

**Chapter Review: Larsen Freeman's Principles and
Techniques in Language Teaching (2000)
Chapter 12**

Ismail Benfilali

**Assistant Professor, English Department, Sidi
Mohamed Ben Abdellah University
Fez, Morocco**

newmanview19@yahoo.fr



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Abstract:

For many years, research in education in general and in language teaching in particular considered the teacher, the content, and ultimately the methods of teaching as the focal points to examine in any academic approach. Nowadays, adopting student-centered teaching methods that encourage positive involvement of learners and active, participation in independent learning activities represent a turning point in the educators' approach to teaching methodology. In this regard, enhancing the quality of student learning is dependent on the teacher's effective choices in planning and organizing the teaching and learning process. For Griffiths (2011), such choices are directly influenced by the educator's perspectives of what effective teaching and learning are:

The choice of teaching method depends on various factors that includes educational philosophy of teacher, classroom demographic, subject area(s) and the mission of school. There are various approaches and methods for teaching children but, there are "several factors involved in the successful implementation of a method or approach" (p.11)

The chapter to be reviewed sheds light on Larsen-Freemen's views about the educator's constant attempts to make informed decisions in their day- to-day teaching. The review sets out to examine the major differences and similarities between various language teaching methods. It demonstrates how reflective teachers manage to create their own teaching methods by blending aspects of others in a principled manner.

Keywords: approach, effective learning, learner engagement, pluralism, teaching method, management of learning.

1- Introduction:

Effective teaching is highly inspired by adequate understanding of pedagogical methods that could help teachers achieve teaching and learning objectives. Achieving course objectives is reliant on a substantial evaluation of the content, context, students' approach to learning, and pedagogical practices that can accommodate all these variables. In his approach the complexity of teachers' responsibility to actively engage students in exploring new skills and learning a meaningful experience, Whitman (1981) notes that educators should constantly as a series of questions, the of which can highly inspire informed decisions related to teaching methods and strategies:

Should they use the teaching methods that have used in the past?

If the method of teaching a course is itself assigned, how can the strengths of the established method be utilized to best advantage? (p.16)

By answering the questions about the potential methods to be used in a given educational environment and with certain groups of learners, teachers are likely to have adequate knowledge to lead their students towards the objectives of the course. However, choosing a teaching and learning strategy is not an easy task. Indeed, each learning experience may call for a different approach to stimulate student learning. Therefore, the choice may differ according to the nature of the course, the educational context and the diverse needs of the learners.

The chapter to be reviewed is the concluding part of Larsen Freeman's book *Principles and Techniques in Language Teaching*, published in 2000, by Oxford University Press. This part briefly examines the major differences and similarities between various language teaching methods. Further, it sets out to examine how a teacher chooses among the teaching methods. Besides, it emphasizes the relationship between teaching and learning "teaching as the management of learning", and ultimately, reflects Larsen-Freeman's view that teaching is a constant developmental process.

2- The complexity of choosing a teaching method:

In order to show the differences and similarities between the various language teaching methods, Larsen-Freeman uses an illustrative and descriptive chart that includes all the methods/approaches in the book. Each method is briefly presented on the basis of the aspects of language and culture focused upon, along with the way each method tends to enhance language learning and teaching alike. However, the author admits that the chart suffers from various limitations, the most important of which is that it fails to reflect the dynamics of methodological change. In addition, the chart obscures the similarities that exist among teaching methods, and some differences are not revealed by this overall treatment of the methods. Due to these limitations, the author decides to discuss each of the previous points in turn.

It goes without saying that all the methods mentioned in the chart are nowadays practiced- though with different distribution- in classrooms all around the world. Some "traditional" methods as the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method have been practiced for many years and are still used in some schools such as the Berlitz'. Furthermore, some methods as the Audio-Lingual method were dominant in the fifties and the sixties in the United States before Noam Chomsky's innatist view led to its decline. In this respect, the emergence of a number of language teaching 'methods' as the Silent Way, Community Language Teaching, and the Natural Approach announced a new period of methodological diversity. However, the wide interest in developing the learners' communicative competence was the unifying factor that paved the way to a steady prevalence of the Communicative Approach.

