



Assuring Learner Centredness through Effective Classroom- management

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Introduction:

Class management has a central role in developing a learner centred classroom context. Novice teachers and even certain experienced teachers face hard times in managing their classes and assuring learner centredness. In these classes, learners handle the responsibility of their learning in an active way. Teachers are no more the source of knowledge rather they become the facilitator of the learning process. Effective classroom management is the number one element in the list of being an effective teacher. However, the shift from a teacher centred classroom to a learner centred needs certain effective classroom management.

Learner-Centered Classroom:

Campoy (2004) sees that effective learning occurs when learners actively process the information in a way that is meaningful to them. Westwood (2008, p. 26) clarifies that learner-centred methods are based on constructivist views of learning, particularly for involving students more actively in acquiring knowledge, skills and strategies. For the constructivists, learners construct their knowledge by using their previous knowledge as an information base for the new knowledge. Further, he (2006, pp.30-40) refers to different approaches in relation to learner centred classroom such as:

- (a) Discovery learning (DL): Students develop knowledge related to a topic largely through their own endeavour, using whatever human and material resources they may need.
- (b) Discovery- based learning (RBL): Students learn from their own active processing of information using a range of authentic resources.
- (c) Project-based learning (PBL): Students work individually, with a partner or in groups to gather information on a particular topic or to investigate a real-world issue. They then share with others what they have learned.

- (d) Problem-based learning (PBL): Also known as ‘issues-based learning’ students are presented with a real-life situation or issue that requires a solution or a decision leading to some form of action.
- (e) Task-based learning (TBL) : Students investigate and report on a contemporary issue, to solve a problem or to collect and collate information around a central theme or topic in a specific subject area.
- (f) Cognitive strategy training: Students plan what they will do, implement their plan, monitor what they are doing, and modify their thoughts and actions, if necessary, as they proceed.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) sees that the conceptual foundations of learner-centered pedagogy are multidisciplinary; it was based on linguistics, sociology, discourse analysis, anthropology, ethnography, ethnomethodology and pragmatics. He adds that language teaching theory of learner centredness recognized the responsibility of the language teachers in helping learners to be more responsible on their learning.

Teacher-centred versus Learner-centred Classrooms:

In contrast to traditional instruction, learner-centered approach to learning focuses on meaning making, inquiry and authentic activity (Garrett, 2008, p. 34). According to her, in teacher-centered classrooms, teacher’s control is of primary importance with highly impersonal relationships with students. These classes are marked by lack of trust, a major focus on the maintenance of order from teacher’ part and an extrinsic motivation from learners’ part. However, the development of interpersonal relationships is an essential component of a learner-centered approach (Garrett, 2008, p. 36). In addition, Harmer (2007, p. 58) emphasizes the importance of involving learners in thinking of their own learning in learner centred classrooms. He clarifies;

Getting students to think for themselves is one aspect of what is often referred to as ‘learner centredness’. Learner-centred classrooms and lessons (where the learners are doing the most of the work, often in pairs and groups) are often seen as opposite to ‘teacher- centred’ lessons, where the teacher is deciding what should happen and where he or she is the center of attention” (Harmer, 2007, p. 58)

Similarly, Minter (2011, p. 749) lists the basic characteristics of teacher centred and learner centred classrooms. In teacher centred classrooms, the focus is on the teacher as teachers talk and learners listen. Teachers answer learners’ questions and choose the learning topics. Teachers evaluate learners’ learning; the classroom is basically quiet and controlled. Hence, learners are extrinsically

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motivated. Conversely, in learner-centred classrooms, the focus is on both the learner and the teacher. In these classes, the learners interact with the teacher and the other learners and answer each other's questions. These learners have some choice of the topics and they evaluate their own learning. These classrooms are often noisy and busy as learners are intrinsically motivated to learn more.

Westwood(2008, p.2) explains that learner centred approach is primarily concerned with bringing about deeper conceptual understandings and changes in students, whereas teacher-centred approach is concerned with effective transmission of information and skills from teacher to learner. Besides. Jones (2007) sees that a student-centered approach helps students to develop a “can-do” attitude;” it is effective, motivating, and enjoyable where the students get more “talking time”” (Idem, p. 1). In a student-centered classroom, the teacher and students are a team working together (Jones, 2007, p. 25).

