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Reinvigoration of Language Cognition and Individual Language Teacher Maxims in Second Language Pedagogies

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ABSTRACT

This article brings into focus the field of second language teaching and learning pedagogies. The notions of language teaching pedagogy continue to undergo revolutions from traditional knowledge of teaching to rational approaches in the current dispensation. Teacher cognition or teacher knowledge base and teacher experiences combine to form a strong pedagogical foundation in language classrooms. The paper purposes to juxtapose the teacher cognition with the individual teacher maxim principles of language in order to determine how cognition informs specific pedagogies, and how teacher maxims relate to teacher cognition. The objectives were; to determine the nature of language teacher maxims, to establish utilization of language teacher maxims in determining language teacher cognition and to compare language teacher cognition with maxims held by language teachers. A qualitative approach was adopted where responses from teachers on their belief principle on pedagogies were utilized. The discussion concludes with recommendations for teacher education and professional development with a focus on teacher maxims

Keywords: Language Cognition, Pedagogy, Teacher maxims

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher knowledge base in second language teacher Education forms a key conceptualization of teacher cognition. By this, Driel, and Meijer (2001) referred knowledge base to every profession-related cognitions that are potentially relevant to the educator's actions in the classroom. The depth and breadth of teacher cognition encompasses general pedagogical knowledge added to the content knowledge; followed by the science and art of teaching juxtaposed with the curriculum conceptualization. This redefinition of teacher cognition implies a deeper knowledge of complete learner characteristics together with the educational contexts and eventually the educational outcomes and values. Walshe, N., & Driver, P. (2019), in their argument for teacher and teacher training brings forth a new level of teacher cognition in the world of technology. Key in this study is student teacher reflections which now yield the belief principles in the classroom as part of teacher cognition and at the same time tilting towards the field of teacher maxim principles.

2. LANGUAGE TEACHER COGNITION VERSUS TEACHER MAXIMS

Korthagen (2017) brings forth teacher cognition in an integrated manner, accordingly, the traditional cognitive perspective and the situated learning perspective.. Looking at teacher cognition from the point of view of the two strands would definitely make a successful framework for successful pedagogy in teacher education. While traditional learning perspectives focuses on the teacher as the only source of information in the classroom, Situated learning environments place students in authentic learning situations where they are actively immersed in an activity while using problem-solving (critical thinking) skills. These opportunities should involve a social community which replicates real world situations. The findings by Korthagen was that not much has been done to address on how situated learning environment should displace

the traditional leaning. The basic belief principle, under situated learning is the maxim that students are more likely to develop a love of education and become lifelong learners. Students use critical thinking skills outside the classroom as they evaluate and reevaluate their perspectives on real-world topics and issue.

Making a language classroom a game like activity and generating a serene linguistic environment adds to cognition and pedagogical applications that a language teacher can impose in class. Pinto, R. D., Peixoto, B., Melo, M., Cabral, L., & Bessa, M. (2021) argues that with the growth and dissemination of this technology, there is a massive opportunity for teachers to add this technology to their methods of teaching a second/foreign language, since students keep showing a growing interest in new technologies. To a larger extent this could be pedagogical but also not distant from teacher maxims. The later inclines to Richards 2008 arguments that language teaching and learning invokes the mental lives of a language teacher cognition which includes the formation of knowledge base and their components followed by the teacher maxims that entails the conceptualization of cognitive processes that that inform the learning experiences in the classroom and thus the inclusion of technology in language teaching classrooms. This study finds the support by Borg (2006) that insists that active language teachers are creative thinkers and decision makers who determines the classroom learning experiences. In both cases, Richard (2008) and Borg (2006) argues on the premise that teacher cognition and teacher maxim principles has impact on language teacher practices

The need to understand the learner as part of teacher cognition is encompassed in Alfadil, M. (2020) works in effectiveness of virtual learner realities. Virtual language learning requires a shift in pedagogical approach by the teacher. Such approaches would be a product of deeper categorization of learners as in the case of VARKS model (2020) where learners fall in four categories represented as visual, aural, reading & writing and

Kinesthetic learners. Such cognition informs most prolific language teachers but however it is not without criticism emanating from teacher maxims. The argument in this case includes the sentiments that relying too heavily on a learning style can cause dilemmas for students as they may refuse to reach for additional opportunities to learn which may be outside of their comfort zone.

