

Evolving Language Teacher Roles

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The idea of knowledge-based society, unseen mobility of population together with information technologies driven changes stipulate the need for revisiting existing practices of education system as a whole and language teacher education in particular. In essence, teachers are often viewed as important agents and precursors of change, capable of meeting high-caliber expectations of modern world, assisting in the shaping of future generations.

The question raised in this respect concerns the roles teachers are expected to play in light of the developments of education prompted by dynamic societal settings. Not surprisingly, evolving roles of the teacher often “cause unease among those entrenched in traditional approaches to education “[2;3]; while those with proactive stance are perplexed by the new lists of expectations as prerequisites of expert teaching and scanty research findings to rely on and inform present-day teacher education contexts [4].

Thus, the present paper aims at analyzing the roles language teachers take up in light of current shifts in educational paradigms.

The methodological premise round which the analysis of teacher roles will be carried out is humanistic perspective and related to it learner-centered educational paradigm, together with the concepts of learner autonomy, individualization, differentiation, and life-long learning. Learner-centeredness “involves a recognition of student’s potential to contribute meaningfully to the shaping of their learning programme, and then a willingness to accommodate this potential as far as the situation will realistically allow” [5;282]. Rethinking the roles students undertake in light of learner-centeredness certainly necessitates reconsideration of teacher roles and responsibilities.

Another important modification of paradigm identifiable in teacher preparation research is the concept of learning replacing the one of teaching [3; 20]. Life-long learning critical to fostering ongoing professional and personal development places

the teacher on the learning platform. Teacher competence and expertise seem to hinge on their learning, therefore further insight into the problem of professional growth can be gained by way of analyzing the learning process teaching professionals undergo along their career path.

Teacher roles do not easily yield themselves to grouping and classification due to the comprehensive nature of instructional process. It should be mentioned from the outset that any attempt at singling out teacher roles appears factitious and relative, inasmuch as they are inseparable from teachers' professional activity, which presents itself a system.

Although one of the basic roles of the teacher is seen to be *knowledge transmission*, it has undergone an alteration of priorities. In conventional teacher-centered education the teacher exercised a tight control over the learning process, with the students' being merely passive receivers of the information disseminated by the teacher. It has been traditionally believed that the more knowledgeable the teacher is, the more he/she is in control, the better students acquire content knowledge, the higher their academic achievements are. However, new approaches in educational psychology prioritizing student-centered education [2] have prompted that educators can no longer serve as sole store-houses of knowledge with undue emphasis on the teacher, but rather as caterers of conditions where students learn how to approach and tackle the fast-growing flood of information. In this context, teachers have assumed a new role that of *facilitators* of learning, i.e. enabling students to interact with the course content, regulate their own learning.

But even though these two roles are often juxtaposed in academic literature, they reflect vital aspects of the teacher's duties and thus should be interwoven. The subject-specific knowledge is by no means to be underestimated. The practicing teacher should strive for comprehensive, current subject matter competence, keeping in line with recent developments in the relevant academic field.

One of the most demanding roles, evolving from learner-centered perspective, the teacher has to perform is developing students' personality, which presupposes creating environment conducive to learner's cognitive, affective, moral and social

maturing. School-settings provide unique opportunities for helping forward student's psychological development, the ultimate outcome of which is self-development.

Foreign language classroom in this respect is exceptionally favourable. Foreign language as a school subject is targeted at one of the basic forms of human interaction i.e. oral and written communication and may serve not only as an aim in itself, but as a tool of enhancing ongoing personal development of learners. "Indeed, L2 motivation researchers have always believed that a foreign language is more than a mere communication code that can be learnt similarly to other academic subjects, and have therefore typically adopted paradigms that linked the L2 to the individual's personal 'core,' forming an important part of one's identity" [1;9]. Moving away from stereotypical view of language learning as the process by which language units of different levels are acquired it becomes apparent that foreign language if perceived as an instrument of perception of the surrounding world and oneself may serve as a powerful tool of personal development.

Moreover, by skillfully managing teaching-learning process teachers gradually foster *autonomy*, which plays a critically important role in language learning that is virtually ceaseless. It is incumbent on language teachers to encourage learners assume greater responsibility for their own learning the by-product of which is autonomy. Learner autonomy is believed to scaffold life-long learning as an intrinsically rewarding activity. The final outcome of skillful teacher's counselling is seen in transferring learning from external constraints of formal instruction towards independent self-regulated engagement, which provides personally meaningful experience.

