



Teaching of English language: socio-philosophical considerations

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is a noble concept, and it is highly respected in the society. It is a social process that is basically derived from philosophy despite the fact that Philosophy is always confused with a farfetched idea or a metaphysical conceit, however, it is very simple to understand. There is no denying the fact that it is not every body's cup of tea. Yet everyone has a specific philosophy that determines his course of action in life. In other words, every human being has a philosophy which he has and tries to live with. Teachers are supposed to do some noble work in order to bring societal change to deal with the modern need of the fast changing time. It will simply not be possible unless they possess some noble thoughts. These ideas or thoughts are nothing but their philosophy. Philosophy of life can further be categorized into sub philosophies. Philosophy of teaching is one of them. In educational system, many educational philosophers are taught, and each future teacher or practicing teacher has a liking for a particular philosopher or educationist. In sum, philosophy of teaching determines every activity or action of a teacher starting from objectives, discipline, teaching style, management, curriculum, evaluation etc. Teaching of English is perhaps more important than any other subject because it plays the role of international communication, global business, medium of instruction, examination and language of science-technology and medicine. Therefore, the teachers of English language must have social values and incorporate philosophical considerations while teaching the target learners.

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Introduction

The definition of Philosophy is not stereotype, thus, it has been defined by different people in different ways. Sometimes one does not intend to define the concept, however he says about something in a way that shows the perception and philosophy of that person. Gandhi once said, 'My life is my philosophy. John Keats (an eminent English romantic poet) opined, 'beauty is truth and truth beauty.' An educationist- philosopher Radhakrishnan (past president of India) stated about philosophy which is nothing but the logical enquiry into the nature of realities.' We always come across to such statement, 'life is not only a bed of roses, but it is full of thorns'.

If we analyze these thoughts we would easily be able to assess the personality of the individual who says about something. Since teaching or education is a very important activity for the inculcation of values and impart of knowledge related to the basics of one's life. Thus, it becomes imperative to consider the philosophical outlook of the person because it will determine his future course of action. If the teacher is an idealist or a realist or a pragmatist, he would surely incorporate his philosophy in the process of education or teaching. It is said that education is the practical side of philosophy so it is very essential to consider the theory without practice.

Philosophy: conceptual framework

Philosophy is etymologically considered as the love of wisdom. It is based on rational argument and appeal to facts. In other words, it studies the fundamental nature of existence, of man, and of man's relationship to existence. Philosophy can help an individual to a comprehensive system of ideas about human nature and the nature of the reality we live in. It is a guide for

living, because the issues it addresses are basic and pervasive, determining the course we take in life and how we conceptualize the world around us and accordingly treat other people.

The topics that Philosophy addresses fall into several categories. Among those of fundamental areas are:

- Metaphysics (the theory of reality),
- Epistemology (the theory of knowledge),
- Ethics (the theory of moral values),
- Aesthetics (the theory of the nature of art),

The study of Philosophy involves not only forming one's own answers to such questions, but also encompasses such areas as: Philosophy of: Law, Religion, Mind, Politics, History, Feminism, Science, Literature, Arts etc.

The most widespread systems of ideas that offer philosophical guidance are religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. Religions differ from philosophies not in the subjects they address, but the focus may be the same-the ultimate development of an individual: psychological, philosophical, spiritual, educational and so on.

Most modern philosophers, however, have specialized in one area or another within Philosophy. However, there are many schools of philosophy such as Pragmatism, Logical Positivism, and Existentialism. The scope of philosophy is basically determined by a goal and a method. Philosophy's goal is nothing less than a systematic world view. General philosophical questions are very abstract, but that is what enables them to cover so many different fields at once which have been the characteristics of Indian culture throughout the ages. The first education minister of free India, Abul Kalam Azad declared, 'today India is free...she can have any kind of mental mould she

pleases, will it be exclusive or will it be all inclusive.'(Khan, 1997).

As mentioned above that philosophy raises some of the basic questions that sometimes appear to go against morality and religion even. Those who study Philosophy are perpetually engaged in asking, answering, and arguing for their answers to life's most fundamental issues. To make such a pursuit more systematic academic Philosophy is traditionally divided into major areas of study. If the one who studies philosophy as clear concept he will not be misguided by some of the basic questions, and he will surely lead to finding a suitable answer in order to solve a problem that is related to logical inquiry.

The following sub branches can be summarized as: Metaphysics that studies the nature of reality, of what exists in the world, what it is like, and how it is ordered. It tries to answer the questions such as What is truth?, Is the world strictly composed of matter?

-Do people have minds and free wills? If so, how is the mind related to the body?,

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Typical questions of concern in epistemology are: What is knowledge?, How do we know what we know?, Can we be justified in claiming to know certain things? This branch of philosophy has a direct link to educational pursuits.

