

COMPREHENDING ‘ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY’ – LEARNING AND PEDAGOGY

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Learning: Introduction

‘Learning’, in the simplest form, can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge. The main aim of education is the harmonious and all round development of the learners. Knowledge about the learner becomes as important as that of the learning process. Experts have stated the five major areas covered in education to make the teaching–learning process interesting, inspirational and effective, they are:– i) The Learner, ii) The Learning Process, iii) The Learning Situation, iv) The Teaching Situation, and v) The Evaluation of Learning Performance.

i) The Learner - Speaking about the learner we can say that no two persons are exactly alike. There is individual difference. Pupils always differ in their level of intelligence, aptitudes, likes and dislikes and in other propensities and potentialities. Keeping this in consideration, different minds are to be trained by the teacher accordingly. An environment should be created to help the teacher to cater to the individual differences of the children to promote successful learning.

ii) The Learning Process – Teaching and learning go side by side. All education depends upon the learning of new responses and the capacity of a human child to learn new responses. The nature of learning theories and types of learning are to be dealt accordingly in the aspects of different age levels and situation. The learners pass through different stages of development – infancy, childhood and adolescence, etc. Each development stage has its own characteristics. Further, in recent years, the importance of social behaviour has acquired a great significance. Therefore, the operations of group dynamics in classroom teaching-learning must be inculcated.

iii) Learning Situation – In simpler terms, learning situation can be illustrated as the understanding of the nature of the classroom learning. This is analysed to adapt and adjust the teaching according to the level of the learners. A teacher is teaching in a class but a large number of the students are unable to follow and understand the subject-matter which is being taught. This problem has thus to be identified and necessary rectification must be taken. It may be that the behaviour of the teacher is not conducive to learning. There may be many other explanations. In such a situation the teaching methodology or the instructional strategy may be changed accordingly.

iii) Teaching Situation - Further, there has been several new approaches, principles and techniques of teaching which are very helpful in eliminating many traditional practices which have become obsolete in the present context. Recent researches made in the field of educational psychology give us valuable suggestions regarding better methods of teaching and memorizing,

for developing desirable habits. For example, how the play-way and recreational methods turn learning into an interesting task.

iv) Evaluation of Learning Performance – To conduct research on educational problems and to enrich knowledge, the evaluation of learning process stands crucial in education. Further, the evaluation of learning performance helps to develop the competence in the following areas: a) Individual Growth and Development, b) The Process of Learning, c) Motivation, d) Personality, e) Individual differences and environment. The learning performance can be well evaluated with the help of survey and statistical records.

In addition to the points discussed above, there are three important aspects of “*Learning*”, they are: a) Curriculum construction, b) Measurement of learning outcomes c) The new Instructional technology and d) The use of innovation and projects.

a) Curriculum construction - Psychological principles are used in formulating curriculum for different stages. Attempts are made to provide subjects and activities in the curriculum which are in conformity to the needs of the students, their developmental characteristics, learning patterns and also needs of the society.

b) Measurement of Learning Outcomes – Quite recently reliable tests and instruments of mental measurements have been designed which are proving to be extremely useful in the field of education. We can quite easily measure mental capacities, basic intelligence, temperamental attitudes and special inclinations of learners on these findings. These measurements show that all the children differ and that every learner is a unique being. Thus we can identify the subject area where a particular learner is strong or weak and explore some other fields where such learner can flourish.

c) The new Instructional Technology - With a deeper insight in understanding the concept of ‘Learning’, we can say that by developing scientific attitude in educational practices we are enabling the process of learning to be more smooth and easy by making it more methodical, objective and rational. It has been experimentally proved that the use of audio-visual aids holds the attention and interests of the learner for a longer period and makes the difficult concepts more clear and learning becomes easier, faster and more lasting. Parrot-like memorisation no longer holds good.

d) The use of innovation and projects – For the improvement of the teaching-learning, several innovative ideas are being introduced. Some of the important innovations are microteaching, programmed instruction, meta-cognitive self-access and self-paced learning.

Pedagogy of Language Learning:

A considerable change in the behaviour of the organism is called learning. ‘Learning’ is a change in response or behaviour (modification, elimination or acquisition of responses involving some degree of performance) caused partly or wholly by conscious or unconscious experiences. This learning does not include physiological changes such as fatigue, temporary sensory

resistance or non functioning even after continued stimulation. As said by Skinner “Learning includes both acquisition and retention.

Meaning, Definition, Characteristics and Principles of Learning:

Meaning of ‘Learning’:

Learning is an important aspect of human life. It is a basic factor in education. Learning is a comprehensive term and includes varied activities and experiences which influences on the behaviour of individuals.

Concept of Learning:

Learning is a special form of mental activity in which the children respond to a stimulus in certain prescribed situation. This concept is based on stimulus and response psychology. S.R. Bond developed by Thorndike made use of certain laws of learning namely, readiness, exercise and effort.

“Learning” according to the latest view is based on biological concept. This view is called the organismic view. It is called the field theory of Learning. Learning occupies the root in the promotion of education. Learning is an enrichment of experience. In learning there is an interaction of the environment with the individual. The environment of man is very complex. His innate urges are not sufficient to cope with the same. Moreover, he has much more capacity of modifying his behaviour in new and changing situations. He learns from every reaction with environment itself therefore we may say that learning is modification through experience. Learning is change. It is an adjustment device. Psychologists however, differ on the concept of learning. Several attempts have been made to define learning. To have a comprehensive view of ‘Learning’, we can analyse some of the important definitions.

Definition of Learning:

According to the Guilford learning is change of behaviour, resulting from behaviour. In the words of Woodsworth, - *“Typically at least learning consist of doing something new, provided this something new is retained by the individual and reappears in his later activities”*.

According to Skinner, - *“Learning is both acquisitions and retention”*.

In the Views of Crow and Crow – Learning involves the acquisition of knowledge, habits and attitudes.

According to Gates, - *“Learning is modification of behaviour through experience”*.

Learning takes place on the cognitive and affective planes. Thus acquisition of knowledge is cognition, modification of emotion is affective, and acquisition of skills and habits is co native. In this way learning can be of various types.

General Characteristic Features of Learning:

The following are the general characteristic features of learning:

- i) Learning is progressive usage in behaviour
- ii) Learning is adjustment.

