Best Teaching and Learning Approaches through the Eyes of Thai EFL Preservice Teachers

Pasara Namsaeng

Faculty of Education

Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University, Chaiyaphum 36000, Thailand

Tel: 66-6-4229-9455   E-mail: pasara.na@cpru.ac.th

Wadinlada Thuratham (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Chonburi 20110, Thailand

Tel: 66-6-5695-6387   E-mail: wadinlada_th@rmutto.ac.th

Abstract

The best teaching and learning approaches have been controversial since the origins of language teaching and learning. This study aims to explore the Thai EFL preservice teachers' perceptions towards the best teaching and learning approaches through the written test. A qualitative research design and purposive sampling were employed to collect data from 46 participants who completed teacher training for at least one semester. Research ethics were obtained prior to data collection. The research instrument was a 150-word written test from 46 participants. The results show that there were 17 features of the best teaching and learning desired by Thai EFL preservice teachers, which can be put into four aspects: lesson, classroom environment, teachers, and students. In detail, lessons should be learned in a group setting using meaningful, real-life situations, simplified language, communication practice, language practice, and thinking practices. The classroom environment should be active, fun, and enjoyable, allowing for freely expressing ideas and opinions and peer-supported learning. Teachers should scaffold, increase motivation, and provide mental support to students. Finally, students must be able to manage their own emotions, have a sense of control over their own learning, and become autonomous learners. The mentioned features are likely to comply with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The reasons that the participants weighed in on

this approach can probably be due to ready-to-use materials to be used in different communicative situations, exciting and motivating approaches with active activities, and technology-supported language learning, leading to idealized pedagogical implementation.

1. Introduction

Teacher education is a program aimed at producing teachers, starting with preservice teachers who undergo training before becoming in-service teachers. In the current curriculum, undergraduates study for four years, with teacher training taking place in actual schools during the second semester of the first year, second year, and third year. The final year consists of comprehensive training and eligibility to obtain a teacher's license (Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University, 2019). Following that, they must take tests in four subjects: professional teaching, digital education, Thai communication, and English communication. However, graduates of teacher-training programs who enrolled in higher education between the academic years 2019 and 2022 only tests on professional teaching (Thai PBS World, 2023). Whenever they pass both tests, they will receive the teacher's license and be eligible to be recruited as a government teacher. Since the second semester of the first year, they will be called preservice teachers.

Becoming a teacher comes with numerous responsibilities, including preparing teaching and learning materials, managing classrooms and after-class activities, and handling ad-hoc assignments (Namsaeng, 2022). Developing teaching skills is crucial for fulfilling these responsibilities effectively, and thus preservice teachers should be equipped with various suitable teaching and learning approaches to adapt to specific students and situations.

Currently, there are several teaching and learning approaches available, such as communicative teaching and learning, game-based learning, cooperative learning, and active learning. The first renowned one is the communicative teaching and learning approach. There are recent research studies mentioning the impact of CLT on listening and speaking skills (Ghafar et al., 2023), the teaching of sustainable CLT (Nurjannah, 2023), and the use of CLT in oral communication (Arana, 2023). The second alternative approach is game-based learning. There have been studies with not only the language but computational thinking (Hsu, 2023) and the integration of game-based learning with engagement, motivation, and performance (Chen, 2023). The third new approach is cooperative learning. It has been used for the English language class as well, with the ideal that the power of brainstorming is better than individual thinking in that it can encourage students to better co-construct, co-regulate, and self-regulate their learning environment (Moura et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2023; Tamimv, 2023). Finally, the attempt to promote active learning in Thai schools Due to the competences developing in Thai education, active learning emphasizes student engagement and hands-on activities as a core to boost learners' interest and desire to study through individual and group work. Instead of performing one-way communication and expecting the students to comply, the teacher's duty in this approach is to encourage, counsel, and promote the students' learning (Kenan Foundation Asia, 2023). Though different teaching and learning approaches

are available in the current teaching trends nowadays, each preservice teacher has different mindsets, beliefs, and thoughts about the best teaching and learning depending on their background, classroom context, learning behaviors, the influence of Thai culture, the teaching and learning context, and child-rearing background (Namsaeng & Sukying, 2020). These backgrounds are perceived and, vice versa, expressed through the teaching techniques that preservice teachers implement in the actual classroom.

