

Pragmatic Analysis of Classroom Interaction and Role of Stakeholders in the Indian Education System

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Abstract

An education system is a well-coordinated mechanism focusing on the upliftment of the learners. Various stakeholders like teachers, learners, society, administrators, parents, alumni etc. play a vital role in deciding the fate of the education system in any setup. In a multilingual and multicultural nation like India, the need for a better and more meaningful discourse among the different stakeholders is of utmost importance. It is in view of this context; that the present paper aims to analyze the model of classroom interaction in relation to language teaching and learning in the first part. The second part of the paper explores and establishes the relationship between different stakeholders to cultivate a propitious milieu for mutual development and better understanding. The paper ends with certain constructive suggestions to strengthen the educational scenario in India.

Keywords: Model of Classroom Interaction, Stakeholders, Pedagogy, Language Teaching

A classroom is a space where students and teachers interact with each other to attain a common goal. In Indian classrooms usually, classroom learning is teacher-centric and dictation oriented. The teacher's duty in the classroom is to manage the flow of interaction and promote a lively interaction not only between teacher and students but also between different groups of students as peer learning. The teacher should either prepare activities of such nature which initiate an interaction or work like a catalyst in the class where ideas can be thrown among the students to discuss them further. Moreover, the teacher should also identify the individual or group of students who are not participating and motivate them to join the interaction in a class by adding easy examples or observations which the unwilling individual or group find interesting.

Role-play or games in the class is another way of promoting class interaction. Whenever the teacher finds the dampness in the mutual interaction, the teacher can add a few more lively examples or ideas to promote learning in the process. Teachers should always praise students and give them feedback about their participation so that students always get motivated. I use the distribution of chocolates in my classes for almost all the students which work like a goading pin for the students. The overall aim of the teacher should be to lessen the classroom anxiety which always creates hurdles and result in less or no participation of the students in classroom teaching and learning. The teacher should always be tolerant in the classroom setting and make students realize that they are equally important in the classroom structure (Gruenewald and Pollak).

Language Learning and Classroom Interaction

Language learning is skill-based learning which is possible when all four aspects of language are taken care of – listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW). In other words, language learning is always context-bound rather than merely content bound. The classroom interaction in a language classroom serves two purposes- it allows the students to check their growth and boosts their self-confidence to learn a new language. It makes the learning very interesting and teachers also have a sense of satisfaction to see the interaction taking place in the classroom. The students realize that by taking active participation in interaction in class, which is mostly situation based, they express views that they never thought about before the conversation started. The learning moves forward and develops a sense of community learning with classroom interaction in any language class. The instant practice model helps them to have a sense of peer learning. They learn new expressions and vocabulary which is useful for everyday communication (Rex and Schiller).

Moreover, if the students are participating in a language learning classroom, they never need extra classes or coaching for separate spoken classes. A sense of satisfaction permeates the classroom. Interaction in the language classroom also foregrounds the practical aspect of learning more than the theoretical one.

Self-Reflexivity of “The Last Lesson”

One of the best ways to foreground the importance of classroom interaction in the classroom is to choose the right material and method of teaching. I want to use here the method of applying self-reflexivity as the appropriate use of the short story – “The Last Lesson” by the great French short story writer Alphonse Daudet provides the opportunity to understand the notion of interaction in a moment of crisis and urgency. Set in the background of the historical war between Prussia and France, this short story provides a self-reflexive and penetrating look at the notion of the importance of classroom interaction and analysis. The story rotates around the theme of the importance of language, ethnicity, nationality, and identity; yet if one reads the story from the perspective of the relationship between teacher and student, one can notice the importance of classroom management where a teacher is qualified to appeal emotionally to the students to take the whole process of learning more seriously.

At a very critical juncture in the short story, where the Germans have already invaded the two villages of France, Alsace-Lorraine, the teacher addresses all the stakeholders of the classroom where he is giving his last lesson by interacting with the students in the presence of their elders so that every stakeholder understands the importance of learning and avoid procrastination in life. By using this story in my language classes, I can deliver and exhibit the importance of classroom analysis and classroom interaction with the element of emotion.

The Background and Role of the Teacher Language Classroom

All teachers start out as learners at some point in time. I did too and continue to learn each day. I can comfortably use Hindi and English to listen, speak, reading, and writing. To explain my experiences as a language learner, I am going to pick ‘English’ as an example, which

I started learning very late into my journey as a learner.¹ English was once a foreign language to me. Now, I find myself thinking / speaking / writing in English, reading English and listening to English more often than ever before. I am very comfortable using the language, at least the way I know how to use it, though I am still more comfortable referring to 'Hindi' as my first language. When I started out, I and some of my classmates pretty much came from the same socio-cultural background, with the same amount of exposure to the language and were schooled using the same methods. Still, where we now stand in terms of our mastery of the language differs - while I've left some of them behind in terms of 'communicative competence' as well as 'linguistic competence', some have outshined me. So, I believe every learner acquires a language differently though might be instructed by the same teacher. What makes a difference here is certainly the importance of classroom interaction and its various manifestations. The interaction differs from subject to subject. As an English language teacher, the right selection of the interaction model makes a difference (Parikh; Seed house).