The following are the general characteristics of Learning:

a) Learning is progressive change in behaviour: Learning is progressive

change in behaviour. The individual reacts to situation. This sets in a cycle of experiences. Expenses modify behaviour. Modifications are not sudden, they are progressive.

b) Learning is adjustment: Learning involves adjustment of the individual to his environment. The individual must learn to adjust himself to the changes that take place around him.

c) Learning is growth: Learning must result in the growth of the child. An immature child is developed into a mature person through the process of learning.

d) Learning is organizing experience: Learning is not like adding one experience to the other; it is rather, organizing the new experience with the old ones, thus giving rise to a new form of behaviour. Thus, learning involves the proper organization of experiences in an intelligent manner. Experiences are gained at every moment of life. Learning is the other name of these experiences.

e) Learning is continuous: There are no dead ends to learning. One can go on learning irrespective of one's age. An organism needs learning (behavioural change) at every moment of life to adjust to new situations at every moment. He cannot sit idle at any time. Situations all the time force him for the acquisition of new learning.

f) Learning is purposeful: The more intense the purpose of the individual, the more rapid the learning. Lack of purpose in learning will hamper learning. Thus, purposeful learning is always more rapid and permanent.

g) Learning is need based: Much of the human learning is need-based. Individual's personal as well as social needs arouse the will to learn. Slowness or quickness of learning depends upon the intensity of the need. It is a matter of experience that near the examination children learn in an hour or so what they could not earlier learn in a normal day when the examination dates are far beyond.

h) Learning is universal: Both men and animals learn. Animals do not possess as much developed brain as human beings do, still they learn although the pace of learning is slow. Circus animals learn the tricks before they are persecuted for public show. Man learns at a quick pace although there are slow learners among human also.

i) Learning is active and creative: Learning is active and creative i.e. learning depends upon the active involvement of the learner. It is said that if the learner is not self active, he cannot learn.

It is, therefore, said that learning is the result of active involvement and experience from the sender and the receiver both.

j) Learning is retained through practice: 'Practice makes a man perfect', is an age old proverb, which is true and a must to retain learning. If practice is not made, learning will be forgotten and the nature of learning will no longer remain permanent. Thus, learning is acquisition and retention both.

k) Learning is goal directed process: Learning is purposeful activity. It is goal directed process. 'Learning', is not learning in actual sense. The individual by his inquisitive nature, tries to enquire, know and comprehend a particular concept to gain and acquire wisdom. Thus, learning is a focussed way to acquire knowledge.

1.3. Basic Process of Teaching and Learning:

Teaching – Learning process is the heart of education on which depends the fulfilment of the aims and objectives of education. It is most powerful instrument of education to bring about desired changes in the students. Teaching learning are related terms. In teaching – learning

process, the teacher, the learner, the curriculum and other variables are organised in a systematic way to attain some pre-determined goal.

Essential Aspects of the Teaching-Learning Process:

According to Diana Laurillard, there are four aspects of the teaching learning process:

- i. **Discussion** – between the teacher and learner.
- ii. **Interaction** – between the learner and some aspect of the world defined by the teacher.
- iii. **Adaptation** – of the world by the teacher and action by the learner.
- iv. **Reflection** – on the learner’s performance by both teacher and learner.

According to Burton:

- a) Teaching can become effective only by relating it to process of learning.
- b) Teaching objective cannot be realised without being related to learning situation.
- c) We may create and use teaching aids to create some appropriate learning situation.
- d) The strategies and devices of teaching may be selected in such a manner that the optimal objectives of learning area achieved.
- e) To understand principles, goals, objectives of education in right perspective.
- f) Appropriate learning situation condition may be created for congenial and effective teaching.

The locus of learning as per the Behaviourists, lies in the stimuli in external environment; and as per the Cognitivists, lies in internal mental process including insight, information processing, memory and perception; and thereafter, as per the Humanists it lies in Affective and Cognitive needs.

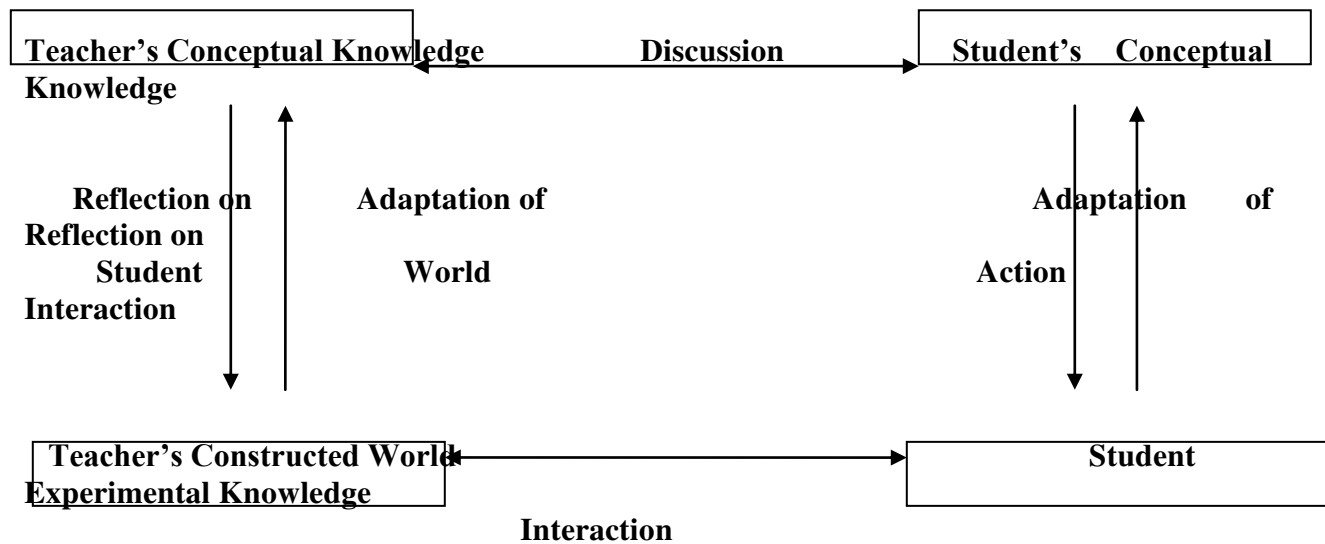


Figure above shows the Essential Aspects of the Ideal Teaching-Learning Process

Factors Affecting Learning:

