

HOW WOULD THE TEACHER WIN THE BATTLE IN THE CLASSROOM?

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Abstract

The present paper explores dimensions relevant to classroom teaching . It examines a vital aspect in language teaching – the classroom – oriented research and studies in the teaching of English as a foreign language . In the present day world technological advancements are said to have brought revolutions in our life and society. Language teaching does not remain unaffected by technological developments. Consequently, the use of equipment and teaching aids in language teaching is a generally accepted principle and is widely practised. In this paper it is maintained that no revolution in technology can be a substitute for classroom teaching . Let us also remember that classroom teaching is a time - honoured means of learning ever since the days of Plato and Socrates . The paper examines and identifies the factors making the teacher crucial in the classroom . A brief survey is presented of the current situation , which is far from satisfactory . The teacher's role has been classified in view of his responsibilities in the classroom and obligations to the subject . An integration of these two dimensions is the basic goal of the teacher . The paper presents the phenomenon of classroom teaching within a theoretical perspective. Towards the end recommendations have been given to help improve classroom teaching . Finally , the paper suggests new avenues for research in this exciting and dynamic activity of teaching English as a foreign language.

Introduction :-

This is an age which can truly be characterized by an explosion of information and knowledge . From the second half of the twentieth century onwards developments in different branches of human knowledge have been , by all accounts stupendous both in kinds and degrees unknown , perhaps unthought of in the past . This is not to deny the importance of earlier ages . Undoubtedly the

foundations were laid in the past and the development of knowledge is a continuous process. But, surely, the present age stands out as the most distinguished age in its contributions to the growth of knowledge. One of the many dimensions that distinguishes the present age is the great advancement in the technological aspects of knowledge that is, practical and applied aspects of knowledge. Most disciplines are differentiated in terms of the theoretical and the applied.

The distinction between the two is well-known – the theoretical is concerned with the development of knowledge for its own and when this knowledge is used for a specific problem it becomes the applied. They are related to each other; they mutually influence each other and, of course, they throw light on each other.

As a result of these developments learning has become complex and difficult. The present paper brings into focus the role of the teacher in the classroom.

Learning is a process which is initiated, aided and accredited by the teacher. It is true that the development of knowledge takes place through research but let us remember that teaching and research go hand in hand. Teaching must lead to potentialities of research and, at the same time, must filter down to the class room. Without such interaction teaching will degenerate into exercises in imitation and repetition and research will become lopsided and will lose its stream of feed-back. In the name of research we cannot downgrade the importance of teaching, particularly the classroom teaching, because any such attempt will lead to serious consequences including retardation of knowledge.

In this age of technological advancement equipment and gadgets are available in many spheres of life and activity. Teaching is also that sphere where we have tremendous facilities in terms of aids and equipment. Their importance and advantages are well recognized and well-known. Without undermining their significance and relevance it needs to be asserted that teaching, primarily, originates

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from the teacher. Just as the movement of hands and legs follow the dictates of the mind similarly equipment and teaching aids are subservient to the activities and needs of the teacher. They extend the teachers' activities or supplement the teachers' activities. But, surely, they cannot replace the teacher's role and activities. They may also be looked upon as arms and ammunition provided to the teacher, but in the ultimate analysis, the teacher has to fight his own battle in the classroom. The teacher has to carve out his path of salvation. The success or the failure of teaching depends basically on the teacher and not on aids and equipment. Let us, therefore, not undermine the role of the teacher who is the role-model, the fountain of knowledge and the ultimate authority in the classroom. Allwright, has aptly put the importance of classroom situation—"Classroom processes become the central focus." 1

Importance of the study :

In the present day world classroom situations have become an object of investigation and research. In language learning classroom-centered studies constitute a visible and thriving sphere of research and academic activity. In the complex network of teaching in the classroom the primary factors are two; the learner and the teacher. Learning is a complex process and this complexity increases with a corresponding increase in our life and society. Whatever the complexity it is a time-honoured concept that the teacher's role in the classroom is both crucial and critical. It is crucial because everything in the classroom follows through the teacher and it is critical because it is the teacher who substantially determines and accelerates the process of learning. Much has been discussed, debated and written on the learner and the process of learning. It is a hot mine in the psychology of learning and in recent years psycholinguistics has been actively engaged in unfolding and specifying the process of learning. The learner's situation constitutes an area of inquiry by itself and contributions to this field are valuable and useful both in theoretical terms and in terms of practical necessity

. while accepting these ideas we should not lose sight of the critical position that the teacher occupies in the classroom . It's time for us to prepare and develop some guidelines for teachers , some kind of manual for teachers , authenticated by theory and tested by practice . The present paper is an attempt in this direction .

