

The Holistic Approach To English Language Teaching : A Survey cum Experiment

A. K. Paliwali*

Abstract

Relativity or Relativism is an essential characteristic of everything in life. Education is also untouched by this relativism. However, the stream is undesirable in the educational world, there is always a gap between theory and practice which is not in tandem that is inherent in education. English is also relative in nature. This has been identified following a survey among B.Ed students. Teachers therefore need to be provided with a gestalt view of education and their misconception methodically removed through an objective holistic approach.

The Relativism in life

Everything in life seems to be relative. All objects are essentially made of something. They have no separate identity. Obviously one exists because of the other. They may be contrastive but still similar and identical like the light and darkness, cold and hot, happiness and sorrow, day and night, activity and passivity, bravery and cowardice, fire and water, love and hate, affection and envy, fear and fearlessness, hollowness and fullness, minority and majority, nearness and

distance, openness and closeness, powerful and powerless, respect and disrespect, morality and immorality, simplicity and complexity, softness and toughness, vicinity and wilderness, yesterday, today and tomorrow, etc. The list could be infinite. The point is that their very existence depends on the other. The secret of their existence is integration, totality, wholeness, completeness.

Can they exist without the other? Honesty has no value without the existence of dishonesty and so is the

* Assistant Professor, Vidya Bhawan IASE, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 313001

case with morality and immorality. Values are constructed by the society and for the society. Arguably they are interdependent. If all the people were honest, there would be no place for dishonesty and thus the so called honesty would lose its significance. However, that would be an ideal situation. I wish it were so. But the problem is that a truly ideal situation never existed in the past, does not exist and I doubt it would ever exist in future because of the practical problems. Therefore, we have no alternative but to accept the existence of the other whatever it may be whether we like it or not. This, in my humble view, is relativism in life. Interestingly, Einstein's Relativism is equally applicable to real life situations, provided we understand it in totality, not just in the context of physics and mathematics. It's high time we broadened our view and vision.

The Relativism in education

As life itself is relative, how can education be untouched by the notion of relativism? In the broadest sense, life itself is true education. Life is what is total. Similarly education is what is total. Education is whole, integrated, and complete. It cannot be separated, divided, disintegrated and cut up into tiny and minute parts. When it is fragmented, it becomes 'something' but not 'education'. Then it can add something to the 'whole' but it can never be the 'whole'. In order for it to become a whole, the parts would have

to come together to form 'totality'. Parts do exist but for the whole.

The fragmentation of '**education**' into **disciplines** and **streams** is basically undesirable. Education is like a river passing through valleys, even and uneven land, and finally reaching its destination: the ocean, which again is 'total', whole, and complete. The ocean, the whole, is bigger, broader, wider, deeper, greater and evidently more majestic and mysterious than its parts. That's the beauty of the whole.

The Relativism in language

Language is also part of education. There cannot be any education without language. And there can be no language without education. They are complementary and they exist for each other. Language has social, physical, psychological, moral and a whole lot of other properties. Language consists of grammatical, lexical, structural, morphological, phonological, orthographic, syntactic and semantic properties. Within each linguistic property, there are a number of other special properties which are connected, interconnected, dependent, and interdependent. They are there because of the other. In brief, they are all relative.

Let us take an example for the elaboration of the idea in question here.

In English grammar there are reported to be eight parts of speech which are: noun, pronoun, adjective,

adverb, verb, connectives, preposition and interjections. They are parts, not whole. These are the parts of the whole. The whole is available in the form of a variety of sentences. The sentence is the unit, not the part. We can normally not have a sentence without the parts coming together to knit a sentence. This unit is SVO (subject + verb + object). These 'subject' and 'object' are generally nouns and / or pronouns.

Further, all 'parts of speech' have morphological, lexical, phonological, structural, orthographic, semantic properties and values. Thus, they are all in one property and vice versa. Each 'part' has holistic property.

Relativism in pedagogy

All theories are a product of processes and vice versa. Processes emerge from theories and vice versa. This is a cycle. Everything is integrated. Unfortunately, in education including teacher education it is either theory or practice which dominates the scene. Usually, there is no correspondence observed between theory and practice in the educational world. In spite of all this hindrance, a new theory emerges out of practice. There is an inherent relativism in pedagogy also.