The major weight in teacher maxims puts teacher professionalism refers to teachers' own views of teaching and the processes by which teachers engage in reflection on their own values, beliefs, and practices. The present research addressed this dimension of individual professionalism by focusing on a wide variety of procedures through which teachers can engage in critical and reflective review of their own practices, for example through self-monitoring, analyzing critical incidents, teacher support groups, and action research (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In SLTE programmes, a focus on teacher cognition can be realized through questionnaires and self-reporting inventories in which teachers describe beliefs and principles; through interviews and other procedures in which teachers verbalize their thinking and understanding of pedagogic incidents and issues; through observation, either of one's own lessons or those of other teachers, and through reflective writing in the form of journals, narratives, or other written reports (Borg, 2006).

3. METHODOLOGY

The teacher was interviewed using a modified multidimensional TESL profile where the tool provided two phases of activities. The first was normal conversation and the second was observation of the classroom procedures and instruction materials. The sessions were video-taped and later transcribed. The teacher revealed that he had taught for fourteen years at both upper and lower primary level. He was currently teaching English at standard four and six.

A general question on what he believes to constitute an ideal instructional environment was asked, he began by explaining that English language teaching and learning is a complex process, he said that the procedure of teaching keeps changing from time to time.

'My years of experience in teaching' have given me a wealth of teaching procedures. Language ideal classroom situation involves a teacher and learner free interactions. I believe mostly in a learner involvement in classroom activities.' The environment should involve a listening, reading, speaking environment which is characterized by both teacher and learner involvement. He added that the environment should be both teacher and learner friendly.

A question was asked on whether he believes in teaching according to plan and he had the following response; that planning is just a necessary activity for language teaching, you cannot teach without planning, a lesson that has been planned will definitely be implemented according to plan. The next question was to sought whether the planning procedures taught in his training was still applicable or not, and he responded as follows : '...training and practice seems to be one and there is need to implement the plan based on situations, for example, the way I plan for my class four lessons vary to a great extent with my planning for my standard six class. I plan fewer learner activities for my standard four class than standard six. This is because, the nature of the content in standard four and that of standard six are varied and thus requires different levels of planning. The

needs and ability of the two classes are also varied. Apart from that in standard four class the learners' level of speaking are distinct. They are from various linguistic backgrounds thus some learners lack basic language skills because of their first language background.

A question was asked on how he allows for learners control of the lesson. The participant responded that control of the lesson was spontaneous rather than plan. He went on that his training on utilization of learner centered approach was a guiding principle and a motivation for allowing learners to control the lesson. He continued to say that the learner would need to control lesson for items which they are able since not all activities are manageable to them.

Whether the participant suggested that he needed to control most of the classes was an extra question asked. He responded that the major challenge was whether he was in control of the class when he allowed learners to carry out most activities or not. He said that since classroom activities were monitored by various supervisors he would only allow learners to control activities in the classroom as planned in his ideal lesson plan.

The other issue that the participant alluded to was the danger of active learners dominating at the expense of the introverts and those who are unable to carry out certain tasks. 'There is tendency of having some learners dominating the class if such was allowed for the learners.' He said. The participant added that there were specific activities that learners would take control of the lesson as in the area of speaking and listening while reading and writing activities would require close supervision by the teacher. The teacher explained that it was his principle belief that learners have great role in lesson activities and should be given the chance to do so.

He was asked the nature of his classroom and the ability of the learners. He responded that learners were of various categories in class four. Some had the basic language skills and required elementary language components skills during their lesson. The use of task based activities was challenging to many elementary learners. He cited that some learners require translation from their first language to the second language since the class comprised of learners from various linguistic communities and thus it was a challenge in meeting their linguistic needs. Ability to read and write was a general linguistic need for most learners as responded by the participant.

The other question was on the conformity to a specific teaching method. The question was *'Do you believe in strictly sticking to the prescribed teaching methods?* The teacher responded that there were various approaches to teaching and each was applicable based on specific situation. He said that the approach he believed in was that which enables the learner to understand specific language approaches and strategies. As earlier observed he highlighted the use of learners' centred approach as the most preferred teaching approach. Teacher directed activities were some of the approaches he inclined to. He posited that these approaches cannot be prescribed for a class but should be based on how they were planned in the lesson.