The 1980s announced a widespread focus on the language learning process, and the students' interaction in authentic learning situations. The new millennium was characterized by more innovations in the teaching field with the appearance of the Computer Assisted Learning and the use of the Internet. This contributed to a redefinition of the teacher's role, responsibilities, and the adoption of social life issues in the classrooms.

Though the various teaching methods look different, they overlap in many ways, one of which is their tendency to develop the students' communicative abilities. Besides, all of these methods- though challenged by new trends and technological

advances such as computer labs and distant learning- are practiced in the language classrooms. A common denominator between these methods is that they all treat culture implicitly. For example, a method like Desuggestopedia makes use of fine arts, not as an object of study, but as a means of facilitating language learning.

Larsen-Freeman notes that there are two types of differences among teaching methods. The first is complementary; that is the methods may emphasize certain components or aspects of learning and teaching in different ways, but this remains helpful in constructing an adequate view of what learning and teaching are. The other type of difference is rather contradictory. For example, the use of the learners' native language is acceptable in the Grammar Translation Method whereas it is proscribed in the Comprehension Approach. This difference and others set behind the question "how is a teacher to choose among teaching methods? Methods that may be different but complementary.

Choosing may imply deciding "which method is best?" Regardless of how different or similar the teaching methods are, one may have to choose. Hence, a sound decision should take into account one's values, aims and attitudes (Stevick 1993). For some teachers, the choice is not that difficult. Simply, they adopt a method that they consider consonant with their values and beliefs, their pedagogical aims, their students and context of instruction, or it is the one they know and have been trained in. This is what Larsen-Freeman refers to as absolutism; "one method is the best." Still, teaching methods tend to be based on certain beliefs and ideals that do not necessarily relate to any particular practitioner. Thus, the teacher, the students, the context of instruction do influence any method put into practice, as Palmer (1998: 147) notes: 'when a person A speaks, I realize that the method that works for him would not work for me, for it is not grounded in who I am.' Thus, a method cannot be suitable for everyone. Moreover, Holliday (1994) argues that a method that is suitable for a particular situation may not be so in another situation.

On the other hand, a relativist approach denotes that each method has its strengths and weaknesses. Relativists believe that methods are not equally suited for all situations; different methods are suitable for different learners in different contexts. Moreover, there is another version of relativism, which can be called pluralism that

“many teachers find reasonable” (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 182). Advocates of this approach believe that there is some value to each method, and instead of believing that different methods should be practiced in different contexts, they believe that different methods should be practiced in the same context (Prabhu 1990). In addition, Larsen-Freeman notes that successful teachers need to recognize ‘the uniqueness’ of each group of learners.

3- A pluralistic approach to teaching methodology:

Adopting a pluralistic approach calls for what is termed principled eclecticism. It implies that a teacher creates his own method by blending aspects of others in a principled manner. However, eclectic does not mean haphazard. Eclecticism implies the careful selection of facets of various methods and their integration into a coherent procedure. This must be in harmony with the teacher's personality, the students' needs and strategies of learning and the aspirations of the community. However, the author argues that the teachers who practice principled eclecticism should be able to give feasible reasons to justify their own practice. Although there is often a gap between our intentions and our practice.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of the teacher as the manager of learning. A role that results from a realization that the students and the teachers can be complementary partners in the enterprise of learning. Thus, a teacher's pedagogical option should not neglect important factors as the affective needs of the learners. Methodology must be compatible with the time available, the aptitude and interests of the learners, and the personality and preparation of the teacher. For Freeman (1991), learning to teach is a developmental permanent process.

