



Educational Philosophy and the English Teacher

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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. 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.

Keywords : philosophy, metaphysical conceit, teaching, style, curriculum, evaluation.

1. 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.' We always come across to such statement, 'life is not only a bed of roses, but it is full of thorns'.

These ideas or thoughts are nothing but forms of 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. Therefore, he also follows his favourite philosopher in his life and institution.

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.

1.1. Philosophy: Conceptual Framework

Philosophy is etymologically considered as the 'love of wisdom'. It is based on rational arguments on facts. In other words, it studies the fundamental nature of existence, of man, and of man's relationship to society and other aspects of life. 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)

Similarly, In order to understand *Piaget* as a structuralist, the intellectual tradition of structuralism is characterized historically and in terms of its epistemology and metaphysics. *Piaget's* theory is located as a branch of structuralism concerned with the concept of truth, in distinction from French structuralism which focuses on meaning. (Broughton, 1981)

Demetriou, Efklides and Platsidou, (1993) discussed the issue of the architecture and dynamics of developing mind.

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:

1.1.1. Metaphysics

This branch of philosophy 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 will? If so, how is the mind related to the body?,

1.1.2. Epistemology

It 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.

1.1.3. Ethics

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?

1.1.4. Logic

It 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.

2. Philosophy and the English teacher

Each teacher is basically a philosopher because he tries to inculcate some values among the learners. Philosophy and education are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, one in the field of education should always try to achieve the philosophical/moral targets through educational activities.

2.1. Impact of Some doctrines on a teacher of English

2.1.1. Idealism

According to the Idealistic philosophy, the role of a teacher is highly important. Idealistic philosophy believes that the process of teaching is a planned action which has two parts: the teacher and the student. Both aim at common target: the development of the individual child. However, the child being immature does not know the importance of the spiritual development. But, the teacher tries to realize the same.

In reality, an idealist teacher possesses high degree of self knowledge, self dynamism and essential qualities of spiritualism. By his own model of life, he tries to shape the spiritualism and the individuality of the child to a life of purity, virtues and other noble qualities. He creates a very conducive environment by his own activities and planned experiences for the child. He guides the child with some demanded act of love, affection and sympathy that he attains his full mental and spiritual content and serenity which leads to the ultimately desired development.

2.1.2. Naturalism

Naturalists suggest that the educator should be a guide and a friend. The educator should try to recollect his own childhood and infancy and act accordingly. The child is naturally inclined to laughter and happiness. Hence, the educator should be a bit humorous and not very strict. He should facilitate the child to grow in the nature-oriented environment of the Education-process where teaching/learning may take place during natural interaction. Ravindra Nath Tagore (an Indian Naturalist) was a renowned English poet and the founder of Shantiniketan, a Naturalist place for learning in Calcutta, India. He set an example of Naturalist's Education system in India.

Characteristics of Naturalist teacher may be summed up as under:

- A naturalist teacher believes in child centered education,
 - In the naturalist's method of teaching, Naturalism emphasized experiences instead of words. The postulates can be summed up as under, as these not only focus on words which are not sufficient for education, rather experiences that are necessary.
- (1) Play way method in Education is the main contribution of this thought.
 - (2) Return to Nature is the main principle. The Naturalists emphasized going back to the peaceful lap of nature, much away from the complexity of civilization. This tendency increases the love for nature.
 - (3) Important place was given to empirical knowledge instead of bookish knowledge.

2.1.3. Realism

Realism advocates that there should be proper sequence of teaching-learning so that whatever is taught must be taught clearly, easily, thoroughly and pleasantly. The teaching method should involve concrete and scientific references in the process of teaching-learning. Understanding and perception are the top priority. Inductive method of teaching is always preferred by a Realist. In short, scientific evaluation is the most important contribution of realism in education.

Realism teaches focus on teaching through experience. It emphasizes on the objectives and practical knowledge based on realistic facts. Words and symbols convey experiences but they are not the targets. Thus, the actual experience should be the main focus. The realist does not attach special importance to the personality of the teacher. The following principles can be emphasised by the 'Realistic Philosophy'.

- (i) Whatever is to be known must be taught,
- (ii) Whatever is taught should be taught in a straight forward manner,
- (iii) Whatever is taught should be taught for practical application in everyday life,
- (iv) If anything is to be learnt its general principles must be explained followed by further details.