3.1 Interviewee 2 C2

This represented the second zone and was interviewed on a different date. The interview was geared towards determining the existence of belief principles that informs language teaching and learning.

On the teaching experience she revealed that she had taught over a period of sixteen years. She alluded her teaching experience to her belief principles in the teaching of English language. She said that she did not need to rely on whatever training background she received previously, since she can handle any language classroom situation as they emerge.

An ideal English language learner according to her is the one who is able to acquire the language skills as they are taught. She was asked a question on what constitutes an ideal classroom (instructional) environment; she said that the linguistic environment at lower primary should be similar to the home environment. The learner should be able to communicate freely and learn new language items. She asserted that it is the teacher who creates the required environment and maintains it.

On what the student need to know while teaching language she had this to say:

I think my student needs to know.....what is a verb? What is the direct object? How can you change the adjective to an adverb? On reading they would need to know a lot on language experience where they would be telling stories about them..... Given this expectation, she said she would emphasize on achieving what she thinks the learner should be able to know.

She was asked whether these expectations were ideally designed from the syllabus or derived from professional undertaking and she responded that these were just but the common and normal expectation of an ideal English language teacher.

Asked about lesson planning and teaching according to the plan, she said that during her initial stages at her profession, she would emphatically plan her lesson for the relevant language items to be taught. However, her years of experience have taught her to teach according to the learners needs.

Whether she was able to teach any type of English language learner despite their abilities, the respondent posited that learners' abilities were varied and that she would teach as essentially based on the learners' ability. The participant further said that English is a second language and it has its challenges for various types of learners. Linguistics needs involve ability to speak clearly in the appropriate second language, as required. She said that not all learners had all this ability and therefore they are handled differently.

Asked how she identified learner's linguistic ability, she responded that she would need her experience as a pivotal factor. Secondly, she would give oral quizzes, allow interaction with members of the class, give equal opportunities to all learners in the class and thus identify individual and general abilities of the learners.

A question on the kind of approaches she use in the teaching of English language was asked and responded as follows: *"During my recent training in a teacher training programme, I learned of skills based approaches, rule based approaches*

*and function based approaches.....*The training has prompted me to apply the teaching approaches to suit a required language approach. Otherwise, I believe I was using the same approaches though not in a formal set up.

An inquiry on which of the three approaches was most suitable to her classroom was made. She responded that it was the learners' ability that may dictate whatever approach was suitable for the class. What constitute learners ability to make grammatical utterances in English, ability to read and write meaningful sentences among others.

A similar question was asked on how would such learners needs be identified, she responded that written tests and oral quizzes were instrumental in identifying such abilities.

She eventually taught three lessons that were observed. Her first lesson was a story telling lesson which the teacher narrated a story and she expected the learners to retell the story as a measure of understanding. The teacher selected a story suitable to the class and the learners' main activity was listening. The teacher applied techniques such as repetition, rephrasing to emphasize learning. Asked whether training is required in order to facilitate such a lesson, the teacher responded that the teacher experience was more relevant here. The teacher said that she was utilizing the opportunity to sharpen learners' ability to listen and speak in correct English.

Another lesson observed was writing. The learners were required to write correct sentences. The teacher provided various sentences which were copied by the learners.

The classroom practices involved learner's instruction, learning correct letterings and shaping of letters. The teacher expected each learner to carry out the task. These implied that learners' ability is assumed to be equal except where learners show some inabilities.

The reading lesson was also observed and it had similar characteristics.

A grammar lesson was finally observed and it reflected the principle of preparation and planning and the principle of empowerment through learning activities that involve sentence construction. Teacher activity involve giving instruction and directing the learners which reflect some degree of learner empowerment. The lesson ended at an appropriate time as it was planned after further activities were given to the learners.

For the purposes of comparison of responses of the participants, Case 111, IV, V and VI were analyzed together. Case IV had a teaching experience of ten years and was teaching in a boys' boarding school. Case V participant had a teaching experience of twelve years and was teaching in an inclusive co-educational school. While case VI participant had a teaching experience of seven years in an ordinary public primary school. A multidirectional teaching English as a second language profile was used in the same way as the other cases previously analyzed. The items involved a) what constitutes the teacher maxim on ideal instructional environment b) the nature of belief principles held by each English teacher c) identification of learners diverse linguistic abilities d) strategies applied in the teaching of learners with diverse linguistic abilities.

