

# **T T E E F F L**

**Teaching Theories and Approaches**

**Ben Shearon  
Chief ALT Advisor  
Miyagi Board of Education**

# Introduction and Definitions

The term TEFL is associated with teaching theory, qualifications, and careers. This handout will touch briefly on all three of these. First of all, some important terms:

## Definitions

<b>EFL</b>	English as a foreign language. This refers to the teaching and learning of English in countries where English is not the primary language.
<b>ESL</b>	English as a second language. This refers to the teaching and learning of English in English speaking countries.
<b>TEFL</b>	Teaching English as a Foreign Language. See EFL above. TEFL programs prepare teachers of English as a foreign language.
<b>TESL</b>	Teaching English as a Second Language. See ESL above. TESL programs prepare teachers of English as a second language.
<b>TESOL</b>	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. This incorporates both EFL and ESL. It is used to refer in a more general way to the field of English language teaching

## TEFL Theories

Most people encounter TEFL theory as part of a course, and perhaps for this reason it can be seen as academic and unconnected to actual teaching. Explicitly studying educational theories can improve our teaching and our classes for several reasons.

- Theories provide explanations for why certain techniques or activities work.
- Theories can also provide useful guidance to teachers who are trying to think about their teaching methods or how they organize their syllabus.
- Sometimes theories complement and clarify observations that teachers have already made in their classes.

Of course, it is important to keep things in perspective and not get carried away implementing new theories. Take the time to see whether theories fit your teaching situation and students before trying to introduce them.

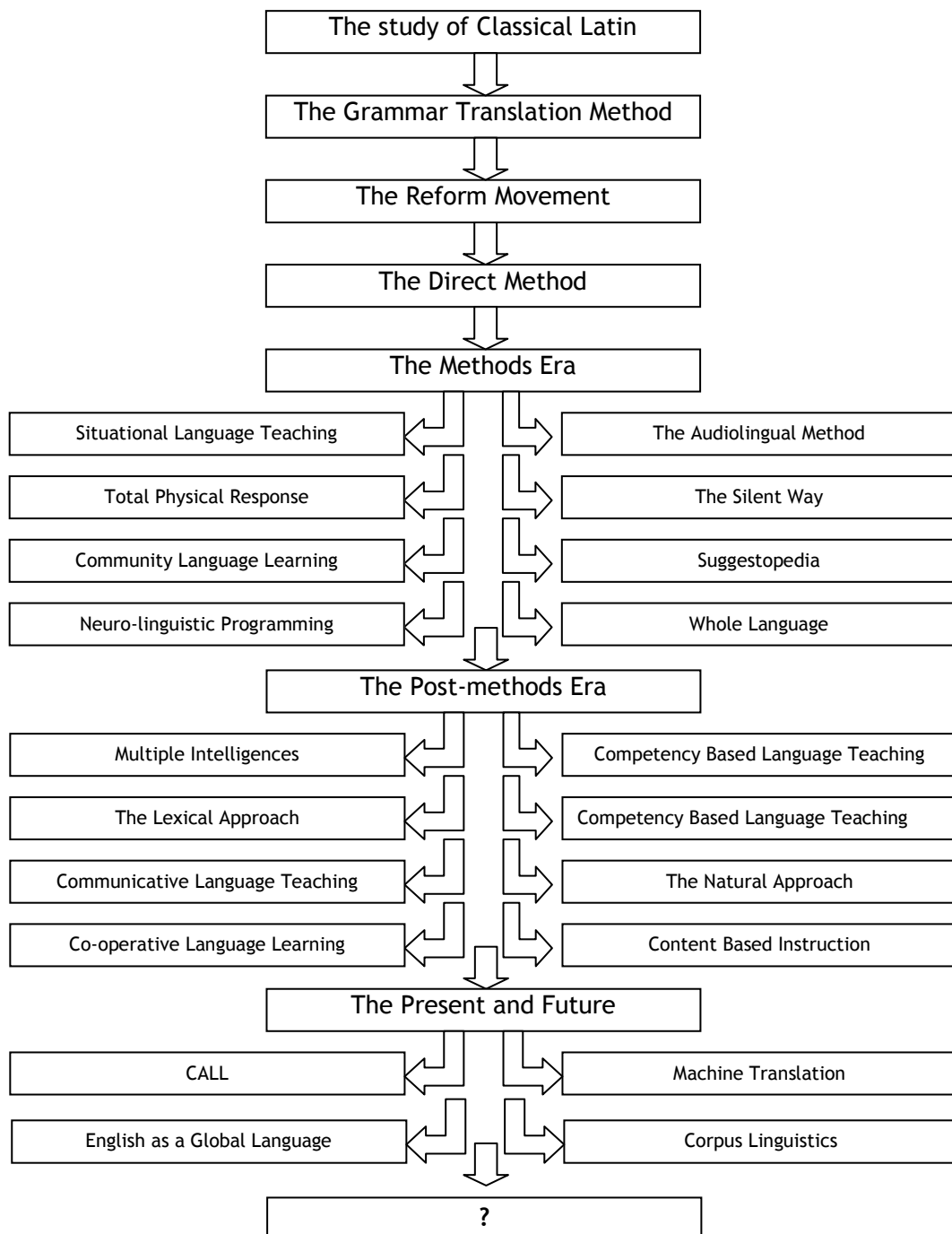
If you are thinking about a career or further study in TEFL, starting to read up on theory now will reduce the load in the future. It could also give you some more insight into your current situation, as well as provide inspiration for your classes.

