

Primary School Teacher as Mediator of Learners' Autonomy in English Language Classroom of Pakistan

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Abstract

The paper investigates the teachers' role as a mediator of learners' autonomy in English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom at primary level in the remote rural setting of Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa Pakistan. At primary level students learn English language more quickly if proper mediation or assistance is provided to approach the potential level of learning. The role of the teacher as a mediator in English Language teaching "is concerned with helping learners to become autonomous, to take control of their own learning, with the fundamental aim of enabling them to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers" (Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 68) which helps in learning English language in a better way. To investigate the study, observation based data of teachers (collected through observation sheet) were collected focusing on 12 criteria of Feuerstein's Mediation Learner Experience (MLE). The data reveal a lack of professionalism in the realization SLO based curriculum. Teachers were also found lacking skills in mediating for learning in the classroom. The results are significant in pointing at the need for providing special training to the teacher as a mean of mediator in the English classroom.

Key words: Socio cultural theory, Mediation, Role of the teacher as a mediator, Feuerstein's Mediation

Introduction

As the traditional method of teaching which is teacher-centered is now diminishing and student-centered is taking place increasingly. At the beginning of 21st century, the roles of teachers have changed provided new ways of learning to students, enabling them to actively participate in activities that promote positive integration with the society and thus they are able to explore new worlds (Tseng, 1999). The socio cultural theory of learning of Vogotsky (1987) plays a significant role in lessening the reliance on traditional ways of instruction. The mediation is an aspect of socio cultural theory which concerns the learning process of child from socio-cultural interaction with peers, parents, teachers and society. Mediation facilitates students in learning the language in an effective way (Williams & Burden, 2000). Furthermore, the instructor plays his part as a "facilitator" or "mediator" which is helpful in learning target SLO's of the syllabus (Williams and Burden, 1997). A teacher helps students in their social and cognitive

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development by performing the role of mediator. Mediation plays an effective role in language learning which encourages the learner to learn in a friendly environment. In this respect, the teacher's role as a mediator should take significance in language instruction at primary level in Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

Mustafa (2012, p. 26) argues that, "Two important sub-sets of national policy on education have been the National Curriculum 2006 and the National Textbooks Policy 2007. The 2006 curriculum was developed by the Ministry of Education and is considered the first curriculum to have clearly identified students learning outcomes' (SLOs)". The Director of Curriculum and Teaching Education (DCTE, 2006) has initiated some reforms in the English syllabus to provide quality education in KPK province.

1. Reading and thinking skills have been introduced, in which students/learners are motivated to find and comprehend an assortment of content kinds through assignments. Students are persuaded to pursue various critical thinking methodologies focusing perception, familiarity and satisfaction. Syllabus helps in distinguishing digraphs, quiet letters and articulation of problematic words.
2. Communication skills may be presented with the assistance of various kinds of dialogues in the context of distinctive social circumstances. Restricted etymological types of correspondence and communication, such as statements of regret, invitation and directions are included besides role plays and short stories in a dialogue form to maximize learning opportunity.
3. Formal and lexical features such as constructing vocabulary, grammar (its construction, syntactic functions and punctuation) are added in the new English syllabus.

Despite reforms in curriculum, teachers' lack of qualification and training as they are inconsistent in applying effective methods and strategies because most of the time they ignore the essential steps in application of these methodologies. This makes the learning environment unfriendly for the students (Alexander, 2008). Teachers feel hurdles in process of mediation in the classroom in the rural areas of K.P.K province. Rote learning is still part of these schools which are a big hindrance in achieving required learning outcomes of the curriculum (Ghulam, 2012). The paper, therefore, explores the gap between curriculum and teachers' role in the classroom of the rural areas of K.P.K.

Research Question

This research explores the role of teacher as mediator at primary level in the rural areas of K.P.K. The paper focuses to find answer to: *What are the roles of a teacher as a mediator in the English classroom in Pakistan?*

Literature Review

Children learn from society, colleagues, educators, and surrounding these an essential part in developing the cognition of children. Vygotsky's (1978) proposed "socio-cultural theory" where he established the interdependence of learning and social context. He proposed that this relation matures in two steps: one being "intermental" and the second being "intramental". The first step is generalized understanding of the external socially embedded realities by the young learner, and the second one emerges when each learner produces individualized nuances in the general. Four areas are important for the emergence of the socio-cultural competence: mediation, regulation, scaffolding and ZPD (Zonal Proximal Development) (Vygotsky, 1978). This work focuses the emergence of the first area, i.e. mediation and assesses the role of teacher.