Class-management:

Class management is the basic element of effective teaching. According to Garrett (2008), classroom management is a multi-faceted concept that includes the organization of the physical environment, by the establishment of rules and routines, the development of effective relationships and the prevention of and response to misbehavior (p. 35). For Oliver (2007) teachers' ability to organize classrooms and manage their students' behaviour is critical to achieving positive educational outcomes (p. 1). He adds, “Effectively managing the classroom is much more difficult for new teachers who may not have received sufficient training” (Idem, p. 3). Westwood (2006), views that well class management is number one element of the list of effective teachers in addition to providing students with the maximum opportunities to learn(p. 5). Scrivener (2011) highlights that the skills of creating a successful class may be the key to the whole success of a course (p. 54).

Class management involves some basic components. First, *classroom rules* establish the behavioural context of the classroom by specifying what behaviours are expected of students, what behaviours will be reinforced, and the consequences for inappropriate behaviour. Therefore, in establishing classroom norms and rules, teachers must reflect on the kinds of knowledge, skills, and materials students will need and then use this information to plan rules and procedures.

Second, *Routines* are more flexible than rules; “routines or procedures” are specific ways of doing things that, for the most part, vary little during the course of the day or the year” (Strone, Tucker & Hindman.2004, p.67).

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Routines shape the classroom atmosphere as they include how to enter and leave the classroom, take attendance, secure materials, turn in assignments and change from one activity or location to another. In fact, classroom routines responsabilise learners for their behaviours and learning. Practicing classroom procedures routines set from the beginning of the year will make class-management easier along the academic year. Raising learners' awareness of classroom procedures will facilitate their learning and the classroom will smoothly function.

Third, *flexible room arrangements*, the spatial environment should be designed to facilitate collaboration. It includes: furniture arrangements and location of materials. Finally, *handling conflict*, teachers will face situations of conflict among students as a result of a classroom discussions and different opinions. Besides, there are conflicts that rise out of problems of regulation as learners' behaviours, learners' groupings and their responsibility towards their learning.

In addition to the above mentioned components, Edge & Garton (2009) identify lesson planning as the first important element in class management. Lesson planning should involve lesson objectives, procedures, order and timing. Likewise, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (3rd ed)* explains that classroom management includes procedures for grouping students for different types of classroom activities, use of lesson plans, handling of equipment, aids, etc., and the direction and management of student behaviour and activity. Therefore, class-management does not intend to control students' behaviour, however, it aims at influencing students' effective learning behaviour.

The Facilitator Teacher

Jones (2007) believes that students can't be "taught" – they can only be helped to learn" (p. 25). For an effective teaching environment, Underhill (1999, pp. 125-126) makes a distinction between three roles the educators undertake in the classroom: the lecturer, the teacher and the facilitator. The first refers to the teacher who has knowledge of the topic taught but no special skill or interest in the techniques and methodology of teaching it. The second implies teacher's knowledge of the topic in addition to a range of a methods and procedures for teaching it. The last refers to the teacher who understands the topic and is skilled in the use of current teaching methods/ techniques and involves learners in their learning. The facilitator teacher actively studies and pays attention to the psychological atmosphere and the inner processes of learning with the aim of enabling learners to take much responsibility for their

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learning. Therefore, facilitation is intentional in the sense that the facilitators are conscious of what they are doing and why, then, explicitly state it to their students.

However, the transition from transmitting content to attending to the learners' needs may be unfamiliar or difficult for both teachers and learners (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 209). Then, how can a traditional lecturer begin the journey towards incorporating the facilitating role into her/his existing classrooms? Two points emerge here: 1) the facilitator is establishing a relationship which is conducive to learning, and 2) s/he is creating the conditions for that learning to take place. Students cannot begin to accept responsibility for their own learning and development unless the teacher relinquishes some of what has traditionally been her responsibility. The teacher will need to do less telling and more listening. In a student centred classroom, the teacher intervenes only when students need help and whenever they face difficulties or feel doubt after they have tried to solve the learning problem by themselves (Jones, 2007).

Learner-centred Classroom Management:

For an effective learner-centred classroom, class-management is a crucial element. Dunbar (2004, p. 5) sees that the best practices in classroom management is based on communicating high expectations to the students and establishing clear rules and procedures, instruct students in how to follow them and the consequences of any misbehavior. He insists on the importance of discipline by enforcing classroom rules from the very first day of study. Creating opportunities for students' cooperation and self-monitoring would guarantee a student centred classroom. Jones (2007, p. 2) sees that students working individually, together- in pairs, groups, or as a whole class- are important criteria for learner centred class-management. He explains:

- Working alone, preparing ideas or making notes before a discussion, doing a listening task, doing a short written assignment, or doing grammar or vocabulary exercises
- Working together in pairs or groups, comparing and discussing their answers, or reading and reacting to one another's written work and suggesting improvements
- Working together in discussions or in role-plays, sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences
- Interacting with the teacher and the whole class, asking questions or brainstorming ideas

Also in a student-centered class, students may be teacher-led as follows:

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- Before students work together, their teacher will help them prepare to work together
- While students are working together, their teacher will be available to give advice and encouragement.
- After they've finished working together, and the class is reassembled, their teacher will give them feedback, offer suggestions and advice, make corrections, and answer questions.

