**Preface**

This book is for teachers who are planning to teach English in Taiwan, or are already doing so. My motivation for writing this book was twofold. First, most language teaching books are written in the context of the Western world and the situations they describe are not always relevant to Taiwanese circumstances. Second, I would like to share with other teachers what I have learned from my years of teaching in Taiwan. This knowledge includes valuable tips about teaching methodologies that are useful in the classroom, as well as teaching the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

This book is organized into three parts. The first part provides background information about teaching English in Taiwan. The first chapter presents a brief history of English teaching in Taiwan, and the second chapter discusses the characteristics of Taiwanese learners. In the second part of the book, I introduce five teaching methods that I think all teachers should know and incorporate into their teaching. Finally, in the third part of the book, I describe the four language acquisition skills and offer suggestions for teachers to consider.

I hope that everyone who reads this book finds it informative and useful.

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**1**

# Developments in English Teaching in Taiwan

In Taiwan, education is highly valued. Schools are considered the main source of knowledge and skills acquisition, and school learners study the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy, and knowledge in specific subject areas. The Taiwanese educational system is historically associated with essentialist theory (Lee, 2011), a perspective that gives rise to the subject-centered approach. The essentialist view is that students should be instilled with the “essential” academic knowledge to render them both smart and virtuous. This approach is simply the academic pursuit of a discipline-centered curriculum (Hlebowitsh, 2004). As a result, the curriculum in Taiwan is heavily tied to the aim of preparing students to achieve high grades in their high school and college entrance examinations. These exams are large-scale and play an important role in Taiwanese education; students who achieve the highest scores have the best chance of being admitted into a good high school and eventually into a good university. Ultimately, this also determines whether one will be able to secure a lucrative job and high social status (Shive, 2000). Therefore, every subject included in the exam is emphasized in the classroom, including the study of English.

The study of English grammar has been a part of the curriculum in Taiwanese universities and colleges for years (Chang, 2011). Grammar can be defined as a set of rules to determine the manner in which words may be combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning in a language (Penny, 2000). Because grammar is an indispensable part of language, teachers and students have always attached great importance to its teaching and learning. In Taiwan, grammar is currently still taught using the traditional system known as the Grammar Translation Method (Chang, 2011). Language structures are typically explained by the teacher and then practiced in spoken or written exercises. After that, the learners use their newly acquired knowledge of the language structures in less controlled activities of speaking or writing. Although this traditional grammar teaching method improves the students’ mastery of grammatical rules, it has certain disadvantages that hinder the students’ development of communicative competence (Chang, 2011). That is, the traditional method is teacher-centered and pays little attention to developing English communicative competence. The students spend the majority of classroom time listening to the teacher’s explanations of English grammar rules or engaging in controlled practices. These controlled exercises require students to translate sentences, to fill in the blanks with proper words, or to correct errors in a sentence. These types of teaching and learning activities add little to the learner’s communicative competence.

In recent years, English has been recognized as one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, especially in the spheres of business, travel, and technology. This recognition has resulted in an increased demand for teaching English skills for communication rather than the traditional approach that focuses on knowledge of English grammar (Chang, 2011; Chang & Goswami, 2011; Littlewood, 2007). The traditional language learning techniques mainly consist of memorization and rote learning tasks, which do little to arouse students’ interest or to improve their communicative strategies in English (Chang, 2011). Occasionally this type of learning even causes students to become anxious when speaking English.

The new trend in language learning is based on the Communicative Approach (CA). This approach has been introduced in settings where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) to improve the students’ ability to use English in a real-life context (Littlewood, 2007). The goal of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is to develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Communicative competence can be defined as the language skills needed for a speaker to communicate within a certain speech community (Hymes, 1972). Hymes (1972) identified four dimensions in communicative competence: grammatical competence, acceptable language use, appropriate language use for the context, and the probability of occurrence. In other words, communicative competence comprises knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, the ability to connect utterances in a discourse, and effective language strategies.

The greater demand for English has also resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on English language learning in Taiwan. The Ministry of Education has recently extended the curriculum so that children at the elementary school level are now required to start learning English, whereas previously the English curriculum started only at junior high school level. This change has granted the English curriculum more weight at the school level. Some parents even send their children to bilingual kindergartens (English and Chinese) so that they may gain a competitive advantage in English language learning. As Reagan and Osborn (2001, p.3) commented, “in societies in which language learning is considered to be an essential component of a child’s education, children routinely begin the study of foreign language very early in their schooling”.

These developments in the approach to language teaching have strongly influenced foreign language teaching at the tertiary level. Shih (1999) investigated English programs in Taiwanese universities, and reported that many universities offered courses focusing on integrated English skills and emphasizing functional language and learners’ needs. In addition to the general English courses offered to university freshmen, elective courses were offered in the second, third, or fourth year to develop students’ English proficiency (Chern, 2002). The increasing emphasis on learning English for communicative purposes also meant that EFL classrooms were focusing more directly on listening and speaking skills.

The question arises: how does this emphasis on learning English for communicative purposes affect Taiwanese students? The next section discusses the typical characteristics of Taiwanese students. Understanding the characteristics of students can help teachers to be more aware of their needs and the challenges facing them.

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**2**

# Characteristics of Taiwanese Students at the Tertiary Level

The term “model minority” is used in the United States to characterize Asians as intelligent, successful, and low-risk for problem behaviors (Lee & Rotheram-Borus, 2009). In the educational sphere, Asian-Americans have achieved extraordinary academic success, with a high college attendance rate and high achievement test scores (Lee, 1991). However, the stereotypical view of Asian students is that they memorize and imitate rather than developing analytical abilities or their own viewpoints. In the classroom, they are often viewed as silent, passive, non-participatory, and superficial learners—traits that many Western teachers consider disadvantageous to learning. This stereotype was widely discussed in the literature, especially in the 1980s (e.g. Ballard & Clanchy, 1984; Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Samuelowicz, 1987). However, more recent studies have strongly challenged this portrayal of Asian students (Park, 2000; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001; Volet & Renshaw, 1996). An Australian study by Volet and Renshaw (1996) reported that international students were able to meet the requirements of their courses and maintain a high level of academic achievement throughout their studies abroad. In a more recent study, Sayers and Franklin (2008) used reflective techniques and showed that Chinese students typically believe that hard work and personal motivation are crucial to the learning process. Chinese students also value hands-on or practical experience in learning, and take pride in accomplishing such tasks. In addition, Sayers and Franklin (2008) reported that Chinese students view social networking as crucial to their learning outcomes. For example, many students reported discussing their assignments with classmates or asked for advice on completing the assignments. A similar finding emerged in a study by Ramburuth and McCormick (2001), who showed that Asian students tend to prefer a collaborative learning style. These examples show that Asian students generally display a positive attitude to learning and that they can succeed academically. However, a number of problems are encountered by teachers who teach Asian students.

The Taiwanese educational system is indeed characterized by a passive, non-participatory, and superficial approach to learning. The curriculum in Taiwanese schools is heavily tied to the purpose of preparing students for high school and college entrance exams. Thus students in these classrooms often sit quietly, pay attention to the teacher, and copy the notes from the blackboard or the overhead projector. Classroom interaction is often limited to students answering questions in their textbooks. These types of classroom activities do not prepare Taiwanese students to prosper in language courses, especially with the growing emphasis on learning competence in communication. Even at the tertiary level, students still expect to sit quietly, pay attention to the teacher, and copy the notes from the blackboard or the overhead projector. Multiple-choice tests are the most common type of assessment, and these do not stimulate the students’ development of language skills and abilities in communicative tasks. Problems with students’ English language include grammatical errors, incoherent organization, poor content, and the inability to express their own ideas. These problems are more prevalent when students are required to complete productive tasks such as writing or speaking. For example, students may need a long time to write a simple paragraph or may have to think for an inordinately long time before being able to respond orally to the teacher’s questions.

The challenge becomes one of identifying strategies for teachers to help their students engage with communicative tasks more easily and proficiently. To help English teachers break away from the traditional methods of teaching, the next section discusses several theories and approaches to language teaching. Although some of these teaching methods are considered outdated, their theories and approaches to teaching and learning remain highly suitable in today’s English classrooms. When these ideas are combined, they become a powerful tool for English teachers.

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**3**

# Grammar-Translation Method

# Background to Grammar-Translation Method

The history of language teaching can be traced to Latin teaching, which was widely studied more than 500 years ago. At that time, Latin was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the Western world. This situation was similar to that of English, which is currently the most widely studied foreign language worldwide (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Latin was taught using the classical method (Brown, 1994), primarily by rote-learning grammar rules and vocabulary and by performing written exercises, including text translation and writing sample sentences (Brown, 1994; Kelly, 1969; Howatt, 1984). The core of the grammar-translation method is learning and memorizing the grammatical rule system of a foreign language. The learner acquires a reading knowledge of foreign languages by studying grammar and applying this knowledge to text interpretation by translating literary works or sentences from the target language to his or her mother tongue (Chang, 2011; Kong, 2011).

As other “modern” languages began to be taught in educational institutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the classical method was adopted as the chief means for teaching foreign languages. A typical textbook consisted of lessons related to a list of grammatical points; each lesson explained the rules on language usage and then provided sample sentences. Oral work was reduced to a minimum, and the lessons emphasized the mastery of the rules through written exercises. Originally based on Latin studies, this approach became the standard for studying foreign languages, and is currently referred to as the grammar-translation method (GTM; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Richards and Rodgers (2001) described the principal characteristics of the GTM as follows:

1. The goal of learning a foreign language is to be able to read its literature and to benefit from the intellectual development resulting from foreign language study. This is achieved by the initial study of grammar rules, followed by applying this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into or out of the target language.
2. Reading and writing constitute the major focus, with little or no focus on speaking or listening.
3. Vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading text, and words are taught through memorization.
4. Much of the lesson is devoted to translating sentences into and out of the target language.
5. Grammar is taught deductively. Grammatical rules are first presented and studied, followed by practical translation exercises.
6. The native language of the student is the instruction medium.

**GTM Activities**

Numerous activities meet the principles of the GTM. First, there is the translation of a literary passage. In this activity, students translate a reading passage from the target language intro their native language. The passage may be an excerpt from the textbook or it may be written by the teacher, and the focus of the translation may be on particular grammar rules or the vocabulary. Students may also be required to answer reading comprehension questions in the target language based on their understanding of the reading passage. The types of questions asked may be on reading for details, understanding the main concepts, or making inferences based on their understanding of the passage. Practice activities may include learning antonyms or synonyms of particular words, recognizing cognates by learning the spelling or sound patterns that correspond between the languages, fill-in-the-blanks with new vocabulary or grammatical items learned, or simply memorizing a given vocabulary list in the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Once the vocabulary and grammatical items are learned, students can apply their understanding in writing. For example, the teacher can assign a topic to students, to write in the target language, and the students must demonstrate their understanding of the newly learned vocabularies and grammatical items by using them in sentences. GTM activities are a popular approach for teaching reading courses in most foreign language courses.

**GTM Advantages**

GTM principles provide certain language-learner advantages. Kong (2011) found that (a) translation skills help students understand the abstract meaning of foreign words and complex sentence structures; (b) a systematic knowledge of grammatical rules develops student capacity to understand grammatical concepts clearly and to learn exact word meanings; students also become proficient in translation; and (c) extensive reading and reciting of original works cultivate student reading and writing abilities. Translation can be a tool to aid in the understanding of the influence of one language on another. For example, when learning a foreign language, errors are caused by a negative transfer from the first language. Full awareness of the differences allows students to avoid making errors when using the second language. When errors occur, students are able to explain why and try not to repeat the same mistakes (Chang, 2011).

Hedge (2000) considered that presenting grammar to learners facilitates numerous learning approaches. First, it provides input for noticing output and accurate English forms. This method also accelerates learning by presenting high-frequency grammatical items explicitly. Although the GTM does not give importance to the spoken aspect of language, it provides information on the communicative use of language structures by contextualizing them in written form.

**GTM Disadvantages**

The GTM often frustrates students because foreign language learning becomes a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary, and producing translations of literary prose (Kalia, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Baw (2002) believed that GTM has no significant value in English teaching, apart from helping students develop a solid grammar base and master L2 structures and their usage. Opposition to the GTM has increased because of its lack of relevance to theories of linguistics, psychology, or education. The method ignores that different learners have varying learning styles, and language learning involves not only form, but also meaning and use (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). The GTM also concentrates heavily on reading and writing, but neglects listening and speaking, which are considered basic skills (Huang & Xu, 1999; Stern, 1993).

