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Humanistic Approach: A Need in English Language Teaching

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In today's global world, the importance of English cannot be denied and ignored since English is the most common language spoken everywhere. With the help of developing technology, English has been playing a major role in many sectors including medicine, engineering and education. As India is a Multi-Lingual country, English has acquired a status of associate language. English symbolizes in Indians mind, better education, better culture and higher intellect. From Britishers English language came in India, since then it has been playing a key role in our national life but not to educational system. This language which was considered to be a foreign language just a few decades back has today become one of the most important things in our lives; in fact, it has become a part of our daily life.

It's difficult to express our life without English. At present the use of English can be seen on the Internet and in the business world. Business transactions are done in English. Today English is ruling over the world. As it is the language of technology it will have its dominance. Showing importance of English, Krishnaswami has rightly said:

“Much like oil or the Microchip, English today is used globally. Life will become paralyzed if petrol and computers are not available anymore. Similarly, we can find it difficult to function if we don't understand or speak English.”

Problems of teaching English:

It is now well established fact that English language has become the global language for day-to-day transactions. It immensely helps to increase employability as a good command over English language is a part of a well-groomed personality.

To diagnose the problems of teaching English to the students is a thrust area of the present paper. Most of the students face difficulty in learning English. They consider it as a tough subject. In one or the other way such students develop inferiority complex compared to those

who hail from urban areas and who have English as a medium of instruction. Therefore, the need of the hour is to develop confidence in them by facilitating them.

On the other side, teachers of English are not able to establish rapport with students while teaching. They teach mechanically as the class is so large that they cannot pay attention to the learners needs. Thus, they just focus on completing the syllabus. In such cases, humanistic approaches can play a vital role which will enable the teachers of English to take initiatives towards the learner's interest and need.

Though the syllabi, methods keep on changing but the expected result is still lacking. The major problem is that there is lack of motivation given to the learners. The human touch is missing. According to Lei (2007), humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the learner and places the individual's thought, emotion and feelings at the forefront of human development. Lack of Whole –hearted involvement is found in the teachers. It is very essential to look at the needs of the learners and what is relevant for them so that the learners can be motivated.

Humanism, as per the Cambridge learners Dictionary, is a belief system based on human needs and values and not on God or religion. So a humanistic perspective in life will create an amicable ambience that can create wonders. Naturally so, a teacher who deals with his/her lessons with a humanistic approach gets a very good result as compared to a teacher without humanism. It was in America that humanism gained popularity in the 20th century. In the academic context, humanism or humanistic approach most possibly referred to the school of psychology called Humanistic psychology that emerged in the 1950s. (Wikipedia.2010)

It was the works of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow that accelerated the development of Humanistic psychology in the early seventies which was called Counselling learning. According to Roger, the learners were not to be considered as a 'class', but as a 'group'. Curran suggested that the learners ought to be considered as 'clients' and the teachers were counselors, who address the needs of the learners. Curran believed that by this method, the anxiety, or fear of making a 'fool' of oneself will be lowered. Another important goal of this kind of an approach is to perceive a teacher as an empathetic helping agent in the learning process and not a threat.

Humanistic education is a way of relating that emphasizes introspection, self-esteem and getting in touch with the strengths and positive qualities of others and ourselves. Teachers shall be the real facilitators of learning and concentrate more on how to learn than what to learn, it means they should provide students with fishing gear rather than fish.

Humanistic approach in ELT is an attempt to respond to these needs. Its basic principle is in shifting the focus in education from teaching to learning, so that the teacher is no longer the focal point in class but someone who facilitates the process of education. It aims to make the learner more independent. The main idea is that the content of a lesson is taught and learned from the point of view of the learner. This new centrality changes the conventional concept of instruction.

Undoubtedly, it makes new demands from the teacher, since the teacher will have to give up some of the conventional practices. If we want humanistic approach to work, the teacher must be sensitive and skillful in helping the learners face these issues. It doesn't seem that special training is required. What is important for the teacher is empathy, a genuine interest in the learner's performance and friendliness.

This method of Counseling learning when applied to language learning came to be known as Community Language Learning (CLL). Community language learning seeks to encourage teachers to consider the learners as 'whole' persons where their feelings, intellect, protective reactions, interpersonal relationships, and desire to learn are considered with empathy and balance. Initially, the learners are encouraged to interact with each other in their native language in an informal manner and then the teacher translates them into English and encourages them to do the same. Here humanism adds to the effectiveness in the learning process. Gradually the students learn to use the target language independently. The students with the humanistic approach of the teacher-counselor are able to self-evaluate themselves and realize their self-worth and responsibilities in the learning process that helps them learn out of interest and not out of compulsion.

