

**Dogme ELT: Oral Expression Teachers' Perceptions**Mohamed Daguiani<sup>1\*</sup>, Saliha Chelli<sup>2</sup>

daguianimohamed@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup>Mostefa Ben Boulaid Batna 2 University-Algeria<sup>2</sup>Mohamed Kheider University- Biskra-Algeria

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**Abstract.** The present paper reports teachers' opinions about the Dogme ELT Teaching Approach. It aims to know whether such as an approach can be used in developing students' abilities to express themselves orally. This exploratory study was conducted by means of a semi-structured questionnaire administered to twenty (n=20) Oral Expression teachers at the Department of Foreign Languages, Section of English at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. The findings revealed that teachers appreciated teaching through conversation and focusing on emergent language, however, the majority refused minimizing the use of materials such as textbooks and technology, which they consider necessary in language teaching.

**Keywords** .Dogme ELT; Oral Expression teachers 'perceptions; Conversation driven; Materials light; Emergent language

الدراسة الحالية تقدم تقريرا عن آراء الأساتذة حول منهج الدوغم لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. الدراسة تهدف إلى معرفة ما مدى إمكانية استعماله في تطوير قدرات الطلبة في التعبير الشفهي. هذه الدراسة الاستكشافية أجريت باستعمال استبيان شبه موجه وزع على عشرين أستاذ التعبير الشفهي بكلية اللغات الأجنبية، قسم الانجليزية بجامعة محمد خيضر ببسكرة. النتائج أظهرت أن الأساتذة ثمنوا التدريس عن طريق المحادثة و التركيز على اللغة الآتية، بينما الأكثرية رفضت تقليل استعمال الوسائل المادية مثل كتب النصوص و التكنولوجيا التي يعتبرونها ضرورية في تعليم اللغة.

**الكلمات الدالة.** الدوغم; آراء أساتذة التعبير الشفوي; المحادثة الموجهة; تخفيف استعمال الوسائل; اللغة الآتية.

## 1. Introduction

At the turn of the third millennium, a new language teaching philosophy has been put forth by Scott Thornbury and Luke Meddings. It is a learner centered way of teaching English as a foreign language with minimum reliance on materials such as course books and technology, and maximum exploitation of language as it emerges in the classroom. It is the Dogme ELT approach which is based on three fundamental tenets: it is teaching that is conversation driven, materials-light and that focuses on emergent language (Meddings&Thornbury, 2009). It revolves also around the idea that a successful lesson can be driven by the materials brought by the students themselves in the classroom. In their book '*Teaching Unplugged*' published in 2009, Thornbury and Meddings suggest 100 lesson ideas for teachers to develop and apply. The Dogme approach became associated with English Language Teaching when Scott Thornbury adapted the philosophy of the 'Dogme 95 film movement' to English Language Teaching.

Despite its dissemination all over the world, the Dogme ELT approach is still unfamiliar in the Algerian Universities. This paper is an attempt at answering a set of questions related to this teaching approach: what is Dogme ELT? What are its principles? How are they perceived by Oral Expression teachers? Hence, we hypothesize that if Oral Expression teachers learn about the so called approach and apply its ideas in the classroom, they would appreciate it and notice its positive effects on their teaching and their students' achievements as well.

### 1.1. An Overview on the Dogme ELT Approach

The Dogme ELT is a communicative approach to language teaching that goes beyond the traditional way of teaching languages. It was launched by Scott Thornbury in his article, 'A Dogma for EFL' (2000) when he criticized English language teachings over usage of supportive published materials and information technology in classroom which complicate the language learning process, and called on fellow teachers to join him in an attempt to restore teaching to its natural root. Dogme is not a method, it is rather a 'movement' and 'a state of mind', and it is "more than simply a new set of techniques and procedures, it is more an attitude shift, a state of mind and a different way of being a teacher" (Meddings&Thornbury, 2009, p. 21). It claims that classrooms had been heavily invaded by materials in the form of "copious photocopies, work books, tapes, tapes-scripts, flashcards, transparencies and technological gimmicks" (Coutler,nd, para. 3). It advocates teaching that does not rely on published text books but relies on conversational communication in the classroom which helps language to emerge from the learners' interest. It also focuses on learners' actual needs and considers them as the primary source of teaching. In other words, learners can internalize and recall language with more success if it is spontaneous and relevant to them. The following elements are the ten key principles that characterize the Dogme ELT (Meddings&Thornbury, 2009, p. 7-8).

