

**Idea Sharing: Analyzing the Principles & Techniques
of English Language Teaching Emphasized
in the Crescent English Course for Yemen**

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education in Yemen has utilized several methods for teaching the English language including the grammar translation method, and the communicative language teaching method. This paper presents an analysis and description of the principles and techniques of English language teaching emphasized in the English language textbook “*Crescent English Course for Yemen*” used for teaching English for the third secondary grade in Yemen. This paper provides also a discussion about the effectiveness and feasibility of the methodology and techniques employed in the textbook. Although the textbook was designed and developed based on the communicative language teaching method to encourage the English language learners to engage in communication, to interact and participate in communicative classroom activities, many obstacles prevent them from achieving these goals. Among these obstacles are that teachers mostly follow the traditional grammar translation method in teaching the English language and students mainly focus on the final results,

namely to pass the examinations which mostly consist of reading and writing tests.

Keywords: Crescent English Course, communicative language teaching method, principles, English language teaching, Yemen

Introduction

Yemen is an Arabian country located on the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. The system of education in Yemen has gone through various stages and has been profoundly affected by political and ideological factors. Before Yemen was unified in 1990, the main two regions of Yemen were ruled by two different ruling regimes. The education system in the northern region was restricted to only Islamic education, and the region was isolated from the entire world (AL-Agbari, 2002). What students learnt at that time was merely memorizing the Holy Quran and some basics of mathematics.

Not much difference between the educational system in the northern region and the southern region, except that Britain, which had colonialized the southern region, had developed the educational system in the main cities designed to assist them in controlling the region (Mohammed, 2009). Additionally, people in the southern region were learning English as they communicated with the British people (Al-Naqeeb, 2012). This situation continued until the northern region became the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962 and southern region gained independence in 1967.

Many neighbor Arabic countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, tried to help both regions by creating educational systems and providing teachers. The Ministry of Education in Yemen adopted the English textbook taught in Egypt. The Egyptian English syllabus called “The Nile Course of English”, which was based on the grammar-translation method, was introduced in the Yemeni schools in 1963 (Mohammed, 2009). The Arabic language was the language of instructions. In 1979, the Ministry of

Education and the British Council in Yemen made a cooperative to design a series of English textbooks under the banner of "English for Yemen". These were designed based on the Yemeni context to meet the needs of Yemeni learners (Mohammed, 2009). This syllabus was a part of a program to develop English language materials and to train teachers. Although the syllabus was based on structure and communicative methods, an evaluation in 1987 revealed that it was unsatisfactory due to weaknesses in the design of the textbooks.

After the unification of the two regions in Yemen in 1990, the Ministry of Education in Yemen developed a new curriculum, in which the needs of society, including the educational philosophy and cultural differences, were accounted for to make a suitable curriculum for all. Unfortunately, the project the Ministry of Education launched did not target the English language as a school subject (Mohammed, 2009).

In 1995, a new English series of textbooks entitled "*Crescent English Course for Yemen*" came into use in Yemen, which replaced the previous series of textbooks "*English for Yemen*". The *Crescent English Course for Yemen* textbook, the target of the current analysis, was designed on the basis of the communicative approach in which the four language skills were integrated.

The *Crescent English Course for Yemen* was first published in 1977 and was used by some Gulf countries. Over time, the textbook has seen several amendments to face the new challenges and different situations. This series of English language textbooks were adopted by the Ministry of Education to address the fact that Yemeni learners of English were unable to speak or use the English language in real-life situations and they needed to be taught English via a different approach.

English Language Teaching in Yemen

The educational system, which has been followed in all Yemeni schools since the unification of the Northern and Southern region of the country in 1990, was established to meet the

planned objectives for the whole country and its people. Three stages exist in this system; the primary stage is the first stage in which students' ages range from 6 to 12. Notably, English is not among the subjects taught in this stage. The preparatory stage is the second stage in which students' ages range from 13 to 15. Students have to attend the national exams at the end of this stage. English is taught at this stage as a compulsory subject at schools. Finally, the secondary stage is the third stage in the Yemeni educational system in which students range in age from 16-18. English is one of the subjects taught in the Yemeni school curriculum at only the preparatory and secondary stages. The primary stage includes 6 grades starting at the age of 6, and the preparatory and secondary stages include only 3 grades for each stage (as shown in Table 1).

