

## **SOME RECENT CHANGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS OF ELBASAN**

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### **Abstract**

In the past decade all the Albanian Education has undergone a period of significant change, in terms of new developments. These developments are almost entirely due to the fact that methods and methodologies changed rapidly their way of being used by the teachers and textbooks, as well.

The process of changes in the Albanian Education System has touched even the English Language Curriculum. Despite other factors which seem to be main ones in reshaping the curriculum, a great emphasis is given even to the modernization of classroom environment and to the modernization of methods within themselves, as well. Teachers and institutions can influence the student's willingness to learn through the way they organize the lesson: from teacher-centered to student-centered; from passive teaching to an active one; from an authoritarian environment to a positive one. Methods play a major role in the way our students acquire the foreign language, too. That is why certain methods tend to change within themselves, such as the example of the creation of Pimsleur method.

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**Keywords:** Teaching English as a foreign language, positive environment, audio-lingual, Pimsleur method.

### **Introduction**

The turbulent transition from a centralized socialist system to a market economy in the 1990s was accompanied by an immediate opening of Albania to the outside world. This confusion also brought about a social and intellectual liberation, a change in mental outlook, and freedom from the weight of dictatorship and the totalitarian mindset. The transformation from collectivized property to private property and the birth of political and cultural pluralism constituted a novel changeable within Albanian society. Then, communication with the world was the main constituent for change, both in a positive and negative sense. A predisposition towards direct contact with Western languages and cultures, interpreted as a sign of the "Europeanization" of Albania, led to the eager desire to learn foreign languages and English predominated.

"English has been equal to the French language during the dictatorship."<sup>393</sup> The number of the pupils who learned these two languages in school has been relatively the same. The next language in great importance to be learned has been Russian, but everything changed in 1991.

"The foreign languages which predominated were: English, French, Italian and German."<sup>394</sup> Nowadays, all the schools teach English. Up to the year 2006, the majority of

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<sup>393</sup> Kulla, Ndricim. "Anglishtja dhe reformiximi i saj i vertete ne shkollat tona".  
[http://www.mash.gov.al/shqiperia\\_anglofone.htm](http://www.mash.gov.al/shqiperia_anglofone.htm)

<sup>394</sup> Nurellari, Adri. "Anglishtja ne shkolla si stimuluese e zhvillimit".  
[http://www.mash.gov.al/shqiperia\\_anglofone.htm](http://www.mash.gov.al/shqiperia_anglofone.htm)

schools in Albania implemented the teaching of English in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but “English has become officially applied to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade school curriculum in the academic year 2007-2008”<sup>395</sup> Not only the foreign languages have risen in importance in everyday life and in school curriculum, but a great importance is paid even to the way of teaching and learning them. The methodology used is taking another direction, in which the interest of the teaching methods is put to the developing of new ideas and concepts with decentralized objectives by the students.

As a result, changes have occurred from the organization of classroom up to the methods used in the textbooks and by the teachers, too.

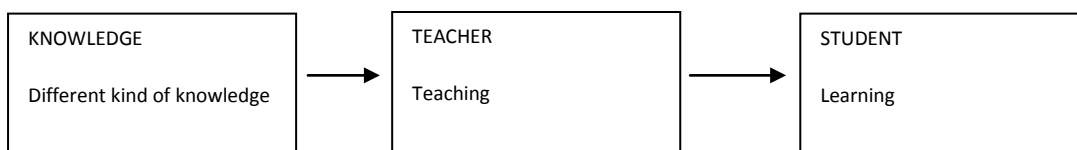
### Main Text

It should be taken in consideration that the evolution of methods has been influenced a lot by the modernization of classroom environment. It is no more a teacher centered classroom nowadays, but the focus is on the student. Also, methods have undergone changes within themselves. To get a clear idea about this, it will be described further the way how one of the best traditional methods, Audio-Lingual Method has changed into the Pimsleur Method. These two topics, the modernization of classroom environment and the modernization of the methods within themselves, are analyzed below.