The idealists opine that discipline among students should not be enforced rather they should be prepared in such a way that they go all out for self discipline. Like Naturalism, this philosophy also gives importance to the place of the child. Child is only a child who is very innocent. He should not only be considered as a younger form of an adult. There is a difference between the needs, desires and interests of a child and those

of an adult. It is improper to talk of the child's education for future by considering truth that is always changeable.

2.1.4. Pragmatism

This is a well known fact that the Pragmatists do not lay emphasis on the aims of education. They believe in 'education for the child' instead of 'education for education'. The importance and needs of education are the fulfillment of some desires of the child. Education has a role to play in enabling us to adjust to the environment. Thus, we see that Pragmatists are nearer to Naturalists, in some aspects.

Taking the mind of a man as a unit, the pragmatic theory of education comes near to Psychology and both affect each other. The effect of this philosophy on the modern age is quite obvious. The ideals of education can't be similar in the changing world, Education should be interesting. It should fulfill all the needs of the child in relation to society. Education should be society-centered and its power should be applied in the development of society. By means of such principles, the pragmatists have provided new dimensions to education. Education has also been strengthened by the pragmatist's school of thought that appreciated Deductive Method, experimental theory and external values.

3. Importance of Personal Teaching Philosophy

There are many reasons as to why a teacher should have a teaching philosophy. Both teaching and learning can have a major impact on the classroom environment. The teachers tend to implement classroom practices that reflect their philosophical beliefs. There are many reasons to articulate your philosophy of teaching, some reasons driven by external requirements and others by the personal or pedagogical value inherent in reflecting on your approach to teaching. You may be asked to prepare your teaching philosophy as a component of your application for an academic position, as supportive documentation in your portfolio for promotion/tenure consideration, or as a portion of an application for teaching awards/grants (Montell, 2003).

A well-reasoned personal philosophy can provide a basis for appropriate action.

3.1. Basic Teaching Philosophies

The following description leads to a detailed understanding of the relevance of teaching philosophy of a teacher:

3.1.1. Perennialist Teaching Philosophy

It is deeply rooted in the philosophy of 'realism', and a realist teacher incorporated teacher-centred teaching in the class. It is based upon universal knowledge and cherished values of society. Universal ideals are the focus of the curriculum: truth, goodness, truth, beauty. The most conservative, traditional, or inflexible of the five philosophies is perennialism, a philosophy drawing heavily from classical definitions of education. Perennialists believe that education, like human nature, is a constant. Because the distinguishing characteristic of humans is the ability to reason, education should focus on developing rationality. Education, for the perennialist, is a preparation for life, and students should be taught the world's permanencies through structured study.

For the perennialist, reality is a world of reason. Such truths are revealed to us through study and sometimes through divine acts. Goodness is to be found in rationality itself. Perennialists would favor a curriculum of subjects and doctrine, taught through highly disciplined drill and behavior control. Schools for the perennialist exist primarily to reveal reason by teaching eternal truths.

3.1.2. Idealistic teaching philosophy

Idealism as a form of philosophy creates a basis for refined wisdom. Reality is noticed within a person's mind. Truth is connected to the consistency of ideas. Goodness is closely related to idealism as an ideal state which is the ultimate focal point of idealism. For idealists, the schools' function is to sharpen intellectual processes, to present the wisdom of the

ages, and to present models of behavior that are exemplary. Students in such schools would have a somewhat passive role, receiving and memorizing the reporting of the teacher. Change in the school program would generally be considered an intrusion on the orderly process of educating.

3.1.3. Realism as teaching philosophy

For the realist, the world is as it is, and the job of schools would be to teach students about the world. Goodness, for the realist, would be found in the laws of nature and the order of the physical world. Truth would be the simple correspondences of observation. The realist would favor a school dominated by subjects of the here-and-now world, such as math and science. Students would be taught factual information for mastery. The teacher would impart knowledge of this reality to students or display such reality for observation and study. Classrooms would be highly ordered and disciplined, like nature, and the students would be passive participants in the study of things. Changes in school would be perceived as a natural evolution toward a perfection of order.

3.1.4. Eclecticism and teaching philosophy

It is a conceptual approach that does not hold rigidly to a single paradigm or set of assumptions, but instead draws upon multiple theories, styles, or ideas to gain complementary insights into a subject, or applies different theories in particular cases.