Kalia (2011) outlined the following list of GTM disadvantages:

* The greatest weakness of this method is that the whole approach to English is through translation and that mother tongue is mostly used in the classroom. Consequently, students tend to think in their mother tongue; thus, one does not really learn the language. Without the ability to think in English, the student will never be able to speak and write English without translation help.
* Students who become accustomed to noting equivalent words in their mother tongue adopt a wrong notion that a word has only one meaning and may fail to learn the use of a word in different contexts.
* The differences in English structure may be untranslatable in the student’s mother tongue. For example, Indian languages have no passive voice, and many English prepositions differ from the mother tongue.
* The GMT does not consider the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and almost wholly neglects the spoken aspect of language.
* The method cannot provide insight into foreign idioms such as “elbow room” if texts are translated word for word.
* The grammatical method of teaching language makes the lessons dull and dry. Students do not take an active part in learning and become absentminded when listening to the teacher.
* This method stresses accuracy rather than fluency. Overemphasis on accuracy leads to excessive correction of learner mistakes, which is demotivating.

## 

## Classroom Considerations

The GTM in the language classroom is still actively used in many Asian countries. The method is still used in situations where understanding of literary texts is the primary focus of foreign language study, and when the spoken language is rarely required. Taiwan constitutes an example of such a setting. Grammar has been taught to English majors in universities and colleges in Taiwan for numerous years (Chang, 2011), using an approach characterized by the traditional teacher-centered method. Students are required to memorize grammar rules and then complete controlled speaking or writing activities. The GTM is popular in Taiwan because it is one of the most convenient methods to use in large classes, where students listen, copy rules, write out exercises, and correct them from the blackboard. Using this method, the teacher does not necessarily need to be a master of the target language, but must only adhere closely to the textbook and discuss it using the mother tongue, as required (Kalia, 2011).

The GTM plays a small but significant role in teaching English in Taiwan, by helping learners understand and produce sentences accurately during communicative tasks. Many learners in Taiwan subconsciously translate English into their mother tongue or vice versa when reading, writing, listening, or even speaking. This phenomenon is reinforced when students plan what they want to say or write in their mother tongue before expressing themselves in the foreign language. Similarly, they might be accustomed to researching and writing new English words by using their native language. These habits are natural when learning a new language, and account for the crucial role of grammatical knowledge. Kong (2011) stated that grammatical knowledge helps learners understand the abstract meaning of foreign words and complex sentence structures. This knowledge also allows learners to decode complex sentence structures, to accurately translate and understand the conveyed message. Learners must also be able to produce grammatically correct sentences to convey their own meaning when communicating, and grammatical knowledge helps ensure the quality of their language output.

The study of classroom grammar (and translation) should be treated as a subject that facilitates learner understanding and the correct use of the target language. Although such a course would be heavily teacher centered, learners would benefit from the controlled grammatical practice exercises and sentence translations. Accuracy should be stressed because the repeated production of grammatically correct sentences enhances good language use, whereas the constant production of grammatically incorrect sentences leads to undesirable language habits. To prevent communicative problems caused by poor language patterns, courses based on the GTM should be provided early on in foreign language study. The ability to speak a language to some degree of proficiency requires grasping certain grammatical knowledge. By teaching grammar, teachers not only give students the means to express themselves, but also fulfill their expectations of what learning a foreign language involves (Chang, 2011).

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**4**

# Audio-Lingual Method

**Background to Audio-Lingual Method**

The audio-lingual method (ALM) is an intensive, oral-based approach to foreign language learning. The roots of the ALM can be traced to the early 1940s when the United States entered World War II. Until the war, foreign language teaching in the United States was mainly focused on establishing foreign-language reading knowledge (Wilkins, 1990). Foreign-language teaching methodology was relatively traditional and produced skilled readers who were poor speakers of the target language. When the United States entered World War II, an urgent need arose for skilled interpreters and fluent speakers of Japanese, German, and the languages of occupied countries in East Asia (Cherrington, 2000a). The government commissioned U.S. universities to develop foreign language programs for military personnel to attain conversational proficiency in various foreign languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was established in 1942 and used a technique called the “informant method.”

In the informant method, students participated in guided conversation with informants and gradually learned to speak the language; they also developed an understanding of basic grammatical rules (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The informant method uses a native speaker of the target language (the informant), who serves as a source of phrases and vocabulary for the student to imitate. A linguist is also involved in the training, whose role is to elicit basic language structures from the informant. This linguist may not necessarily be a native speaker of the language, but knows the skills to supervise the drilling of given phrases and sentences. The linguist also participates in guided conversation with students and learns basic language rules (Cherrington, 2000a).

The U.S. Army had a high degree of success using the ASTP in wartime. Students possessed high motivation levels because they had specific goals linked not only to language mastery, but also to helping the war effort by executing military-related jobs and tasks (Cherrington, 2000a). The program focused intensively on oral work, and students often studied 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. Small-class teaching also added to the high success rate. The program lasted until the end of the war. One reason for its decline is that linguists did not consider it suitable for ordinary foreign language learning in the post-war situation (Cherrington, 2000a), and it lacked a well-developed theoretical and methodological base. However, its novelty and high success rate has led to the development of an intensive, oral-based approach to language teaching.

Foreign language teaching was given increased attention in the United States throughout the 1950s as the country emerged as the major international power toward the end of World War II. Thousands of foreign students entered the United States to study in universities, and many of them required English training before they could begin their actual studies (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The approach developed by linguists at U.S. universities advocated initial aural training and coaching in pronunciation, followed by speaking, reading, and writing instruction. The combination of the linguistic principles of the aural-oral approach and psychological learning theory gave rise to the method that came to be known as audio-lingualism, a term coined by Professor Nelson Brooks in 1964 (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

**Behaviorist Theory in the Audio-Lingual Method**

Audio-lingualism offered a convincing and powerful theory of language learning that was based on behavioral psychology. Behaviorism is based on the premise that most human behavior is learned through a continual process of responding to stimuli. Stimulus reinforcement and response patterns then lead to repetitive habits and behavior (Cherrington, 2000b). Behavioral psychology was, and continues to be, a prominent school in American psychology. Behaviorists posit that humans are capable of a wide range of behaviors, and that the occurrence of any behavior depends on three crucial learning elements. The first is a *stimulus*, which elicits a behavior by triggering a *response* from the person. The final element is *reinforcement*, which serves to inhibit or strengthen the response likelihood for future use. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.56) stated, “Reinforcement is a vital element in the learning process because it increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again and eventually become a habit.” This theory is built on the work of Pavlov, a Russian psychologist who studied the stimulus and response process in dog experiments. Pavlov and his assistants noted that dogs salivated by the presence and smell of food. By adding a new stimulus (a bell), Pavlov hoped to evoke the salivation response naturally and automatically without the presence and smell of food. After several conditioning scenarios, Pavlov observed that the dogs began to salivate after hearing the bell. The result of dogs being conditioned to salivate (response) to a bell ringing (stimulus) is a classic example of early stimulus-response psychology (Cherrington, 2000b).

The behaviorist theory of learning in the audio-lingual approach outlined by Richards and Rodgers (2001) includes four principles. First, foreign language learning is a process of mechanical habit formation; good habits are formed by the student providing correct responses and by memorizing various dialogues and performing pattern drills. Second, language skills are learned effectively if the items to be learned in the target language are presented in spoken form before they are seen in written form. Third, analogies provide a better foundation for language learning than analysis. Finally, word meanings are learned within a linguistic and cultural context rather than in isolation.

**General ALM Assumptions**

Abu-Melhim (2009, p.41) presented the following assumptions underlying the ALM from Alkhuli (2005).

1. Language is mainly speech, and writing merely represents speech.
2. Speech is the foreign language skill that must be emphasized more than reading or writing.
3. Teaching a foreign language should follow the order of listening, speaking, and reading, and then writing. This sequence implies that learners speak what they have listened to, read what they have spoken, and write what or about what they have read.
4. Acquiring a foreign language is similar to acquiring a native language.
5. A foreign language is best acquired through habit formation achieved by pattern practice.
6. Teaching about the foreign language is of no use.
7. Each language is unique.
8. Translation is harmful in teaching a foreign language.
9. The best foreign language teacher is a trained native speaker of that foreign language; however, these assumptions are criticized and refuted by certain methodologists who present the following counterarguments:
10. Speech is not the sole form of language; it is simply one form of it.
11. Speech should not be emphasized at the expense of other foreign language skills, which are as important as speech.
12. The order of listening, speaking, and reading, and then writing is nonessential because these skills may be taught simultaneously, rather than sequentially.
13. Second language acquisition differs from first language acquisition in both qualitative and quantitative terms.
14. A foreign language is not only learned through habit formation, but also through cognition.
15. Teaching about the foreign language is not without advantages.
16. Languages differ, but they also have certain common features.
17. Translation may be usefully employed in teaching a foreign language.
18. The native speaker of a foreign language may not be the best teacher of that foreign language because he/she often does not know the students' native language, and thus, cannot predict or account for their problems, mistakes, or areas of difficulty.

**ALM Activities**

ALM learning and teaching activities consist mainly of dialogues and drills. Dialogues are used for repetition and memorization, and emphasize correct pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation. Dialogues provide a means of contextualizing the language and illustrating situations in which the language might be used. They also provide cultural insight on the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Throughout the learning process, the target language is used as the instruction and translation medium, and use of the student’s native language is discouraged.

In a typical ALM lesson, students first listen to the teacher-model-dialogue containing the key structures that comprise the lesson. Students repeat each line of the dialogue, both individually and in chorus, and the teacher guides their pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. The dialogue is eventually memorized line by line without students consulting their textbooks. Once a dialogue has been presented and memorized, specific grammatical patterns are selected and applied in various drills and exercises that allow students to practice using those patterns. The patterns consist of sentences with the same grammatical structure as the model dialogue, but with different lexical items, and learners are required to repeat and modify the sentences during the pattern practice. This is occasionally referred to as the substitution drill. For example, the teacher may replace one word in a sentence or phrase with another word to expand the students’ vocabulary. In contrast to the substitution drill, teachers may employ another technique called the transformation drill. In this example, the teacher might provide an utterance and ask students to transform it into the negative or interrogative form. Students may also change the tense, mood, voice, aspect, or modality of an utterance. Learners may also be invited to role-play the dialogues in the original form or with language modifications according to the role-playing circumstances. Follow-up activities take place in the language laboratory, or students may refer to their textbooks for reading, writing, or vocabulary exercises based on the dialogue they have just learned. Throughout this process, learners are not encouraged to initiate interactions because this may lead to mistakes and the formation of poor language habits (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). At the beginner level, activities such as writing tasks are purely imitative and consist of copying sentences that have been practiced.

**ALM Advantages**

The advantages and disadvantages of the ALM are often subject to debate because scholars frequently disagree on what constitutes either an advantage or a disadvantage (Abu-Melhim, 2009). Among the advantages is the emphasis on aural-oral skills, where teachers stress the importance of proper pronunciation, with a particular focus on intonation. Oral drilling in the classroom offers several advantages. First, learners listen to accurate sentence production, which improves their production of spoken English in aspects such as pronunciation, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation. This leads to the correct development of the target language. Learner sensitivity to intonation also allows them to be more readily acquainted with intonation functions. For example, learners are able to recognize questions, statements, or commands based on the intonation used. Second, oral drilling gives learners the opportunity to speak the target language, enabling them to familiarize themselves with situational conversations in the target language, providing an authentic setting for verbal interactions with a native speaker (Abu-Melhim, 2009). This is important in countries such as Taiwan, where the environment outside the classroom does not naturally include English. Finally, choral drilling gives shy learners the opportunity to practice their speaking skills without having to worry about others hearing them. Sustained exposure to the ALM often increases self-confidence in English speaking.

