

<https://doi.org/10.52387/1811-5470.2023.2.16>
 CZU: 37.016:811.111

APPROACHES REDUCING ESL STUDENTS' FEAR OF SPEAKING

Mariana NIȚA,

PhD candidate,

Doctoral School of Educational Sciences,
 "Ion Creanga" State Pedagogical University

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0998-9161

Abstract. *This paper reports on students' linguistic barriers who study English and some points to bear in mind when teaching it. English is a complex language, but there are some factors that can guide us, and once we have understood them, we have no constraints or limits to achieve English fluency and accuracy. Some issues related to the teaching/learning process are going to be explored and the way we teachers can assist our students in order to improve their communicative abilities. We have collected some data from our students that will help us shape our pedagogical actions and to empower the ways we teach the language despite some learning difficulties ESL students have. Gaining a communicative competence has turned into a vital issue for students and teachers all around the world. Due to all these factors, both teachers and students try to do their best in order to be aware of the linguistic barriers than can prevent them from achieving their own goals.*

Keywords: *authentic materials, motivation, intrinsic motivation, linguistic barriers, inductive and deductive teaching strategies*

ABORDĂRI DE PREDARE CARE AJUTĂ LA DEPĂȘIREA FRICII DE A COMUNICA ÎN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ

Rezumat. *Studiul de față face referire la barierele lingvistice întâlnite de către studenții anglofoni și unele aspecte ce ar trebui luate în considerație atunci când predăm limba engleză. Engleza este o limbă complexă, însă dacă vom aborda o metodologie adecvată în procesul instructiv/educativ, nu vom mai avea acele constrângeri care ne împiedică să dobândim acea fluentă în utilizarea limbii engleze. Astfel, planificăm să examinăm acele obstacole care apar în procesul de predare/învățare și să ne axăm pe strategiile utilizate de către profesori pentru ai ajuta pe studenți să-și îmbunătățească abilitățile de exprimare în limba engleză. Cu ajutorul informației obținute, vom încerca să modificăm și/sau să ajustăm demersul nostru educațional în scopul obținerii rezultatelor scontate. Dobândirea competenței comunicative a devenit astăzi, atât pentru cadrele didactice, cât și pentru studenți o provocare globală. Datorită acestor factori, suntem impuși să căutăm noi soluții metodologice pentru a putea depăși orice tip de barieră lingvistică care împiedică atingerea scopurilor propuse.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *materiale de predare autentice, motivația intrinsecă, bariere lingvistice, strategii de predare inductive și deductive.*

In modern societies education provides one of the major means of promoting language acquisition that represents an important aspect of personal and professional development. Language acquisition takes time and effort that is why it is quite common to encounter challenges and setbacks along the way. It is said that inability to speak at least one foreign language (the English language) is the main reason of our poor economic performance; therefore, we have limited job opportunities and this fact creates communication barriers. English is widely recognized as the global language of business and diplomacy. Not understanding English restricts our

access to a vast amount of information, educational resources, and we can even face difficulties pursuing higher education or accessing research materials. John Adams made the following insightful prophecy: „English will be the most respectable language in the world and the most universally read and spoken in the next century, if not before the close of this one” [5].

Nowadays, English is the language of science and technology. We live in a global community where the English language represents our *lingua franca* which helps us interact, cascade, and broaden our knowledge (personal/professional development)

irrespective of the fact who we are (a teacher, student, parent, employer...), where we are (at home, work, somewhere abroad), or what our goals are (teaching, studying, travelling, visiting someone, etc.). In our daily life, we speak in many different ways and this depends on the audience (who is listening to us) and what we are looking for. Our unique goal is, on the one hand to be heard, and on the other hand to be understood. There are a lot of approaches to teaching English. Usually, teachers have the idea of teaching/learning process starting with the years when they were students themselves. The way we teach represents our personality, our individual method, a method that can encompass different aspects: the way we were taught English, the way we like to learn, and the way we have been taught. But, depending on our students' profile, their needs, preferences and interests, we are trying to teach differently, so that we could live up to our students' expectations. The reasons language teachers give for choosing this profession are divided into three categories [6]:

- reasons related to the interaction with our students;
- reasons related to the importance of language learning;
- reasons related to didactic innovations.

It is worth noticing that effective language teaching often involves a combination of several *approaches*, but the most important ones are the process of interaction and communication with our students, as well as the way of adapting the instructions to suit the learners' needs and proficiency level. A skilled teacher will always integrate various approaches and methodologies to create a dynamic and engaging learning experience.

