



Exploring Alternative Teaching Methods in EFL Education: Innovations, Methodologies, and Practical Applications

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Abstract

The field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has continuously evolved, characterized by dynamic perspectives, aspiring methodologies, and the integration of innovative teaching tools. This paper aims to explore the utilization of alternative teaching methods in the context of EFL education and examine various innovative practices employed in classrooms, with a focus on assessing their efficacy within the Albanian educational context. By investigating the implementation of alternative teaching methods, this study contributes to the existing corpus of knowledge in EFL pedagogy and offers insights into practical applications of these methodologies in diverse linguistic and cultural settings, particularly at secondary and tertiary education levels where these methodologies and tools are most applicable. Through empirical investigation and critical analysis, this paper aims to provide valuable guidance for educators and instructors who are always in search of appropriate means necessary for enhancement of the quality and effectiveness of EFL teaching. It reaches into a very important conclusion (among others): utilizing alternative teaching methods in EFL in education brings a new era in today's teaching environments.

Keywords: quality, educational context, EFL, innovative practices, teaching tools

1. Introduction

There are various perspectives in the field of the digitalization of education and most of them agree on the overall positive impact it has on both educators' and students' experiences. In the long run, teaching approaches, methodologies and practices have undergone changes and adaptations-some methodologies have disappeared, new ones have emerged, and others have reappeared, changed and freshened. Also, there have been one or two which have emerged combined with other, older ones. Therefore, it can be stated that the exploration of alternative teaching methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practice is an ongoing journey

marked by innovation, adaptation and dedication to enriching the EFL classroom experience and improving students' learning outcomes.

This paper aims to bring forward some of the most prominent methodologies, their application in EFL teaching and learning, and ways of integrating them into practice within the Albanian context. It focuses on some of the main regions of Albania where the new trends are expected to be more evident. Educators often draw ideas from multiple digital sources, positively influencing the choice of methodologies in accordance with their targets, classes, needs, topics, etc.

Before starting with the literature review, it is worth noting that throughout the paper, foreign language learners are often referred to as 'students' due to the fact that the findings are mostly related to this category. However, it should be noted that most of them are valid for all categories of foreign language learners.

2. Literature Review

Over the years, various approaches have exercised their influence on the educators' teaching practices. Characterized by specific advantages and drawbacks, each methodology has been utilized in various contexts and as recently witnessed, EFL classes have become subject to the application of new practices owing to the emergence of Educational Technology. This has rendered the entire process of knowledge transmission more challenging on foreign language teachers' behalf and more welcoming on students' side. Traditional teaching methods like **Grammar Translation Method** (GTM) (which focuses on teaching grammar rules and translation of texts to/from the target language) and **Direct Method** (DM) (which emphasizes direct immersion in the target language through speaking and listening activities without translation) have given way to more communicative and student-centered approaches shifting, thus, towards learners' engagement and the use of authentic language in teaching EFL (Richard & Rodgers, 2014). The necessity for alternative teaching methods which cater to the diverse needs of students as much as encourage significant development in language acquisition and skills, leaving aside teacher-centered approaches (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007), shifted educators' interest towards student-centered methods offering innovative, alternative teaching methods which emphasize learner's engagement, collaboration, and authentic language use (Richard & Rodgers, 2014).

The importance of communication in learning a foreign language has been brought into focus by teaching methods like **Communicative Language Teaching** (CLT) which has played a significant role in foreign language acquisition drawing attention towards 'interaction' as a medium of learning (Richard & Rodgers, 2014; Nisha, 2024). This teaching methodology aims to develop communicative competence by immersing students in various situational contexts, enabling them to use the target foreign language authentically and actively in realistic scenarios.