**ALM Disadvantages**

The ALM has been widely adopted in North America for teaching foreign languages, including English as a second or foreign language. However, criticism of this method has arisen from several fronts. Chomsky rejected the behaviorist theory of learning, stating that it could not possibly serve as a model of how humans learn languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Chomsky argued for language acquisition in the form of habit formation through a stimulus from children’s linguistic environment, and stated that reinforcing a correct response cannot account for the ability to generate an infinite number of utterances (Byram, 2000). Behaviorist theory does not allow for human language creativity. Practitioners found that the results fell short of their expectations because students were often unable to transfer the language skills acquired in ALM lessons to real communication settings outside the classroom. The materials and the method appeared to be effective only for the first few years of learning, but not for intermediate or advanced learners.

From the pedagogical viewpoint, many students (particularly adults) found the study experience through ALM procedures boring and unsatisfying. The repetitive drills are too mechanical, uninteresting, and do little to develop communicative competence. ALM opponents argue that the mechanical and rote-learning process does not teach students how to communicate spontaneously as a native speaker would (Abu-Melhim, 2009). Diller stated, “Pattern drills require the student to think only about the mechanics of manipulating grammatical structures. He is not required to think in the language when he does a pattern drill” (1970, p.27). Jacobovits and Gordon observed, “What is actually being practiced is a particular stereotyped and unnatural dialogue routine. The expectation that this restricted routine will somehow mysteriously generalize to free, expressive speech enactments is gratuitous in the extreme” (1974, p.712). The ALM also relies heavily on memorization, the downside of which is that much of a student’s linguistic knowledge is stored in short-term memory. Without internalizing what has been learned in the classroom, the possibility of forgetting what was learned is increased.

## Classroom Considerations

ALM theories and principles should be adopted and incorporated into language instruction rather than used in the original ALM format. Classroom lessons should include oral drills, especially for beginning English students. One advantage of the ALM is the emphasis on aural-oral skills. The traditional teacher-centered method in Taiwan has resulted in passive learners who are incapable or afraid of speaking English. The ALM is a great method to overcome this problem. Drilling provides a safe context in which learners can practice oral skills without the fear of making mistakes. This builds self-confidence in English speaking until students are ready to communicate by using the target language on their own in authentic communicative tasks.

The ALM emphasizes aural-oral skills; therefore, teachers should use the ALM mainly to train students’ speaking. Demirezen (2010) suggested that a rehabilitation method based on the ALM has the potential to correct fossilized pronunciation errors. If properly applied, the ALM can help learners sound more like native speakers of the target language. The teacher’s focus should be on improving different aspects of spoken English, such as pronunciation, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation. Vocabulary and grammar can be learned though other methods and approaches. To avoid ALM pitfalls, teachers must not spend too much time on oral drills. Excessive oral drilling may cause students to lose focus and interest in the activity, resulting in mindless repetitions and responses to the stimulus.

The ALM is best applied to learning textbook dialogues used for speaking or conversation classes. One possible procedure for applying the ALM in studying dialogues is the following: First, model the dialogue line by line and have all the students repeat the lines together as a class. Listen carefully to the students’ pronunciation and intonation. If mistakes are made, return and repeat the word or phrase until the students can accurately pronounce each line in the dialogue. Next, practice the dialogue as a class. This could be achieved by dividing the class in half, with one side modeling the lines for Speaker A and the other side modeling the lines for Speaker B. Another possibility is for the teacher to model the lines for Speaker A and the class to model the lines for Speaker B. Students can then practice the dialogues in pairs or smaller groups while the teacher moves around the classroom and monitors student performance. This procedure would make the ALM process less repetitive, and students would be engaged through various drilling procedures.

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**5**

# Whole Language Approach

**Background to Whole Language Approach**

The whole language approach (WLA) is a theory of language instruction based on learning to read and write naturally, with a focus on real communication. The term “whole language” was coined in the 1980s by a group of American educators who believed that language should be taught as a “whole” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The key principle in this approach is that language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) should be integrated into the learning process. The WLA became popular in the 1990s as an innovative and motivational method of teaching language skills (reading and writing) to primary school children in the United States. This approach to language instruction can also be successfully adapted to the teaching of foreign languages.

The learning theory underlying the WLA is based on humanism and constructivism. From the humanistic perspective, the WHA is an authentic, personalized, self-directed, collaborative, and pluralistic method that helps learners focus and motivate them to master language skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Authenticity is heavily emphasized, and language is used for meaningful purposes. From the constructivist perspective, knowledge is socially constructed rather than received or discovered. Therefore, rather than aiming to teach the syllabus, the teacher is a facilitator in the learning process and collaborates with learners to help them generate the knowledge to be learned.

Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are two psychologists who influenced the WLA learning theory. Piaget found that children learn language for personal and aesthetic reasons through a gradual, constructive approach. Language is the result of an active process in exploration and discovery, a constant building of meaning (Shafer, 1998). Galda, Cullinan, and Strickland (1993, p.10) described the process as follows: “As learners encounter new information, they integrate it with what they already know. They then apply this new knowledge to novel situations (assimilation) and restructure their schemata to include the new knowledge (accommodation).” Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist and an educator, wrote on the power of social interaction, play, and the importance of creating learning contexts that foster discovery. In communicative activities, students improve their language ability by actively using it in their surroundings (Ling, 2012). Teachers should not be instructing the students, but act as a facilitator of learning. Rather than being taught or conditioned to execute an action, learners should actively participate in an academic setting. If activities are meaningful for each dynamic person, students would approach English classes with an intrinsic desire to comprehend their world through communication (Shafer, 1998).

**WLA Principles**

The WHA should not be regarded as a teaching method, but as a theory of language teaching and directing classroom activities. One of the first principles in the WLA is teaching as a whole. Instructors in traditional classroom settings separately teach language skills such as pronunciation, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The WLA insists that “by putting language knowledge and language abilities into rich, real, natural language environments, students gradually and actively master the language, including language knowledge and language abilities” (Ling, 2012, p.149). Classroom teaching should emphasize meaningful activities that teach language skills as a whole. The teacher may focus on understanding entire reading passages by reading and discussing the main ideas together. The study of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation may be added at any time during the lesson when problems arise, but they do not constitute the main lesson focus. Students not only cultivate comprehension and thinking abilities by using this approach, but also cultivate their overall language abilities (Ling, 2012).

The WLA includes student-centered learning. Teachers should consider the needs, aims, and interests of students. Student-centered learning also means giving students more study choices by allowing them to select the books they would like to read or writing on a subject of their choice. Teachers should provide students numerous opportunities to use the language. This may include group activities, discussions, or reading and writing with other students. All language learning should be cultivated in a natural environment.

**WLA Activities**

Full use of the learning context is important in WLA lessons, and the mechanical practice of sentence patterns and drills should be avoided. Learning should focus on understanding the content and practicing language as a whole. An important WLA activity is reading, particularly the reading of authentic texts. The main purpose of reading is to gain information from the text. Graded readers (books with language made easier for language learners) commonly used in language-learning classrooms are inappropriate because they lack the vocabulary and feel of the original text (Ling, 2012). Reading provides a context in which learners learn to cultivate thinking and language abilities. During instruction, when teachers find problems with pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, they can indicate them and provide an explanation to learners, who thus develop accurate language skills. Reading also leads to oral practice. Retelling a story, discussing the context and characters of the story, and performing a play are all frequently used WLA techniques. This could be done as a class or in small groups where learners help each other by exchanging knowledge. Finally, reading frequently leads to writing on the text that the students have just learned. Through writing, learners understand the relationship between oral and written English. Writing also helps students deepen their understanding of the texts while accumulating language knowledge (Ling, 2012). Types of writing activities include stories, diaries, poems, letters, and essays. Teachers can focus not only on the types of writing, but also on the process. WLA activities could be limitless, as long as the activities fulfill the principles of the approach, but the WLA requires careful teacher planning.

**WLA Advantages**

An important advantage of WLA is that language skills are integrated and taught as a whole. This has several benefits. Students feel less isolation when learning, and activities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking classes have no connection to each other. In traditional English classes, the four skills are often taught in isolation with various teachers using different textbooks. Students understand and recognize how to learn a language and use it in authentic commutative tasks when all the skills are taught as a whole.

Another important advantage of the WLA is student-centered learning, particularly for reading. Matsuoka and Hirsh (2010) found that English learning textbooks provided minimal opportunities for learners to develop their vocabulary beyond high-frequency and academic words. Using authentic reading material and giving students time to perform activities such as extensive reading overcomes this problem.

Research in extensive reading has shown many beneficial effects on students. Nation (2001) claimed that when pupils read, they not only learn new words, but they also develop syntactic knowledge, in addition to world knowledge. Recent studies have also shown that students who participated in extensive reading displayed increased gains in vocabulary knowledge (Hirsch, 2003; Horst, 2005) and in reading comprehension and reading fluency (Hirsch, 2003; Iwahori, 2008; Sheu, 2003). One possible explanation for the increase could be that students acquire new words incidentally by reading thousands of words each day. This may be more effective than rote memorization because, by reading interesting texts, students learn new words and review familiar ones. Students can also talk and share with the class what they have read or written in an assignment. In the WLA, learning the four skills is never an isolated activity.

**WLA Disadvantages**

One problem with WLA is that older students (particularly those with previous language-learning experience) may be accustomed to the traditional-language teaching style and environment, and may have trouble adjusting to a WLA classroom. Traditional English classes are heavily teacher-centered, with students sitting quietly, listening, and taking lecture notes. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking classes are taught in isolation. Students in a reading class know that they are working on reading and learning reading skills, and students in a writing class know that they are learning writing skills, and so forth. If all the skills are taught as a whole, students who do not understand the WLA concept may feel that they are given the opportunity to learn specific skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. To overcome this problem, it is important for teachers to discuss the classroom teaching approach and activities with students to enhance their comfort in the new learning environment.

## Classroom Considerations

Three major principles underlie WLA instruction. First, the teacher should integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills and teach them as a whole. This integration is important because language should be used for meaningful purposes and to conduct authentic functions. Second, the use of authentic material rather than commercially prepared artificial texts and exercises is important because natural texts are produced for communication purposes. Reading should be conducted for comprehension and to serve a useful purpose. Writing should be a process for exploring and discovering real meanings rather than simply practicing writing skills. Lastly, WLA instruction provides student-centered learning, and students should be given a choice of what they read and write. Rigg (1991, p.526) stated, “Choice is vital in a whole language class, because without the ability to select activities, materials, and conversational partners, the students cannot use language for their own purposes.”

When these principles are adopted into English courses, students do not learn English simply to learn. English becomes a part of the learner’s life rather than a course to study and pass. This sense of affinity increases student motivation, which is an important learning factor. Motivated students have a strong desire to continue learning.

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**6**

# Cooperative Language Learning

**Background of Cooperative Language Learning**

Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) is a language teaching approach that uses cooperative activities and formats, such as pairs and small groups, to develop communicative competence in a language while improving the understanding of a subject. CLL is a learner-centered approach that fosters cooperation rather than competition in learning. In this process, students with varying levels of ability and social skills and different gender conduct their learning process by working in small groups and helping each other. This creates an atmosphere of achievement, which enables students to maximize their own and others’ learning (Bolukbas, Keskin, & Polat, 2011). Cooperative groups succeed when learners are aware of their own responsibility to study and learn while helping other group members to learn. CLL provides learners with less anxiety and a more supportive learning environment because it reduces competitiveness and individualism, but increases opportunities to actively construct or transform knowledge among students (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2002). Students working in groups have more opportunities to talk and share ideas with their peers; therefore, they can think and generate new ideas.

Social interaction in learning is based on constructivism, which is the theoretical work of the developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Constructivist learning theory posits that students build connections between their prior knowledge and new ideas to construct new meanings. According to Jenkins (1996, p.4), “Each learner constructs reality in terms of his or her prior knowledge, his or her values, his or her attitudes and his or her preferred ways of knowing.” Because the learning experience of each learner is unique, similar information presented to two learners may differ between them. Because students in a group are from different backgrounds and have varying English abilities, group members complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in English (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010). Thus, the construction of meaning is an active process occurring within the person. In the language classroom, learners learn from one another and must learn to work well with others, who help them feel confident and secure.

**CLL Principles**

Johnson and Johnson (1989) proposed five elements in which cooperative efforts are more effective and productive than competition and individualistic efforts. They are described as (a) positive interdependence; (b) promotive (face-to-face) interaction; (c) individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve group goals; (d) frequent use of relevant interpersonal and small-group skills; and (e) frequent and regular use of group processing to improve group effectiveness.

