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The Resolutions of the Post-Millennium Structuralism Teaching Strategies for the Prerequisite TOEFL Course within the University Settings

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Abstract: *This paper sheds light upon the newly existed literary movement, the Post-Millennial Structuralism in teaching TOEFL for university students. The paper experiments the literary approach in the five TOEFL skills: structure, reading, listening, speaking and writing. As well as indicating the attachment of nowadays learning habits to the students' backgrounds that are totally indulged with technology, domestic, materialistic and social issues. The approach summons the EFL educators to the new standards of teaching TOEFL after conceiving the new life trends of a particular community. This has been demonstrated in a classroom of six Arab female university students in the UAE, of which three students are taught traditionally as guided by a certain book course as the other three are taught using the Post-Millennium Structuralism approach that also points out the necessity of acknowledging the evolvement of English Language Education in this rushing world.*

Keywords: *teaching TOEFL, post-millennium structuralism movement, university, EFL learners and EFL educators, Middle East.*

Introduction

The educational systems in the Middle East have been entirely connected with the Western's cultural and social involvements for more than a century. Since the last decade, the English Language has been imposed by many ministries of education and employers as a major language requirement amongst scholars and employees. Simultaneously, various media have assertively emerged the language, such as some popular social networks, advertised online courses and programs, radios and televisions encourage many people to study the language conveniently.
However, the merging of an English speaking culture with the Arabs' cultures through the media have created a big gap of understanding the language in its proper standards even though the people's demands to such media are very high. Many educators strive to keep in pace with the media such as creating useful lessons on Facebook, nevertheless, the foundations of the English Language would not be properly conceived. Therefore, the growth of the media from the start of the millennium was vast and rapid that many educators have failed to adjust their teaching

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

strategies accordingly, in addition, nowadays many learners mainly depend on the educators, whether up-to-date with the media or not.

Moreover, the reality of the language lies in acquiring it gradually from the early ages of a learner, and it would be shaped based on the three factors: environment, domestic and the cerebrum's thinking part . The educators fall into the environment and the thinking part as they either enhance their learners' language developments or retreat them throughout the twelve years of schooling. Hence, the results of the learners' language capabilities are genuine crystal-clear when they apply for university admissions as they are required to sit for an English Language Proficiency Exam, whether the TOEFL iBT, TOEFL ITP or Academic IELTS depending on an institution's test requirement, or the degree and/ or specialization applying for.

The Post-Millennium Structuralism (PMS) movement is a result from the aftermaths of the Middle East economic and social crises that well affected the Arab's community's standards. Therefore, this movement gives the English Language Education a new concept of language teaching and learning by highlighting on the importance of the English Language world-wide, and that's why the Ministries of Education in the Arab world have imposed the ETS tests or the IELTS among the learners as well as among many employees who seek professional developments or job promotions. Unfortunately, many young learners are not aware about the statuses of their English Language levels and the importance of the language in their countries until it would be quite hard for them to learn it as how it has been going on with some university students.

In order to lessen the pressure among the university learners and the TOEFL instructors, the teaching strategies on the basis of the Post-Millennium Structuralism movement manifest the reasons and the modern strategies in teaching TOEFL.

What is Post-Millennium Structuralism?

