

The applicability of English language teaching methods to other subjects

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a pilot teacher training course being delivered to teachers and teacher educators of Islamic studies subject at British Council Afghanistan. The main aim of the training course was to find out to what extent the methodologies and approaches being used to teach English language are applicable in teaching other subjects. In this research fifteen teachers and educators participated in a four-day training course. The findings show that Test-Teach-Test, Task-based Learning, Jigsaw Reading, and many other teaching methods are easily applicable in teaching Islamic studies.

Keywords: *teaching methodology, English language, applicability, other contexts, test-teach-test, task-based learning, teaching listening, teaching reading, jigsaw reading*

Introduction

In Afghanistan, classic, traditional, and deductive methods and approaches of teaching have dominated most of the educational institutions in the country. However, in the last few years all the educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities have been instructed by the ministries of Education and Higher Education to implement student-centered curriculum. From my working experience in the field, this has caused many challenges as the teachers and teacher educators have limited practical knowledge of what a student-centered lesson is and how to deliver it. This article will firstly discuss the issues regarding teaching and learning in Afghanistan and finally reports the findings of a pilot teacher training course which was delivered to Islamic Studies Teachers and Teacher Educators at British Council Afghanistan.

Theoretical background

In Afghanistan, traditional, deductive and classical methods and approaches of teaching have dominated the teaching and learning. Most of the educational institutions in the country still deliver lessons through lectures and PowerPoint presentations. There is no time for students to interact and engage with the lesson. According to ÜNVER (2014), this is causing many challenges with transferring the knowledge into practice. To overcome this issue, the ministries of Education and Higher Education in the last few years have instructed all the educational institutions to change their approach and deliver student-centered lessons at their institutions so that the students are involved in the learning process.

From my experience ^[*] of working in the field of teaching and teacher training, the instructions for changing the approach from traditional and classical methods to student-centered approach has caused many problems as every teacher has his/her own interpretation about student-centered learning. For example, some teachers assign students to self-study a complete chapter of a book during a session and then share what they learned with their classmates, whereas, some other teachers assign students to explain the lesson to their peers or groupmates without giving them an input first.

This might be due to the limited number of experts at teacher education institutions having practical knowledge of modern teaching approaches and methods as well as practical knowledge about delivering a student-centered lesson in order to demonstrate to the novice or experienced teachers how a student-centered lesson is delivered. At Afghan teacher education institutions, from my observation, almost all teaching methodology courses are delivered through lectures and presentations and there are

* Due to limited research related to the context the author is referring to his background experience.

very limited opportunities for the trainee teachers to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. For example, in a four-year English teacher education degree, there are only six to eight hours of teaching practicum in the last year of their studies. Furthermore, micro-teaching is also neglected in most of the teacher education degrees.

Limited hours of teaching practicum, learning the teaching methods through lecture and presentation, and neglecting micro-teaching in a teacher education course have caused many problems. Firstly, delivering teaching method sessions through lectures and PowerPoint slides make the trainee teachers become “consumers of theories” (Hutner et al. 2011: 151) and learn teaching methods theoretically while lack practical knowledge and experience in applying teaching methods effectively in a lesson. Secondly, there would remain “a strong inequality between theory and practice” (Korthagen et al. 2001) and this would cause that novice teachers “meet many problematic situations for which they were not sufficiently prepared” (Korthagen et al. 2001).

This four-day pilot teacher training course was developed and designed at the British Council Afghanistan to bridge the gap between the theoretical knowledge the Islamic Studies teachers have about teaching methodology and student-centered learning with the practical knowledge and experience. Further detail about the course is provided in the course description section of this study.

Research Question:

To what extent the teaching methodologies and approaches being used to teach English language are applicable in teaching other subjects?

Methodology

In this study, fifteen Islamic Studies teachers and teacher educators of which seven were females and eight were males participated in a four-day pilot teacher training course at British Council Afghanistan. The participants teach Islamic Studies subjects as well as English at schools, universities, and teacher training colleges. In this section, firstly I will discuss why Islamic Studies teachers and teacher Educators were selected as course participants, and secondly, the course will be discussed in detail.