Problem of the study :

The teacher in the classroom carries a twin responsibility on his shoulders : firstly he is responsible to his students to whom he has to deliver the goods and secondly he has obligations to the discipline he seeks to transmit . Both of them are interlinked and they mutually influence each other . However , for reasons of convenience and practical necessity we can distinguish them as of two types - professional and academic .

Teaching is a profession and the teacher takes it as a profession . Thus conditions of teaching (as against conditions of learning) , personality and behaviour of the teacher , his style of presentation and his method of interaction with students can be grouped together in the category of the professional aspect of teaching . The academic aspect would include the teacher's knowledge of the subject , his insight into the subject , his acquaintance with and understanding of new trends and developments in the subject . It needs to be mentioned here that these dimensions suggested here are by no means exhaustive. They are simply representative .It is important to realize that the teacher has to fulfil two kinds of responsibility simultaneously – the professional responsibility and the academic responsibility . It is not necessary to go into a detailed discussion of the nature of these two types of responsibility. But , surely ,the success or the failure of the teacher depends largely on how he meets these responsibilities or obligations in the classroom .

Review of the present situation :

Let us briefly consider some basic dimensions which identify these two aspects of the teacher's responsibility . In this age of competition (and unemployment) a teacher may not have his choice of institution - be it a school or a college or a university . If he does have a choice so much the better and such a teacher will be looked upon as fortunate .

It is also to be noted that there are two kinds of institutions , public institutions and private institutions that is those funded and controlled by the government and those funded and controlled by individuals . The demands of these two types of institutions vary – often considerably - and the teacher has to be conscious of them right from the beginning. It is difficult to evaluate the relative merit of these different institutions because it would be , besides other things , dependent on the economic structure of the country .Suffice it to say here that the teacher must know the system within which he / she has to work .

Unfortunately , there isn't hardly any orientation course or programme before a teacher joins the profession . In a large number of cases a person graduates and enters the classroom to teach . It is time to think about the feasibility and desirability of some orientation programme for teachers of different levels - primary schools , secondary schools and colleges . At present a teacher has to orient himself/ herself . This is not a very happy situation for the profession . However , because of the absence of any orientation programme some useful suggestions are given here for those teachers who seek to orient themselves .

Limitations of the present situation :

The primary task of the teacher in the classroom is to establish a rapport with students . Teaching is not unidirectional . It is a two - way process . What the teacher gives can be satisfactorily received by students only if the teacher has been able to build up a rapport with his students. In fact once this is done half the battle is won . The success of his teaching (or lecturing), his discussions , his interactions depend primarily on this fact . The teacher has to be a keen observer. He has to observe how well he gets across , how well he delivers the goods . This observation can come in two ways- either by vocal response of students or even by their silence . As a matter of fact the silence of students also speaks and the teacher has to be sensitive to their silence as well . All these aspects are related to the teacher's rapport with students . In fact even the problem of discipline in the class can be tackled successfully if the teacher has built up his rapport with students . On the other hand, without such a rapport students and the teacher will move in different directions leading to a failure of communication between them . In such a situation the teacher will become helpless and students restless, to say the least.

In other words students and the teacher should have an understanding between themselves . Unfortunately these factors are being continuously ignored in the present situation of classroom teaching . The purpose of this paper is to suggest improvements – both in terms of theoretical perspective and practical applications .

Discussions :

This leads us to the basic question - how can this understanding be achieved ? Let us remember that this understanding is multidimensional- that is ,it's not a product of one factor but of several factors forming a unit . The teacher has not only to be an expert in the subject (that he must be) but he has to be knowledgeable about several other areas directly or indirectly relevant

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to his profession .It is useful for the teacher to be acquainted , in general terms , with life , society and conditions of learning and education. Some relevant knowledge of the background of students , not necessarily on individual basis but in general terms , will help the teacher to establish an equation with students. All these factors will lead students to develop an affinity with the teacher - that is one of them and not a man from the Mars. In most cases there remains a distance (sometimes quite long) between the teacher and students .

This distance inhibits students and let us not forget that inhibition is a handicap in the process of learning . The teacher has to come out of the Ivory Tower because from the Ivory Tower he can , at best , lecture but not teach or communicate . In such a situation teaching will become lecturing - a kind of one way traffic - without any feedback from students and then the basic objective of teaching will be defeated . In this process the teacher has to take the initiative and if it is done students are bound to reciprocate and reciprocate with enthusiasm . In fact , students' enthusiasm for and interest in learning are basic objectives of teaching . In a way, if the teacher has succeeded in creating in students interest in learning his job is well done . This can only be done if the teacher reaches students and doesn't remain on the pedestal all the time .

