



Classroom Implications of Second Language Learning Theories

The process of mastering a skill involves trials and tribulations. Learners make mistakes. Learners who expect ridicule or punishment from the teacher on making mistakes tend not to take any risks. Hence, it is the responsibility of the teacher to create a secure atmosphere in the classroom. The discussion makes us aware that this field of teaching needs a lot of research in the field of preparing material, curriculum teaching methods and teacher's attitude. Actually changes are happening at all stages. In this way the present research student has tried to analyse various concepts of different psychological schools and language learning theories based on them, their usefulness in the classroom.

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The branch of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), teaching and learning has been developed and discussed a lot during recent years. All of us know that 'Language Learning' is a complicated process. Therefore different schools of psychology have explained the whole learning process in general and language learning in particular.

There are four major schools of psychology and their theories.

(A) Behaviourism : It is proposed by Pavlov, B.F. Skinner. They believed that 'learning is the change in behavior or change in the state of the knowledge,' of a learner. This learning is achieved through repetition, reinforcement and drilling.

(B) Cognitivism : In this theory Noam Chomsky, Stephen Krashen proved that language learning takes place due to LAD Language Acquisition Device and it is already there in the brain of the human child. Therefore, s/he can learn unlimited sentences with limited rules.

(C) Developmental Psychology : Psychologists like Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky have detailed studied the various stages of human development and progress of language learning through these stages and advised to design study material accordingly.

(D) Affective Psychology or Humanism : The chief exponents of Humanism are Erik Erikson, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. They tried to provide the human angle to the psychological study. They tried to study the whole person instead of a particular aspect. Humanism makes us aware of multifacetedness of our existence the physical, the emotional, the intellectual and the social.

Classroom Implication of the above theories :

We know that language learning process is

complicated. It involves various factors and difficult to analyse which factor is more responsible for learning a language. Again it differs from learner to learner.

Besides it, many scholars, intellectuals, educationalists have successfully implemented all these theories for actual teaching in the classroom.

Classroom Implications of Behaviouristics Theories :

It is generally accepted that second language learning takes place in an artificial atmosphere of school and colleges. Behaviouristic views predominated in educational practice emphasizing drill and practice of grammatical forms and sentence structures.

For behaviorists the learning process consisted of imitation, repetition and reinforcement of grammatical structures. Errors were to be corrected immediately to avoid forming bad habits that would be difficult to overcome later. On behaviouristic language teaching method popular in 1960s was the 'audio-lingual' method, in which dialogues were presented on tape for students to memorize, followed by pattern drills for practicing verb forms and sentence structures. Students were first taught to listen and speak, then taught to read and write based on assumption that is the natural sequence in first language acquisition.

They believed learning / teaching a language item by item. So followers of behaviouristic theory always introduced 'Substitution Tables', for learning grammatical structures.

For example :

My Friend	Has	Known Mr.Rao	Since	Last June
Mohan		Taught German		1965
Your Sister		Lived in Hyderabad		April

(PGCTE Block II, p.31)

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The learner can practice the pattern using the table to “read off” as many sentences as possible. Each time a correct sentence is produced. At the same time, it becomes impossible to produce an incorrect sentence.

Behaviourism also lead to over-teaching or saturation of learning. In effect, this means that the teacher should not stop when the learner appears to have learnt what is required. The learner must persist until the item of learning has been fully mastered. Over teaching frequently takes the form of repetition and drilling.

American psychologists, Thorndike's three rules are also applied in second language learning. The 'Law of Effect' suggests that if second language learning is rewarding and relevant, it will be learnt quickly. The 'Law of Exercise', again emphasis the importance of practice and repetition in second language learning and the 'Law of Readiness' gives importance to second language learner's motivation and willingness, willing, motivated learners learn the language in a better way.