A humanistic approach to language teaching is a welcome method. But how do we apply this methodology to our system of education. Humanism would concentrate upon the development of the child's self concept. When a child feels good and confident about

him/her, it shows a positive beginning. Only when a learner's self-esteem is raised, he/she realizes responsibilities in the learning process. Now, the learner has not only started his/her learning earnestly but also is progressing towards self-development. Humanism in any field can do wonders. But when applied to teaching it gains significance because it is with the teachers that the learners spend most of their valuable and moldable years. Teachers should realize that their responsibility doesn't stop in just imparting knowledge to the learners but also in facilitating them toward self-motivation.

A humanistic approach in teaching not only helps learners easily to learn things but also develops their personality in various ways. They easily solve problems in life situations, have good reasoning capabilities and are self developed with free will and co-operation. This approach gives importance to the self or the individual. It is concerned with the learner's academic and emotional needs. It is a learner-centered approach. Humanism highly values the development of the human potential. By this approach the learners are de-emphasized to attain material goals. The primary goal of humanistic learning and teaching is self-actualization.

Humanistic Psychology, which is closely associated with works of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, offered a more holistic approach to psychology than those prevailing practices and focused on the whole person. In clinical terms, Humanistic Psychology is closely connected with counseling and notions of self-help. In research terms, it leans towards qualitative analysis rather than quantitative iron clad boot of statistics. Its insistence on the uniquely human aspects of human existence, on the importance of considering 'wholes' rather than parts, struck a popular chord and a series of almost evangelical writings catapulted Humanistic Psychology into the mainstream.

In the world of language teaching, humanism of the Rogerian kind made an indelible mark. In Roger's humanism, one can see quite a departure from the scientific analysis of Skinnerian psychology. Roger's humanism is not concerned with the actual process of cognitive learning since, he feels, if the context for learning is created properly, then, learners will learn everything they need to. The teacher as a facilitator must therefore provide the nurturing context for learning and not see his mission as one of rather programmatically feeding students, quantities of knowledge which they subsequently devour.(1980)

Moskowitz's first emphasis is that "Humanistic education takes into consideration that learning is affected by how students feel about themselves"(12). It is concerned with educating the whole person- the intellectual and the emotional dimensions (11). Her second emphasis is on bringing out uniqueness of each individual.

Many humanistic methodologies in language teaching and learning were introduced as early as the 1970s. They were the Total Physical Response, the silent way, Community Language Learning and Suggestopedia. In the 1970s, these methodologies remained as theories, but now they are being carefully put into practice.

The Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method developed by Dr. James J. Asher and is based on the premise that the human brain has the biological capacity to acquire any natural language including the sign language of the deaf. Just as an infant who acquires first language by physically responding to its parents speeches, one can acquire a second language too following this approach. The teacher taking the role of the parent helps the learners to get motivated easily and their self-confidence is boosted. This method is an excellent humanistic method of language teaching and learning only at the beginner level and miserably proves to be failure at the advanced level.

Suggestopedia is another humanistic teaching method developed by a Bulgarian psychotherapist, Georgi Lozanov claims that, by this method, a language can be learned three to five times faster than by the traditional teaching methods. This method is based on modern understanding of how the brain works and how we learn most effectively. Much of the learning relies on music, games, puzzles etc.

These and many other methods involving humanistic approaches are being developed to foster second language acquisition especially English in this global world. Till recently the goal of every English teacher was to develop student's communicative competence. Educationists today stress the importance of moral values and social identities associated with language use in the society.

Man is the most intellectual being among all the creatures that are born on the planet Earth. He needs knowledge on par with the growing technology which is fast pacing due to modernization. As Swami Vivekananda says, "Education is the manifestation of perfection

already in man.” Education is the light that shows the mankind the right direction to surge. Knowledge in the name of education has to be imparted through innovative methods but not conventional and traditional methods. Hence, a learner can meet the needs of an employer which is not possible at present as there is mismatch between the educational outcome and the requirements of the employers.

As conventional and traditional methods of Lecture method and Grammar Translation Methods are too old, they should be superseded by novice methods of 21st century. Basically, teaching must include two major components of sending and receiving information. Actually, if teacher could come down to the level of students, the primary purpose of teaching is fulfilled. But, keeping in track until the whole teaching programme is over is a burning issue. Due to globalization, the world is changing rapidly, hence a teacher has to advance and update his/her knowledge to meet the demands of changing era.

So, whatever be the methodology adopted by the teacher to suit the needs of his/her students, a teacher with a humanistic approach open-heartedly shares with his/her students his/her wonder and fascination in learning to remember, to understand, to think and to learn. He/she questions and through his/her quiet questioning teaches the learners how to question thoughtfully.

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