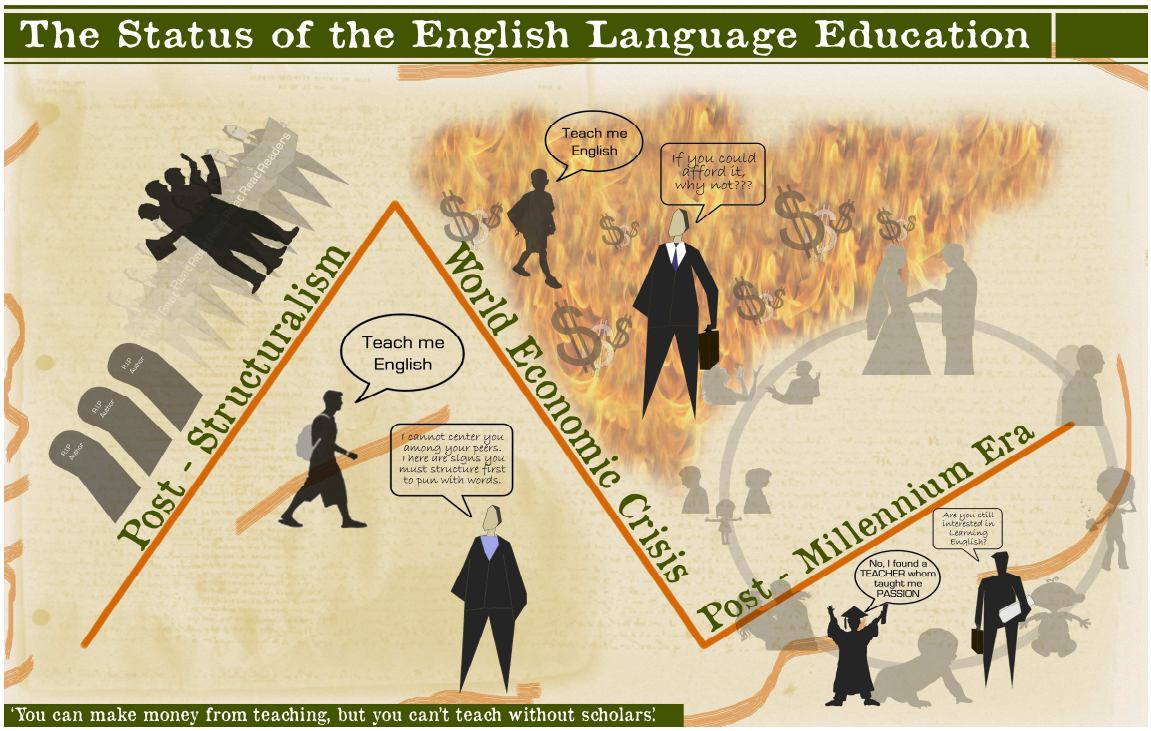
At the start of the millennium, when the internet came into existence, many educationalists and readers referred to online resources and readings, and people from different parts of the world have become closer to each other through free communicative means. The result is a cocktail of different cultures, ideologies, philosophies, languages and attitudes producing a great reaction against the norms of the past life, hereby, education is one of the most important factors of life - a means to a better future. Also, the involvement of online media has upgraded, degraded or maintained education around the world.

The emergence of the PMS is the result of the fluctuations of life situations in the Arab regions, and one of these situations is the essential acquirement of the English Language among the Arabs. Media has played its part in promoting the language followed by the fall of the economic

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

life in the Middle East, which was a bigger gain for the media in a world where people tend to live and learn non-traditionally, unlike the Post-Structuralism Era when learners were eager to depend on themselves for academic achievements. Therefore, this new trend has resulted in the English Language Education's dependence on the educators' novelistic teaching strategies.

Figure 1. The Status of the ELT from the start of the last century until the Millennium Era



The English Language Education is a broad topic to cover in one research, so this paper focuses only on experimenting the implementation of PMS in teaching TOEFL to university students. In order to encourage students to become more independent in acquiring the TOEFL skills, there are two levels in the evolution of the PMS which an educator should consider in order to plant the passion of teaching TOEFL: the surface level and the deep level. Regarding the surface level, an educator must first scrutinize the learners' psychological backgrounds before practicing the teaching methods inside the classrooms. For example, teaching TOEFL to EFL students may not be as easy as teaching it to native speakers of English because TOEFL books consist of conversations and reading texts that mainly reflect the American culture which does not resemble what they have observed or heard from the media. An educator must look for ways that should be convenient to EFL students, even though if they are smart, modernized or wealthy. In all cases, they always prefer the easiest and the most modern way to acquire the TOEFL skills.

To ensure the quality of education in a certain region, separate educational frames are to be implemented in different parts of the world. TOEFL is not an easy subject to many non-native students, so sticking to a stereotype and a traditional way of teaching TOEFL would lead to

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

unproductive classrooms. Educators should crucially implement the surface level throughout a term as they teach to bring out the best of the EFL classrooms.