# A Brief History of Language Teaching

Modern techniques for teaching foreign languages draw on a rich and convoluted history, originating in the study of Classical Latin in Europe and passing through several stages. Different countries, organizations, and teachers prefer different methods, and almost all of the theories and approaches shown in the diagram below still carry weight somewhere.

Figure 1 is my attempt at displaying this history visually:

Figure 1



# Initial Approaches

Initial approaches came about before the Second World War, when operational necessity fuelled a new interest in language teaching methods.

## The Study of Classical Latin

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Latin was studied in Europe as an intellectual exercise, with students memorizing grammar and vocabulary with the aim of reading and writing accurately. Students spent their time committing declensions and conjugations to memory, and wrestling with grammar and rhetoric.

## The Grammar Translation Method

The Grammar Translation Method appeared after modern languages (French, German, English) started to be taught in schools. Teachers of these new languages fell back on the traditional way of teaching Latin, and so the fundamentals of the language class did not change.

The Grammar Translation method is dull and monotonous for students, but easy for teachers to implement and teach. It is still widely used, even though there is no theory that justifies it or that “attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

## The Direct Method

Also known as the Natural Method or the Berlitz Method, the Direct Method grew out of dissatisfaction with previous methods of instruction. According to it, classroom instruction is carried out entirely in the target language, preferably native speakers. It is essentially the “product of enlightened amateurism” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Its drawbacks include the need for skilled native speakers as teachers and the rigidity of trying to run classes completely in the target language when sometimes a quick lapse into L1 would solve problems more quickly.

## Situational Language Teaching

Situational language teaching emphasized oral practice, grammar, and sentence patterns. It also introduced the extremely influential P-P-P lesson model (presentation, practice, production) that is still visible in schools all over Japan.

The method consists of using concrete objects, pictures, and realia along with actions and gestures to demonstrate the meaning of new items. This allows teachers to dispense with explanation or L1.

# The Guru Age

Following the Second World War, and up to the 1980s, EFL was dominated by a succession of methods that claimed to have the answers to the problem of how to teach. While none of them provided a satisfactory complete solution, many have useful elements.

## The Audiolingual Method (the Army Method)

An intensive, oral-based approach developed by the US Army to train interpreters. It involves memorizing dialogues and doing language drills. It went out of fashion due to attacks on its theoretical foundations and disappointment in its results. It was also felt to be boring and unsatisfying for students.

## Total Physical Response (TPR)

Created by James Asher, a professor of psychology, TPR is an excellent complementary technique, especially for beginners' and children's classes. As a self-contained method, however, it proved inadequate at intermediate and advanced levels.