Crescent English course for Yemen is the name of a series of textbooks used to teaching the English language in Yemen. This current study analyzes the English textbook taught in the third secondary grade (*Crescent English Course for Yemen 6*). This textbook was chosen for several particular reasons. This textbook is taught to the Yemeni students in the last year of the secondary stage. This period of study is critical for Yemeni students. Students do their best to pass the final examination and obtain the marks needed to later join the tertiary education system in their preferred major. The Yemeni students at this stage need to improve their English proficiency to be able to successfully pass the final examination and to prepare themselves for achieving the English proficiency required by the Yemeni colleges or institutions in higher education. Having a good command of communicative English is also a necessity for those who want to study abroad where English is the language of instruction and communication.

Table 1.

Stages of the Educational System in Yemen and their textbooks

Stages of the Educational System	Grade	Textbook Used
Primary Stage	1-6	No English Classes
Preparatory Stage	1	<i>Crescent English course for Yemen (1)</i>
	2	<i>Crescent English course for Yemen (2)</i>
	3	<i>Crescent English course for Yemen (3)</i>
Secondary Stage	1	<i>Crescent English course for Yemen (4)</i>
	2	<i>Crescent English course for Yemen (5)</i>
	3	<i>Crescent English course for Yemen (6)</i>

English language learning in Yemen encounters many difficulties and challenges, such as using poor traditional teaching methods, large classes, the low motivation of students to learn English and limited teaching materials (Ahmed, 2018; Fareh, 2010). Although the textbook used to teach English in the Yemeni schools is designed based on the communicative language teaching approach, teachers have been following the old-fashioned method of teaching English, especially grammar, through teaching explicit rules separately, repeating sentences and vocabularies after teachers, and putting more focus on the English structures and rules rather than on the language functions and how to use the language in real-life situations through communication (Ezzi, 2012). The process of teaching and learning in Yemen is teacher-centered. Some researchers, such as Al-Shamiry (2000) and Thabet (2002), have pointed this out as a reason behind the dominance of structure-based methods. Among the reasons related to the continued usages of these methods are the general lack of knowledge of the EFL methods and the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), in particular. Bataineh, Bataineh, and Thabet (2011) stated that teachers of English

language in the Yemeni schools were fairly knowledgeable of the principles of CLT as they did not receive a formal training in CLT, which explained their tendency to resort to structure-based practices.

Students who graduated from the secondary schools showed a poor level of competence and proficiency (Al-Sohbani, 2013), and these were attributed to different causes, such as using the mother-tongue language, focusing on the language structure, and a lack of motivation for learning or speaking English. Another problem is that students cannot apply rules of grammar in their speaking and writing even though they can state them (Ezzi, 2012). This is because realizing the grammar rules is different from being capable of applying those rules efficiently in the basic language skills.

As mentioned above, the Yemeni teachers have been doing most of the speaking in the English classes; therefore, only little interaction and communication have occurred either between the students and teachers or between the students themselves. Consequently, this has adversely affected the level of English competence in speaking. According to Altaj (2014), the Yemeni learners of English rely on memorization while studying English in the classroom. They are requested by their teachers to memorize the grammar rules, vocabulary and English sentences. They do not have sufficient opportunities to use English in communication either in the classroom or in the outside world.

According to Ahmed (2018), many Yemeni teachers of English lack the communicative competence in English and have limited experience in teaching the English language communicatively. Thus, these teachers prefer the traditional methods of teaching as they find them easier to run. To help resolve this issue, Ahmad recommended recruiting Yemeni teachers of English based on their proficiency levels and to train them in workshops. The study also revealed that the teachers of English ignored teaching the oral skills because of the large sized classes, a lack of teaching materials, and the low proficiency of teachers, which led them to focus on grammar and reading.

Secondary School English Course and its Approach

According to Al-Naqeeb (2012), the Crescent English Course for Yemen was adopted by the Ministry of Education in Yemen as a replacement for the former series of textbooks called "*English for Yemen*", which was used before the unification of the two regions of the country. The reason for choosing this new series of textbooks was the demand for a new approach of language teaching and learning. Yemeni learners of English had been found to be unable to use the language for communication. So, it was necessary to change the curriculum based on appropriate and effective activities, games, songs, pair work, or role play in which the aim was to create a learner-centered curriculum. Anderson and Larsen-Freeman (2011) stated that being able to communicate requires more than having linguistic knowledge about rules and vocabulary because learners also need to be communicatively competent.