As for the deep level, it is unsuccessful without the perception and adoption of the surface level first because innovation cannot simply exist without scrutinizing the learners' needs. In general, innovation elevates any learner from one step to another. Innovation is "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption." (Rogers, 2003) So, when a learner seeks for innovation, the gratitude goes back to the educator who is mainly or partially responsible for a learner's progress in education. Educators who follow the traditional teaching systems are not necessarily unsuccessful in their teachings, but are not likely to bother themselves in steering their beliefs towards modern education which requires a lot of work. For instance, modern educators would think of something new to benefit their students and to improve their teaching by making TOEFL learning simpler.

Therefore, the deepest level, must necessarily be convinced by an educator to produce a modern learning environment; hence, the educator would easily perceive the surface level: psych-education of the learners and what teaching methodologies are recommended for a particular class:

Post-Millennium Structuralism
(Untraditional Teaching)
|
Surface Level
(Psychological Conceptions)
AND
Deep Level
(Advanced Teaching)

The implementation of the Post-Millennium Structuralism Movement in Teaching TOEFL

Taking the two levels deeper, it is crucial to acknowledge that the PMS movement is a new trend that follows no rules, but takes the paths of current situations. One of these paths is a modernization which is advancing faster than any times before in the developing countries, and this is the major reason for the learners' dependence on the media's English. In this case, for an educator to be on the same line with his or her learners, new teaching methodologies must be adopted to keep pace with modernity such as songs and movies as language examples, assigning electronic homework and the use of language laboratories for instructional processes. In other words, an educator must busy the EFL learners with what are out of the norms by avoiding monotonous teaching attitudes. Moreover, today's learners have a lot to absorb and are loaded with many domestic, environment and scholastic situations that may affect their thinking skills.

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

In this case, when teaching TOEFL, it would be unproductive to deepen the teaching methods and to depend on them to work individually at the start of the course, for they are not to be treated as learners with good commands of the language.

Next are the five TOEFL teaching skills practiced on six university students. Three students have been taught traditionally as the other three have been taught using the PMS methods.

Structure

When one possesses at least good English structure, then the writing skill would be easy as when one possesses sufficient vocabulary words, then the reading skill would be easy as well. Traditionally, an educator would follow the lessons in order as how they are instructed in a certain TOEFL book, and in some cases s/he may refer to some other resources for further reinforcement on some lessons when required.

The traditional way is useful for learners who are good in English structure, but what about the ones who are good in other skills, but encounter grammatical problems? To encourage learners to acquire the English structure comprehensively, it is recommended to start with the easiest lessons first, and not necessarily to go in order as guided by some TOEFL books.

For example, there are 60 skills in the Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL TEST book. The first five skills are on '*Sentences with One Clause'*, which is considered one of the hardest grammar lessons for the EFL learners; moreover, for a learner to practice on '*Clauses'*, she must know how to construct sentences first and easily identify the parts of speech. Therefore, the PMS method highlights on the following points when teaching structure:

- It would be more productive to start a TOEFL course with lessons on the Parts of Speech such as '*Nouns'*, '*Verbs*', '*Adverbs'* and so on, followed by '*Problems with Subject/Verb Agreement'* and '*Parallel Structure'* then finalizing this part with the *'Clauses'* lessons.
- This is the only learning part when an educator must continuously carry out weekly quizzes and/ or tests to ensure that the lessons are not forgotten as they progress, and to help them to acquire the other four skills as smoothly as possible.
- An educator can simplify the lessons by referring to outside resources or avoid using sophisticated titles at the beginning of a lesson such as the title of Skill 15: '*Invert the Subject and Verb with Question Words'* from the Longman's Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test.

For instance, it would be simpler if all the '*Yes/ No Questions'* and the '*Question Words'* are listed on the board in different tenses to i) briefly revise the tenses they took at earlier stages, ii) tell the difference between a sentence and a question and iii) explain to them the order of

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

the words in each tense. In this case, a quick review of the basic tenses in terms of sentences and question types have been covered.