Classroom Implications of Cognitivist or Innatist Theories :

We know that cognitivts or Innatist believed that some inner mechanism / faculty called as 'Language Acquisition Device' is responsible for language learning. No doubt exposure to environment was also important for them. They refused the concepts of imitation, repetition and enforcement. Cognitivists didn't like 'mindless' practice as done in the substitution table. So they suggested the improvement of 'Matching Table', forces the learners to think about the sentence being produced as there is a possibility of producing incorrect sentences if care is not taken.

The following table illustrates it :

My	Has	Known	In	Since	Ten
friends		lived	Hyderabad		years
Your	have	taught	German	For	Last
sister		eaten	Rice		June
She					
					April

(PGCTE, Block II, p.31)

Another dominant exponent of cognitivist school is Stephen Krashen and his hypothesis / theories influenced in the field of teaching /learning in the following manner :

- (i) Focus on communication
- (ii) Allow students a silent period rather than forcing immediate speech production.
- (iii) Create a low anxiety environment, it is the responsibility of parents and teachers.

Classroom Implications Developmental Theories :

We have come to know the concepts of 'Developmental Psychologists' Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky. How can they be used while teaching / learning a language ?

Piaget made a sharp division of four-stages of cognitive development and 'emphasised the learner' and 'his learning through self discovery.'

In recent years, our concepts of 'learner-centered' classroom and 'open-education' are based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development. No doubt, the proper guidance and material is provided to the learners. But learners themselves have to read, analyze, understand the concepts and prepare notes. The EFLU, English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad has designed its courses like PGCTE- Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching English, PGDTE Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching English, on this concept. Most of the universities are bringing change in the syllabi from teacher-centered to learner centered.

Besides it, while teaching a language, a language teacher can consider the cognitive stage of the learners and accordingly they can adopt the teaching material and style.

Again its necessary to understand that not all learners possess the same abilities at the same stage. We should pitch our instructional materials and activities to suit each learner's developmental level. The materials and activities should provoke interest and curiosity and should be moderately challenging.

Learners, especially in the lower classes, should be expressed to concrete ideas and objects before they are explained at a more general level or abstract level.

Learners learn better and faster if they can relate new information to the information they already possess in their mind. It is teacher's responsibility to help them to do this.

“As this leads to better understanding of information the need for rote remORIZATION of information will not be perceived by the learners.” (PGDTE, Block II, Unit I, p.11)

Bruner proposes his three modes of teaching to help the teacher. Inactive mode, Iconic mode and Symbolic mode, while teaching a language teacher can follow these modes to simplify the topics. They can prepare their teaching material with the help of different actions, images and symbols. Teacher can follow Bruner's concept of 'Spiral Curriculum' easy topics can be introduced earlier and their difficulty level is increased gradually.

Even he emphasizes that any topic, at any age can be taught with the help of these three modes. It's not necessary to wait. For it, he suggests the concept of 'scaffolding'.

Vygotsky's 'Socio-Cultural' perspective to cognitive development theory has influenced and is influencing the educational field in general and language is particular. His concept of ZPD has influenced the area of assessment, curriculum and instruction.

Assessment :

The goals of educational assessment should be to :

- (i) Identify abilities that are in the process of developing.
- (ii) Attempt to predict that the learner will do independently in the future [dynamic assessment]

Curriculum :

Curriculum considering Vygotsky's concepts gives importance to interaction, negotiation and collaboration like 'Community Language Learning', Functional English. It will help students to communicate properly and fluently at social, educational and professional levels. So it's necessary to

design material and methods of teaching accordingly.

Instructional Implications :

Informed by a Socio-Cultural perspective learning is thought to occur through interaction, negotiation and collaboration. These features are characteristic of 'Cooperative Learning'. The goal of instruction is to support students to engage in the activities, talk and use of tools in a manner that is consistent with practices of the community which students are being introduced, e.g. scientists, mathematicians, historians, etc.