In the first element, positive interdependence exists when students understand and perceive that they cannot succeed in a task unless their teammates (or other group members) succeed. This requires careful coordination and effort among all group members to complete the task and the sense that “we are all in this together.” For positive interdependence to work, students are responsible for learning the assigned material and ensuring that all group members have learned the assigned material by working in small groups and sharing their resources.

Positive interdependence results in promotive interaction, defined as people encouraging and facilitating each other's efforts to achieve and complete tasks to attain group goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In this requirement, group members motivate and help one another. Examples of face-to-face promotive interaction include people offering each other help and assistance, exchanging resources such as information and materials, and providing each other with feedback to improve subsequent tasks. Although positive interdependence may affect the group outcome, promotive interaction fosters interrelationships and social adjustments.

Individual accountability, the third CLL element, holds the student responsible for contributing to his or her fair share of the group’s success. Group success depends on the learning of each person. Every learner has the responsibility to learn the subject and accomplish the goal, irrespective of what it may be (Bolukbas, Keskin, & Polat, 2011). Under this condition, group members know they cannot have a “free ride.” To ensure that each student is individually accountable for his or her fair share of the group work, teachers must assess the amount of effort each member contributes to the group work, and provide feedback to groups and individual students (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Appropriate use of interpersonal and small-group skills, the fourth CLL element, coordinates efforts to achieve a common goal. In this element, students must (a) get to know and trust each other, (b) communicate accurately and unambiguously, (c) accept and support each other, and (d) resolve conflict constructively (Johnson, 1990, 1991). However, not all learners are born with the instinct or personality of knowing how to effectively interact with others. Teachers may need to teach learners how to build relations if the groups are to be productive.

Finally, group effectiveness is influenced by whether groups reflect on how well they function. Group processing involves reflecting on a group session to identify what member actions are helpful or unhelpful in deciding whether to continue or modify their actions. Group processing clarifies and improves member effectiveness in contributing to collaborative efforts to achieve group goals (Johnson, 1990, 1991). Such processing enables learning groups to focus on maintaining good working relationships among members, facilitates learning cooperative skills, ensures that members receive feedback regarding their participation, and reinforces the positive behaviors of group members.

**CLL Activities**

CLL success depends on the nature and organization of the group work. The teacher must create a highly structured and well-organized classroom-learning environment. The teacher as a facilitator is responsible for planning and structuring tasks, assigning students to groups and roles, selecting materials, and managing the use of time. In contrast, students learn by direct and active involvement and participation. The primary role of the learner entails becoming a group member who works collaboratively on tasks with other group members. Students learn to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process, which is an important skill.

Common CLL activities include group work and pair work, which have become increasingly popular in language teaching because of their many advantages. Students involved in group work and pair work tend to participate more equally and are also more capable of experimenting and using the language than those who are in a whole-class arrangement where only one student talks at a time (Meng, 2010). Richards and Rodgers (2001) asserted that pair work is the most typical CLL format because it ensures that students spend the maximum amount of time engaged in learning tasks. Both pair work and group work give students the chance for greater independence because they work together without the teacher controlling their every move. They are responsible for their own learning decisions, they decide what language to use to complete a certain task, and they can work without the pressure of the entire class watching to what they are doing (Meng, 2010). Cooperative learning activities vary in time from a few minutes in a class period to several weeks. Integrating CLL into second-language classrooms facilitates the ability of a learner to communicate in the target language because it provides increased opportunities for comprehensible input, real-life experience of language use, and positive peer interaction (Holt, 1993; Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006; Jacobs & Goh, 2007).

**CLL Advantages**

The CLL approach has several advantages over teacher-centered classroom methods. First, it provides opportunities for naturalistic second-language acquisition through the frequent use of interactive activities. These activities vary and provide learners with increased exposure to second-language practice. CLL also provides opportunities for learners to act as mutual resources and to play an active role in their own learning process. Second, CLL develops learners’ critical skills. Cooperative activities encourage learners to ask each other questions and provide responses, fostering critical thinking development (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Finally, CLL creates a positive classroom climate by enhancing learner motivation and reducing learner stress. Learners cooperate to accomplish mutual goals rather than competing against each other to achieve an academic goal or grade. This collaboration maximizes their learning.

**CLL Disadvantages**

One major challenge in successfully implementing CLL in the language classroom is in managing students of different levels and class size. The language classroom includes proficient learners, less proficient learners, and problem learners of English. This makes it difficult for teachers to not only teach but to also organize activities. For example, teachers may focus more on less proficient students by teaching at a slow speed; however, proficient students will feel bored. If teachers tailor to more proficient students, less proficient students will feel neglected. Although CLL principles require students to be responsible for their own learning and to engage actively in tasks, less proficient learners and problem learners of English may present certain problems in the classroom. First, less proficient students may have no interest in English, and not participate in activities. They may frequently use their first language when discussing and communicating with other group members, reducing the opportunities for others in the group to practice the target language. Less proficient learners and problem learners also produce poorer-quality work compared to students who are more proficient. This may cause problems when students decide which members to work with. Learners who are proficient in English may not always want to work with learners who are less proficient and not diligent in their work, especially if formal grading is involved. Consequently, the less proficient are always grouped together and produce mediocre work, resulting in less learning. To overcome this problem, teachers can assign students to groups, ensuring a mix of proficient and less proficient learners in each group. This allows maximum CLL potential because proficient students will help less proficient students. Less popular students in the class will also not feel left out because they could not find any partners. Pair and group work should not be a popularity contest.

Another obstacle in implementing CLL is class size. In Taiwan, language classes with 40 or 50 students are common. During CLL activities, it may be difficult for teachers to monitor and focus on all groups and individual students. The noise level in a large class of students working together can also be high, especially if one or many groups are off task. This creates a learning environment that I less than ideal for the others. In a large class, teachers often interact with certain students more frequently than with others. Although teachers try to treat students fairly and give every student in the class an equal opportunity to participate in the lesson, it is often difficult to avoid interacting with certain students more than others (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). To overcome these problems, teachers must move around the classroom to monitor student progress. Not only is this a good classroom-management procedure, but it also allows students with problems or questions to ask the teacher when he or she checks on their group. Moving around the classroom from group to group enables teachers to confirm that students are on task while learning and communicating using the target language.

## Classroom Considerations

CLL in English teaching provides learners with opportunities to use and interact in the target language. Although teachers are occasionally required to lecture in the classroom, the emphasis is on learners using and practicing the target language. Activities designed around CLL, such as dialogues, role-playing, and group or pair discussions, all contribute to the learner’s progress. Learners can work in pairs to write their own dialogues or copy practice dialogues from their textbooks. Teachers can even include ALM techniques when presenting the dialogues and role-plays. Group or pair discussions not only help develop learners’ critical thinking skills, but also foster autonomy. Teachers must include such activities in each lesson. The language classroom that uses CLL should be lively and filled with abundant target-language usage; over time, learners improve their language skills by using the language rather than by studying it. CCL contributes to caring relationships, and enables learners to acquire knowledge by collaborating with other members. The socials skills that learners gain from a cooperative learning setting help them learn both academic and non-academic content effectively (Chen & Goswami, 2011).

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**7**

# Communicative Approach

**Background to Communicative Approach**

The Communicative Approach (CA) is a language-teaching theory based on a communication model of language. This second- and foreign-language teaching approach mainly focuses on developing communicative competence and emphasizes using language for meaningful purposes in an authentic situation. The goal of language teaching is to improve student communicative competence by using techniques that focus on language as a communication medium. Language teaching recognizes the social purpose of communication, in which learners say something to find out something else. Learners essentially learn to communicate by communicating (Tao, Yu, & Jin, 2011).

The CA dates back to the late 1960s when linguists discerned the need for language teaching to focus on communicative proficiency rather than the mere mastery of structures. During this period, the increasing interdependence of European countries resulted in a greater demand for adult education in the major languages of the European Common Market (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, popular foreign language teaching methods at the time, such as the grammar translation method (GMT) and the audio-lingual method (ALM), could not be used for non-native learners to develop speaking abilities because they were based on memorizing language forms and rules. These methods overemphasized meaningless mechanistic pattern drills, repetition, and reinforcement, which linguists considered weak foreign-language teaching activities (Demirezen, 2011).

The notion of communicative competence is the basic theory from which the communicative teaching approach is developed. Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence as “a knowledge of the rules for understanding and producing both the referential and social meaning of language” (p.338). Canale (1983) suggested that communicative ability consists of four competences: (a) Grammatical competence relates to language system mastery, such as vocabulary, word formation, and sentence meaning. (b) Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to understand and produce accurate utterance in accordance with the context in which the utterances occur. (c) Discourse competence relates to the ability in combining language form and meaning. (d) Strategy competence refers to the ability to overcome obstacles and simultaneously improve communication effectiveness.

In 1971 a group of experts began to develop language courses in which learning tasks are segmented into units. Each unit corresponds to a component of the learner’s needs, and is systematically related. This functional or communicative approach to language learning was readily accepted in Britain and was applied in textbooks and curricula. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.161) outlined certain CA characteristics as follows:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is to enable interaction and communication.
3. Language structure reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are categories of functional and communicative meaning in discourse.

**CA Principles**

Linguists such as Stephen Krashen have subsequently developed theories that support CA principles. Krashen viewed acquisition (rather than learning) as the basic process involved in developing language proficiency. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.162) stated, “Acquisition refers to the unconscious development of the target language as a result of using the language for real communication. Learning is the conscious representation of grammatical knowledge that has resulted from instruction and cannot lead to acquisition.” Krashen’s theory states that the acquired language system is used during communication, whereas the learned system is used merely to monitor the correctness of output from the acquired system. Thus, Krashen believed that language is learned using language communicatively rather than by practicing language skills.

The CA theory of learning includes three principles. The first is described as the communication principle, in which activities involving real communication naturally promote learning. Study and practice materials must relate to the actual lives of learners, using authentic language and materials taken from real life and the real world. The goal of foreign language learning is to gain communicative competence in the target language. In certain aspects, fluency is emphasized over accuracy to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use (Brown, 2000), and errors are ignored to a certain extent, particularly during communicative tasks. Errors are tolerated and viewed as a natural outcome of communication skill development. Because the activity involves fluency, the teacher does not correct the student, but simply notes the error, which the teacher returns to at a later point (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p.127). Idiomatic and everyday language is also encouraged in CA. In certain situations, slang terms can be introduced and practiced because this type of language is a real-life form used in communication between people (Demirezen, 2011).

The second principle in the CA is the task principle, in which activities that use language to perform meaningful tasks promote learning (Johnson, 1982). The social context of the communicative event is essential in giving meaning to utterances (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Communicative tasks emphasize the ability to understand the meaning of conveyed messages and using them in the foreign language. Class cooperation is essential for communicative tasks to be successful, and students must also have cooperative relationships among themselves. Cooperation exists between teachers and students and between students and students. Students must regularly work in groups or perform pair work, to transfer meaning in situations where one student has information the other(s) lack (Demirezen, 2011). Teachers should engage students in role-play or dramatization to promote their use of the target language in different social contexts, and observe what problems students have.

The third principle in the CA is the meaningfulness principle, in which language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. The CA is student-centered learning and requires teachers to create an atmosphere for student expression in English (Irmawati, 2012; Tao, Yu, & Jin, 2011). Learner needs are of utmost importance in the CA, and the syllabus must be based on student needs and interests. Teaching materials should meet students’ communication needs (Demirezen, 2011).

**CA Activities**

The development and use of a syllabus is central to the CA. The syllabus typically includes descriptions of the objectives of foreign language courses, situations in which students might typically need to use a foreign language, topics that might require discussion, the functions of language, and necessary vocabulary and grammar (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The range of CA classroom activities is limitless, but authentic and meaningful communication should always be the goal. Classroom activities are designed to engage students in the communicative process while working on tasks that relate to the communicative objectives of the curriculum.

