

THE POSSIBILITY OF APPLYING THE HUMANISTIC APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF YEMENI SCHOOLS

Dr. Mohammed Hussien Al-Anisi

Associate Professor
Department of English
Albaydha University
Albaydha, Yemen

Abstract

Approaches and methods of teaching English as a second/foreign language keep changing. These changes stem from the emergence of new theories related to language teaching/learning, opinions of the teachers working in the field, technological innovations and so on. The Humanistic Approach is a trend used to teach languages; it comprises different methods that share their principles. It could be applicable to certain contexts but are not in the others. This study seeks to account for The Humanistic Approach, explore its principles and examine the possibility of applying them in the context of Yemeni schools. The exploratory and descriptive approaches are used to achieve the objectives. The findings indicate that it is impossible to apply this approach in the current situation and that shifting to use it needs certain requirements.

Keywords: The Humanistic Approach, methods of teaching, traditional methods, post-method era, Yemeni schools.

1. Introduction

The importance of English as a lingua franca is increasing day by day all over the world. This importance made people in an immense need to learn English and become professional in using it. The main concern of theorists, linguists and educationists has been to develop theories, approaches and methods to teach/learn English language. Historically, approaches/methods are classified as traditional, modern and post-modern. The traditional are teacher-centered, the post-modern are student-centered while in the modern ones the responsibility is shared between teachers and students. There was a shift from teacher to. This shift was not restricted to changing the role of a learner from passive listener to active participant but looking at learners as humans learner (Freeman & Richards, 1993). This came to be known as 'The Humanistic Approach' that emphasizes human values, growth in self – awareness and emotions, sensitive to human feelings and in the understanding of others (Hamzah, 2024).

Although there are several approaches/methods with variations in their principles, characteristics, techniques, etc., it can be claimed that there is no approach/method that is the best. Teachers of English should be aware of the approaches and methods to be able to decide on the appropriate one based on the skill being taught and the level of their students. They are to be encouraged to explore what works and what does not work in a certain ELT context, using what

Brown (2007) called 'an enlightened and eclectic approach/method'. Hence, programs of pre-service teacher training should pay attention to equipping student-teachers with both the theoretical and practical aspects required. However, as stated by Vergas (2015, p.83):

In any language teacher training program, it is common for at least one of the courses on the syllabus to have to do with language teaching methods as its focus. The purpose of this course, however, is not always that clear. In a few cases, this course's goal can be for pre-service language teachers to know about the development of the discipline or for them to enrich their future professional practice by studying different methods and combining their various elements (strategies, techniques, and others) while teaching. Nonetheless, such theoretical study may be but a mere intellectual exercise with few pragmatic applications in language teachers' professional practice.

This comes in line with the view held by Kumaravadivelu (1994, p.31) that "the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization can only be realized within the domain of application through the immediate activity of teaching".

2. Statement of the Problem

It is observed that Yemeni teachers of English use traditional methods of teaching which are completely teacher-centered. There is a little or no involvement of learners in activities/tasks while teaching English. A little attention is paid to the needs, background, motivation and individual differences of their students. In addition, most of the teachers do not provide feedback and others tend to provide a negative one which in turn demotivates their students to progress in English language learning. All the previous practices go against the trend of teaching known as The Humanistic Approach and the methods derived from it. Furthermore, it could be an indicator that Yemeni teachers are not familiar with this approach and its importance in language teaching/learning. Thus, it is of an immense need to shed light on this approach and to explore the possibility of applying it in the context of Yemeni schools as well as the challenges that hinder its application.

3. Questions of the Study

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1- What is The Humanistic Approach and its importance in English language teaching?
- 2- Is it possible to apply it in the context of Yemeni schools and what are the challenges that hinder its application?
- 3- How can we overcome such challenges?

4. Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- Account for The Humanistic Approach and its importance in English language teaching.
- 2- Explore the possibility of applying it in the context of Yemeni schools and identify the challenges that hinder its application.
- 3- Provide recommendations on how to overcome such challenges.