The *Crescent English Course for Yemen* was designed specifically for the purpose of encouraging communication and interaction involved in many communicative exercises and activities (Al-Tamimi, 2006). According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), the role of teachers in the communicative language teaching is to facilitate communication inside the classroom and create real-life situations to urge students to communicate and create a learner-centered learning. According to Wagdi (2016), different roles are assigned in the methodology followed in the "*Crescent English Course for Yemen*", which is based on the communicative approach to turn the teacher into a facilitator, rather than a controller. Many communicative activities are included to make the learners interact and communicate individually or in group work.

As pointed out clearly in the syllabus, "*Crescent English Course for Yemen*" has a syllabus that combines functions and grammar. It is a structural functional syllabus in which the units are designed based on functions, such as describing things, asking information or reporting events, and on grammar as well.

English Language Teaching Principles Emphasized in the Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)

This section analyzes the principles emphasized in the *Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)*, which is used to teach the English language for the third secondary grade in Yemen. The framework used in the analysis of the current paper is an eclectic framework, which is primarily based on the principles derived from Brown (2007) and supported by the principles derived from Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011). The principles found in the Yemeni textbook were reported and analyzed by the author, and the analysis was linked with the theoretical aspects concerning the principles of English language teaching provided by Brown (2007) and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011).

Automaticity is the first principle to be applied to the *Crescent English Course for Yemen* textbook. Automaticity is a cognitive principle in which the process of teaching and learning does not pay too much attention to various language forms so that students do not think too much before they speak or participate in the classroom. Brown (2007) proposed Automaticity in which he assumes that learning a second language can be efficiently achieved when teachers and learners focus on fluency and use the language as much as possible. This syllabus emphasizes that using a language inside or outside the classroom is a main objective of the current curriculum, which can be noticed in the activities and exercises given in the student's book or in the workbook. These include guessing or discussing in pair work or group work (Workbook, Unit 1, p. 7). Students do most of the talking part, and the teacher's role is to monitor and facilitate the task for them (Brown, 2007). This does not mean neglecting the role of language forms as they are teaching these in the early stages, as shown in the syllabus. Different forms of language are introduced to students, which enable them to achieve the bigger part of the lesson through which language is used effectively.

Meaningful learning is another cognitive principle found in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen*. According to Brown

(2007), to guarantee a long-term retention, associations between what students already know or experience in their life must be made with the new information presented in the lesson or activity. This principle is applied in this textbook (Unit 1, p. 6; Unit 6, p. 48 & 49), in which students have a good topical knowledge that helps to motivate them to learn more and to interact inside the classroom.

Students should be intrinsically motivated to achieve successful language learning and to perform well inside and outside the classroom (Brown, 2007). *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* is designed with a variety of activities and exercises to keep students interested and challenged. There are many role-playing games or vocabulary games in the workbook that teachers can use to motivate their students (such as Workbook, Unit 1, p. 7; Unit 2, p. 13). According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), games have a crucial role to play in communicative language classes in which students work in small groups to maximize the opportunities for communication inside the classroom. Students like to face challenges such as grammar activities, speaking activities, writing and comprehension activities as well, which also help to keep their interest high. This textbook is designed to enable students to associate with people and communicate with them using English. This can be shown in the syllabus. According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), students should be exposed, whenever possible, to authentic language. This can be seen also in the pupil's book (Unit 2, p. 14 & 16).

The strategic investment principle is also emphasized in this English textbook. According to Brown (2007), students have a huge responsibility for succeeding in mastering the second language as they have to invest much time and efforts using various strategies to comprehend and produce the language. The previous curricula, which were based on structure approach, emphasized teacher-centered learning and teaching. However, in this current curriculum, students do most of the work. This is ensured by the variety of activities provided to students in the

pupil's book or in the workbook, such as discussion in pairs or in groups, audiovisual and vocabulary games, describing things in writing or speaking, or listening and speaking exercises and activities performed by the students. Therefore, a transfer from the teacher-centered learning into the student-centered learning has occurred.

Another principle emphasized in this textbook is "*Autonomy*", which is defined as the ability of students to take responsibility for their own learning (Benson, 2007). Many activities are present in the pupil's book or the workbook, in which students are required to take responsibility and do a task such as speaking activities, role playing and discussions (Pupil's Book, Unit 6, p. 46; Workbook, Unit 3, p. 38 & 39).

Sometimes, students do not have enough vocabulary or a control over grammar, so they feel shy, consequently, and fragile. Another principle analyzed and present in the *Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* is *language ego*. Students do not want to feel silly or humiliated. The techniques and activities used in this course try to prevent such feelings by introducing the activities to students so that they understand what they should do. Vocabularies and pictures are also provided to make the task easy for them. Working in pairs permits students to help each other in correcting mistakes and providing feedback.

