Learner- Centered English Language Teaching
(An Observation: Public & Private Teachers' Training Systems
At Primary Level)

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--**Abstract**--
The study aimed to observe public and private sectors teachers' training systems for the teaching of English at primary level. Considering the parameters of learner centered teaching style, eighty public and private sectors' trainees were observed during the training sessions at two training centers by applying observation checklist. The results of the study reflect training that at the government sector training center focuses classical approach to train teachers for teaching English by using mother tongue whereas private sector training incorporates learner-centered techniques as demonstrated by both the trainers and trainees. They practically involve learners in the process of teaching/learning English language, use English as medium of instruction and classroom language, promote discussion and questions and make low cost teaching aids for facilitating teaching and learning of English at primary level. The observation of these two training systems highlights the need to follow private sector training system to ensure the teaching of English at primary level aiming at maximum learner involvement to develop grade appropriate communicative competence. Hence the study recommends not only the revamping of public sector training system in light of paradigm shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy, but also the possibility of training the government school teachers with the assistance of private sector's teacher training resource to achieve better results in the enhancement of pedagogical skills of primary school teachers for the teaching of English at primary level.

I. Introduction

In Pakistan, millions of children go to government schools, and these are the students who have no exposure to English language at their homes. It leaves a lot on the teachers to provide them with exposure to English language, as the only place in their life remains classroom. Despite recurring calls from policy makers and teacher educators for the use of more interactive- learner centered- teaching techniques in the classroom, lecturing is still the most prevalent activity of the English language teachers teaching at the primary schools. This is the reason why our students lack grade appropriate communicative competence prescribed and aimed at in the curriculum objectives.

The teacher's role is to create an environment, which stimulates the desired behavior and discourages those that are believed to be undesirable. This role makes the teacher the focus of attention. By contrast, the learner-centered approach assumes that learners are active and have unlimited potential for individual development. The individual learner rather than the body of information is the focus of teaching. In the field of language teaching, Hart (2003) defines through constructivism the view that "language learners should develop their understanding of the convention of language used by engaging in the kinds of language activity found in real life rather than by learning lists of rules" (p.288). In a broader sense of education, Kain (2003) explains that in learner-centered approaches, the construction of knowledge is shared, and learning is achieved through learners' engagement with various activities. The idea of focusing on the learner rather than the teacher requires that teachers' and learners' roles be reexamined in the learning process. Teachers need to consider a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered teaching style to a learner-centered one.

To inculcate the awareness about this paradigm shift, teacher-training institutes have to bolster responsibility. English language teaching has received special focus in the training in Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme and meticulously taken up the challenge of training school teachers. It is observed that there is still a marked difference in the training of schoolteachers so far as government and private sectors' roles are concerned.

Trainers are expected to train schoolteachers in such a way that students get direct benefit of the imparted training. But there are some lacunas in the training of primary school teachers in the subject of English language as it has been witnessed that government sector teachers do not promote communicative language teaching techniques during the training. The objective of all the teaching techniques is the involvement of learners in learning process and to have communicative competence. Teachers' training programmes are designed to train the teachers with the same objective.

In education sector there have been efforts by the government to revolutionize teachers' training. Public sector training institutes were given the task of teachers' training in the light of modern language education demands. Modern challenges in educational field need scientific outlook on one hand, and teacher/taught participation on the other for their solutions. Students at school level need active involvement in the classroom having their due role in teaching/learning process.

In the light of this educational need the study has been devised to survey the existing teachers' training systems to know what kind of strategies are adopted for the training of primary school teachers by Government and non-governmental organizations while training in-service teachers.

II.   Review of Literature

The problem of teacher's resistance to teaching critical thinking skills, according to Haas and Keeley (1998) is mainly because teachers sometimes are not simply exposed to pedagogical styles and assessment strategies associated with them such as access to proper training (Jacobson, 2000, 2001), pressure from students who are themselves resistant to change (Child & Williams, 1996), class sizes that number in dozens or hundreds where the lecture model may seem the only viable solution.

As defined by the US Department of State, CL (collaborative learning) is a teaching strategy where students of different levels of ability are grouped together to work on a number of activities that aim to enhance their learning of a subject (Balkcom, 1992). According to the US Department of State, "each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement" (Balkcom, 1992, "What is it?"). Brown (2007) describes a CL class as a learner-based class that is not competitive. It is a class where students have the chance to share ideas and knowledge while working in groups (Brown, 2007).