Factors affecting learning can be classified into three categories:

- Factors belonging to the learner himself
- Factors belonging to the teacher

- Factors belonging to the material and human resources
 - i) Factors belonging to the learner himself, they are as follows:
 - a) Motivation level of the child: There is a proverb in Hindi that we cannot arrange a market by knitting the shopkeepers with ropes. If learner is not motivated to learn, no learning can take place. If these motives are not there in him, they are given to him from outside. Since, all learners cannot be motivated by the same techniques; motives according to the psychology of learners are identified and selected.
 - b) Intellectual ability of the child: We cannot make a mentally retarded child learn by adopting any measure howsoever, it is effective. If level of intelligence of a learner is high, his learning ability will also be high and vice versa provided that he has not become problematic or delinquent because of his superior intelligence.
 - c) Interest of the child: Children also differ in interests because of the differences in mental tendencies and attitudes to the environment. Interest can also be created by providing incentive to him.
 - d) Age of the child: Learning efficiency increases with age but to a certain extent till it reaches to the maturity level of a particular age. Maturation of an individual makes a difference in the total learning of an individual. This process is reversed in the old age.
 - e) Child's willingness to learn: The amount of learning will not work if guidance is not provided to learners in them. Guidance can eliminate frustration and tension from their minds and it will work more positively for learning. This guidance should be so much as to facilitate learning. Excessive guidance is an impediment for learning.
 - f) Background of the child: Socio-economic status of the child's family also affects learning. If educational background of the child is poor and his low family income is a source of continuous tension for the child, a number of factors will work to reduce the amount and quality of learning of the child. Good educational background facilities transfer of training and hence learning.
 - g) Physical health of the child: Physical health is a function of sensory motor coordination and development of cognitive structure. A student should be physically fit so that he may learn easily and comfortably. Attention span, concentration, interests etc. all depends on the physical health of the child. Hence, health is a necessary factor affecting learning.
 - i) Factors related to the teacher: Following factors on the teacher's side affect learning:
 - a) Use of psychological principles and theories: It is the teacher who creates environment for learning; and proper learning environment can be created by applying psychological theories and principles in the classroom. If such principles and theories are applied, only then environment will match with age, maturity and tendencies of the child's growth to the procedures of learning and motivation, everything contributes to learning.
 - b) Professional efficiency of the teacher: The teacher should have full command over the subject that he is to teach along with the knowledge of educational philosophy and psychology. He should be lifelong student of his field in order to give more and more to his students.

- c) Knowledge of educational technology: Educational technology includes application of mechanical hardware devices into the teaching learning process for the speedy transfer of knowledge to students and use of scientific procedures and practices in the classroom. Such a knowledge and commitment to its use facilitate learning.
 - d) Knowledge of individual differences: No two individuals are alike with respect to physical, mental or emotional abilities so as a teacher has to deal not a class of 40 – 50 students but 40 – 50 different individuals. This makes the task of a teacher very difficult and gigantic. The task of a teacher will not be over unless each and every child is satisfied with him.
 - e) Attitude and personality of the teacher: Teaching profession is not a physical job like that a person engaged in a physical labour job. His job is psychological in nature because he deals with human being. Unless his attitude towards humans is not positive and his personality is not structured in the line of learning, learning will not be facilitated.
- ii) Factors related to material and human: The teacher is helped by the available resources for bringing desirable changes in his behaviour. How effectively such changes will be introduced in his behaviour depends much on the quality and management of these resources. Such things and factors affecting learning may be listed as below:
- a) The quality of the teacher in terms of his mastery over the subject matter, teaching skills, rich experiences and teacher like qualities and behaviour.
 - b) The socio-emotional climate available in the institution in the shape of teacher pupil relationship.
 - c) The availability of appropriate learning material and facilities in terms of teaching learning aids, text book, library and laboratory facilities project work etc.
 - d) Proper conducive environment and learning situation like:
 - Proper seating arrangement
 - Quite calm and peaceful environment
 - Management and control of factors leading to distraction
 - Cooperative and competitive group situation
 - Learning environment at home
 - Rest and recreation facilities provided to the learner

Acquisition:

Language acquisition is the process by which the language capability develops in a human. It is the process by which a child acquires its mother tongue. It is the most wonderful feat that we perform in our whole life and we do it at an age when we can hardly do anything else. It is an active process by which children, take cues available to them, construct their own utterances and say things they have never heard of. Language learning is a behaviour acquired by making conscious efforts. It involves certain skills – learning to understand when it is spoken, when he/she reads and when he/she writes. It is also forming a certain set of habits. It is acquired by imitation and practice. Since language is a learned activity, we have to learn it and teach it properly.

Distinction between Acquisition and Learning:

There are many distinctions between the process of acquisition and learning.

- Children within 5 years of age learn their mother tongue through acquisition. A second language is through conscious effort of learning.
- Acquisition is an unconscious process where no formal classroom instruction is involved. Learning, however, is about conscious knowledge and the application of rules and structures.
- In language acquisition, the focus is on communication or reception of a message. But in language learning the thrust is on syntax and grammar.
- The context is usually crucial and meaningful in language acquisition but it need not so for second learning.
- Motivation is a matter of urgent necessity for acquisition. It is not so for second learning.
- Most importantly, the usual outcome of language acquisition is fluency which is by no means guaranteed in language learning.

It is the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive, produce and use words to understand and communicate. This capacity involves the picking up of diverse capacities including syntax, phonetics and an extensive vocabulary. This language might be vocal as with speech or manual as in sign. Language acquisition usually refers to first language acquisition, which studies infants' acquisition of their native language, rather than second language acquisition, which deals with acquisition (in both children and adults) of additional languages.

The capacity to acquire and use language is a key aspect that distinguishes humans from other organisms. While many forms of animal communication exist, they have a limited range of non-syntactically structured vocabulary tokens that lack cross cultural variation between groups.

