and strategic communication skills. CLT aligns with

interactionist theories because it emphasizes communication and interaction as essential components of language acquisition (Urhahne et al., 2023).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a modern instructional approach in language education that developed as an extension of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks as the central unit of language instruction. Rather than focusing primarily on the explicit teaching of grammatical rules or isolated vocabulary items, TBLT encourages learners to use the target language to accomplish real-life tasks that reflect authentic communicative situations. The main objective of this approach is to help learners develop communicative competence by engaging in purposeful language use within meaningful contexts (Weng et al., 2024).

In Task-Based Language Teaching, a task is defined as an activity in which learners use the target language to achieve a specific goal or outcome. These tasks are typically designed to resemble real-world language use, allowing learners to apply their linguistic knowledge in practical situations. Examples of such tasks may include writing emails, conducting interviews, giving directions, planning a trip, participating in discussions, or solving problems collaboratively. Through these activities, learners practice various language skills including speaking, listening, reading, and writing while focusing primarily on completing the task rather than on the form of the language itself. In addition, Task-Based Language Teaching often follows a structured framework consisting of three main stages: the pre-task stage, the task cycle, and the language focus stage. During the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic and prepares learners for the task by providing necessary background information and vocabulary. In the task cycle, learners perform the task individually or in groups while focusing on communicating their ideas (Xalilova & Atoyeva, 2023).

Audio-Lingual Method:

The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) is a language teaching approach that developed in the mid-twentieth century and is strongly influenced by behaviorist learning theory and structural linguistics. According to behaviorist principles, language learning occurs through habit formation, where learners acquire correct language patterns through repetition, imitation, and reinforcement. The main objective of this method is to help learners develop accurate language habits by practicing correct sentence structures repeatedly. In the Audio-Lingual Method, teachers provide models of correct sentences, and students repeat them several times until they become automatic. Lessons usually begin with listening and speaking activities before reading and writing are introduced. The method makes extensive use of drills and pattern practice, such as repetition drills, substitution drills, and question-and-answer exercises. Through these activities, learners practice grammatical patterns and improve their pronunciation and fluency in the target language (Xie et al., 2022).

Grammar in this method is taught implicitly through repeated exposure to language patterns rather than through direct explanation of rules. Dialogues are

often used as the main teaching material, and students are encouraged to memorize and practice them. The teacher also plays an important role in correcting errors immediately to prevent the formation of incorrect language habits (Ayu et al., 2017).

Total Physical Response (TPR):

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method that integrates language learning with physical movement, making it highly interactive and learner centered. In this approach, teachers issue commands in the target language, and students respond by performing corresponding actions. By linking language with physical activity, learners are able to internalize vocabulary and sentence structures more effectively. The method is based on the observation that children often respond physically to language before they begin speaking, mirroring the natural process of first language acquisition. TPR is particularly effective for beginners and young learners because it lowers anxiety and creates a relaxed learning environment. Students can participate without the fear of making verbal mistakes, which encourages engagement and active learning. Additionally, this method promotes listening comprehension, as learners must accurately interpret the commands to respond correctly. While primarily used for early-stage learners, TPR can also be adapted for more advanced students through storytelling, role-plays, and interactive classroom games, making it a flexible and practical approach to language instruction (Maftunabonu, 2023).

Sheltered Instruction and Eclectic Approach:

Sheltered Instruction:

Sheltered Instruction is an educational approach designed to help English Language Learners (ELLs) understand academic content while simultaneously developing their English language proficiency. This method integrates language and content instruction, allowing learners to engage with subject matter such as science, mathematics, or social studies in ways that are linguistically accessible. Teachers adapt their instruction to the learners' language proficiency by using strategies such as simplified language, visual aids, graphic organizers, gestures, modeling, and cooperative learning activities (Macaro, 2018). The main goal of Sheltered Instruction is to make content comprehensible without lowering academic standards. By scaffolding instruction, teachers provide support that gradually decreases as learners become more proficient in English. This approach emphasizes interaction, collaboration, and active participation, allowing students to acquire both language skills and academic knowledge simultaneously. Sheltered Instruction is particularly effective in multicultural classrooms where students have varying levels of English proficiency and different cultural backgrounds. It helps bridge the gap between language development and academic achievement, ensuring that learners do not fall behind in content areas while learning English (LaForett et al., 2023).

Eclectic Approach:

The Eclectic Approach to language teaching involves the flexible integration of techniques and strategies from multiple teaching methodologies, depending on

learners' needs, learning objectives, and classroom contexts. Rather than adhering strictly to one method, teachers select and combine elements from approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, the Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, or Sheltered Instruction to create a balanced and effective learning experience. The strength of the Eclectic Approach lies in its adaptability. Teachers can adjust activities to suit learners' proficiency levels, learning styles, and the specific skills being targeted, whether it is listening, speaking, reading, or writing. For example, a lesson may begin with a TPR activity to introduce new vocabulary, followed by a communicative task to practice using the vocabulary in context, and conclude with a short drill from the Audio-Lingual Method to reinforce grammatical structures (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018).