Table 1. An example of a structure class on Types of Questions

Tense	**Yes/ No Question**	**Word Question**
Simple Present	Is Tom in the classroom? *v s*	Where is Tom? *qw v s*
Present Continuous	Is Tom sleeping? *hv s mv*	How is Tom going home? *qw hv s mv* [1]
Simple Past	Was Tom in the classroom? *v s*	Where was Tom? *qw v s*
Past Continuous	Were Tom and Fred *hv s* studying? *mv*	What were Tom and Fred *qw hv s* doing? *mv*
Present Perfect	Has Tom spoken to his *hv s mv* parents?	How have you reached the *qw hv s mv* hotel?
Past Perfect	Had they finished their *hv s mv* homework?	When had the children gone *qw hv s mv* to bed?
Future Tenses	a. Are you going to come to *hv s mv* the party? b. Will Liz travel soon? *hv s mv*	a. Why aren't you going to *qw hv s* go with your friends? mv b. Who will take you home? *qw hv mv s*

In summary, a quick revision of lessons *not* required to study as TOEFL learners would lead to better understandings of the required TOEFL lessons. Also, the study schedule of the lessons does not have to be as it is ordered in the book. An educator can freely choose what lesson skill s/he may start with depending on a class' English Language level. Finally, it is very important to study structure every week in forms of tests, worksheets or writing in later stages since it is the foundation when acquiring the language.

Reading

[1] *qw = question word; hv = helping verb; s = subject; mv = main verb.*

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

The problem with the reading skill is that many learners cannot understand the texts mainly because of the unfamiliar words they encounter in a passage and/ or of the unfamiliar topic due to their specializations, lifestyles or background knowledge. Furthermore, vocabulary is not a separate skill that they learn throughout the course, therefore, without the vocabulary knowledge; it would be extremely hard for them to comprehend the reading texts.

The passage below has been exposed to the six learners who are willing to sit for the official exam after the course, which is too difficult to all of them as EFL learners who are not even majoring in Human Psychology or other related majors. Furthermore, according to the Barron's TOEFL iBT learning strategies, a learner is recommended to preview, read faster, use context clues, make inferences, skim and scan, make connections and to summarize texts. So, only exposing these headlined sub-topics to them, they would feel hopeless, and worries would start occupying them. Therefore, it is crucial first to emphasize on vocabulary as they get to study each text at a time. However, it may sound hectic at first and time consuming when an educator starts planning for a teaching method, but if the results show progress then an educator will keep on designing time-defeating teaching methodologies that best suit a class.

After teaching them the two-way vocabulary teaching related to the text, three of them have been asked to read the text as recommended by the book with some class discussions. As for the three students that are taught using the PMS strategy have managed to achieve better scores as clarified in the Conclusion section.

"The Heredity Versus Environment Debate"

"***Environmentalist view***. *By the middle of the twentieth century, numerous studies had counteracted the hereditarian view, and most social scientists took the position that environment is as important as or even more important than heredity in determining intelligence. Social scientists who stress the* ***environmentalist view of intelligence*** *generally emphasize the need for compensatory programs on a continual basis beginning in infancy. Many also criticize the use of IQ tests on the grounds that these tests are culturally biased."*

- The Traditional Teaching Method

An instructor would usually prepare a list of vocabulary words that commonly appear in TOEFL exams, and many non-native EFL educators that share the same language with the learners would either translate the words to their mother-tongues or design separate worksheets for the students to work on with regards to the guidelines mentioned in some TOEFL practice books. However, the results are not always low or unaccepted, but that depends on the learners' English Language learning capacities. Simultaneously, the learners would be asked to read, skim, scan, preview or analyze a text, depending on what has been

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

required by the educator. In this case, the load of learning new and difficult words on their own as well as trying to comprehend the paragraph, which tells of an unfamiliar subject, the results have turned out to be quite lower from the ones who have been taught the PMS way.