Firstly, a language teacher is more of a facilitator than an instructor. When I initially tried to acquire the language 'English', I struggled till I sat myself down and invested time to tutor myself. I had to read a lot, try to recognize the rules of the language, build my vocabulary, practice and then read again some more before I was in any position to understand the language, let alone use it for listening/comprehending, reading/comprehending, speaking intelligibly or writing coherently. Hence, I feel that to learn a language, every learner needs to transform himself/herself into a teacher because when you learn something from a teacher's point of view, you learn twice as much. As a teacher, a learner is focused on learning a language, a subject or a skill with the point of view of being able to teach others, which means we try to understand and apply as much as we can. Based on my experience as a learner, I, as a language teacher, try to guide my learners towards discovering their personal learning self-tutoring methods and applying them effectively.

Secondly, after acquiring the basics of the language, when I went on to do my PhD in "Literary Theory and Criticism" under renowned scholars, I learned even better from their experience and the exposure. So, as a language teacher, I also believe it is equally important to create the right kind of environment that cultivates learning in my classrooms.

Lastly, different teachers using different techniques to teach me when I was a learner, has taught me that we won't be able to keep our audience involved in our classes unless we apply different methodologies to keep them guessing and create as well as quench their thirst for creative learning, for them to acquire the language skills, which can be applied by them in their day-to-day life, in their careers, and in many more avenues. In five words – "evolve and keep it dynamic".

Importance of Negotiation in Language Classroom

In a language class as well as in almost all the other subject classes, most of the decisions related to knowledge transfer are predominantly made by the teacher. Negotiation is

¹From my tenth grade – as one subject, though I didn't learn it in any real sense till my BA [in Sanskrit] or more appropriately till my MA [in English].

rarely seen in language learning classes unless it's language training in an integrative interaction model. In the past and now, I've always encouraged my learners to involve, interact, voice out their opinions about the class, and share their ideas. I have sometimes also made decisions like what should be covered on a particular day though never postponed a particular class, based on students' moods.

I do believe negotiation to some degree is important in language learning because language teaching cannot be effective without the involvement of our learners. Personally, I've seen very good results by devoting 10-15 minutes of my class time to teaching my learners something they've requested and are interested in, apart from the predesigned agenda. This technique makes them look forward to your classes and they are predisposed to paying attention to the rest of what you must deliver (Seed house; Mahn). This also makes them more interactive than usual, so it is possible to work on their fluency as well. I often use this element of surprise in my classroom interaction with the students.

As teachers, we must ask our students to share their perspectives – What are their expectations from the class? What are the things they'd like to learn? Do they like the class? What would make things more interesting for them? What changes would they like their feedback on how things are done at present? Are they comfortable? Post this, we should utilize their feedback to improve our procedures, delivery methods, training aids used in the classroom, etc. wherever possible. This will help us grow as a teacher. However, I've never seen it fit to lose the chain of command or the final decision-making authority in my classroom because as a teacher we are accountable for what happens in our classrooms. As I have mentioned the role of learner and teacher as the active stakeholders in the process of classroom interaction in the first half; in the second half of my paper, I want to focus on the relationship of school to the broader society and locate it in the context of classroom interaction.

Relationship of School to Society

Suppose we perceive the idea of a school. In that case, as an institutional framework meant to disseminate knowledge, both the receptive and expressive horizons of the school must have explicit or implicit interactions with society. What do I mean by receptive horizon brings forth the image of society as a group of cultured people who want to get an education and hence send their sons or daughters as potential students to the school. The expressive horizon would return the favour and the educated students would question, resist, and transform the notion, values, and the whole ethos of society they come from. The power of the school as an institution creates social knowledge, and society as a body of certain cultures and values demands something substantial from the school. I see the image of the teacher as a common member and a link between school and society here. Every teacher is a member of a community or society and hence carries certain values with him/her at the same time stands in a class to teach to various diversified members of different societies who are present in a classroom as students.

The school and society interact and encounter at various levels. The first and foremost interaction manifests in a classroom as a learning experience between teachers and students. Every classroom in this sense stands out as a microcosm of society. There is a sense of responsibility towards a society which every school needs to uphold and exercise to the best of

its resources. Every society also presents itself as a context, both geographical and cultural, and as a testing ground for the success of any institution like school. At the time of teacher-parent meetings, admission and career counseling, public talks, inter-school activities, annual functions, various other cultural or academic activities, strikes etc. the school-society relationship can be observed taking various forms and having different outcomes. It also enriches and broadens the notion of classroom interaction beyond the classroom (Vaish; Parikh).

Since the relationship between school and society is intrinsically inalienable, it certainly helps and hinders students' and teachers' overall learning experience. Both students and teachers are active members of society outside of the classroom. They have their specific value systems which must and do interact and learn from each other. The learning experience gets modified, in both negative and positive ways, when a student or a teacher returns to society after school. In this way, the social public space provides a testing lab to check the feasibility and utility of classroom learning. If a school fails to provide fruitful education, society also resists and can subvert the power which is exercised by the school authorities. The strikes or an impasse between teachers and parents can be cited here as an example of such incidents.

