INTEGRATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS AT UNDER-GRADUATION LEVEL THROUGH PRINCIPLED ECLECTICISM METHOD

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ABSTRACT: *According to academic research, linguists have demonstrated that there is not one single best method for everyone in all contexts, and that no single teaching method is good or bad or inherently superior to the others. The ground reality is that it is not always possible and appropriate to apply the same pedagogy to all learners, who have different objectives, environments and learning needs like Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The modern teacher, in fact needs to use a variety of methodologies and approaches, choosing techniques from each method that he considers more effective and applies them according to learning context and objectives. A professional EFL teacher follows what is described as the Principled Eclecticism approach, where students are also encouraged to be autonomous in their learning. The teacher can integrate and develop all four skills of English, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. English language learners should not expect the teacher to deliver everything to them ready-made but should realize their own sense of responsibility with self-motivation, self-direction and spirit of self-learning English as a second language through the techniques that suits to their needs of learning the target language. The present critical situation of teaching-learning English in Jazan University has been interrogated through questionnaire and opinionnaire developed for the teachers and the students for valid and reliable data.*

KEYWORDS: *skills, integration, pedagogy, principled-eclectic-approach, learner, needs.*

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to do everything if only one method is used especially in Saudi Arabian context as there is a yawning gap between students existing knowledge of English language and the course content at under-graduation level. Most proponents of eclecticism do not advocate unconstrained pluralism and instead propose principles that will lead to coherent choices of learning activities to meet students need and touch upon the weak aspects of English language. The use of a principled eclecticism overcomes weaknesses of unconstrained pluralism. However, the principles must be made explicit and subjected to critical evaluation while integrating language skills as the process of improvement goes on and on. Basically, principled eclecticism refers to the use of various teaching styles in a discriminating manner as required by learner needs and styles or situation. One of the challenges of learners in second language acquisition could be categorized into student related issues, teacher related issues and pedagogy related issues. Kenneth (2011) suggested that methodology of language teaching can pose a problem when mishandled especially in situations where teachers are not creative enough to improvise with different activities to actualize learning objectives. Eclecticism is a conceptual approach that does not hold rigidly to a single paradigm or

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set of assumptions or method, but instead draws upon multiple theories, styles, or ideas to gain complementary insights into a subject or an issue. According to Wang (2004) the expression "principled eclecticism" was used to depict the attractive, rational, and pluralistic methodology, which includes the utilization of an assortment of language learning exercises in a segregating way as required by learner needs also, which in most cases aim at developing language competence of the learner.

As indicated by Mellow (2002), principled eclecticism has been given an assortment of names like viable or effective eclecticism, edified eclecticism, educated or all around educated eclecticism, integrative eclecticism, and so forth. It is called "learning eclecticism" by Rodgers (2001), and he indicated that this methodology is prone to shape the educating of a second language in years to come as he believes that its numerous names vouches for the impact and ubiquity of this method and its relevance and contribution to the world of language learning in varying contexts.

According to Alshumaimeri (2003) "Teachers have pointed out that students leave the secondary stage without the ability to carry out a short conversation." After learning English for many years, the students achieve little in terms of language proficiency, and making a large number of students and teachers waste of time and energy. So, the important question is why there has been no improvement among the students. Fareh (2010) pointed out some of the challenges of EFL program in the Arab world and these are: (i) improperly trained teachers or inadequate teaching methodology, (ii) teacher-centered rather than learner-centered activities, (iii) students' aptitude, initial preparedness and motivation: School and university teachers often complain of the low proficiency of their students. They also claim that students are not motivated to learn, (iv) compartmentalization vs. whole language approach, (v) lack of emphasis on developing skills – emphasis is rather on rote learning, (vi) textbooks and teaching materials, (vii) assessment methods and (viii) exposure to English as a foreign/second language or the target language.