## The Silent Way

Based on the premise that teachers should be silent while students should produce language in the classroom, the Silent Way depends on colored wooden rods and pronunciation charts to aid students in figuring out language with minimal teacher input.

## Community Language Learning

Based on counseling and psychology, CLL involves students and teacher forming a community that works together to figure out the target language. Teachers need special training in counseling techniques.

## Suggestopedia

Slightly ridiculous method that was devised as a kind of placebo, using scientific jargon and baroque music to create the right learning mood in learners.

## Whole Language

Whole language is based on "authenticity" of language. It is characterized by only using authentic texts, having meaningful interaction, and doing exercises with real purpose. The actual characteristics of Whole Language are very hard to pin down beyond this.

## Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP)

NLP is a set of working principles for directing or guiding therapeutic change, which have been adapted for EFL. More an attitude than an approach.

# Integrating Approaches

In the 1980s and 90s, the EFL world slowly moved to a new approach: the eclectic approach. Self-contained methods with all the answers had been discredited, and teachers came to realize that they were the best arbiters of what worked in their classroom.

From then on, the eclectic method has involved taking effective techniques and integrating them into a personalized approach.

## Multiple Intelligences

Based on the work of Howard Gardner, MI refers to a learner-based philosophy that characterizes human intelligence as having multiple dimensions that should be acknowledged in education. He lists linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligences.

## The Lexical Approach

The lexical approach takes the view that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, or notions, but lexis (vocabulary).

## Competency Based Language Learning

Competency Based Education focuses on the outcomes or outputs of learning. It is a kind of performance based teaching: looking at what learners will be able to do with language, regardless of how they learned it. Used in ESL contexts ( particularly Australia's Migrant Education Program).

## Communicative Language Learning

Communicative language learning is another vague and broad "approach" that commands widespread support. It is based upon a communicative model of language and language use, where learners are involved as much as possible in real communication (information gaps, etc.). The goal is communicative competence, the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately.

## The Natural Approach

Similar to Communicative Language Learning, the Natural Approach was developed by Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen, who refer to it as a communicative approach.

It focuses on the difference between acquisition (unconscious language uptake) and learning (conscious language uptake) and attempts to encourage the former.

There are two other major theories involved:

- The input hypothesis states that we learn best by understanding language slightly beyond our level (i+1).
- The affective filter hypothesis states that we learn best if relaxed and comfortable.

## Co-operative Language Learning

Cooperative Language Learning is an approach to teaching that makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom.

It is designed to foster cooperation, critical thinking skills, and develop communicative competence.

## Content Based Instruction

In Content Based Instruction, teaching is based around the content or information that students will acquire. It is based on the following two principles:

- People learn language more successfully when they use it as a means of acquiring information rather than as an end in itself
- CBI better reflects learners' needs for learning a second language

Content Based Instruction is primarily used in ESL.

## Task Based Language Learning

Task Based Language Learning focuses on the processes that students attempt rather than the content or outcomes. It is strongly linked to Communicative Language Learning.

# Recent Developments

Recent developments, especially in technology, hint at revolutions to come in the world of EFL, but it seems likely that any innovations would be integrated into current theoretical frameworks rather than embraced as replacements.

## Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

One of the hottest areas in EFL recently, CALL has been further enhanced in the spread of broadband internet and online class management technologies. It seems likely that computers will continue to play increasingly important roles in language learning, whether through advances in language learning software or by facilitating the development of virtual classrooms.

## Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguistics uses computers to analyze huge databases of language (corpora) and determine word frequencies and usages. It has been used to make a new generation of dictionaries and is set to revolutionize how we think about language.

## Machine Translation

Not so much teaching, but rapid advances in machine translation could conceivably eliminate the need to learn foreign languages at some point in the future!

# TEFL Qualifications

TEFL qualifications run the full range from short courses to PhDs, with corresponding commitments in terms of time and money.

## TEFL Certificates

TEFL certificates are available from a wide range of organizations. Most involve attending classes, but distance and internet courses are also available.

The British Council website has the following explanation:

“The most commonly accepted qualifications are the Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) awarded by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and the Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (Cert. TESOL) awarded by Trinity College London. These certificates are generally seen as a minimum qualification to teach English as a Foreign Language.