Moreover, Jones (2007) sees that the ideal size for a student-centered language class is probably 12 that can be divided in pair or groups of three, four or six students. He further highlights that even with classes of thirty students; teachers can assure learner-centred class-managements (Idem).

The Study:

Didactics is a module designed to third year students (LMD system) in the department of English, Badji Mokhtar University- Annaba. It deals with language teaching methodology. From the beginning of the academic year 2013-2014, the recurrent observation was students' dependence on teacher centred instruction model where the teacher is the only source of knowledge and only two or three students participated. The great majority of the students were in the classroom to listen to the teacher and take notes. This situation resulted in the lack of real interaction in the classroom and learners' ignorance of the active role they have to play for learning. The main question of this study was: "How can the teacher of didactics ensure a student-centred class-management?"

The next year, along 2 semesters of 2014-2015, 40 students were involved in an experiment where they were concerned with constructing their own knowledge. This experiment had two goals' types:

(a) Short term goals were:

- Involving learners in constructing their own learning.
- Responsibilizing them for their learning.
- Developing their intrinsic motivation towards the module and raising their self-confidence.
- Socialize students in the classroom through pair, group and whole class activities
- Equipping students – future teacher- with certain background knowledge about language teaching accounting for the different

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teaching methods, learners' individual variations, lesson planning and classroom management.

(b) Long term goals consisted of:

- Achieving student centred classroom.
- Developing autonomous learners.
- Prompting learners' reflection on the effect of teacher and teaching on learner and learning.
- Sensibilizing students for their future duties as teachers.
- Involving students in lessons 'planning through the experience of teacher modeling " teacher training"..'.

Teacher's assumptions and Beliefs:

Since the learners are in their final year of study, the teacher assumes that they can use English as the only medium of instruction. They certainly can read, write, speak and listen in English. Besides, students should have developed certain research skills from their previous years of study.

The teacher believes that whatever students' level, teacher should express high expectations, positive regards, and work jointly with the students towards a learner-centred learning environment. Besides, the teacher should be the facilitator of knowledge and no more its provider.

The teacher considered the main components of classroom management as explained in the literature review in order to guarantee a learner centred classroom. Here are the rules, procedures, and learners' groupings along the two semesters:

Rules: The first day of study is very crucial in establishing rules; I set the followings for the didactics session:

- Respect is the golden rule of relation: Respect yourself, and respect each other, in addition to the mutual respect between the teacher and the learners.
- Lesson preparation is a must during the didactics session, and if not done there should be a justification only for the first time, otherwise students won't be accepted.
- All learners are equal: good, intermediate, or poor learners.
- Whenever late, the student should ask for permission to enter the classroom.

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- No laughing at any student's participation, opinion, even repetition of what has been already said.
- We listen to each other without interruption." No student intervenes while another student is speaking", or "while the teacher is speaking".
- Whenever you have not understood something, it is your right to ask for clarification and repetition
- No talking without raising hands (permission).

Classroom Routines/procedures:

1st semester:

In the first semester, the students were involved in different students' groupings as follows:

- Individual work: lesson preparation at home, taking notes, lessons' reflection at the end of some sessions.
- Pair work: comparing methods, answering certain questions, sharing opinions.
- Group work (five to six students): In front of the whole classroom, students present the lesson together by dividing the presentation among them. Every student is accountable in the group. In some sessions, the students in groups will be required to answer certain questions that the teacher wrote on the board from their lesson preparation; they work in circles.
- Whole class: class discussion of students' lesson presentation, assessment of groups' work, and lesson discussions.

In the classroom, the teacher assured that the students are handling seriously their responsibility of lesson preparation, and are efficiently working in pair/group work. Students were not used to work in pairs/groups and some even refused that; the teacher as facilitator should motivate learners to be part of such groupings by explaining their benefits and the best way to apply them. The teacher kept walking in the classroom and stood beside groups for a few moments listening to their interactions. The teacher intervened whenever a misunderstanding among group members occurred or when students needed some clarifications. In classroom discussions, the teacher was the last to provide her opinion.

Moreover, the teacher made sure that the students have respected the time allotted either for lesson presentation or question answering. One hour and a half won't be sufficient to hear all the groups; the teacher took note of the

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remaining groups for next sessions. Every session is a new lesson and in every lesson, all students should prepare the lessons.