Similarly, it will be unjust to blame one particular issue, like the textbooks or the students for the unsatisfactory result of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia. There are a lot of other factors which can also be responsible. Among those, the most important factors are: curriculum, need analysis, textbooks, teaching material and the learners' needs, teachers' qualification and their proper training, methodologies of English language teaching, students motivated towards learning English, the students' exposure to the target language, i.e. English. Each teaching method is based on a particular vision of understanding the language or the learning process, often using specific techniques and materials used in a set sequence. The main methodologies in the chronological order of their development are: (i) Grammar Translation Method (the classical method of teaching a second language), (ii) Direct Method (the use of the target language in natural way), (iii) Audio-lingual Method (dialogue exchanges are mainly focused), (iv) Humanistic Approaches (a range of holistic methods applied to language learning, e.g. the silent way, suggestopedia, community language learning and comprehension approach), (v) Communicative Language Teaching (the modern standard method) and (vi) Principled Eclecticism (fitting the method to the learner, not the learner to the method). Every method has some merits and demerits (in varying contexts) when its suitability is attached to a specific context. The research in the area of pedagogy is on its climax. The ultimate and the latest findings suggest the use of 'principled eclecticism method' to teaching

English as a second language is quite promising as it encompasses varying contexts and learners' needs.

Lack of motivation on the part of the learners, teacher-centered methods and inadequate assessment techniques are among the major problems that render EFL programs in KSA unable to deliver as expected. The fact is that the outcomes of the teaching learning process are still below expectations despite the tremendous efforts exerted in teaching EFL in Saudi context.   A state of anxiety loaded with stress and strain that the researcher had been experiencing for the last eight years or so due to alarming situation of teaching-learning English at under-graduation level in Jazan University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, led to the present study. In a word, generally the students enter college with their weak background knowledge in English language. This situation proves frustrating both for the teacher and the student. The teacher usually over expects students' background knowledge in English and starts and ends teaching at his own level. Consequently, majority of graduates are not expected to meet the desired standard in real life-like situations. The researcher aimed at exploring the problematic areas with suitable suggestions, bridging the gaps whatever towards improvement and betterment in teaching-learning of integrated skills of English language through 'principled eclecticism pedagogy'. For this very reason, a questionnaire for the teachers and an opinionnaire for the students at Jazan University have been developed to collect valid and reliable information that help finding the weak areas especially in pedagogy. The collected data, its analysis and conclusion will definitely prove fruitful for future pedagogy to teaching-learning of English as an L2/Foreign Language.

Conceptual Framework

Methods of teaching English have developed rapidly, especially in the previous 40 years. As a language learner, training manager, or teacher, it is important to understand the various methods and techniques. Each method has a different focus or priority as the situation demands. Most proponents of eclecticism do not advocate unconstrained pluralism and instead propose principles that will lead to coherent choices of learning activities to meet students need and touch upon the weak aspect of English language. In a similar context, Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Mellow (2000) have used the term principled eclecticism to describe a desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching. Eclecticism involves the use of a variety of language learning activities, each of which may have very different characteristics and may be motivated by different underlying assumptions. The justifications provided for these many different types of eclecticism provide insight into a number of important strengths and weaknesses of pluralistic approaches to teaching. Principled eclecticism has often been proposed in contrast to (i) single-theory reliance or absolutism; (ii) relativism; and (iii) unconstrained pluralism. Reliance upon a single theory or method of teaching has been criticized because adherence to the use of a limited number of procedures can become mechanistic and inflexible environment and may potentially imply that materials need to be fixed and teacher-centered.

As mentioned above, the modern language teacher doesn't follow one rigid method, but applies the Principled Eclecticism approach, fitting the method to the learner. American university professor, Douglas Brown, suggests a list of the 'ten commandments' for effective language learning, applied to both ESL teachers and learners. The teacher and the taught should be familiar

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to all useful tips suggested by Brown, a renowned scholar to develop confidence in teaching-learning of English as a second language (Pearson Longman, 2001). Moreover, this means choosing the techniques and activities that are appropriate for each particular task, context and learner, with a focus on motivation and helping learners, become independent and inspired to learn more. The explanation of Principled Eclecticism also includes a useful ten-point guide for teachers and language students on the best teaching and learning techniques.