Approaches, methods, procedures and strategies in teaching

Now, let us have a look at the differences we have when talking about *approaches*, *methods*, and *procedures*. J. Harmer uses the term *approach* to refer to theories about the nature of language and language learning. These provide reasons for doing things in the classroom and the reasons for the way they are done. It is about the manner people acquire their knowledge of the language and make statements about the conditions which will promote successful language learning. A *method* is the practical classroom realisation of an approach. Methods include different procedures and techniques as part of their standard fare. A *procedure* can be described in terms such as *First you do this, then you do that...*, so it is an ordered sequence of techniques [4]. It is

thought that there are no boring days in the teaching profession because of the development in didactics, applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Good teachers are enthusiastic about their subject, but sometimes this might not have been enough to make lessons comprehensible and attractive to our students.

New technologies and innovation in language teaching/learning field are a fact that we will always welcome and be looking forward to. A new challenge for teachers/students, and not only, was the Pandemic Era (March, 2020), and of course, the Russia-Ukraine war (February, 2022) when we all had to learn and get all the insights about *blended learning/e-learning*: when the teacher and the students work with an interconnected mix of books, classroom presentation and activities, and digital resources practised and revised online, and how to explore the new methods of teaching through the latest technology. In a digital era, there are some literacies that we must acquire if we want to operate successfully on the internet. During that period (and even today) teachers from Moldova State University mostly made use of the platforms Moodle, Skype, Viber, Zoom, Google Classroom, etc. by combining the two approaches: *synchronous* and *asynchronous*. When we have internet connectivity, a lot of possibilities are opened up (during the Pandemic, we could virtually bring native speakers to our lessons and talk to them, we could encourage our students to interact with their peers from other countries). The most challenging thing for teachers was to adapt and design all the materials to students' needs and interests because the focus of the instruction had to be on the student, not the teacher (learner-centered approach that has evolved since the 1970s), we wanted them to play an active role in the class.

But many forms of digital technology did not have a significant impact on learning. During the Pandemic, teachers faced great challenges as well: organisation of work process and time management, gadgets shortage and crashing systems, computer literacy, isolation, lack of interaction with students and colleagues, and hybrid teaching efficacy. The weakness of the online teaching was the ongoing assessment of student achievements that needed to maximize effectiveness of it and that could frustrate teachers [2]. We needed to rethink our pedagogical methods to be used in our virtual classes, the design of our courses, the evaluation and even our academic integrity. We could notice that students could learn English much better when teachers used a

wide range of activities afforded by Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (1993) and the learning strategies used by students. If we want learners to retain knowledge for a long time, we have to use different strategies to help them remember it and create an environment that encourages and rewards open critical thinking. We know that learner strategies can be taught; they involve different aspects, not just the cognitive one; they allow students to be self-directed by expanding the role of teachers, and of course they are problem-oriented. In order to be successful, students should be aware of all learning strategies and learning techniques that can help them in changing their minds about language anxiety they can experience and become independent learners. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), the learning strategies are divided into:

A. Metacognitive strategies, where learners are thinking about the process of learning. They plan and organise the material to be studied, often by skimming the information for the organising principle; they decide in advance to attend to specific aspects of input, often by scanning for key-words, concepts, and linguistic markers.

B. Cognitive strategies, where learners create strategies for specific tasks or assignments. Students use target language reference materials (dictionaries, textbooks), they classify words, terminology, or concepts according to their attributes of meaning and in order to remember a new word they can identify a familiar word in the first language that sounds like and generate recalled images of some relationship with the first language homonym and the new word in the target language.

C. Social mediation, where learners work together to get knowledge; cooperation is vital because they work together to solve a problem, check a learning task, model a language activity [8].

As teachers, we are looking at different ways to encourage „real speaking“ in our classrooms and we want to be sure that they do more than just listen and react to our commands. But for this, we have first of all to ask ourselves:

- Is the topic interesting enough for our students to pay attention to?
- Do they have enough background information about the topic to be discussed?
- Do our students have the appropriate language input to carry on the discussion?

It is very important for both teachers and students to draw their attention to all these aspects because if the subject lacks curiosity and the needs, interests our students are looking for, than nobody

will take part in the activities we have prepared because they will encounter different types of barriers like *linguistic* or *psychological barriers*. Some of the teachers are slightly worried at the beginning of the course because they are not sure their students will like the topics (sometimes teachers and students do not like the same things, do not share the same ideas) and it is frustrating for us, teachers, to see that our students do not have the same level of enthusiasm and they may not have courage to speak and express their feelings and wishes (maybe because they don't have enough background knowledge on the subject in order to take part actively in the class or maybe because they are not interested in the subject). That is why we are always looking for new and interesting strategies or techniques to implement in order to engage them in different communicative tasks, not only in our classrooms, but also outside them, for example in the worlds of leisure and work. Cambridge Assessment English platform explains that engaging teaching is about **CLARA**:

- **C** - challenging activities,
- **L** - learner-centred teaching,
- **A** - active participation, classroom interaction,
- **R** - relevant/valuable support depending on students' needs,
- **A** - autonomy-rich directions that can set clear goals and have an impact on their future achievements.

