Theories and techniques for teaching and learning English as a foreign language
The ESA method

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An experienced teacher knows that there are important differences in the student population. Effective lesson planning must take them into account. For that reason there are fundamental differences between ESL and EFL classrooms. According to the definitions, an ESL (*English as a Second Language*) classroom is in a country where English is the dominant language. The students are immigrants or visitors. The class is usually of mixed nationalities, so students don't share a native language or a common culture. Outside the classroom, students have a specific, practical need for English, and ample opportunity to use it. Students have extensive daily exposure to English-speaking culture, although their understanding may be limited by their language skills. And an EFL (*English as a foreign language*) classroom is in a country where English is not the dominant language. Students share the same language and culture. The teacher may be the only native English speaker they have exposure to. Outside of the classroom students have very few opportunities to use English. For some, learning English may not have any obvious practical benefit. Students have limited exposure to English-speaking culture, most often through a distorted lens like TV or music. In recent years, there has been more emphasis upon «student-centred» lessons, as opposed to «teacher centred». The reality is that some stages of a lesson will be more centred on the teacher and others will be very much more centred on the students. The role that teachers employ is largely going to depend on the type of activity and what she wishes the students to achieve. Some stages of a lesson will require that the teacher is more dominating or leading, while others will require a more withdrawn role. It is important that the teacher is able to switch between these roles appropriately and is aware of how to carry out the required role. During a typical lesson, a teacher will have a multitude of roles:

Manager or Controller. When teachers take on the role of a controller, they are effectively in charge of the class and of the activity in a way that is quite different from an activity where the students are working

on their own, in pairs or as part of a group .The teacher would normally be standing at the front of the class giving explanations, reading aloud. As a controller, she has her place in the classroom but certainly, it should not be overused.

Organizer. This role is one of the most important, as teachers very frequently find themselves having to organize students to do various activities. Often this will involve giving instructions, organizing students into groups/pairs, initiating activities, ending activities and organizing feedbacks. It is extremely important that teachers are comfortable in this role, as chaos could be caused if students are not aware of the task.

Assessor. Students are usually very keen to find out whether or not they are producing correct English and this is where the teacher will need to act as an assessor, giving feedback and correction as well as evaluating and grading. It is vitally important in this role that the teacher is fair and consistent with all the students as well as being very sensitive to the students' reactions and providing necessary support.

Prompter. There are times when students will lose the thread of what they are trying to say or become stuck for ideas. When this happens, the teacher needs to decide what to do about it. She should gently encourage the student along.
A great deal of sensitivity and encouragement is required.

Participant. At certain stages of the lesson, the teacher may wish to participate in the lesson as an equal, not as the teacher. There can be a number of reasons for this such as being able to liven activities up from the inside of the group as opposed to prompting from outside the group. When participating, it is important for the teacher not to dominate the activity or focus attention upon herself.

Tutor. Tutoring implies a more personal role for the teacher .This role will often be employed when students are working individually and need some guidance and support or when they are working in pairs and we stop briefly to give encouragement. Again, care needs to be taken to ensure the teacher gives equal attention to all students and to avoid intruding too much.

Resource or Facilitator. The teacher devises activities that allow the students simply to get on with the process of learning a language for themselves. There are many occasions when the teacher will wish to withdraw completely from the activity and leave the students to participate in tasks without any interruption or interference. The teacher still needs, however, to be available as a resource in case the students require any assistance or guidance. When acting as a resource we want to be helpful and available but we have to resist the temptation to spoon-feed.

Observer or Monitor. Often during the course of a lesson, the teacher will wish to monitor what is going on in the classroom. This can give the teacher information as to how long an activity is likely to take and how successful it has been. During oral communicative activities, the teacher may also want to make notes for correction or praise at a later stage.

While observing it is important that the teacher generally maintains a distance from the students to not distract them from the activity that they are involved in, but there are occasions when the teacher may also need to move in a little, to hear spoken work or to look at writing in progress, in order to monitor effectively.

When looking at learners of English, we have to consider a number of factors, such as age, culture, language level and motivation for learning. Any of these factors could have a bearing on what we perceive to be a 'good learner'. However, there are a number of general characteristics that successful students appear to possess. These can include a willingness to listen to the language, a desire to experiment with the language, a willingness to ask questions and display curiosity, imagination, an ability to think about their own learning process and methods, an acceptance of error correction, a desire to learn.