Understanding preservice teachers' views and thoughts on the best teaching and learning approaches is crucial as it reflects how they will approach their own teaching once their education is complete. By allowing them to express their perceptions through written form, this study aimed to uncover their beliefs and preferences. It also aimed to encourage them to think critically, propose innovative approaches, and foster awareness of effective teaching and learning practices. Ultimately, the study sought to explore Thai EFL preservice teachers' perceptions of the best teaching and learning approaches through a written test.

To express their perceptions towards a written work makes preservice teachers able to: 1) be free to express themselves, *i.e.*, no limitation in terms of boundaries or contents to be presented; 2) open the channel for them to express themselves, *i.e.*, compared with the discussion in the classroom, they would have a limited amount of content and time to express their opinion; 3) deliberately convey the message through the thinking process, making it more coverage of utterances; 4) give a chance to think outside the box, whereas they can propose both already existing teaching and learning approaches; and 5) raise awareness of how they are likely to teach and be taught in the classroom. If they do not think that particular teaching and learning approaches work, they will not pass on similar teaching styles to the next generation, leading to improvement and innovation implementation in the classroom. For example, rote learning through the memorization of the whole dictionary or the translation of 1000 words must not be considered as an effective task in teaching and learning. Eventually, the teaching and learning approaches in the classroom will be modernized and effectively shifted. As such, the current study explored Thai EFL preservice teachers' perceptions towards the best teaching and learning approaches through the written test.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Dead of Grammar Translation Method and the End of PPP Approach Era

The Grammar Translation Method is a historical teaching method in language teaching from the past, and it was famous and widely used. Originally, it was a method used in learning Latin, which is considered a dead language (Richards& Rodgers, 2014). According to its name, it focuses on grammar and translation, whereas the learners had to translate to an accurately grammatical form to another language. There were negative criticisms found, such as the demand for oral ability in foreign languages in the nineteenth century; hence, the grammar translation method has decreased, and alternative methods are being sought.

The invention of the audiolingual method served to enhance oral language ability. PPP stands for presentation (P), practice (P), and production (P). This method has been widely used over the decades, even until the present generation of conversative teachers. PPP was originally

adopted from the Audiolingual Method, where teachers can achieve their learning goals, students can practice under circumstances, and learning takes place when transferring the information to other situations (Criado, 2013). Though the declarative and procedural knowledge has been identified as a positive criticism for PPP, especially the stages of presentation and practice in noticing the linguistic features in the language, it is still problematic for the students to believe that the learning was always a straight line or learning the isolated language, not a chunk. Another negative criticism of PPP is the encouragement to focus on the accuracy of using forms rather than the meaning, real-life communication, or other learning principles (Criado, 2013). With the mentioned criticisms, the PPP approach has been questioned as to whether or not it is still the most popular teaching and learning approach nowadays. As we can see, there are many teaching and learning approaches that were later invented, leading to the methods era, such as situational methods, communicative approaches, silent ways, total physical approaches, content-based instruction, task-based instruction, text-based instruction, competency-based instruction, cooperative language learning, whole language learning, multiple intelligences, and CEFR (Richards& Rodgers, 2014). These methods have somehow been fitted into different teaching and learning contexts.

2.2 The Era of English for Communication

However, for those applying for admission into the program at the undergraduate level, there will be 1-2 English for Communication courses embedded in the bachelor's program. This is due to the continuous search for the best teaching and learning approaches in the current academic community and the invention of language learning innovation with the belief of the most efficiency in learning a language. Emphasizing the course description, it says, "Developing students to have listening and speaking skills in order to provide information and comment on issues such as culture, sports, hobbies, news, and social issues, to have reading skills such as reading for topics, reading for main ideas and details, and to be able to answer questions from the story and write a short essay" (Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University, 2019). This can be implied by the fact that the program specification focuses on the use of language in real-life situations rather than having high proficiency in the English language, providing a new paradigm shift in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