The purpose behind designing this syllabus is to have a communicative English class in which the students' anxiety of having a conversation is eliminated because they have been unaccustomed to talking to other students in a classroom. Perhaps communication in the new language is the goal of many learners who hope to speak and communicate in the target language communicatively. The *Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* is a communicative course, which adopts many exercises and activities to ensure that Brown's (2007) principle of *willingness to communicate* is achieved.

Willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001) is a new principle added by Brown (2007) to the socio-affective principles of the language learning principles. This

principle combines two concepts that are: 1) self-confidence and 2) risk-taking. There are other two related concepts that are: 1) anxiety and 2) self-efficacy. Learners may feel anxious when they try to communicate in the target language; therefore, learners need self-efficacy to achieve the assigned tasks. The sequencing of activities in *Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* is laddered from the easiest to the most difficult tasks, which represents the commitment to the principle of *willingness to communicate*.

Notably, the course contains a mixture of cultures in the texts and pictures provided in the reading passages. The *language-culture connection* is another principle emphasized in this curriculum. Language is affected by the culture (Mahadi, 2012). Culture is a way of life (Brown, 2007). So learners have to be exposed to different cultures because language is an essential part of that culture.

The *communicative competence* is another principle (Brown, 2007). Students are required to use the language as much as possible. The goal emphasized in this principle is fluency. There are many activities and techniques in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* in which students are motivated to participate and interact using the grammar that they have learnt and their schemata as well. By doing these activities, such as role playing, students will learn language forms and how to use them in real-life situations. According to Kamiya (2006), role playing is effective in improving the learners' communicative competence of learners.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Methodology and Techniques in the Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)

The current curriculum used in Yemen is based on the communicative approach in which students are encouraged to speak and communicate either inside the classroom or outside the classroom with people in society. According to Halliday (1973), to be able to communicate in society, the mastery of linguistic structure is not enough for students. They have to be able to perform specific functions in society such as describing things and

inviting people, among others (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

There are many speaking techniques and activities introduced to Yemeni learners in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)*. According to Ur (1996), several features are necessary for an effective activity in speaking, one of which learners engage in much talking. Students should have opportunities to speak most of the time during a language class. This can be noticed in the techniques and activities provided to learners in the textbook. Role play, discussion, pair work and group work are all activities in which learners can gain more opportunities to speak their mind and participate in a classroom. Therefore, all learners will get a chance to speak. The topics in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* are interesting and motivating so that students feel eager to participate and contribute to achieve the objectives of the task. There are many speaking techniques and activities in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* such as: 1) pictures games; matching pictures with words or description (Workbook, p. 1, 2, 18, & 41), describing pictures (Unit 1, p. 3. Workbook), 2) guessing game (Workbook. Unit 5, p. 67), 3) information gap activities, such as exchanging information (Pupil's Book, Unit2, p.16), 4) discussion activities (Workbook, p. 44), and 5) story telling (Workbook, p. 70).

The assumption in this syllabus is that pictures allow teachers to uncover the knowledge of students about a particular topic as they describe those pictures. According to Harmer (2001), the use of pictures in communication activities is important. Pictures are used in a classroom to let students make guesses and predictions about the topic being taught.

According to Susanti (2007), role play plays a critical role in communicative learning and teaching because it provides chances for students to communicate in various social situations and roles. It allows students to be innovative. Accordingly, role play is considered an ideal exercise to let students be creative in using a language. During role play, students improvise and create a real-

world dialogue so that they are encouraged to think creatively and practice skills in a non-threatening situation (Susanti, 2007).

The syllabus suggests putting students in pairs and groups to let them discuss and share information. Discussion allows for real conversations in a classroom. Many activities are given in the workbook to let students work in pairs and communicate as much as possible. According to Ur (1996), discussion gives students opportunities to express ideas in an oral and organized manner to arrive with alternatives. Storytelling is another enjoyable exercise for both speakers and listeners engaged in, which can be used at any learning level.