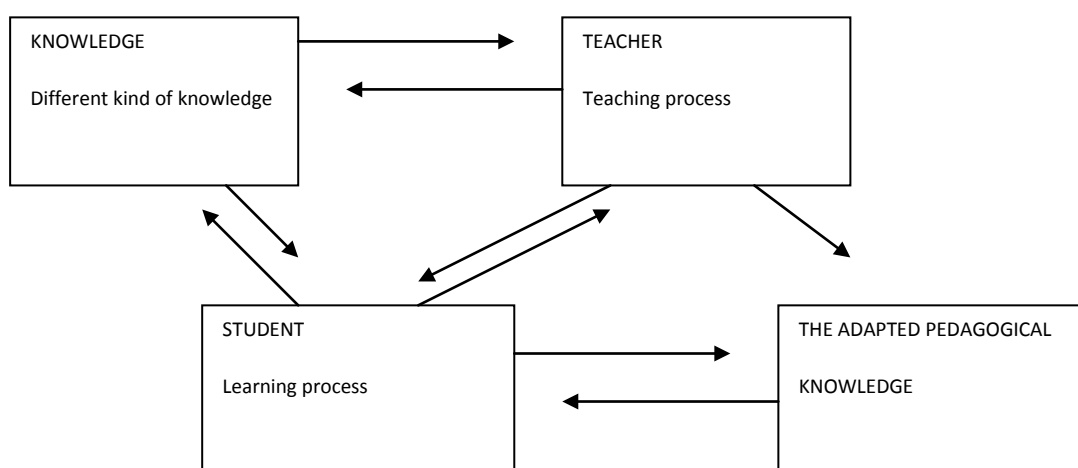
### Modernization of classroom environment: From teacher centered to student centered

*The model of teaching in the traditional classroom, teacher-centered:*

--KNOWLEDGE



*The model of teaching in the nowadays classroom, student-centered:*



396

<sup>395</sup> Pollo, Genc “Për të konkurruar në tregun global të punës duhet anglishtja”

<http://www.mash.gov.al/LAJMET%20E%20DITES/konf%20me%20gazetaret%209%20mars.htm> Tirane, 9 march 2007

<sup>396</sup> Gjokutaj, Mimoza and Ladi Shahini. “Mësimdhënia me në qendër nxënësin”. Tiranë: Geer, 2005. (page 19-20)

Arrows show the relation between the new information taken and the role of the teacher and student in the classroom. This relation is not cooperative in the first scheme, while in the second one it is cooperative and students, teachers and knowledge are seen as having their own importance. Thus, “the teacher’s and learner’s roles must always be seen in relation to each other.”<sup>397</sup>

This simple scheme makes it easier to understand how the role of the teacher and the role of the students have changed in the classroom.

“The process of teaching is considered as a process which mixes up the art and the science”<sup>398</sup>

Therefore, when it is considered as art, it relies on the teacher’s work, intuition and the professionalism which the lesson hour is organized. This is worthy to make the curricula more usable, flexible and vivid. No school curricula can be lively without art, intuition or action on the part of the teacher.

On the other hand, when the teaching process is considered as a science it relies on the way the textbooks are organized and the standards and objectives that are put in order to be met.

Both these are two important factors: the way the teacher organizes the lesson according to the methods he/she uses and the way the textbooks are created.

### **Today, there is no more a passive teaching, but an active one.**

The teacher does not explain anymore from the beginning till the end of the lesson, but just gives directions, instructions and orientates.

The student does not only listen but he/she is even included in every activity in classroom.

The teacher does not only make questions or ask students one by one, but students can make questions to each other.

The teacher is not the only who speaks anymore, but the teacher discusses, debates and exchanges ideas with the students.

The teacher is not the only one who evaluates, but students are included in self- or peer-assessment, too.

The teacher does not command anymore, but just manages, organizes the classroom.

<sup>399</sup>

As it can be seen, the time has come when the focus of the classroom is the student, not the teacher. To make this sound true, the authors of the textbooks have given their contribution while composing these texts. It is confirmed that the slogan “teaching for learning”<sup>400</sup> is accurate. So, the lesson is not constructed in the way that the teacher says what he/she has to say, what he/she has planned, but it should be taken in consideration the quality of the students’ learning.