1. **Interactivity:** the direct route to learning is found in the interactivity between teachers and students, and between the students themselves.
2. **Engagement:** Students are most engaged by content they create themselves.
3. **Dialogic process:** learning is social and dialogic process, where knowledge is co-constructed rather than imported from teacher/course book to student.

4. **Scaffolded conversation:** learning takes place through conversation that is assisted by the teacher.
5. **Emergence:** language emerges from the leaning process unlike the acquisition of language
6. **Affordance:** the teacher's role is to optimize language learning affordances; he directs attention to emergent language.
7. **Voice:** students' beliefs, knowledge, experience, concerns and desires are given recognition and importance.
8. **Empowerment:** freeing the classroom of imported materials empowers students and teachers.
9. **Relevance:** materials, when used should have relevance for the students.
10. **Critical use:** published materials should be used by students in a critical way that recognizes their cultural and ideological biases.

From the above ten key principles, Dogme ELT takes its three axiomatic tenets which are conversation driven, materials light, and emergent language (Skechley, 2012, 2010).

### 1.1.1 Conversation Driven

Conversation is viewed as the most fundamental and widespread means of human communication, which is given much priority by modern language teaching methods that is why "Most language learners feel cheated if their course includes little or no conversation practice" (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 8). Conversation is "the kind of speech that happens informally, symmetrically and for the purposes of establishing and maintaining social ties" (Thornbury & Slade, 2006, p. 25). The Dogme ELT highlights the centrality of communication and dialogue within every lesson and considers learners able to practice language if they are simply asked to talk about themselves; hence, it opposes the transfer of knowledge prescribed by the old models of education. Allright (1984) notes that teaching communication exceeds the level of teaching grammar and vocabulary, and if the latter is the aim, it should be the major element in the process, and suggests that the best way to learn how to communicate is by communicating.

Conversation is not "evidence of grammatical acquisition, but a pre-requisite for it" (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 9). The Dogme language is not transactional, but also interactional, it provides learners with opportunities to converse, to negotiate concepts, to exchange experiences, and to tell jokes (Corbett, 2003). Acka (2012) notes that the teacher has to take advantage of any incidental conversation, and scaffolds information for the learners to reformulate, repair, or refine the emergent language. Kumaravadivelo (2003, p. 2), for instance, states that interaction should focus on "ideas and emotions participants bring with them based on their lived experiences, past and present". Ushioda (2011, p. 205) has the same point of view and asserts that:

"The Dogme approach places a premium on conversational interaction among teacher and learners where communication is authentic and learner-driven rather than pedagogically contrived and controlled by the teacher. Choice of learning content and materials is thus shaped by students' own preferred interests and agendas, and language development emerges through the scaffolded dialogic interactions among learners and the teacher"

In the Dogme ELT class, conversation is the core of teaching, and the content of the lesson is not preplanned around a course book. On the contrary, it emerges from real conversation and it is often shaped by students. That conversation should focus on the context students and teachers are inscribed using the most important resources in classroom. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) point that far from traditional language teaching that stresses primarily the sentence level such as parts of speech and verb models, the Dogme approach offers a large space for students discourse to fulfill their specific communicative needs, to engage in conversation, to co-operate, to become members of discourse community, and therefore to be acquainted and familiar with the semantic and pragmatic level of connected and coherent text. One main useful way to empower students' communicative interaction is scaffolding which "assists learners in moving toward new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding" (Gibbons, 2015 p. 16), and therefore establishes a social relationship among learners. Another purpose of holding conversation besides exchanging information is establishing and maintaining social relations. So, a dogmetist teacher often devotes the first minutes of the lecture to chat with the students to relax them and to create a group dynamic that is conducive to learning though it is not a part of the lesson.