Ethics is often concerned with what we ought to do and what it would be best to do? In struggling with this issue, larger questions about what is good and right, moral and immoral, vice and virtues arise. So, the ethicist attempts to answer such questions as:

What is good and ethical?, What makes people morally good ?,What is right?, What makes actions right?, Is morality objective or subjective?, Do values exist or we should discover?, Is there any defined norms of behaviour?

Logic relates to the reasons given for people's answers to these questions. To this end philosophers employ logic to study the nature and structure of arguments. Logicians ask such questions as:

What constitutes "good" or "bad" reasoning? How do we determine whether a given piece of reasoning is good or bad? However, we should bear the fact in mind that logic can be both positive and negative.

The English teacher and his teaching Philosophy

It is believed that second/foreign language learning is carried out in a compatible learning environment characterized by infrastructure, good curriculum, clear aims, appropriate teaching, equipped teacher-professional, better assessment techniques etc.

The teaching-learning process basically depends on the facility, interaction, remedial measures and follows up. The interaction should provide opportunities to practice all of the aspects of the target language.

The teacher should vary presentation styles and take into account different student learning styles (visual, aural and kinaesthetic). Students should be made accountable for the whole process of learning ranging from attendance, focus, discipline, participation, and homework.

Philosophy has a great influence on the teacher both in the area of thinking and behaving. Really speaking, a teacher is not a teacher alone, he is basically a philosopher. The teacher should know the needs of children and the demands of society and then plan his methods of teaching. He must keep in mind that his own beliefs, ideology and principles of behaviour have a

powerful impact on the development of children. Hence he must possess a good understanding of all the philosophies of life and choose good and wholesome elements from them to form his own philosophy. Further, he must be a person full of high ideals and possess moral and spiritual values which go to form his character and shape his conduct. He must also be well conscious of national needs in all spheres and plan his teaching activities to fulfill those needs. Only such teachers who are imbued with high ideals, moral and spiritual values together with a sense of national responsibility for human prosperity can justify their roles. They can create patriotic, dynamic resourceful and enterprising citizens as future generation.

If one analyses one would discover the essence of philosophy in every aspect of human life. Aristotle says that man is a social, political and gregarious animal. Karl Marks opine that man is a productive animal. On a different occasion Aristotle pointed out that the difference between educated and uneducated is the difference between the man alive and dead.'(Khan, 1996)

Philosophy has a great influence on the teacher both in the area of thinking and behaving. Really speaking, a teacher is not a teacher alone, he is basically a philosopher, therefore, he needs to study in deep the philosophy in general and educational philosophy in particular in order to deal with the problems related to teaching and learning. The teacher should know the needs of children and the demands of society and accordingly plan his methods of teaching. He must keep in mind that his own beliefs, ideology and principles have a powerful impact on the development of children. The following analysis is based on the doctrines Jon Dewey, an eminent pragmatist American philosopher that leads to the making of teaching philosophy.

John Dewey

John Dewey was a philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose thoughts and ideas have been greatly influential in the United States and around the world. He is well recognized as one of the founders of the philosophical school of Pragmatism

Dewey is one of the founders of The New School for Social Research. Dewey's most significant writings were "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" (1896), a critique of a standard psychological concept and the basis of all his further work; Human Nature and Conduct (1922), a study of the role of habit in human behavior; The Public and its Problems (1927), a defense of democracy written in response to Walter Lippmann's The Phantom Public (1925); Experience and Nature (1925), Dewey's most "metaphysical" statement; Art as Experience (1934), Dewey's major work on aesthetics; A Common Faith (1934) etc.

Dewey noted, "to prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities".(Dewey,1897)

In addition to helping students realize their full potential, Dewey goes on to acknowledge that education and schooling are instrumental in creating social change and reform. He notes that "education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction" (1897, p. 16).

Dewey further argues that the major flaw in this methodology is the inactivity of the student; within this particular framework, "the child is simply the immature being

who is to be matured; he is the superficial being who is to be deepened” Dewey, J. (1902). He argues that in order for education to be most effective, content must be presented in a way that allows the student to relate the information to prior experiences, thus deepening the connection with this new knowledge. Gandhi further added that “if knowledge comes from the impressions made upon us by natural objects, it is impossible to procure knowledge without the use of objects which impress the mind” (Khan, 2005)

Educational philosophy of John Dewey

Dewey's philosophical anthropology does not account for the origin of thought of the modern mind in the aesthetic, more precisely the myth, but instead in the original occupations and industries of ancient people, and eventually in the history of science. A criticism of this approach is that it does not account for the origin of cultural institutions, which can be accounted for by the aesthetic. Language and its development, in Dewey's philosophical anthropology, have not a central role but are instead a consequence of the cognitive capacity.