Distance learning courses can also be a good introduction, but feedback on your teaching practice is essential and most distance courses will not include this, and therefore will not be acceptable to many teaching institutes.”

CELTA and Cert. TESOL courses are available all over the world. Short TEFL courses, as well as distance or internet ones, will not be counted as real certification by most employers (especially in Europe). Despite this, some people find the content useful enough to make it worth pursuing this option.

## TEFL Post-graduate Degrees

In order to have access to the more stable, lucrative, and prestigious jobs at the tertiary level, it is generally necessary to be in possession of a relevant post-graduate degree.

The bare minimum for working full-time at a Japanese university is a relevant Masters' degree, while the best jobs also require a PhD (often in a specialized subject such as corpus linguistics, second language acquisition, etc.).

In general, full-time face to face degrees are seen as better than distance degrees, but there are several excellent distance/internet MAs.

A face to face MA will take a year, and the cost will of course depend on the location and university, and a host of other factors such as residence, scholarships and other awards, etc.

A distance MA will normally take two to three years and cost between 10,000 and 15,000 US dollars. Several excellent courses are available online or by distance, and the workload tends to be around 10 hours per week.

PhDs are usually residential and take between two and five years to complete.

# TEFL Qualifications (2)

While TEFL certificates and postgraduate degrees are the obvious qualifications to pursue on the road to an English teaching career, they are not the only ones.

## Teaching Certification

Having a teaching certification from your home country not only opens up a career there but can also prove advantageous abroad. The training and experience teaching courses provide will prove extremely helpful in the classroom.

In addition, certified teachers are able to work at international schools, consistently among the best-paid and prestigious teaching jobs abroad.

Increasingly, private language schools are also coming to realize the worth of having trained classroom teachers for their children's programs.

## Membership of Professional Associations

In addition to more formal qualifications, membership of professional associations of English teachers can be extremely beneficial. Such organizations can:

- provide you with information and training
- provide you with a ready-made network of people in the industry
- make you seem serious and committed to your work

There are two main EFL associations in Japan, ETJ and JALT, each of which has a slightly different flavor.

**ETJ** English Teachers in Japan: professional association with great mailing lists and active local chapters (one in Sendai). Membership free.

<http://www.eltnews.com/ETJ/>

**JALT** Japan Association of Language Teachers. Great networking opportunities and a slightly more academic focus. Membership 10,000 yen per year.

<http://www.jalt.org/>

## Research and Publications

Like membership of professional associations, doing classroom research and getting the results published can be a way to prove your enthusiasm and commitment to teaching.

There is a huge range of EFL publications, from the academic to the intensely practical. Being a published author is as simple as taking the time to research, write, and submit!

# Careers and Job-hunting

It is easy to get a job teaching English almost anywhere in the world.

It is difficult to get a good job teaching English anywhere in the world.

What distinguishes the people who get good jobs from the ones that don't can be broken down into four categories: qualifications, experience (please note that experience as an ALT will not necessarily be recognized as relevant by employers), local knowledge, and professionalism. For more information on qualifications please see the previous section.

This section will be divided into information and advice regarding Japan, followed by information and advice regarding other countries.

## Jobs in Japan

There is a wide range of English teaching jobs in Japan:

- **Private dispatch teacher**  
Work for a company that supplies teachers to other organizations (usually schools, businesses, or universities). Pay and conditions tend to be worse than teachers employed directly by similar organizations. Salaries usually range from 190,000-260,000 yen per month.
- **Private language school teacher (eikaiwa)**  
Extremely varied work, teaching babies to senior citizens. Salaries range is usually 200,000 to 350,000 yen per month, with the majority of jobs paying 230,000-260,000.
- **Private ALT**  
Work for a school or board of education in an ALT role. Some positions involve solo teaching. Salaries tend to range between 250,000 and 450,000 yen per month, although the higher end of the scale is rare and often requires further qualifications. Some long term positions available.
- **International School Teacher**  
Work for an international school as a regular teacher. Under normal circumstances it is necessary to have a teaching license. Pay and conditions tend to be very good.
- **University Teacher**  
Teach at a university, either part or full time. Part-time teachers are paid per 90 minute class, full-time teachers tend to enjoy good wages, long holidays, and a relatively relaxed workload. Usual minimum qualifications include a relevant Masters' degree, publications, and some experience of teaching at the university level (the reason there are part-time university teachers!).