2nd Semester:

As students' got used to lesson preparation and presentation, the next step was to make them model teacher role- role play activity- by standing with their lesson plans in front of their classmate- who became their students- for half an hour teaching them the lesson. This teacher should use the board and any material s/he found useful. Here the student playing teachers' role became one hundred percent responsible for their lesson preparation and presentation. The teacher pinpoints: "No novice teacher is perfect", "we all made make mistakes, just get profit from this occasion before being a real teacher". She provides the following instruction:

- You should behave as a real teacher and this needed rehearsing at home.
- You should interact with your students- the classmates.
- You should train your voice to be heard by all your students.
- You will be assessed first by yourself, your classmates and finally by the teacher.
- Certain criteria will be considered in the assessment: the content, teacher-students interaction, teacher's role, students' role, board use, teacher confidence/hesitation, students' motivation, teacher movements in the classroom.
- The full lesson will be handed to the didactics teacher by the end of the session.

Experiment Difficulties:

Implementing this experiment was not easy, since the students got used to certain classroom managements where they had no responsibility towards their learning. The difficulties were as follows:

1. Students were not used to prepare lessons
2. They were not used to work together either in pairs or groups and if it happened in their previous learning experiences, they were rare and not weekly.
3. They showed hesitation, anxiety and even fear in presenting their ideas.
4. They were afraid of making language mistakes.
5. They didn't like the new burden of weekly lesson preparation.
6. They were not comfortable during the first sessions.
7. Teacher should be in tight control of the experiment and lessons' procedures.

Experiment Results:

As the semester progressed, students got used to their responsibility and became more motivated to study didactics. The classroom atmosphere became more positive since students learned how to respect, cooperate and discuss with each other. The students became more comfortable in their relation with each other and with the teacher. The teacher was in tight control of the experiment to make students accept their new roles, once this happened; the session became more vivid with less tension from both sides- teacher and students.

By the end of the year, students became highly responsible, motivated and even autonomous. They have developed their English in the four skills since they were in constant contact with English inside and outside the classroom: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Certain Introvert learners did overcome their fear and anxiety to speak English in front of the classroom and to express their ideas. They learned from pair/group work how to be more confident as they found that some students are sharing their same feelings but still they participate. Besides, teacher's encouragements and beliefs made students work to achieve her expectations. Here are the results of the experiment:

- (c) Students became more involved, committed and responsible for their learning.
- (d) They became intrinsically motivated with less anxiety and more self-confidence.
- (e) They became aware of the benefits of individual, pair/group work.
- (f) They developed certain background knowledge on language teaching accounting for the different teaching methods, learners' individual variations, lesson planning and classroom management.
- (g) The didactics session is a student centred classroom where the teacher is the facilitator.
- (h) Students are more aware of the impact of the teacher and teaching on learners and learning.
- (i) They are more aware that "teaching is a responsibility" that needs knowledge and skills.

Consequently, from the second semester, the hallmark of the didactics session was students' participation and interaction. The didactics session

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became vivid with new voices every session. The teacher became a participant in the classroom, intervening when ideas needed support or clarification. As part of learner centred classroom management, teacher did not judge students' performance as teachers, it's up to them to judge themselves first then hear the classmates and finally the teacher. The students felt the necessity of preparing well their lessons and the importance of brainstorming ways to present them effectively.

By the end of the year students were asked about the effect of this experiment on them; the great majority of students were happy with this experience because it helped them to discover their strengths and weaknesses by themselves in addition to what type of teachers they want to be in the near future. From this experience, students learned to value their efforts, assess their performances and plan for better learning. Some learners, when they did not like what they have presented or how they presented it, they asked for a second chance and this was the real success of this experiment; "Students became satisfied only by the good work". These students raised their standard to the level of teacher's expectations. The didactics session became an active session with students constant interactions and discussions.

Conclusion:

Learner centred classroom is a joyful classroom, where the time is never enough to end a discussion or to hear all the students. It is very motivating, enjoyable and thoughtful not only for the learners but also for the teacher. By the end of the sessions, students seem happier, enthusiastic and more confident because they constructed their knowledge by themselves. Saying that does not underestimate teacher's role, because without teacher's planning for classroom management and constant research there would be no student centred classrooms. Therefore, implementing this approach in the classroom is a decision taken by the teachers who want to make a changes in their classrooms. In such classes the teacher learns how to listen and observe attentively the students. However, for a student centred class- management, one hour and a half is never enough, because the students and the teacher have a lot to do and to discuss.

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