- The PMS Teaching Method

Usually, the educators are glued to the traditional styles of teaching regardless of the learners' backgrounds and English Language levels. However, when changing the teaching style, it is very important to understand the learners' backgrounds to know what teaching method would be most appropriate. So, during a class discussion about a selected text, it has been noticed that the three learners know the meaning of the word *environment*, but they have failed to connect it with the noun *environmentalist*. Therefore, it has been concluded that they have a lack of word coordination with their derivations.

Most of the TOEFL books have simplified lessons on *'Affixes'*, but the problem lies in the learners' abilities to learn the meaning of the affixes. So, here comes the media part with bearing in mind that the females in the UAE are normally conservative, and being so, they mainly practice indoor activities such as cooking, studying, watching TV, surfing the net, doing home visits and so on. In this case, the educator chooses an activity they usually practice such as watching a popular TV series that runs on the most visited channels like 'The Mentalist'. The girls are set in a visual laboratory and watch some selected scenes from the show. Then, the educator opens up a class discussion based on what they have watched and understood such as "What do you think the man in the navy blue suit is doing?", "Do the mentalist and the detective have the same job tasks?" and so on. Even if a learner is not familiar with 'The Mentalist', a learner can still talk about the scene(s) watched and joins the class discussions.

Figure 2. A scenery from the TV series, 'The Mentalist'



ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

The point of using an outside resource is to simply expose the words *mentalist* and *environmentalist* which both end with the suffix *-ist* and the educator highlights this point to the learners, then explains the meaning of words with that suffix by making them first to guess what is a *mentalist* from watching the series, then try to guess the meaning of the word *environmentalist*. Also, to gradually expose to them the American culture in an interesting and modern way. Next, the educator lists the words with the same suffix such as *journalist, scientists* and labels them as *'Nouns'* that have a common meaning, which is*'people with professions'*. And the same technique applies to other words from the same text such as *numerous, hereditarian, social* and so on.

As for words that do not require affixes, such as *view* and *infancy*, it is still recommended to use the visual teaching strategy. For instance, the educator asks the learners to focus on the word *view* as it is being used in a sentence: "Nice view. I like the way the people are standing and the background." Also, the educator can draw a human development figure on the board (smart boards are highly recommended) to show the growing stages of an individual from birth to adulthood and to graphically identify the word *infancy*.

The point is not to depend on the learners at the beginning of any course to avoid them from dropping the course or to convert to majors that are instructed in the Arabic Language out of disappointment and hopelessness. During the course, as the learners progress with their reading skills, the educator can advance her/his teaching skill and do real practice exercises from the study book(s).

Listening

After obtaining some English vocabulary and structure, the listening skill will not be hard to learn. Grammatically, a learner needs to know the lessons of *'Passives'*, '*Question Words*, *'Negations'* and a great deal of vocabulary terms in order to focus on how and who to listen to.
Therefore, according to the PMS method, the listening section should not be at the start of a TOEFL course since it involves a good knowledge of structure, vocabulary and familiarity with the American culture as well as the American accents. Part A of the listening skill is usually easy for many learners, but as the conversations become deeper, faster and longer as in parts B and C, the learners without the recommended practices beforehand would not do quite well.

All of the students have taken the diagnostic listening practice in parts B and C only. Three of them are have been diagnosed according to the TOEFL strategy as the others have been diagnosed the PMS way. In other words, during the beginning of the course only three of them have attended the listening class whilst the other three have been excused to leave early. After covering the reading, structure and part A of the listening skills, only three students have been thence asked to take the diagnostic listening practice. The results have shown that all of the first

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

three students that took the practice at the beginning of the course scored 9, and two scored 10 out of 15, whereas, the other three scored 12 each.
Though the results have slightly varied, still the little progress in their scores implies that it is essential to familiarize them with the recommended PMS teaching method to ensure the maximum TOEFL scores that the students could achieve.

