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THE HISTORY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY AND ITS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The article discusses the history of foreign language teaching methodology and its stages of development. It explores how language teaching methods have evolved from traditional grammar-based approaches to modern communicative and task-based techniques. The research highlights the main principles, goals, and changes that occurred throughout history in response to social and educational needs. The findings emphasize that each stage in the development of methodology has contributed to improving the quality of teaching and learning foreign languages.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, methodology, Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, language acquisition, teaching approaches, learning strategies, educational development, modern pedagogy, historical evolution, 19th–21st centuries, linguistics, communication skills.

Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages has always been one of the most important aspects of education throughout history. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a bridge that connects people, cultures, and civilizations.

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As human society developed, the need for learning foreign languages increased rapidly, especially in the fields of trade, science, diplomacy, and culture. Consequently, the methodology of foreign language teaching has undergone many changes and improvements over time. Each historical period brought its own teaching methods, principles, and approaches that reflected the educational goals and social realities of that era. In the early stages of language education, foreign languages such as Latin and Greek were taught mainly through memorization, grammar rules, and translation of texts. The primary purpose of teaching was not communication but the development of intellectual skills and the ability to understand classical literature. Over the centuries, educators began to realize that language should be taught as a means of real-life communication rather than an academic subject. This realization led to the gradual evolution of various methods designed to make language learning more effective, interactive, and learner-centered. The development of foreign language teaching methodology can be divided into several major stages — from the traditional Grammar-Translation Method to the Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, and finally to modern communicative and task-based approaches. Each stage contributed new insights and techniques that shaped the current understanding of how languages are learned and taught. The purpose of this article is to explore the historical evolution of foreign language teaching methodology, to analyze its major stages of development, and to identify the main factors that have influenced the transformation of teaching practices throughout history.

Early History of Language Teaching (Grammar-Translation Period)

The early history of foreign language teaching was deeply influenced by the tradition of teaching classical languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, learning Latin was essential for education, religion, and science. Since these languages were no longer spoken in daily life, the goal of instruction was not communication, but rather the ability to read, understand, and translate written texts. This classical approach laid the foundation

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for what later became known as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The Grammar-Translation Method emphasized the mastery of grammatical rules and the memorization of vocabulary. Teachers explained grammatical structures in a deductive way — first giving the rule, then providing examples and translation exercises. Students were required to translate complex literary sentences between their native language and the target language. Accuracy in grammar and written translation was considered more important than oral communication. As a result, learners often developed strong reading and writing skills but lacked the ability to speak or understand the language fluently. Despite these shortcomings, the Grammar-Translation Method remained dominant throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. One of its main advantages was practicality: it did not require native-speaking teachers or modern technology, and textbooks could easily be written. Moreover, in academic settings, knowledge of Latin-style grammar was viewed as a sign of intelligence and discipline. However, as societies became more global and international communication increased, educators began to question this method's effectiveness. The need for speaking and understanding real-life language led to the search for new, more communicative approaches, marking the beginning of a new era in foreign language teaching. Language learning is almost as old as human history itself, and communication is an essential tool for the prosperity of all human societies. Some argue that the fact that over 50% of the world's population is multilingual today means that teaching and learning languages is still important today. Throughout history, different approaches and methodologies have emerged in the transmission of language learning. Some approaches have been around for a short time and have since fallen into disuse, while others have stood the test of time and can still be found in second language (L2) classrooms around the world. This article looks at one such approach to language acquisition, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which has a very long history and is still used in L2 classrooms. Although some modern researchers and academics consider the GTM to be very old and obsolete, it is

