

Teacher's Role and Skills in Promoting English Language Competence in Semi-urban Schools

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1. Introduction

Philosophy of teaching gives prominence to the development of teacher's role. Various teacher educationists have explained the multifaceted teacher roles in terms of the teacher's commitment to numerous roles s/he has to play in a variety of contexts as a coordinator, facilitator, participant etc. What is documented regarding teacher role actualizes in classroom that the students are definite to achieve the relevant goals, in the respective disciplines. In that sense, English is taught as a compulsory language from grade one to thirteen in Sri Lankan government schools. So, even in semi-urban areas, students are given text books, work books and the teachers are also provided with teachers' guide. Despite these facilities, majority of the students in semi-urban areas do not have a good language competence compared to urban schools. Out of hundred students there may be one or two, depending on the situation, who can perform in English to satisfy the competence level stipulated in the curricula. The majority remain handicaps in English.

Accordingly, it could be detected that the main reason for this low competence is the effectiveness of the role played by the English teacher. This research investigates how the teacher's role affects the students' language competence in semi-urban schools. It also examines how the teacher's attitudes, learning experience, education, and knowledge of subject matter, methodology, and student's needs impact on the improvement of the students' language competence and also how does the teacher's skills affect students' language competence Accordingly, the objectives of the research are (a) to assess the effectiveness of the teacher's role in enhancing students' language competence by focusing on the teacher's usage of methodology, knowledge about subject matter and understanding about students' needs and (b) to assess the impact of the teacher's skills such as imagination, adaptability, confidence and alertness to the current trends in the field impact on improving their roles and also student performance.

2. Literature Review

Throughout the history, different scholars have studied the teacher's role in teaching English. Scrivener (2007) divides the teacher's role into three categories as the explainer, the enabler, and the involver. According to his suggestions, the enabling teacher is the best one who is well aware of the subject matter, teaching approaches and students. As well as, he teaches according to their physical, cognitive and affective needs. So, she engages in micro-teaching according to students' particular styles rather than teaching to the whole class. Harmer (2001) suggests that some teachers are like actors while some others are like orchestral conductors and some others feel like gardeners. He also explains seven different roles of teacher and suggests the importance of switching between different roles. Fonseka (2006) has conducted a research related to the teacher's role in Sri Lankan context. He has mainly focused on the language competence of the students at University of Ruhuna. According to Fonseka, students have faced a diagnostic test and majority of students have earned low marks. He has also discovered the main reason for that is the lack of students' exposure to English as they have received a scant attention from school teachers. But these studies have paid limited attention on what the teacher can do and how does the teacher's role impact on the language competence of semi-urban schools. So, this study explores how the teacher can promote the language competence by becoming a good manager, assessor, resource person, observer, participant, investigator and a role model in the classroom.

3. Research Methodology

Deniyaya educational zone which belongs to Matara district in the southern Province was selected as the research area. The main reason to select this area is that it has not been subjected to any research focusing semi-urban schools. Three schools namely, school A, school B and school C (difficult to mention the real names of schools as it will affect the reputation of schools and the participants) were selected for the study from Deniyaya semi-urban area. Here, the sample size is three schools, six teachers and six classrooms. Two teachers and two classes were selected from each school. Qualitative data collection method was used and the primary data were collected mainly through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires. Secondary data were collected from websites and library books.

4. Results and Discussion

There were some good enabling teachers in school B, who were well-qualified and skilled in language teaching. They were very adaptable to various occasions and switched between different roles by becoming a manager, assessor, a resource person, participant, prompter, organizer, and observer. They used very efficient methods to

teach by enhancing student classroom interaction in a learner centred classroom. Student talking time is higher than teacher talking time in those classes. The students who speak mostly in English were only in school A. On contrary, in school A and C students were not good at productive skills. It is vivid that mostly in Deniyaya area less or under qualified teachers have been recruited as English teachers. Non-English teachers in the same school were also forced to teach English and they were not satisfied with their job and neglected their responsibilities as teachers. They were not well prepared for the lessons and just tried to cover the syllabus depending only on the text books. In teacher-centred classes, teacher talking time was higher than student talking time and classroom interaction was very low.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Accordingly, it could be concluded that well-skilled enabling teachers who were confident and adaptable played a vital role in enhancing the students' productive skills by switching between different roles in the classroom. They also made a pleasant, warm and positive environment to teach the language by enhancing classroom interaction and task-based activities. As well as they used proper classroom management techniques and tried their best to teach according to the learner styles and preferences. In contrast, traditional explainers only depended on text books and made language learning boring as they paid scant attention to learner styles. They just tried to cover the syllabus and the classroom is teacher centred. So it could be concluded that the teacher's role directly affected the language competence of the students in semi-urban areas. To overcome the shortcomings of under-qualified teachers, they should participate in good training programmes to enhance their skills and to build up a sense of belongingness and loyalty.

6. References

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