Speaking

Thoughtfully, this skill is considered the easiest among many learners, but once they get to know the speaking prompts they'd acknowledge its own set rules as any other skill. It is not a free speaking exercise or practice, once again the learners are to be encountered with problems that they have to think of, take notes and express to a recorded machine. Moreover, questions like: "Some students live in dormitories on campus. Other students live in apartments off campus. Which living situation you think is better and why?" is not only a question problem that they can simply think of and talk about; it is a dilemma that they cannot talk about at all! Not to mention, the skill in test consists of six speaking questions, and a question becomes harder as a tester progresses with only 45 to 60 seconds in responding to each question.

Nevertheless, the educator does not have much to do to prepare the learners for this skill since they have already obtained some vocabulary and structures. Moreover, they can know a little bit more about the academic life in the States through exposing them to related academic scenes from some American movies such as 'The Social Network' as a start to attract their attention, which exposes a bit about an American university. Next, they can watch authentic YouTube channels about the academic life in the United States to understand the American educational systems from a wider perspective. Finally, after obtaining sufficient academic terms and well-structured spoken English, the general conversations are narrowed down to the practice of TOEFL conversations to score well in the test.

Below is a link to a videoed conversation of an Arab student at the Herriot-Watt University in Dubai, whom possesses an excellent command of the language, but is not willing to travel to the United States to continue her education, but is planning to sit for the official exam. The point of this video is to highlight on the point that no matter one's excellent language fluency and accuracy, still not having sufficient knowledge of the States' academic life and education in general might lead to marks' deduction. The question asked is usually the first and the easiest out of the six speaking questions, which is "Where would you like to study in the United States?"

The student's answer is viewed at the following site: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=538367702859726

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

On the other hand, a typical answer as mentioned in the Barron's TOEFL iBT practice book is: *"I'd like to study at a university in Washington, D.C., because I have family in the area, and it would be nice to have them close by so I could visit them on holidays and in case I need advice or help. I've been to Washington several times, and I like it there. It's an international city with restaurants and stores where I can buy food and other things from my country while, uh, while I'm living abroad. And Washington is an exciting place. I've gone on several tours, but I still have many places on my list of sites to see. Also, um, there are trains to New York and Florida so I could take advantage of my free time to see other cities. Um, as for the universities, there are several, uh, several excellent schools in Washington and…..and I'd probably be accepted at one of them."*

Writing

It is expected that learners could not write a good-structured essay of three basic paragraphs that consists of the introduction, body and conclusion. So, the PMS method prepares them gradually by following the suggested steps after obtaining sufficient structure and vocabulary so that they can start writing cohered meaningful sentences and short paragraphs:

With the PMS method the learners get to watch modern and short documentary shows about American history, geography, education, government, presidents, economic and social lives. Also, the educator conducts class discussions on what they have observed, gives out a TOEFL writing worksheet related to what they have watched (as exemplified on the next) and encourages peer discussions and correction by focusing on a paragraph's structure and the contents.

Figure 3. A sample teaching resource material on the foundations of writing a paragraph on one of the TOEFL writing tasks

Lesson's objective(s): Identifying and using *transitional words, topics, main ideas* and *supporting details* for paragraph construction.

Some people believe that money spent on space research benefits all of humanity. Other people take the opposite view and say that money spent on this type of research is wasted. Tell which point of view you agree with and explain why, using specific details and reasons.

a. What is the Topic about?

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

The topic is about the studies of space and its advantages or drawbacks on people.

b. Give a suitable Main Idea for the topic suggested.

Researchers around the world are already spending a lot of money on other practical or invaluable issues.

c. Give examples that support the Main Idea suggested.

- Advantages: public awareness of the universe, practical researches, short-term researches, governments' supports modern satellites, pollution.
- Disadvantages: long-term researches, much money wasted theoretical researches.

d.
i. Suggested transitional words for agreeable statements: *in addition, as well as, moreover, furthermore, simultaneously, similarly, also, and, etc.*

ii. Suggested transitional words for disagreeable statements: *on the other hand, whereas, on the contrary, in opposition with, etc.*

e. Write a short constructive paragraph by answering questions *a.*, *b.* and *c.* with the use of some transitional words.

