**The Talk Show Method in the ESL Classroom**

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**Abstract**
This paper introduces a new English Language Teaching (ELT) method, called the Talk Show Method (TSM). In this method, the teacher and students participate in an imaginary television program. The teacher hosts the program in which one of the students is a guest speaker who is an expert in a specific area. The other students can choose to be members of the studio audience or home viewers who are allowed to call in or write to the host in order to ask questions, criticize, or share ideas. As a learner-centered method, TSM provides an opportunity for the learner to participate in an engaging, non-threatening, and novel experience of learning. This paper discusses TSM principles and procedures as well as materials and concludes with a review of its advantages and challenges.

**Introduction**
Learning and teaching a second language can be a *Tale of Two Cities*; for some it is the "spring of hope" or for others "the winter of despair". What makes a difference is the way in which the learner or the teacher approaches the experience. Some teachers make an effort to cover the syllabus with books closed. Using interesting teaching plans and well-planned advance organizers, they teach in such a way that their learners do not notice when they are learning a new lesson. Their classes are so engaging that their learners do not notice the passing of time. There is also another group of teachers who are so dependent on the book that they forget the learners. Most (if not all) English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners have experienced both situations.

I am not very proud of my own language learning experience. When I started learning English, I was 12 years old. The experience was exciting. Learning English would open a new window to a different world. I could not wait to see that different world. However, what my English teachers did confused me. They started writing strange rules on the window that was supposed to open to that different world. I wish at least these rules had been taught in English. As the years passed by, the rules grew in number and complexity. All I could see were several window panes tinted with rules. After four years, I was blessed to get a teacher who managed to confuse me so much that at the end of the school year I failed the course. This was a blessing in disguise. The pain urged me to find a solution. I registered in a language center. After four years of learning English, I did not even require a placement test; they sent me to the very basic level! I remember the day my favorite teacher walked into our classroom. I wondered what he was going to do with my tinted English language windows. After

four years of suspense how excited I was to see the other side. He simply opened the windows. He used English to introduce himself and showed us we could learn English as we used it.

Evidently the same student can experience completely different outcomes when a more effective method is followed by the teacher. Ever since the Second World War, a myriad of English Language Teaching (ELT) methods have been introduced, practiced, researched, and criticized. Ever since methods like the Audio-Lingual Method or Communicative Language Teaching Approach were introduced, immense changes have occurred in the area of language education. Theories like socio-cognitive learning theory have gained momentum in addition to the novel possibilities offered by educational technology. These changes necessitate the emergence of new ELT methods.

This paper presents a language teaching method that jelled after the author's years of trying to teach English to his students in a different and engaging way. The method is called the Talk Show Method (hereinafter referred to as TSM). In a language class where TSM is used, the class turns into a TV talk show. The teacher usually hosts the show while the students participate as the guest, studio audience or home viewers. In addition to a thorough description of the procedure and materials commonly used in TSM, the paper also discusses the theoretical foundations in support of this method.

**Talk Show Method (TSM)**
The Talk Show Method offers a novel way to teach in regular English courses. It follows a procedure in most parts similar to that of a television talk show. The TV talk show has been defined as a type of TV broadcast in which one or more people discuss issues raised by a host (Vallet, Essid, Carrive & Richard, 2011). In a class following TSM, the teacher may become the "host", one or more students may become "guests" who may be popular experts in an area related to the topic at hand, and "viewers", who may wish to be studio-audience or home-viewers. The method is different from a role-play in that it involves the whole class and not a group of students. Also in contrast to a role-play, TSM integrates all language skills. Finally, although TSM is fairly structured, it leaves room for the teacher or the learners to add their own spontaneous moves and/or words. Its main objective is to develop learners' communicative competence in an animated and engaging learning-teaching environment. This section presents the principles, design and a possible procedure for implementing TSM.

*Principles*
English language learning-teaching methods are typically based on a combination of learning and language theories. The Audio-Lingual Method, for example, follows the principles of behavioristic psychology (learning theory) and structuralism (theory of language). What follows is a discussion on the theoretical foundations of TSM along with the implications of these foundations for classroom teaching.