These are all qualities that successful learners usually have and it is the teacher's responsibility to encourage and foster these attributes in the classroom. It is important to define the difference between young learners and adults. Generally, adults is taken to mean those who are 18 years of age or more, and the term is self-explanatory. However, there are at least three categories of young learner. First (and possibly the most difficult) is the post puberty or early teen-age learner, i.e. 13-plus, who is often unmotivated, self-conscious and unwilling to take risks or experiment with language. Second is the pre-puberty learner, 8 to 12 years old, who are usually more receptive to the new sounds, words and grammar of a foreign language. Finally, the very young learners, who are aged 7 years and less. They have shorter attention spans, and, in the case of the very young ones have not even completely mastered the grammar of their mother tongue, but all are generally amenable to fun games, singing, drawing, etc. As for the learning experience, adults will usually come into a classroom for the first time with a long history of learning experience. They will usually have gone through a number of years schooling, as well as other courses. These learning experiences (both good and bad) will often cause them to have a fixed view of how teaching should be carried out. Adults, also, come with their own history of success and failure, which can influence their belief that they can succeed with the language.

Young learners, on the other hand, have also probably had some prior learning experience but it is unlikely that their views are as fixed and they are more likely to have an open- minded approach to new learning experiences and methods. With regard to motivation, adult learners will usually have made their own decision to attend classes and as such will usually be quite motivated. Younger learners however, have rarely made that decision for themselves and may be somewhat lacking in motivation. A caring teacher will help build and encourage motivation by making classes varied and interesting. Furthermore, adults are often more nervous about a new learning experience than younger learners. Anxiety about success is the major factor here. It is important for the teacher to be gentle and encouraging while helping build confidence. In terms of language awareness, adults usually want to be able to match new language to their native language and this can sometimes lead to problems, Younger learners are far more likely to be able to absorb language from context and usage in much the same way as they acquired their own language. Regarding behaviour problems, adults have a greater attention span than younger learners do have and as a result present fewer problems for the teacher regarding behaviour and discipline. With reference to life experience, adults naturally have more life experience to bring in the classroom and this can make the lessons more varied and interesting.

It is also usually easier for a teacher to build rapport and have interesting discussions with adult students of a similar age. Different cultures have different approaches to learning. Good teachers should be aware of their students' customs and differences that could affect the success of the classes. Language level distinctions between different levels of ability in the English language clearly have to be made.

Teachers often have their own favourite levels. With lower levels success is easy to see and usually good fun. It may be a bit restricting, however, for the teacher, due to difficulties the students have in communicating in English. Students at this level are not likely to ask too many complicated grammar questions and the teaching is mainly visual. Mid-level students have already achieved a lot and success can be difficult to measure. To get to this level, students are usually motivated and the teacher is able to communicate with the students on a greater range of topics. Higher level students already know many English and are usually highly motivated. At this level, the teacher needs to encourage students to take more and more responsibility for their own language learning. Obviously, the teaching and the complexity/speed at which teacher speaks to her students will largely be determined by the level of the students in front of her. Many activities can be adapted to more than one level, but there are some, which are patently more suited to one level. It would be rather pointless and possibly patronising to give an advanced student very basic material. Likewise, there is no sense in giving beginners activities which they have no hope of comprehending or completing. As can be seen from the above, the relationship between learners and teachers is a very important and complex issue. An enthusiastic, sensitive, motivated and caring teacher is much more likely to have successful students who enjoy their learning and continue attending classes. As a result, we can say that a 'good teacher' will most likely have 'good students'.

Learners of English, who have the opportunity to live in an English- speaking environment while studying, have a huge advantage. They are surrounded by the language continuously and are able to put acquired language into practice in everyday, realistic situations. However, the majority of English learners are living in their native countries, where English is not the first language and as a result, do not have these benefits. Many of these students may have the opportunity to use English at work, with their friends or in some other practical way where they are able to use their English on a regular basis. Many other learners of English are not so fortunate and their only contact with the language may be daily, twice weekly or weekly English classes at school or at a private language institute. As a result, these students do not get the same exposure to the language and opportunity to put it into practice. As children, we all learnt our native language without the aid of language teachers and course books. We simply absorbed the language around us, processed it and through trial and error formulated internal ideas and rules to allow us to be able to use the language fluently and accurately This *natural language acquisition* is impossible to replicate in the classroom, but many of the most popular methodologies in EFL teaching today do try to imitate it as far as is practical. For as long as people have been learning and teaching language, there has been continual, and often heated, debate as to which methods and techniques produce the best results. The most common of these, along with a brief description, are listed below. Grammar-translation. This was probably the mainstay of language teaching and learning for hundreds of years, and indeed is still practised in many situations. Many of us will have been exposed to this system of learning in the state school sector. The basic principle of this system is, as its name suggests, learning about a language through finding equivalents in the students' own language and the foreign language being

learned. It is, in effect, a system of translation. The major drawback with grammar-translation is that it seems to prevent the students from getting the kind of natural language input that will really help them acquire the language. The danger therefore, is that students will learn about the language rather than learning the language itself. This methodology also requires the teacher to be proficient in the students' native language.