This concept is enriched more with the didactic saying “less knowledge and more strategies”<sup>401</sup>. The authors of the textbooks in the past have had as a main principle the giving of as many knowledge and concepts as possible. This mania let very little free place for the inclusion of the practical use of these knowledge and concepts.

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<sup>397</sup> Richards, Jack and David Nunan. “Second language Teacher Education”. 1990. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997. (page 82)

<sup>398</sup> Gjokutaj, Mimoza and Ladi Shahini. “*Mësimdhënia me në qendër nxënësin*”. Tiranë: Geer, 2005 (page 19)

<sup>399</sup> See appendix 2, “Classroom Interaction”

<sup>400</sup> Gjokutaj, Mimoza and Ladi Shahini. “*Mësimdhënia me në qendër nxënësin*”. Tiranë: Geer, 2005. (page 12)

<sup>401</sup> Harmer, Jeremy. “*The Practice of English Language Teaching*”. England: Pearson Education Limited, 2007. (page 112)

Nowadays, the textbooks refer to many forms, strategies and techniques to realize the learning process in the best way possible.

For example, the students had just to read the text and retell it, without giving personal opinions and ideas about it. They were not involved in critical thinking and did not see the practical part of it. But, now students have the possibility not only to receive information but even give their own and support or contradict the new one they receive.

### **From an Authoritarian environment to Positive reinforcement**

When we refer to the traditional classroom during communist time, we may visualize in our minds the strict teacher and the students being in a high affective filter state. According to Stephen Krashen, the first who dealt with this problem “the lower the affective filter, the better will the learner acquire the foreign language”<sup>402</sup>. In this case, we come to contradiction with the posture of the strict teacher, sometimes even with a stick in her hands. “Thinking disturbances in the classroom are the primary sources of anxiety”<sup>403</sup>

Creating a positive environment is one of the focal points of the modern classroom. “Factors of motivation, interpersonal acceptance and self-esteem can enhance or limit the speed and levels of second language learned.”<sup>404</sup> The teacher plays an important role in this part. Usually students pick up the teacher’s feelings and attitudes, and if it is exhibited pleasure and enthusiasm during teaching, students will be stimulated and show their willingness to this approach by being attentive and giving good responses.

This procedure may take some additional time each day to create a sense of familiarity and community within the group. Students come from different families with great diversity in their abilities to interact and get along with others. It is the teacher’s duty to guide them to see their class as a family away from home. “Teachers are now aware of this and they give positive responses to cooperation, but even stimulate them to be conscious that each of them has a value, they are all worthy.”<sup>405</sup>

Students are helped to be supportive by the sensitive input. As a result, even the shy students or those less accepted because of discipline problems feel to be paid attention. “Success and satisfaction are key factors in sustaining motivation.”<sup>406</sup> According to the teachers I have interviewed<sup>407</sup> for this case study, positive reinforcement is very much preferred to negative consequences of misbehaviors. Some of the reinforcements the teachers use are:

- Teacher praises students time after time. They are very personal.
- Teacher uses non verbal approval, such as a smile, a pat on the back, a hug.
- Teacher gives each student the privilege of being the leader of the raw in turns.
- Teacher organizes a class party for something special done well by the class.
- Teacher gives free time for game activities.
- Teacher calls parents at home to tell about a good experience of the student.
- Teacher puts extra points or stars on a chart for certain activities.
- Teacher gives special classroom award.

All these help teachers and students collaborate harmoniously with each other and create a positive environment in the classroom. “Where the feelings of the learner are ‘positive’, we might say that she is more ‘open’ to input. Her filter is clean and language

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<sup>402</sup> [www.The\\_affective\\_filter-hypothesis.htm](http://www.The_affective_filter-hypothesis.htm)

<sup>403</sup> “Strategies for coping with language anxiety”. ELT Journal. Volume 58/3. UK: Oxford University Press. July, 2004. (page 259)

<sup>404</sup> Tafani, Vilma. “Language Teaching and Learning Methodology”. Tiranë: SHBLU, 2003. (page 72)

<sup>405</sup> See appendix 2, “Classroom Interaction”

<sup>406</sup> Willis, Jane. “A Framework for Task-Based Learning”. Birmingham: Longman, 1996. (page 14)

<sup>407</sup> See appendix 1, “Methodology Survey”

passes easily through it.”<sup>408</sup> The desire of the student to learn is enhanced and the teacher teaches with great aspiration.