Mediation

"Mediation theory has played a central role in social constructivist framework" (Sun, 2005, p.6), which "is concerned with helping learners to become autonomous, to take control of their own learning, with the fundamental aim of enabling them to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers" (Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 68). According to the Vygotsky (1978) an individual has an indirect relation to society and his surroundings. The low level mental procedures like oblivious consideration, unintended reaction and unconstrained tribute have straight human/world connection. Interestingly, the creating procedure which is high mental level has an optional connection to society and the external world. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) make sense of richly, a man/world connection which intervenes in nature in figure 1.

The mediate nature of the human / world relationship (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 62).

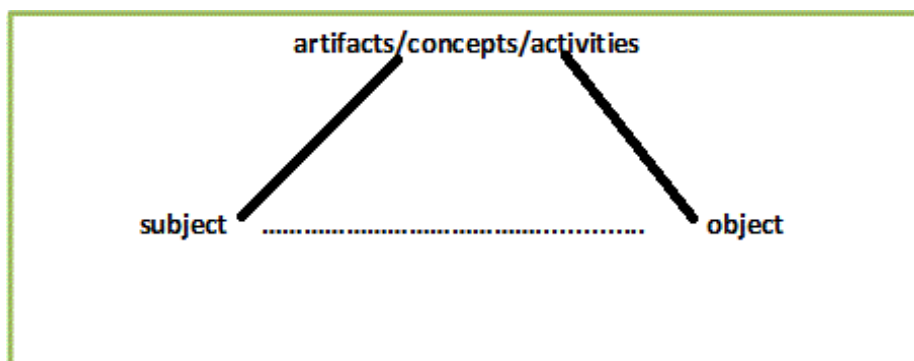


Figure 1: Individual's Realisation of the World

Lantof & Thorne represent the indirect or mediated relation with arrows and direct relation with dots in figure 2. Aforementioned figure can be formulated with the classroom environment as follows.

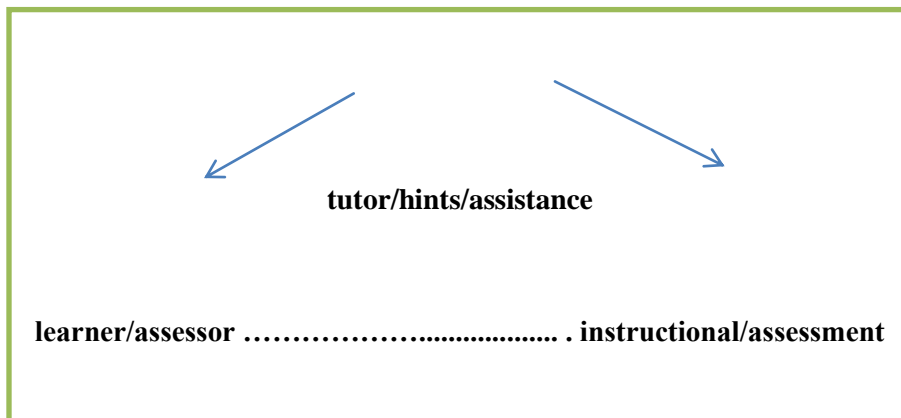


Figure 2 reveals that teacher works as a mediator between learner and instructional or assessment objectives. The teacher tries to enhance existing learner's ability to a new and higher level of development through the process of mediation. In first stage teacher tries to find out the gap between student's primary level and its potential level and then mediate to fill the gap (Lantolf & Thorne (2006).

The Role of the Teacher as Mediator

Sternberg & Grigorenko (2002, p. 29) viewed that "teacher/assessor's conventional attitude of neutrality is replaced by an atmosphere of teaching and helping". According to the above statement teacher is no more neutral agent, but acts as a helper or assistant in the class. The teacher provides aids with leading questions and hints to uplift the learner's primary level to potential level (Poehner, 2008). Only need/gap assessment in mediation is not sufficient, appropriate support is necessary for effective mediation to achieve the best results (Poehner & Lantolf (2010). Mediation should be part of learning process during participation/ completion of learning tasks when learner needs assistance and it should be withdrawn when learner shows the sign of doing a task independently.