Task-Based Learning (TBL) and **Project-Based Teaching** (PBT) are next in line. While both have into focus the enhancement of students' linguistic skills through hands-on learning experiences, they differ from each-other. The former has in its core engaging students in real-world tasks to develop their language skills (Celik, 2017; Ellis, 2003). Its primary focus is on achieving a specific task with language occurring incidentally (Sánchez, 2004). The latter is an instructional approach which contributes to students' language acquisition through all the steps included in the process of writing a project either individually or in group and present it to the rest of the class in order to share their ideas and findings (King & Smith, 2020; Prianty et al., 2021). It not only contributes to students' knowledge but also to their interpersonal

skills as they learn how to manage difficult situations which might arise during their work. As with any unconventional methodology, educators might face different types of difficulties while implementing it, but its contribution to teachers' ongoing professional development and students' overall improvement surpasses all of them (Rao, 2019).

Another teaching method which has seen popularity is **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**. It integrates language learning with subject matter content making it possible for students not only to learn the language, but also to deepen their understanding of complex topics (Urmeneta, 2019). In this way, this teaching methodology enhances language proficiency while promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and cross-curricular connections. In Albania, this method of teaching finds application ground in secondary and tertiary level of studies. It is also found in some private educational institutions starting from primary education. It is worth mentioning the fact that it is applied almost exclusively in private institutions at all levels.

Genre-Based Approach (GBA) is going to be brought into the focus of our study as a highly efficient way of foreign language teaching, widely utilized in colleges and universities. It is randomly encountered in writing classes as a form of developing students' linguistic competence in various fields of life. For example, teaching a foreign language through the production of different genres of texts such as academic essays, business reports, etc., not only helps students studying Economy-related subjects (and/or any other one) improve their field-specific skills and gain a deeper understanding of market dynamics and global trends, but also sharpens their language skills. Hence, mastering students' ability to analyze the specific functions a text might have and helping them improve their purpose related meaning. However, Liu and Chen (2020) advise educators to carefully select the texts that they are going to work on with their students. Regarding the same topic, it is worth bringing into focus Martin and Rose's (2007) argument according to whom, in this teaching approach, language and context are closely related to each-other. In this aspect, thorough investigation of many elements directly or indirectly affecting students' performance and competences is necessary and continuous professional development for foreign language teachers is essential (Karasaliu, 2023) in order to foster language acquisition.

Synchronous Online Learning and **Asynchronous Online Learning (SOL and AOL)** environments have also been explored, each offering unique strategies for engaging students and promoting effective learning outcomes. Various researchers among whom Curt Bank and Charles R. Graham (2004) have explored SOL as a practical way for fostering real-time interaction and collaboration. However, AOL has raised the interest of many other researchers, some of whom have focused on the instructional design principles for effective asynchronous online courses, emphasizing strategies to promote engagement and learning outcomes in self-paced learning environments (Worsley, 2017; Perveen, 2016). In addition, it is worth mentioning studies whose focus is to compare and contrast both forms of online learning, giving instructions of instances of 'when' and ways 'how' to successfully integrate each of them in EFL teaching. For more detailed research on the matter see Gündüz & Akkoyunlu, 2019; Abraham, 2008; Salmon 2013; Rika and Sulistyani, 2020; Dahmash, 2021; and Pham et al., 2023. In many cases, researchers agree on the positive influence that the combination of both forms of teaching has in increasing students' involvement, promoting collaboration and improving communication. As Joseph R. Freidhoff (2008) admits, there are a number of affordances and constraints of technology use for educational purposes but the

skills of educators and those of students have improved considerably, hence facilitating its implementation in most of the educational levels.

A very praised teaching model, **Flipped Classroom Model** motivates students to take ownership of their learning (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018), collaborate with their peers (Kachka, 2012 cited in Anwar, 2017), and apply their knowledge in meaningful ways. It is a way to transform passive students into active participants in their own learning journey (Anwar, 2017; Choiril, 2017; Dill, 2012 Hung, 2015). Among the disadvantages of this teaching methodology, the two more frequently encountered are the inability to cater to every individual (Gustian et.al, 2023), and the difficulty in selecting appropriate videos (Talbert, 2012). Nevertheless, the evolving trends and the number of advantages that this reversed method has outnumber them, allowing the promotion of active learning and personalized educational experience. Hence, shifting the focus from passive listening, to active engagement; fostering deeper understanding; and promoting critical thinking skills among students.