TSM theory of learning

In the last century, two of the most dominant learning theories included cognitive psychology and social learning theory. Cognitivists argue that learning is the result of a series of mental processes of transforming, reducing, elaborating, storing, recovering, and using sensory input (Neisser, 1967). Cognitive psychology regards learning as a discovery process that results from an interaction between known and unknown knowledge. Social learning theory, on the other hand, looks at learning from a constructivist's point of view. For the proponents of social learning theory, learning is a social behavior. They believe that language learning takes place as the learners actively participate in the real context of social interactions and observe others and replicate their behaviors (Bandura, 1976; Miller & Dollard, 1941).

In a class following TSM, learning is more than just internal mental discovery processes or just a social behavior. Rather, it is a combination of the two. That is to say, learning a language, in addition to the cognitive processes, requires the learner's interaction with the models provided by the sources and/or users of the target language. Thus, TSM regards learning as a socio-cognitive process, in which cognitive psychology is combined with social learning theory.

TSM theory of language

In addition to the learning-teaching theories they follow, language teaching methods can also be distinguished by the way in which they view the language. TSM approaches the language from a pragmatic viewpoint, which regards language ability as being more than linguistic competence (Table 1):

**Table 1: Linguistic competence vs. pragmatic competence**

| Linguistic competence | Pragmatic competence |
|---|---|
| Language usage | Language use |
| Linguistic level (e.g., vocabulary & grammar) | Discourse level (Linguistic & extra-linguistic knowledge) |
| Text | Context |
| Referential meaning | Inferential meaning |
| Sentence | Utterance |
| Accuracy | Appropriacy |

Language is more than a finite set of rules helping its users generate an infinite number of accurate sentences. A competent language user is equipped with pragmatic competence in addition to linguistic competence (Green, 1989; Leech, 1983). A teacher following TSM knows that in order to communicate efficiently in the language, learners not only need to master linguistic knowledge but also should be aware of the extra-linguistic elements that can affect their intended meaning. That is, they should learn to focus on the text in its present context because what is said can have an inferential or intended meaning in addition to its referential meaning. Besides the accuracy of their sentences, competent language learners can generate utterances suitable for the context.

TSM and learners' affect

Another important point that should be of priority in a class following the TSM method is the focus on the learners' affect. According to Krashen's (1987) affective filter hypothesis, affective variables like motivation and self-confidence can facilitate learning while factors like anxiety can have a negative effect on learning. There is evidence that learners' motivation can outweigh their language aptitude in improving their language acquisition (Gardner, 1972; Wigfield & Wentzel, 2007). Research findings have indicated that learners' motivation is very important in predicting their success (Bernard, 2010). Language teachers, therefore, should not be oblivious of the positive effect of motivation on their learners' language development.

Reportedly, the factor that can most influence an increase in language learners' motivation is their success in achieving what they had planned to achieve: "Successful learners were eleven times more likely to want to continue, which would lead to even greater mastery" (CASLS, 2011, p.1). Therefore, language teachers should boost their learners' expectation to succeed, by creating a positive environment in the language classroom that can improve their self-efficacy. Another factor that can increase learners' motivation to learn is the use of fun activities that "promote language use about students' own lives and interests" (Bernard, 2010, p.2). Learner motivation can also be boosted by having some simple quizzes (as in real talk shows) that can make the show less monotonous.

The teacher should also seek to minimize learners' foreign language anxiety, which is known to have a deleterious effect on their final success (Horwirz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Learning a foreign language can be very anxiety provoking for some individuals. It can lead some learners to avoid active participation in classroom discussions. TSM creates an opportunity for the teacher to minimize learners' foreign language anxiety. The learner who plays the role of the talk show guest is often encouraged to emulate the role of a knowledgeable and popular expert in the area of the topic under discussion. This new identity works like a mask under which the learner can feel secure. What often makes us worried is when we have something and are afraid of losing it. This fear fades away once we do not have anything important to lose. Allowing learners to choose new identities takes away the fear of messing up to it. In TSM classes, some students take their new identity so seriously that they produce some fictitious books with fake covers with their pictures and false names on them. Using a foreign language under the mask of a new identity seems to be able to minimize learners' foreign language anxiety levels.