The history of language teaching has been characterized by a search for more effective ways of teaching a language. Although much has been done to clarify these and other important questions in language teaching, the profession is continually exploring new options for addressing these and other basic issues and the effectiveness of different instructional strategies and methods in the classroom. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), language teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century. The whole foundation of contemporary language teaching was developed during the early part of the twentieth century. Since then, a number of teaching methods and approaches have been developed. The problems in teaching-learning of English as an L2 resulted into eclecticism. As Al Hamash and Younis (1985:22) put it, "eclecticism is defined as a type of methodology that makes use of the different language learning approaches instead of sticking to one standard approach". Pachler and Field (1997:44) state that "the communicative approach can be seen as an eclectic assortment of traditional and novel approaches based on the tenet of the development in learners of an ability to communicate in the target language rather than as a prescriptive method of how to teach." It can therefore, be reiterated that the method being recommended is indeed the eclectic approach. Brown (2002) argues that eclecticism provides the solution to teaching language because the approach allows the teachers to select what works within their own dynamic contexts. Gao (2011) further states that principled eclecticism challenges the teacher to ensure that every decision about classroom instruction and activities is based on a thorough and holistic understanding of all learning theories and related pedagogies, in terms of the purpose and context of language teaching and learning, the needs of the learners, materials available, how language is learnt and what teaching is all about. Wali (2009:40) summarizes this proposition when he stated the following:

One of the premises of eclecticism is that teaching should serve learners not methods. Thus, teachers should feel free in choosing techniques and procedures inside the classroom. There is no ideal approach in language learning. Each one has its merits and demerits. There is no royalty to certain methods. Teachers should know that they have the right to choose the best methods and techniques in any method according to learners' needs and learning situation. Teachers can adopt a flexible method and technique so as to achieve their goals. They may choose whatever works best at a particular time in a particular situation.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) states that a teacher can choose to be pluralistic, in which case a teacher will pick and choose from among methods to create their own blend which make allowances for differences among learners. This implies that a teacher will create his/her own method by blending aspects of others in a coherent and principled manner which result into principled eclecticism. Freeman adds that the selection of a method to be used in the classroom will be influenced by the teacher, the students, the conditions of instruction and the broader social cultural context. He

advises that there should not be any method prescribed for success for everyone because each learning context requires particular methods. Since method selection involves both thoughts and actions, it is expected that eclectic teachers should be able to give reasons for why they do what they do. Most of their decisions take into consideration the complexity of the classroom reality, including what is happening socially among the learners (Alright 1984; Nunan 1992; Prabbu 1992; Clarke 1994). In order for teachers to give reasons for the selection of their blend of methods, it is important that they undergo comprehensive teacher education which should prepare them adequately for the knowledge of the approach and how it can be used in the classroom. This is the reason why Larsen-Freeman (2000) argues that the knowledge of methods is part of the knowledge base for teaching. It was therefore, important to find out in the study whether or not teachers of English in Jazan university are adequately trained and whether they could give reasons for the use of the methods and activities they chose to apply in the classroom.

Luo, H. Yang (2001) and Gao (2011:362) sum up the five features of successful eclectic teaching as: (i) determine the purposes of each individual method; (ii) be flexible in the selection and application of each method; (iii) make each method effective; (iv) consider the appropriateness of each method and (v) maintain the continuity of the whole teaching process. The teaching procedure should be divided into three stages namely: (i) teacher-centered at the input or presentation stage; (ii) learner-centered at the practice stage; and (iii) learner-centered at the production stage.

This means that the application of the eclectic approach is systematic and the teacher should have a thorough understanding of the approach and how it works in order to apply it appropriately and correctly in the classroom situation. The teacher should be aware of how s/he can re-contextualize this approach to the teaching of English Grammar in his/her unique classroom situation. Re-contextualization is a very important skill which teachers should develop during teacher training and they need it in their lesson preparation and delivery in the classroom. The interpretation of the syllabus requires that the teacher knows how to re-contextualize existing knowledge and the means (teaching methods) by which knowledge can be transferred from the syllabus to the learner in the classroom. Larsen-Freeman (2000:181-182) was right when he stated about the nature of methods, i.e. methods themselves are de-contextualized. They describe a certain ideal based on certain beliefs. They deal with what, how and why. They say little or nothing about to who/whom, when and where. This means that a teacher has the responsibility of re-contextualizing the methods in the classroom depending on the learners, their background and the general context of teaching and learning. It can be assumed that syllabus designers at the national level contextualize the methods at a national level.