While drafting their syllabuses before the beginning of an academic year, many teachers struggle to decide on the final coursework in order to find a topic which will be of interest for their students. When **Collaborative Learning** is under consideration, questions may arise in teachers' minds: 'Will I have to think of drafting many topics for different projects? Do they always have to be worked on in groups? How will the assignment process work? Well, not necessarily. While educators are expected to draft and prepare collaborative assignments/tasks for their students, both parties benefit from the entire process. This form of learning is considered as successful for reasons like personal responsibility for the task in general, which means that students are expected to self-literate on all the topics in question, in order for it to be successful. Peer-interaction, active participation and learning for life are other positive aspects of this method of learning. Whether it is implemented in a hundred percent of the syllabus or only in a part of it is the teachers' responsibility, strictly related to elements such as motivation, dedication and willingness for cooperating with their students, preparing tasks and assessing them objectively (Smith & MacGregor, 1992).

Without entering into the historical background of **Functional Translation Method (FTM)** as a teaching methodology, we focus our attention to its actual application and inclusion in and out of the classroom context. As indicated by its name, FTM is an approach which has in its main focus translation based on the function of the text (Weschler, 1997). It is a very useful method of teaching a foreign language especially when English for Special Purposes (ESP) comes into question (but not only) as students practice translating words/phrases taking into consideration the purpose of the text and any specialized terminology by negotiating its meaning (Weschler, 1997). Students benefit a lot from this method as they acquire their knowledge actively, by reshuffling their previous one and, when necessary, exploring new nuances/uses of a certain term/phrase and in the end, by deciding on the meaning in accordance with the purpose of the text. Ranging from utilization of bilingual text analysis for deeper understanding (Cook, 2010), to translation games, engaging tasks, and interactive activities to reinforce language skills, this methodology has proven to be a helpful way of integrating knowledge in any form of classes (on-site and online). Moreover, practices like collaborative translation where students carry out translation projects; translation role-plays (either onsite or remotely); and even workshops to enhance language proficiency and cultural competence greatly contribute to the use of translation in EFL teaching and learning. In

addition to the above-mentioned forms of the inclusion of translation as a teaching methodology, it is worth mentioning cultural translation where students explore cultural nuances through the translation of idiomatic expressions and proverbs giving way to the communicative aspect of the language use. It is obvious that the educator plays a crucial role in efficiently implementing translation in Foreign Language Teaching (Kern, 2000 cited in Karasaliu, 2019). This teaching methodology continues to evolve and adapt in accordance with educational contexts and the changing needs of language learners. Its integration in foreign language teaching is achieved through the utilization of authentic and meaningful language use.

Finally, it is worth mentioning Nisha's idea that despite the plethora of teaching methodologies, teachers have their own experience of learning a foreign language and it is their choice to follow the same path or shift to other ones which better cater to their students' needs and preferences. (Nisha, 2024)

3. Methodology

This study was carried out through literature analysis and empirical research and after that, the found data was seen under the magnifier of Albanian educational setting. In addition, observations were conducted in secondary and tertiary levels of education in a number of regions such as Korça, Elbasan, Tiranë, Durrës, Shkodra and Vlorë. Moreover, to complete the study, practical examples are suggested and various tools are presented.

Research questions addressed how alternative teaching methods influence language acquisition and proficiency in EFL learners, the opportunities and difficulties associated with innovative teaching tools, and methods for integrating these methodologies purposefully within the Albanian context.