Various materials are used to support the communicative approach to language teaching. Activities should provide opportunities for all students to rehearse real-life situations and provide opportunities for real-world communication (Demirezen, 2011). Classroom materials that fulfill the primary role of promoting communicative language use are classified as text based, task based, or “realia.” Examples of text-based materials include textbooks containing graded, sequenced language-practice exercises designed to support the CA. A typical lesson consists of a theme, a task for thematic development, a practice situation, and comprehension questions. Tasked-based activities used in CA classrooms include various games, role-play, dramatizations, projects, dialogues, sketches, and simulations designed for interactive formats, with opportunities to practice English expressions. Group activity is an important part of the CA, in which students conduct activities cooperatively. In group discussion, students are required to discuss first, summarize views to devise common points, and then express them in English. Group work provides students with opportunities to practice oral expression, train their logic, and develop other necessary communication skills (Tao, Yu, & Jin, 2011). Realia or authentic materials include magazines, advertisements, newspapers, or graphic and visual sources such as maps, pictures, graphs, and charts that can be used to build communicative activities. Learning activities are selected according to how well they engage learners in meaningful and authentic language use.

**CA Advantages**

The CA has numerous benefits when used in places that favor traditional foreign-language teaching methods. The traditional mode of teaching is “characterized by stereotyped monotonousness in teachers’ conducting classes, spoon-feeding way in interacting with students, and teachers’ blackboard-writing accompanying students’ note-taking” (Zhang, 2012, p.996 ). This type of language teaching does not develop communicative competence in foreign language learners. Students did not know how to communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions when were taught using the traditional grammatical method (Xu, 2010). When properly applied, Xu (2010) suggested that learners learn real-life knowledge and target-culture knowledge. Language teaching is a type of knowledge teaching, and the CA gives students a flexible situation in which they learn the language used in real-life situations. Students are not only exposed to new vocabulary but also to sentential and grammatical patterns (Xu, 2010). The CA also stimulates student-learning potential, because their motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways on significant topics. Students have more varied exposure to language when they use it in communicating. CA tasks use authentic resources, which enhance interest and motivation (Irmawati, 2012). Language teaching is a type of culture teaching, and the CA gives students more opportunities to understand the target-language culture than do other traditional approaches. Students can easily compare the differences between their own culture and the target culture when they practice dialogues (Xu, 2010).

**CA Disadvantages**

Similar to any teaching method, certain learners may find this approach to be initially interesting and refreshing, but become discontent with this teaching model in the classroom. This is because the CA is based on extensive use of pair, group, and mingling activities, in which learners communicate and complete tasks by typical interaction with other learners in their class. Therefore, teachers must vary not only the activities and topics, but also find ways for learners to interact with other students in the classroom when using this approach. Teachers must also be aware that, for the activities to be successful, learners must be confident to express their opinions and to speak English. CA learning requires active participation and students who are serious about performing tasks and who actively use the language (Irmawati, 2012). However, most students may be accustomed to the traditional passive-learning environment, particularly if they are concerned with accurate language use. Teachers must therefore not only be learning facilitators, but also motivators and learning prompters.

## Classroom Considerations

The emphasis on using English for communicative purposes has resulted in the CA. CA principles have been widely incorporated into English Learning Teaching (ELT) textbooks currently used in Taiwan. Many ELT textbooks integrate reading and writing or listening and speaking skills into everyday topics for students. ELT textbooks in the language classroom offer several advantages. These include having a structured set of clearly identified achievement objectives, consistency in the topics and genres across the four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and activities that are convenient for teachers to prepare (Chou, 2010, 2011). These advantages render ELT course books a popular choice in the English learning curriculum.

However, teachers should not rely on ELT textbooks as the sole source of classroom learning material; authentic materials must be used in combination with textbooks. Classroom activities should not be limited to the material presented in ELT textbooks because learners must be exposed to a wide range of different activities that promote communicative language use. Certain ELT textbooks do not provide an adequate amount of reading material to help learners build their vocabulary. Matsuoka and Hirsh (2010) showed that ELT textbooks provided minimal opportunities for learners to develop their vocabulary knowledge of words that were not used frequently or in academic contexts. The use of authentic materials for extensive reading practice developed greater vocabulary knowledge in language learners.

Developing student communicative competence is difficult in Taiwan because English is seldom used outside the classroom. The increasing possibilities in international trade, travel, professional cooperation between business, study, and research have changed habits and a growing need for good communication skills in English (Demirezen, 2011). The CA is applied to second- and foreign-language teaching, and mainly focuses on developing communicative competence through language use for meaningful purposes in authentic situations. If teachers properly apply the principles of this approach, learners not only learn by communicating with others but also find real-world applications for learning a foreign language.

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**8**

# Principles of Reading Instruction

## The nature of reading

Reading is perhaps the most important receptive skill a language learner needs to acquire. Reading is useful for language learning because it allows learners to gain vocabulary knowledge and to improve their spelling and writing ability (Harmer, 2007). A good reading text not only provides a model for English writing but also introduces interesting topics, stimulates discussion, and enhances a lesson. Reading material is commonly divided into two types, referred to as extensive reading and intensive reading. Extensive reading involves reading outside of the classroom, and may include novels, web pages, newspapers, magazines, or reference materials. Learners often choose to read whatever interests them and extensive reading materials are generally read for pleasure or leisure. By contrast, intensive reading refers to reading that occurs within the classroom. Learners do not choose the genre or topic but are required to read the content presented in the language course book. Intensive reading focuses on developing the learner’s reading skills. The skills learners need for effective reading include the extraction of main ideas and the ability to comprehend the finer details. In reading for main ideas, learners read the text to glean a general idea of its content. If they are asked to perform this task rapidly, the term “skimming” is used to describe the process. In reading for details, learners are required to locate specific information in the text to answer reading comprehension questions. In a test situation, learners may again be required to work rapidly and the process is then called “scanning”.

## The role of vocabulary and background knowledge in reading

Vocabulary and background knowledge are key components of reading comprehension. Students whose vocabulary is limited or who lack sufficient content knowledge on a theme or topic may have difficulty in comprehending a written or spoken text. Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in helping students to decode the text, whereas background knowledge helps them to understand and recall the text. Qian (2002) studied the roles of breadth versus depth of vocabulary in reading comprehension in academic settings. Breadth of vocabulary refers to the number of words a person knows, and depth of vocabulary refers to their familiarity with the meanings of words. These two aspects of vocabulary interact and affect the level of a student’s comprehension in reading. By contrast, background knowledge helps students to make inferences that aid comprehension (Brantmeier, 2005; Hammadou, 1991, 2000; Johnson, 1982; Lee, 1986; Nassaji, 2003).

Johnson (1982) conducted a study with ESL students who were asked to read a passage on Halloween. The findings showed that a lack of cultural familiarity affected the students’ reading comprehension of the passage to a greater extent than the pre-teaching of vocabulary. Lee (1986) found that learners’ ability to recall was enhanced when they were presented with one of the three components of background knowledge (context, transparency, and familiarity). A more recent study by Chou (2011A) showed that vocabulary knowledge was more essential to a foreign language learner than background knowledge. The reason for this finding is probably that one of the first steps in understanding a foreign language is decoding the individual words that make up phrases and sentences. Chou (2011A) showed that students who received a list of vocabulary words to study performed significantly better on a reading comprehension test than students who relied purely on background knowledge. The results of the study indicate that background knowledge and topic familiarity are two distinct matters. To gather background knowledge, the student must understand terminology and information that assist in drawing inferences. Thus, students who relied on background knowledge did not possess sufficient vocabulary knowledge to understand the reading passages. Similar observations have been reported that background knowledge may not help to improve a student’s reading comprehension of relatively long and difficult passages (Brantmeier, 2005; Hammadou, 2000; Pulido, 2004).

## Problems in Taiwanese students’ reading

Taiwanese students frequently encounter two problems in reading English. First, if they encounter an unknown word, they immediately search for its meaning in the dictionary. This urge to look up words is understandable, because vocabulary knowledge is an important variable affecting reading comprehension in both first and second language learning (Alderson, 2000; Joshi, 2005; Qian, 2002; Ricketts, Nation & Bishop, 2007). Without understanding the individual words, students would not be able to comprehend the overall text. However, students may encounter unknown words extremely frequently when reading authentic texts or advanced passages. The reading task then becomes an exercise in repeatedly checking the vocabulary, and the student begins to focus on vocabulary acquisition rather than understanding the overall content of the passage. The task of reading then becomes daunting and students often lose interest and motivation rapidly at this point.

The second problem that occurs in Taiwanese students’ reading is that students are unable to read critically. At primary and secondary school level, students tend to learn passively by listening to the teacher and memorizing facts and figures. Students do not enjoy sharing their opinions in the classroom, because any difference of opinion may be seen as a direct challenge to the teacher; in Taiwan, teachers are considered the highest authority and they are to be respected. As a result, few students contribute their ideas in a constructive manner and the majority of students are educated to be “receivers” (Hsieh, 2006). When students merely focus on identifying facts and figures in their reading, classroom discussions are often dominated by the teacher’s explanations of his or her own ideas, with little or no input from the learners.

## Principles for teaching reading

### Encourage students to read as often and widely as possible

Nation (2001) claimed that when learners read, they not only learn new words but also develop syntactic knowledge and broaden their general knowledge of the world. Studies have shown that students who participated in extensive reading increased their vocabulary knowledge (Hirsch, 2003; Horst, 2005) as well as their reading comprehension and fluency (Hirsch, 2003; Iwahori, 2008; Sheu, 2003). A possible explanation for these improvements is that students acquire new words incidentally through reading thousands of words every day. This method may be more effective than rote memorization, because when students read interesting texts they learn new vocabulary and review the meanings of words they already know. A steady increase in vocabulary is important because studies have shown a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Joshi & Aaron, 2000; Martin-Chang, 2008). Vocabulary knowledge is essential in reading comprehension and having a large vocabulary allows a student to comprehend and make inferences on texts. Vocabulary knowledge also helps students in decoding, which is an important part of reading (Qian, 2002). The more learners read, the less time they spend checking vocabulary in the dictionary, which in turn increases their reading pleasure.

### Students need to be engaged with what they are reading

Students must be involved and engaged with the material they read. This means that they should be presented with questions to develop their critical thinking rather than simply focusing on identifying information from the reading. Questions provide an effective prompt to help students develop and organize their thoughts (Hsieh, 2006). The use of authentic texts for extensive reading is particularly helpful for developing critical thinking skills. When ELT textbooks are used, students encounter uniform reading passages, questions, and answers; in these circumstances the classroom easily becomes teacher-centered, with passive learners who simply wait for the answers. When learners are required to confront a variety of texts, they have to take active responsibility for reading. Learners need to articulate information from the materials and perhaps share it with their classmates and teachers. Reading and learning then become active processes and learners must absorb more of what they read. Reading may also become more pleasurable as a result.

### The use of authentic texts is encouraged

Recent studies have shown that ELT textbooks provide minimal opportunities for learners to develop vocabulary knowledge beyond the limited range of words that are used frequently or academically (Chou, 2011B; Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010). These findings suggest that an additional extensive reading program is needed to promote vocabulary development when students are taught using language course books. For example, Chou (2011B) found that ELT textbooks did not provide adequate opportunities for learners to read fully developed passages such as those found in authentic texts. The material contained in ELT textbooks generally consisted of short descriptions of food and places, advertisements, interviews with a celebrity, or a questionnaire from a magazine. If learners were not additionally exposed to longer pieces of writing, they might encounter problems with academic reading in advanced classes or at tertiary level (Chou, 2011B). In addition, ELT textbooks are often designed in a mundane fashion with a traditional style, which may become boring to learners over time. Learners who are not given the opportunity to choose their own reading materials may find the reading passages in their textbooks too easy, which decreases their motivation to learn. Although motivation can be enhanced by interesting class activities, if the textbook is uninteresting then keeping students motivated becomes a challenge regardless of other classroom activities (Chou, 2011B). The supplemental use of authentic texts overcomes these limitations of ELT textbooks. In addition, students who read widely, especially for pleasure, will increase their vocabulary and reading rate, both of which facilitate reading comprehension (Martin-Chang, Lyn & Gould, 2008).

## Considerations in teaching reading

### Pre-reading activities

An important aspect of pre-reading preparation entails providing the learners with sufficient background knowledge. This would include general information about the topic or theme of the article, and relevant vocabulary. The majority of ELT textbooks include introductory activities in each lesson’s design. However, when using authentic materials the teacher must help the learners to prepare for their encounter with the text. Typical activities include discussions on what learners already know about the topic and presentation of a list of key words. These activities help learners to think about the topic and anticipate ideas that might assist in comprehension.