Larsen-Freeman (2000:82) warned that "there can be no method for everyone… methods should not be exported from one situation to another". This requires that a teacher decides what to do depending on his/her peculiar classroom situation. To justify this proposition further, Larsen-Freeman (2000: xi) noted that the "Decisions that teachers make are often affected by the exigencies in the classroom rather than by methodological considerations. From this background, it is clear that there is no one method for all. The best way to teach is to use the principled eclectic approach which is a blend of methods depending on the teacher, learners, materials available, the culture of the teacher and learners, background of the learners and the learning objectives. This

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requires that teachers are adequately trained in order to have a thorough understanding of the eclectic approach and how it can be re-contextualized in the classroom to suit the target learners. Teachers understanding of the principled eclecticism and re-contextualization of education knowledge become particularly crucial in teaching. Hence, the consideration of these factors in the teaching and learning of English as a second language was interesting to establish. Therefore, within the theoretical and contextual framework provided, this study aimed at revealing teacher's preparation and understanding to use the eclectic approach, their attitudes about eclecticism, how they re-contextualized the approach in the teaching of English, their views on its use in the classroom situation and the challenges which they faced. The study also shows whether teachers are consciously aware of the different methods they used when teaching English language. This type of eclecticism has often been criticized because it may be arbitrary, atheoretical, incoherent, uncritical, unsystematic, and lacking in philosophical direction (e.g.,Glascott & Crews, 1998; Lazarus & Beutler, 1993; Schwab, 1971). All this requires a basic grasp of some of the principle schools of thought as a means of getting an overview of issues directly related to satisfying learners' needs. In a nutshell, the application of principled eclecticism proceeds by first addressing the issue of learners' needs and styles. Once these two basic elements have been evaluated, the teacher can develop a needs analysis which can then be used to develop the course syllabus.

Hypothesis
The Saudi students' English language learning context, needs, and teaching methodology don't support one another hence usually the expected results could not be earned.

Research Questions
1) What are the most important aspects of English as a second language that the Saudi students need to improve at under-graduation level?
2) Does the teaching methodology suit to their need of learning English as a second language?
3) What are the gaps between their existing knowledge of English language and the level of teaching-learning of English as an L2 that need to be bridged?

Objectives
1) Identify the specific areas of English as a second language that the Saudi students need to master at under-graduation level.
2) Explore the suitability of the English language teaching methods being used at under-graduation level.
3) Suggest some suitable English language teaching methodology that suits to the Saudi context.

Significance of the study
The present study would definitely prove useful and helping both for the English teacher and the students towards an overall improvement and ultimately betterment in teaching-learning of English as a second language in Saudi Arabia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method is both qualitative and quantitative. The researcher developed a questionnaire (with close-ended and open-ended questions) for the teachers and an opinionnaire for the students of English Department (level-7 and level-8) to collect valid and reliable data on the existing situation of teaching-learning of English at under-graduation level in Jazan University, Jazan (KSA).

Data Collection and analysis

The most relevant data specifically responding to hypothesis, research questions and objectives of the study have been collected through the questionnaire and the opinionnaire developed for the teachers and the students of Jazan University, (KSA). Then the researcher developed tables and graphs to display the collected data clearly. Description of the tables and the graphs with analysis has been given for the ease of the readers. The most prominent differences have been focused and highlighted with certain suggestions for an overall improvement in teaching-learning of English.

Table-1: Questionnaire developed for Teachers

S/No	Question text	Yes %age	No %age
1	Do you determine your students' existing level of English language knowledge before teaching the course content in class at college level?	24	66
2	Do you find any gap between students' existing knowledge of English language and the course content at college level?	80	5
3	Do you use direct method in teaching of English?	75	17
4	Is the teaching-leaning of English student-centered?	25	70
5	Is the environment conducive to teaching-learning of English?	85	8
6	Do you integrate language skills in class?	30	65
7	Are the textbooks and teaching material relevant to students' needs and interests?	20	73
8	Do the students participate willingly in the classroom activities?	10	83
9	Do you make efforts to develop your students' creative writing through critical thinking?	35	55
10	Do you always determine clear objectives for teaching English in classroom?	67	15
11	Do you emphasize the 'use' of the target language in class?	78	17
12	Are your students well-motivated to learn English language?	30	65
13	Are you successful in motivating your students to improve the target language through their self-learning?	15	80
14	Do you diagnose students' problems in learning English language?	88	7
15	Are you successful in improving your students' proficiency in English language?	35	55
16	Is your students' proficiency in English language inadequate and below your expectation?	58	30
17	Do you use different methods in teaching of English?	20	75
18	Do you always use only one method in teaching of English in class?	70	20
19	Are you satisfied with the existing system of assessment of the students' learning outcomes?	54	36
20	Would you like to use eclectic approach in teaching of English?	63	31

Q-21: What would you suggest to improve the overall scenario of teaching-learning of English in Saudi Arabian context?