3.1.5. Essentialist Teaching Philosophy

Education is viewed as a mastery of essential facts and skills - English, math, science, history, and foreign language (teacher-centered education). It is not rooted in the past, but is more concerned with contemporary scene. Like perennialism, Essentialism rejects art, music, physical education, home making, and vocational education. It is rather concerned with conceptual thought and the principles and theories of subject matter. Teacher is seen as an authority.

3.1.6. Progressivism and Teaching Philosophy

This philosophical doctrine emphasizes on 'student-centered educational processes.

In other words, participation is focused. Learning must include content plus the skills of learning: brainstorming, decision making, problem solving, creativity, scientific inquiry, participative attitude etc. On the other hand, temporary memory and superficial knowledge/learning has no place an English curriculum according to the philosophical postulates of Progressive philosophy.

Curriculum tends to be interdisciplinary, and teaching methods are not based on authority.

The teacher is seen as more of a guide than an all-knowing sage

3.1.7. Re-constructionist Teaching Philosophy

This teaching philosophy lays emphasis on societal reformation and betterment. The focus of academic activities mainly lies on the 'society-centered education'. It is believed that 'Education' and teaching should be relevant in the social context, therefore concepts like pluralism, equality, futurism etc should be included in the curriculum and achieved through different methods of teaching. The advocates of this philosophy feel that the teachers are considered prime units of social and political change.

3.1.8. Idiosyncratic Teaching Philosophies

It can't be categorically stated that a teacher is highly restricted to one philosophy, and he can't shift even a little in a given scenario. The choice of a philosophy and its implementation in the classroom is primarily based on the attitude, situation and experience.

4. Philosophy and the teacher's role

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 differs a little due to the fact that all the teachers of today are not true 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.

5. Perceptions of the English teachers on the relevance of educational philosophy

A questionnaires (Appendix-A) was used to elicit perceptions of the teachers regarding the significance of educational philosophy. 40 teachers constituted the sample. The collected data was tabulated (Appendix-B), and graphically presented (Appendix-C).

The findings show that the English teachers in particular needs to have teaching philosophy in order to understand the curricular aims, methods and achievement problems. It was also noticed that such teachers can better deliver if they are suitably qualified and professionally trained and developed.

5.1. My Philosophy for Teaching English for preparatory year students in Saudi Arabia

1. The target learner should be able to listen to the speech, dialogue or audios/videos and understand the closer meaning.
2. Though English for Saudi learners serves specific purpose, it enables him to get a better job, and provides better business opportunities.

The prescribed text books are based on planning, policies, curriculum design etc. In addition, supplementary material in English in the form of books as well as e-learning resource is well integrated to yield maximum results.

3. I emphasize to my students that they should practically use whatever they learn in the class or they will forget soon.
4. I assign homework for those who want to do it and I give some written class work (ideas, opinions, letters, etc.) on a daily basis.
5. I always focus on: the needs of the student and on specific objectives. These have already been identified and well written in the course outline.
6. My sessions are usually based on group work, however the teacher's role as the transmitter of knowledge can't be minimized
7. The subjects and topics I choose for each session depend on the interests and needs of the students. My focus is always on the learning no matter what method I apply.
8. I am very particular about student participation; everybody must participate. E-learning tools such as edu-gaming, solving crossword puzzles can be proved to be much better.
9. I try to learn from my students as much as I try to help

them learn about English.

10. An interesting session is a successful session. I am always on the lookout for new and interesting ideas and a very good source are my students.

5.2. Philosophy and modes of teaching

My philosophy of teaching/learning English focuses the 'individual child'. Therefore, student centred teaching is emphasized in my class. My primary goal is to convert a classroom a miniature society a classroom in which my students feel part of a community, where we are engaged, interactive, and highly-cognitive about our learning. I create a classroom where the texts, plays, poems, and other works my students read are concrete; they relate to and become a part of the literature. I focus on skill development that can be utilized through entire life. I employ e-learning because I believe in Dewey's pragmatism.

5.3. philosophy of Training and professional development

Teacher factor is the most important of all in the educational setting. It is the teacher's responsibility to afresh his knowledge update his potential and equip himself with the advancement of the society and use of technology in general and educational environment in particular. (Khan, 2005) In order to justify the job of a teacher he has to attend trainings/refresher programs which are considered quite essential in this fast changing society. Thus, in order to be update, modern and sophisticated, one should attend in-service training or professional development programs.

6. 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.