Various are the strong points of this chapter. The fact that the used data are based on classroom observation and current teaching practice makes it a reliable reference for language teachers and researchers. Indeed, the chapter may derive its importance from that of the book itself that was published for two times in one year. Besides, Larsen-Freeman' treatment of the teaching methodology develops from classroom observation, description of the methods and approaches, then an overall evaluation of the method/approach. Besides, the different issues discussed in the chapter are clearly

indicated by sub-titles (The dynamics of methodological change; similarities among language teaching methods)

The chapter invites the teachers to a re-examination of their own practice. The general belief is that teachers can make sound decisions if they have an adequate knowledge of the various teaching methods and feasible realization of why they are using such or such a method. In her argumentative development of the various issues related to teaching methodology and teacher development, the author makes use of a variety of references (Ellis 1996; Stevick 1993; Nunan 1992; Prabhu 1992) in addition to her own teaching experience. She notes that she used to teach with a method she was trained in for many years, but her dissatisfaction with her teaching lead her to seek more education and to learn more about teaching.

Thus, the author came up with the conviction that language, learning and teaching are dynamic and constantly changing. In this respect, the author emphasizes the difference between speaking about an experience, and expressing one's own beliefs that arise from his/her own practice as a teacher and researcher in teacher education. Still, it cannot be claimed that the chapter is prescriptive in that it does not push the reader to adopt any particular method or approach, it is rather an attempt to push its readers to meditate about their practice and to critically examine their teaching experience.

4- The implications of the author's approach to teaching methodology:

Though the chapter thoroughly examines teaching methodology and teachers' role in the teaching field, it does not consider questions as 'how can a teaching method affect the students' motivation to learn a language'. Still, this can hardly be considered as a deficiency in that a single study cannot include all the issues. In this respect, Harmer (1983) claims that the method by which students are taught must have some effect on their motivation. If they find it deadly boring, they will probably be unmotivated, whereas if they have confidence in the method they will find it motivating. Moreover, If the students find that a method neglects their learning needs, they are likely to be unmotivated.

Another question that is related to the student's motivation in language learning is 'what are the qualities a teacher needs to help in enhancing the students' intrinsic motivation?' The answer was elicited from a thousand children between the ages of twelve and seventeen. They were asked to put these qualities in order of preference (1-10):

1- He makes his course interesting.	7- He shows great patience.
2- He teaches good pronunciation.	8- He insists on the spoken language.
3- He explains clearly.	9- He makes his pupils work.
4- He speaks good English.	10- He uses an audio-lingual method.
5- He shows the same interest in all his students.	
6- He makes all the students participate.	

(Gerard 1970, quoted in Harmer 1983: 5-6)

5- Conclusion:

There are a variety of useful and effective teaching strategies that teachers adopt in order to achieve the teaching/learning objectives. Larsen-Freeman argues that choosing among the variety of teaching methods is a very challenging task for educators. For the author, the diversity of teaching methods indicates that practitioners are in dire need to evaluate each method based on its relevance to the students' needs and learning strategies, the nature of the course being taught, the objectives of the course along with their own beliefs about what effective teaching is. The author also indicates that in their attempt to seek the best method for instruction, teachers manage to explore a variety of teaching strategies that can be used for developing the learners' knowledge and skills.

A major hypothesis in this chapter is that teaching methods and strategies are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, several methods or parts of methods can be adapted to suit a given teaching/learning environment. Here, educators can resort to eclectic

pluralism to select areas of several teaching methods that can be blended together to achieve their objectives. Such an initiative grants a considerable degree of flexibility and efficiency to classroom instruction. In other words, the teaching method is customized to suit students with diverse needs and approaches to learning, which indicates that classroom instruction can overcome the challenge of accommodating the diversity of students' learning strategies and motivation.

Adopting an eclectic approach successfully is highly dependent on the teacher's evaluation of a series of criteria that are directly related to the teaching/ learning environment. The course objectives and contents, the availability of pedagogical resources, and the characteristics of the learners are among the factors that influence the choice and method(s) of classroom instruction. Furthermore, the way learners perceive a given teaching method is likely to play an influential role in the efficiency of teaching and learning. Thus, the teachers' examination of the students' performance and feedback can help evaluate the quality and productivity of teaching methodology.

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