1. Why Islamic Studies teachers and educators are selected as course participants?

In this course, the Islamic Studies teachers and educators were selected for two main reasons. Firstly, they had a very good level of English language as they had previously taken English language courses with the British Council Afghanistan. The participants’ English level was ranging between A2 and B1 according to CEFR. Secondly, they were all interested in growing professionally in their field.

2. Course detail:

On the first day of the course, the course participants learned how to teach reading and jigsaw reading. Each session started with a demo lesson and analysis and ended with a discussion on how the teachers can apply the teaching methods and approaches in their context. In the demo lessons, they explored the teaching methodology practically and acted as real students. In the lesson analysis part, the British Council teacher trainer analyzed the demo lesson and in the final discussion part, the teacher trainer gave the course participants the awareness of how they can adapt and apply the teaching methods they learned in teaching Islamic Studies subject.

On the second day of the course, they learned how to teach listening and the test-teach-test approach. Each session, the same as the first day, started with a demo lesson, lesson analysis, and ended with a discussion on the application of the methods and approaches in their context. On the third day of the course, the course participants learned the task-based learning approach to teaching and learning and how to give clear instruction and ICQs (Instruction Checking Questions). The task-based learning approach was introduced through a demo lesson and the teacher trainer analyzed the lesson after that. The participants were also given the awareness of how they can apply task-based learning in their context. The instruction and ICQs session gave the participants the awareness of giving clear and

short instructions and how to develop ICQs. The participants were also helped to prepare and plan for their Teaching Practice on the third day of the course.

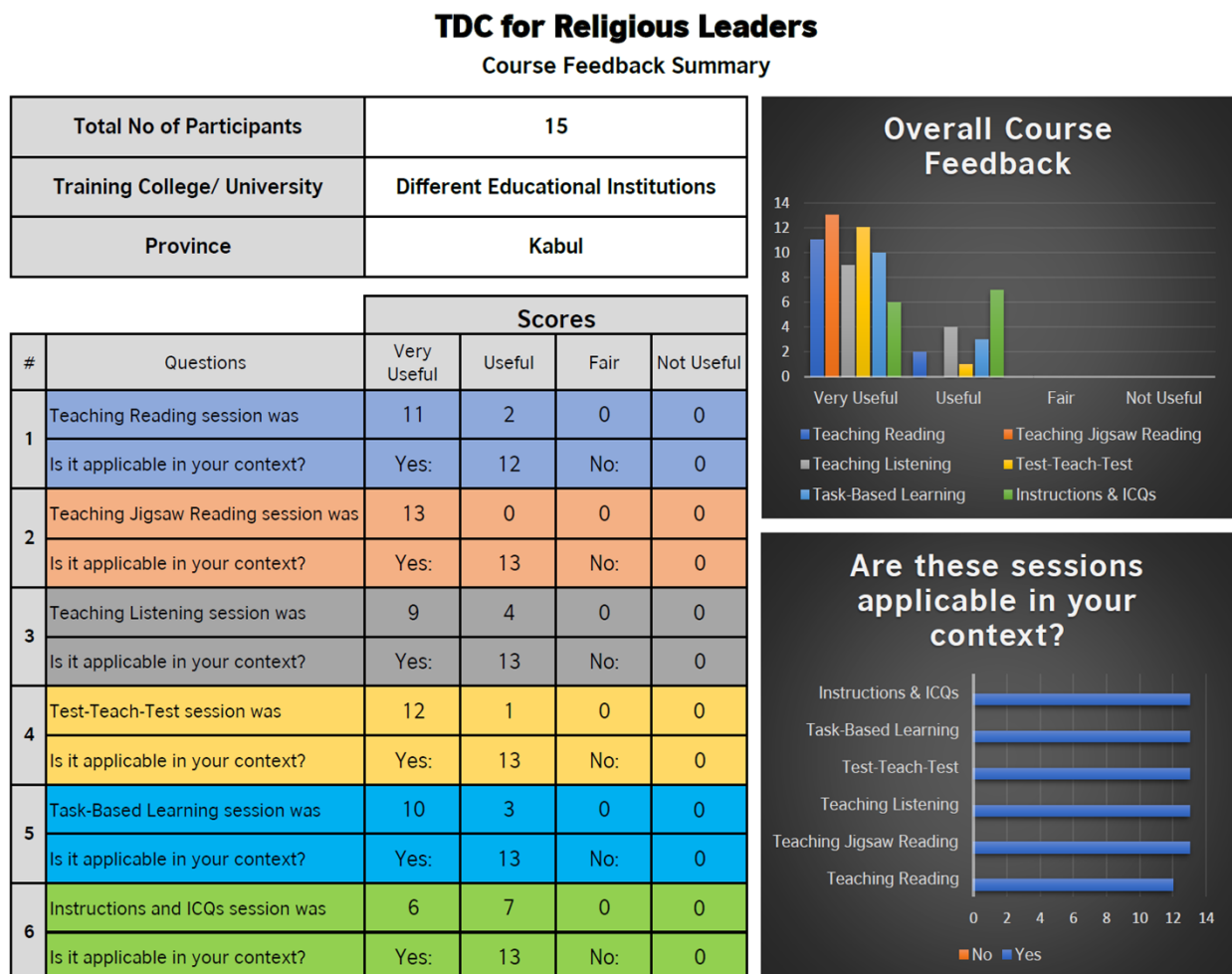
On the last day of the course, the course participants delivered demo lessons applying what they learned throughout the course in their teaching. The participants were divided in four groups and each group had to present a one complete lesson. The content of their demo lesson was Islamic Studies. By the end of the course the participants filled in a survey questionnaire in order to express their opinions to what extent the course was useful to them and applicable in their context. Three of the participants also wrote their reflections on the course which is discussed in detail in the next section of this study.

