Exploring English Language Teachers' Role In An ESL Classroom

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Abstract

English language has occupied an important status in the world being an International Language and the language of Business, Technology and Science. It has increased the role of English teachers especially in Pakistan. The role and responsibilities of English language teachers in Pakistan is very critical issue. This study intends to find the perceptions of the English language teachers and the learners of English regarding the variety of roles that are performed by English language teachers in the classroom. This study aims to find the gap between the perception of the English teachers and the students so that the English teachers can try to bridge the gap. The samples of the study are the teachers and the students of Government Postgraduate College Bure Wala Distt. Vehari. The data was collected through the tool of interview as two semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teachers and the students. So the data was collected by employing qualitative method. The text elicited from the interviews was transcribed carefully and later it was analyzed by using grounded theory analysis techniques of" Open, Axial and Selective Coding "paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Different roles of the English teachers were developed out this coding process resulting into a "core category" that was formulated after finding common and most frequently mentioned roles of the English language teacher in the perception of both the English teachers and English language learners. So this study is an effort to bridge the gap between the perception of the English teachers and the students regarding the various roles of English teachers. It further highlights the expected roles of English teachers as are demanded from better teachers.

Key Terms: English Teacher, ELT/EFL/ESL, Open Codes, Axial Codes, Selective Codes, Core Category, ICT Skills

Introduction

Teaching is considered a very important profession as it works as a productive factory to provide the builders of a nation. It needs expertise for the justification of teaching because it is considered a tri-polar activity which involves three important stages: Input-activity-output. The success of teaching is at the same time `a target achieved` for a learner and `success` for a teacher. Teaching English as a second language is always a difficult job as it requires knowledge, skill, innovations and dedication of the teacher. If an English teacher possesses such qualities, his efforts can become fruitful and he can achieve the objectives of his work.

A teacher is a person who has learnt the teaching skills and possesses the ability to train the learners for a career. There are some teachers who are `born teachers `and they do not require too much training in teaching skill as compared to those who do not adoptteaching professionas their first choice. Both types of such teachers can gain something through training programs but the former ones can get lot better out of teacher training programs. There is no doubt that teacher is a tower of light who brightens the minds and produces future generation of the world.

In the past the traditional view about a good teacher was that a person who had rich knowledge of something. Such person was given respect and whatever he said was believed and obeyed. Now the things have changed drastically. People have become critical and scientific minded. There is variety and vastnesses in every subject these days. This has given rise to the concept of specialization in pedagogy. A teacher of today has to learn different skills and knowledge of modern technology.

Teachers of English language play a pivotal role in the performance of the institution. As English is a compulsory subject up to graduation level in Pakistan, the performance of English teachers determines the status of a school or a college. As English teachers have to work under sensitive responsibilities, they need to know about their pedagogical objectives of the learners as well as the professional growth of themselves. They cannot gain any progress until they are aware of their multiple roles and responsibilities. The role of a teacher started gaining more importance since 1930 with the mounting awareness of the public sector education. There are different philosophies of education like Idealism, Realism, Naturalism, Constructivism, Perennialism, Progressivism and others that deal with the curriculum design, methods of teaching, ways of assessment and evaluation but the role of teacher plays a central part in almost all of them. Later on if Skinner (1976)

proposed the concept of "skill and drill", Lowery (2011) gave the idea of "effective teachers` flexibility" that gave a healthy shift to the content from "memorisable" to "memorable". For such shift and to cope with the present needs of education the English language teachers have to perform multi-faceted roles now to meet with the variety of needs.

Most of the studies done in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Pakistan involve the difficulties and challenges faced by the English language teachers, methodology or input provided to the learners or to investigate the involvement and interest of the learners. There have been some studies related to the testing or evaluation of the learning of the students of ESL/EFL class. It is also agreeable that some researchers went further to find out the deficiencies on the part of English teachers as well. It is quite strange that there is not much work to find out the traits of the better teachers of English language. In the same way there is little research work to cover the various roles of the English language teachers.

Statement of the Problem

English has been occupying a status of official language in Pakistan for the past many decades. It has raised its status and the demand within the curricula and in the practical life of the people. The importance of English as an international Language is obviously as clear as the sun. On the other hand, the performance of Pakistani students in the subject of English has been shaky and unpredictable. In other words, the performance of the Pakistani students in English language has never been as good as in the field of Urdu. If some hard working students get better command of different aspects of English like Vocabulary, Syntax or Semantics etc., they often struggle while communicating in English. This unsatisfactory performance of the students of English is sometimes attached to the performance of the teacher. It is often ignored that there are many other social, cultural, economic and personal factors as well which play counter to their learning of English language.