## **Modernization of methods**

### **From Audio-lingual Method to Pimsleur Method**

Except from having new methods in the curriculum of teaching and learning foreign languages, there are even changes of the traditional methods. “New ideas do not just spring out of thin air: they often come out of old ideas”.<sup>409</sup> Therefore, the traditional methods are still used and they have a great impact in the learning process, but there have occurred changes in the way of using them. Let’s take an example by showing how the audio-lingual method has turned into Pimsleur method<sup>410</sup>.

According to Audio-Lingual method, language courses should be based on the principle of repetition, in order to create communicative competence in learners. Teachers drummed words into the students' minds over and over, as if the mind were a record whose grooves wore deeper with repetition. However, neurophysiologists tell us that, on the contrary, “simple and unchallenging repetition has a hypnotic, even dulling effect on the learning process.”<sup>411</sup> But, in the long run of time, the words being repeated would lose their meaning. Dr. Pimsleur discovered that “learning accelerates when there is an “input/output” system of interaction”<sup>412</sup> in which students receive information and then are asked to retrieve and use it. As a result, it was created the method of Dr. Pimsleur, which is widely used nowadays, just like a substitution of the Audio-Lingual one.

Memory is a very important aspect in learning a foreign language. Yet before Dr. Pimsleur's work, no one had explored more effective ways for building language memory. In his research, Dr. Pimsleur discovered how long students remembered new information and at what intervals they needed to be reminded of it. If reminded too soon or too late, they failed to retain the information. This discovery enabled him to create a schedule of exactly when and how the information should be reintroduced.

Suppose one learns a new word. He/she tells himself/herself to remember it, but after five minutes the word can't be recalled. If this student had been reminded of it after five seconds, he/she probably would have remembered it for maybe a minute. Then the student would have needed another reminder. “Each time the student is reminded, he/she will remember the word longer than he/she did the time before. The intervals between reminders become longer and longer, until the student eventually remembers the word without being reminded at all.”<sup>413</sup>

But, how can this be achieved? It is known that if the new vocabulary taken in a certain lesson is used again and again, all the students will remember it very well. This of course is impossible, as new vocabulary is added on the next days, so the volume of the vocabulary to be remembered prevents recalling it everyday.

The vocabulary of a given lesson is studied at a given time. Then, it may fade from use in the class until it reappears later on a test, and the student is graded on whether he remembers it. If the vocabulary is remembered, the student is praised, as it is thought that

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<sup>408</sup> Johnson, Keith. “An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching.” London: Longman, 2001. (page 94)

<sup>409</sup> Ibid (page 38)

<sup>410</sup> See appendix 3

<sup>411</sup> Adams, Frank. “Resources for Teaching and Learning English”. Cd. April, 2008.

<sup>412</sup> “The Pimsleur Method”. <http://www.pimsleur-language.com/method.htm>

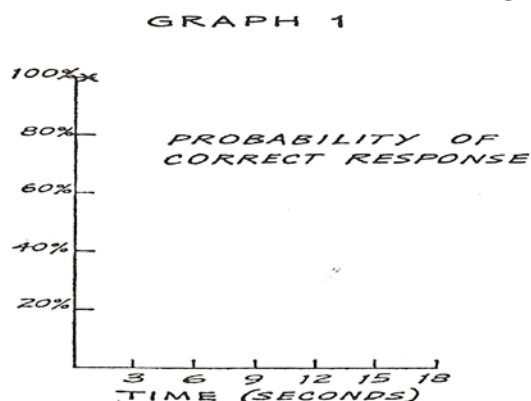
<sup>413</sup> “Pimsleur language learning system” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pimsleur\\_language\\_learning\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pimsleur_language_learning_system)

he/she has studied it at home. But, “not all students have the same ability to remember new words.”<sup>414</sup> Even the textbooks do not aid them in this task.