A major concern in understanding language acquisition is how these capacities are picked up by infants from what appears to be of a great input. A range of theories of language acquisition has been created in order to explain this apparent problem including innatism in which a child is born prepared in some manner with these capacities, as opposed to the other theories in which language is simply learned.

Social interactionist theory consists of a number of hypotheses on language acquisition. These hypotheses on language deal with written, spoken or visual social tools which consist of complex systems of symbols and rules on language acquisition and development. The compromise between 'nature' and 'nurture' is the 'interactionist' approach. In addition, for years, psychologists and researchers have been asking the same question. What are the language behaviours that nature provides innately and what are those behaviours that are realized by environmental exposure, which is nurture.

The relational frame theory (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, Roche, 2001), provides a wholly selectionist/learning account of the origin and development of language competence and complexity. Based upon the principles of Skinnerian behaviourism the relational frame theory posits that children acquire language purely through interacting with the environment. The relational frame theorists introduced the concept of functional contextualism in language learning, which emphasizes the importance of predicting and influencing psychological events, such as thoughts, feelings and behaviours, by focusing on variables that can be manipulated in

their context. The relational frame theory distinguishes itself from Skinner's work by identifying and defining a particular type of operant conditioning known as derived relational responding, a learning process that to date appears to occur only in humans possessing a capacity for language. Empirical studies supporting the predictions of relational frame theory suggest that children learn language. Empirical studies supporting the predictions of relational frame theory suggest that children learn language via a system of inherent reinforcements, challenging the view that language acquisition is based upon innate, language-specific cognitive capacities.

Emergentist theories, such as Mac Winney's competition model, posit that language acquisition is a cognitive process that emerges from the interaction of biological pressures and the environment. According to these theories, neither nature nor nurture alone is sufficient to trigger language learning; both of these influences must work together in order to allow children to acquire a language. The proponents of these theories argue that general cognitive processes sub-serve language-specific phenomena, such as word learning and grammar acquisition is a more complex process than many believe.

Principles of Language Teaching:

Due to the evolution problems of teaching theories, educationists are now mostly concerned with the development of teaching principles rather than theories. These principles are only tested guidelines for a teacher because they are mostly based on learning theories and principles.

i) Principle of Activity: This principle states that, 'Teaching' should mostly go in the direction of students' activity is never forgotten. According to Mc-Dougal, every child has some natural instinct. He is always in action doing one thing or the other. If a teacher does not get him involved in any activity, he will himself do something without purpose.

Activities are of two types – physical and mental. Both these activities are important in teaching. However, physical activities are preferred to mental ones because acquisition of knowledge is already concerned with mental activities.

The introduction of physical activity into teaching learning process can be understood with an example. We can forget a story read in a book after one or two years but we do not forget the skill of cycling after we have learnt it once. The reason is that activity is involved in the second type of knowledge. So, if a teacher wants to make a knowledge fixed into the minds of learners, he must supplement the theoretical knowledge with the practical one. Even history can be taught by doing activity, by dramatizing the incidents and staging it in the class. Due to the utility of this principle many modern methods of teaching such as Montessori Method, Project Method, Kindergarten Method, and Problem Solving Method etc. are based on it.

ii) Principle of Interest: According to this principle, a teacher should teach in the class only when students take interest does not exist, it should first be created by the teacher. Interests in learning can be created in the class in many ways. Some of them are discussed as follows:

- Discussing with the students the aims of their life.
- Discussing with them how useful they are for the country.
- Developing curiosity of learning in them.
- Clarifying the objectives of the lesson before the students
- Teach the subject-matter to students by relating it with their daily life situations.

- Principles of learning by doing and motivation should be followed.
- Clear cut relation must be established between content, aims and students.
- Lesson should be made interesting by using proper material aids and engineering technology and so on.

iii) Principle of Linking with life: It has been seen that every child lives in his own world. Thus, children take interest in those activities and subjects only which have a direct link with their lives. Thus, according to this principle, subject-matter should be taught to students only after it has been linked with the daily life of the child. This enables them to learn at a faster rate and with ease. The reason for this is simple enough. When new experiences are integrated with old ones, they also become the part of old experiences. For example, if we want to teach consumer's surplus to students we first of all tell them why or how a commodity is cheap or dear for persons of different incomes. Then we inculcate the concepts of ability to pay and willingness to pay and finally, the concept of consumer's surplus becomes clear to them. If a teacher is fully acquainted with the background of his students only then he can use this principle.

iv) Principle of Definite Aim: Teaching objectives must be clear to the teacher prior his teaching because only on the basis of these objectives he selects suitable teaching strategies and techniques. For example, if the purpose of a poetry teaching is the appreciation of the poem, then pronunciation and rhythm will be emphasized and if understanding is the aim of poetry teaching, then vocabulary and sense perception will be emphasized. Thus, a teacher must know why he has to do an activity in the class before doing the activity.

v) Principle of Selection: Content is selected keeping in view the larger objectives of education. There may be many irrelevant materials in a lesson which are not useful for students. Similarly, many such things may be there in a text-book which does not pace with the level of learner. So, teacher selects only that part of the subject-matter which match the objectives and are meaningful for learners, For example, if a teacher decides that his students should score at least 90% marks in the examination, he selects all those parts which enable the students to score 90% marks in the exam.

Principles of Planning: A teacher must prepare a lesson plan of the lesson which he is to teach. Planning helps him to identify the expected problems of teaching and select suitable strategies to overcome them. If such a problem arises during teaching about which teacher had not even thought of while preparing the lesson plan, this type of problem is solved by the teacher on the basis of his experiences. Planning is actually the name of taking benefit of the experiences of others.

Principle of Division: If a teacher teaches a lesson after dividing it into different natural parts, his presentation will be effective. But the teacher should keep this fact in mind that every unit of the lesson should be complete for the learning of the next unit. This makes the whole lesson easy and systematic for learners. When a teacher teaches a lesson in this way, he synthesizes these units in a logical sequence also.

Principle of Revision: Whatever lesson is taught to students, it must be revised by them as well. If it is not so, it will be forgotten very soon as the human mind has a tendency to forget and get

rid of memory not use since long. Tough subject matter thus needs more revisions. Home work or assignment for practice on the same topic is given to the students only on the basis of the same basis of this very principle.