There is no doubt that the teacher and the classroom are not the only factors causing the poor learning of the students of English. There are many other extrinsic and hidden issues that hinder the path of learning for the students. It is agreed on all grounds that the role of teacher can solve many of the tangible and abstract reasons that can affect the performance of the English language learners. So it is the need of the moment that the English teachers should have clear vision and knowledge of their roles and duties. This study aims to highlight the major roles of English language teachers who are teaching English in educational institutions of Pakistan.

Research Questions

This study focuses on finding the answers to the following questions:

(i)   What are the roles that an English teacher performs in EFL classroom?
(ii)   What is the perception of the teachers and the students about these roles?
(iii)   Do the teachers and the students have same perception about the role of the English teacher in the classroom?

Literature Review

A teacher plays a vital role in the working of the educational system. It is the teacher who leads, manages and controls the process of teaching and learning. As far as a teacher of English language is concerned, there are different theories for general educational perspective and some particular for language learning and teaching purpose. The theories of learning, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and other relevant models are there to align the content material in an order to make it learnable and to reach the targets of teaching and learning process. Behaviorism, Social Constructivism and Cognitive Constructivism are the major learning theories along with the other studies in the fields of Child Psychology, Anthropology, Cognitive Science, Education and Neuroscience.

J.B. Watson (1930) and B.F. Skinner (1976) claimed that information is conveyed to the learner through stimulus and response process. The behaviorists believe that "skill and drill "are useful for different aspects of language learning. According to Behaviorism it is the duty of the language teacher to continue the drills and revise the content again and again and also to provide reward or punishment after the responses of the learners.

On the other hand, Piaget (1968) and Perry (1999) considered the mental process of the learner going into his head and proposed Cognitive Constructivist Approach. According to this theory knowledge is constructed and it is the job of learning to discover that knowledge. So it is the role of a teacher to offer new knowledge to satisfy discovery and to motivate the learners gain this new knowledge.

Vygotsky (1968) presented cognitive functions of social interactions through Social Constructivism and claim that learning is a process where learners are introduced to the knowledge community. Vygotsky (1978) observed that the conceptual themes and language itself are both the social phenomena.Social Constructivism demands for collaborative type of learning. According to this theory it is the role of a teacher to involve or engage the students into pair or groups for collaborative learning as this is a social or collective phenomenon that demands for collective and cooperative learning.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories offer different views regarding learning a second language comparatively under the shadow of learning first language. Such theories have been based on inductive or deductive method of teaching. Some of these theories are still in vogue as they are relevant and significant. Major theories regarding SLA are: Krashen Monitor Model, Linguistic Universals, Input Model, Universal Grammar, Multidimensional Model and Acculturation /Pidginization Model. All of these theories mention or determine some roles of a language teacher. Krashen`s (1985) Monitor Model provides a comprehensive approach for language learning and language acquisition. This Model is based on five central hypotheses: Acquisition versus Learning Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen`s Monitor Theory is a kind of Macro Model which covers all the major factors of language acquisition like personality traits, age classroom activities, innate system of language acquisition, environment and input etc. It shows that the English language teacher has to cope with cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of Bloom`s (1956).

Selinker (1969) observed that there are some linguistic stages that a language learner has to go through during language learning process. It is one of the interlanguage theories. There are three approaches to interlanguage system of language learning. Selinker (1972) gives the first system as he suggests a temporary grammar that has a set of rules. These rules are developed through five cognitive processes: over generalization, transfer or training, language transfer, strategies of second language learning and second language communication. Adjemian (1976) gave the second approach and admits that interlanguages are quite natural and have unique grammar.Taron (1979& 1982) offered the third approach and she believes that interlanguage is a content process of speech styles. Ellis, R (1985) claims that there are free variations in second language acquisition in the initial stage (non-systematic variability) but later it changes into more organized approach (systematic variability).

Noam Chomsky (1969) gave the concept of Universal Grammar (UG) that there are some basic rules of grammar which quite universal in almost all languages. This theory was basically concerned with the first language learning. Later it was used for fossilization, language transfer and second language pedagogy. Felix (1985) offered the Competition Model that carried two systems: The Language Specific System (LSC-System) and the Problem Solving System and the English language teacher should focus on these processes while teaching.

Cognitive theories of psychologists and psycholinguists show that second language learning means acquiring some complicated skills and sub-skills. These skills require some

grammatical rules and proper vocabulary (McLaughlin, 1987). Multidimensional Model (Clahsen, Meisel & Pienemann, 1983) claim that second or target language learning is done by going through some stages that are governed by two ways: the learner's social-psychological orientation and the learner's developmental stage. Acculturation/Pidginization Theory by Schumann (1978) claims that second language learning is an aspect of acculturation.