Yet, there is much the teacher can do to help the students to remember. Between the impossible extreme of repeating all the vocabulary every day, and the undesirable but common practice of hardly repeating it at all, there is a pattern of repetitions which is enough to raise the student’s memory level, yet, without consuming too much class time.

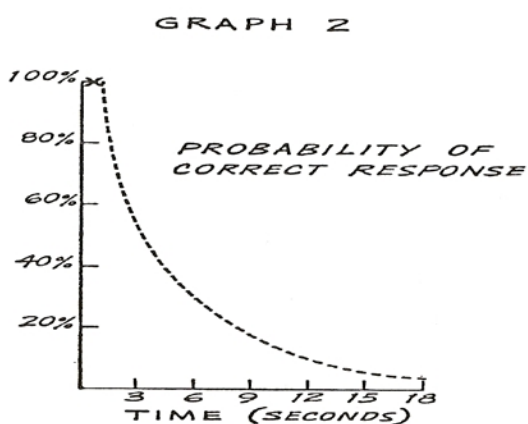
Let’s take an example with one of the primary words learned to students of English as a foreign language (usually for the elementary students of English, who come in high school without having learned a foreign language before). It is “excuse me”. If the student was asked to recall this word one second after he/she learned it, it would be done with 100% certainty. This can be shown in the graph below. X indicates the probability of responding correctly about the word learned, if the teacher asks the student. It is 100% sure of responding correctly.

Graph 1<sup>415</sup>



But as seconds move on, the probability of remembering “excuse me” will decrease rapidly, particularly as students will be busy learning other new words. This rapid decrease may be shown by a dotted line as in the graph 2.

Graph 2<sup>416</sup>



If the word is not repeated again, it will disappear from the student’s memory. But, the teacher may be aware of this danger, and ask the student again “Do you remember how to excuse yourself in English?” and, the student is going to try to give the right answer, even if the probability of having a good chance to remember it is 60%. Although the student does not

<sup>414</sup> Krashen, Stephen and Tracy Terrel. “Hypothesis to Language Acquisition and Learning.” Pergamon press, 1987. (page 19)

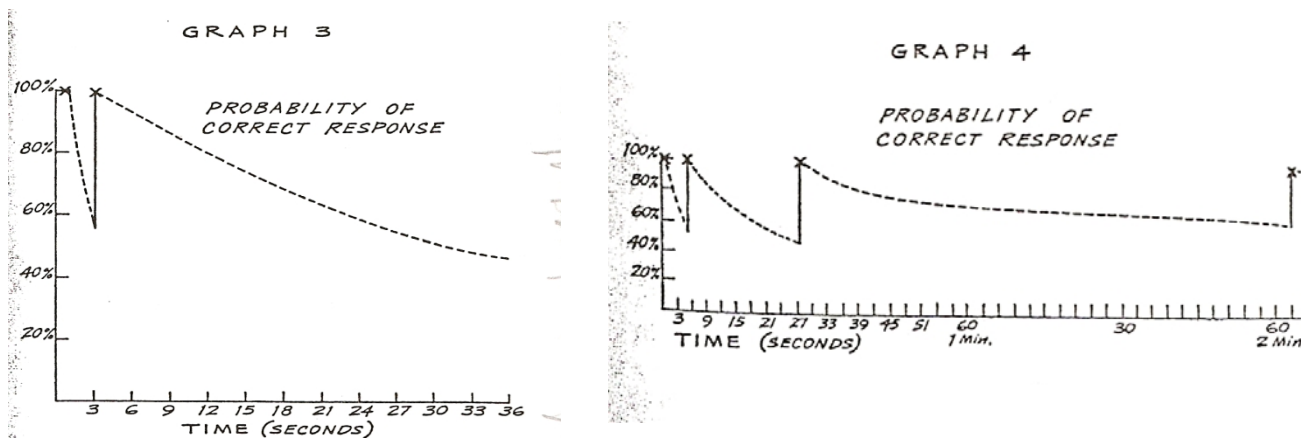
<sup>415</sup> Adams, Frank. “Resources for Teaching and Learning English”. Cd. April, 2008

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

respond correctly, he/she will be reminded of the good answer. At that moment, his/her knowledge of the word is back up to 100%.