Teachers as Mediators Developing Collaborative Settings

The collaborative aspect of learning setting is not only necessary for consolidation of the formative factors in language direction; it also acts as an amazingly basic field to help and energize the students' learning process (Brown, 2001). With reference to social-constructivism, learning settings are places for student's boundless trying and independent learning. Friendly and collaborative environment give maximum chance to learners to maximize their learning process. Instructor ought not to restrict their abilities just to giving activities and empowering correspondences (Brown, 2001). They create fabulous learning settings sensible to participations, where students get educators' assistance, and also collaborate with each other (Brown, 2001). Ideally, students make sense of how to achieve their individual learning targets by using a magnificent arranged variety of instruments and

valuable sources to fulfill a task (Cheng, 2004). In the context of teacher substitute and understudy instinctive sufficiency, the educator as center individual is in this way foreseen would include the going with points in association with wise condition.

Teacher as a Mediator Producing Outstanding Classroom Circumstances

Proper arrangement of the classroom helps in efficient achievement of learning objectives (Brown, 2001). The teacher needs to be mindful of the classroom setting at the start of learning session. To begin with, he/she must organize seating of the students so the arrangement support instead of hindering the planned activities and interaction in the language classroom (Brown, 2001). How seats are arranged depend on the nature of planned activities. They may be clustered in groups, arranged in circle (where teacher stand in the middle) or evenly spaced matrix (to focus on individual tasks). All such arrangement must allow sufficient space for activities and ensure enough proximity among students of a group so that can easily interact (Brown, 2001; Wei, 2004). The setup of separate tables helps in organizing an activity of groups of small size. In such a group teacher can easily participate as mediator (Ur, 2000). The classes with small size of students also allow the teacher to form “circle” or “horseshoe” arrangement of seats where all students face each other and multi-point interaction can easily take place (Brown, 2001; Cheng, 2004). This setting can be used to engage the whole class in an interaction activity that allows the students to see all and be seen by them (allowing face to face communication). The table with two seats allow teacher to promote pair-work tasks (Brown, 2001; Cheng, 2004). The seating arrangement as discussed here allows teacher a smooth continuum of the tasks. The grouping, that is added by the non-traditional arrangement of seats increase the level of interest of learners and help in individual as well as group based communication and learning of English language. A heterogeneous class in terms of proficiency level of learner benefits from such grouping where the teacher can titrate the difficulty level of English language according to the median competence of the constituted groups where sufficient homogeneity emerges (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 2004).

Teacher as a Mediator Generating a Pleasant Affective Atmosphere

A glad, bright, law based, friendly, and cheerful environment will undoubtedly bring students a conviction that all is good and satisfying, which adds to undertaking movement and achievement for the accompanying reasons (Fisher, 2005; Wei, 2004). To begin with, it appears to build up abundant compatibility between the instructor and student based on shared regard and trust. The instructor and student ought to constitute a network, cooperatively building a learning air filled with concordance, correspondence, and division based system (Wei, 2004). Second, an appropriate way to deal with assessment might be foreordained. Both intemperate acclaim and feedback negatively affect students' scholarly advancement (Brown, 2001; Fisher, 2005). Compelling recognition is helpful to the students' acknowledgment of feedback (Fisher, 2005; Wei, 2004). In such manner, Brown (2001) reasons that compelling recognition from the educator is subjected to seven standards as takes after: (a) showing genuine joy and concerns, (b) consolidating oral and non-oral acclaim, (c)

explaining on points of interest of students' accomplishments, (d) being gone for students' careful endeavors, (e) owing students' prosperity to their endeavors, (f) developing students' natural inspiration, and (g) abstaining from interfering with understudies' continuous communications. At last, it is up to the instructor to choose a focused or synergistic instructional style on the ground of particular circumstances in the EFL classroom. Competition style cooperation adds to incitement of students' drives and energy, yet it effectively achieves the disappointment of connections by virtue of this opposition (Brown, 2001). Consequently, students ought to be educated that their individual execution is critical to the satisfaction of a general assignment focus in the opposition style cooperation and that they should achieve learning errands with the guide of competition and coordinated effort (Feuerstein, 1980). Cooperation style intuitive learning produces co-agent connections expecting partners to help each other by means of communications as learning objectives are accomplished by sharing and consummating their individual points of view.