5. Significance of the Study

The significance lies in attracting the attention of policy makers, officials in charge of pre-service training, teachers and learners to the importance of the topic. In addition, it reviews

the related literature covering all the issues regarding this approach. Furthermore, it sheds light on to how to incorporate this approach in language classroom and provides recommendations to overcome challenges hindering its application. Finally, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first attempt to tackle this topic in the context of Yemen.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to exploring the possibility of applying The Humanistic Approach in teaching English in the context of Yemeni schools. To be specific, it covers classes from Grade 7 to Grade 12 at public and private schools. As a result, English institutes and departments of English at universities are out of the scope of the study.

7. Theoretical Background

7.1. The Humanistic Theory vs The Humanistic Approach

To many, there is an overlap between the two terms and they are used interchangeably. However, this is not true as The Humanistic Theory is originally a psychological theory developed by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers in 1940s and 1950s. Drew (2022) stated that The Humanistic Theory "is an educational theory that believes in teaching the 'whole' learner. It has a strong focus on learners' emotional wellbeing and eternally view children as innately good at the core". It emphasizes the significance of the human being's inner world; it brings the individual's feelings, thoughts and emotions to the forefront of all human developments. It focuses on the positive aspects of human nature, self-awareness and potential to grow and develop (Crystal, 2007). Ellis (2003, p. 6) defined Humanistic Theory as an approach to language teaching that emphasizes tasks involving the development of human values and sensitivity to the feeling and emotion to others. On the other hand, The Humanistic Approach that emerged in 1960s and became popular in 1970s is an educational approach that applies the principles of The Humanistic Theory. According to Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics the definition of The Humanistic Approach in language teaching states that the term is used for methods in which the following principles are considered very important:

- development of human values,
- evolution in self-awareness and in the understanding of others,
- sensitivity to human feelings and emotions,
- active student involvement in learning and in the way learning takes place.

Stevick (1990, p. 21) stated that "Humanistic Approach is a language teaching method which emphasizes humanism as the most significant element in the teaching process". In his book *Humanism in Language Teaching* (1990), he pointed out that in a language course, success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom. According to Sellaf (2018), The Humanistic Approach is of a basic relevance related to the educator himself since it is the linking dot between the contextual realities of the institute socio-political existence. The approach is strongly attached to what the learner lives and experiences from social and cultural to the environmental truths; it's in sort alike to student-centered approach, yet, it preserves the standards of teaching-learning process, since it allows the student to pave his way towards a quality learning rather than just aiming at fulfilling the curriculum's objectives. According to Lei (2007), The Humanistic Approach emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the learner and places the individual's thought, emotion and feelings at the forefront of human development. The same view was held earlier by Combs (1946). Sellaf (2018) believed that The Humanistic Approach with its divert

range emphasizes the emotional factors and allow teachers to be more empathetic by coping with the real meaning of the human behavior, additionally, it induces self-development, enables learners to reach self-actualization and become more self-centered, stimulates creativity and enhance teaching and learning situations by making learning more interesting and motivating.

To conclude, The Humanistic Theory is the theoretical framework from which The Humanistic Approach came out as a practical application.

7.2.Principles of The Humanistic Approach

The principles of The Humanistic Approach are summarized as follows:

1. Respecting learners as people, including fostering the individual learner's self - esteem /promoting mutual esteem among learners, and developing each learner's awareness of self and others.
2. Recognizing the affective as well as the cognitive nature of the learning experience. This means working productively with the learner's emotions response to the foreign language and culture and to the learning situation.
3. Rethinking traditional syllabuses and materials. Humanistic approaches encourage learners to express their own meaning rather replicate model utterances. This method used as person related and the learner's personal experience and perspective are seen as primary resources for both lesson content and language form and function. This contrasts with more traditional approaches which focus on declarative rather than procedural knowledge (Byram and Hu 2003, p. 1).
4. Focusing on the learner's desire for positive growth, subjective feeling, needs, self-concept, choices in life, and interpersonal relationships.
5. Feelings and emotions are the keys to learning, communication, and understanding. Humanists worry that in today's stressful society people can easily lose touch with their feelings, which sets the stage for emotional problems and difficulties in learning. (Bestable, 2006, p. 56)
6. Learner not educator chooses what is to be learned. This means that educator serves as a resource person whose job is to help and guide learners.
7. The role of any educator and teacher is to be a facilitator.
8. The humanistic perspective is largely a motivational theory.
9. The assumption of the humanistic learning theory is that each individual is unique and that all individuals have a desire to grow in a positive way. (ibid, p. 330)
10. Students should be allowed to negotiate learning out comes; to cooperate with the teacher and other learners in a process of discovery, to engage in critical thinking, and to relate everything they do in school to the reality outside the classroom.
11. The teacher should allow time to students so that they can discover facts and principles for themselves.
12. Classroom activities and material in language teaching should utilize meaningful contexts of genuine communication with students engaged together in the process of becoming " persons " (Brown, 2007, p. 98) .

13. Through the establishment of interpersonal relationships with learners, teachers become the facilitators of learning.
14. Students must feel positive rather than negative about what they are learning.
15. Human beings will learn all they need to if a context of learning is properly created (ibid, p.97). (Cited in Hamzah, 2024).

7.3. Role of the Teacher in The Humanistic Approach

The role of the teacher has dramatically changed as classes have become learner-centered rather than teacher-centered. Teachers are looked at as facilitators of learning. Another role for the teacher is to encourage and evaluate changes in learner's need, self-concept, and feelings (Bastable, 2006).

7.4. Methodologies that Emerged out of The Humanistic Approach

The principles and characteristics of The Humanistic Approach are thought to be reflected in four methods, i.e. The Community Language Learning (proposed by Charles Curran with the view that teachers take an unobtrusive role and just aid the learners to learn the language and learners form a community helping one another to learn), the Silent Way (evolved by Caleb Gattegno who stated that the teacher is just a facilitator and speaks very little), Suggestopedia (developed by George Lozanov who used a suggestion as an anxiety-reducing and barrier-removing tool) and Total Physical Response of Asher who adopted a strategy to have the students listen to a command in a foreign language and immediately obey with a physical action. However, it is clear that other methods were under the influence of The Humanistic Approach such as Cooperative Language Learning and Andragogy which is both a theory as well as a teaching approach. Noam Chomsky's Innatist Theory and Vygotsky's notion of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' are probably based on The Humanistic Approach as well. A brief overview of each of them is presented below.

7.4.1. The Community Language Learning

This method emphasizes the sense of community in the learning group. It encourages interaction as a vehicle for learning. It also gives much and priority to the students' feelings and the recognition of struggles in language acquisition. There is no syllabus or textbook to follow. It is the students themselves who determine the content of the lesson by means of meaningful conversations in which they discuss real messages. The method draws on the counseling base and refers to these respective roles as a counselor and a client. According to Curran, "a counselor helps a client understand his or her own problems better by 'capturing the essence of the clients concern [and] relating [the client's] affect to cognition...; in effect, understanding the client and responding in a detached yet considerate manner". (Cited in Manohar and Reddy, 2018, p. 66)

7.4.2. The Silent Way

Gattegno introduced the method in his book *Teaching Foreign Languages in Schools* in 1963. In this method a teacher keeps silent and learners are encouraged to speak as much as possible. "The Silent Way is characterized by its focus on discovery, creativity, problem

solving and the use of accompanying materials”. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p.99). The premises are reflected in the words of Benjamin Franklin:

Tell me and I forget

Teach me and I remember

Involve me and I learn (ibid)

7.4.3. *Suggestopedia*

Suggestopedia is a modern teaching method, which focuses on how to deal with the relationship between mental potential and learning ability. “It is very appropriate to use in teaching speaking for young language learners” (Xue, 2005). The most important objective of suggestopedia is to motivate more of students’ mental potential to learn by suggestion. Desuggestion means unloading the memory banks, or blocking memories. Suggestion means loading the memory banks with desired and facilitating memories. (Maleki, 2005 cited in Manohar and Reddy, 2018).