If this process is repeated time after time, the students will be remembering for longer periods each time. "This is the keystone upon which to build foreign language materials."<sup>417</sup>

Graph 3 and 4<sup>418</sup>



That is why the teacher should recall the item very frequently right after it is first presented.

Subsequently, a student should be reminded of new information at the exact intervals where maximum retention takes place. Each time the memory begins to fade, the student will be asked to recall the word. Through this powerful method, the student progresses from short-term to long-term memory without being aware of it, while avoiding the monotonous repetition used in traditional language courses.

Just like the audio-lingual method, "the Pimsleur Method centers around the mastery in understanding and speaking the foreign language."<sup>419</sup> Students will be working on their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation all at once, while also learning phrases that have practical use in daily life. It has been said that language is primarily speech. With this concept in mind, Dr. Pimsleur created his language programs on audio because he knew that students of languages would "learn better with their ears, not their eyes."<sup>420</sup> This is achieved through the system that enables the student to learn grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in a natural and exciting way, created by Pimsleur.

He aims to teach students to understand and to speak the essential elements of the new language in a relatively short time. During each half-hour lesson, students will actually converse in pairs, using the type of language used in social life. This way of teaching and learning through presenting dialogue relieves students of most common learning problems.

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, while reshaping the curriculum it should be considered that similar to the high schools of Elbasan, the process of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language at the present time is one of the most important school objectives for our students. History has caused main changes to the process of teaching, beginning with the modernization of the classroom environment. The student centered classroom and the

<http://www.pimsleurmethod.com>

<sup>418</sup> Adams, Frank. "Resources for Teaching and Learning English". Cd. April, 2008

<sup>419</sup> "The Pimsleur Method". <http://www.pimsleur-language.com/method.htm>

<sup>420</sup> "Pimsleur Method: Authorized Pimsleur Dealer" <http://www.pimsleurmethod.com>

positive atmosphere created in it, is associated with the innovations brought by the methods of teaching. However, “teaching English is a difficult task, but a rewarding one”<sup>421</sup>

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### Appendices

#### Appendix 1: Survey “Methodology”

##### Grammar translation (traditional method)

- Translating target language to native language
- Finding information in a passage, making inferences and relating to personal experience
- Finding antonyms or synonyms for words or set of words
- Learning spelling/sound patterns for words or set of words
- Understanding grammar rules and their exceptions, then applying them to new examples
- Filling in gaps in sentences with new words or items of a particular grammar type

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<sup>421</sup> Asher, James. “Learning Another Language Through Actions: Total Physical Response.” 1977. California: Sky Oaks, 2003. (page 6, chapter 2)



Memorizing vocabulary lists, grammatical rules and grammatical paradigms  
Students create sentences to illustrate they know the meaning and use of new words  
Students write about a topic using the target language

## **2. Natural method (traditional method)**

Focus more on communicative competence rather than on grammatical perfection  
Students have a warm, affective atmosphere in class  
Students create with the language at all times  
Students acquire language rather than learn it  
Receptive skills (listening/reading), precede productive skills (speaking/writing)  
Motivation and understanding is enhanced from activity and games  
Mother tongue is not used  
Students do not learn grammatical rules, but acquire them through communication  
It is a big focus on vocabulary, which is rapidly extended  
Affective rather than cognitive factors are primary in language learning

## **3. Communicative Language Teaching (traditional method)**

Meaning is of primary importance and contextualization is a basic principle  
Students use dialogs a lot, but they do not memorize them  
Effective communication is sought  
Native language and translation can be used when needed  
Communicative competence is the desired goal  
Fluency is the primary goal  
Classroom language learning is linked to language activation outside the classroom  
There are used authentic texts into the learning situation  
Drilling may occur, but not peripherally