Similarly CL is defined by Slavin (1980) and Tuan (2010) as teaching and "instructional" techniques where students are put into groups to work on a certain activity in order to encourage student-student interaction, thus, maximizing student learning. In their definition of CL, Allen (2006) and Yamarik (2007) agree that CL should be characterized by individual responsibility and positive interdependence among students while working on group activities together. Totten (1991) stressed differentiating between the idea of group work and cooperative learning as a teaching/learning technique. He explained that CL was more than just students put into groups for an activity. On the contrary, he agreed with Allen (2006) that CL involved direct interaction among students, having heterogeneous groups and a practice of social skills (Totten, 1991).

On the other hand Haas & Keeley (1998) refer to the need for proper training of teachers because training of schoolteachers is one of the most significant prerequisites to achieve educational objectives. Through training, teachers may be made aware of the importance of learner involvement in the classroom activities, which would prolong the time span allocated to students in a traditional environment.

For typical classrooms, some research studies suggest that students are engaged in learning activities for no more than half of the time that is allocated for those learning activities (Jones, 1979). Other studies place this figure nearer 75 percent (Goodlad, 1984). The time allocated to learning activities averages only about 40 percent of the total time students spend in the school. Thus, the average amount of time students spend actively engaged in learning activities ranges (depending on which study you believe) between 20 and 30 percent of the time they are in school (Latham, 1984).

Increasing the time span of learner involvement in the class emphasizes the need to adopt leaner-centered teaching methodology by the teacher training institutes as Dupin-Bryant (2004) defines learner-centered teaching "a style of instruction that is responsive, collaborative, problem-centered, and democratic in which both students and the instructor decide how, what, and when learning occurs" (p.42).

Although teachers are taught a variety of instructional methods, the approaches that are considered "best practice" are learner-centered. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde examined recent reports of US organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Center for the Study of Reading, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, as well as other major stakeholders in teacher education and from them developed a list of "state-of-the-art" educational practices for which there is a "strong consensus" (1998). The authors characterized these practices as "student-centered, active, experimental, democratic, [and] collaborative," which is to say they are the same practices herein termed "learner-centered."

Some methods are totally dependent on the teacher as a source of knowledge and direction; others see the teacher's role as catalyst, consultant, guide, and model for learning; still others try to "teacher proof" the instructional system by limiting teacher initiative and by building instructional content and direction into texts or lesson plans (Richards & Rodgers 1988, p. 23). But the teacher should not unilaterally decide as to what is to be taught nor should he deny the pupil as an individual. He should understand that a pupil always tries to protect himself from failure, competition and punishment (Jesa, 2005).

In principle, the term is quite impressive and nobody can think of refuting it but in practice the picture is pretty grim as the result of the research conducted by Liu, Qiao and Liu (*Arizona Working Papers in SLAT*) shows that teachers mostly use teacher centered approach in practice. However, they suggest this discrepancy can be reduced if the teacher training institutes effectively impart training in a learner centered pattern so that the trainee teachers have a hands-on experience of how this paradigm shift actually occurs.

Methodology

The study was conducted by observing two teacher training institutes, one from public sector and the other from private sector imparting training to teach English at primary level. The trainers and trainees (total 80) were observed during training sessions to find out that to what extent they apply the imparted training especially the learner-centered strategies. The researcher visited one government sponsored in-service training center, as well as one training center under the auspices of an NGO, and observed, according to the following parameters, whether the nature of instruction was learner centered or not:

Observation Checklist

1. Teacher lectures most of the time.

2. Teacher arranges the classroom in such a manner that it is easy for the students to interact.

3. Teacher invites students to ask questions

4. Teacher encourages discussion in the class.

5. Teacher uses writing board to the maximum.

6. Teacher encourages students to speak in English in the class.

7. Teacher makes students work in cooperative learning environment.

8. Teacher uses mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

9. Teacher prepares and uses teaching aids.

10. Teacher allocates more time for student-talk.

Findings

The descriptive analysis of the data collected shows a marked difference between the instruction styles of both the training centers. While observing the public sector training institute, the researcher found that even the trainer imparted knowledge following the traditional lecture based approach; however, asking trainees to follow learner centered practices. And when the trainees of this institute were observed during their demonstrations, the same teacher centered practice was visible having few traces of student questions and some charts as teaching aids. The most regretting situation that the researcher came across during this observation was teaching of English with the help of first language (L1), which was Urdu.