In terms of classroom instruction, the continuum of concepts learner responsibility – autonomy – ongoing personal development are best envisaged on the basis of the concept of learner-centeredness. In literature on pedagogy, it is generally opposed to traditional teacher-centered classroom and advocates the application of methods, techniques, approaches, materials etc. that provide for learners' individual needs. It presupposes a shift in the distribution of the roles between the teacher and the student, making learners assume greater responsibility for their learning outcomes, in our case languages skills acquisition. All this, however, does not

diminish teacher's accountability for academic success or failure of his/her students. New teacher roles are evolving in the learner-centered paradigm i.e. that of a *psychologist*, who can diagnose and attend to students' needs, *manager* who helps learners organize their own learning, and *counselor*, who advises students on the personally tailored learning pathways.

Interwoven with the previous is the role of the teacher as a *socializing agent*. However, if the previous teaching role as a catalyst of personal growth lies in nurturing of moral, aesthetic and other forms of development, the latter prepares students to create and maintain relationships in real social environments, which are more often than not far from being ideal. Educational establishments of all levels, be it kindergarten, primary or high school, are in themselves distinct social institutions, providing students with vast experience of social interaction.

In terms of foreign language as a school curriculum an undeniable importance is attached to the role of the teacher as *a model of language and culture*. Students acquiring a language in the context where the target language does not serve as a means of communication, can get a distorted vision of it being an artificial means of communication, existing only in books or at best in media, while native speakers seem no less fantastic than aliens from outer space, and therefore personally meaningless. In this respect the teacher should strive at demonstrating that the target language is live, may serve in everyday intercourse, in this way fostering and reinforcing the image of the target language as an effective means of communication. Even though teacher's language competence may not be, strictly speaking, profound what matters is its practical application.

Closely connected to the previous role is the function of the language teacher as a culture-transmitter. Deriving from the premise that foreign language learning goes hand in hand with foreign culture learning, a language teacher should promote students' understanding and first experience with the target culture by serving as *a target culture role model*.

The current shift of conceptual orientations from teaching to learning have steered academic discussions and practices to the redefinition of the roles of teachers. *Teacher as researcher* pertains to research of the teacher emerging from practice,

which has been described in the academic literature as action research. It is the process by which practicing teacher puts new ideas, methods, techniques etc. to test, analyzes results of their implementation, drawing conclusions which can inform further steps leading to improvement of one's teaching and learning outcomes. Moreover, organizing findings rigorously and sharing them with educational community in the form of publications of scholarly or more pragmatic nature, contributes to informed educational theory.

On the teacher's part, systemic action research involves analyzing one's own learning, teaching practice, professional self-concept, relationship with learners, colleagues etc. Teachers systemically conducting research become reflective about their own learning and teaching, gain deeper understanding of what goes behind the stalls of instructional process, develop competence of applying research methods etc. One obvious advantage of action research is that it activates and sustains personal and professional self-development, which is at the core of life-long learning.

Implications

Reassessment of teacher roles in light of humanistic paradigm, learning paradigm and learner-centered approach entails assuming greater responsibility and much deeper insight on both teacher's and learner's part.

On the one hand, additional skills may be required of the teacher, like that of a psychologist, being able to exploit the human potential of learners, facilitator of learning, manager of the instructional process, counselor, researcher of one's own learning and teaching practice etc.

On the other hand, the new educational paradigm requires on the learners' part deeper awareness of psychological and linguistic foundations of the language acquisition process in order to make sound decisions concerning language learning goals, perceive one's needs, plan and implement autonomously language learning pathway.

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Abstract. The present paper has considered the roles of language teachers in the context of developments taking place in education. Traditional language teacher roles have been reassessed in light of recent shifts of educational paradigms such as humanistic paradigm, a paradigm in which learning is prioritized over teaching and learner-centered approach.

Key words: education, teacher roles, foreign language

Резюме. У статті висвітлюється питання ролей вчителя іноземних мов у контексті оновлення освітньої парадигми. Традиційні ролі вчителя переосмислюються у світлі гуманізму, особистісно-орієнтованого підходу та перерозподілу пріоритетів між викладанням і навчанням, згідно чого перспективним напрямком дослідження є учіння вчителя.

Ключові слова: освіта, ролі вчителя, іноземна мова

Резюме. В статье рассматривается вопрос ролей преподавателя иностранных языков в контексте изменений образовательной парадигмы. Традиционные роли учителя переосмысляются в русле гуманизма, личностно-ориентированного подхода, а также перераспределения приоритетов между преподаванием и учением, в центре которого находится учение преподавателя.

Ключевые слова: образование, роли преподавателя, иностранный язык

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