Table-2: Opinionnaire developed for Students

S/No	Question text	Yes %age	No %age
1	Your teachers test your knowledge of English language before starting the course content at college.	10	80
2	There is a gap between your existing knowledge of English language and the course content at college.	77	20
3	You are taught English through direct method.	73	23
4	Teaching-learning of English is student-centered.	17	73
5	The environment is conducive to teaching-learning of English.	80	10
6	Your teacher integrates English language skills.	35	55
7	The textbooks and other teaching material suit to your needs and interests.	15	75
8	Students participate willingly in the classroom activities and question-answer session.	25	65
9	Your teacher develops your creative writing through critical thinking.	23	67
10	You always achieve the objectives of teaching-learning of English in classroom.	60	30
11	You always use the English language in classroom activities.	65	25
12	Are you interested in learning of English language?	40	50
13	You are well aware of the importance of self-improvement through self-learning of English language.	15	75
14	You are well-aware of your own problems in learning English language.	85	5
15	You are able to improve your proficiency in English language.	35	55
16	Your proficiency in English language is below your expectation.	65	25
17	Your teacher uses different methods in teaching of English in class.	20	70
18	Your teacher uses only one method in teaching of English in class.	75	15
19	You are satisfied with the present assessment criteria of English language.	60	30
20	You appreciate different pedagogy in different situations.	70	20

Q-21: What are your suggestions to overcome different problems in teaching-learning of English in Saudi Arabian context?

Description and analysis of Table-1 & 2: The information both in the questionnaire developed for the teachers and the opinionnaire developed for the students of Jazan University is the same for a cross check with a view to make the data more valid and reliable. That is how the analysis has been put together as follows:

(i)   Students' existing level of English language knowledge is not determined before teaching the course content in class at college level.

(ii)   There is a yawning gap between students' existing knowledge of English language and the course content at college level.

(iii)   Direct method is used in teaching of English at college level.

(iv)   Teaching-leaning of English is teacher-centered.

(v)   The environment is conducive to teaching-learning of English.

(vi)   Language skills are not integrated in classroom.

(vii)   The textbooks and teaching material are generally not relevant to students' needs and interests.

(viii)   The students do not participate willingly in the classroom activities.

(ix)   The creative writing through critical thinking is not in practice so far.

(x)   Generally objectives are determined by the teacher but not always achieved.

(xi)   The 'use' of the target language in the classroom is emphasized.

(xii)   The students are not well-motivated to learn English language.

(xiii)   Teachers are not always successful in motivating the students to improve the target language through their self-learning.

(xiv)   Some of the students' problems in learning English language are diagnosed.

(xv)   The students' proficiency in English language generally remains below expectation.

(xvi)   The students' proficiency in English language is inadequate and below expectation.

(xvii)   Only Direct Method is used for teaching of English at college level.

(xviii) Only one method is used in teaching of English in classroom.

(xix)   The teacher and the student are satisfied with the existing system of assessment of the students' learning outcomes.

(xx)   The teachers would love and appreciate the use eclectic approach in teaching of English at college level.

(xxi)   In response to the open ended question-21 (Teachers' Questionnaire), the teaching faculty of the English department suggests the following to improve the overall scenario of teaching-learning of English language in the College of Arts & Humanities, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia: The students' existing level of English language knowledge should be determined, before teaching the course content in class at college level to bridge up the gap(s). The eclectic approach may earn better results. The students need to be motivated and teaching material should be adapted to students level of existing knowledge to overcome their weaknesses that they brought to college from secondary school, in order to deliver the college course contents in a better way. Otherwise both the teacher and the student might be in a state of constant frustration and confusion throughout the semester(s). English language skills should be integrated through students' willing participation in classroom activities. Critical thinking, creative writing and the 'use' of target language are to be emphasized. Moreover, the standardized assessment would produce the students, proficient in English language that meet the demand of the national and international labor market.

