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"An Attempt to Characterize the Frequent Teaching Procedures for Effective Language Teaching"

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Abstract:

This study is an attempt to classify the most frequent teaching procedures in English classes. A short inventory of teaching procedures for each language skill, including grammar and vocabulary, was created in the form of a questionnaire that was circulated among nearly 200 experienced language teachers at Jazan University, KSA. They were requested to rate the frequency of using those techniques in class. The response rate was low, but it was enough to indicate the overall frequencies. Sixty-two teachers completed the survey. The objective was to find out if there were common practices among English language teachers, that might mark effective language classes. Analysis showed that there were no prevailing teaching styles. However, certain procedures seemed to be more frequent than others, particularly those techniques that teachers believed to be more effective, most probably out of their experience in the teaching profession. A recommendation list for better English classes is summed up in the conclusion.

Keywords: Effective Teaching, English Classes, Language Skills, Teaching Styles.

Introduction and rationale:

First, let us review certain terminology relevant to the scope of this study. Brown (2002), following Anthony (1963), views techniques as "specific classroom activities consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well" (p. 9). Techniques, or procedures, come as the third level in this 'conceptualized' hierarchy: approaches, methods, and techniques. The approach deals with language, teaching, and learning. Methods are the systematic presentation of a selected approach. According to Richards and Rogers (2014, p. 22), approach refers to "theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching". Richards and Rogers (2014, p. 29) define design as "the level of method analysis" in which several factors should be considered. These factors include: objectives of the methods, selection of language content and its organisation, the type of syllabus model incorporated by the model, learning and teaching activities, roles of the teachers, roles of the learners, and the roles of the materials. Finally, the procedure comes as the third conceptualisation of language teaching methods. It is the practical realisation of procedures implemented in the classroom. Richards and Rogers (2014, p. 35) conclude that the "procedure focuses on the way a method handles the presentation, practice, and feedback phases of teaching". We are interested to investigate the third level of this hierarchy, mainly procedures. In this study we use techniques and procedures interchangeably.

There are many methods and approaches for teaching English but none of them can exactly be followed due to so many classroom conditions and due to students' individual differences in learning strategies and goals for language learning. Other differences may include varying language levels, age, intrinsic motivation and language aptitude. Moreover, teaching the different language skills will in effect require different procedures and techniques due to their nature. The type of the language program itself may have an indirect influence of the teaching strategy, whether it is intended for academic or specific purposes; whether it is an intensive course or a requirement in an educational or vocational program. If we may look further, then we will see the medium of instruction; whether the delivery is online or on site (or blended learning). All these will have an impact on the selected teaching procedure in any language learning class.

The goal of this paper is to present a characterisation of the frequent teaching techniques (or procedures) for teaching the language skills. It will review the relevant literature of effective language teaching and the language skills. It will make reference to several resource books pertaining to the teaching of language skills.

Research questions

The research questions stated herein are meant for guidance since teaching practices cannot be adequately measured; they are subjectively judged. Therefore, we have two main questions to guide this research, and which will direct our argument.

- 1. What do ELT teachers believe to be the most frequent practices in class?
- 2. What recommendations can we make for effective language teaching?

Review of literature

According to Musumeci (2009), despite a history of second-language learning that certainly predates writing, formal accounts of second-language teaching (SLT) show that SLT began in the Western tradition with the teaching of Latin, and that justifies why language teaching is traced back to the teaching and learning of Latin. Therefore, different teaching methods are



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documented in a vast number of references since then. Not only are their characteristics and principles reported, but also historical backgrounds are presented to lay the foundation of their evolution and development (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Stern, 1983).

The complex nature of teaching makes it difficult to define. Teachers are taught to understand the complexity of teaching. Shulman (1987) categorizes the type of knowledge which teachers should have, including sufficient knowledge of the following: the subject content, the pedagogical strategies, pedagogical principles, the curriculum, learners and their characteristics, the educational context, and finally knowledge of educational goals, purposes, and values. Shulman (1987, p. 7) asserts that teachers "can transform understanding, performance skills, or desired attitudes or values into pedagogical representations and action".