### 1.1.2 Materials Light

The Dogme ELT advocates materials light as a paradigm of teaching that frees the teacher from dependence on course books and technology, and "if not actually to burn course books, at least to banish them from the classroom" (Medding&Thornbury, 2009, p. 11). Though this opinion seems to be negative, it is agreed upon it by many linguists such as Bell and Gower (1998) who note that creativity of the teacher as well as the learner's is destroyed by materials. Butzkamm (2003) considers the problem of language learning as a result of abundant irrelevant materials which are used in language teaching.

The originators of Dogme, Thornbury and Meddings argue that they are not totally against the use of course books, but they believe that materials imposed by the teacher are useless, and they welcome instead the 'Dogme-friendly' materials imported by the students themselves such as pictures, photos, magazines and newspaper articles, authentic texts written or recorded by the learners, or music selected and available on the learners' mobile phones which ensure that they could establish an atmosphere of mutual discourse. So, student-produced material is preferable to published materials and text books which focus on grammar more than communicative tasks and which often show cultural biases. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) do not see Dogme as being opposed to technology, but refuse technology which does not enable teaching that is both learner-centered and is based upon authentic communication.

They describe the Dogme classroom as "a room with a few chairs, a blackboard, a teacher and some learners, where learning is jointly constructed out of the talk that evolves in that simplest and most prototypical of situations" (Meddings&Thornbury, 2009, p. 12). They claim that though materials could provide stimulus for real communication, most of them have an agenda of delivering and consuming pre-selected, pre-graded, and pre-digested grammatical structures and vocabulary such as verb tenses which are not relevant to learners. English has globally spread and ELT has become a global industry with predetermined economic perspectives, so course books are materialistic and non neutral and often diffuse cultural and educational values and styles of thinking owned by local communities that do not

overlap with the learners' local socio-cultural needs (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Therefore, it is advised to discuss course books topics from learners' linguistic and cultural perspectives so that they can connect their own world with the world of English, to use locally produced materials if they are available, or to invent and compose their own texts.

Another shortcoming of text books is that they are affected by colonialist discourse which adopts positivism; this latter is based on the idea that knowledge exists beyond the learner as facts and should be transferred only by a text book or a teacher (Meddings&Thornbury, 2009). The idea is rejected by many linguists such as the Brazilian reformer Paulo Freire (cited in Meddings&Thornbury, 2009), who advocated a dialogic pedagogy that focuses on the local needs and concerns of the students. Ashton-Warner (1963, p. 118), assumes that "the more material there is for a child, the less pull there is on his own resources". Hence, the rejection of external input leads to transparency between the teacher and the learner, and facilitate the learning process.

### 1.1.3 Emergent Language

Another interesting principle of the Dogme ELT is that the language content of the lesson should emerge from the communicative needs and the interaction between the participants in the classroom (Meddings & Thornbury, 2001), and learners are not intrinsically motivated and engaged in their learning process unless their emergent language is used as the source of the lesson. But how does language emerge? Meddings and Thornbury (2009) state that language emerges at two levels: out of interpersonal activities when students produce language output through collaborative conversation directed and activated by the teacher and out of intrapersonal language when students produce language they were not taught before). They add that the process of language emergence includes the ability to pick up patterns from a massive input, to build and to chunk sets of already formed associations into large units such as sound and word sequence. Hence "the language focus should emerge from and not determine the communicative needs of the learners" (Thornbury, 2005, p. 4).

Dogme ELT shares many of its belief with communicative language teaching which focuses on the syllabus of tasks rather than discrete linguistic items. They both focus on meaning and communication through which language form is learnt and learners can improve their accuracy, and their errors are tolerated and considered as a part of the learning process. Allright (1979, p. 170) claims "if the language teacher's management activities are directed exclusively at involving the learners in solving communication problems in the target language, then language learning will take care of itself". The proponents of the Dogme argue that language learning is an emergent process and there is no need to cover items on syllabus, but what is needed is to motivate students through providing them with opportunities to practice the language rather than to acquire it. Hence "Speech cannot be taught directly but 'emerges' on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985, p. 80)