Feuerstein's Mediation

Feuerstein (1980) introduces a new way of mediation process and he believes that a teacher could mediate the learners in so many ways. He introduces 12 criteria for the evaluation of the teacher's mediation process and names mediated learner experience (MLE). A teacher can use these 12 criteria in the language learning classroom in different ways (Seng et al., 2003). The first "three criteria are also considered universal, in the sense that they can be present in all races, ethnic groups, cultural entities, and socioeconomic strata" (Seng et al., 2003, p. 36). By contrast, "the remaining nine criteria are considered responsible for the process of diversification of humankind in terms of cognitive styles, need systems, types of skills mastered, and the structure of knowledge", and "these nine criteria are also considered situational because they need not always be present in every MLE" (Seng et al., 2003, p. 36).

Methodology

Participants

To investigate the role of the teacher as a mediator in the classroom 15 schools have been selected; teachers at primary level schools in rural areas of Galyait district Abbottabad. From each school, two teachers were taken to investigate my study. Teachers were about 40-45 years of age, having 15-20 years teaching experience at primary level. The sample size of 30 teachers was taken to complete the study.

Instrument

The qualitative research method is selected to investigate the role of the teacher in the English classroom. The observation sheet grounded on the parameter of Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (1980) was used to investigate the teacher mediation process through classroom interaction. An observation sheet is designed according to

Likert type scale. The observation sheet comprised of 12 statements which are all about the role of the teacher as a mediator in the classroom in EFL situations at primary grade.

Procedure

In order to investigate the role of teacher as a mediator, researcher visited ten schools of Galyait region district Abbottabad K.P.K. At the initial stage researcher met the P.H.S.T (Primary School Head Teacher) of these schools and got recommendation for classroom observation. After that, the teachers of the schools were observed while teaching English lessons in different grades from 1 to 5. Before observation process all the teachers were intimated that the purpose of the observation is not to check their performance, but evaluate the process of mediation on their part. I informed the teachers to perform naturally as they do in their daily lesson and no need to be extra formal so that the current research may be helpful in reforming the curriculum and introducing new ways of teacher development. After completing the observation process, the data were analyzed by using SPSS.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, SPSS has been used. The data has been analyzed according to feedback of observation made in the classroom. The observation sheet was containing 12 statements (marked A1-A12) of **Feuerstein's MLE criteria** to investigate the role of the teacher as a mediator. Respondents were observed on scale 1 to 5, representing *never, sometimes, often, usually, and always* given against each statement. Data was analyzed by Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (S.D), whereas N is the total number of participants. Statements were arranged in descending order according to their Mean value. The statements with high Mean values represent a high tendency other than having a low Mean value.

The statements A1 to A3 have Mean value ($M > 3$) which represent teachers' positive attitude in ***Shared intention, Sharing and Belief in positive outcomes***. Statements from A4 to A7 have mean value ($M > 2$) which show less tendency of teachers as mediators in perspective of ***A sense of competence, Control of own behavior, Goal-setting and Challenge***. The statements from A8-A12 have mean value ($M < 2$) present least tendency of teachers in ***Awareness of change, Purpose beyond the here and now, Significance, Individuality and a sense of belonging***.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Feuerstein's MLE Criteria

F	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
A1	Make guidelines clear when giving an assignment to your students.	30	3.20	.887
A2	Instruct students to work co-operatively.	30	3.07	.980
A3	Help students if they continuously try to tackle an issue, they will discover an answer.	30	3.00	.759
A4	Help students to build up feeling of trust in their capacity to learn.	30	2.83	.791
A5	Show students the procedures they have to learn successfully.	30	2.73	.907
A6	Instruct students how to set their own particular objectives in learning.	30	2.50	.894
A7	Help their learners to set challenges for themselves and to meet those challenges.	30	2.43	.629
A8	Help your students to monitor changes in themselves.	30	1.30	.630
A9	Explain to students how doing a learning activity will help them later on.	30	1.40	.563
A10	Explain to students why they are doing a particular activity	30	1.37	.615
A11	Help students' progress as individuals.	30	1.33	.661
A12	Foster in students a sense of belonging to a classroom community.	30	1.00	.000
	Valid N (list wise)	30		