### Main reading activities

The teaching of reading takes several forms and each works well with certain types of material. The teacher can read to the class as a semi-lecture that includes reading passages and explaining key points along the way. Learners may find this method helpful especially when dealing with complex texts of the kind commonly encountered in authentic materials. Alternatively, the lesson can be conducted as a discussion, with the teacher asking comprehension questions and probing the learners’ opinions on the topic. This method facilitates the learners’ ability to relate to the text and develop their critical thinking skills.

The teacher may also select students to read parts of a passage aloud or may ask the class to perform choral reading. These methods allow students to practice their English pronunciation. When students read aloud individually in class, the teacher can identify difficulties or problems that they may be experiencing in reading. The main disadvantage of asking individual students to read aloud is that less proficient learners may feel shy or become so anxious that their voices are barely audible. Choral reading overcomes this problem because all the students read together, but less proficient learners still have the chance to read aloud and practice their English pronunciation. The challenge in choral reading is to synchronize the entire class to read in unison. The teacher can facilitate this by reading the first few words of a sentence to set the tempo for the class to follow.

### Post-reading activities

The main purpose of post-reading activities is to check the students’ comprehension and further develop their critical thinking skills. Learners should be able to comprehend both the main ideas and specific details of the text. ELT textbooks typically include post-reading activities that are based on the reading and present multiple-choice or short answer questions. For authentic materials, teachers do not always need to prepare multiple-choice questions to check the students’ understanding; short answer questions can be more effective. Taiwanese learners tend to benefit from short answer questions rather than multiple-choice, because providing short answers requires them to understand and analyze the passage to identify specific points. The student thus needs to grasp the meaning of the text correctly rather than merely thinking about whether the multiple-choice items are foils or correct. Asking students to provide short answers to questions can also stimulate classroom discussion. Learners are required to answer questions using complete sentences, which gives them the opportunity to practice their language skills.

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**9**

# Principles of Writing Instruction

## The nature of writing

Writing is a productive skill that involves producing language to communicate a message. Writing tasks give students more “thinking time” than spontaneous conversation, which provides an opportunity for language processing. To write, we need to be able to form letters and words, and to join them together to make sentences to communicate a message to an audience. According to Harmer (2007), writing can be divided into two types: writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing. Writing-for-learning tasks are assigned by language teachers to help students practice and work with the language they are studying. This may include the study and use of grammar and vocabulary items or the study of writing in various genres. Students may be asked to complete controlled or guided writing exercises that draw on their grammar or vocabulary knowledge to produce an appropriate text. They may also complete longer pieces of writing, such as writing in different genres. The genre approach requires students to study texts in a specific genre before attempting to write their own passage using the same style or genre. This exercise provides a general framework in which the students can imitate a work and produce their own writing; the clarity and structure of this approach tends to reduce the students’ stress and the anxiety of wondering what to say. Students writing within a certain genre need to consider various factors, such as their knowledge of the topic, the conventions and styles of the genre, and the context in which their writing will be read (Harmer, 2001).

In writing-for-writing, students focus on improving their writing skills. Focal points may include appropriate language use, text construction, layout, style, and effectiveness. Activities for this type of writing include tasks such as writing poetry, stories, and plays. These activities are referred to as creative writing; frequently such tasks engage students more thoroughly than guided writing exercises, and students may strive harder than usual and produce a greater variety of passages displaying correct and appropriate language (Harmer, 2001). However, some students find writing imaginatively difficult because they have “nothing to say”; for such students, creative writing exercises may constitute a painful and frustrating experience. Thus the teacher should not expect well-written compositions at the outset, because not all students in the class will have the necessary skills and ideas for creative writing. Teachers should instill reasonable expectations at the beginning and build up students’ creative writing bit by bit.

## Problems frequently encountered with Taiwanese students

The problems that Taiwanese students tend to have in learning accurate language use and writing skills can be categorized into three areas. These are grammar, word usage, and organization. Taiwanese students are typically meticulous in avoiding grammatical mistakes, as they “[have] the impression that good writing is correct writing, rather than considering features of writing that are important in communicating a message to a reader” (Shih, 1999, p. 21). However, grammatical problems do not necessarily reflect an inadequate grasp of English grammar. Students often make the worst errors when translating a Chinese sentence into English but retaining the Chinese sentence structure (Hsieh, 2006). Thus students who comprehend a passage might actually make worse errors than those whose comprehension is limited. Furthermore, knowledge of a word’s meaning does not necessarily imply the student knows how to use the word. Students often use a dictionary to try and find words to express their ideas, but they may select an inappropriate word and this reduces the comprehensibility of their writing. Knowing a word well enough to use it competently involves more than simply being aware of a singular meaning; it also includes knowledge of the lexical aspects such as the word’s grammatical behavior, collocations, and register senses (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). Finally, Chinese cognitive patterns differ widely from those of English speakers. When talking about a topic, Chinese or other Asian people frequently talk “around” the topic, whereas Americans go straight to the point (Hsieh, 2006). These cultural differences may cause students with poor writing skills to struggle even more with simple sentence construction and the writing of paragraphs. Sometimes their texts are so unintelligible that readers cannot grasp even the main points.

## Principles for teaching writing

### Writing should promote meaningful communication

Students in Taiwan need to learn to write with the intention of sharing and communicating their thoughts and opinions. Too often, students at the tertiary level have trouble producing a cohesive and coherent text because they are unsure what to say. The problem arises partly from the schooling system, in which the curricula emphasize the controlled practice of writing simple sentences that are grammatically correct. In other words, students might be used to writing-for-learning but not writing-for-writing. Such students are often able to produce a piece of text based on learning the structures of sentences rather than learning the structures of written communication.

Teachers can help students overcome this problem and build their confidence by planning assignments that prompt them to write about their past experiences. For example, students will likely feel more able to write about their family or a memorable summer vacation than a complex topic such as “How can Taiwan's air quality be improved?” One cannot expect a student aged 18 years or thereabouts to have something meaningful to say about such an unfamiliar and advanced topic. Most young adults are concerned about fashion, celebrity news, or the latest social trends. According to Leki and Garson (1997, p. 50), “if the crucial condition of familiarity with the topic was met, many students felt that writing without having to be concerned about a source text was liberating.” Similarly, Reid (1996, p. 42) stated that “the more students know about any topic and the more background knowledge they have, the easier it is to learn more about that topic, and the more effective students will be in communicating that information in writing.”

### Writing should promote critical thinking

Critical thinking is not fostered sufficiently by the Taiwanese school system. In traditional English classes, the class size and standardized curricula and examinations mean that teachers often focus purely on teaching word usage and grammatical analysis (Hsieh, 2006). As a result, students do not learn to develop their own view points through providing facts or examples or by articulating their reasoning. One method of developing critical thinking is by reading and responding to a written text. However, in Taiwan, students in reading classes usually read at a superficial level, for example by skimming or scanning. Then they check their reading comprehension of a text by responding to multiple-choice questions or completing short written exercises. Any discussion of the text is usually oral, and the written responses are seldom longer than a page. These controlled exercises in reading and writing can harm the learners, because they do not gain experience in reading more than one passage at a time and making logical connections between articles.

An example of this problem is the challenge of writing a research paper. The majority of Taiwanese students do not write any research papers until their final year of study at a college or university. Writing up a piece of research is an extremely advanced writing skill as it involves so many different components. None of their writing classes have prepared the students for this type of writing. The result is that teachers are faced with students who lack critical thinking skills, and research papers that are typically based on summarizing and paraphrasing ideas obtained from a single source. The end product may resemble a rendition of that one source and generally does not show any evidence of personal or original thinking and opinions about the topic.

To overcome this problem, teachers at the tertiary level should make written exercises, in which students are asked to respond to a reading passage in writing, a regular part of the classroom activity. This is especially important when authentic reading materials are used. Short stories, novels, and news articles usually contain several messages or issues that can be discussed in a written response by the student. By helping students to identify and respond to textual messages and issues, the teacher fosters critical thinking skills and gives the writing task a meaningful purpose and authentic function. Once students know how to read and write critically, writing a research paper becomes a far more manageable task. The development of critical thinking can also help students overcome the problem of encountering a mental “blank” when asked to respond to a topic.

### Writing should promote accurate language use

In Taiwan, grammar has been taught for years at universities and colleges as a required course for English majors (Chang, 2011). Grammar can be defined as a set of rules for changing or combining the words in a language to form acceptable units of meaning (Penny, 2000). Because grammar is an indispensable part of a language, teachers and students attach great importance to the teaching and learning thereof. The current system of grammar teaching in colleges continues to be based on the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (Chang, 2011). In a typical lesson, language structures are presented by the teacher and then practiced by students in spoken or written exercises. Thereafter, the learners use the newly-learned language structures in less controlled speaking or writing activities.

Although the traditional grammar teaching method helps students to master the grammatical rules, it has certain disadvantages that hinder students’ development of communicative competence (Chang, 2011). The traditional method is teacher-centered and little attention is paid specifically to developing the students’ communicative ability in English. The students spend the majority of class time listening to the teacher’s explanation of English grammar rules and performing controlled practice. These types of teaching and learning activities add little to the learner’s communicative competence. Although Taiwanese students are generally able to complete grammar exercises and tests successfully, merely possessing grammatical knowledge does not necessarily mean the learner is able to communicate a message clearly to the reader. Many students achieve perfect scores on grammar tests but cannot communicate clearly in a piece of independent writing.

The ideal solution for Taiwanese students’ problems in writing grammar is to encourage them to write as much as they can. Writing is a learned skill and the more one does it, the more proficient one becomes. The primary focus of writing should be to communicate a message clearly to the reader, without worrying too much whether the tenses and subject/verb agreement are correct. When students are able to say or write something clearly, with adequate grammatical accuracy, they have successfully learned to communicate. Students should not be graded purely on the quality of their grammar; over correction can prove to be extremely demotivating for students (Harmer, 2007). Grammatical errors that interfere with meaning and comprehensibility should be corrected ahead of other types of grammatical errors.

The content and organization of ideas is another major component of good writing. In addition, students should be encouraged to read as extensively as possible to develop a sense of how to organize and express their ideas clearly to the reader. Students gain background knowledge and vocabulary from reading and also gradually learn to express their ideas in English in phrases similar to those used by native speakers. When students become able to think and write in English without resorting to translation, their writing will become easier to understand and will contain fewer grammatical errors. The advantage of the WLA method is that it integrates all four skills in the learning process, and activity in one area may also improve the students’ skills in other areas.

## Considerations in teaching writing

Writing is a process. One of the goals of writing instruction is to help learners understand this process and become successful writers, both in the classroom and beyond. The process of writing includes planning what one will write, drafting the text, reviewing and editing it, and then producing a final draft.

### Pre-writing activities

The first step in the writing process is to identify the topic. The majority of ELT textbooks offer students a choice of topics to write about. However, at times students are required to select their own topic; this is often the case when teachers present authentic materials in the classroom. Initially, teachers may find that students have difficulty in selecting their own topics. At such times, teachers can assist by providing numerous ideas for topics until the students understand the writing process well enough to try on their own.

After the topic has been established, teachers should help the students to plan and organize their writing. This stage includes gathering ideas and making an outline of the intended content. Although students may be asked to write individual assignments, the process of planning does not have to be done individually. Planning pair or group work activities during this stage of writing can be beneficial to the learners because they can gather new ideas from their partners. Pair or group work also allows them to practice their language skills. After the planning stage is complete, the learners can begin writing the first draft.

### Main writing activities

The goal of the first draft is to produce a piece of writing that will later be finalized and then evaluated by the teacher. The first draft is usually the most time-consuming part of the writing process. The teacher should instruct the learners to try and produce a piece of writing that is not necessary grammatically correct but has comprehensible content and conveys the intended meaning. Teaching students to write effectively requires guiding them to edit and revise their own drafts. The most common errors in Taiwanese students’ writing include capitalization, spelling errors, and faulty punctuation. These problems can be identified by the learners themselves, and they should be taught to check the text carefully before moving on to post-writing activities.