CLT is trying to fix the errors found in grammar translation and audiolingual methods such as activities for real communication, meaningful tasks, students' engagement, and authentic language materials (Richards& Rodgers, 2014). The developed version of CLT has been enhanced to enhance four skills of English learning as well as the dual focus on fluency and accuracy. The teaching and learning activities can be information gap-like, dynamic, and motivating for the students to learn, such as jigsaw, task completion, information gathering, opinion sharing, information transfer, and role-play activities. Though some criticisms are found, such as over-emphasis on communication, native-speakerism, which is not applicable in other cultures, and western-based top-down approaches, CLT is still a trend and is being effectively used in the real classroom.

3. Research Questions

The objective of this present study is to investigate characteristics of the best teaching and learning approaches for the Thai EFL preservice teacher, so the research question can be determined as follows,

> *What are the characteristics of the best teaching and learning approaches for the Thai EFL preservice teacher context?*

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used, in which the data was collected from a written test. The participants were asked to write a 150-word academic paragraph, entitled, "What is the best teaching method in your opinion? Why?" The reasons will be given along with the relevant examples. The research ethics have already been approved by the Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University Ethics Committee for Human Research (CPRU) before collecting data as a Research Ethics Exemption or Exemption Review. The consent forms as well as the explanation of research details were prepared prior to the data collection procedure. A coding system and content analysis were used to assess the qualitative data, and an interrater was used to check its reliability.

4.2 Population and Sampling

The participants were Thai EFL preservice teachers who had already completed a one-semester teacher training program at the actual school. All 46 participants were 36 females, 8 males, and 2 gender-unidentified pre-service teachers between the ages of 19 and 21. All of the participants were second-year English majors, and as a result of their shared learning styles, personality traits, and language proficiency, they were regarded as a homogenous group. The participants had not previously written or expressed their thoughts regarding the topic.

4.3 Instruments

4.3.1 A Written Test

An academic written test from 46 participants was the research instrument for the current study. The initial part of the test was the explanation of research details as well as the instructions. The participants were then asked to fill out the first part of the general information form, which included their 1) major, 2) gender, 3) age, 4) current GPA, and 5) English level from 1 to 5, followed by the second part of the written test. They were asked to write a 150-word academic paragraph entitled, "What is the best teaching method in your opinion? Why?". The reasons were given along with the relevant examples. The Academic Word List (AWL) was encouraged to include in their writings (Coxhead, 2011).

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Research Instrument Validity through the Exemption Review by the Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University Ethics Committee for Human Research (CPRU)

The current study is part of the research project entitled, "Using the Gradual Release Model and Scaffolding Approach to Develop Academic Writing Skills in Thai EFL Preservice Teachers". Through the process of gaining the Exemption Review, the Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University Ethics Committee for Human Research (CPRU) reviewed and revised not only the aspect of ethics in research, but also the holistic content regarding questions to be asked in the test. All research instruments included in the mentioned research project were officially validated by CPRU.

4.4.2 Pilot Study

The test was implemented in English language providing sufficient ideas and examples for the participants. The test was piloted by the same group of the students (during the pre-test of the main research project) if they understood and were able to write correctly as well as minimized the misunderstanding being found.

(1) A Written Test

The 46 participants were required to complete a 150-word academic paragraph within 1 hour with the same topic in order to be able to express their thoughts and ideas abundantly.
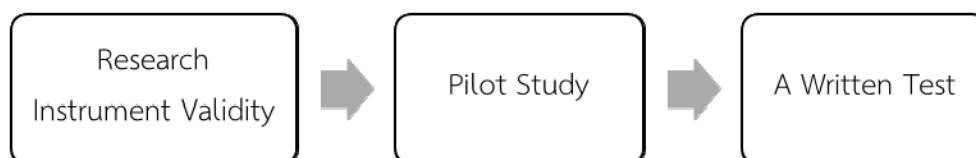

Figure 1. Data collection procedure

4.5 Data Analysis

The data from the written test was analyzed by content analysis. Then, an experienced inter-coder verified the data. The theme of the qualitative data was based on the collected qualitative data.