Audio-lingualism. This is the name given to a language teaching/learning methodology based upon behaviourist theories of learning. This theory suggests that much learning is a result of habit formation through conditioning. Audio-lingualism concentrates therefore, to a
large degree on long repetition-drills, in which the students would be conditioned into using the language correctly. Audio-lingualism largely went out of fashion because most linguists believed that language learning consisted of more than merely forming habits and that speakers of a language are able to process language more effectively from the knowledge they have acquired. However, it is useful to note that language drills are still popular, especially for low-level students.

Presentation, Practice and Production. In this method, teachers first present the context and situation for the language, as well as explaining and demonstrating the meaning and form of the new language. The students then practice making sentences with the language in a controlled way (including drilling) before going on to the production stage where they are able to be more creative with the language. PPP has proved to be extremely effective in teaching simple language at lower levels. It is less effective with higher- level students who already know a lot of language, and therefore do not need such a marked production stage *Communicative Language Teaching*. The communicative approach stresses the importance of language functions as opposed to reliance only on grammar and vocabulary. This approach also suggests that if students have enough exposure to the language and opportunity to use it then language learning would, in effect, take care of itself. Activities in CLT typically require students to use the language in real life situations, so role-play and have become popular with this method. CLT places far more emphasis on completion of the task than the accuracy of the language.

Community Language Learning. Students sit in a circle and it is up to them to decide what they want to talk about. The teacher (standing outside the circle) will help, as and when necessary, with language problems that arise during the course of the discussion. This methodology has helped teachers focus on the need to make the lessons as «student-centred» as possible by allowing the students to choose the topic and language. *The Lexical approach*. This approach argues that words and phrases are far better building blocks for language acquisition than grammatical structure With so many different approaches and methods, it can be rather difficult to decide which is the best to use. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer as much will depend upon teacher's individual circumstances. The teacher's personality, the culture of the students, and their needs will all play a part in taking a decision. In reality, each method has its pluses and minuses but certain conclusions can be drawn: students need as much exposure to language as possible; students need a certain amount of input from the teacher; communicative tasks offer real learning possibilities but are not enough on their own; anxiety and stress need to be low for effective language learning; where possible students should be encouraged to discover language for themselves; vocabulary is as important as grammar, both need each other. The methodology that the teacher prefers may not be the preferred or correct option for students from different cultures. Compromise may be necessary. If, as discussed earlier, students need to be

motivated, be exposed to the language and have the opportunity to use it, then we need to make sure that all these factors come into play in the classroom. The most effective method for this was put forward by the writer and teacher Jeremy Harmer, where he called these elements ESA: *Engage, Study and Activate*. This approach allows all of the previously mentioned conditions to be applied and gives the teacher a great deal of flexibility in the classroom. Overall, this is probably the most effective of all the methodologies.

Engage. This is the sequence, in the lesson, where the teacher will try to arouse the students' interest and get them involved in the lesson. If students are involved and interested, they will find the lesson more stimulating and fun, thus reducing inhibitions and leading to a more conducive language-learning environment. Activities and materials, which tend to engage students include; games, discussions, music, interesting pictures, stories. Even if such activities are not used, it is vital that students engage with the topic and language that they are going to be dealing with. For example, the teacher will show the students a picture of someone and lead that into a discussion before reading about that person. Alternatively, if the language topic is for example, can/can't, the teacher might start with pictures and a discussion about favourite animals before discussing what they can and cannot do.

Study. These activities are those where the students will focus on the language (or information) and how it is constructed. They could range from the practice and study of a single sound to an examination and practice of a verb tense. Sometimes the teacher will explain the language; at other times, the teacher will want the students to discover it for themselves They may work in groups studying a text for vocabulary or study a transcript to discover style of speech. Whatever the method, Study means any stage where the students will be focused on the construction of the language.

Activate. This is the stage where the students are encouraged to use any all of the language they know. Here students should be using the language as *freely* and communicatively as possible. The focus is very much more on fluency than accuracy with no restrictions on language usage. Typical Activate activities include role-plays, communication games, debates, discussions, and story writing.

