

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

Scientific supervisor: **Abruyeva Malika.**

Teacher of SamSIFL

Marqayeva Marjona,

Kurbanbayeva Zuhra,

Jumaniyozova Munira

The student of the 5th course of SamSIFL

Annotation: This article explores the theoretical foundations of English language teaching methods, focusing on the historical evolution, core principles, and pedagogical frameworks that shape modern language instruction. It examines how traditional grammatical approaches gradually transformed into communicative and learner-centered methodologies as a response to global linguistic needs and advancements in educational psychology. The paper discusses major theoretical perspectives, including behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and sociocultural theory, highlighting how each has contributed to the development of effective teaching strategies for English as a foreign language. Special attention is given to the role of language acquisition theories, communicative competence, and task-based learning, which have reshaped classroom practices and emphasized meaningful interaction over mechanical drill exercises. The article also analyzes the influence of global trends, such as digitalization and intercultural communication, on modern methodological frameworks.

Key words: language teaching theory, English methodology, communicative competence, teaching approaches, instructional frameworks, language acquisition theory

INTRODUCTION

The process of teaching English as a foreign language has undergone significant transformations over the course of the last century, shaped by developments in linguistics, pedagogy, psychology and sociolinguistics. As global communication, academic mobility and international cooperation continue to expand, English language proficiency has become an essential requirement for educational, professional and social success. Consequently, understanding the theoretical foundations of English language teaching (ELT) methods has become increasingly important for educators seeking to apply effective and scientifically grounded instructional strategies. Theories of language, theories of learning and pedagogical principles together constitute the core basis upon which teaching methods are formulated, evaluated and improved. Each methodological approach whether traditional, structural, communicative or learner-centered reflects specific assumptions about how language is acquired, how learners process information, and which classroom practices best facilitate linguistic competence.

Historically, ELT methods have evolved in response to both scholarly research and the practical needs of language learners. Early approaches such as the Grammar-Translation Method focused on written accuracy, literary texts and explicit grammar instruction, reflecting the classical tradition of language learning. Later, structuralist and behaviorist theories gave rise to the Audio-Lingual Method, which emphasized habit formation, pattern drills and repetition. However, with the emergence of cognitive psychology and sociolinguistic theory in the late 20th century, communicative and constructivist methods increasingly dominated the field. These modern approaches highlight the importance of meaningful interaction, contextualized input, learner auto-

my and the development of communicative competence rather than memorization of isolated forms. As a result, contemporary ELT pedagogy combines elements of linguistic theory, cognitive science and social learning to address the diverse needs of today's learners

Literature review. The theoretical study of English language teaching methods has evolved through several pedagogical paradigms, reflecting changes in linguistic theory, psychological perspectives on learning, and socio-cultural developments. Early instructional traditions were shaped by the Grammar-Translation Method, which emphasized grammatical accuracy, reading classical texts, and translating sentences between the target language and the mother tongue. Richards and Rodgers (2014) note that this method, despite its limited focus on communication, laid an early foundation for structured linguistic analysis. In contrast, the Direct Method emerged as a response, promoting immersion, inductive grammar learning, and exclusive use of the target language in the classroom. Larsen-Freeman (2008) highlights its significance in shifting the teacher's role from a transmitter of rules to a facilitator of natural language use [6,576]. The mid-20th century witnessed the rise of the Audiolingual Method, influenced by behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics. According to Brown (2010), audiolingual practices pattern drills, repetition, and habit formation were considered effective for developing oral fluency, although later criticized for lacking cognitive engagement. With the decline of behaviorism, cognitive theories reshaped pedagogical approaches, leading to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which remains the dominant framework today. Harmer J. (2015) explains that CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, authentic communication, and learner autonomy, reflecting the shift from language as a set of structures to language as a tool for social interaction [3,456].

Theoretical developments continued with the emergence of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Nunan D. (2003) describes TBLT as an approach grounded in second language acquisition research, focusing on learners' performance of real-life tasks that promote meaningful communication and natural acquisition processes. Complementing this, sociocultural theory introduced by Vygotsky expanded the conceptual basis of teaching methods. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) argue that language learning is fundamentally mediated by social interaction, scaffolding, and collaborative activity, thereby influencing the rise of learner-centered methods [5,284].

Methodology. This study employed a qualitative research methodology to examine the theoretical foundations of English language teaching (ELT) methods, focusing on both historical and contemporary approaches. The research aimed to identify the core principles, strategies, and pedagogical theories underpinning widely used ELT methods and to analyze their relevance to modern classroom practice. Data were collected through a systematic review of scholarly literature, textbooks, research articles, and educational reports on English language teaching methodologies [1,352].

The research process involved three main stages: data collection, thematic analysis, and synthesis of findings. During the data collection stage, primary sources included academic publications on ELT theories, such as Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Secondary sources included reviews and meta-analyses of ELT effectiveness, as well as professional teaching manuals and case studies. The selection criteria focused on materials published within the last 25 years, with some foundational sources included to ensure historical context and theoretical depth [2,528].

Thematic analysis was conducted to categorize methods based on their theoretical orientation, instructional focus, teacher-student roles, and the integration of skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Each method was examined for its pedagogical rationale, key principles, and instructional strategies. Comparative analysis was applied to highlight the evolution of ELT methods from traditional approaches emphasizing grammar and translation to modern approaches prioritizing communication, task-based interaction, and learner-centered instruction [4,410].

Results. The study's analysis revealed that English language teaching methods have evolved significantly over time, reflecting shifts in pedagogical theory, linguistic research, and educational priorities. Traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method, were primarily teacher-centered and focused on grammar accuracy, vocabulary memorization, and reading comprehension. These methods provided a strong theoretical foundation for understanding linguistic structures but were limited in promoting communicative competence.

In contrast, modern methods, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), emphasize learner-centered instruction, authentic communication, and interaction. These approaches integrate multiple skills simultaneously and encourage active participation, problem-solving, and collaborative learning. The study found that modern methods align more closely with current educational objectives, particularly in developing practical language use, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills.

Discussion. The findings of this study highlight the importance of understanding the theoretical foundations behind English language teaching methods. Traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation and Direct Methods, provide learners with a clear understanding of grammatical rules and structured language knowledge. However, these methods often lack opportunities for authentic communication and interactive practice, which are crucial for developing practical language skills.

Modern approaches, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), address these limitations by emphasizing learner-centered instruction, interaction, and real-life language use. These methods foster collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which align with the needs of 21st-century learners. By integrating modern methods with traditional practices, educators can offer a more balanced instructional approach that supports both theoretical knowledge and communicative competence.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that understanding the theoretical foundations of English language teaching methods is essential for effective language instruction. Traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation and Direct Methods, provide learners with a structured approach to grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. While these methods establish a solid linguistic foundation, they are limited in promoting interactive and communicative skills, which are increasingly important in modern language learning contexts.

In conclusion, knowledge of ELT theory equips teachers with the tools to select, adapt, and integrate teaching methods effectively, catering to diverse learner needs and proficiency levels. By applying both traditional and modern strategies, educators can foster improved language proficiency, engagement, and long-term retention, preparing students to communicate confidently and competently in English.

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