5. Results

In response to the research question, "What are the characteristics of the best teaching and learning approaches for the Thai EFL preservice teacher context?", the collected data from the written test were analyzed. The 17 characteristics from the written test of Thai EFL preservice teachers' needs and preferences towards their best language teaching and learning, as well as the excerpts regarding each aspect, are presented below.

Characteristics of the best language teaching and
learning approaches by Thai EFL preservice teachers

1. Groupwork/ Teamwork
2. Real-life situation
3. Meaningful
4. Interaction
5. Communication
6. Thinking practice
7. Language practice
8. Fun and enjoyable
9. Able to express idea
10. Motivation
11. Mentally support
12. Peer-supported learning
13. Teacher Scaffolding
14. Autonomous learners
15. Sense of control their own learning
16. Emotional management
17. Language simplification

Figure 2. Characteristics of the best language teaching and learning by
Thai EFL preservice teachers

Figure 2 illustrates the 17 characteristics of the best language teaching and learning approaches provided by Thai EFL preservice teachers. The details of each characteristic were shown in the following excerpts:

(1) Groupwork/Teamwork

Students	Excerpts
6	"Students *work together in groups* to create a positive learning environment in the classroom through group lessons."
7	"The *students in the group help each other*. allow students to *practice working with others and practicing unity with group members*."
11	*"Practice in a small group* using a chain drill to give students the opportunity to communicate with everyone."
13	"The group's presentation and t*eamwork give students more classroom experience."*
29	"Students need to *practice cooperative working*, communicating, planning, and critical thinking such as arranging the sentences in relation to the picture in the group."
31	"A group teaching style that focuses on *creating good relationships with each other in the group* and with the other students in the class and an *exchange of different knowledge and ideas within the group."*
36	"Activities that *focus on getting students to interact and work together as a group* for analytical thinking."
45	"By focusing on the students' ability to *work in groups to support mutual goals and reach their goals."*

(2) Real-Life Situation

Students	Excerpts
17	"It is an opportunity to learn about *the real state of life as it relates to nature, the economy, culture, politics, and way of life*."
22	"By allowing students to *interact with things in data and information situations that reflect reality*… Allow learners to learn from reality-like conditions."
28	"Learn a language from the *everyday environment*."
32	"Immerse students in a variety of *real-life situations*. It is so beneficial that they can learn how to use their language skills to communicate in the real world."
36	"Focus on doing activities to *practice using language in situations as close to real life as possible."*
39	"Indeed, I believe that the audio-lingual method can help learners with *everyday conversation* and learning languages very well."
41	"Students can use it in *their daily lives."*
44	"To give students *real-world experience* by participating in learning activities to practice skills related to games in a variety of situations."

(3) Meaningful

Students	Excerpts
17	"Producing *meaningful learning* can help pupils grow mentally, emotionally, and physically."
19	"Give children the opportunity to *learn a language from meaningful things* in everyday life."

(4) Interaction

Students	Excerpts
2	"Active learning creates *interaction between students and teachers.*"
8	"Acquisition requires *meaningful interaction* in the target language—natural communication."
32	"It helps with *interaction with other students when performing communicative language activities.*"

(5) Communication

Students	Excerpts
20	*"Emphasize language for communication* and coherence knowledge and skills."
39	*"Practice the conversation*; it will help us get used to the situation of speaking in front of others without having to memorize."
41	"Learners *practice communicating fluently in the form of an activity*."

(6) Thinking Practice

Students	Excerpts
3	"Pictures help *support creativity and imagination*…change the attitude of the students."
15	"AQM teaching will *greatly improve the learner's learning process and thinking skills.*"
17	"Focus on pupils' ability to develop information on their own, employing *the critical thinking process.*"
18	"Develop the *thinking process of the learners* without realizing it."
22	"Involving students in *problem-solving situation.*"
25	"Practice *analytical thinking skills.*"
35	"They can use a foreign language in *a more creative way* than by mechanically memorizing single sentences."
36	"Focus on getting students to interact and work together as a group for *analytical thinking.*"
37	"They practice *analytical thinking skills.*"