The process of language learning in Dogme ELT is similar to the one advocated by the whole language learning which sees that the materials selected and needed by the class are more fruitful than the curriculum itself. Both the Task Based Approach and the Dogme ELT argue that through fluency, accuracy is acquired and developed, and classroom activities lead to collaborative communication amongst learners, and language produced is not necessarily

taught. So, communication remains the core of Dogme ELT as Herbert Puchta and Michael Schratz (1993) report that the quality of communication between the participants in the classroom shapes the process of teaching and learning. Hence, learner-centered curriculum is less based on the knowledge of grammar but on the process of communication and learning, and instead of designing syllabus including pre-selected items, the Dogme ELT calls for a post-lesson plan and a syllabus based on the students' needs. The following are ten crucial strategies through which the teacher can encourage learners to engage with emergent language summarized from (Meddings&Thornbury, 2009, p. 20)

- 1- **Reward** emergent language. Show learners that you value their output
- 2- **Retrieve** it. Making notes or writing a learner's utterance on the board.
- 3- **Repeat** it. Repeat it yourself; have other learners repeat it-even drill it.
- 4- **Recast** it. Reformulate learners' language production into a more target-like form.
- 5- **Report** it. Ask learners to report what they said and heard in group work.
- 6- **Recycle** it. Encourage learners to use the emergent items in new context.
- 7- **Record** it. Make sure learners have a written record of the new item.
- 8- **Research** it. Help learners to find regularities and patterns in the emergent language.
- 9- **Reference** it. Link emergent language to the 'external' syllabus objectives.
- 10-**Review**. At the end of the lesson, ask learners to write five words they have learned

## 2. Method and Tools

To identify teachers' perceptions about the Dogme ELT approach, we opted for a descriptive method. The study is based on a semi-structure questionnaire which includes ten questions (closed ended and open ended questions) administered to 20 oral expression teachers, who were selected randomly at the Department of English (section of English) at Mohamed Kheidher University (Biskra) in the academic year 2017/2018. The questionnaire is divided into two sections: the first section seeks for participants' personal and background information such as, qualifications, experience, and whether teaching oral expression was personal or imposed by the administration. The section deals also with teachers' attitudes about the approaches and methods employed in teaching speaking, the difficulties often encountered in the classroom and their suggestions. The last section which is the most important one investigates teachers' opinions about the implementation of the principles of the Dogme ELT approach.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Results of the Questionnaire

#### 3.1.1. Analysis of the first section: Background information

This first section includes four questions. Concerning the participants' qualifications, only 30 hold the Doctorate degree, 60 hold the Magister degree, and 10 the Master degree. The results show that 50 of the participants use the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT), 20 use different approaches and methods such as Suggestopedia, Task Based Learning (TBL), Whole Language Teaching (WLT), and the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). However 30 do not use any particular approach at all, some of them use eclecticism. 55 of the participants assume that the main difficulty of teaching speaking

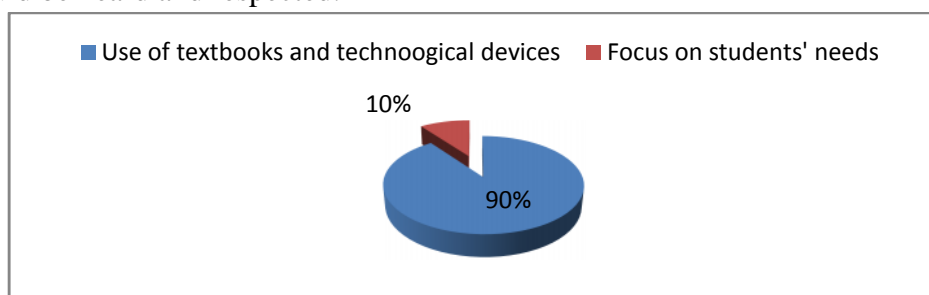


pertains to the students' psychological problems such as anxiety, shyness, lack of self-confidence, fear of doing mistakes, lack of motivation, and laziness. 35 refer these difficulties to pedagogical problems such as the lack of teaching materials (labs, data show, speakers ...). 10 of believe that the main difficulty is the large classes

To improve teaching speaking, 50 suggest the use of media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as television, radio, newspapers and internet which can stimulate students to learn. 20 suggest the implementation of outdoor activities that would motivate them to draw a link between the classroom and the world, providing labs in which the listening and speaking skills would be easily and enjoyably practiced. 30 of the teachers appeal for reducing the class size so they can take into consideration the students learning styles as well as their interests.