It is true that teaching is a profession . But it has to be born in mind that it is fundamentally different from other professions . A manager in a factory is primarily concerned with the products that he manufactures . An engineer is basically concerned with the buildings or bridges that he constructs . But his behaviours and activities outside his office are not relevant to his work. But a teacher is not only in the classroom but outside the classroom . The personality of the teacher distinguishes him from other professions . He is not concerned with giving a shape to products or buildings but is concerned with the shaping of human materials. Consequently, what he does outside ,how he behaves outside are directly relevant to his work in the classroom .There is a well-known joke when a wife rebukes her husband – stop

behaving like a professor at home ! As said earlier a teacher is a role model in the class . He cannot and should not forget this fact . The personality of a teacher is crucial factor in the process of teaching . What he teaches does not only come from the mind but through his entire personality . There are many things associated with a teacher's personality and one of the major things is the sense of fairness to students .

Fairness is not only to practise but should also appear to have been practised . Young and budding teachers would do well to identify these aspects and develop what may be called a teacher's personality .

There are bound to be several other dimensions in the professional aspect and no attempt is made here to exhaust all such features . The purpose here is to throw light on this aspect so that its importance and relevance can be realized and attempts may be made to improve the situation . Similarly the academic aspect of the teacher's responsibility also needs to be probed thoroughly so that effective and planned result could be obtained through the profession of teaching . As said earlier the academic aspect is variable – that is to say , the needs and requirements of each subject are different . For instance , the teaching of Natural science , Social Science, Medical Studies ,Humanistic Studies cannot all of them be placed in the same bag . Separate research will have to be carried out for individual subjects – their needs and perspectives , their goals and their methods . This paper deals with problems faced by the teachers of English .

To begin with the first thing that strikes any researcher in this field is the lack of correspondence between school teaching and college teaching . It is not the case that college teaching takes off where the school teaching leaves off . That should have been the ideal situation but unfortunately this does not happen . It is obvious that because of this lack of correspondence the final input is neither desirable nor adequate . Teacher training institutes or some nodal agency should look into this problem and work out a system to

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remove the hurdles and plug in the holes which cause handicaps in the process of learning English .

It needs to be realized that the teaching of English (or any other language) is fundamentally different from the teaching of any other subject . It is not concerned with giving information or providing facts (new or old) . It seeks to create and develop communicative competence in the learner so that he can handle the language independently . It is because of this that the whole teaching process has to be conceived and planned in its totality and not piecemeal .The process of implementation has to be in stages but these stages are inter-linked – one leading to the other.

Coming to the teaching of English in schools and colleges at universities the first thing that a teacher faces is a large class and a heterogeneous group . The effectiveness of the teaching of English suffers heavily because of these two factors .Language teaching is not only a receptive but is productive . Large classes create serious hurdles and handicaps in the development of the productive mechanism of English . Secondly , the teacher has to face a heterogeneous group in the class – that is , students with different social and educational background are unavoidably perhaps , placed in the same class . In other words the entry behaviour of students in the class is different and diverse .This situation directly and seriously would effect the expected terminal behaviour of students . If this situation changes or improves , so much the better. But the teaching of English cannot wait until the conditions of teaching improve.

Consequently , the teacher has to develop strategies accordingly to meet the given situation .

Recommendations:

At this place it would be worth while exploring the idea and possibility of Refresher Courses related to specific problems of

teaching for young and junior teachers of English. In applied linguistics the process of language learning is an exciting area of research and new insights are available in the development of teaching strategies . In language learning considerable attention has been paid towards learners`strategies and characteristics. Valuable as they are but they should also be supplemented with the development of teaching strategies in view of factors such as unusually large class of heterogeneous groups.

In recent years problems of classroom have attracted attention and research in this aspect has been receiving focus of inquiry . It is commonly termed as action research .

It has promise and potentiality for teachers actively engaged in classroom work .

Action research is derived from practical actions leading to,as Van Lier says , “reiterated cycle of procedures” 2 .

It is a continuous process based on the researcher’s reflection and subsequent action .

Kemmis and McTaggart define action research as “a form of self-reflective inquiry” 3. The scope of action research is particularly relevant to problem originating from classroom situations. It has specific goals and can be used to improve situations and solve difficulties. Cohen and Manion 4 identify several specific areas which can lead to all round improvements in classroom teaching . Some of the areas

identified by them are the following :

- a- To remedy problems in specific situations.
- b- In service training .

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c- Additional and innovative teaching.

Action research helps to strengthen the professional and academic ability of the teacher in the classroom . In fact the teacher can carry out research while teaching .

The classroom becomes a place of teaching and also a laboratory for research . Mutual feedback enrich and illuminate each other .

To sum up the classroom is the central place in the process of learning and the teacher is the pivotal factor in this process . Learning is continuous process and never stops.

The teacher is basically a learner and remains a learner all his life . It is through learning and strategies adapted in the classroom that the teacher can win the battle .

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