Principle of Democratic Dealing: The behaviour of the teacher should be democratic in the class. It means that he should give full opportunities to students to develop their self-thinking and self-expression by respecting their personalities. In democratic dealing teacher is guided by the students and vice-versa. Thus, the teacher develops the lesson with the cooperation of students. He also invites them for criticising him at the end of the teaching. All these activities increase the self-confidence of students.

Psychological principles of Teaching: These principles are based on psychological researches conducted on lower animals and children. Some of these principles are given below.:

- a) **Principle of Motivation:** The task of a teacher becomes very easy if he is successful in motivating his students for learning. Since, motivation is directly related to needs, the teacher must take steps to satisfy their needs. Reward and punishment, praise and blame, arousing and quenching the curiosity of learners, using material aids in teaching, competition and co-operation etc. are some important techniques of motivation.
- b) **Principle of Recreation:** Lengthy and dull teaching tasks bore the students and proper enthusiasm on both sides can entertain both of them. In order to reduce the fatigue and boredom of students, teaching task is made interesting. A teacher must make his teaching a means of recreation not a burden on students.
- c) **Principles of Individual Differences:** No two learners are alike in the world in their abilities and interest. So, teaching work is done keeping in view the individual differences of learners. Thus, the teacher has to satisfy atleast four groups of students by his teaching simultaneously.
 - Talented and superior students.
 - Weak and dull students
 - Students of average performance
 - Students with special problems
- d) **Principle of Remedial Teaching:** It has generally been seen that only those students shun the classes who are educationally backward in any way. This problem of backwardness lies in defective method of teaching and unsystematic classroom management. A good teacher is one who diagnoses his faults of teaching by applying standardized test and adopts remedial measures thereon.
- e) **Principle of Sympathy:** Those teachers who are sympathetic to their students can easily motivate their students for learning. If a teacher is able to develop a feeling in his students that there is none more sympathetic to them than him, the teacher will always be co-operated by his students.
- f) **Principle of Reinforcement:** Reinforcement refers to removing barriers from the way of students and presenting such stimuli before them which increases the rate of responses by learners. The teacher reinforces his students off and on during teaching sometimes verbally and sometimes by giving rewards in order that their enthusiasm for more correct responses increases.

g) **Principle of Training to Senses:** Five sense organs play a very important role in the acquisition of knowledge. Teacher initiates those activities in the class which are conducive to the development of senses.

Role of Listening: Listening is an active process that has three basic steps.

- **Hearing:** Hearing just means listening enough to catch what the speaker is saying. For example, say you were listening to a report on horses, and the speaker mentioned that no two are alike. If you can repeat the fact, then you have heard what has been said.
- **Understanding:** The next part of listening happens when you take what you have heard and understood it in your own way. Let us take an example of a discourse on horses – “No two are alike.” One may think about what that might mean. One might think that the colour is different for each horse; or on the other hand, one might also think that the pace at which these horses run are different for different horses.
- **Judging:** After one is sure to understand what the speaker has said, he/she has to think whether the said statement makes any sense or not; and based on his/her understanding one will judge to respond accordingly. In judging he has to understanding it in various aspects, whether the statement was spoken in a negative sense or in a positive sense or whether the statement spoken was true or false, so on and so forth.

How to Become a Good Listener:

- One has to give full attention to the person who is speaking.
- One has to be focussed too. It can be easy to let mind wander, but it is then that one has to change his mind set and concentrate on the speaker’s words.
- The speaker should complete his statement before anyone else begins to speak. Speakers appreciate having the chance to say without being interrupted.
- One should listen to the speaker completely before he/she begins to speak. One can’t really listen if one is busy thinking about what one wants to say next.
- One should listen to the main ideas and concepts. The main ideas and core concepts is what any speaker would like to put across. These main ideas and core concepts may be mentioned at the start or end of a talk, and get repeated a number of times.
- If one is not sure of what the speaker has said, then one should ask questions. It is good to repeat in one’s own word what the speaker has said so that one can be sure he/she understands what is correct.
- Acknowledging the speaker by now and then verbal nods, smile or frown or laugh or be silent as the situation depending on the context to which the speaker is speaking. These are various ways to make the speaker feel that he/she is being listened.

Role of Speaking:

Speaking English is the main goal of many learners. Their personalities play a large role in determining how quickly and how correctly they will accomplish this goal. Those who are risk-takers unafraid of making mistakes will generally be more talkative, but with many errors that could become hard-to-break habits. Conservative, shy students may take a long time to speak confidently, but when they do, their English often contains fewer errors and they will be proud of their English ability. It’s a matter of quantity vs. quality, and neither approach is wrong. However, if the aim of speaking in communication and that does not require perfect English,

then it makes sense to encourage quantity in your classroom. The teacher should break the silence and get students communicating with whatever English they can use, correct or not, and selectively address errors that block communication.

Speaking lessons often tie in pronunciation and grammar which are necessary for effective oral communication. Or a grammar or reading lesson may incorporate a speaking activity. Either way, students will need some preparation before the speaking task. This includes introducing the topic and providing a model of the speech they are to produce. A model may not apply to discussion-type activities, in which case students will need clear and specific instructions about the task to be accomplished. Then the students will practice with the actual speaking activity.

These activities may include imitating (repeating), answering verbal cues, interactive conversation, or an oral presentation. Most speaking activities inherently practice listening skills as well, such as when one student is given a simple drawing and sits behind another student, facing away. The first must give instructions to the second to reproduce the drawing. The second student asks questions to clarify unclear instructions, and neither can look at each other's page during the activity.

Some ideas to be kept in mind as one plans his/her speaking activities:

- **Content:** As much as possible, the content should be practical and usable in real-life situations. One must avoid too much new vocabulary or grammar, and focus on speaking with the language the students have.
- **Correcting Error:** One needs to provide an appropriate feedback and correction, but don't interrupt the flow of communication. The instructor must take notes while pairs or group are talking and one should address the problems to the class after the activity without embarrassing the student who made errors. The instructor can write the error on the board and ask who can correct it.
- **Conversation Strategies:** The instructor should encourage strategies like asking for clarification, paraphrasing, gestures, and initiating (e.g. 'hey', 'so', 'by the way' etc.).
- **Teacher Intervention:** If a speaking activity loses steam, then the instructor may jump into an activity of role-play, ask more discussion-based questions, clarify his/her instruction, or stop an activity that is too difficult or boring.
- **Quantity vs. Quality:** The instructor should address both interactive fluency and accuracy, striving foremost for communication. He/she should get to know each learner's personality and encourage the quieter ones to take more risks. The instructor should keep in mind to keep a balance between quantity and quality and that none of them should be compromised.

