

The application of foreign language teaching techniques into Vietnamese classrooms

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Since 1992 many teacher training workshops, courses and conferences have been conducted by outside – Vietnam organizations coming from New Zealand, Australia and the UK. Vietnamese English Language (EL) teachers have opportunities to be trained new teaching techniques by famous teacher trainers. Vietnamese Educational authorities believe that with the help of famous teacher trainers the teaching and learning of English in Vietnamese schools will be improved. According to many school EL teachers, although some achievements have been made, there are many problems in applying the new teaching techniques which foreign teacher trainers use or which are written in teaching methodological books into Vietnamese language classrooms. Some teaching techniques work well and with a little change some of them can be used. However, others cannot be used for many reasons.

Attending teacher training workshops helps the Vietnamese EL teachers accumulate a repertoire of language teaching techniques for themselves. Many teaching techniques, including techniques for teaching Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing were used in training rooms or introduced through resource books for the teachers to refer to for their classroom use. Up to now, about 500 EL teaching techniques have been used to train or introduced in Vietnam through provincial training workshops or national conferences (many publishing houses are the sponsors of the conferences).

In training workshops, before presenting a teaching technique or an activity the foreign teacher trainers usually start by asking the participants to imitate students and the sample lesson begins. After the presentation, the trainers ask Vietnamese EL teachers if they can use the training techniques in Vietnamese language classrooms. The typical answer is “Yes. It is very interesting and we can use it”. We can believe this answer. Such an answer is given not because the participants want to please the trainers, but because the people who participate in the activity are the teachers working as students – the best students with a high level of English studying a low level lesson, not the real students in a classroom. In general what happens is *that the teachers say “Yes” in the training room, they then apply it in their real classroom, but it can be regularly used only by some teachers, not all of them.* (In some cases I heard the participants’ whisper that it would very difficult for their students to practice. Those participants are teaching under difficult circumstances).

Only the trainers who have the chance to observe all the participants’ real classrooms can evaluate the effectiveness of their training or can help them to make adjustments to make a trained teaching technique work. I have had the chance to observe 300 Upper Secondary School EL teachers in my province and the chance to talk to about 20 teachers in other provinces in Vietnam and I found out that Vietnamese EL teachers’ opinions about the application of foreign teaching techniques into Vietnamese language classrooms are varied. I also asked the teachers in my province to send reports on how they apply the teaching techniques or activities they have tried in the VTTN workshops or from the VTTN Newsletters, **English Now**, resource books, especially the book “Humanizing Your Coursebook” by Mario Rinvolucri

The results of my observation and from the teachers’ reports are as follows:

1. There are many teaching techniques which can be used successfully

Techniques Types	Number of techniques used successfully
Techniques for teaching Listening	9
Techniques for teaching Speaking	28
Techniques for teaching Reading	22
Techniques for teaching Writing	27
Techniques for teaching Dialogues	12
Using pictures Techniques	18
Techniques for teaching Vocabulary	30
Techniques for teaching Grammar	26

Teaching techniques which are used successfully are the techniques on which the teachers:

- do not spend much time on preparation in advance
- do not spend more than 10 minutes on implementing in classrooms
- do not need modern teaching facilities for

- do not need to remember too many teaching steps
- do not integrate two skills together
- do not bring many materials, pictures or teaching aids to the classrooms
- can use available things in classrooms, even waste paper
- can use the space in the classrooms for the students to practise
- can add some physical movements

2. There are some teaching techniques which can be used but with little change. For example, in the original technique there is a step in which the teacher dictates sentences. The change is that the teacher shows the sentences because the students are still weak at listening.

3. There are some activities which can be used but not very successfully as follows:

Name of technique	Reasons why they are not used successfully
Thank God it didn't Happen	Not many students can participate in the activity or, maybe, they don't like it.
Change a Letter Change the Meaning	The students do not know many words to use in the activity.
Dictogloss	Students can jot down the key words, but they cannot reconstruct the sentences with word-for-word accuracy

4. Teaching techniques which have not been used in classrooms are the techniques which:

- are very complicated
- contain cultural factors which are not familiar to a Vietnamese context
- require a lot of time spent in classrooms
- require comparing one student with the other

There are many reasons which cause the failure of some of the trained techniques, but sometimes it is the teachers' fault. For example, the teachers do not think of the students' level when selecting a teaching technique, or the teachers confuse the steps of using a technique.

In order to use foreign teaching techniques successfully, in my opinion, the following should be used:

- Adopt the techniques if they are simple.
- Adapt the techniques if they are complicated. Change them a little so that the students can understand and can do what you ask them to do.

The following is an example of how I change one activity. It is "Grammar I like" in the book "Humanizing Your Coursebook" (page 34) with my evaluation of this activity.

In the book	Our changes
1. Pair the students and ask them to go back over the last five to six units in the course book and pick out all the different grammar patterns they have been exposed to. Give them ten minutes.	<u>1.</u> We use this technique in a Review Lesson. We asked the students to prepare at home when we set homework for them in the previous lesson.
2. Ask one student to come to the board and take dictation from the other students. They shout out the example sentences they have picked out. 3. When the board is full of example sentences, ask each student to pick out two they like and two they dislike. 4. Ask each student to come to the board and put a cross next two the two they dislike and a tick next to the two they like.	<u>2. 3. 4.</u> We ask each student to pick out one they find difficult for many reasons [they usually make mistakes when using it, they don't understand the rule(s) or they forget the usage(s)] We ask students in turn to come to the board and write the example sentences they have picked out if they have different sentences.
5. Choose the sentences with the most crosses and ticks and ask the students who marked them to	<u>5.</u> We ask the best student to explain the usage(s) of the Grammar point(s) [but not very successfully,

explain why.	except when he/she was prepared in advance] or we explain again (Using Deductive Approach to grammar teaching). 6. We ask students to practise more by doing grammar exercises or making sentences themselves (if we have time or those exercises are available in our briefcase.)
The activity helps to train students to be active in their learning, to raise awareness of self-study. It helps students to revise many grammar points. The lesson goes by students, under the management of the teacher (but he only gives direction). Students have more time to speak in the class	We change it so that the activity can work well in our context.

With the help of the British Council, through the VTTN workshops and VTTN resource books, about 500 teaching techniques have been introduced to Vietnamese English Language teachers. Those techniques which have been used by some Vietnamese EL teachers in different schools in Vietnam are used to train others. On average, an EL teacher who comes to 2 – 3 workshops was trained to use 10 – 20 teaching techniques. A teacher who is interested in using new teaching techniques and is active or eager to try new things in the workshop can master 20 to 50 teaching techniques. Foreign teaching techniques are helpful to Vietnamese English language teachers, especially when the new series of English textbooks are used in schools. If you are trained in some new teaching techniques, try to apply them to your teaching in context.