All these types of job have benefits and drawbacks, but they have been listed in order of perceived attractiveness. The last two, in particular, have much higher qualification requirements but provide a much more attractive remuneration deal.

I truly believe that if you are serious about a career in EFL (in Japan or elsewhere) it is vital that you start working on your qualifications as soon as possible. At the very least a CELTA or Cert. TESOL certificate, and preferable a teacher's license and postgraduate degree. Armed with qualifications, it is possible to actually enjoy an EFL career rather than drift from low-paid job to low-paid job.

# Careers and Job-hunting (2)

A career in EFL will probably not be well-paid or prestigious, but there are several benefits:

- travel opportunities: English teaching opportunities exist in almost every country
- a varied and social work environment
- a creative and ever-changing job

## Getting Jobs in Japan

Due to the failings of the public school system, as well as the enduring appeal of English, there are numerous jobs in Japan. The chances of getting one are greatly improved by:

- a personal introduction
- the appearance of professionalism (appearance, manner, speech, punctuality, etc.)
- good Japanese skills

Even more so than in most countries, it's not who you are, it's who you know and how you appear.

## Jobs Outside Japan

Jobs in other Asian countries are plentiful, but not as well paid as in Japan (Korea and Taiwan are probably the next highest paying, with China and Thailand lower on the scale). Qualifications and experience are helpful but not necessary.

The jobs market in Europe is more competitive and more demanding. Most employers will want some kind of qualification.

Other regions' TESOL jobs markets are less developed but worth looking into.

## Getting Jobs Outside Japan

Finding (and getting) jobs in another country will depend on the quality of your sources of information. Websites like Dave's ESL Café (see the resources section), online versions of local newspapers, professional organizations of English teachers in the country in question; all of these can provide you with leads.

Often the best course of action is to visit the place you want to work with a view to finding a job and checking out the local scene. Most of the time this is not possible due to budgetary and time constraints, but if you can afford to it is worth doing as employers would much rather hire someone they have met rather than an unknown. Being able to look over a school or apartment before committing can also save applicants a lot of trouble in the long run.

# Bibliography and Resources

## Bibliography

Coltrane, Bronwyn & Morrison, Sally (2002). *TESOL Certification: What Are The Options?*  
Retrieved February 2005, from the Center for Applied Linguistics web site:  
<http://www.cal.org/resources/langlink/nov02feature.html>

Richards, Jack C. & Rodgers, Theodore S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

British Council Website  
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/teacherrecruitment-tefl-qualifications.htm>

TEFL.NET Website  
<http://www.tefl.net/teacher-training/qualifications.htm>

## TEFL Qualifications

CELTA Homepage Information on the CELTA course and where to take it  
<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teaching/celta.htm>

Online TEFL Online 40 or 60 hour TEFL courses  
<http://www.onlinetefl.com/>

Birmingham University MA in TEFL/TESL Online MA with local support from David English House in Hiroshima  
[http://www.eltnews.com/ad/deh/tefl\\_tesl.shtml](http://www.eltnews.com/ad/deh/tefl_tesl.shtml)

## TEFL Careers

Dave's ESL Café Probably the biggest English teaching jobs website. Also includes teaching and job-hunting resources  
<http://www.eslcafe.com/>

GaijinPot Jobs site with an emphasis on teaching jobs and jobs in Tokyo  
<http://www.gaijinpot.com/>

Ohayo Sensei One of the best resources for teaching jobs in Japan, from ALT to university lecturer positions  
<http://www.ohayosensei.com/>

ELT News Another Japan based jobs and information site  
<http://www.eltnews.com/jobs/>

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments:

**Ben Shearon, Chief ALT Advisor**  
Upper Secondary Division, Miyagi Board of Education  
3-8-1 Honcho, Aoba-ku, Sendai, Japan  
Tel 022 211-3625 Fax 022 211-3696