The techniques and strategies used in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* are given in the syllabus. First, these suggest that students can predict what the text is about using their schemata. Pictures and vocabularies are given before the lesson starts to stimulate students in predicting the content of the text. Second, two reading techniques are presented in the syllabus: skimming and scanning. According to the syllabus, skimming is useful and students can practice the technique outside the classroom when they deal with large printed materials in their daily life. Similarly, scanning is shown to be useful when the students want to locate specific information. According to Ellis (2006), grammar should be taught explicitly at the intermediate and advance levels. Many previous researches have suggested that grammar is indispensable to achieve communicative competence. Grammar is integrated in *The Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)*. In each unit, two language reviews are included in which the grammar rules given in the unit are reviewed. Finally, a balance exists between authenticity and readability while designing the texts in the *Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)*.

Evaluation of Feasibility of Methodology and Techniques

The *Crescent English Course for Yemen (6)* is based on the communicative approach. The variety of activities and techniques in which students are involved in real-life situations with different interesting topics will attract students (Brown, 2007). According to

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), one of the learners' needs is to learn independently. The strategies mentioned in the curriculum are not enough to achieve this goal. Besides skimming and scanning strategies, students need to learn different kinds of strategies that enable them to learn outside the classroom. The teacher's role is not to teach English but to teach learners of English how to learn English.

Three criteria are involved in selecting a reading text: suitability, exploitability and readability (Brown, 2007). The reading texts in this course are often unsuitable for Yemeni students as their topics and language are not socially and culturally acceptable, and the content of the texts is based on different cultural imperatives (Mohammed, 2009).

Intrinsic motivation is one of the cognitive principles that Brown (2007) has enumerated. This seems lacking in the present situation. Even though the activities are interesting, students are attracted to those activities that will help them pass the final exam. The final exam is based on reading and writing. Speaking and listening are not taken seriously by many Yemeni students and teachers as well because these skills will not be tested (Al-Hammadi & Sidek, 2015).

Although the curriculum is based on communicative approach, previous researches (Al-Shamiry, 2000; Bataineh et al., 2011; Thabet, 2002) have revealed that most teachers were unaware of the communicative language teaching (CLT) principles and that they were still practicing the grammar-translation method in their teaching. Yemeni teachers of English need to be trained to teach such communicative English courses. The policymakers and curriculum developers in Yemen have to look carefully to those teachers and train them. It is not enough to design a curriculum based on communicative approach along. That is because the skills and ability of English-language teachers must be boosted to enable them to teach using those materials effectively.

Results reported in previous studies, such as Al-Mansoori (2008) and Al-Ahdal (2010), have revealed that the students did

not have adequate knowledge that could enable them to use the English language communicatively in their daily lives. Al-Mansoori (2008) found that Yemeni students demonstrated a poor level of proficiency even they had been taught the English language in school for six years. Al-Hammadi and Sidek (2015) stated that the students “tend to study English with the aim to simply pass the final examinations rather than to make use of it in their future life” (p. 171). This led to losing the main goal of using the curriculum and made both teachers and students neglect the communicative activities and pay more attention to passing the written exams (Al-Hammadi & Sidek, 2015).

Conclusion

Education in Yemen has gone through different stages before and after unification of the two regions of Yemen. Different kinds of approaches and methods have been adopted by the Ministry of Education in Yemen: the grammar-translation method, audio-lingual method and communicative language method. From 1962 to 1990, the approach used in the Yemeni curriculum was based on grammar-translation method as students were taught to translate and memorize. In 1995, *The Crescent English Course for Yemen* was designed by the Ministry of Education in Yemen in collaboration with the British Council in Yemen. The course was designed to let students interact and participate in a classroom as much as possible, which would enable them to use English effectively in real-life situations.

The goal of most curricula in modern times is to achieve communicative purposes and meaningful learning processes. However, the curriculum cannot stand alone because it is related with teaching methods, classroom size, students' interaction and motivation and many other environmental conditions. Consequently, any curriculum, even with the most modern way of teaching and learning, is doomed to failure unless factors related to the teacher's effort, student' encouragement and other educational and environmental factors are involved.

Theoretically speaking, the Yemeni curriculum adopts the principles of learning and teaching suggested by Brown (2007) including the techniques that are most suitable to make an English class interactive and help students to be communicative; however, the effects of the curriculum remain connected with what motivates students more to achieve high marks. The curriculum adopts the communicative approach and urges both teachers and students to interact, and do pair work and other conversational activities, but the final exams of English language in Yemen do not include speaking and listening questions in all grades. This leads both teachers and students to neglect all speaking, conversations and listening activities and to focus only on reading comprehension, grammar and writing. Thus, the curriculum cannot achieve its goals and the communicative language teaching (CLT) is rendered meaningless.

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