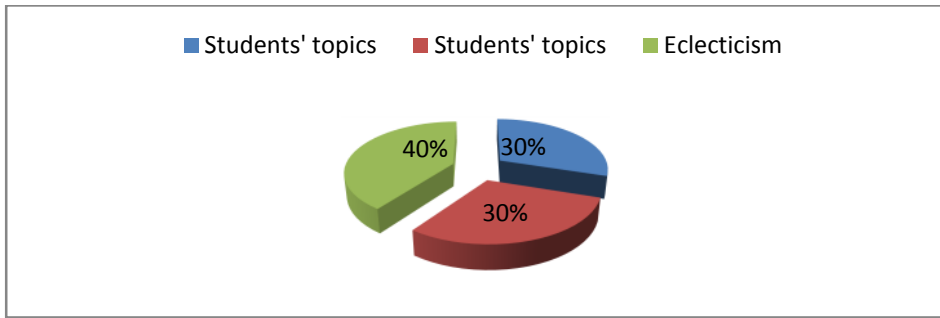
### 3.1.2. Analysis of the Second Section: Teachers' Perceptions about the Implementation of the Dogme ELT Approach

The questions in this section represent the core of this study as they implicitly include the most important principles of the Dogme approach among those mentioned previously: the use of textbooks and technology, the focus on emergent language, and the use of information gap activity to stimulate classroom conversation. Figure 1 shows that 90 of the participants believe that the use of textbooks and technological devices is necessary in teaching speaking. They think that books are a road map for both teachers and students to learn, and technology has become a necessity due to the fact that today's generation is purely digital. They note that while learned, any knowledge needs to be anchored so that the learner retains it and this cannot be reached without the use of materials such as textbooks and technology. 10 give the priority to the students' needs and assume that if students stand against any material, their voice should be heard and respected.



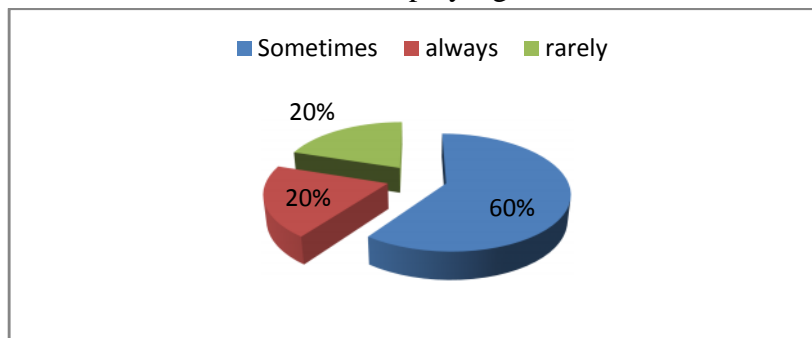
**Figure 1: Teachers' opinions about use of textbooks and technological devices**

Concerning the tools they use to make students interact, 30 say that they use only students' topics; they see that nothing is interesting and motivating for students more than their own topics which are chosen freely and without teachers' obligation. 30 say they use both their topics as well as their students' topics. They believe that making a balance will be fruitful for students who speak best about their own interests and benefit from new knowledge of their teachers, too. 40 insist that teachers should be eclectic; they are free to pick out tools, techniques from the different trends in language teaching for the sake of testing and selecting the most effective ones.



**Figure 02: Teachers' tools for stimulating students' interaction**

60 of the participants state that they sometimes use information gap activities because they need to try other different oral activities which they consider useful, too. 20 say that they always use them since they serve learner-learner interaction and enables students to exchange ideas and experiences and therefore to speak spontaneously with each other. 20 use it rarely; they prefer other activities such as role plays, games, interviews and monologues.