The goal of teaching, on the other hand, is to impart or transfer knowledge or to facilitate the acquisition of a skill via a planned and timely process. The teacher is supposed to instruct the learners (as receivers) to achieve the pre-set objectives, which are materialised in the curriculum. Teachers are not merely instructors, but they have other roles in the learning process. These roles can differ in the classroom according to the situation. The teacher's role can be viewed as an instructor, a facilitator, a guide, a source of knowledge, and an assessor.

In his critique of language teaching methods, Nunan (1991, p. 228) states that "it has been realised that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities". A similar stance is taken by Brown (2002), who argues that language teaching methods become similar in the classroom and one's approach is their theoretical justification of what they believe happens in their classes. The approach gradually becomes "the cumulative body of knowledge and principles that enables teachers, as "technicians" in the classroom, to diagnose the needs of students, to treat students with successful pedagogical techniques, and to assess the outcome of those treatments" (Brown, 2002, p. 11). In his view, the best teachers are those who are "able to take calculated risks in the classroom: as new student needs are perceived, innovative pedagogical techniques are attempted, and the follow-up assessment yields an observed judgment on their effectiveness" (Brown, 2002, p. 11). Similarly, Long (2009, p. 374) reports that studies of language teaching "have found considerable differences between what advocates of the methods prescribe or proscribe and what teachers actually do over time, between how teachers were trained to teach and how they actually teach".

According to Richards (2002) the general and essential skills for teaching are to treat different situations differently, to find out the characteristics of each unique situation, to try and experiment different teaching styles and strategies, and finally to develop your own personal approaches to teaching. In my view, the complexity of language teaching arises from the nature of language itself, the proficiency level of the students, the individual differences, the conditions of language learning and acquisition, the facilities available, and the beliefs and experience of teachers. It is true that effective teaching may depend on the teacher's experience, skill, qualification, personality, and commitment, and the extent of how all these are applied as a reaction towards the learning situation and the teaching context. However, effectiveness of teaching may indirectly be influenced by the learner's positive interaction with the teacher, showing persistence for learning, and high motivation. Musumeci (2009, p. 61) states that "attempts to force students to use a language that is not necessary for the acquisition of subject matter knowledge in the classroom or that serves no practical purpose outside it have small hope of success".

Despite of what has been stated, long (2009, pp. 373-374) asserts that language teaching methods "differ in some respects, but tend to countenance many of the same activities and procedures". Literally, there is no single teaching method that may be fully adopted in the classroom. Similar contexts and conditions, such as lesson objectives, students' age and level as well as the language material, may direct teachers, who even have profound training and experiences, to follow similar teaching methods and styles. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), teachers can differ in their styles when delivering a language lesson in terms of how they perceive their role in the classroom and their interaction with their students and the way they encourage them for learning. They define the teaching style as the "teacher's individual instructional methods and approach and the characteristic manner in which the teacher carries out instruction" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 589).

Any language lesson has an objective and the language teacher is obliged to achieve that objective as far as possible. It is not merely a matter of coverage or delivery. It is a matter of being effective in delivery to fulfil the requirement of the current context of that lesson. Zahorik (1986, p. 22) describes a good teacher as "a person who assesses the needs and possibilities of a situation and creates and uses practices that have promise for that situation". Richards (2002, p. 23) views a good teacher as "one who analyses a situation, realizes that a range of options is available based on the particular class circumstances, and then selects an alternative which is likely to be most effective for the circumstances". The effective teacher is expected to



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normally modify the teaching style and techniques even when teaching the same lesson to fit the 'new' situation. In many situations, the level of the students and their needs might require a change in styles and procedures during the language presentation process and activity practice, in terms of exemplification, explanation, and feedback.

Context of the study

In our context, some effective measures are taken by the English Language Institute (ELI) of Jazan University to ensure a successful language program. These measures are similar to most of Cotton's (1995) principles for effective teaching. These measures are reported here as an example of effective language program, and to describe the context of the study. These measures can be grouped into four major domains, mainly (1) course planning, (2), material selection, (3) students' assessment, and (4) teachers' professional development.