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still the dominant doctrine in language teaching. Question: why? We examine the effectiveness of different levels of GTM and finally conclude which approaches to L2 English learning are most appropriate for students in today's educational environment. What was later codified and compiled into a grammar translation method dates back to the early 16th century (McLelland, 2018). At that time, Latin was the lingua franca in most of Europe, primarily serving as the language used by the educated elite, as well as the language of philosophy, education, religion, culture and business (Celce- Murica, 2014). The "classical method", originally derived from the teaching of Latin, remained relatively unchanged until the 19th century, when Latin began to be replaced by other "modern" foreign languages in schools. In this technique, special attention was paid to the study of grammar rules through translation exercises. Since the ability to communicate effectively in a language was considered only a secondary goal, conversational practice was minimal. The Grammar Translation method is not new. It has had different names, it has been used by language teachers for many years it was called the Classical Method because it was the first method in teaching the classical languages like Latin and Greek. Earlier in this century, it was used for the purpose of helping students to read and appreciate foreign language literature. In the late 19th century, leading German linguists began to systematize the basic elements of what was to become the method of language translation. Indeed, when GTM was first introduced in the United States, it was synonymous with German science and was known as the "Prussian method". However, GTM was criticized early on by critics who advocated a "hands-on" approach to language learning. These critics advocated the use of communicative methods in the classroom, and by the 1930s most American classrooms had switched to the "reading" method, using specially designed textbooks for L2 students instead of translations writings of unrelated texts. During World War II, the US military developed a "phonological" approach to language teaching, and by the 1960s, this method had largely replaced GTM in the United States. However, in some parts

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of the world, translation has been the preferred approach and foreign language teachers can still be found in classrooms around the world. The main features of the grammatical method of translation can be summarized as follows: 1. Students learn to translate directly from the target language into their native language. 2. Students learn grammatical rules deductively. 3. Lists of target words are presented with their native language equivalents. 4. In the process of teaching and learning, the mother tongue is mainly used, not the language of the student. 5. In the translation, great attention is paid to the correctness of the student, correction by the teacher, just giving the right answer. Today, GTM is considered as obsolete by many modern language educators and out of place in the modern L2 classroom. Richards and Rogers, in their book *Approaches and Methods for Teaching Foreign Languages*, state: "It is true that the grammar and translation method is still widely used, but it has no supporters. This theory exists as a non-existent method."

2. Development of New Methods (19th–20th Century)

By the late nineteenth century, educators and linguists began to recognize the weaknesses of the Grammar-Translation Method, particularly its failure to develop students' speaking and listening skills. As a result, a reform movement in language education emerged across Europe, leading to the creation of new, more practical methods. This period marked the beginning of the Direct Method, which aimed to teach languages through direct use rather than translation. The Direct Method encouraged thinking in the target language and emphasized oral communication, pronunciation, and spontaneous use of vocabulary. Teachers used visual aids, objects, and everyday situations to connect words with their meanings. This approach made learning more natural and helped students develop communicative competence. In the early twentieth century, the influence of psychology, especially behaviorism, brought a new perspective to language teaching. This gave rise to the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), which became

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dominant during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the United States. The method was based on the idea that language learning is a process of habit formation. Students repeated dialogues and drills to form correct sentence structures and pronunciation patterns. Audio recordings and language laboratories were commonly used to reinforce learning through repetition and imitation. While the Audio-Lingual Method successfully developed accuracy and listening comprehension, it was later criticized for being too mechanical and limiting students' creativity. Nevertheless, both the Direct and Audio-Lingual Methods played a crucial role in moving language teaching from a purely grammatical focus to a more communicative and interactive process. They laid the groundwork for modern approaches that emphasize real-life communication and learner engagement in the classroom.