**Figure 03: Frequency of using information gap activity**

One main important way the teacher uses to stimulate students to converse with him and with each other is to chat with them at the beginning of the lesson and to call them by their names. So, what kind of questions should be asked? Participants have their own strategies which differ from one to another. The following are the most common strategies proposed by the teachers:

- Can you tell me what happened yesterday (in such country)?
- How did you pass your weekend?
- What is the important news, today?
- What position do you want to hold in the future, and why?
- Did you have any test in the other modules?
- Have you ever experienced a difficult or an embarrassing situation before?
- If you become rich, what do you want to do with money?

Teachers provided different suggestions to improve classroom conversation such as encouraging students' initiatives, appreciating their contributions, boosting their self-confidence, stopping correcting their errors explicitly and involving them in group discussions. They advocated implementing outdoor activities, improving the receptive skills (listening and reading) to gather the background needed for speaking, using audio-visual aids through watching movies, listening to music, and presenting data show and power point works. For many of them, the more students use their own resources, topics and suggestions,



the more they speak comfortably, and therefore acquire communicative competence which is the main objective of learning foreign languages.

### 3.2. Discussion of Teachers' Responses

Since the aim of the administered questionnaire was to know Oral Expression teachers' perceptions about the core principles of the Dogme ELT in teaching speaking. The questions implicitly included the approach's principles: conversation driven, materials light, and emergent language. Building classroom conversation remains the main objective of teachers who use different techniques to stimulate students to speak. Teachers prefer to focus on students' topics to build classroom conversation because they believe that motivation rises when students' interest and needs are satisfied. They also note that besides the students' topics, they also use their topics; their choice is based on the fact that they are more experienced and know what is useful for their students. Teachers are also considered as an important source of input for students, they often present interesting issues they already introduced to previous classes and which proved their effectiveness.

In this era of modernity and innovation, teachers believe that technology has become a must since it facilitates the task for them and their students as well. Integrating some forms of technology in the classroom is a part of blended learning which allows instant access to knowledge to students in their study place. Students often use technological tools in their daily life; hence, they may entertain them and therefore comfortably participate in the classroom. Teachers also believe that textbooks are excellent teaching aids and helpful particularly for less experienced or novice teachers. They also have a clearly identified set of achievement objectives. Teachers think it is difficult and time consuming to develop a material because textbooks provide readymade activities and effective language models and input; they help teachers to clarify and simplify concepts and provide needed assistance.

To create students' emergent language, teachers use information gap activities which promote students-centered classroom and peer to collaboration, increase intrinsic motivation, and inspire critical thinking skills. They also use other communicative activities such as role plays, storytelling, interviews, and monologues. However, it seems these activities are preplanned and loose spontaneity; therefore, students' emergent language looks artificial and cannot develop conversational skill. What is advocated is to focus on activities in which students intentionally and comfortably involve themselves in the learning process, and this is what makes the differences between Dogme ELT and the other communicative approaches. The participants agreed partially about the tenets of the Dogme ELT approach. They stood for teaching through conversation and focusing on emergent language, but they considered that materials such as textbooks and technological tools are necessary in language teaching. Hence the hypothesis previously mentioned is not entirely supported by the participants since one of the three Dogme ELT tenets (materials light) was refused.

### 4. Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that despite the fact that the Dogme ELT, which is an alternative approach for language teaching and another way of being a teacher is unfamiliar in

Algerian Universities, teachers use some of its principles in their teaching. They advocate communicative, eclectic, and learner-centered approaches from which the Dogme ELT inspires its tenets. Building and managing classroom conversation remains the main objective of Oral Expression teachers. It is why, to create spontaneous target language, they encourage their students to bring their own texts and technological devices into the classroom. However, they do not agree upon minimizing the use of materials such as published textbooks and technology in the classroom. Hence, in any further research, we need to proceed through an experimental research using a large sample and applying Dogme activities in oral classes in order to test the effectiveness of the principles of the Dogme ELT Approach in teaching English.

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