The topic is about the studies of space and its advantages or drawbacks on people. Researchers around the world are already spending a lot of money on other practical or invaluable issues. For example, short-term useful researches that have a positive impact on our earth such as the effect of air pollution to the outer space and its resolutions are worth working on since it alerts people on how to save our planet and the atmosphere. On the other hand, time consuming and expensive researches such as providing space trips to other planets do not show any positive reaction. It consumes mostly people's money through paying high taxes for the governments.

After three or four lessons on the same teaching strategy, the learners progress from writing paragraphs to writing essays. Trainings on how to write paragraphs should end before the eighth week of the fifteen week course since it matters to TOEFL students to know how to compose deep argumentative and reasonable essays.

Conclusion

As time races, people change drastically and these changes in them need to practice innovative habits to break the daily humdrum. The Post-Millennium Structuralism movement

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

is always aligned with the people's changes as a result of many effective life factors such as technology, education, wars and mixed cultures, which helps people to develop and to activate their thinking skills to ease their social, academic and environmental lives in this harsh world. Traditions are not favored by many people nowadays due to their prolonging practices and unfitness in today's needs and a simple example of this is presented in teaching TOEFL within the PMS concepts. Hereby, it is necessary to be an updated educator with some knowledge of the American and the students' cultures to ease the teaching processes.

To sum up, the new teaching philosophy is as light as it seems and just requires a little bit of effort from an educator to extrinsically motivate the learners to acquire the language. When applying the PMS method to an average of a 15 week long teaching course, it is recommended to teach in the following order: structure, reading, listening, speaking and finally the writing skill, as well as reinforcing the structure skills by continuously referring to outside resources through using different techniques in a course's syllabus. Nevertheless, it is crucial to introduce to the learners about the TOEFL program, who should take the test and why, explain to them the test types and perform diagnostic tests for the purpose of engineering their minds into what they are about to study in a friendly way rather than shocking them when starting the course.

The PMS and the traditional methods have been implemented in the two groups of learners. However, the main focus is only on the three skills; structure, reading and listening since they are the required skills for the final exam and the TOEFL ITP test. Nevertheless, all five skills have been taught because not all students are taking the TOEFL ITP, some may be sitting for the TOEFL iBT or the IELTS exam. Moreover, whether they are sitting for the TOEFL iBT or the IELTS exam, both have the five skills, but the latter is designed with the British English Language, as for the former test is in the American English Language.

The results obtained verify that the PMS method is more productive than the traditional teaching methods as shown in the two tables:

Tables 2. and 3. show the contrasts between the learners' final scores according to the teaching methods applied

Traditional Method (Group 1)

Skills	Structure (40)	Reading (50)	Listening (50)
Learner A	35	33	29
Learner B	34	38	29
Learner C	35	39	29
Averages in percentage	86.6 %	73.3 %	58 %

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:3, July 2014

The PMS Method (Group 2)

Skills	Structure (40)	Reading (50)	Listening (50)
Learner A	36	40	31
Learner B	37	41	32
Learner C	35	40	41
Averages in percentage	90 %	80.6 %	69.3 %

There has been no cutting down when teaching the first group; as a matter of fact the educator has gone by the syllabus, but the second group has performed better simply because the educator has psychologically understood the learners' backgrounds and learning abilities after some years of experience in the Middle East. Therefore, the strategies manifested in this paper have been practiced with consideration to the course's duration and syllabus.

Nowadays, learners are eager to pass for materialistic needs such as university admissions or job promotions, and that's one of the main reasons why the English Language is not taken into depth. Therefore, an educator should extrinsically motivate them by designing innovative, easy-to-learn teaching materials and forcing them to study in classrooms before depending on them to work alone. Though university EFL learners are adults, but they are not willing to go back home and study for a lesson or for a test unless they have been forced to by the educator. All in all, the PMS movement encourages the educators to seek for innovative teaching methods to develop their students' learning abilities, and the better they become in learning the language, the more positively it reflects upon the educator's modern teaching standards.

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