Course planning involves specifying the learning outcomes (and course objectives), suggesting teaching procedures, proposing plans and methods of evaluation and assessment. It is accomplished through different stages: specifying the general goals (as outcomes), selecting the material (text books), then preparing a syllabus plan (detailed course specifications), course distribution (a timeline plan detailing objectives for each unit for each language skill), and finally method of assessment. Course distribution is given in advance to students (objectives, content, and extra recommended sources for language learning) to allow them to prepare for their lessons at home. This happens during the first week of each semester, in which class rules and university code of conduct are presented as well.

Material selection involves the selection of the appropriate material. The language content should be goal-oriented, appropriate to the students' level (or slightly higher), graded and skill integrated. The material content should present learning activities at a level that is neither too easy nor too difficult for many students to allow the teachers to make adaptations to serve equally the needs of strong and weak students.

Teachers' development program (TDP) is directed to serve several purposes. Teachers are encouraged to maintain an environment conducive to learning, which should motivate the students and promote a positive learning climate. Though all faculty are qualified English teachers, there is a need to disseminate the ELI principles to ensure uniformity of instruction and preserve the quality of learning. For this purpose, the ELI runs an ongoing teacher professional development (semi-formal, in-service teacher training) throughout the academic year. It is run through online seminars (or webinars) and onsite monthly short workshops on specific themes of language teaching. It is a theme-oriented program as found in language teaching textbooks such as Gebhard (2017), Scrivener (2011) and Watkins (2005).

Students' assessment is achieved through both formative assessment and summative assessment. This allows the teacher to monitor their performance and progress and to provide timely feedback to them. Some criteria that must be observed include: the test must be based on the course objectives; it must be quite comprehensive to cover the content; and it must include a wide range of items to test all the language skills.

Purpose and methodology

In this paper we are interested to find out those techniques or procedures which teachers frequently implement, and accordingly recommend some principles for teachers to apply in the classroom. For this purpose, a survey was devised as the tool of the research method. The questionnaire sets several procedures for every language skill. The survey as a tool was selected for the following two reasons. Firstly, it is beyond the scope of this paper to report on every action the language teacher does in the classroom. The survey is merely an attempt to discover the most frequent (and salient) procedures when teaching any language skill. Secondly, if a longitudinal classroom observation is implemented, this process will take time, and it is only possible when it is curried out as a project of collective efforts. As an alternative, the tool of this research paper is a survey for rating the frequencies of many procedures of different skills. Prominent procedures are listed as clues for reflection.

Preparation of the survey items were extracted from several skill-focused publications, particularly Pearson's How-to series (Harmer, 2004, 2007; Kelly, 2000; Thornbury, 2000, 2002, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Some other similar series were also consulted particularly McGraw-Hill's Practical English language teaching (Anderson, 2008; Bailey, 2004; Hegelson & Brown, 2006; Nunan, 2003, 2005).

The survey was sent as a single survey to nearly 200 English teachers affiliated to the English Language Institute (ELI) of Jazan University, KSA. Most of the participants were MA holders in ELT or English studies, the rest were either BA holders



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or PhD holders, who are fulltime English language teachers. All its sections were required to allow final submission, which meant no-one could do a part and leave the other parts. Google Forms were used for this purpose. The survey was available for two weeks to allow for a larger participation. In the end, luckily sixty-two participants completed the survey.

Procedure of analysis

Since the survey (questionnaire) was designed and structured according to Likert scale, the following possible treatment is reported in this section. First, it must be noted that our data is purely ordinal, and there is no nominal data that may be used for internal comparisons, such as between males and females, or MA holders and PhD holders. (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). Second, numerals were used to indicate frequencies. These numerals were used to represent values of frequencies (reported under each response for any future duplication or external statistical analysis). Accordingly, averages for each item were calculated to compute the true value for each item. The highest value which any statement can get is five. Therefore, if an item gets more than 60% it indicates a "higher frequency" for that particular item, but if it gets less than 50% it means a "lesser frequency" for that item, otherwise (i.e. between 50-59%) it should be judged as "neutral". Third, once the values (reported as percentages) for each item were completed, then items for each skill were sorted by values from the highest to the lowest to indicate the rank of a procedure. In other words, the higher percentage a procedure gets, the more frequent it is in class. This is a theoretical assumption which may not be true in reality, but it remains consistent with the purpose of this study.