### Post-writing activities

Before students turn in their writing assignments, post-writing activities are recommended to assist them with editing and rewriting the paper. A widely used method involves peer-editing in the classroom, and peer-editing offers several advantages. First, each learner can read and observe how other people have organized and written their assignments. Peer-editing is beneficial for writers who are not yet proficient because they can refer to other students’ assignments as a model, and can observe the language that the author used to express his or her views. Peer-editing also provides input from other students, who might be able to correct grammatical problems or give useful feedback. This would reduce the amount of editing or correcting the teacher is required to do on the final draft. Peer-editing activities not only enhance the learners’ writing skills but also allow the students to learn about each other, which can foster learner autonomy.

When correcting learners’ written assignments, teachers must be careful in their approach. Overcorrection can be extremely demotivating for students (Harmer, 2007). If learners receive an assignment full of red marks and a poor grade, they may feel hurt and discouraged because the grade might not reflect the time and effort they invested in the paper. Correcting every minor grammatical mistake will not help a learner to become a better writer, whereas feedback on the style and content of the piece is generally useful (Harmer, 2007). Thus, the teacher should give the student an honest opinion and should make suggestions in response to the paper. Grading rubrics are a useful tool for providing feedback without risking overcorrection. The use of a grading rubric guides learners to concentrate on multiple aspects of their writing rather than simply the grammar. Learners have the reassurance of knowing that they may achieve a good grade even if their grammar is poor, because their writing will be judged partly on its content and format. Grading rubrics allow learners to identify aspects of their writing that are acceptable and other areas that require further effort. When writing, learners should focus on the effective communication of a message rather than simply the grammatical aspects. Communication should be the goal of writing and language development in general.

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**10**

# Principles of Teaching Listening Skills

## The nature of listening

Listening, like reading, constitutes a receptive skill, but “receptive” does not mean “passive”. Listening is an active process that demands a number of complex processes on the part of the learner (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Shu, 2009; Zhang, 2011). To understand the content of what has been heard, people need to employ their knowledge of the spoken language, using phonological and grammatical patterns, extensive knowledge of lexical items, and contextual clues. Shu (2009, p.133) points out that “the decoding of a message calls for active participation in communication between participants”. Constant interaction occurs between the listener and the speaker. For example, during a conversation or discussion, the listener also participates as a speaker by reacting verbally to the other person’s message (Zhang, 2011). Zhang (2011) constructed the following outline of the process of listening comprehension (Figure 1):

***Figure 1. The process of listening comprehension as mapped by Zhang (2011)***

Knowledge

Analysis

Comprehension

Perception

Application

Code

Decode

According to Cele-Murcia (1995), listening comprehension includes both a bottom-up and a top-down process. This bottom-up and top-down model of information processing is increasingly advocated and applied by English teachers to foster listening comprehension and communication skills (Wang, 2011). Top-down processing refers to the ability to interpret the general meaning of a message using schemata or structures of knowledge (Nunan, 1998). This view emphasizes the role of the listener’s (learner’s) background knowledge in making sense of the information they hear. Bottom-up processing, on the other hand, involves constructing meaning from the smallest unit of the spoken language to form phrases and sentences that are interpreted (Nunan, 1998). According to Harmer (2007), different skills are used for different types of activities. For example, top-down processing is used when teachers want learners to identify the main ideas or gist of a lecture or spoken message. Bottom-up processing is used when teachers want the learners to listen for specific information or details.

## Problems in Taiwanese students’ listening

Many learners who are proficient in English reading may have trouble with English listening. The major difference between reading and listening is that the words remain visible on the page during reading, whereas they disappear as soon as they have been heard while listening. This transience causes problems for learners because they are unable to go back and check their understanding of what was said. In addition, when reading, learners can look up unknown words, whereas they might not be able to recall unfamiliar words that they heard but did not see. These difficulties result partly from the manner in which traditional English listening classes are conducted. In a typical listening lesson, students listen to a taped script of a conversation or lecture; thereafter, they answer multiple-choice questions based on the content of the passage. In this type of lesson, correct answers are emphasized but the listening process necessary to decode information is ignored. Students are tested on their ability to answer questions correctly and are not taught how to listen accurately in English.

## Effects of anxiety on listening

Anxiety is one of the factors that can result in poor listening ability. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991, p.87), “Anxious students are likely to experience mental block, negative self-talk and ruminate over a poor performance which affects their ability to process information in language learning contexts”. Young (1992) pointed out that listening tasks provoke great anxiety if the listener finds the discourse incomprehensible. Studies on anxiety in the classroom have been correlational by design and have shown that a negative correlation exists between anxiety level and achievement measures. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) found a significant negative correlation between classroom anxiety and performance on a vocabulary learning task for French students. Two studies have used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and showed that a significant negative correlation existed between FLCAS scores and final grades (Aida, 1994; Saito & Samimy, 1996). Other studies have confirmed the negative relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and listening proficiency (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Sadighi et al., 2009).

A recent study by Wang (2010) found that several factors contributed to listening anxiety in Chinese students who were English majors. These factors included the number of times the passage was listened to, whether or not the passage was presented with an accent (i.e., not standard American English), the speed at which the speaker spoke, and whether visual cues accompanied the passage. Approximately half (51.8%) of the participants reported feeling nervous if they were allowed to hear a passage only once during an English listening exam. The majority (70.3%) of the participants reported feeling nervous if they were exposed to English spoken with an accent that was difficult to understand. If English was spoken rapidly, 69.4% of the participants worried that they might not understand the entire passage. Finally, 73.1% of the participants reported that they felt more relaxed when visual cues were presented, such as pictures, television programs, or facial expressions, to help them understand the context better. Wang (2010) concluded that listening anxiety was negatively correlated with the use of listening comprehension strategies, and that students who used a greater number of strategies in their listening process experienced lower levels of anxiety.

## Principles for teaching listening skills

### Pre-listening activities can increase listening comprehension

Pre-listening activities are important to learners for several reasons: (a) they help to build background knowledge; (b) they help learners to make predictions; and (c) they build listening skills. Background knowledge is an important factor in listening because learners are better equipped to decode speech if they possess adequate background information (Brown, 2001; Numan, 1999). Pre-listening activities prompt the teacher to provide students with background knowledge they might otherwise lack, and help to narrow the gap between listener and speaker. Chiang and Dunkel (1992) stated that:

…written text, or spoken discourse, does not carry meaning in and of itself. Rather, meaning occurs as a result of the interaction between the reader’s or listener’s prior knowledge about the world and the text or speech. This world knowledge is rooted in life experiences and enables individuals to make inferences and form expectations about commonplace situations. (p.350)

Background knowledge helps learners to decode meaning as they read, and it also helps them to make predictions while listening. Mendelsohn (1994) stated that strategies such as guessing and inferring should be taught to learners to help them compensate for a possible lack of understanding. Learners of a foreign language frequently do not comprehend everything they hear, and need to guess the meaning of the sections they did not fully understand and predict what might follow. Sufficient background knowledge increases their chance of success. Finally, some important listening strategies can be learned from pre-listening activities. These strategies include listening for the gist (main ideas), listening for specific information, learning to predict or make inferences, and learning to interpret non-verbal cues.

### Students should listen to both commercial and authentic materials

Standard ELT materials provide good listening opportunities for students because they are well structured, with practice exercises to gradually build the students’ listening skills. However, language learning should equip students to understand the target language in the real world. If learners are accustomed to using artificial materials only, they cannot achieve this goal. Herron and Seay (1991, p. 488) stated that “Teachers are urged to exploit more authentic text (video and film, radio broadcasts, television programs) in all levels of foreign language instruction in order to involve students in activities that mirror ‘real life’ listening contexts”. Authentic language and real-world activities allow students to relate their classroom activities to their long-term language learning goals (Brown, 2001). At times, authentic materials may be too challenging for learners; in such cases the teacher should break down the materials to provide simple tasks to help learners develop their listening ability. This simplification would prevent learners from becoming confused, frustrated, or demotivated.

## Considerations when teaching listening

In the classroom, teachers can use various listening activities to support the students’ interpretation of the text. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) and Wang (2011) suggested that listening activities can be categorized into pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening tasks.

### Pre-listening activities

Pre-listening activities fulfill two primary goals. First, they help to activate students’ prior knowledge and build their anticipation for information that may follow (prediction). The top-down approach is often used in predicting information during this process. Teachers may ask students to predict the content or what they think a speaker is going to say, based on information provided in the textbook. Second, pre-listening tasks provide the necessary context for a specific listening task. The teacher may select certain words, difficult grammatical structures, or expressions and offer explanations for these during an initial discussion of the topic (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). These warm-up activities help students to guess what will follow next, and prepare them to establish a link between their existing knowledge and the new information (Wang, 2011).

### While-listening activities

Many listening tasks require students to make interpretations and judgments based on what they heard, or to answer comprehension questions. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011, p. 982), suggested that “while-listening activities usually have some of the following purposes: to focus students’ comprehension of the speaker’s language and ideas; to focus students’ attention on such things as the speaker‘s organizational patterns; to encourage students’ critical reactions and personal responses to the speaker‘s ideas and use of language.” To fulfill these objectives, students must perform several mental operations including processing the information, holding the information in short-term memory, determining the speech event, making inferences about the speaker, recalling background information, and assigning a literal or intended meaning to the information (Wang, 2011). Bottom-up processing is significant at this stage of the activity. Teachers might choose to play the listening passage twice to help students process and understand all the information presented. For the first listening, students should be instructed to aim for a general understanding of the material by thinking about *Who*, *Where*, *When*, *What*, *Why* and *How* questions. The second listening should be focused on details and the learners should be asked to make written notes.

### Post-listening activities

Well-planned post-listening activities offer students the opportunity to connect the information they have just heard with their own existing ideas and experiences. In addition, such exercises encourage interpretive and critical listening (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Post-listening activities allow the teacher to assess and check students’ comprehension and clarify the meanings of words or phrases. Effective post-listening activities help students to extend their listening comprehension beyond the literal level to the interpretive and critical levels. Examples of such activities include identifying functional language use and inferring the meaning of new words. Post-listening activities are most effective when performed immediately after the listening experience (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

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11

# Principles in Coaching Students to Speak

## The nature of speaking

Similar to writing, speaking is a productive skill that involves using speech to communicate a message to others. Speaking is one of the most complex skills in language learning because it entails many dimensions. These include fluency and accuracy in speaking and the use of interactive strategies. Fluency refers to speaking at a normal speed and without hesitation, repetition, or excessive self-correction; fluent speakers are able to connect their spoken utterances smoothly. Accuracy in speaking entails the correct use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Interactive strategies include eye contact, facial expressions, asking questions to check the speaker’s meaning or message, and confirming one’s understanding. Classroom activities should develop the speaking skills of learners by focusing regularly on particular aspects of speaking, such as fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and body language.

## Problems in the spoken English of Taiwanese students

Speaking is a complex skill that includes knowledge of various other skills in a specific language, a skill that is most often neglected in the EFL classroom (Chaung, 2009). Schools throughout Asia tend to emphasize vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills over speaking skills in the language classroom (Cheng, 2006). Classroom organization is typically teacher centered, with learners sitting in rows facing the teacher. In a typical speaking class, students spend most of their time repeating and manipulating models provided by the teacher, the textbook, and audio recordings. Although students in such classrooms read texts correctly with accurate intonation and memorize numerous words and expressions, they rarely learn how to use stored knowledge in an organized or creative manner. They do not learn how to express their own ideas and to share them by communicating with others (Meng, 2010).

Foreign languages, including English, are seldom encountered outside the classroom, and most learners lack other opportunities to hear and speak English. Therefore, helping students speak fluently and communicate clearly in English is a difficult but necessary task for language teachers. Speakers who lack fluency are characterized by a slow rate of speech, false starts, and long pauses (Gorsuch, 2011). Hsieh (2006) cited an example of students in Taiwan who froze and were speechless on stage during an impromptu speech contest. The English-speaking problems of Taiwanese students can be categorized into three aspects: (a) language; (b) speaking skills; and (c) background knowledge (Hsieh, 2006). Learners with a limited vocabulary may have difficulty finding the right words when conversing, and others make frequent grammatical errors. For speaking skills, certain learners have difficulty presenting their ideas clearly and logically. Hsieh (2006, p.227) stated, “When talking about a topic, Chinese, and many Asians, usually talk around the topic, while Americans, the largest group of English speakers, go straight to the point.” Finally, many learners do not possess sufficient background knowledge to converse fluently on a topic, which might result in their feeling that they do not have anything meaningful to say.