Because students learn things in different ways, we have to draw simultaneously more styles (VAK: *visual, auditory, kinaesthetic*) for the benefit of our learners. Above all, how we tackle the diverse needs of our students depends on whether we really believe in their potential or not. Rogers (2003) argues that **strategopedia** (teaching method relying on strategy training) can be a new force in the language teaching of our millennium. He claims „to teach the learner to learn, that is to enable him to carry out the various steps which make up the learning process, is considered the best way of ensuring that learning takes place“. That is why teaching our students how to learn is more than a guideline for the language learning of the future [8].

In 1960s and 1970s new theories helped change how language is taught. Among these approaches are: *humanistic approach*, that focuses on learner intellectual and emotional development to be equally important; and *communicative language teaching approach*, that is based on teaching real world communication skills. Today, the majority of teachers tend to use the *communicative approach* because

it emphasizes communication as the primary goal of language learning. Teachers try to encourage students to get into authentic conversations with different audience by using interactive activities, group work, and real-life language to develop students' language skills. Our overall efforts to promote and build up a good relationship with the students is our main priority. When asking students what language anxiety is for them, they will say that this feeling of tension comes from „some authoritarian teachers, tests they have to write, assimilation of great amount of knowledge, negative evaluation, shyness, etc.

Our purpose now is to rework the traditional methods, the humanistic methods, and communicative language teaching method (*historical, reflective and practical* methods) in a way to develop the best approach so that we could break new ground and build a cooperative learning climate, an approach that can reduce shyness or fear of speaking and students can exchange ideas and reach strategic decisions [7]. We have to think what and how to do so that our learners did not feel isolated, left on the other side of the screen because this can be a source of anxiety for them. Teachers know that every student has a self-concept about their own approaches to learning process and their way of interaction with educators.

In order to succeed in the world, our students need more than a high level of English. They need to develop **life competencies** that will strengthen their power, self-esteem, growth, collaboration, and encourage learning partnerships; we need to convince them to exercise great control over their own learning so that they could act on the world to change it. **The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework** is the greatest tool that we have to help them become a generation that focuses on a *divergent thinking* that involves more creativity rather than on a *convergent thinking*, when they tend to find just one well-defined solution to a given problem. These competencies are:

- **Creative thinking:** students actively participate in creative activities, generate new ideas and use them to solve problems.
- **Critical thinking:** students identify patterns and relationships, evaluate ideas and use these skills to solve problems.
- **Learning to learn:** students develop practical skills to support and take control of their learning and reflect on their own progress.
- **Communication:** students choose the most appropriate language to use in different situations, manage conversations effectively and express themselves clearly and confidently.

- **Collaboration:** students work well together in groups, through actively taking part in group activities, listening to others, sharing tasks and finding solutions to problems.
- **Social responsibilities:** students recognise and describe different roles and responsibilities in a variety of groups and understand cultural and global issues.

Even though we are linguistically and methodologically prepared to teach them, the most important factor is our students' well-being, their willingness to listen to us and learn new things that will generate these competencies, will help them be opened, support each other in different situations. If teachers encourage positive attitudes and raise their self-esteem, they will be able to grow not only personally, but also professionally. Language learning does not represent a simple do-it-yourself kit. Both teachers and students need to be aware and understand some principles of language learning and teaching and to be aware of their own learning styles. Having a look at the past century of language teaching methods, we can understand that when it comes to choosing the best way to teach English, we can say for sure that there is no „best teaching methodology” that would guarantee the success of acquisition of a fluent and accurate English. In the *Table 1*, we have enumerated some common features of language teachers and language learners that play a crucial role when speaking about the implementation of the best methods used in teaching/learning English language [1]:

According to these principles, we can say that learning process is influenced by our teachers' competence to act, and organize learning environments and their ability to persuade students to do their own investigation related to their goals, needs and interests. We need to know how to foster good relationships with our students so that they could work together in a spirit of friendliness and make them feel secure, comfortable, and motivated to ask questions when they have no answers.