Even more, the guest has to do some research on the topic beforehand, but s/he knows that the information s/he will be sharing with the host (the teacher) or the studio audience (peers) does not have to be absolutely accurate. The show does not have to be serious at all if the class does not want it to be so. Guests can stretch the truth at times when they are not sure about the information or advice they are providing. This also adds humor to the show. In the meantime, a chance is provided for learners who may suffer from higher degrees of foreign language anxiety to *gradually* approach the guest's role. In a TSM class, students are free to communicate with the host (teacher), guest (peer), studio audience or home viewers (other peers)

by pretending to communicate their questions or arguments through "letters", "text messages" or "emails". Therefore, even the learners that are highly anxious will be able to communicate. Less anxious learners may choose to "call in" or be a member of the "studio audience". This makes TSM a unique method that helps learners manage foreign language anxiety practically.

Integrating language skills
Another feature of TSM is the way in which all language skills are naturally integrated. Language skills can be learned best when integrated. Reportedly, integrating language skills can result in learners' enhanced achievement and retention levels (Durukan, 2011). Admittedly, the teacher may have to focus on one single language skill at a time, but it is not realistic to separate language skills from one another. Language skills are interrelated. When one reads, one is exposed to the myriad of ways in which one can use the same structures to word one's own concepts (Flower et al., 1990; Leki, 1993). Therefore, in a classroom following TSM, the focus is on all language skills rather than merely on speaking or listening.

Promoting learners' communicative competence
Teachers who work on improving learners' communicative competence make frequent use of information gap activities that create opportunities for negotiation of meaning among the students (Varonis & Gass, 1985). One of the main features of the design of a TSM classroom is the meaningful and authentic interaction between the teacher and the learners as well as among the learners themselves. The learner, who is the guest, is an expert who knows what the teacher and peers do not. TSM allows the teacher to create information gaps that can engage the learners in purposeful negotiation of meaning.

Creating a flow
Based on Krashen's (2009) forgetting hypothesis, learners learn best when they "forget" that they are learning the language while, in fact, they are "effortlessly" acquiring it. This happens when the teacher is able to create a "flow" in the classroom, which occurs when learners are so lost in the topic under discussion that they hardly notice the passing of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Egbert, 2004). TSM works at its best when the teacher can engage the learners in the show to the extent that they forget they are actually using or learning a foreign language.

Raising learner consciousness
TSM seeks to keep the students engaged; however, the teacher should provide input whenever the learners need it. The best time to raise learners' consciousness about the language structures and rules is after they have been exposed to a sufficient amount of comprehensible and relevant input. Of course, the teacher may have to write down some vocabulary items in case the learners should need them. However, it would not be advisable to stop or pause the show to correct a mistake or teach some language rule. Pausing the show in order to focus on form will "turn play into work" (Krashen, 2009, p.183). The best way to approach learner errors would be to make note of them and then at the end of the class to ask the learners themselves to correct the items

independently. Another useful method would be to ask the learners to do some research on the new structures or vocabulary items for the next class meeting.

*Materials and equipment*
The typical materials in a TSM class include the materials needed in a regular language classroom. In addition, the teacher may leave the students free to read and listen to materials of their own choice depending on the needs, interests and level of the class. These can be in the form of self-access materials or a wide range of authentic materials that provide suitable sources for the learners, such as newspapers, magazines and/or websites.

Teachers may decide to develop their own simple work-sheets. Alternatively, the teacher may ask the guest to prepare his/her own work-sheet. This can save a lot of the teacher's time by passing on the laborious task of developing work-sheets. The teacher can simply supervise or advise learners when necessary. Furthermore, the teacher may wish to give some notes or handouts that highlight certain aspects of the target language raised during the show.

The students may require equipment such as a video projector and a computer to present more effectively. It may also be very helpful to have loudspeakers in case the guests wish to share some recorded video or audio material with the audience. Also, depending on the guests' preferences or the nature of the topic, there may be need for a whiteboard or some realia.