As can be seen in his *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey sought to at once synthesize, criticize, and expand upon the democratic or proto-democratic educational philosophies of Rousseau and Plato. He saw Rousseau's philosophy as overemphasizing the individual and Plato's philosophy as overemphasizing the society in which the individual lived. However, as evidenced in his later *Experience and Nature* (1925) Dewey recognizes the importance of the subjective experience of individual people in introducing revolutionary new ideas. For Dewey, it was vitally important that education should not be the teaching of mere dead fact, but that the skills and knowledge which students learned be integrated fully into their lives as persons, citizens and human beings. This practical element—learning by doing—sprang from his subscription to the philosophical school of Pragmatism.

Dewey and historical progressive education

The central concept of John Dewey's view of education was that greater emphasis should be placed on the broadening of intellect and development of problem solving and critical thinking skills, rather than simply on the memorization of lessons. This is because Dewey saw the public school's relation to society was much like a repair organ to the organism of society. One of Dewey's main theories was the incorporation of the student's past experiences into the classroom. This was a job of both the educator and the caretaker. The quality of experiences is the key in the development of Dewey's progressivism.

Dewey and pragmatism

Dewey is one of the three central figures in American pragmatism, along with Charles Sanders Peirce, who coined the term, and William James, who popularized it—though Dewey did not identify himself as a pragmatist per se, and instead referred to his philosophy as “instrumentalism”

Dewey felt that only science could reliably further human good, specifically denying that religion or metaphysics could form a valid foundation for morality and social values (Dewey, 1897). Of the idea of God, Dewey said, “it denotes the unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and actions.”

Self-Action: Pre scientific concepts regarded humans, animals, and things as possessing powers of their own which initiated or caused their actions.

Interaction: as described by Newton, where things, living and inorganic, are balanced against thing in a system of interaction,

for example, the third law of motion that action and reaction are equal and opposite.

Transaction is Fact such that no one of the constituents can be adequately specified as apart from the specification of all the other constituents of the full subject matter.

Transaction regards the extension in time to be comparable to the extension in space, so that “thing” is in action, and “action” is observable in things.

Illustration of differences between self-action, interaction, and transaction, as well as the different facets of transactional inquiry are provided by statements of positions that In summary, all of human knowledge consists of actions and products of acts in which men and women participate with other human beings, with animals and plants, as well as objects of all types, in any environment.

Dewey and logic

Dewey sees paradox in contemporary logical theory. Proximate subject matter garners general agreement and advance, while the ultimate subject matter of logic generates unremitting controversy. In other words, he challenges confident logicians to answer the question of the truth of Logical positivism also figured in Dewey's thought. However, he registers a small complaint against the use of “sentences” and “words” in that without careful interpretation the act or process of transposition “narrows unduly the scope of symbols and language, since it is not customary to treat gestures and diagrams (maps, blueprints, etc.) as words or sentences.” In other words, sentences and words, considered in isolation, do not disclose intent, which may be inferred or “adjudged only by means of context.”

Dewey believed that communication creates a great community, and citizens who actively participate in public life contribute to that community. “The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.

My teaching philosophy:

As an instructor/facilitator, I believe that every individual is able to strive for success in their academic performance, however exception are always there. To achieve academic goals, as a teacher everyone must try to facilitate over all development by fostering sound imagination, creativity, knowledge.

In other words, the overall purpose of education must be accomplished. As a true professional, I should practice professionalism such as showing good example of knowledge, skill, behaviour and dedication. As a teacher, I should be able to address to my students' personal and academic issues so that a teacher-taught bond be created for growth and development of the personality. I should also create a setting for impressive communication because it is main purpose of learning an international language.

Dewey and the English teacher:

The teachers of English can utilize the concept of learning by doing because in the case of learning English as a foreign language, practice is needed more than the learning of English as first/second language. Here comes the role of learning by doing as propounded by the pragmatist philosopher.

Transaction, as opined by Dewey, regards the extension in time to be comparable to the extension in space, so that “thing” is in action, and “action” is observable in things.

The transaction of knowledge can be made easier by following Dewey's concept.

As Dewey was a pragmatist-scientist, he focused on the use of lab. The English teacher can use the concept of self-action by practicing and doing activities in the language lab.

Importance of Teaching: Socio-philosophical viewpoint

Philosophy, being theoretical side of Education lays emphasis on setting goals: socio-cultural, political, economic, moral and last but not least, 'Educational' aims.