British Council *Teaching English* platform has helped us to have a better understanding of the most useful approaches that are used all over the world in teaching English language. Before analysing them, let us explain the difference between **inductive** and **deductive** reasoning that are important to our teaching/learning process. With the *deductive* approach, the teacher introduces the new topic overtly, by giving its name, meaning, form, usage, etc., then the teacher brings examples to help students understand and apply the principle [3]. It

Table 1. *Teachers and learners' roles*

Roles of language teachers	Roles of language learners
Language teacher functions as an organizer in the classroom. The teacher maintains discipline to the extent that an effective learning atmosphere is established. It can be done by involving the learners more actively in the classroom activities that demand inter-student communication and co-operative efforts.	Learners plan their own learning program and thus ultimately assume responsibility for what they do in the classroom.
Language teacher functions as a counselor. The teacher role is to respond the learners' problems nonjudgmentally and help the learners to reach what they want to learn.	Learners monitor and evaluate their own progress.
Language teacher functions as a motivator; the language teacher gives praise and encouragement for positive efforts by the learners. It can be done by giving positive feedback on returned assignments.	Learners are members of a group and learn by interacting with others.
Language teacher functions as an observer. The teacher shows the errors that the learners have produced and let the learners work on the correction.	Learners tutor other learners.
Language teacher functions as a model for producing correct expressions and judges whether the learners' contributions to the learning process and their efforts are relevant and correct.	Learners learn from the teacher, from other students, and from other teaching sources.
Language teacher functions as a resource of knowledge and direction. The teacher establishes a position of dominance over the learners in selecting the materials to learn and also how to acquire them.	

follows a top-down approach, starting with the general information and moving to the specific one. The goal is for students to develop a deep understanding of the general principle and be able to make use of it in different situations. Usually, this approach is used with lower-level students who do not have a good command of the English language. The deductive approach is quite teacher-centred and some learners like it because it is less work for them, it is time-saving and allows more time for practising the language items. The *inductive* approach to teaching goes the opposite way, from example to rule [see Table 2]. It involves asking learners to work in order to discover language on their own. A teacher who uses the inductive lesson may be heard asking questions like: Is this correct or not? Why did you use that preposition, tense? Check with your partner. In this case, we have almost a student-centred lesson.

Table 2. *Deductive vs. Inductive approach*

<i>Deductive approach</i>	<i>Inductive approach</i>
Teacher tells student the rules explicitly	Teacher helps students discover the rules

As we have mentioned above, the most popular approaches we teachers use in our classes are *communicative language teaching*, *audio-lingual method*, and *direct method* (depending on the level and goal we have). **Communicative language teaching** (CLT) is a product of the 1970s that originated in Great Britain, focuses on helping learners

to communicate well and appropriately in different real-life situations. One of the principal features of CLT was a shift away from a focus on how language was formed (grammar, vocabulary) to an emphasis on what language was used for. The other feature is that if the "language is communication", then our students should be involved in meaning-focused communicative tasks. Activities like role-play, simulation where students act out different scenarios are the ones that they like most because teachers do not intervene in order to correct their mistakes; we are interested in letting them use a variety of language and show their desire to communicate [4]. The theory behind **audio-lingual method** is that learning the language means learning habits. We hear the language, drill repeatedly the structures and then, the learner can see the studied material in its written form. Students can mime, repeat and learn by heart set phrases and grammar structures. Native language and translation are forbidden, the aim of learning is linguistic competence, and intrinsic motivation will result from the interest in language as a system. And, of course, the **direct method** where we learn English in the same way we learnt our first language. All teaching is done in the target language, there is no translation, we do not pay attention to grammar mistakes, the emphasis is on oral interaction and teachers use realia to teach new vocabulary. We are not going to describe the all advantages and disadvantages of these approaches because

every teacher knows the way they function. Let us take some notes and draw our attention to some additional interesting approaches that were presented by British Council platform that are interesting enough for us and our students and namely **PPP, TBL, TTT, Guided discovery**.

- **PPP** approach (a deductive approach) is more suitable for lower-level students and it has three stages: 1. **Presentation** – teacher builds context and elicits/highlights meaning, form, and pronunciation (it lasts about 15 minutes). The teacher can present the new language creatively by using realia, flashcards, short stories. 2. **Practice** – we have a controlled practice because students practise the target language by means of drills and restricted-use activities (20 minutes). Teacher should correct phonological and grammatical mistakes. Common activities for this stage are gap fill exercises, sentence transformations, split sentences, reordering sentences. 3. **Production** – this is the most important stage because it develops student's confidence and competence; students try to personalise and use the language by focusing on fluency (25 minutes). Activities like role plays, simulations, spot the differences between two pictures, problem solving... Teacher has to monitor and make notes of errors so that at the end of the lesson, all of them could be discussed.