It is very helpful to have the learners keep journals that record their experience and the challenges they faced before, during, and after the show. Students should be guided on how to keep efficient journals, which highlight important experiences throughout the show.

The class may also decide to video-/audio-record the talk show; therefore, a voice recorder and/or video camera may help. The recorded material can be shared later on the class' Facebook or YouTube page. This can prompt peer or teacher comments and/or posts that can be very useful sources of feedback.

*Procedure*
TSM emulates the procedures of a typical talk show, and paradoxically the unique feature of a successful talk show is that it avoids typicality and predictability in order to win more and more viewers. If the viewers know what is going to happen, after a while TSM itself can turn into another predictable and monotonous language learning-teaching method. That is why talk shows may follow varying procedures. The show may be in the form of a serious interview. The host may either begin solo, and then invite the guest to the stage or may start with the guest right next to him/her. Alternatively, the show may be filmed outside the studio as the host/guest is visiting someone somewhere. There may be a studio audience, which may or may not be invited to ask questions or participate in short discussions. The host may have some time left to read some messages mailed, texted or emailed to the show. The

possibilities are numerous. Therefore, it would only be fair to provide an example of one possible way among many others in which TSM can be conducted in an English language classroom.

Before the show
1. It would be best to assign the topics at the beginning of the course. This will give plenty of time for learners to research their topic and design the way in which they want to run their show. The students can be provided with a list of topics from which they select one or more topics depending on the number of students and availability of time. The topics may be chosen depending on the course objectives. In an English proficiency test preparation course, the teacher may decide to go for topics which are commonly found on that test.
2. At this stage, it is also important to provide the class with as many interesting examples of talk shows as possible. Some of the most popular talk shows are available on-line (mostly on YouTube). Here are some examples:
   a. The Ellen DeGeneres Show
      examples: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qt4cgVgATs8;
                www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCaKuAdKumA
   b. The Oprah Winfrey Show
      examples: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfJm4X--qqg;
                www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVffJAxylyM)
3. Before class, all the guests will have to plan the way in which they are going to run their show. Creativity and variety should be most welcome. Some students may wish to bring their own real guests and want to be the host themselves. Other guests may make an actual report on the topic and then replay the video/audio-taped report to the class some time during the show. For example, if the show is on eating habits, the guest may ask a few people about it, record the dialogues, and then share them with the class.
4. Guests share their plans and content with peers, receive feedback, and make revisions accordingly.
5. Before the show, each guest shows his/her plan to the teacher in a short meeting. Together they decide the way the show is going to be conducted. This is what real hosts and guests do before TV talk shows: discuss the protocols or the content to be covered before, during, and after the show. The guest may have to make further revisions to the plan after this student-teacher conferencing.
6. Right before the show, the host (teacher) describes the way in which the show is going to be run. In the case of large classes, the students can be divided into two groups of "studio audience" (who sit right in front of the host and guest) and "home viewers" (who sit further back). At this point the host may also remind the audience that they do not have to reveal their real names and other personal information during the show. They can create imaginary identities, nationalities, problems, etc. Home viewers are informed that they can communicate with the guest through fictitious emails, letters, etc., and ask questions or leave comments. In the meantime, the members of the studio audience are also allowed to participate in the discussion by raising their

hands. The class is reminded that they can video/audio-tape the show if they wish to.

During the show
1. As common on any TV talk show, the program starts with the host's welcome note to the home viewers, studio audience and the guest.
2. The host briefly introduces the show, the topic, and the guest.
3. The guest talks about him/herself as well as his/her professional life and introduces the topic.
4. In the meantime, the viewers who wish to make a query or share a view write messages and pass them to the host or simply raise their hand and talk. Some viewers may even wish to call in and ask questions (a very popular method among my students).
5. The guest may also decide to pose a question for the viewers at the beginning of the show. The viewer who provides the best answer for this focus question wins a real or imaginary prize. For instance, if the topic is on nutrition, the guest may choose to ask some general information questions on nutrition.
6. At times the host may invite the studio audience and/or home viewers to walk up to the "microphone", call in, or send messages to answer the focus question(s) and/or ask the guest questions.
7. At the end of the show, the guest's email address is provided for the viewers, who are encouraged to contact the guest and ask questions for which there was not sufficient time during the show.
8. Towards the end of the talk show, the teacher signals that they are running out of time and that they have to wind up the talk. The whole show may last something like half an hour.
9. The show may end with the guest receiving a fictitious or real present from the host as a token of appreciation for professional support.