This flexibility allows educators to address the diverse needs of students and combine the benefits of multiple instructional strategies in one cohesive lesson. By combining Sheltered Instruction and the Eclectic Approach, teachers can design lessons that are both content-rich and linguistically supportive while also drawing from a variety of methodologies to maximize learning outcomes. This combination is particularly effective in classrooms with heterogeneous learners, ensuring that all students receive the linguistic and cognitive support they need to succeed academically and develop proficiency in English (Noprival, 2024).

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Instructional Approaches:

The effectiveness of instructional approaches in teaching English to non-native speakers depends on several key factors. Learner motivation plays a crucial role, as highly motivated learners engage more actively and persist in learning. Age affects language acquisition, with younger learners often excelling in pronunciation, while older learners benefit from advanced cognitive skills. The learning environment also impacts effectiveness; classrooms that provide meaningful language exposure, interaction, and authentic materials promote better outcomes. Cultural context influences learners' communication styles and expectations, making culturally responsive teaching essential. Learner proficiency and learning styles determine which methods are most suitable, with beginners benefiting from comprehension-based approaches like TPR and advanced learners from task-based or communicative methods (Xie et al., 2022).

Teacher competence and instructional design are critical. Skilled teachers who adapt methods to learners' needs, use scaffolding, and combine strategies from multiple approaches (Eclectic Approach) can maximize learning outcomes. Considering these factors ensures that instructional approaches are engaging, supportive, and effective for diverse learners (Puspitasari, 2018).

Recommendations:

Based on the review of instructional approaches for teaching English to non-native speakers and the theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the following recommendations are proposed to enhance language teaching effectiveness:

- should adopt an eclectic approach, combining techniques from various methods such as Task-Based Language Teaching, Audio-Lingual Method, TPR, and Sheltered Instruction depending on learners' proficiency levels, age, and learning objectives. This flexibility ensures lessons are engaging and meet diverse learner needs.
- should prioritize communicative competence over rote memorization. Activities that involve real-life tasks, collaborative problem-solving, and authentic language use help learners apply language naturally and increase motivation.
- should account for learner characteristics, including age, motivation, cultural background, and preferred learning styles. Tailoring instruction to these factors can improve comprehension, participation, and retention of language skills.
- Techniques such as Sheltered Instruction and guided scaffolding should be implemented to help learners access academic content while developing language proficiency. Gradually reducing support encourages autonomy and independent language use.
- should promote interaction, collaboration, and hands-on engagement. Group work, pair activities, role-plays, and TPR-style exercises foster active learning, reduce anxiety, and improve language acquisition.
- should use multimedia, videos, authentic texts, and online resources to provide exposure to real language. This supports listening and reading comprehension, expands vocabulary, and connects classroom learning to real-world contexts.
- should receive continuous training in SLA theories and modern instructional approaches to enhance their understanding of language acquisition processes and improve lesson planning and delivery. should foster a supportive, low-anxiety environment where learners feel comfortable experimenting with language, making mistakes, and collaborating with peers from diverse backgrounds.

Future research: Future research could focus on conducting empirical studies to examine the effectiveness of different instructional approaches in real classrooms. It is also important to explore the role of technology in language learning, including digital tools and online platforms that support second language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching English to non-native speakers requires instructional approaches that are grounded in well-established theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). SLA research has provided valuable insights into how learners acquire a second language and the factors that influence this process. Theories such as behaviorism, innatism, cognitive theory, interactionism, and sociocultural

theory have contributed to the development of various teaching methods and strategies used in language classrooms.

This study has discussed several instructional approaches derived from these theories, including Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, the Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, Sheltered Instruction, and the Eclectic Approach. Each of these approaches offers different advantages and focuses on particular aspects of language learning, such as communication, interaction, repetition, or collaborative learning. However, no single approach can fully address all the needs of language learners. Therefore, effective English language teaching should involve a flexible and integrated use of different instructional strategies. Teachers should consider important factors such as learners' motivation, age, cultural background, learning styles, and proficiency levels when selecting appropriate teaching methods. Creating interactive learning environments that encourage communication, collaboration, and meaningful language use can significantly enhance the language acquisition process. Ultimately, understanding SLA theories and applying them in classroom practice can help educators design more effective teaching strategies and support learners in developing both linguistic competence and communicative ability. By integrating theoretical knowledge with practical instructional approaches, teachers can facilitate successful English language learning for non-native speakers in diverse educational contexts.

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