Moreover, the economical aspect of this relationship is also fundamental in developing a better understanding of the whole process. On the one hand, an affluent society demands a high standard from the school, on the other, a costly school latently seems unaffordable to an average society. This ambiguous relationship ultimately affects the learning experience. The experience that a teacher learns from society, as an integral part of it, bolsters his classroom teaching and in return, the students achieve many things in their life based on their learning, both in and out of the classroom. It is my personal experience that both teachers and students and school and society, in general, must be tolerant of each other. There should be a sense of check and balances but it should neither be motivated by any personal grudges nor channelizing towards blind comparisons between different schools.

Interaction with Parents

As a teacher, I think, the most fruitful encounter and interaction is with parents. Since I am working with a government university, my job as a teacher is to send regular feedback to the parents at the end of every semester. I usually meet parents at the time of admission or in teacher-parent meetings. The interaction with parents is always two-fold, I give feedback, discuss a particular student's growth and problems and parents share their expectations and point out the personal characteristics of a student which is necessary to know them better but we don't know it while teaching in the classroom.

As a part of some formation committees, like fee structure, admission policies and personal development of students, I had interactions with policymakers in board rooms. To be very honest, it is mostly a servile unilateral discourse in which we as teachers participate, slavishly. There are fewer discussions and more impositions from the policy maker's side. Though they take our review and feedback every year, as teachers, we are not allowed to speak on decision-making in the meetings. I think we could have had a better say in the policy-making of a university as potential decision-makers because we understand it better on a personal level.

It is at the time of syllabus formation, departmental meetings, prospectus designing, public lectures, conferences etc. I interact often with academic staff. It is like meeting a fraternity and giving and taking from each other in respect of knowledge. Besides academic issues, we also talk about the faculty development dimension. These interactions are also directed toward students because we give each other valuable advice and feedback on teaching as well as the growth of students. We plan an academic calendar and explore the possibilities of future conferences, orientation programs, refresher programs etc.

The interaction with students and parents is most valuable for me as a teacher. I have interactions with them both in and off the class. Classroom interaction is most fruitful because it allows me to improve myself and gives me feedback from my students. We all learn from each other during the course. I am also a class mentor, so I have to interact with students from different classes who I am not teaching. It is rather informal and friendly where they share their problems with me and I try to resolve them with help of parents, other teachers and sometimes by bringing the higher authorities into the picture (Gruenewald and Pollak; Moore).

The interaction with the principal is also very formal. We interact mostly by discussing the classroom teaching methodologies, course files, issues related to attendance of the students, academic events, departmental meetings etc. All of the teachers are usually part of a few committees. Since I am the coordinator of student committees; my interaction with him is also about organizing academic and cultural events on and off campus. The principal also works as a link between us and policymakers. I also interact with him to get his feedback about my classes because he often visits the classes when I am teaching.

Interaction with Broader Fraternity

The public is a very amorphous term in academics. Parents, academic staff members and other faculty members, principals, students, media etc. – all are part of the public. The way I am using the term public is restricted to the people who are not directly associated with the college but indirectly earn from us. I am talking about the shopkeepers outside of our college, workers, society members, hostel owners etc. They form a public space for me where sometimes we get information about our students, receive severe criticism about policies of our campus, face stark comparison with other colleges. Still, mostly it is full of popular gossip, which as a teacher I neglect.

Constructive Suggestions

After a detailed interaction analysis, both in and off the classroom with different stakeholders, I now want to propose some constructive suggestions to make the relationship more robust and diversified. Following are some of the suggestions from my experience which could have improved my interactions with different bodies-

- I. There should be more public events where all the sectors of academics- policy makers, teachers, parents, and students- come on a platform and get involved in a healthy criticism to improve institutions.
- II. Policymaker body should include more teachers and fewer trustees to improve the quality of education.

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- III. There should be more constructive interactions between academic staff of different colleges so that we can learn from each other's experiences and make our teaching methodologies better.
 - IV. There should be facility of feedback form filled by the parents of the students to keep an eye on the growth of the students as well as improve education in general.
 - V. Policy makers should interact directly with students to know their personal problems on campus, let it be regarding infrastructure, academics etc.
 - VI. Along with students, teachers should be motivated and included in the social welfare programs to interact more with the public.
 - VII. With help from NGOs or NSS, teachers can and should interact with the public more and on a regular level to disseminate knowledge and spread social awareness.
 - VIII. I almost had interaction with all the groups, but with policymakers, I had the least interaction. If at all I have, it is very servile and mechanical. I guess one of the reasons for this is because I work in a private organization where we as teachers don't have much say in policy formation.

By adopting a vibrant approach toward different models and manifestations of interaction, various stakeholders can provide a suitable environment for the learners to learn and grow.

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