After the show
1. After the show, the teacher may ask some follow-up questions on the content of the show, ask for students' opinions, and/or highlight the new words or language structures they noticed in the show. The teacher may wish to do this using handouts, work-sheets, etc.
2. The show may be posted on YouTube or Facebook for students to watch and leave comments. It may be fully or partially subtitled. .
3. Later students add their experience with the show in their journals.

**Merits**
The method has a number of advantages that will be discussed in this section:
1. TSM offers a new way to learn/teach a second or foreign language in a fun way. Humor, joy and playfulness, which are pivotal features of L1 learning (Cook, 2000) but are commonly missing in ESL learning/teaching (Maley, 2009), are brought back to the language classroom. In addition, learners are exposed to a good deal of useful comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987) in a natural way.

2. The method integrates useful tools, such as simulation, role-play, dramatization, and games, to provide a new way to approach teaching.

3. The creativity and imagination of the learners are stimulated. The learners' brains are engaged in right-brain as well as left-brain activities.

4. TSM is a good way to help learners "forget" (Krashen, 2009) that they are learning a language. The method can help language teachers change their learners' expectation into expectancy (Maley, 2009) by creating a "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993) in the language classroom. TSM can create an environment in which learners do not remain passive and silent but rather naturally use the target language.

5. It is common practice in many intermediate and advanced foreign language learning classes to get learners to present lectures in front of the class. Most students find this rather anxiety-provoking and as a result they find every excuse to escape. However, when the teacher provides an opportunity for the less courageous learners to go to the front stage gradually (that is, first as a home-viewer, next as a member of the studio audience and finally as a reporter or a guest), they find it less threatening or non-threatening. There are always learners who are willing to participate in classroom activities, but they are too shy to do so. When they see the teacher and their peers playing different roles, when they realize that they can also change their own identities, and when they know that they can communicate by writing, the most timid learners will start actively participating in the show.

6. The quiz in the show can make it more engaging for the learners who need some instrumental motivation to get them started.

7. TSM promotes discovery and project-based language learning in which the learner is given choices and feels responsible for his/her own learning.

8. In my experience, TSM is even suitable for the most serious types of language courses such as TOEFL or IELTS preparation courses. Once we had an acupuncturist as a guest in an IELTS preparation class. We had a talk show on alternative medicine, which was an alien topic for most of the students. Interestingly, after these learners came back from the test, they were very happy because one of the reading passages (that is, one-third of the whole reading test in IELTS) was on alternative medicine. They could answer some of the questions even without reading the passage since they were familiar with the topic.

9. TSM makes the language class very lively. For most learners, learning another language can be boring torture. TSM provides strategies that give life and soul to a language class.

There are a few challenges that the teacher who decides to use TSM should be aware of. The next section discusses these challenges.

**Challenges**

A wealth of literature is available on the benefits of dramatization and role-play activities in the language classroom. Research findings on the effect of such activities on language learners have shown promising results (Burke, 2002; Holt & Kysilka, 2006). These activities and the Talk Show Method may have certain features in

common, but as was discussed before, there are vast differences. The empirical evidence available on the effectiveness of dramatization, for example, cannot provide support for TSM. Therefore, empirical studies need to be conducted on the effect of the method in real language learning-teaching situations before it can be established as an effective ELT method.

Another challenge is whether TSM will in reality be interesting for all learners from different demographic backgrounds. As my experience with EFL learners in Iran and ESL learners in Malaysia has shown so far, the method is promising for intermediate and advanced, male and female, young adult and adult language learners. However, the method should still be tested on language learners from a variety of demographic backgrounds.