Results and discussion

The survey results are appended at the end of this paper, except for lesson delivery which is reported below as an illustrative example of how the results are interpreted. To answer the first research question (regarding the most frequent practices in the classroom), we found that there is no single procedure to be dominant in language teaching. Though some procedures scored higher percentages than others, teachers use a variety of methods and procedures. The teaching context requires certain techniques, which may justify similarity in teaching strategies and styles. For the other question, we found that teacher share similar procedures and techniques which means that effective teaching can be reached using different techniques appropriate to the teaching context. One general remark on the survey results is that the scores for productive skills procedures (writing and speaking) did not reach 80% as the other skills did (see Speaking and Writing in the Appendix).

Table 1. Classroom general principles

Area	Resi	ponses	Value	Value			
	1	2	3	4	5	Totals	%
Motivating students	2	3	7	14	36	265	85%
Directing students' learning strategies	1	3	8	24	26	257	83%
Classroom management	4	2	11	15	30	251	81%
Students' formative assessment	1	10	17	16	18	226	73%
Using visual aids	2	10	16	16	18	224	72%
Covering the lesson plan	4	8	19	17	14	215	69%
Taking attendance	11	11	26	4	10	177	57%

Table 1 shows that teachers pay attention to motivating students and directing their learning strategies, rather than covering the content. Classroom management is a key in a successful lesson delivery where students can be encouraged to participate, and where the teacher provides feedback and language input. When we take a general look at the Appendix, we may report the general observations. Detailed comments are excluded here, because the procedures are listed based on their value percentages.

For speaking, teachers reflected that speaking is better taught through integration with other language skills where the learner may possibly use the language input (given during the language class) as an input for the speaking task. Some teachers did not consider reading aloud as a form of speaking activity. This practice may be viewed as a form of 'integration' between



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reading and speaking. Interested teachers may review books related to teaching speaking including Bailey (2004), Bleistein, Smith & Lewis (2020), Hughes & Reed (2017), and Nation & Newton (2020).

Teachers' responses on listening provide indirect evidence where teachers believe that listening skills are acquired through high exposure to listening material (Nemtchinova, 2020; Rost, 2015). Teachers believe in extensive listening outside the class with more activities. However, they thought that providing students with listening scripts might not aid listening. This technique did not have the approval of the teachers. It was intentionally inserted by the researcher as a new technique which proved effective particularly with weak students. Students would, at least theoretically, benefit from following the audios and learn how certain words are pronounced, or how rhythm, intonation, and pausing, are realised. Even if not implemented in the classroom, it was shared with teachers to rate its effectiveness or frequency. Teachers approved other listening techniques as may be recommended in books for teaching listening (cf. Field, 2009; Flower & Miller, 2005; Lynch, 2009).

For reading, it is obvious that teachers focus on comprehension more than decoding. However, we cannot generalise from this data that the top-down method is prevailing over the bottom-up approach because they complement each other in a successful reading process (Day, 2020; Hudson, 2007). Teachers showed that they are aware of the role played by the text type and the reading purpose, and this central in directing students' reading strategies. Again, reading can be given more focus since it practices a lot of the language input provided in the classroom, such as vocabulary and grammar. Novice teachers, for instance, may consult handy references, which combine theory and practice, such as Grabe (2008), and Nation & Macalister (2020).

For writing, teachers prefer to teach writing step-by-step via guided writing and examples, and that they ultimately focus on the product (see Tomas, Kostka & Mott-Smith, 2020). Moreover, teachers use all available techniques to teach writing. What is interesting here is that teachers do not use reading passages to improve writing skills though, it is believed, that good writers are basically good readers (Ferris, 2003; Hinkel, 2015; Nation & Macalister, 2020). This area needs more research to get a valid answer for the question: can the technique of writing summaries for reading passages improve the writing skills? This is because reading passages reflect the structure of guided writing and the students' product reflects their free writing.