On the issue of what constitute an ideal instructional environment, C4 responded that a linguistic environment is created by both the learner and the teacher. It involve total interaction between the two. While C5 asserted that a language environment is a product of the teacher regardless of the nature of the learners. C6 on the other hand believe that linguistic environment includes an environment of speaking and listening, reading and writing which is headed by the teacher. All the three participants concurred that their approaches to teachings has changed with their years of experiences and that teacher training experiences influences a teacher belief principle. However C4 believe the he has his personal ways of teaching language that slightly varies from his training orientation. The three cases have the principle according to plan and that planning enhances effective teaching learning instruction. C4 participant belief in a prototype lesson plan use, while C5 believe that the lesson plan was necessary document but not a panacea to effective instruction and C6 believe that a lesson plan was not a very necessary instrument for language teaching and learning the three participants generally ascribed to the maxim of planning.

A question asked on maxim of conformity posted different responses. The researcher wanted to know whether the respondent teaches in conformity to the prescribed methods of teaching language. The responses were as follow; C4 said that there is always a specific way of teaching specific language items therefore teachers ascribe to such methods. C5 asserted that the methods prescribed are merely axiomatic and teachers would teach using their own skills and experiences dictated by many other variables. C6 agrees with C4 that language teaching is done methodologically and the teacher requires appropriate skills in handling language items.

A question on whether a method of teaching should be skill based, rule based or function based was asked in different context. Conformity to skill based approaches was found among all the respondents. However, C5 was skeptical that even the any untrained teacher could sufficiently give language instruction regardless of insufficient skills. Case six said that second language teaching is a structured approached that is done according to the rule of grammar. The three respondents were unanimous that any approach utilized by a language teacher should enhance effective communication, that is, to bring up a learner who can utilize the language items meaningfully. These responses reflected the functional approach and thus a maxim of conformity. The three participants posited that though a teacher possesses an individual maxim, there is a tendency for a professional teacher to conform to professionally and universally classroom practices.

A question regarding the learners' diverse linguistic abilities was asked the three respondents agreed that learners are of different characteristics and that it was the role of a teacher to identify linguistic needs of the learners and address them accordingly.

A question was also asked on strategies used to address the learners needs based on the teacher maxim. C5 asserted that being in an inclusive set up he had realized that learners' linguistic needs are diverse depending on the nature of the learner physically, socially and mentally condition. He cited the writing needs for those who are physically handicapped. They may be challenged in several ways including inability to hold a pen, inability to recognize letters, inability to hear

correctly and inability to speak appropriately. He however C5 noted that these were easily identifiable physical needs and the task of the teacher is to identify intrinsic linguistic need.

The last phase of data collection was an observation of at least three lessons from each case as it was in C1, C2, and C3. A general trend was observed in each of the three cases. A lesson plan was available as an instructional tool for teaching each of the lessons observed except in C6 who hardly utilized the lesson plan. He believes that since he has been teaching the same language items he has internalized the concept and lesson planning was but duplication of duty. Clear analysis of the classroom practices or activities from the lesson observed reflected the teachers' maxims. In each of the 24 lessons observed they planned for practices that they believed to inform the best beliefs principles they hold. Though the lessons were taught wholesomely in a class, attention was geared toward individual learner ability which again reflected the teacher belief principle. Similarly, in all the lessons observed, teachers' practices reflected belief principles that were geared toward skill based approach to teaching, rule based approach and function based approaches. Learner variability in language shaped the activity that various teachers engage in classroom practices.

4. DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The first objective of the study was *to find out the nature of teachers' maxims in the teaching of English language learners*. Literature review as in Richards (2008) revealed a list of maxims principles held universally by teachers. This included the maxims of planning, it was revealed that this involved teachers believe in teaching after appropriate preparations of the lessons. The interpretation here is that professional documents such as schemes of work and lesson plans preceded teachers' classroom practices. The interviews carried out in this study also revealed that most teachers would embrace these maxims for the purpose of appropriate instructions in language classrooms. As earlier in Johnson (1992), teachers maxims were identified in three strands; Skill based, rule based and function based belief. The findings from the questionnaires did not clearly bring out the maxim of planning but interview questions were designed based on these strands. The three strands were all acceptable and utilized by most interviewees. The theory according to Carl Rodgers (2006) was identical with the researchers' philosophical position on positivist that reality in language teaching was relatively determined based on individual teacher's maxim. The interviews revealed the various approaches in the three classifications of maxim, but teacher's believed more in function based maxims.