- **TBL** approach (task-based learning) focuses on completing meaningful tasks that require language use and it follows three stages: *pre-task activities*, *the task cycle* (students complete the task and plan a report), *reporting, analysing language and post-task activities*. First of all, the teacher has to arouse interest in the topic to be discussed. Then, the teacher models the task and students work in pairs to do the task. After this stage, students prepare a short report on what happened during the task. The class gives feedback and the teacher may compare students' reports to the model. In the end, learners do practice activities on the vocabulary used in the task. Students are engaged in activities and projects that simulate real-life situations to promote language acquisition.

- **TTT** approach (test-teach-test) gives the opportunity to the teacher to spot specific needs of students related to a language area. By using this approach, learners produce language first (before learning the new language). Depending on the types of problems students have, the teacher plans the lesson with the target language. Then the learners do another activity in order to practise it again. This type of lesson demonstrates a collaborative atmosphere, some of the students who already know the

material can help their peers by encouraging peer teaching. It is interesting for them to discover that they know how to solve the problem.

- **Guided discovery** is an inductive approach because the teacher has to create a context to show the meaning of the language using pictures, reading, or listening. Then students are asked questions at each stage of the lesson. All students are engaged in working out the rules and this is the reason why some of them can feel insecure about being asked to give the rule. They analyse and cooperate as they develop their understanding of the language. Teacher's role is to choose tasks that suit students' needs, give clear instructions, help, and give feedback during the lesson, and of course to ask the correct questions so that they could detect the rules from the context [6].

If we want our students to take on the new language and not to be afraid of speaking and expressing their ideas, we need to think about some important points in order to show them that they can talk and use real-life language in the class without thinking of some linguistic or grammar gaps they may have. Controlled practice, drills, the study and application of grammar rules and activities should help students to notice their needs and develop not only fluency but also accuracy. Teachers' goal is to make students get away from language practice and to try to communicate meaningfully about the subjects they are interested in, even though it may mean making mistakes. Everything depends on the teacher's level of creativity and willingness to help them, give positive feedback because this fact encourages shy learners to speak more.

Conclusions:

As teachers, we do not need to reinvent the wheel; we just have to identify our students' goals and develop an excellent rapport with them in order to establish a healthy sense of community in our class so that they could manage anxiety and overcome the fear of speaking. Thus, having a good command of all these approaches and being aware of our students' aims, we should think about this new opportunity to expand our repertoire of techniques, trying them out by putting them into practice and be open to all these alternatives to develop learners' *listening-to-learn* and *speaking-to-learn* abilities. We have no constraints, we need to experiment and adapt new methods to our teaching context depending on our class profile, learning style, and needs. By mixing and matching all these approaches and ideas, we can help ourselves (professional development) and our students to achieve English

fluency, to develop their capacity to learn content materials while listening to and taking notes on lectures. Teachers must make use of individualized methods of instruction based on "multiple-intelligences" view, in which different approaches can be applied to different language learners (this way our students can see that we value their abilities to speak English), and use those teaching methods

that can create a cooperative learning climate and can sustain students' involvement in learning activities over long periods of time. We need to cooperate with our colleagues in order to get mutual assistance in planning, coordinating, and evaluating our students' work with the help of all these learning methods, to find those practices that best support effective learning.

REFERENCES

1. BAMBANG, S. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu, 2020, p. 176. ISBN 978-623-228-389-3
2. DEBORAH, L., PRUERR-SAID, T. *A Kaleidoscope of Models and Strategies for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Libraries Unlimited: Teacher Ideas Press, 2006, p. 100. ISBN 1-59158-372-1
3. DOUGLAS BROWN, H. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. San Francisco State University, Longman, 2000, p.350. ISBN 0-13-017816-0
4. HARMER, J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Pearson Education Limited, 2015, p. 446. ISBN 978-1-4479-8025-4
5. MCKAY, S., HORNBERGER, N. *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: University Press, 1996, p. 484. ISBN 0-521-48434-0
6. RÁDAI, P., BERNAUS, M. et al. *The Status of Language Educators*. European Centre for Modern Languages, Council of Europe Publishing, 2003, p.150. ISBN 92-871-5226-8
7. SHLOMO, S. *Handbook of cooperative learning methods*. Praeger: London, 1999, p. 375. ISBN 0-313-28352-4
8. TURULA, A. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language: from theory to practice...and all the way back*. Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Lingwistycznej: Częstochowa, 2010, p.250. ISBN 978-83-61425-19-9
9. VIZENTAL, A. *Metodica Predării Limbii Engleze: strategies of teaching and testing English as a foreign language*. Iasi: Polirom, 2008, p. 340. ISBN 978-973-46-0954-3.