## **4. Task Based Learning (alternative method)**

The class activities have a perceived purpose and a clear outcome, a task  
The demand on thinking made by the activity is just above the level which learners can meet without help  
The teacher asks the students time after time if a particular answer is right  
The teacher switches to yes/no questions instead of wh-questions  
The teacher reformulates the students' answers  
Students use authentic materials for activities such as Speaking or Listening  
Students are invited to make observations about the day's lesson and what they have learned  
Students receive feedback on their level of success in completing the task

## **5. Suggestopedia (alternative method)**

Students are in a comfortable physical environment that does not “feel” like a normal classroom. They have soft cushioned seating and cheerful lighting.  
Students first absorb information from the environment than from the material to be attended  
Students are asked to close their eyes and visualize scenes and events, to encourage creativity  
Students pretend temporarily that they are someone else and role-play  
Teacher uses classical instrumental music in background during the lesson hour  
Students are encouraged to be child-like  
Vocabulary is read, then listened to with music.  
Students always review the previous days material the next day.  
Students do creative exercises to activate the learned material.  
Errors are tolerated

Materials are read dramatically (with great emotion).

#### **6. TPR (alternative method)**

The teacher directs and students act in response  
Listening and physical response skills are emphasized over oral production  
Use of commands requiring physical actions (Do this, do that.)  
Students direct the teacher and each other  
Students are not required to speak until they feel naturally ready or confident enough to do so  
Spoken language is emphasized over written language  
Humor is used during the lesson when possible  
Review is done by creative recombination of the words and grammar concepts.

#### **Teachers interviewed**

Ciftja, Ermelinda “Mahir Domi”  
Myftarai, Najada “Kostandin Kristoforidhi”  
Pepa, Olda “Vasil kamami”  
Shopi, Fatma “Vasil Kamami”  
Sula, Sofie “Mahmud & Ali Cungu”

**Note:** *teachers would put a number from 0-3 according to the use of each feature of the methods.*

0 – not at all  
1 – slightly  
2 – very much  
3 – completely

#### **Appendix 2: Survey “Classroom Interaction”**

Teacher asks a display question (question she knows the answer).  
Teacher asks a referential question (a question she does not know the answer)  
Teacher explains a grammatical point.  
Teacher explains meaning of a vocabulary item.  
Teacher explains functional point.  
Teacher explains point relating to the content (theme/topic) of the lesson.  
Teacher gives instructions, directions.  
Teacher praises.  
Teacher criticizes.  
Learner asks a question.  
Learner answers questions.  
Learner talks to another learner.  
Period of silence or confusion.

**Note:** *Students had to put a plus (+) if the above mentioned situation occurred often in their class, and a minus (-) if it occurred rarely.*

(87 students of the primary school and 128 students of the secondary school were asked to fill this questionnaire.)

### Appendix 3: An example from Pimsleur Method

#### Unit 5.2

**Sara:**



Çfarë bëre të dielën?  
*What did you do on Sunday?*

**Xheni:**



Vizitova kushëririn tim Artanin dhe luajtëm tenis së bashku.  
*I visited my cousin Artan and we played tennis together.*

**Sara:**



Po në orën 10 të mëngjesit ku ishe?  
*And where were you at 10 o'clock in the morning?*



U përpoqa të të telefonoja, por nuk u përgjigje  
*I tried to call you, but you didn't answer.*

**Xheni:**



Në atë orë po ndihmoja babain në kopsht, po mbillnim ca qepë.  
*At that time I was helping my host father in the garden, we were planting some bulbs.*



Po ju si e kaluat paraditen?  
*And how did you spend the morning?*

**Sara:**



Unë ndoqa emisionin: “Jeta në planetin tonë”.  
*I attended the programe "Life in our planet."*

**Xheni:**



Në cilin kanal?  
*On which channel?*



Sepse edhe unë isha e interesuar për ta parë këtë emision.  
*Because I was interested to watch this program, too.*

**Sara:**



Tek Top Channel.  
*At Top Channel.*

**Xheni:**



Sa keq që nuk e pashë!  
*What a pity that I didn't watch it!*