(xxii)   In response to the open ended question-21 (Students' Opinionnaire), the students of the English department (Level-7 & 8), suggest the following to improve the teaching-learning of English language in the College of Arts & Humanities, Jazan University (KSA):

(xxiii)

We need to be taught the basics of English language and the course content simultaneously to earn better outcomes of teaching-learning of English language at college level. The course content need to be more interesting that suit to our context. Students are to be motivated toward learning of English language and the use of target language in classroom through active and willing participation in different activities. The use of different techniques for teaching English language in the classroom may prove more fruitful. The students should be taught focusing upon their needs, difficulties and ever changing contexts. Integration of English language skills through critical

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thinking and creative writing is demand of the current prevailing situation in our classrooms for better output with proficiency in English language.

Firstly, the most important, prominent and remarkable data collected through Questionnaire and Opinionnaire (1-10) is displayed in Graph-1 for quick view and ease of the reader:

Graph-1
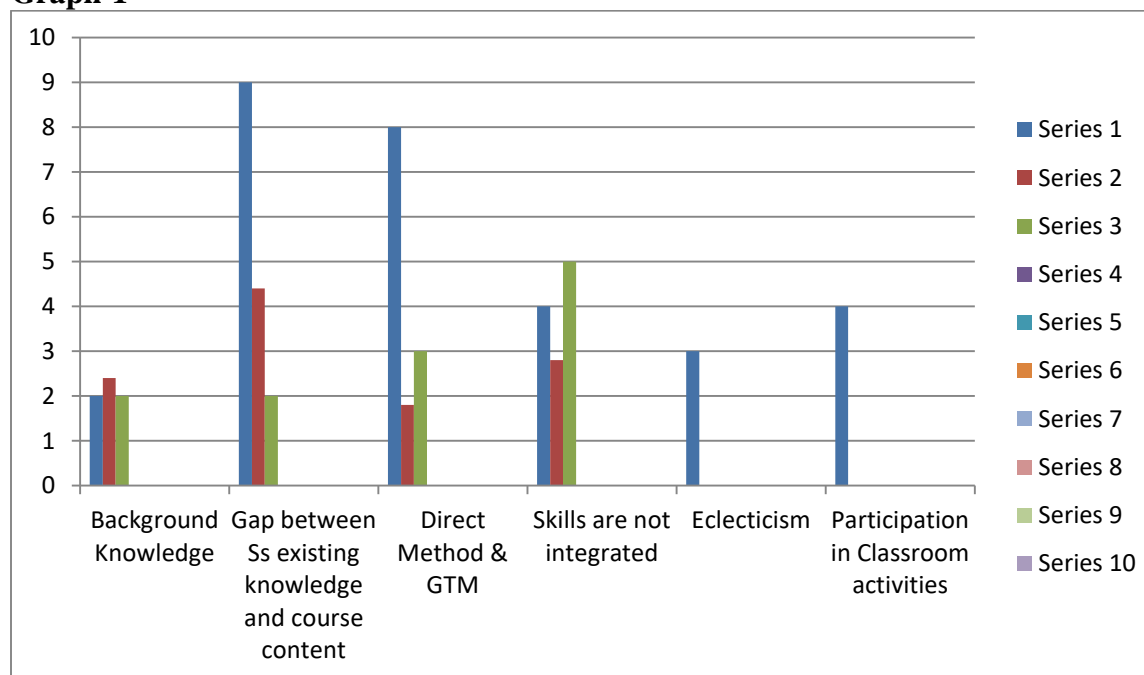
Graph-1 Analysis: There is a yawning gap between students' background and existing knowledge of English language and the course content at college level courses. A mixture of Direct Method and Grammar Translation Method is common in classroom but English language skills are not integrated whatever the pedagogy is. Principled eclecticism is not in practice. Moreover, it is crystal clear that the students don't participate in classroom activities willingly. The students need to be realized the importance and value of self-motivation, self-discipline, self-guidance and ultimately self-learning at college level. The teacher and the student have to go on double pace through hard work to bridge the gap between the student's weak foundations of English language and the course content at college level. The teacher should not go for some fixed teaching method(s) instead pick up all best and relevant techniques from different methods that suit to the student's needs, context and learning style. There are mixed-ability students in classes so their needs generally vary from one another.