The Direct Method in language teaching, also known as the natural method, has its roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Cai & Hwang, 2020; Esawey, 2013; Liu, 2020). This approach emphasizes teaching language through direct immersion, where the target language is used exclusively in the classroom. The method seeks to replicate the way children acquire their first language by focusing on everyday vocabulary, oral communication, and inductive grammar learning (Agbo & Oyelere, 2019; Alaofi, 2020; Brandão et al., 2021). This contrasts with traditional grammar-translation methods, which rely heavily on the learner's native language and explicit grammar instruction (González-Lloret, 2020). The Direct Method gained popularity due to its promise of building fluency in speaking and listening. The appeal of the Direct Method lies in its student-centered approach, which

encourages active participation and immediate use of the language (Allwood, 2011; Amin, 2019; Anckar, 2008). It prioritizes oral proficiency, making it particularly effective for learners who need to quickly develop conversational skills. The method also emphasizes the importance of natural language acquisition through real-life communication (Abourehab & Azaz, 2023; Aceto et

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al., 2018), avoiding direct translation or explanations in the learners' native language. As a result, it has been widely adopted in various educational settings, especially in foreign language instruction. Despite its historical significance and continued use, the Direct Method has faced criticism for its limitations, particularly in developing comprehensive language proficiency (Graesser et al., 2021; Mudinillah et al., 2024). While the method excels in promoting speaking and listening skills, it often lacks sufficient focus on reading, writing, and complex grammar instruction. Critics argue that this narrow focus may hinder learners' ability to fully master the target language, especially at more advanced levels (Dörnyei, 2021). As language learning has evolved, alternative approaches, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), have gained prominence. The continued use of the Direct Method in various educational contexts, despite the emergence of alternative teaching methodologies, raises important questions about its long-term effectiveness (Al-Ajmi, 2020). While it remains a popular choice in some language programs, especially for beginner and intermediate learners, its role in modern language education is increasingly debated (Ait Si Ahmad et al., 2021). Understanding its strengths and limitations is crucial for determining whether it can meet the demands of today's language learners and educators. Despite the widespread use of the Direct Method in language teaching, there is a significant gap in research evaluating its long-term effectiveness, particularly in comparison to more modern approaches. Many studies focus on short-term gains in speaking and listening proficiency, but few explore whether these improvements are sustained over time (Hidden, 2020). Additionally, there is limited research on how the Direct Method impacts other language skills, such as reading and writing. This gap leaves unanswered questions about the overall effectiveness of the method in developing comprehensive language competence. Another gap in the literature concerns the adaptability of the Direct Method in diverse educational contexts. Most of the existing research has been conducted in Western

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educational systems, where the focus on oral communication aligns with cultural and pedagogical norms (Oliver, 2021). There is limited exploration of how this method performs in non-Western or more traditional educational settings, where emphasis on reading, writing, and grammar may be more prominent. Understanding how the Direct Method can be adapted to different cultural contexts is essential for assessing its global applicability (Wang, 2018). Research on the role of teacher proficiency in the success of the Direct Method is also limited. The effectiveness of this approach relies heavily on the teacher's ability to create an immersive language environment and provide rich input in the target language (Dörnyei, 2021). However, few studies examine the specific skills and training teachers need to implement the method effectively (Ali, 2020). Without adequate teacher preparation, the potential benefits of the Direct Method may not be fully realized, leading to inconsistent results in language learning outcomes. There is also a lack of research on how the Direct Method compares to other language teaching methodologies in terms of learner motivation and engagement. While the method's focus on oral communication is generally seen as motivating for students, particularly beginners, it is unclear whether this engagement is sustained as learners progress to higher levels of language proficiency (González-Lloret, 2020). More research is needed to understand how the Direct Method affects learner motivation over time and how it compares to more interactive or task-based approaches. The primary aim of this literature review is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Direct Method in language teaching by synthesizing findings from various empirical studies. This review seeks to assess how well the method fosters language proficiency, with a particular focus on speaking and listening skills (Ahmed, 2021). By examining studies from different educational contexts, the review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and limitations of the Direct Method. Additionally, the review will explore how the method compares to other language teaching approaches in terms of learner outcomes and motivation (Golfetto, 2020). The scope of this review

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includes both qualitative and quantitative studies that have evaluated the Direct Method across various age groups, proficiency levels, and cultural contexts. The review will analyze research from different parts of the world, particularly in educational systems where the method is still widely used (Andayani, 2020). By including studies from both Western and non-Western contexts, the review aims to provide a global perspective on the effectiveness of the Direct Method and its adaptability to diverse educational settings.