The picture was entirely different when the researcher observed the training and demonstrations of the trainees at a private sector training institute. To the surprise of the researcher, the trainees were themselves being trained according to the learner-centered approach having ample chances for questions and discussion in the training sessions. Various workshops were observed where the trainees were taught how to make cost effective teaching aids using junk material. The moment the trainees started demonstrating, the researcher was pleased to notice that the trainees changed the seating of the learners to promote interaction in their class, gave

more chances to students to pose questions to the teacher, and after the lesson and extended discussion about the lesson was held so that learners got to know the real life application of their knowledge. Interestingly, English was taught in English to the maximum, and concepts were cleared not by translating into L1 but by using various teaching aids and the body language and gestures of the teachers.

Hence, the study reflects that trainers and trainees of the government sector follow teacher centered teaching techniques while teaching English whereas the private sector teachers focus learners during and after the training. The study also reflects that the trainees trained by government sector are found hesitant while speaking English and are less motivated. Whereas the teachers trained by the private sector are more confident, motivated, and active in the classroom. They are found generating English speaking environment and promoting interaction through discussion. It means that they have been motivated by the trainers in such a way that they manifest the imparted training at the training center leaving the researcher assume that the same might be practised at the schools while teaching English at primary level.

The study presents different picture- government school primary teachers themselves are found reluctant to use English language during their training sessions whereas the private sector is a step ahead. The trainees were found promoting discussion and involved in the classroom proceedings with the help of teaching aids made by them. Government sector training system is found focusing on the charts only. However, private sector training system promotes the preparation of all kinds of teaching aids, like, flash cards, clay toys, as well as teaching aids made with low cost material especially prepared with the stuff, which is sometimes considered as junk at homes.

Discussion

Chinese proverb "I listen I forget, I see I remember and I do I understand", requires to be the core belief of teachers' training. To materialize the statement a trainer has to create conducive environment for the consummation of teaching objectives. Accepted or not interactive teaching technique is acknowledged as the latest trend in pedagogy. While teaching English language it is expected that there may be habit, on teacher's part, to develop a lot of initiative and should try to use new ideas to motivate and involve the students in the use of English language. At the same time teacher's lesson plans should incorporate all the four skills of English language through different methods. It is important to note that teacher's qualification, material to be taught and the methodology work together for the achievements of objectives. Well-planned lesson organization is pre-requisite for the teachers in the classroom, which ultimately affect the English language learning.

Student centered teaching should not be viewed with a grain of salt on emotional grounds as a sign of lessening the authority of teacher in the classroom. It is an effort to unburden the teacher from the unwanted and tiring responsibility of solo teaching and making the student an equal partner in teaching learning process. Teachers are refreshed through inservice training to stop them using autocratic teaching technique as the students are entirely on the mercy of the teacher in a traditional classroom and that sort of teaching makes him/her a passive listener, gradually molding him/her more passive member of the society who shall take years to reshape his/her personality.

To avoid such ills emphasis on interactive or student centered teaching could be the treatment wherein lies the remedy of students' learning problems. It may make students confident and independent learners and would take them far away from the cruel clutches of cramming and helping books. We have to develop sense of sharing and life like teaching/learning situations to ease down classroom tensions. Once the student becomes independent learner he/she shall strive to be innovative having multidimensional out look instead of following things blindly. Moreover, this method might pave the way for the teachers to use variety of other techniques including communicative practices for better teaching and learning and would also enable them to cope with all sorts of pedagogical intricacies involved in the teaching/learning of English language at early stages. Therefore, training of teachers is getting imperative day by so that the paradigm of teacher-centered teaching could be practically shifted to learner-centered teaching. In case of language teaching, it has become more than essential because today languages are not taught for the sake of knowledge only, rather they are to be used for communicative purposes. This is possible only when the learner is involved in learning of language which justifies John Dewey's interpretation of education i.e. learning by doing.

The encouraging picture observed at the private sector training institute leaves us with this assumption that these trainees would teach English by involving the students in the classroom activities. However, this assumption may not be fully materialized in the actual classroom teaching as the trainees were observed only during their demonstrations. Though this sounds a bit disappointing, the researcher was relieved to see that unlike the public sector training institute the private sector training was reflecting the aforementioned paradigm shift both in principle and practice. This effort is just like first drop of rain leaving the hope that many others will follow and bring about enormous change one day in the teaching of English by incorporating learner centered approach.

III.   Conclusion

Training system sponsored by the government to impart training for the teaching of English needs more concrete reforms in light of language education demands. We need such teacher training system, which may enable the primary school teachers to use modern pedagogical skills to ensure grade-appropriate communicative competence on one hand and quality of learning on the other. It should also provide them theoretical knowledge based on the practice of latest trends in pedagogy in the teaching of English.