7.4.4. *Total Physical Response*

Total Physical Response is based on the theory that the memory is enhanced through association with physical movement. It is also based on listening which is linked to physical actions and oral pronunciation. There are no texts in the teaching environment but there is a teaching foreign language through songs, games, and stories. Total Physical Response is a method which is built around the coordination of speech and action in other words it is to teach language through activity (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

7.4.5. *Cooperative Language Learning*

Cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. (Olsen and Kagan 1992). Though it belongs to The Collaborative Approach, it shares some characteristics of The Humanistic Approach as among its goals are:

- To provide opportunities for learners to develop successful learning and communication strategies.
- To enhance learner motivation and reduce learner stress and to create a positive affective classroom climate. (Richards and Rogers, 2001)

7.4.6. *Andragogy*

Andragogy was defined by Knowles (1980) as "the art and science of helping adults learn". The influence of The Humanistic Approach is reflected in the components proposed by Knowles which are:

- 1- Adults need to know a reason that makes sense to them, for whatever they need to learn.
- 2- They have a deep need to be self-directing and take responsibility for themselves.
- 3- Adults enter a learning activity with a quality and volume of experience that is a resource for their own and others’ learning.
- 4- They are ready to learn when they experience a need to know, or be able to do, something to perform more effectively in some aspect of their life.
- 5- Adults’ orientation to learning is around life situations that are task, issue- or

problem-centered, for which they seek solutions.

6- Adults are motivated much more internally than externally. (Knowles, 1995)

7.4.7. Chomsky's Innatist Theory

By the late 1960s, Chomsky's assumption that children are born with an innate potential for language acquisition was the basis for the Innatist Theory to language learning. Within such a theory, it was claimed that regardless of the environment where speakers were to produce language, they had the internal faculty, or competence in Chomsky's terms, to create and understand an infinite amount of discourse (Hughes 2002). Thus, learner's role changed from merely receiving input and repeating it to actively thinking how to produce language. Consequently, learners took on a more important role in that they were provided with opportunities to use the language more creatively and innovatively.

7.4.8. Vygotsky's Notion of the Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky believes that learning begins at birth and continues throughout all of life. One of the most important ways that advancements in development are achieved is through what Vygotsky called "the zone of proximal development". He described ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vigotsky, 1986 cited in Renshaw, 1992). From this comes the notion of 'scaffolding' that refers to what a learner can do by him/herself and what can be done with the help of others.

8. Incorporating The Humanistic Approach in English Classroom

Having reviewed the literature in this regard, it is found that incorporating The Humanistic Approach in English classroom is not that easy task. The requirements to do so include shifting from teacher-centered to learner-centered method of teaching, teacher training, materials and activities used, comprehending the principles of the approach, motivating learners and convincing them to adapt such a new approach, etc. Stevick (1990), pointed out the requirements of a humanistic language teaching are firm command over the language being taught, proper training in language teaching methodology and understanding of learner's cognitive, affective requirements, personality and language needs. According to Freeman (2000) and Rivers (1981), certain techniques are to be used in this such as small group tasks, role play, peer correction, class debate on a topic and simulation games. Arnold (1998) emphasized that all the classroom activities in this approach have to include students themselves and the input has to be comprehensible.

9. Use of The Humanistic Approach: Pros and Cons

Like any theory, approach or teaching method, The Humanistic Approach has witnessed controversial debate. Rivers (1981), Byram and Hu (2003), Bestable (2006), Brown (2007), Ellis (2003), Lei (2007), Arnold (1999), Mehrgan (n.d.), Prabhavathy & Mahalakshmi (2012), Maslow (1968), Moskowitz (1994), Manohar and Reddy (2018) represent the view advocating the use of The Humanistic Approach asserting its advantages for both learners and teachers. In contrast, Underhill (1989), Gadd (1998), Atkinson (1989), and Yadav (2022) represent the opposite view showing its drawbacks and difficulties that are faced in applying its principles.