4. Practical Applications in Albanian Educational Setting: Examples

In this part of the research, practical applications are brought into focus aiming to give a more concrete aspect. In Albanian educational setting, task-based learning is vastly used in speaking classes in both educational levels in question. Students either collaborate or work individually on real-world tasks such as planning a trip to the nearby regions; activities on important historical dates; solving a problem which might arise inside the classroom among students themselves, etc.

While FTM is often encountered in translating different texts based on their communicative functions such as contracts, instructions, etc at tertiary education, PBT is met at all levels of education. It seems as a useful way for integrating new language, fostering investigation and the sense of responsibility among students. They undertake projects related to their field of study such as creating business plans or conducting market research at university level; and environmental ones as part of cross-curricular enterprises at secondary education (but not only).

Below are some examples which could serve as models for each form of teaching mentioned in this paper:

FTM: Role-play: Business Negotiation. Students are given a scenario where they need to negotiate a business deal with a foreign partner. They translate and interpret key phrases and expressions related to negotiation tactics and strategies.

CLT: Pair or group discussions where students are given a topic to discuss using the target language. Ex: students discuss their favorite holiday destinations.

PBT: Cross-Cultural Project. Students collaborate on a project exploring a cultural aspect of a country where English is spoken. Ex: they might create a presentation or traditional celebrations, food, or customs, incorporating language learning along the way.

TBL: Planning a party. Students are tasked with planning a party, including creating invitations, designing a menu, and organizing entertainment.

CLIL: In a high school EFL class, students study a unit on environmental science. The teacher delivers lectures and assignments in English, covering topics such as climate change, renewable energy, and pollution. Students engage in discussions, conduct research, and present their findings in English, integrating language learning with specific content.

GBA: In a university EFL writing course, students learn about different genres of academic writing, such as essays, research papers, and literature reviews. They analyze sample texts, identify key features of each genre, and practice writing their own compositions following genre-specific conventions and structures.

SOL & AOL: In an EFL course for adult learners, the teacher uses a virtual classroom to deliver live online lessons. Students participate in real-time discussions, collaborate on group projects, and receive immediate feedback from the teacher. Additionally, the teacher provides recorded lectures and supplementary materials for self-paced learning outside of class hours.

PBT: Cross-Cultural Project. Students collaborate on a project exploring a cultural aspect of a country where English is spoken. Ex: they might create a presentation or traditional celebrations, food, or customs, incorporating language learning along the way.

FCM: In a high school, students are assigned pre-recorded video lectures and reading on grammar and vocabulary topics to review at home. During class time, they engage in communicative activities, role-plays, and debates to practice using the language in context. The teacher provides individualized support and guidance as students apply their learning in meaningful ways.

Collaborative Learning: In an EFL class, students work in pairs or small groups to complete a project on cultural differences. Each group researches a specific aspect of culture, such as greetings, gestures, or food customs, and prepares a presentation to share with the class. Through collaboration, students practice speaking, listening, and cultural awareness skills while developing language proficiency.

The above-mentioned methodologies are often seen combined with interactive whiteboards and online resources owing to the benefits the utilization of technology has in improving students' skills. Peer-teaching and group-work are two other practices encountered in our observation. The first one is randomly met at university level as part of staff exchange programs and sometimes at secondary education as part of international projects for specialized schools. The latter is employed in all levels of education due to its multi-levelled benefits ranging from collaboration, to peer learning to enhance language acquisition.

5. The Use of Interactive Tools in EFL Teaching Practice

The number of interactive tools utilized in EFL teaching practice and of those which could be adapted as per necessity is considerable but in this study are presented only some of them which are currently being used in secondary and tertiary education, vastly by private educational institutions and considerably by public ones. Another reason is the fact that the tools mentioned below are either free of charge or offer some of their features for free which means that are more likely to be prevalent in educational institutions as much as utilized by students themselves.