Teaching is a 'process of Interaction' by which educational aims are attained by a group involved in educational institutions. Teacher is an individual that is considered as the most important source of achieving different targets. Therefore, philosophy of a teacher plays very important role in forming a clear cut vision to understand educational goal in a particular socio-political set up and evolve better strategy to attain the same for fruitful implementation. The role of a teacher in multi-lingual and pluro-cultural society like India is much more important and crucial than countries with simple and open social patterns.

Philosophers, Educationalists and Planners have some genuine expectations from the teachers in the beginning of the new era. Philosophers think that teachers would act as they wish them to do. While the fact is little different because the teachers of today are not always philosophers. On the other hand, every educationalist is a philosopher, therefore, he has some thoughts and visions to be professed and implemented.

We have some names of learned personalities or philosophers who ruled the minds of many teachers after independence.

Having seen some of the postulates of two philosophical doctrines in particular, and their effect on the personalities of the teachers, we can now easily sum up teacher's role who is simultaneously a philosopher, an educationalist, a politician, a social reformer and a moral guide. The following is a bird-eye view of the roles of an ideal teacher.

Teacher as a Gardener:

The role of a teacher is highly critical. It is said that a teacher is the same as a gardener. The philosophical status of a teacher as gardener explains the role of a child as a flower. A flower is very soft, supple and sensitive. It has to be nourished, watered and looked after properly. It may wither away against rough wind. Therefore, a teacher has a keep in his mind all the adverse factors that may affect a blossoming flower and be vigilant so that the flower may be protected in time and subsequently grow and maintain its beauty and charm and spread its fragrance.

Teacher as a Pot-maker:

A pot-maker prepares clay for a pot and tries to give a desired shape. If a pot-maker is not well experienced and suitably trained he may not be able to succeed in his targets. However, the same lump of clay be used to make another one, on the other hand, while in the process of making of a student, another chance may not be utilised as sometimes, it is too late to mend. Therefore, a teacher deals with more delicate material.

Teacher as a Diamond-maker:

Teacher's responsibility as a diamond-maker is to sharpen and use the inherent potential of the students. A diamond maker polishes a stone until it becomes a diamond – a precious stone. He can't do this crucial task unless he is well trained while processing it, the stone may be broken and the entire effort may prove to be futile and a resource may be wasted. Similar job is done by a teacher. When a student is admitted he is an ordinary stone, however, the potential to convert him into a diamond exists there. After the teacher provides the academic treatment

and required training the same student modifies his behavior and in the end, it shines like a diamond and becomes a valuable person. The process of making a diamond is very difficult. It is to be seen whether which stone has the quality to be converted into a diamond and how much polish is needed. If it is polished less it remains a stone and if polished carelessly it may be broken. Therefore, a teacher as a diamond-maker performs a very crucial role and a valuable duty to change an ordinary man into human beings, a person into a responsible citizen, a child into an intelligent scholar or a human resource.

Teacher as an Instructor:

According to the new theories of Teaching/Learning, the role of a teacher is more like an instructor, however, there are some philosophical limitations with this concept. A teacher supervises students as if they were doing some experiment and in order that they may not to 'Trial-Error' which leads to waste, he instructs them from time to time. This idea is highly technical but sometime, may not be applied to outside class-room situation that is also not less important than classroom activity.

By instructing less experienced lot (students), a more experienced person (instructor) brings about some changes, in the students' personalities. Moreover, it is also one of the teacher's roles in the form of some practical knowledge.

Teacher as a Maker of Future Generation:

A teacher is considered as the maker of future generation. In fact, students are treated as future generation and he teacher is morally and socially responsible for imparting knowledge for personality development. If a teacher is not good and well equipped the outputs (the students) may not be able to become what one expects from them. He is supposed to make or spoil thirty six generations, simply because he is employed at the age of 24 and serves for thirty six years until he retires. Therefore, a teacher is responsible for good or bad career of the students. Each society expects change and development in the future and the role and responsibility of a teacher in the entire process of change and development is evident. A teacher is rightly said to be a social reformer because it is the teacher who visualizes an ideal society. He tries to give shape to a student as he desires according to need and requirement of the future. There are two kinds of teacher: a teacher by choice and a teacher by chance. There is a good percentage of teachers who wanted to become doctors, engineers or managers but they could not materialise their dreams. On the contrary, they opted for teaching positions which happened only by a chance. Such teachers do not have any interest in teaching because they are not properly motivated towards their jobs and they only pass their time in order to get money at the end of the month.

Conclusion

Knowledge of Philosophy is an advantage in all spheres of life. Thus education is not an exception. The teachers being human being and followers of a particular philosophy can apply in the teaching context: objectives, books, resources, teaching, discipline and even evaluation. English being an important subject at all educational level, and a necessary skill to master (by practising or doing) should have a philosophical and rational basis so that the teachers can realize the objectives conceived by the course planners.

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