Vocabulary is vital in the foreign language class (Schmitt, 2000). Teachers showed that they use different procedures in introducing and teaching vocabulary. Though the use of L1 is not emphasized upon, yet it is still used as a common practice for more than half of the teachers, particularly for difficult words; i.e., those words which are abstract and need more explanation to grasp via definitions. Since vocabulary is in the heart of learning a foreign language, teachers need to explore and implement a variety of strategies to hasten and consolidate vocabulary acquisition (Coxhead, 2014; Gairns & Redman, 1986).

Finally, results show that grammar is best learned in context via extra examples and more exercises. Teachers indirectly reveal that they were aware of the differences between rules and the intended meaning, i.e., form and function. Teaching grammar cannot be merely mastering the rule, but how and where to apply it; this is a matter of accuracy and appropriacy (Crawford, 2020; Thornbury, 2000). Teachers show a balanced view regarding the inductive and deductive approach, and that is probably they select the suitable method according to the grammatical item being taught.

Conclusion

To conclude, teaching is more effective when many and different procedures are selected and integrated according to the context of the teaching process. That context should consider various factors, including the objectives, the learners, and the material. By scrutinizing the responses of the teachers on their practices in class, the following nine principles are reported to be more effective in language teaching.

- Teachers should motivate students.
- Students' learning strategies are more effective when made explicit to the learners.
- Successful classroom management can be part of effective teaching, such as encouraging students to participate.
- Speaking classes are integrated with other language skills as post-activities, where these activities of 'other language skills' are considered as a language input and theoretical background. People speak better of things they know.
- Intensive and extensive listening and reading are highly encouraged for faster and more consolidated language learning.
- In reading classes, background activation and while reading improve understanding, especially when the text type is known to the learners.



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- Guided writing is necessary for writing skills in order to build confidence and to provide practice, before free writing.
- Vocabulary must be emphasized upon throughout the lesson.
- Grammar is learnt best through more exercises.

Many of the above principles are detailed in specialized literature in teaching the language skills (Brown, 2014; Celce-Murcia, 2014), or in self-development references (Gebhard, 2017; Harmer, 2015). The above survey was built out of experience. It can be improved if this study is duplicated where the focus is laid on individual skills with more details. The purpose is to come to the most effective techniques for each skill. Such categorization may be of help in teacher education or during in-service language programs (Bailey, 2009).

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The Appendix: Responses and values of the questionnaire

Procedures		ponses		Values	T/ 1 0/		
		2	3	4	5	Total	Value %
Speaking Skill							
Speaking classes are integrated with other language skills as post-activities	2	5	18	23	14	228	74%
Pronunciation is integrated with speaking	3	4	20	19	16	227	73%
Encouraging students to do short dialogues in class once a week	2	10	15	18	17	224	72%
Asking students to work in pairs	2	12	12	20	16	222	72%
Fluency, rather than accuracy, is emphasized upon	4	6	28	10	14	210	68%
Dividing students into smaller groups	5	10	25	4	18	206	66%
Reading aloud is a form of speaking practice	0	16	18	24	4	202	65%
Listening Skill							
Allowing students to listen again once the listening activities are completed	1	2	13	20	26	254	82%
Encouraging students to listen extensively outside the class	0	2	19	22	19	244	79%
Focusing on comprehension	5	3	9	26	19	237	76%
Listening is more effective when followed with extra activities	4	8	13	14	23	230	74%
Discussing pre-listening questions	2	8	16	18	18	228	74%
Introducing new words first	4	5	16	21	16	226	73%
Providing extra listening material to my students with exercises	6	6	21	10	19	216	70%
Listening is more effective when the audio script is given to the learners.	8	15	13	22	4	185	60%
Reading Skill							
Different reading strategies are introduced according to text type and/or reading purpose	4	0	16	9	33	253	82%
Post reading activities are meant for comprehension	2	2	15	15	28	251	81%
While reading activities are directed for general understanding	0	6	7	28	21	250	81%
Title of the passage is used to activate the background knowledge	4	2	15	11	30	247	80%