Pronunciation is another feature of speaking that Taiwanese learners struggle with even after years of having learned English. Pronunciation refers to producing sounds to form meaning. This includes attention to particular language sounds (segments), aspects of speech beyond individual sounds such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, and rhythm (suprasegmental aspects), how the voice is projected (voice quality), and attention to gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way people speak in a language (Gilakjani, 2012). Pronunciation problems often involve intelligibility, which suggests that those starting to learn English after their school years are most likely to experience difficulties in acquiring intelligible pronunciation. This difficulty is unrelated to intelligence or education level, or even knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, but is related to conceptual sound patterns from their first language that have been internalized in childhood (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). The result is what is often referred to as an accent. Pronunciation is the habit of continually producing sounds and accents that are a result of first-language habits (Gilakjani, 2012). Changing the way a learner pronounces words involves altering the manner in which they think about the component sounds of those words. Traditional approaches to pronunciation have often focused on segmental aspects, but to help learners acquire communicative competence, the emphasis should be on suprasegmental features of pronunciation (Seferoglu, 2005).

## Principles for coaching students to speak English

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### Controlled to less controlled classroom activities

Classroom learners benefit from both controlled and less controlled speaking-practice activities. Controlled practice provides limited opportunities for speaking because learners focus solely on accuracy rather than on real communication. The benefits of controlled speaking activities in the classroom are numerous, particularly at lower levels. First, these activities provide useful preparation for less controlled practice activities. Beginner students and children require ample time to process new language knowledge before producing fluent speech. Learners typically produce language that is more correct if they have sufficient practice time. Second, controlled-speaking tasks allow learners to practice simple sentences or dialogues to build confidence before attempting to speak more freely in real communicative tasks. Most learners are nervous when asked to speak in front of others, and the opportunity to practice controlled speech can help them overcome this anxiety. Finally, the use of the ALM as a controlled-practice activity helps learners improve their pronunciation. When learners repeat sentences and dialogues with the teacher, their pronunciation and fluency gradually improve.

Freer speaking practice tasks are activities that require learners to use their own language to communicate and interact with others. The use of CLL activities such as classroom discussions, oral presentations, and dramas and role-plays benefit both subject-content areas and language learning. CLL promotes team-building strategies, practice in developing social skills, academic information sharing, content mastery, and building communication and thinking skills (Kagan, 1986; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006). Teachers must provide learners adequate time to plan and prepare for free-speech activities so that they can perform well and feel satisfied with their performance.

### Incorporating speaking activities with other subjects

Learners speak more willingly in class if they have a reason to communicate and wish to share an opinion or information. Most ELT textbooks help learners achieve this goal though carefully planned topics and activities. English-speaking skills are commonly integrated with listening tasks that require students to listen to a passage on a certain topic, followed by classroom discussion and activities. To stimulate discussion, teachers can incorporate speaking tasks into other subjects, particularly reading or writing. In the reading class, the teacher can ask students to present summaries of articles or stories they have read. This task gives learners a topic to discuss and the opportunity to speak. In the writing class, the teacher can ask learners to read their written passages aloud to the class. Reading aloud is a form of controlled-speaking practice. Students do not have to think about what to say when they are reading, unless they have not completed the assignment. This task provides an opportunity for the teacher to identify problems that might occur in the learner’s writing and pronunciation.

## Considerations for coaching students to speak English

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### Pre-speaking activities

Pre-task activities in speaking help learners prepare to speak in English. Most Taiwanese learners are shy in public speaking and need time to prepare. Most ELT textbooks (in which listening and speaking are integrated tasks) present speaking activities following the listening passage for the unit or chapter. The speaking activities in ELT textbooks are designed to develop the critical thinking skills of learners, in addition to practicing English speech. The same goals are pertinent when speaking tasks are combined with other language-skill tasks, such as reading or writing. The main goal of pre-task activities in speaking is to allow learners time to gather their thoughts and perhaps write down what they want to say. Impromptu speaking is not practiced regularly in the classroom and should be reserved for advanced English learners. Students feel more confident when they are allowed to read a speech aloud or to memorize their speech before presenting it to the class. This is equally true for speaking activities such as paired conversations or group role-playing.

### Main speaking activities

Most teachers consider practical speaking activities to entail the actual performance of learners in paired conversations or group role-playing in front of the class. However, speaking practice includes the time that learners spend practicing their conversations or role-play with partners. Such practice runs indicate that the students’ total language-practice time exceeds that of actually speaking in front of the class. Learners have only one chance to perform in front of the class, but may practice their dialogue beforehand several times. The gains of such practice, rather than the student’s brief stage performance, typically account for improved speaking ability.

### Post-speaking activities

Teachers should refrain from interrupting a learner who is speaking on stage or at the front of the class. This is an inappropriate moment to correct student errors in grammar or pronunciation because such interruptions disrupt student concentration and increase anxiety, which might result in the student forgetting his or her prepared speech. However, most learners appreciate feedback on their English after they have completed the spoken task. Teachers should take notes while the learner is speaking, and provide feedback at the presentation end. Teachers can decide whether to comment on individual learners or make general comments to the class as a whole. Pre-task activities of subsequent lessons can address speaking problems that learners encountered during the activity, to gradually enhance the ability of students to speak English.

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**Summary and Conclusion**

Teachers are as unique as the students they teach. The focus of a teacher should not be on the “right” or “wrong” way of teaching English, but on continued growth from experiences and developing a personal approach to teaching. Each new class, new textbook, and new student provide a new learning opportunity. A good teacher is not necessarily someone who successfully helps learners complete a language course or pass an examination, but who demonstrates the ability to adapt to changes and focus on student needs.

In Taiwan, educational policies are constantly changing to meet societal needs and demands. These changes may affect the “teachers’ pedagogical values and beliefs, their understanding of the nature of language or second language learning, or their classroom practices and uses of teaching materials” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 246). Therefore, as with any changes in educational policies, a teacher must also make changes in teaching to meet the needs and requirements of new policies. We mentioned that the English-teaching trend has changed from a teacher-centered tradition to a communicative approach. However, numerous foreign teachers traveling to teach in Taiwan have experienced attempting to start a class discussion in a group of learners who are silent, passive, and non-participatory. This is because the traditional methods of teaching have not changed as quickly as the changes in educational policies. The communicative approach is primarily developed and used in the United States and other English-speaking countries, which are culturally diverse from Taiwan. However, studies have reported that Asian students were able to maintain a high level of academic achievement throughout their studies abroad (Park, 2000; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001; Volet & Renshaw, 1996). This shows that Taiwanese students can be successful learners under different learning contexts. To help English learners break away from the traditional methods of learning, teachers must adopt different language-learning theories and approaches into their teaching.

**Developing a personal teaching approach**

For a novice teacher, learning different teaching methods and approaches is useful. Understanding the techniques and procedures of a specific method provides teachers confidence and strategies when presenting lessons. The methods and approaches are also a rich resource for classroom activity. Every teaching method and approach in this book has a certain merit, and individual teachers must apply the theories and principles in the classroom based on their own interpretation, skill, and expertise. The following questions are useful to ask when adopting and implementing different classroom methods and approaches:

1. What are the major theories and assumptions in the method or approach?
2. What advantages do the methods and approaches offer? How are they more effective than current practices?
3. How can the theories and assumptions from the methods and approaches be applied to classroom practices? How compatible are the theories and assumptions with teacher beliefs and classroom practices?

The answers to these questions indicate that no teacher teaches with only one type of teaching method or approach. Each teacher has his or her own personal approach to teaching based on individual values, beliefs, principles, and experiences. In certain cases, these values, beliefs, principles, and experiences are based on various teaching methods and approaches they have used. Therefore, understanding the differences in the theories and assumptions of various teaching methods and approaches is an important step in assisting teachers to develop their own teaching approach.

**Connecting it all together**

The methods and approaches presented in this book include both traditional and non-traditional teaching methods. Both are combined to create a more powerful approach to teaching English. The following illustrates how theories and principles from different methods and approaches may influence the manner in which we teach the four skills:

**Reading**

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| --- | --- |
| Reading Principles | Influence from methods and approaches |
| 1. Encourage students to read as often and as much as possible 2. Students need to be engaged with what they are reading 3. The use of authentic text is encouraged whenever possible | * Whole Language Approach (WLA) * Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) |

Both the WLA and CLT stress that language is to be used for meaningful communication. Because the goal of language learning is to communicate effectively in the target language, WLA and CLT stress using authentic materials because they are produced for communication purposes. When learners read authentic texts inside and outside of the classroom, they become more engaged and interested in what they read. This encourages learners to treat reading as an act of enjoyment rather than as an academic task. Extensive reading not only develops learners’ general knowledge of the world, but also promotes learning by increasing vocabulary knowledge (Hirsch, 2003; Horst, 2005), and improves reading comprehension and reading fluency (Hirsch, 2003; Iwahori, 2008; Sheu, 2003). The theories and assumptions form WLA and CLT make reading more pleasurable and motivate learners to continue learning.

**Writing**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Writing Principles | Influence from methods and approaches |
| 1. Writing should promote meaningful communication 2. Writing should promote critical thinking 3. Writing should promote accurate language use | * Grammar Translation Method (GTM) * Whole Language Approach (WLA) * Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) |

Writing principles are based on the theories and principles from the WLA and CLT. However, grammar study using the GTM is important because controlled or guided writing exercises help learners produce an appropriate text. Implicit writing instruction is also necessary to help learners overcome problems of grammar, word usage, and organization. Focal points may include appropriate language use, text construction, layout, style, and effectiveness. To promote meaningful communication in writing, learners should learn to write with the intention of sharing and communicating their thoughts and opinions. When learners are able to produce a cohesive and coherent text, they also improve their critical thinking by developing their own viewpoint through providing facts or examples or by articulating their reasoning. Coupled with accurate language use from grammatical studies, writing becomes meaningful communication.

**Listening**

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| Listening Principles | Influence from methods and approaches |
| 1. Activate pre-listening activities to increase listening comprehension 2. Students should listen to both commercial and authentic materials | * Whole Language Approach * Communicative Language Teaching |

Unlike reading, words disappear as soon as they have been heard. Recalling unfamiliar words that are heard, but not seen, is a major challenge to learners. The fear of not seeing words that are heard may increase anxiety levels and reduce performance. Therefore, in listening instruction, pre-listening activities activate the schemas necessary for listening. These include listening for the gist (main ideas), listening for specific information, learning to predict or make inferences, and learning to interpret non-verbal cues. Learners who acquire these necessary skills are ready to understand the target language in the real world. The WLA and CLT stress using authentic materials to communicate for real purposes. Exposing learners to authentic language allows them to relate their classroom activities to their long-term language learning goals (Brown, 2001).

**Speaking**

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| --- | --- |
| Speaking Principles | Influence from methods and approaches |
| 1. Classroom activities should involve both controlled and less controlled practice 2. Speaking activities should be regularly incorporated with other subjects | * Audio-lingual Method (ALM) * Whole Language Approach (WLA) * Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) * Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) |

Speaking can be a frightening experience for a Taiwanese learner. This is because in Taiwan, schools tend to emphasize vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills over speaking skills. Consequently, poor English speakers are characterized by a slow rate of speech, false starts, and long pauses (Gorsuch, 2011). To overcome this problem and instill confidence in speakers, learners can benefit from both controlled and less controlled speaking-practice activities. For example, choral drilling using the audio-lingual method helps learners improve their pronunciation. Controlled speaking tasks using ALM also allow learners to practice simple sentences or dialogues to build their confidence. Once learners are ready, they can proceed to speak more freely in real communicative tasks. However, speaking in front of a whole class may be frightening at first, which is why understanding and applying the principles of cooperative language learning is important. Through various interactive activities, learners have increased and varied naturalistic second language practice. Cooperative activities also encourage learners to ask and respond to each other and develop critical thinking skills. Using language in authentic tasks is consistent with the theories and principles underlying the WLA and CLT.

**Conclusion**

Books cannot tell teachers what to say and do in every lesson. When teaching a foreign language such as English, there is no “teaching by the book.” Teachers should constantly explore and experiment with new ideas. Although numerous other methods and approaches are worthy of study, teachers can interpret and judge for themselves how to apply them to their teaching. Teachers should not simply teach according to how they were taught. Progress in teacher development is as important as learner progress. The first step to improving teaching is to develop one’s own principles, values, and beliefs on teaching.

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