3. Modern Approaches (Late 20th–21st Century) From the late 20th century to the present day, the methodology of foreign language teaching has undergone a significant transformation. The traditional focus on grammar and translation has been replaced by approaches that emphasize communication, interaction, and learner autonomy. The most influential among these are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The Communicative Language Teaching approach emerged as a response to the limitations of earlier structural and audio-lingual methods. According to Nigmatova (2022), CLT places real communication at the heart of the learning process, prioritizing fluency, negotiation of meaning, and the use of language in authentic contexts. Students participate in pair and group discussions, role-plays, and interactive tasks that simulate real-life situations. Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) argue that this method increases learners' confidence and motivation, helping them acquire both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. In the 21st century, Task-Based Learning (TBL) has further developed the communicative approach. TBL organizes lessons around meaningful tasks such as problem-solving, interviews, or project work. Research by Ismail et al. (2023) shows that TBL enhances learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and problem-solving skills, as it requires them to use the target language purposefully. Similarly, Lestariani (2023) highlights that TBL fosters collaboration and critical thinking among students. Another influential approach is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated

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Learning), which combines subject learning and language instruction. Nurmatov (2025) notes that CLIL helps learners develop both linguistic and cognitive skills by studying subjects such as history or science through the medium of a foreign language. This approach also supports cultural awareness and interdisciplinary learning. Finally, the integration of modern technology has become a defining feature of 21st-century language teaching. Digital tools, online platforms, and AI-based applications such as Duolingo, Memrise, and ChatGPT enable personalized learning, continuous feedback, and global communication. As Elmirezayeva and To'ychiyev (2025) state, technology-supported methods make the learning process more dynamic, interactive, and accessible. TBL tasks enable teachers in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context to enhance the development of learners' skills by fostering an interactive group learning setting with increased exposure to target language usage (Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011 (2011) recognized several additional TBL issues, including the requirement for resources beyond the textbook, the teachers' originality and dynamism in developing the activities, and the task's suitability in the target language. These several obstacles can be overcome by incorporating technology into the teaching and learning processes to improve the quality of TBL and increase by the teacher through assigned tasks (Celik, 2017). Completing tasks in the classroom establishes an environment in which students can organically engage in activities. The paired sample t-test and Cohen's d coefficient analysis verified that students' learning outcomes increased significantly after enrolling in a TOEFL preparatory course, indicating the course's favourable influence. These findings corroborate prior research demonstrating that Task-Based Learning enhances students' language skills (Celik, 2017), while incorporating technology into TBL environments enables English language learners to develop their English and digital literacy skills (Chen & Lin, 2018). At this point, the task-based learning implementation and digital tools are merged according to the integration model given by Casañ-Pitarch and Candel-Mora (2021). ...

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In conclusion, the history of foreign language teaching demonstrates a continuous process of change and adaptation influenced by social, cultural, and technological developments. During the early period of the Grammar-Translation Method, language learning was mainly focused on reading, writing, and grammatical accuracy rather than communication. Although it helped learners understand classical texts, it lacked practicality in real-life communication. In the 19th and 20th centuries, new approaches such as the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Method emerged in response to the limitations of traditional grammar-based learning. These innovations emphasized pronunciation, oral practice, and habit formation, showing the growing importance of speaking and listening in language acquisition. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the field of language teaching shifted towards more communicative and learner-centered approaches. Methods like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning, and the integration of technology have transformed classrooms into interactive environments. These modern approaches highlight meaningful communication, cultural awareness, and digital competence as essential elements of successful language education. Overall, the development of language teaching methods reflects humanity's constant effort to improve communication and understanding across cultures. By combining traditional strengths with modern innovations, educators today can design effective, balanced, and motivating lessons for learners around the world.

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