Finding

According to analyzed data, more than normal teachers are practicing the role mediator in a better way in *Shared intention, Sharing and Belief in positive outcomes*. Most of the teachers know making clear instruction before assigning any task in classroom which provides a clear way to complete tasks. In teachers' role in perspective of sharing, most of them know how to divide the class into groups and pairs to maximize their level of sharing. In the teachers' role "belief in positive outcomes" data reveal that teachers are better in helping the learners to set challenges for themselves and to meet those challenges is positive to empower their learning.

In next roles of teachers as mediator like *A sense of competence, Control of own behavior, Goal-setting and Challenge*, they show less tendency. In these four roles teachers need more improvement to play a better part in the classroom. In sense of competence teacher always tries to develop the sense of confidence in their feeling of learning new tasks. Positive feedback is one of the ways which could help the students to

be more confident in learning process. Applauding, reinforcement and positive feedback help the students in better learning. In contrast, negative feedback discourages the sense of confidence in feeling and stops the opportunities of cognitive development. In control of own behavior, teachers need more improvement in encouraging students to become autonomous learners by self-controlling their learning. In the objective setting process, the role of teachers as mediator shows less tendency in training students how to build up achievable targets and to find approaches for acknowledging them. In challenge, the teacher helps learners to develop an internal need to confront the challenges and to seek for new challenges in life. The teacher has to encourage reluctant and shy in the classroom to participate at their maximum. The data shows, teachers need more training to improve the aspect of the challenge in the perspective of a mediator.

The last five statements of **Feuerstein's MLE criteria** in which teachers show the least tendency in practicing the role of the mediator are: *Awareness of change, Purpose beyond the here and now, Significance, Individuality and a sense of belonging*. Williams & Burden (2000, p. 76) focused on helping student's self-access changes in themselves "as equally important to foster the ability to self-evaluate if we are to produce autonomous learners". Analyzed data show that teachers need more improvement in developing the sense of awareness of change in their character to approach maximum outputs. In addition, teachers need more training in improving their role as mediator other aspects like in purpose beyond the here and now, significance, Individuality and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

In conclusion of study, the role of mediator in EFL situations at the primary grade in rural areas of KP, it is concluded that teachers failed to mediate their students at primary level. During observation, it has been noticed that teachers have lack of knowledge of mediation role in EFL situation. Besides no proper training is provided to improve the role of teachers as mediator. So it is proposed that teacher should rethink his role from the traditional way of teaching to mediator to bring innovative progress in students' attitude in the English learning process.

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Observation sheet for classroom interactions analysis of English teachers at primary level in District Abbottabad Galyat K.P.K.

Teacher's Bio

Sex	
Age	
Experience	
Academic Qualification	
Professional Qualification	
Designation	
School Code	

Observer Name _____ Date ____/____/____

Time _____ Subject English Grade _____

For each of the following 12 statements, 1 for never to 5 for always that most closely agrees with routine teaching practices.

1= Never; 2= Sometimes; 3= Often; 4= Usually; 5= Always

How often teacher does: Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

Code No		Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Shared intention	Make guidelines unmistakable when gives an assignment to your students.					
2	Significance	Explain to students why they are completing a particular activity.					
3	Purpose beyond the here and now	Explain to students how doing a learning activity will help them later on.					
4	A sense of competence	Help students to build up feeling of trust in their capacity to learn.					
5	Control of own behavior	Show students the procedures they have to learn successfully.					
6	Goal-setting	Instruct students how to set their own particular objectives in learning.					
7	Challenge	Help learners to set challenges for themselves and to meet those challenges.					
8	Awareness of change	Help your students to monitor changes in themselves.					
9	A belief in positive outcomes	Help students if they continuously try to tackle an issue, they will discover an answer.					
10	Sharing	Instruct students to work co-operatively.					
11	Individuality	Help student progress as individuals.					
12	A sense of belonging	Foster in students a sense of belonging to a classroom community.					