It has been experienced that government-sponsored teacher training system lacks motivation, as the trainees are found less active and interactive in the training session. But it is pertinent to write that practical training requires reflection of the same because teachers are expected, after training, to teach English language at schools with same zeal. It can be inferred that public sector teachers training system requires serious efforts to achieve quality training in the teaching of English Language at primary level as has been observed during the training session sponsored by the private sector. Living within the same society and same environment if private sector can go for a paradigm shift in training then why not public sector? Of course this is possible if public sector teacher training system is revamped thoroughly. This is possible if the concerned authorities demonstrate a strong will to do so.

Suggestions
1. Public sector teacher training programmes and institutes should revamp their system in order to incorporate latest trends in pedagogy in general and language teaching in particular.
2. During the training, the trainees must be practically shown how the paradigm shifts from teacher-centered teaching to the learner-centered one.
3. Teachers' training should be organized on regular basis to keep abreast with the changing trends in pedagogy.
4. During the training sessions trainees should be exposed to actual classrooms so that they may teach students and get instant feedback.
5. Trainers have to motivate trainees by making the use of English mandatory in the training sessions.
6. There must be maximum participation of the trainees in the training sessions, which will ultimately enable them to practise pedagogical skills in their own classes at schools.
7. Trainees of the government sector should be trained to prepare low cost teaching aids during the training sessions.
8. There may be close liaison between public and private sectors teachers' training institutes including some reputed NGOs.
9. Teacher trainers' own language proficiency should be above board.
10. There must be monitoring system after the training programmes so that trainees' achievement may be evaluated.

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Appendix: A

Government Sector
Total No. Trainees and Trainers: 40 (20 male and 20 female)

Observation Indicators	Always	Sometimes	Not at all
Teacher lectures most of the time.	30	7	3
Teacher arranges the classroom in such a manner that it is easy for the students to interact.	4	8	28
Teacher invites students to ask questions	6	8	26
Teacher encourages discussion in the class.	3	6	29
Teacher uses writing board to the maximum.	37	2	1
Teacher encourages students to speak in English in the class.	3	5	32
Teacher makes students work in cooperative learning environment.	1	5	34
Teacher uses mother tongue as the medium of instruction.	37	2	1
Teacher prepares and uses teaching aids.	5	8	27
Teacher allocates more time for student-talk.	2	7	31
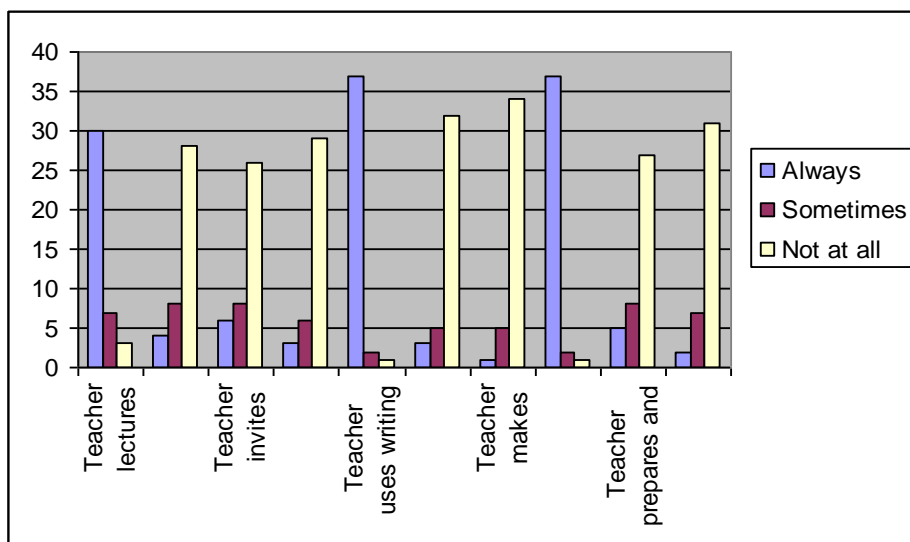
Appendix: B

Private Sector
Total No. Trainees and Trainers: 40 (20 male and 20 female)

Observation Indicators	Always	Sometimes	Not at all
Teacher lectures most of the time.	7	12	21
Teacher arranges the classroom in such a manner that it is easy for the students to interact.	28	7	5
Teacher invites students to ask questions	26	11	3
Teacher encourages discussion in the class.	24	12	4
Teacher uses writing board to the maximum.	8	15	17
Teacher encourages students to speak in English in the class.	32	6	2
Teacher makes students work in cooperative learning environment.	23	12	5
Teacher uses mother tongue as the medium of instruction.	5	7	28
Teacher prepares and uses teaching aids.	25	8	7
Teacher allocates more time for student-talk.	23	10	7