These ESA elements need to be present in most lessons to provide a balanced range of activities for the students. Some lessons may be more heavily focused on one stage or another but all stages should be included wherever possible. To say that all three elements need to be included does not mean that they always have to happen in the same order. Instead, the order can be varied to give teacher greater flexibility in the content of her lessons. In terms of order, the only real rule is that all lessons should finish with an Activate stage.

A *Straight Arrow* lesson is where the teacher takes the lesson in the ESA order. First, the teacher Engages the students, then they Study the language, finally they try to Activate the language by putting it into production. Straight Arrows lessons can work very well with certain structures. However, such lessons may not be the best way to deal with more complex language. The lessons will also become very predictable and potentially boring if this is the only way of teaching. Therefore, teacher will sometimes use this method and will choose a different sequence for her lessons.

A *Boomerang* sequencing of the lesson gives teacher more possibilities, while still incorporating ESA. This variance on the *Straight Arrow* technique ensures that the teacher is only supplying the students with language when they have already demonstrated that they do not know it and have need of it. Such a lesson would follow this pattern: Engage, Activate 1, Study, and Activate 2. The difficulty with this sequence is that the teacher has to try and predict what problems the students are likely to have in the first activate stage in order to have materials/ideas for helping students in the study phase. Such a lesson might be more useful for higher level students as they will need quite a lot of language for the activate stages.

The *Straight Arrow* sequence is useful as the teacher knows what the students need and will take them logically to the point where they can use that language. The *Boomerang* sequence is also useful as it allows the teacher to see what the students need before teaching the language. However, many lessons are not as straightforward as this, and will require a lot of mini-sequences building to a whole. This is a *Patchwork* ESA lesson. Such lessons allow for a greater deal of flexibility and provide a nice balance between study and activation The role of correction in the classroom is far from clear-cut. However, all teachers do need to know the skills of correction work, the ability to recognize and correct both spoken and written mistakes. The aim of giving feedback is to encourage self-awareness and improvement. By providing ongoing feedback can help students to evaluate their success and progress. Feedback can take a number of forms: going through activities checking students' answers, giving praise and encouragement, correcting, setting regular tests, having regular group discussions, individual tutorials. The type and extent of feedback depends largely on the following factors: individual students, culture and the expected role of the teacher, the stage of the lesson, the type of activity. When giving feedback on oral or written work, teacher must be positive. Ways of giving positive feedback can range from an informal 'well done', publishing good written work around the classroom, using it as a model, to using a grading system. Feedback from an activity has to be clear and audible so students can have the opportunity to correct their own work. The ability to correct is a skill that takes time and experience to perfect. It is an area in which students are often critical of the teacher. Too much correction can be equally as off-putting as too little. It is also important to note that praising the students is equally as important as correcting, if not more so. In teaching EFL, it is usual to distinguish between mistakes and errors. A mistake can be thought of as a slip of the tongue or the pen. The student is able to correct himself or herself, either unprompted or with the help of the teacher or other students. An error is something that is more deeply ingrained and may be made because the student believes what he is saying is correct or he does not know the correct form. However, there is a positive side of errors which implies, at least the student is trying: by making errors learners are experimenting with language, which is part of the learning process and by noting errors the teacher can see what needs focusing on in future lessons. Self-correction should be done as it provides the student with the opportunity to reflect upon what he has said and to try again. Before students can correct themselves, they must be aware that something is not accurate and what kind of error is. If the student is unable to correct him quickly, it is better to move on rather than humiliating him. If the student is unable to correct his own mistake, it is often useful to allow the other students to correct the mistake.

Students usually like helping each other. However, this method should not be used if the teacher feels that it would make the student, who made the mistake, feel uncomfortable or confused. These two

methods allow the students to identify the problem and correct it. If the teacher corrects straight away, then the students do not have to think about the mistake and work out why it is not correct. Therefore, they are less likely to remember it and are more likely to continue to repeat the mistake in the future. It can be difficult for teachers to know exactly what type of mistakes to correct. Generally, we can say that for activities where accuracy is the focus, (the study stage) correction is more vital than for activities where fluency is the primary objective. There are three occasions when it is relevant to correct: the mistake is with the language point which is being thought, the mistake is being regularly repeated either by the student or other class members and so risks becoming ingrained, the mistake seriously impedes understanding. When one of the above mistakes/errors is made, the teacher can indicate that something needs correcting by repeating it to the student with a questioning tone, asking if they think it is right, by saying 'again?' by having a puzzled expression or by putting it up on the board. Putting it on the board is probably more useful for more complex mistakes as it allows all students to focus on the mistake and think about it. This technique also allows the teacher to highlight on the board the type of mistake and where it is. It is important to wait until the student has finished speaking or until the end of the activity to avoid interrupting the flow of the activity. As for writing, probably the most effective way of correcting written work is by using codes in the margin or the body of the writing.