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While reading activities are used for guessing new	3	5	8	27	19	240	77%
vocabulary				2,	17	2.0	, , , , ,
Certain reading strategies are explained explicitly	6	4	12	16	24	234	75%
Skimming through the passage first to get the gist.	3	6	15	20	18	230	74%
Asking students to check their answers for the pre-	0	3	23	27	9	228	74%
reading questions			23	2,		220	, 1,0
Extra material is always given on a weekly basis	7	2	18	27	8	213	69%
Reading aloud first, then asking students to read.	8	18	18	7	11	181	58%
reading arous first, their asking students to read.	U	10	10	,	11	101	3070
Writing Skill							
Teaching writing via examples of text types and how	1	4	12	24	21	246	79%
they are structured							
Using guided writing as an effective method to teach	0	6	16	17	23	243	78%
writing							
Writing procedures emphasize on the product (final	1	6	16	20	19	236	76%
version)							
Writing procedures emphasize on the process (e.g.,	3	2	22	15	20	233	75%
drafting)							
Asking students to write the same topic again after	5	4	15	16	22	232	75%
correction and feedback							
Directing students to write about a topic they	3	5	20	15	19	228	74%
practised during the class							
Reading passages are used as language input for	12	7	28	8	7	177	57%
students to write summaries							
¥7 1 1							
Vocabulary							
Vocabulary is emphasized upon throughout the	1	5	8	20	28	255	82%
lesson							
Definitions are given after requesting students to	2	6	12	15	27	245	79%
guess the new meanings							
Synonyms and antonyms are used to explain new	4	4	12	14	28	244	79%
words							
New words are introduced prior to any language	1	6	18	16	21	236	76%
activity							
Students are encouraged to use dictionaries	2	9	13	17	21	232	75%
Students put new words into sentences and read them	4	5	17	15	21	230	74%
aloud to class							
L1 is used to explain difficult vocabulary	15	7	12	18	10	187	60%
Grammar							
Commencial count has taken also as a consistent	1	2	10	10	20	250	920/
Grammar is learnt best through more exercises	1	3	10	19	29	258	83%
Form and function are integrated via examples Extra material is used to show similar relations to	2	3 5	13 7	17	27	250	81%
	2	3	/	23	25	250	81%
other structures	1	0	17	21	1.4	224	720/
Introducing the rules (deductive approach) first	1	9	17	21	14	224	72%
Starting with examples (inductive approach) first	5	5	19	15	18	222	72%
Putting emphasis on function (meaning first)	3	3	27	17	12	218	70%
Putting emphasis on structure (form first)	3	9	20	14	16	217	70%



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"محاولة لتوصيف طرائق التدريس المتكررة لتدريس اللغة بشكل فعال"

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ملخص:

هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لتصنيف طلرائق التدريس الأكثر شيوعا في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية. تم إنشاء مسرد قصير لطرائق التدريس لكل مهارة لغوية، بما في ذلك القواعد والمفردات، في شكل استبيان تم تعميمه على ما يقرب من 200 مدرس لغة من ذوي الخبرة في جامعة جازان، المملكة العربية السعودية. وطلب منهم تقييم تواتر استخدام هذه الاساليب في الفصل. كان معدل الاستجابة منخفضا، لكنه كان كافيا للإشارة إلى التكرارات الإجمالية. وأكمل 62 مدرسا الدراسة الاستقصائية. كان الهدف هو معرفة ما إذا كانت هناك ممارسات شائعة بين معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية، والتي قد تميز فصول اللغة الفعالة. أظهر التحليل أنه لا توجد أساليب تدريس سائدة. ومع ذلك، يبدو أن بعض الإجراءات أكثر تواترا من غيرها، ولا سيما تلك التقنيات التي يعتقد المعلمون أنها أكثر فعالية، على الأرجح من خبرتهم في مهنة التدريس. يتم تلخيص قائمة التوصيات لفصول اللغة الإنجليزية الأفضل في الاستنتاج.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريس الفعال، دروس اللغة الإنجليزية، المهارات اللغوية، أساليب التدريس.