Observations found that the most preferred interactive tools among Albanian students (but not only) are dialogue boxes like: Duolingo, Babel and especially ChatGPT. They utilize them for different purposes in and out of their classes; in aid of or/and as part of their assignments; etc. These tools are currently being employed by most of foreign language teachers in Albania for different educational purposes.

When hearing about 'simulation games', the first thing that comes to mind are fun games, but after careful consideration, we come to realize their true potential. They simulate real-world scenarios, such as other interactive tools that can enhance EFL instruction (Sebastian, 2021) and are particularly effective with students of different branches at tertiary education. For

example, students of Economics and other related fields can benefit from games like ‘Negotiator’ or ‘Harvard Business School Negotiation Exercises’. Their biggest advantage in foreign language learning is the fact that they offer real-like interaction options.

The main focus of many studies recently, Virtual Reality (VR) Experiences are what educators of all subjects might consider as the ‘chalk’ of the future. They are immersive environments which thoroughly capture students’ attention by allowing them to interact with language and culture in a realistic setting (Prandi et al., 2021). Some of the applications which offer these experiences are: MondlyVR, ImmerseMe, and VRChat; while from immersion programs we can mention: AltspaceVR, Engage, Mozilla Hubs, etc. Despite not being a new concept to the educational system in Albania, it seems like more work needs to be done by educators and institutions in order to properly facilitate the incorporation of these tools into their teaching practice.

When interactive tools are in question, online discussion forums such as Reddit, Discord, Quora, LinkedIn, etc., should not be neglected. These platforms used for synchronous and asynchronous communication where students can engage in discussions, share ideas, and receive feedback, greatly foster their engagement and enrich their language knowledge incidentally. Also, Learning Management Systems and Social Learning Platforms have long become part of educational institutions in Albania. In this context, systems like Moodle, Canvas, Schoology and platforms like Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Edmodo, etc., can be mentioned as some of the most prevalent ones.

Finally, there are mobile applications. Albanian teachers use various popular language learning apps with interactive exercises, quizzes, and multimedia content to support independent learning. Here we can mention Apps like: Memrise, Hello Talk, etc., and also Flashcard Apps such as Anki, Quizlet, etc. Many training sessions have been organized by the Ministry of Education and Sports in order to help teachers integrate them into their practice hence wide incorporation of them was encountered in both levels of education.

Practice has shown that the incorporation of educational technology in every aspect of Foreign language teaching and learning has considerable benefits for teachers and students. Researchers like Curtis J Bonk, a well-known educator and researcher who has carried out various studies on many aspects of innovative methodologies, interactive tools, blended learning, benefits and challenges of their utilization in the teaching practice have considerably influenced teachers decisions on the ways they can implement various tools into their practices. In his book, “The world is open: How web technology is revolutionizing education” published in 2009, Bonk puts forward interesting aspects of the benefits of student-centered teaching and the influence of the world’s digitalization on education in general. This and many other studies carried out by advocates of educational technologies serve as a good starting point for all the teachers who still fear the implementation of technology into their practice.

6. Interactive Tools-Examples

Here are some examples of interactive tools which can be utilized in our teaching practice:

Dialogue Boxes: In an online EFL course, dialogue boxes can be used to simulate conversational exchanges between characters. For example: students might interact with

virtual avatars in a language learning software; respond to prompts and practice dialogues in different social contexts, such as ordering food at a restaurant; or making travel arrangements.

VR Experience: students are immersed in English-speaking environments where they explore virtual cities, interact with native speakers, and engage in everyday activities such as shopping, dining and sightseeing.

Simulation Games: Students play a simulation game that simulates a business negotiation scenario. They take on different roles, such as representatives or clients. Through role-play and decision-making activities, students practice communication strategies and negotiation techniques in a realistic context.

Online Discussion Forums: Students can use them to discuss texts, books, lectures, etc. Through asynchronous communication in Reddit, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc., students engage in meaningful discussions, share ideas, and collaborate with peers outside the classroom.