It is very important that teachers are aware if the aim of a speaking activity is fluency or accuracy, because the role of the teacher is radically different in each activity type.

In accuracy activities, the teacher needs to correct the students if they make mistakes. The whole point of the activity is to form correct sentences, so if a student gets it wrong, it needs to be immediately addressed in the form of correction.

In process oriented fluency activities, however, correcting students can be very counter-productive indeed. If we want our students to communicate, we need to give them time and space to do so, in order that they can start learn to deal with all the demands of oral interaction.

In activities for enhancing fluency, the teacher should become more of an organiser, a facilitator, a manager, a guide, a guru. The teacher should set up the activity, he should explain what needs to be done, he should also organise the necessary groupings.

Functions of Language:

There are six major functions of the English language which needs to be well noted in mind as an English Language Teacher, they are as follows:

- A means of conveying information, example, “The ‘Gitanjali Superfast Express’ train is now approaching on platform 4.” This example is of conveying to those waiting for the ‘Gitanjali Superfast Express’ train that it has now arrived at the concerned platform.
- An instrument of action, example, “Don’t forget to feed the dog.” This example is of telling the second person in the conversation to do something.
- To maintain social relationships example, “Good morning, how’s life?” Here we see that this function allows us to make and keep friends. This function is usually more informal than others.
- Acting as a marker of groups, example, “He was out for a duck.” This example would only be heard by someone talking about the cricket, therefore establishing that the people involved in the conversation are involved with cricket in one way or another, marking them as a group.
- As an instrument of cognitive and conceptual development. This is the power of language to influence thinking. This is why we have many words that mean basically the same thing, because they all have slight differences or are used in different circumstances. For example if one only could say he/she was happy, but not excited, thrilled, etc., then one would not be able to give as much detail.
- As an art form, language can be purposed towards beauty for beauty’s sake.

The Role of Grammar in Learning a Language:

It is a question of debate for long, whether learning grammar is necessary for picking up a new language. Some linguists think grammar rules are usually considered core of any language teaching and learning class, without which a student would be completely lost. However, a language acquisition theory from Dr. Stephen Krashen, a renowned linguistics professor, suggests picking up a new language doesn’t require any conscious knowledge of grammar; instead, the best and most effective methods of acquiring a new language occur through regular and useful conversation.

Dr. Krashen actually separates the way people learn languages into two separate categories: the ‘acquired system’ and the ‘learned system’. The acquired points to learning a new language in an almost subconscious manner is mostly through regular communication and interaction using the target language. The learned system, on the other hand, points to the traditional method of learning that many of us are used to, in which we learn conjugations, grammar rules, tenses, etc. The most important conclusion of Krashen’s hypothesis is however, is that the ‘acquired system’ is more effective and indeed better the ‘learned system’ used by most language schools worldwide.

Language, which includes grammar, would emerge as a result of interaction and communication or that it would emerge as a result of comprehensible input. Krashen holds that given a ‘natural order’ in acquisition, grammar teaching is necessary, with practice being a strong pillar for support to implement the learning successful.

However, the acquisition of a second language is usually achieved in an acquisition rich environment. In an acquisition poor environment like China, there isn’t much natural exposure to the target language. We cannot expect the students to achieve grammatical competence solely through interaction and communication.

In communicative language teaching, students could assimilate new structures through active practice and use. However, some also felt that more able and/or elder pupils wanted, and could benefit from systemic and explicit presentation of grammatical rules and explanations, and also that grammatical expositions could assist pupils in shifting from rote learning to a more creative use of the target language. Wilkins (1996) points out that acquiring the grammatical system of the target language is of central importance, because an adequate knowledge of grammar would severely constrain linguistic creativity and limit the capacity for communication.

Challenges of Teaching Language in a Diverse Classroom: Language Difficulty:

Students in bilingual classrooms manipulate more than one language and are influenced by more than one culture. Their experiences with these languages and cultures influence their learning. The more we understand the personal, socio-cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of bilingual students, the better equipped we will be to provide these students with an effective learning environment. The environment should be one that supports learning in a second language and culture, while fostering a positive attitude and respect for the other language and culture.

The responsibility for English language learning, academic progress, and integration of bilingual learners into the school community should be assumed by all personnel at the school, not just by the bilingual staff. School administrators should make certain that bilingual students have opportunities to integrate both socially and academically with monolingual English speakers. The following practices promote the inclusion of all the students in a supportive, educational environment:

1. We need to create participatory, inquiry-based classrooms.
2. We need to maintain high expectations for all students.
3. We need to teach English through content-area instruction.
4. We need to induce thematic units.
5. We need to incorporate culturally familiar learning strategies.
6. We need to use a variety of strategies when teaching literacy.
7. We need to provide appropriate and valid assessment.
8. We need to provide continuous feedback.
9. We need to recognize that students use both languages to learn.
10. Last but not the least, we need to boost up the students with proper motivational techniques to build up their level of confidence.

Errors:

English is such a complex language; it is fraught with traps that we all frequently fall into. With this list I hope to clear up at least few of the confusing words we use every day. This is a list of some of the more common errors people make with English.

Its/It's:

As in the case above, the apostrophe denotes an abbreviation: it's = it is. The next word – 'Its' means 'belongs to it'. The confusion arises here because we use an apostrophe in English to denote possession.

Your/You're:

Here in the case mentioned above, the word 'Your' means 'belonging to you'; whereas, the word 'You're' means 'You are'. It is thus the short form being used rather than the elongated form. Many of the language learners get confused about the above two examples mentioned and consider it to be one and the same.

Practice/Practise:

In English, the word – 'Practise' is used as either a verb (doing or process of action) and the other word – 'Practice' is used as a noun (naming word). Hence, a doctor has a practice, and a person practices the violin.

