

From Training to Self-empowerment: Self esteem as the Turning Point in Second Language Teacher Development

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Corresponding to the developments in the realm of educational psychology in general and second language acquisition (SLA) research in particular, quality improvement in teaching profession has been of greater concern to educationists. English Language Teacher Empowerment Programme (ELTEP), a project intended to empower the second language teachers identified four stages in professional improvement namely, training, education, development and empowerment. While the first two were found effective as pre-service programmes, the last two were found more effective as inservice programmes. Nurturing of self-esteem has been identified as the key factor in empowerment programmes, following the cues from sociological studies.

This paper is an attempt at conceptualizing the findings of a one-year old second language teacher inservice teacher development project called English Language Teacher Empowerment Programme (ELTEP). This programme has certain unique features : firstly the primary school teachers who participate in this programme are certified teachers working in Government and Government-aided schools whose minimum qualifications are Higher Secondary Certificate and Trained Teachers' Certificate in the general and professional streams, respectively. They are about 100 teachers attending the programme at nine centres in Kannur (erstwhile Cannanore) District of Kerala. They are self motivated and they attend the course exclusively on public holidays including Sundays and they do not get any incentives from any public or private agencies. Moreover they spend a little money towards the cost of instructional materials. The selection and sequencing of the course contents have been, to a great extent, determined by the participants whereas an overall frame had been provided by

the researcher. Finally, the outcome of the inservice teacher development programme has been immediately perceivable in terms of both the performance of the participating teachers and more importantly in the performance of the learners in their respective classrooms.

ELTEP has been conceived as a procedural transition from training to empowerment through intermediary points such as education and development. In other words, it can be seen as a linear progression as diagrammatically represented below:

Infact, much qualitative difference may not be perceivable among these various stages; nor can the behavioral changes be quantified in terms of degrees of improvement. Moreover, attitude change remains the core component throughout the progression. As P.J. Hills (1982) points out

“There is no clear line between education and training. Some suggested differentiations can be made. Education deals a great deal with the acquisition of knowledge. Training deals more with

the application of knowledge" (Hills, P.J. 1982: 273).

Training is aimed at modifying attitudes, knowledge or skill behavior so that effective performance may be achieved in a particular task. But at the same time, since training is anchored on behavioural modification, the major focus of training tends to be on the conditioning of the individual based on certain models, at least it happens to be so in teacher training programmes.

Both training and development are terms used to refer to pre-service programmes; the latter replacing the former by shifting the emphasis from behaviorism to cognitivism as their basic underlying principles. The concept of development in teaching profession came much later, towards the last decades of the twentieth century bringing in self-initiated efforts to the core of professional improvement. The otherness of an educator was assimilated into the educated in the process of development; or in other words, as a self-regulated process of improvement, development can be defined as an effort at self-actualization and the accountability of the whole processes lies on the qualitative change brought back to the teacher through his or her learner performance.

A much more recent conceptualization in the field of teaching profession came as a sociological intervention in the field of education. Pedagogy, more than ever before, moved closely towards sociology and language teaching was second to no academic subjects in this regard. Applied linguistics and pragmatic studies heavily depended on sociological studies; and as a result, pedagogy became more of a social science than an academic subject (Sealey and Carter, 2004).

The nucleus of the teacher empowerment programme outlined at the outset of this paper is self-concept.

'The self-concept has three main components; the self-image or impression we hold of ourselves; which is constructed largely from how we think we see ourselves reflected back from others; the ideal-self, which is our image of how we could or should be; and self-esteem, which has its origins in the feeling we have about the self we believe ourselves to be' (Hills, P.J: 1982:247).

The teacher-participants who take part in the English Language Teacher Empowerment Programme seem to be trying to move from the

first point namely that of self-image to the second phase of ideal-self by making use of the third aspect of self-esteem as their potential energy for onward movement.

On the ELTEP, the participating teachers have been induced to explore their full potentials in terms of not only pedagogues, but also, decision makers, curriculum planners, project implementors, programme evaluators and above all, social reformers intervening in the act of socializing formal education. As a result, their self-esteem has been considerably at work at various levels of instruction in varying capacities as teachers, facilitators, promoters, caretakers, supporters, guides, supervisors and above all, decision makers. Perhaps the most rewarding and fruitful development in the whole programme was that practising teachers were convinced of their authority as decision makers in relation to the whole aspects of instructional programme ranging from curriculum design to course evaluation. For the first time in their career (Some of the participants have a teaching career of about twenty years.) They have been given autonomy in selecting and rejecting, and also in adopting and supplementing instructional materials. So has been the case with decision making in the case of selecting appropriate classroom procedures as well. This newly acquired autonomy has resulted in shouldering greater responsibility in classroom management, performance and finally in greater accountability. (It is to be noted in this context that accountability was a matter of formal or official routine in the pre-ELTEP phase of their career, but on completion of the one year old first phase of the programme, the participants theoretically as well as practically interpreted accountability in terms of social commitment and professional prerequisites).

The basic pedagogical principles underlying the language teacher empowerment programme can be summarized as follows: Language learning is people: this is the basic social process of learning. Learning, the acquisition of second language, occurs in an interpersonal relationship between a teacher and a group of students, as well as among students themselves. Dynamic interaction means that persons are given birth and growth in a foreign language. Their relationship change as they develop in the language. Dynamic interaction means that the teacher provides meaningful learning experience which fit the needs of the

learners at various stages of their development (La Forge, 1988).

From the participants' perspective, the programme is an attempt at moving away from the stand point of viewing language as a product to be stored and retrieved to the point of language as a process which the learner is to step into. Like all social processes, languages also are contracts—they are negotiations of reciprocal meanings, agreements on natural expectations, the discovery of interpersonal significations and two-way circuits. Language is considered as the place in which the social individual is constructed. A social process view of language means that language is people, persons in contact, and persons in response.

The outcome of the one year old first phase of the English Language Teacher Empowerment

Programme is yet to be quantified. This paper is only an attempt at conceptualising the interim progress in terms of observable psychological behaviour of the participating teachers. The programme has entered into its second phase with continuing education as its interim goal.

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