7. Practical Applications-Challenges and Discussion

There are a number of difficulties educators might encounter while trying to implement new teaching methodologies into their practice. Technical issues often arise in our everyday experience (and this is not valid only for Albania). Both parties involved in the process might encounter technical difficulties such as compatibility issues with devices (for example [lingro.com](https://www.lingro.com), a very useful dictionary does not offer all its features when accessed via a mobile phone); or poor internet connectivity all of which can hinder students' engagement; etc.

Another problem encountered is equity. There are cases when students don't have access to the necessary technology or resources (Rideout & Katz, 2016) required to use the assigned tools effectively leading to inequity among them. These problems, which are often results of socioeconomic and geographical factors, in many cases, prevent students from exercising and reflecting their true capabilities.

Students' learning interest and time comes next. As educators, we are aware of the fact that students (and people in general) need to take their time when acquiring new knowledge, especially when technology comes into question (Petrescu, 2023). Some tools, especially virtual reality experiences and simulation games may need some effort on the teachers' (and students') part in order to become proficient in their use, and integrate them into the curriculum.

Authenticity, a topic which is paid a lot of tribute in today's academic field, plays its part in rendering the use of educational technology trickier. While simulation games and virtual reality experiences aim to simulate real-world scenarios, they may not always accurately reflect authentic language use or cultural context and this somehow limits their effectiveness for the process of learning a foreign language. Moreover, taking into consideration the fact that students have encountered these tools before their teachers poses more difficulties for the latter, not only in the type of the interactive tool they select, but also in making it interesting enough for capturing their students' interest (Prensky, 2001). In Albania, authentic use of these tools leave room for improvement.

Another challenge worth bringing into focus is the implementation of these tools in the teaching practice. Integrating them into the curriculum in a meaningful and effective way requires careful planning, instructional design, and teacher training. It is understandable that teachers have difficulties in adapting some of these tools with the learning objectives and

ensuring that they contribute to their students' learning experience (Tammets & Ley, 2023) instead of detracting from them. In addition, attention should be paid to the process of assessment and evaluation. Assessing students' progress when using interactive tools can be challenging, as traditional assessment methods may not fully measure the skills and competences developed through immersive learning experiences. In this context, it is understandable that ongoing teachers' qualification is essential.

Last, but of a high importance are privacy and security: Some online platforms and mobile applications may raise concerns about data privacy and security, particularly when collecting personal information or user data. It requires willingness and dedication on teachers' and institutions' behalf to take measures to protect students' data. It should be highlighted, however, that educational institutions in Albania take full responsibility for protecting their students' privacy when institutional platforms are utilized.

8. Conclusion

Based on the above discussed material we can admit that education has a dynamic nature which will keep teachers always on the run to improve, adapt and transform new forms of knowledge transmission.

Exploring alternative teaching methods in EFL education is not only merely about embracing change but also about utilizing innovative teaching methodologies and technology in order to give students a more personalized learning experience; enrich our teaching practices; foster active learning; and cultural understanding. Hence, by embracing innovation, adapting methodologies, and incorporating practical applications, we can enhance the quality and effectiveness of EFL teaching.

It is important to maintain continuous professional development and collaboration between academia, educational technology, and educators to meet the evolving needs of learners and practitioners in the field of EFL education.

Based on the insights gained from this study, the utilization of alternative teaching methods and interactive tools in the Albanian educational context is evolving rapidly. In spite of the challenges related to technical issues and resource accessibility, educators are dedicated to adapting and integrating these methodologies purposefully to improve the quality of EFL instruction and meet the evolving needs of language learners in Albania.

9. Limitations

This study is concentrated in some of the biggest cities in Albania and it does not reflect the situation in the entire country. There is ground for deeper research which will feature a wider view of the situation in the country. In addition, it is worth noting that most of the above teaching methodologies and a number of interactive tools are utilized even in other levels of education in Albania. They are not made part of this study and extension of the research in that sector can be of interest.

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