This makes correction neater, less threatening and gives the students a chance to correct their own work. Frequently used codes refers to issues such as tense, spelling and word order. Typical codes include: «s» spelling, «wo» word order, «t» wrong tense, «s/p» wrong usage of singular/plural forms, «^» something is missing, «[]» something is not necessary, «m» meaning is not clear, «an» usage is not appropriate, «p» punctuation is wrong.

A teacher with a plan is a more confident teacher (Jensen, 2001). Lesson planning is at the heart of being an effective teacher. It is a creative process that allows us to synthesize our understanding of second language acquisition and language teaching pedagogy with our knowledge of our learners, the curriculum, and the teaching context. Farrell (2002) defined a lesson plan as «a unit in which it is a sequence of correlated lessons around a particular theme or it can be specified as a systematic record of a teacher's thoughts about what will be covered during a lesson». He further adds that a daily lesson plan is a written description of how students will move towards obtaining specific objectives. Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2005) pointed out that lesson plan is a series of course plan which provides direction for a teacher of what kind of materials of study to be taught and how to teach them. It is true that too much planning can make lessons rather rigid and stop the teacher being flexible to the needs of the students.

However, it is very difficult for inexperienced teachers to be able to be as flexible as this would require. The teacher is expected to let the students decide what to do in the class but an inexperienced teacher would find great difficulty in being able to conduct a lesson in such a way, as she would not be prepared to deal with some of the language problems that may arise from such a lesson and lessons, therefore, may well lack direction. Most teachers will find themselves somewhere between these two extremes. They will make notes, or complete lesson plan forms, but will build in flexibility. The writing of lesson plans has a number of important functions. First of all, it is a sort of aid. Plan focuses the teacher's mind on what needs to be achieved and the best way of achieving it. Writing a lesson plan helps teachers to think more clearly about what they are

going to do, why they are doing it and how they will do it in relation to available time. Second of all, a lesson plan helps the teacher to keep on target and gives her something to refer to during the lesson. However, it should not stop from being flexible and responding to the needs of the class. For example, if the class is really enjoying a particular activity, the teacher will probably want to extend the time allocated to that task and maybe postpone other tasks until a later lesson what a class has done and which materials have been used.

Recording class content will also help. Basic principles of lesson planning are: keep it simple, do not try to script the lesson, structure it and maintain the same structure, write the anticipated time for each activity in the margin check for balance of skills, try to make sure activities fit together to give the lesson a smooth flow, keep it flexible and open to adaptation. Before starting the lesson, the teacher must check that she has all the necessary aids and materials needed, that the equipment works, materials and aids are laid out so that she can easily find them, the seating are arranged as desired, and the board is clean. Having a chat to the students, as they come into class, would help break the ice with them and get them in the mood to learn. As for the content to be included, a lesson plan is very much up to the individual. It is recommended to include all of the following in a plan.

Learner objectives: this is what the teacher want the students to be able to do by the end of the lesson. Personal aims: what the teacher wish to achieve. Context: this shows the theme around which the lesson is based and how it fits in with past and planned future lessons. Teaching aids: materials and other aids that you will need in the lesson. Anticipated problems (for the students and the teacher): It is very important to try and anticipate any particular problems that the students (or the teacher) may have with the lesson. Procedure: the activities used to achieve the learner objectives. Phase: Engage, Study or Activate. Timing: it is vital to plan how long each activity is expected to take.

A teacher should then be able to see if she has too much content or not enough. It is important to be realistic and flexible with the timing. If not, teacher will have to either make up for lost time or fill in extra time. Interaction: who will be interacting at each stage of the lesson. It could be the teacher-student (T-S), student - student (S-S) or students working alone. Class level: the level of ability that the class bas with the English language. Number of students: teacher may wish to anticipate how many students will attend to make sure that her activities are suitable for the class size. Date/time: this will allow teacher to keep a historical record of what she has done with a class and when.

It will also help teachers who may teach the same class at a later date. Teacher and observer's names: may be useful if the class is being monitored. A good teacher will want to monitor the quality of her own lessons. An effective way of doing this is for the teacher to evaluate her own lessons and make notes of what went well and where the lesson could have been improved. By focusing on each lesson's strengths and weaknesses, teachers will be helping themselves to develop. A great deal is involved in planning a lesson on which depends a successful lesson.

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