Furthermore, an important factor that may lead to the success or failure of TSM is the choice of topic. It is quite challenging to think of engaging topics for all the learners and for the entire duration of a language course. Even when the topic *is* interesting, it may not be suitable for a given group of learners. Therefore, the learners should be monitored and guided when they are selecting topics for their shows. Once they have thought of an issue, they share these topics with their teacher. The teacher, then, helps to make the topics more appealing, providing ideas on how they can be presented, the way a talk show host may advise a guest before a program. The teacher should also remind the learners to avoid sensitive issues including sexism, politics, religion and the like. Indeed, topics should be selected very meticulously and based on the learners' needs, interests, and background.

Some language classes may be really interesting, but after they are over, the learner may not really have learned anything new. How is it possible to make sure that the learners are really learning something? One possible way would be to expose learners to useful words by having them listen to or read related texts. Recording learners' errors and discussing them in weblogs or simply on the whiteboard after the show may also be helpful. Errors should be corrected at the right time in an effective way. Correction is best made immediately after the activity while it is still fresh in the learners' minds. Self-correction and peer-correction have also been recommended as effective ways to deal with learner errors (Liu & Ding, 2009).

**Conclusion**
This paper presented a new method for language teaching, the Talk Show Method (TSM). The principles in support of this method were reviewed. The materials that may be used in a TSM class were also reviewed. The paper also addressed the procedures in which a language class may be conducted using TSM. Other possibilities for using this method were also discussed. Finally, the merits and challenges of the method were argued.

When one observes the way language is taught in most language classes today, one is convinced that language instruction is in need of some reform. There are still many language classes that approach the target language as separate skills. Unfortunately,

this is also the case in standard language testing systems like IELTS. TSM provides a chance for the teacher to integrate all language skills in a single teaching plan. As was discussed above, integrating language skills results in enhancing learners' achievement and retention (Durukan, 2011).

Language classes can also create foreign language anxiety in the learners. Many language teachers get their students to prepare lectures and present them individually in front of the class. This provokes anxiety particularly in shy learners who have been asked to lecture. Lectures are formal and put the learner under a lot of pressure. In a TSM class, learners who have high levels of foreign language anxiety are given an opportunity to manage their fear. Having the learners play the role of famous characters will help them be more confident and can encourage them to take more risks in their target language interactions. In addition, the rest of the students are not actively involved during such lectures. TSM involves all the learners in a class actively in a real-life discourse. Empirical evidence is required for this claim but it sounds logical to argue that language teachers will find TSM a useful method for supporting their anxious and passive learners.

The proposed method also shares the advantages of Project-Based Learning. As Blumenfeld et al. (1991) argue, Project-Based Learning engages "students in investigation of authentic problems" (p. 369) besides keeping them "cognitively engaged with subject matter over an extended period of time" (p. 374). Likewise, TSM encourages learners' investment in their own learning by getting them to review relevant resources and discover related materials that they wish to share during the show.

Another important feature of TSM is its ability to integrate educational technology in the language classroom. Technology offers extremely useful tools for learners. TSM encourages language learners to use technology (including the Internet with its staggering number of resources, smart phones with their useful applications, computers, etc.) in their language learning experience. What is important to note is that the method does not merely get the learners to use the static language learning software offered by Learning Management Systems (LMS). TSM promotes a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in which technology is used as a tool to support the teacher and learners in educational settings. Lewis (2008) made a very important distinction between LMS and VLE; they are two different types of educational technology. LMS adheres to static, periodical, and ready-made learning-teaching materials and exercises accompanied by keys. VLE, on the other hand, provides dynamic programs, tools, and choices that foster teacher and learner engagement and creativity (Lewis, 2008). TSM creates many opportunities for language learners to use technology as a dynamic tool that involves them and guides them to choose or develop their own materials.

Like any other method, TSM offers a new avenue worthy of investigation for researchers in the area of ELT. The effect of the method on language learners' proficiency level and/or retention can be tested in experiments. The probable changes

in learner attitude or levels of foreign language anxiety after experiencing TSM will result in invaluable implications for language teaching.

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