Bandura (1989) in Social Learning Theory state that human behavior is in fact reciprocal interaction of behavioral, cognitive and environmental impacts and he has given three models of observational learning. Sternberg and Williams (2009,) in their "Good models for social learning" state that the behavior of a teacher is more followed than the behavior of the adult learner. Knowles (1980) asserts that an English teacher is a motivator, facilitator, helper, sharer of ideas, planner, guide and explorer. Dewey (1899) believes that a teacher is a leader of activities. Burner (1966) finds the teacher an inquirer whereas Bandura and Walters (1963) consider teacher as a role model. Gage (1972) states that there are four traits of teacher: indirectness, warmth, enthusiasm to improve learning and cognitive organization. Freeman (1986) claims that an English teacher is a motivator, supporter, monitor, director and stimulator. Stevick (1996) takes an English teacher as a controller, encourager and manage. These roles of English language teacher claimed by theorists and researchers are benchmarks in the process of English language teaching.

Research Methodology

Constructivist Grounded Theory has been used to collect and analyze than data from the English teachers and the students to know about the perception they have regarding various roles performed by English language teachers. Textual data was collected from the students and the teachers and was transcribed. The data was analyzed by applying Sarantakos (2005) model of coding the text under three coding processes: Open, Axial and Selective Coding. At first the textual data was identified and arranged into open coding process on the basis of frequency of their occurrence. The subjects of the study were 5 English language teachers and 25 students of Intermediate (Pre-Medical and Pre-Engineering) at Government Postgraduate College Bure Wala, Distt. Vehari and they were selected through purposive sampling. Qualitative method of data collection was used by employing semi-structured interviews (One for the English teachers and one for the students). The tool of protocol comprised of 10 open-ended questions for the teachers and the same number of questions from the students (through focused group interview) with introspection and retrospection to find their views about different roles of the English language teachers.

Findings and Discussion

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews of the English language teachers and focused group interviews of the students. The text was transcribed with care and systematically analyzed by using grounded theory analysis techniques of" Open, Axial and Selective Coding "paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Open codes: By exploring the data some open codes emerged through the perception of the teachers and the students. The following roles of English language teachers came out like: coordinator, role –model, guide, facilitator, competent, proficient, organizer, administrator, evaluator, resource person, subject knowledge and ICT, controller, encouraging, need analyzer, supervisor, examiner, trainer, informer, provider of learning opportunities, counselor, friendly, dynamic, tutor, instructor, trainer, examiner, composed, firm, independent, practical, authoritative, trustworthy, creative, user of different teaching strategies, supportive, skillful.

Axial codes: The open codes were further analyzed into axial codes to elicit axial codes of the English language teachers from the perception of the teachers and the students. From the perceptions of the English teachers the axial codes emerged were: trainer, examiner and administrator. The axial codes elicited from the perception of the students developed the following axial codes: administrator, subject knowledge and examiner.

Selective codes: the axial codes were further analyzed to develop selective codes. The selective codes from the perception of English teachers were: Teaching experience, teaching practices, examiner, trainer subject knowledge and ICT skills. In the perception of the students the selective codes emerged were: teaching practices, teaching experience, subject knowledge, and examiner.

Core category: Core category is like a sun that stands in an orderly way and maintains a relationship with its planets (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The sub- categories are linked with the core category, so a frame work was designed through data analysis and a core category was developed that a versatile English language teacher possesses:

- Command of subject and ICT skills
- Teaching experience
- Teaching practices
- Examiner
- Trainer
- Performer of the roles of an instructor, helper and facilitator
- Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion and Recommendations

The English language teachers have to perform multiple roles in a classroom and after analyzing the previously developed roles, there is not a single one which can be denied or ignored. They have to prove their worth and utility under all conditions. From the responses of the teachers and the students, one thing was common that almost all the teachers have to follow the instructions of and the scheme designed by the high-ups. Still the dedicated and dynamic teachers bring variation in the teaching strategies and prove their value and worth. A versatile English teacher expects a positive change in the performance of an English teacher that certainly brings a positive change in the whole system. It also came out through this study that teaching English does not mean only to transfer content or knowledge of English language through a teacher-centered environment to the learner. Rather it demands to develop a learner – centered situation where knowledge should be constructed and developed instead of mere transfer. Han (2005) claims the same thing that an English teacher should forget the "old self" and try to gain "a new –self from zero. It has also been observed that the English teachers have to adjust themselves in the traditional role of a teacher and the role of a teacher under modern and latest conditions. He has to maintain a balance. This study was based on beliefs, perceptions and personal views of a sample so it cannot suggest some wider changes in the education system which clearly requires complicated changes at different levels. However, it is recommended that to meet the latest needs of education system the English language teachers should attend pre-service and in-service training workshops and ELT training programs to enhance their efficiencies and to have better understanding of their multiple roles in the classroom. They should also try to explore the gape of perception and practices in the process of English language teaching (ELT).

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