Results and discussion

The findings from the survey, observation reports of the participants’ teaching practice, and course reflections indicate that the pilot teacher training course for Islamic Studies subject teachers has been very successful.

Results of the survey questionnaire that thirteen course participants filled-in by the end of the course show that most of the teachers found the four-day pilot teacher training course very useful and a few of them useful. None of the course participants stated that the course was ‘Fair’ or ‘Not Useful’. Furthermore, all the course participants stated that the knowledge they learned throughout the course is applicable in their context (teaching Islamic studies subjects).

Figure 1: Result of the survey form by numbers and bar charts.



In addition to the survey form, the participants wrote written reflections about the course. Teacher A wrote:

I have learnt many things which I didn't have familiarity with. I think we can implement all of these methods in our teaching, and it is good for teaching in each subject like: Islamic, language, social science and another subjects.

Moreover, Teacher B stated that the "training was completely different" to him from other teacher training he has been. He also said that in the four days training he has gained "like four years of university" experience. Finally, Teacher C wrote that the training "has brought an evolution to our brains" (translated from Dari – official language of Afghanistan). He also said that "these methods having their specific stages all end to student-centered learning, making students brain active and include them in the learning process" (translated from Dari).

On the last day of the course, the participants delivered demo lessons. All the course participants were divided in three groups of four and one group of three. The first group delivered a demo lesson applying what they learned from the Teaching Reading session. The second group delivered a demo lesson applying the Jigsaw Reading lesson stages into their lesson. The third group delivered a demo lesson applying the stages of Test-Teach-Test and the last group applied Task-based Learning stages into their lessons. All demo lessons were 40 minutes and from each group two group members delivered the lesson, 20 minutes each.

All the groups displayed a high level of output and applied all the stages they learned from each session very successfully. According to the class observation notes all the lessons were very successful lessons. However, there were a few classroom management points that the teachers needed to consider. For example, the TBL group missed to confirm students' response, the teaching reading group missed to signpost the handouts, the Test-Teach-Test group was standing closer to the students who were responding to a question.

Conclusion

In Afghanistan, every teacher has his/her own perception and interpretation of student-centered learning. Some teachers ask students to stand up and explain the lesson without giving them an input first, whereas, some other teachers might assign students to self-study a complete unit/ chapter of the book and then explain for their peers or groupmates.

To familiarize Afghan teachers and teacher educators with student-centered learning, the four-days pilot teacher training course was designed and implemented at the British Council Afghanistan. The participants of this course were Islamic Studies subjects teachers and teacher educators. The pilot teacher training course helped the participants gain an awareness of how to teach a text, how to involve the learners when they give a lecture, test-teach-test, and task-based learning.

The result of the course feedback indicates that the course was very successful and useful to the participants. Almost all the participants indicated that the course was very useful to them and all of them reported that the knowledge they learned from the course is applicable in their context. Overall, the course helped the participants gain new knowledge of teaching methods.

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