Lose/Loose:

In English generally we pronounce 'oo' as it is written – such as 'moo'. For example: the pronunciation of the word 'Chose' is /tʃɔz/ [Phonemic Transcription], whereas, in the word 'Choose' it is /tʃu:z/ [Phonemic Transcription].

However, the above example is totally different in the case of the words Loose/Lose. The word 'Loose' is pronounced as /lu:z/, whereas, the word 'Lose' is also pronounced the same /lu:z/. Thus the second example is confusing. In this case, contrary to normal rules of English, the word 'Loose' means 'not tight', as in, he is wearing trouser that are loose. The word 'Lose' on the other hand, relates to 'loss', for example: 'I hope we don't lose the game.'

Thus, in English language, it is not that the rules will comply every time. This makes things confusing for the learners at times. Things as such can be rectified by constant focus and practice by the learner of English Language Learners.

Learning the Language Skills:

There are, in generally, four language skills, each based upon the modality of emphasis. These are 'Listening', 'Speaking', 'Reading' and 'Writing' skills.

Listening Skills:

Listening in English is attending to and interpreting oral English. Listening is necessary to develop the speaking skills. The student listens to oral speech in English, then separates into segments the stretch of utterances he hears, groups them into words, phrases and sentences, and, finally, he understands the message these carry. Listening prepares the students to understand the speech of the native speakers of English as they speak naturally in a normal speed and normal manner.

There are three approaches to listening: interactive (listening to a message and doing something as a consequence) and one-way communication or non-interactive (just listening and retaining the message, in activities such as conversations overhead, public address

announcements, recorded messages, etc.) and self-talk. Listening to radio and watching TV and Films, public performances, lectures, religious services etc. generally reflect non-interactive listening. Responding to the commands given reflects interactive listening, which, in fact, is equally widespread in communicative situations. Self talk is also an important process by which internal thinking and reasoning is carried out.

Role of Listening:

In the classroom, students listen in order to repeat and to understand. In listening to repeat, students imitate and memorise linguistic items such as words, idioms, and sentence patterns. This is an important task and focus of listening exercises. However, it is listening to understand, that is, real listening in its own right.

Students listen to understand as part of using English for communication purposes. In listening to understand, students may be involved in the question oriented response model of learning or in the task oriented model of learning. In the question oriented response model, students may be asked to listen to a sentence, a dialogue, a conversation, a passage or a lecture and asked to answer questions which may be presented in the form of true or false statements, multiple choice questions, fill in the blanks or short answers. In the task oriented response model, students may be asked to listen to a passage and accomplish the task described in the passage through interaction with others or by themselves.

Listening Comprehension:

The listening skill is the most neglected one, both in first and second language teaching. Teachers tend to focus on the rudimentary elements of listening, and pass over to other aspects of language teaching. Discrimination of sounds and intonations often form the major part of listening practice in the classroom. Listening for content is often assumed. In reality, the listening skill is fundamental to the entire process of mastering and using a language, whether first or second or foreign.

In the past, listening was labelled as a passive skill, along with reading; no doubt, it is a receptive skill like reading. Speaking and writing were considered to be productive skills, but also active skills. While this categorization is somewhat justifiable because the focus of listening is on reception of information, listening itself cannot be fully and correctly characterized only as passive skill.

There is a need for an active involvement of self for the efficient performance of listening. The listener is often forced into guessing an approximation to what the speaker is communicating. The listener expects and anticipates what may be the form and content of the immediate message being delivered. He actively avoids the redundancies in the process of listening, focuses himself on the relevant, interesting and/or crucial points, and engages himself in some critical analysis of content. Listening becomes the stepping stone for action. In view of all these and other activities that are involved in listening, we should consider listening as an active skill demanding active participation of the listener.

In essence, listening is not mere recognition of linguistic units and their meanings. It comprises an ability to predict information based on linguistic context, and the situation and topic of the message conveyed by the linguistic code, as well as the expectations about the world. Listening helps also to understand and act according to the emotional state of the speaker.

It should not be considered that listening comprehension exercises are miniature tests. These generally come in the form of questions to be answered, action to be performed, or objects to be identified, etc. Because this format demands response in the form in which tests are generally prepared and presented, we tend to treat the exercise as test. Listening comprehension should be considered only as practice in which we can try to look for progress in the student performance.

Brief listening comprehension exercises with content which are interesting to the students and which focus upon and incorporate his communicative needs will develop his listening comprehension to a satisfactory level should be incorporated. Students need to be attentive to the tone of the conversation, and should ask questions whenever they find it difficult to understand the conversation.

We need to know, what the generally followed form of listening comprehension exercises is. Students are given a specific task such as answering questions or solving problems. They listen to the teacher or the recorded material and perform the task asked for. Thus the teacher as well as materials on tape/cassette recorders becomes the major means to train the students in listening comprehension.

Speaking Skills:

Imitation and repetition are important elementary steps in developing speaking skills in English. Imitation and repetition are inter-related, and yet they are distinct.

Imitation helps students to pronounce and produce the English utterance they hear from the teacher as closely as possible to the utterance produced by him/her (teacher). Imitation is not restricted to mere production of the sounds, phrases, and sentences. It includes also the capacity to produce the utterances in the contexts in which the original utterances were produced.

Some of the imitation and repetition exercises may be organized in the following manner: The teacher can present some simple sentence, phrase, or word and ask student to repeat after him/her (teacher). If we want them to understand and repeat a conversation, then the teacher can say the questions and the answers and have the students repeat the latter, or perhaps both, signalling the meaning in some way. The meaning can be demonstrated with realia (real objects brought into the classroom), pictures, gestures, or translating.

The teachers may use pictures, gestures, pantomime, translation, guessing, and drawing on the board to make the student understand the meaning. It is important that one should use only meaningful words, phrases, and sentences for imitation and repetition. The props that the teacher uses to explain or demonstrate the meaning should enable the students to learn the meaning with ease, along with the pronunciation.

Substitution of a word, phrase or sentence by another is an elementary method which helps students to produce new utterances and to develop speaking skill.

Expressions of greeting, gratitude, small talk, introductions and making acquaintance, leave-taking, appreciation, expressions of regret and asking to be excused, etc., are very important communicative acts that the students need to master. For one thing, such expressions may take on different form and import in English than the ones students are accustomed to in their language culture.