(7) Language Practice

Students	Excerpts
28	"By allowing children to *practice using the language* by speaking and conversing with their classmates."
41	"Learners *practice language in various situations freely.*"

(8) Fun and Enjoyable

Students	Excerpts
7	"Make students *excited and have fun* learning."
16	"Playing, singing, and dancing. And it was because of these experiences that I grew to appreciate and *enjoy English learning while having fun.*"
18	"It helps to make *learning fun and enjoyable* for the learners instead of boring and cumbersome."
25	"It's *a fun and not boring technique...* Students are *excited and eager* to participate in learning."
33	"Teaching will help students be *satisfied and enjoyable* because they will be active at all times."
38	"It promotes lessons to be *entertaining* and represents the thoughts and feelings of the students."
42	"They can have *fun with the lesson and enjoy it at the same time.*"
44	"When teaching is *fun and interesting, students will be excited and eager to learn.*"

(9) Able to Express Idea

Students	Excerpts
1	"Teachers encourage students to be creative... *Freedom to express thoughts and expressions*"
2	"Allow students to *express their opinions and share their knowledge.*"
6	*"Exchange opinions within the group.*"
24	"Learners *exchanged ideas and knowledge with friends.*"
29	"Each group needs to *share their opinions and find solutions together.*"
31	"Having students group together to find information and find their opinions in order to *exchange information within the group.*"

(10) Motivation

Students	Excerpts
5	"Motivational processes such as games help *create motivation* and increase intelligence."
9	"The use of *persuasion during the course, such as prizes, compliments, and competition scores.*"
29	*"Stimulate students' desire to study* because most children like to play games, especially those that challenge their curiosity."
42	*"Something to motivate, such as points, items, rewards, and some snacks.*"

(11) Mentally Support

Students	Excerpts
1	"This method of teaching *emphasizes good relationships*. And the friendship between the teacher and the group of students is important."
44	"Teaching *relieves students' stress.*"
46	"Teachers must *understand students' feelings* while interacting with each other, both *physically and mentally.*"

(12) Peer-Supported Learning

Students	Excerpts
8	"Such as *one-on-one lessons with foreigners from all over the world*. You can choose from a variety of coaches to practice listening in a variety of accents."
24	*"Learners exchanged ideas* and knowledge with friends."
38	"It enables *kids to practice working together* with their peers."

(13) Teacher Scaffolding

Students	Excerpts
11	"The teacher *just kept supervising the students*."
21	"A teacher can *gauge understanding, provide timely feedback, take anecdotal notes, and build strong relationships with students*."
24	"The teacher *closely guides them so that students can do it by themselves*."
46	"A teacher must *not only consider the intellect of the learners*; it also means that teachers must understand students' feelings while *interacting with each other, both physically and mentally."*

(14) Autonomous Learners

Students	Excerpts
17	"Students have a chance to *learn on their own, which promotes lifelong learning*."
24	"Help instill in learners the *desire to seek knowledge for themselves*, which contributes to lifelong learning skills."
26	"It is a *self-study through the internet network*. Students can choose to study according to their own preferences... Learners can be everyone, everywhere, and study anytime."

(15) Sense of Control Their Own Learning

Students	Excerpts
28	"Teachers should give children the *opportunity to choose what they are interested in*."

(16) Emotional Management

Students	Excerpts
37	"It *teaches students how to manage their own emotions and respond appropriately to various situations."*

(17) Language Simplification

Students	Excerpts
44	*"Making the lesson easy for children* to understand."