Johnson (1992), found teachers that held beliefs in skill based, rule based and function based approaches respectively as earlier noted in literature. Similarly the current study found out that teachers' approaches were directed by the purpose in which they teach they teach. One respondent interview clearly said that language teachers should direct learners towards language use. Most teachers believe in language for utilitarian purpose. In order to apply this principle, a teacher focuses on creative language use as in the school of thought of facilitative teachers as posited in this study's theory by Rodgers. Further findings in this study were realized that teachers maxims were guided by teachers own experiences, prior teaching experiences. This was similar to the works of Muijis and Reynolds (2000). Reflections from the interviews showed that as teachers remain and gain experiences in language classroom they tent to develop more individual maxims

related to dynamic classrooms. The philosophy in this study is that teachers have varied beliefs though they have common competencies as a product of their professional experiences. These teachers do not rely on the same experiences but they apply instructions based on their personal belief. Johnson's position seems to be structured in a more formal approach to language teaching while Muijs and Reynolds (2000) takes a relativist approach which is a post positivist position as in this study.

The questionnaires revealed the maxim of conformity. A reflection from Richard's (2008) enrich the current study in that teachers' philosophy in teaching a language class is not based on the contents or materials or activities that had been planned because the direction of the lesson may change based on emerging classroom situation or learners needs. The ontological position held in these study still remain that there is no prescribed rule or approach that is said to best suit the needs of a learner. Just as Rodgers (2008) in the theoretical framework, the facilitative teacher should be able to listen to the learners and pay attention to their needs in order to come up with effective teaching. The literature on maxim of efficiency justified this position. The new knowledge in this study emanates from the interactions between the teacher and the learner in the classroom. The findings generally reveal that each teacher holds a unique maxim.

The study from the literature identified the maxim of empowerment as a principle held among many teachers. In Richards (2008) the maxim states clearly that the role of a teacher is not being in an absolute position with "all the knowledge and wisdom" from which students only passively receive knowledge and even copy the way teachers think. From the interview revelations, teachers who possess this maxim see themselves as mentors who guide the students. They want to play a role of teachers in giving a sense of both potential and responsibility to the learners. The study found an equal relationship on this maxim to Rodgers' theory on facilitating teachers. Such teachers according to the theory are participants who allow learners to do things on their own as the teacher facilitates instructions. The maxim of empowerment upholds the study philosophical position as social constructivism, in that this maxim as Richard (2008) gave an example of finding of learners observed reading a text as earlier discussed in chapter two; it clearly came up that meaning is as a result of constructing knowledge from the context based on the learner's understanding. It was found out that learning in such context is said to have taken place if the learner is able to come up with what is termed as specialized knowledge which the study had previously identified as a gap that existed between teacher's knowledge and classroom practices.

Maxim of efficiency was further identified in the current study. Both the questionnaires items and the interview revealed that the teachers' believe in making sure that the lesson time is clearly utilized. However during the interview session it was revealed that the teachers believe that the limitation of lesson time was an obvious factor that may inhibit appropriate instructions. The results showed that efficiency would be realized if the learner is able to utilize the lesson concept even after instructions. It was found out that teachers expected learners to utilize what was learned during their daily interactions amongst themselves, or during other formal set-ups. The ontological position agrees with this maxim of efficiency. It is not only the prescribed classroom where language learning is realized. Social context and formal

context can facilitate new knowledge to the learners and thus a learner can socially construct knowledge as a result of instruction having taken place in the classroom then the same knowledge is translated to out of lesson time situation.

The study therefore found out that individual maxims are held by each teacher. Richard (2008) citing Leung, from the literature review identified what he termed as institutionally prescribed professionalism and independent prescribed professionalism. Stern (1983) was reviewed and he made suggestion that teachers maxims of secured language are often based on methodologies they use. The findings from this literature revealed that apart from the prescribed professionalism, teachers ascribe to individual maxims where they engage in reflection on their own values, beliefs and practices. The current study developed a new dimension from Richard's point of view on such maxims in that Richard's dimension was from general perspective of teachers maxims while the current study looked at such maxims with a reflection of a learner's linguistic need.

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