Teaching is the noblest profession and the teacher is the role model. Everyone in a society is bound to respect a teacher because value system is always attached to him in particular. Teachers in general and English teachers in particular are always accountable for bringing certain desired changes in society in general and students in particular. Saudi Arabia is no exception to such changes and developments. English as an international language and a means of instruction in Saudi Arabia is being duly emphasized these days. Many researches are being undertaken in the area to diagnose problems and find out solutions if any. In spite of the fact that the government has taken many genuine and serious steps to impart knowledge and develop the level of English in the country, the students face a lot of problems during the courses of study. Apart from so many other factors, teacher remains the most crucial aspect of teaching-learning environment. It has been assumed if English teachers are properly trained and appropriately educated in the branches like Educational philosophy, educational sociology, educational psychology and pedagogy, the chances of further waste can be minimized.

Appendix-A (Questionnaires)

NAME: (Optional):

| S. N. | Statements | agree | undecided | disagree |
|-------|---|-------|-----------|----------|
| 1 | I studied educational philosophy as a student. | | | |
| 2 | It helped me a lot. | | | |
| 3 | I studied teaching philosophy my own after becoming an English teacher. | | | |

| | | | | |
|----|---|--|--|--|
| 4 | Teaching philosophy is the basis of curriculum and lesson objectives. | | | |
| 5 | An English teacher should better get prior teacher training. | | | |
| 6 | Teaching of English in KSA is different from teaching elsewhere. | | | |
| 7 | A pragmatist teacher will focus more on the practical side. | | | |
| 8 | An idealist teacher will achieve overall development, and not only course objectives. | | | |
| 9 | Philosophy is the theoretical side of education. | | | |
| 10 | Every teacher is basically a philosopher. | | | |
| 11 | Every philosopher is not an English teacher. | | | |
| 12 | Teacher is like a cook who may spoil food if not trained or experienced. | | | |
| 13 | An English teacher should visualize 'curriculum' globally. | | | |
| 14 | Students of English are not only national resource but also global capital. | | | |
| 15 | An English teacher should better go for continuous professional development. | | | |
| | Any other comments | | | |

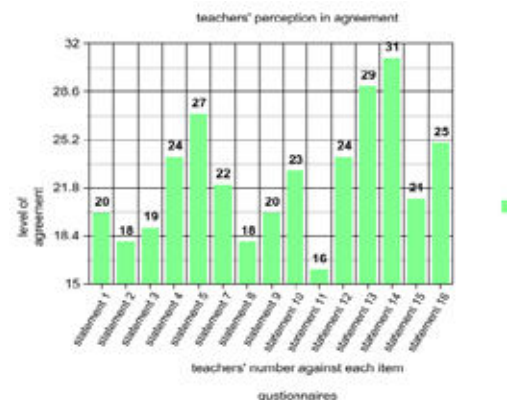
| | | | | |
|----|---|----|----|----|
| 5 | An English teacher should better get prior teacher training. | 27 | 9 | 4 |
| 6 | Teaching of English in KSA is different from teaching elsewhere. | 22 | 9 | 9 |
| 7 | A pragmatist teacher will focus more on the practical side. | 18 | 11 | 11 |
| 8 | An idealist teacher will achieve overall development, and not only course objectives. | 20 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | Philosophy is the theoretical side of education. | 23 | 7 | 10 |
| 10 | Every teacher is basically a philosopher. | 16 | 12 | 12 |
| 11 | Every philosopher is not an English teacher. | 24 | 8 | 8 |
| 12 | Teacher is like a cook who may spoil food if not trained or experienced. | 29 | 7 | 4 |
| 13 | An English teacher should visualize 'curriculum' globally. | 31 | 5 | 4 |
| 14 | Students of English are not only national resource but also global capital. | 21 | 9 | 10 |
| 15 | An English teacher should better go for continuous professional development. | 25 | 6 | 9 |
| | Any other comments | | | |

Appendix. B (Tabulated data) Appendix-A (Questionnaires)

NAME: (Optional):

| S. N. | Statements | agree | undecided | disagree |
|-------|---|-------|-----------|----------|
| 1 | I studied educational philosophy as a student. | 20 | 13 | 7 |
| 2 | It helped me a lot. | 18 | 14 | 8 |
| 3 | I studied teaching philosophy my own after becoming an English teacher. | 19 | 11 | 10 |
| 4 | Teaching philosophy is the basis of curriculum and lesson objectives. | 24 | 7 | 9 |

Appendix-C (Graphical presentation of the perceptions)



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