To conclude, the Thai EFL preservice teachers, as both teachers and students, desired to have 17 characteristics of their ideal classrooms, and these can be restructured through the 4 aspects as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Best teaching and learning by lesson, classroom environment, teacher, and students

Lesson:	Classroom Environment:	Teachers:	Students:
• Group learning • Meaningful • A real-life situation • Simplified language • Practice communication • Practice languages • Practice thinking skills	• Interaction • Fun and enjoyable • Able to express ideas and opinions • Peer-supported learning	• Scaffolding • Increase motivation • Mentally support	• Manage their emotions • Have a sense of control over their own learning • Autonomous leaners

Table 1 restructures the 17 characteristics of best teaching and learning through the eyes of Thai EFL preservice teachers into four aspects. First, lessons should be learned in a group setting using meaningful, real-life situations, simplified language, communication practice, language practice, and thinking practices. Second, the classroom environment should be active, fun, and enjoyable, allowing for freely expressing ideas and opinions and peer-supported learning. Third, teachers should scaffold, increase motivation, and provide mental support to students. Finally, students must be able to manage their own emotions, have a sense of control over their own learning, and become autonomous learners.

6. Discussion

6.1 The Proposed Characteristics for Complying with the Communicative Language Teaching

Forty-six participants provided rich information in the form of a written test. The previously supplied information was elaborately detailed. The suggested characteristics undoubtedly reflected the preferences and requirements of Thai EFL preservice teachers for their potential classrooms. When closely examined, the aforementioned characteristics appeared to share some similarities with a popular pedagogical movement known as Communicative Language Teaching, or CLT, which has been widely studied as mentioned earlier.

There are potential reasons why students love CLT so much. First, it is probably the ready-to-use equipment that the students can use immediately. According to the theory of language, CLT is viewed as a communicative competence that requires both knowledge and ability for language use (Hymes, 1972) and functional linguistics (Halliday, 1973). It means that CLT can be promptly used in the classroom. Students just pick up and adjust to be perfectly fitted in their expressions. By doing this, it makes their expressions meaningful and

valuable in communication.

Second, the exciting teaching and learning activities make students motivated. Richards and Rodgers (2014) listed the activities being used in the CLT, which are jigsaw activities, task-completion activities, information-gathering activities, opinion-sharing activities, information-transfer activities, reasoning gap activities, and role plays. It can be seen that these activities are freshly adapted into different contents that could very well draw students' attention.

Third, the great emphasis on technology-supported materials conforms with the current digital era. It is undeniable that technology plays a crucial role in education, especially during the COVID period. Educational technology has been continuing to grow more efficiently ever since. It is hard to separate the students from the technological learning. Indeed, CLT strictly adheres to authentic materials, so it is one of the approaches that eases the use of technology the most.

6.2 The Transformation of Lesson, Classroom Environment, Teacher, and Student into a Lesson Plan

There was no single best method of teaching and learning, but the integration of various aspects. When closely viewing 17 characteristics, it requires looking at four components: lessons, learning environments, teachers, and students; however, it can also be included in the step of teaching as a following lesson plan:

(1) Warm-up: increase motivation;

(2) Introduction;

(3) Content: meaningful, a real-life situation, simplified language;

(4) Activities: scaffolding, group learning, manage their emotions, have a sense of control over their own learning, autonomous leaners, interaction, fun and enjoyable, able to express ideas and opinions, peer-supported learning, practice communication, practice languages, and practice thinking skills;

(5) Wrap-up;

(6) Throughout the lesson: mental support.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, Thai EFL preservice teachers prioritize 17 key aspects when it comes to effective teaching and learning methods. These aspects encompass various aspects of the lesson, classroom environment, teacher role, and student engagement. In terms of the lesson, it is important to facilitate group learning with practical, real-life situations, simplified language, opportunities for communication practice, language practice, and critical thinking exercises. Creating a lively and engaging classroom atmosphere that encourages open discussions and peer-supported learning is also crucial. Teachers should focus on motivating students, providing scaffolding, and offering mental support. Students, on the other hand,

should learn to manage their emotions, take ownership of their education, and develop independent thinking skills. These identified characteristics align well with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching. The preference for this approach could be attributed to its practical language use, motivational techniques, and alignment with the digital era's authentic technology-supported learning. Future research should prioritize exploring teaching and learning strategies that cater specifically to the needs and preferences of Thai EFL preservice teachers. Additionally, considering the complexity of the term "approaches," a simplified alternative could be utilized for better comprehension. Lastly, expanding the sample size to include learners from primary and secondary schools, as well as other educational levels, would provide a broader perspective.

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