A simple question-answer dialogue around a given context and object/objects is another elementary method to develop speaking skills in students.

Now the question arises, as to how a teacher should teach matters related to dialogue. There are three types of drills that a teacher can incorporate in the class: ‘**Choral Drill**’ in which the entire class participates in one voice with the teacher modelling the utterance; ‘**Chain Drill**’

in which one student asks the question and another answers, and in this way the entire class participates as a chain; and ‘**Individual Drill**’ in which individual students are pointed out and asked to produce the utterance modelled by the teacher.

Eliciting is an important process which teachers must employ to get the class involved in what is going on in the class. For speaking practice eliciting is highly essential. It helps students to focus their attention, to think, and to use what they already know. It helps teachers to assess of what the class already knew.

Translation is another helpful device to encourage students to speak in English. The students may be given some sentences in their own native language and asked to translate them and use these to answer or ask questions. There are several other ways of using translation as a tool to develop speaking skills.

Reading Skills:

Scholars classify reading into three kinds: i) Extensive Reading, ii) Intensive Reading and iii) Oral Reading.

Extensive reading is used to refer to – “teaching of reading through reading. In this approach, there is no overt focus on teaching reading. Rather, it is assumed that the best way for students to learn to read is by reading a great deal of comprehensible material.”

Intensive reading is used to refer to the actual teaching skills in an instructional setting. Students are exposed to a variety of materials and asked to perform activities such as answering comprehension questions on the passage they have read. They may be trained to look for critical information in the passage they read, and make inferences etc. Intensive reading is instruction-based and forms the core of teaching reading in the classroom.

Oral reading does attract much attention from many teachers, but it is an integral part of reading. At the initial level, the focus is on the mechanics of reading. The beginner needs to be taught the relationship and the correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and the spoken language.

In a sense, the letters are all abstract symbols. The letter functions as a tag to the sounds it represents. By seeing (reading) the letter, beginner identifies the appropriate sound value for that letter in that context.

This is not easy task even for the adult learner. It is possible that the learner may come from a language in which the Roman alphabet similar to the one used in English is being used. And yet the sound values of letters in his language may vary context to context in his language also, which in turn may be in conflict with the sound values of the letters as used in English.

It may also be the case that the learner may come from a language background in which syllables are used. That is, she/he may be accustomed to reading the syllables which more or less retain the same values wherever they are used. However, he will find that in the word ‘character’ and in the word ‘chat’, the word ‘chat’ needs to be read and pronounced accordingly different.

Again, the case could also be such that the learner may come from a language background where pictograms are used, as in Mandarin (Chinese), in which there is no easy and manifest correspondence between the ‘letter’ and the sound.

Thus the following points should be kept in mind when the teacher begins teaching reading at the beginner’s level:

1. The background of the beginner: a child, an illiterate, a moderately educated person.
2. The Reading task involves decoding the system of abstract symbols to discover its

relation to the spoke language system.

3. The time taken to master this relationship varies with age, maturation, previous experience, and other social factors.
4. With primary emphasis on mechanics one may master the mechanics of reading in about four to six months, as considered to be standard worldwide.
5. Some recognition problems in English: capital letter, small letter, italics, handwriting, left to right, distinction between letters, mirror image problems.
6. We should choose the words which express familiar meanings or meanings which can be recognized and retained in memory.
7. We should choose only those words which focus on the item to be learned.
8. We should not choose those words which may have the same spelling in English as well as in the learner's language, but are read (pronounced) differently.
9. We should not ignore 'stress', because it also plays a vital role in language by reflecting the mood and meaning of the spoken sentence.

Writing Skills:

Writing is an individual effort. Individuals compose their thoughts often in privacy and then reduce their thoughts to writing, using the strict conventions followed in the language. Writing is an individual effort or work, but it must follow the rules laid down. The development of writing even in native English speaking children is conscious and is thus non-spontaneous.

In writing, the discrete nature of linguistic signs should be appreciated consciously. The learner must recognize the sound structure of each word, dissect it and reproduce it in alphabetical symbols, which he must have studied and memorized before. This same deliberate preparedness is needed to put words in a certain sequence to form a sentence.

'Writing' is more an individual effort than 'Speaking', while at the same time more rule-bound and therefore more error-prone. The speaker does not have to pronounce each word exactly according to one standard of pronunciation or one model of structure, while the writer is expected to produce according to one model of spelling, and usually a reduced range of structures, with 100 percent accuracy.

The writing classes have the potential to help consolidate and improve the students' speaking and reading skills. However, it is important for us to remember that writing is an important skill which can be taught as an end in it, although none of the language skills is far removed from other language skills. Focusing on writing as an independent skill helps us to identify the specific needs of the learners, and to identify the specific needs of the learners relating to writing. Mechanics of writing are distinct from the mechanics of other skills such as speaking and reading. While reading involves seeing and pronouncing, writing involves association of sounds with mental composition of thoughts and their orderly presentation, and gestures of the body. Raimes classifies approaches to teaching of writing, paragraph pattern, grammar-syntax-organization, communicative and process approaches. In the controlled to free approach, "students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words or clauses or combine sentences" (Raimes 1983).

In the free writing approach, students are asked to "write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes..... The teachers do not correct these short pieces of free writing; they simply read them, and may perhaps comment on the ideas the

writer has expressed” (Raimes 1983). In the paragraph pattern approach, “students copy paragraphs, analyse the form of model paragraphs, and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into paragraph order, they identify general specific statements, they choose or invent an appropriate topic sentence, they insert or delete sentences” (Raimes 1983). In the communicative approach to writing, students are asked to assume the role of writer who is writing for an audience to read. Whatever is written by a student is modified by other students for better communicative effect. In the process approach to writing, students “move away from a concentration on the written product to an emphasis on the process of writing” (Raime 1983).

We should note that a proper blend of these approaches to writing will give us best results. For example, the controlled to free approach to writing helps us to focus on proper mechanics in the beginning level, whereas, communicative approach to writing will be very effective once the students have acquired a good number of words and sentence structures to help them match these with their thoughts. All successful texts and teachers have always tried to take the best and relevant aspects of every method to suit the learner’s level and need.

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