This theory is aware of use of new technology like Smart Phone, Internet, Videos. These tools create new skills and habits of mind and shift the focus from reading and writing the printed word to multi-modal literacy. 'Online distance Learning' is designed with socio-cultural theory in mind.

Classroom Implications of Humanism :

Three leading exponents of Humanism came forward with their theories considering human being as a whole and internal forces affecting external, earthly achievements or success.

Erik Erikson divided the human life into eight phases. Every phase has its own struggling internal elements. He makes us aware and gives a different perspective to human life and education.

Every stage in the life of an individual poses a challenge which the individual can meet with the help of people and him/her. Hence, parents and teachers should prepare him/her to meet those challenges. This is essential because the individuals handling of the subsequent tasks depend on his/her effectiveness in resolving the previous conflicts.

Erikson makes us aware of life-long nature of learning as opposed particular phases of life. Learning and development tasks place throughout one's life.

Education should not be viewed as a piecemeal approach. But it should adopt 'holistic' approach. Instead, it should be viewed as something which takes into account feelings and emotions of a person. Education should involve the whole person. Only 'cognitive' development does not guarantee social adjustment.

Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' helps teachers in gaining insights into learners behavior. He believes that the 'deficiency needs' (lower level needs) need to be gratified before they can be concerned with growth or being needs (higher-level) needs.

If learners are restless or look uninterested it could be because they had insufficient sleep or did not have breakfast. Similarly, learners may not be taking active part in an activity, if they are anxious or have fear that the teacher may punish them for their mistakes. It is the responsibility of teachers to find out why a learner's behavior does not match our expectation. Teachers may not be able to satisfy their needs but they can certainly not compound the problem by punishing them. For example if learners come without breakfast, they may not be able to satisfy their physiological needs. When teachers punish them, they will be making them feel insecure and threaten their safety.

Thus, Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' helps teachers in gaining insights into learner's behavior which is helpful for learning.

Carl Rogers added some more elements in this theory of Humanism. According to him for a person to develop, it is necessary to have favourable environment, unconditional acceptance with positive regard and empathy. He believes that every person can achieve his/her goals, wishes, desires in life when 'self actualization' takes place. Self-image and personality also plays an important role in one's progress. According to him a learner should be ready to learn, learning takes place when it has real life value, utility and free from threat. Teachers should provide an atmosphere of warmth and trust. Teachers should play the role of facilitator and respond to the needs of the students. He should be in a supporting role, not expected to do everything like in a conventional classroom, where teacher leads, does everything.

Instead, he can tell students what to do, give them a range of tasks and activities and let them choose the tasks and activities which will lead to more learner involvement. But sometimes learners fail to choose what is beneficial for them and here also teachers should direct them and let them know how they are going to benefit from that.

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(1) Bruner J. (1974). *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press. (2) Cook, V. (2007). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. (3rd Ed.). New York. OUP. (3) Erikson, Erik H. (1959). *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York. International University Press. (4) Piaget, J. (1972). *The Psychology of the Child*. New York : Basic Books. (5) Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge MA : MIT Press. (6) Woolfolk, A.E. (1998). *Educational Psychology*. Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Electronic Resources :

(1) <http://en.wikipedia.org...> (Theories of Second Language Acquisition) (2) www.newfoundations.com/Gallery/Piaget/html. (3) [http://infed.org/mobi/jerome-bruner-and-the-process-of-education \(a\) Mark K. Smith](http://infed.org/mobi/jerome-bruner-and-the-process-of-education-a-Mark-K-Smith). (4) www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky/html. (5) <http://en.wikipedia.org...> Free encyclopedea (Erikson's stages of psychological development). (6) www.carlrogers.com

Other Resources :

(1) PGCTE Block II *Methods of Teaching English. Unit I Behaviourism, Unit II Cognitivism*. (2) PGCTE Block II - *Psychology for Language Teacher. Unit I Cognitive Development, Unit II Humanism*. (Both blocks published by School of Distance Education, EFLU, Hyderabad.)