Secondly, the most important, distinctive and remarkable data collected through Questionnaire and Opinionnaire (11-20) is displayed in Graph-2 for quick view and ease of the reader:
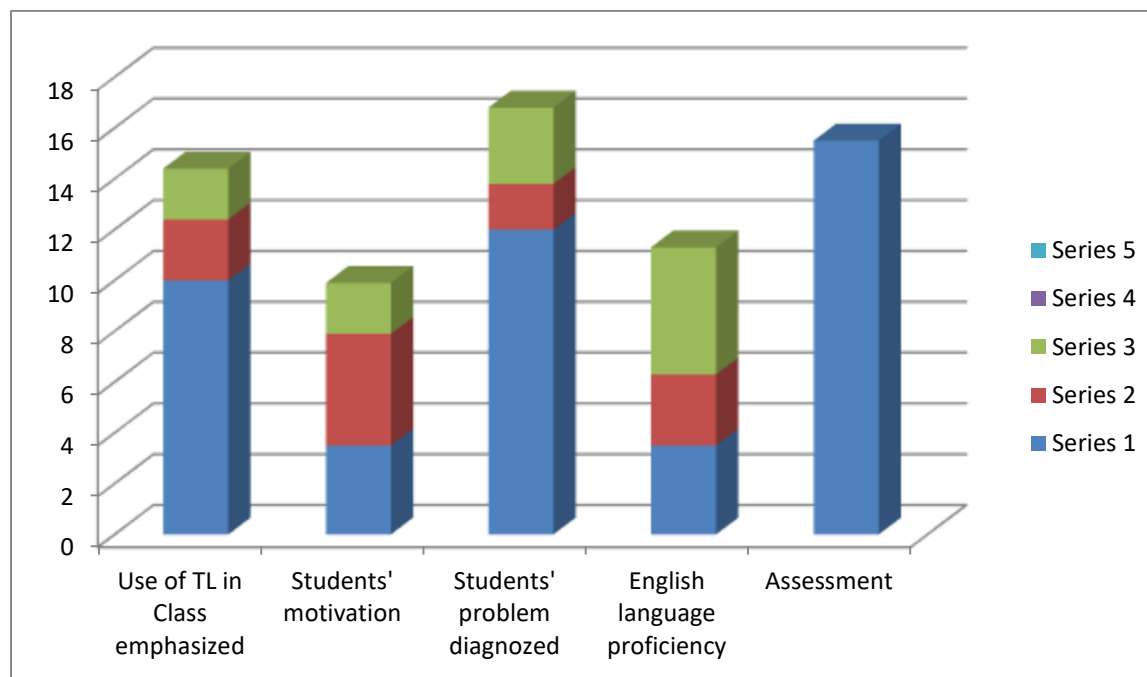
Graph-2 Analysis: The graph shows that students' motivation even at college level is not encouraging despite teacher's concerted efforts. Similarly, the students' English language proficiency is alarming even when their problems in English language are diagnosed by the teachers and the use of the target language in classroom is also emphasized. The students are always motivated to develop their interest in learning of English as a second language even then overall learning of the students is below the line of satisfaction. Some sort of information is there with the students through rotting and cramming but the skills and competency in the use of the target language are to be developed in the learners. The level of assessment is improving gradually. However, the students should be prepared to perform and demonstrate their skills in real life-like situations through the process of critical thinking and creative writing integrating all four skills of English language. It is the teacher who makes the course content interesting through lesson planning with interesting activities that suit to students needs and interest.

CONCLUSION

In the light of valuable past research in the area related to the present study, collected data and it analysis, the researcher concludes the study as follows:
(i)   In a word, the teaching should serve learners not methods. Either the teaching method is teacher-centered or student-centered or principled-eclecticism, it must be 'learning-centered'.
(ii)   Teaching method should fit to the learner's need.
(iii)   Use a variety of methodologies and approaches, choosing techniques from each method that are effective and applying them according to the learning context and objectives.
(iv)   Say no to any one specific method.

(v)   Prefer the Principled Eclecticism approach, where students are also encouraged to be autonomous in their learning.

(vi)   Focus on students' motivation and their autonomy in learning.

(vii)   There is not one single best method for everyone in all contexts, and that no one teaching method is inherently superior to the others.

(viii)   It is not always possible or appropriate to apply the same methodology to all learners, who have different objectives, environments and learning needs.

(ix)   Adopts the Principled Eclecticism approach, deciding on the most suitable techniques and applying the most appropriate methodology for that learner's specific objectives, learning style and context.

Recommendation

The conclusion of the present study guided the researcher to recommend further studies in the art of teaching-learning of English as a Second or Foreign Language, especially teacher training, the course content, pedagogy and assessment that will definitely prove helpful and ultimately fruitful for the teacher and the taught in future.

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Acknowledgement