10. Methodology

The exploratory and descriptive approaches were used to achieve the objectives mentioned above. This was done by reviewing related literature and explaining the current situation of teaching English at schools in Yemen as well as content analysis of the textbooks used and the researcher's experience. The principles of The Humanistic Approach were presented and their application in the context of Yemeni schools was examined. Having identified the challenges of their application, suitable recommendations were provided.

11. The Possibility of Applying the Humanistic Approach to Teach English in the Context of Yemeni Schools

To examine the possibility of applying The Humanistic Approach in teaching English in the context of Yemeni schools, it is crucial to have a close look at the current situation of teaching English. This includes presenting the current situation, analyzing the textbooks used in teaching English and comparing the principles of The Humanistic Approach to what is practiced at schools.

English is taught in Yemen as a foreign language at schools and universities. Majority of students learn English for short-term goals, i.e. to pass exams or to get a job. The program of preparing teachers of English at departments of English at the Yemeni universities is not sufficient enough to equip student-teachers with all what they need to perform well in the field. This is evident from the obvious imbalance between the courses devoted to literature, linguistics and ELT. Only one course relates to methods of teaching is taught in one semester of 10 – 11 lectures so it is impossible to cover all the theories, approaches and methods of teaching (Al-Anisi, 2015). Looking at the resource books such as *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* by Richards and Rogers and *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* by Larsen-Freeman, it is found that the methods are listed chronologically from the oldest to the recent ones. Thus, as it is impossible to cover them all, students remain unfamiliar with the recent approaches and methods. The recent methods are characterized by being learner-centered. This drawback is accompanied by absence of in-service teacher training particularly since 2016 because of the economic situation resulted from the siege imposed on Yemen. In such a situation, it can be concluded that applying an approach that is student-centered becomes unrealistic.

From the researcher's experience as an inspector at schools for five years, it is observed that teachers of English use traditional methods in teaching. The most commonly used method is Grammar Translation Method which is completely teacher-centered. Some teachers use either the Direct Method or the Audio-lingual Method but none of them use any of the humanistic methods or student-centered approaches. Students are accustomed to learn accordingly so supposing that if teachers undergo a training or a workshop it would take time and effort to shift to a humanistic approach. Lack of interest and motivation as well as the negative attitudes represent other obstacles. The textbooks used in teaching English at schools in Yemen, i.e. *English Course for Yemen* adopts the Audio-lingual Method which belongs to behaviorism that looks at language learning as a habit formation emphasizing the role of a teacher as a model to be imitated and its focus on repetition and memorization. These textbooks have been used since 1995 with no change so both teachers and students are accustomed to using them and neither the teachers nor policy makers seem to think of replacing them with other ones that adopt a humanistic approach. As a result, shifting to use this approach requires changing methods of teaching, designing textbooks based on learner-centered approach, etc.

Comparing the principles of The Humanistic Approach to what is practiced at schools shows impossibility of applying it currently and reveals the following:

| Principles of The Humanistic Approach | Practice at schools |
|---|--|
| Respecting learners as people, including fostering the individual learner's self - esteem / promoting mutual esteem among learners, and developing each learner's awareness of self and others. | Learners as people are not respected and teachers do not foster their self-esteem nor develop each learner's awareness of self and others. |
| Recognizing the affective as well as the cognitive nature of the learning experience. This means working productively with the learner's emotions response to the foreign language and culture and to the learning situation. | Not applicable in case of Yemeni schools as teachers follow traditional methods. |
| Humanistic approaches encourage learners to express their own meaning rather replicate model utterances. This method used as person related and the learner's personal experience and perspective are seen as primary resources for both lesson content and language form and function. | Learners are mostly passive recipients given a little chance to participate especially at schools that have large number of students. The textbooks used adopt the Audio-lingual Method and replicate model dialogues. |
| Focusing on the learner's desire for positive growth, subjective feeling, needs, self - concept, choices in life, and interpersonal relationships. | Completely ignored. Focus is on course content and preparing students for exams. |
| Learner not educator chooses what is to be learned. This means that educator serves as a resource persons whose job is to help and guide learners. | What is to be learned is decided by policy makers and teachers are the authority and source of information. |
| The role of any educator and teacher is to be a facilitator. | The teacher is the source of knowledge, authority, instructor. |
| The humanistic perspective is largely a motivational theory. | The Behaviorist Theory is followed and learners learn through repetition, imitation and lecturing method. |
| The assumption of the humanistic learning theory is that each individual is unique and that all individuals have a desire to grow in a positive way. | Individual differences are not taken into account whether while designing the syllabus or during teaching process. |
| Students should be allowed to negotiate learning outcomes; to cooperate with the teacher and other learners in a process of discovery, to engage in critical thinking, and to relate everything they do in school to the reality outside the classroom. | No opportunity is given to negotiate learning outcomes or relate things being done in school to reality outside it; a little chance is given to participation and involvement of all students. |
| The teacher should allow time to students so that they can discover facts and principles for | The time allocated is not sufficient to cover subject matter rather than |

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| themselves. | letting students to discover facts and principles for themselves. |
| Classroom activities and material in language teaching should utilize meaningful contexts of genuine communication with students engaged together in the process of becoming "persons". | Activities are limited and only few students are allowed to participate. Students who raise hands are usually selected. |
| Through the establishment of interpersonal relationships with learners, teachers become the facilitators of learning. | Interpersonal relations are build based on certain criteria that does include scaffolding slow-learners and motivate those who are not motivated. |
| Students must feel positive rather than negative about what they are learning. | Majority of the students have negative attitude towards English and study only to pass exams. |
| Human beings will learn all they need to, If a context of learning is properly created. | The context of learning is demotivated particularly in case of public schools with crowded classes, shortage of textbooks and other facilities, use of traditional methods, etc. |

12. The Findings

By examining the principles, analyzing the textbooks used, and the researcher's observation, it is found that it is impossible to apply The Humanistic Approach in the context of Yemeni schools at present because of several considerations. First of all teachers of English are unaware of this approach as well as the methods that came out of it. Secondly, teachers and students are accustomed to use traditional methods and need special training to be ready to shift to applying such methods. Thirdly, programs of pre-service training at departments of English, faculties of education suffer from imbalance of the courses taught and need to be revised. Fourthly, the textbooks used in schools, teachers' and students' attitudes and lack of in-service training are other obstacles that hinder application of this approach at present.

13. Recommendations

In the light of what has been found, certain recommendations are addressed to policy makers, officials at departments of English responsible for pre-service teacher training and teachers of English as follows:

1. Applying The Humanistic Approach is not recommended at the current situation as there are still many challenges and obstacles.
2. Policy makers have to re-think of the textbooks in use and call for a productive workshop run by experts in the field to adopt learner-centered approaches to teach English. Then, textbooks should be designed accordingly.
3. In-service training should be held to equip teachers in the field with the required information regarding Humanistic Approaches, recent methodologies and the textbooks designed to prepare them for shifting from traditional methods.

4. Officials at departments of English who are in charge of preparing teachers of English should revise the program components paying attention to courses related to teaching approaches/methods.
5. Number of courses and lectures at such programs should be sufficient enough to meet the expected needs and cover essential requirements.
6. Teachers of English should be rewarded and paid well to create positive attitude towards teaching that in turn leads to creativity.
7. Students should be convinced to adopt The Humanistic Approach by showing its advantages as well as by making needs analysis before designing textbooks.

14. Conclusion

This study accounted for The Humanistic Approach, explored its principles and examined the possibility of applying them in the context of Yemeni schools. This was done by reviewing related literature and explaining the current situation of teaching English at schools in Yemen as well as content analysis of the textbooks used and the researcher's experience. The exploratory and descriptive approaches were used to achieve the objectives. The findings indicated that it is impossible to apply this approach in the current situation and that shifting to use it needs certain requirements. In the light of the findings, the researcher came up with some recommendations.

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