Relativism in ELT

ELT (English Language Teaching) is also relative in nature. We have already discussed that the notion of integration of separate entities in a language. Is there any integration in language teaching also including ELT?

Our past experience provides the

answer which is NO. The basic reason of the answer being in negative is our obstinate habit of 'analysis' in place of 'synthesis'. This is the reason we cannot see the woods for the trees.

Like teaching we have compartmentalised language teaching also possibly for the sake of convenience. As a result we treat grammar, structures, vocabulary, basic language skills (LSRW) as separate parts of language while as a matter of fact they are parts of the whole, that is, language.

A 'Pre -Holistic Discussion' Survey:

It is to be mentioned here that the theatrical discussion-cum hypotheses need to be supported by some empirical evidence for making it a strong case for dissemination of the idea in question. Keeping in view this objective it was decided to conduct a small survey with B.Ed students with a view to finding out whether they favoured the idea of relativism in life, education and pedagogy. The author of this paper worked with a group of 20 prospective secondary school teachers of English who were readily available and willing to be involved in the survey at Vidya Bhawan IASE, Udaipur, Rajasthan.

They were involved in '**pre- holistic discussion survey**' conducted through a brief questionnaire, the results of which are shown in Table 1.

Table I shows that a majority of students do not agree with the view that there is relativism (wholism, totality, completeness, fullness) in life, education, language, teaching, language teaching and ELT. They also

Table 1 : Students' Percentage of Responses

	Questions	% of 'YES	% of NO	% of DON'T KNOW
(A)	Is there relativism in life?	10	60	30
(B)	Is there relativism in education?	10	50	40
(C)	Is there relativism in teaching?	10	60	30
(D)	Is there relativism in language?	10	50	40
(E)	Does language have no grammar?	0	100	0
(F)	Are grammar and language one and the same thing?	90	10	10
(G)	Do vocabulary, structures and basic language skills have no grammar?	80	10	10
(H)	Is there relativism in language teaching?	10	80	10
(I)	Can grammar be taught without vocabulary, structures and basic language skills?	80	10	10
(J)	Do you approve of the Holistic Approach to ELT?	10	90	0

hold the view that languages including English cannot be taught through the holistic approach.

A Post 'Holistic Discussion' Survey

The author along with a couple of his colleagues conducted discussions and intervened also if need arose. Some new information was provided to them by clearing their doubts and motivating them to ask allied questions. No attempt was made to impose views on them. No concluding remarks were made. The same group of students was involved in 'post-holistic discussion survey' through the same questionnaire the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that after discussions on the relativism and the holistic approach a majority of students agree

with the view that there is relativism (wholism, totality, completeness, fullness) in life, education, language, teaching and ELT. They also hold the view that languages including English can be taught through the holistic approach.

Concluding Remarks

The pre-test and post-test data indicate that there is a significant difference between the views of the respondents generated through the pre-holistic discussion and post-holistic discussion. Since the study was conducted with a small sample, the results may not be generalised without strong and empirical evidence elected through valid and reliable tools administered to a big population. However, the meager evidence still implies that there is a need for a full

Table 2 : Students' Percentage of Responses

	Questions	% of YES	% of NO	% of DON'T KNOW
(A)	Is there relativism in life?	80	10	10
(B)	Is there relativism in education?	70	20	10
(C)	Is there relativism in teaching?	80	10	10
(D)	Is there relativism in language?	70	20	10
(E)	Does language have no grammar?	10	70	20
(F)	Are grammar and language not one and the same thing?	10	80	10
(G)	Do vocabulary, structures and basic language skills have no grammar?	10	80	10
(H)	Is there relativism in language teaching?	70	10	20
(I)	Can grammar be taught without vocabulary, structures and basic language skills?	10	70	20
(J)	Do you approve of the Holistic Approach to ELT?	70	10	20

scale study in this regard. Nonetheless, it may be suggested that pre-service and in-service teachers need to be provided with a gestalt view of education and their misconceptions are methodically removed through an objective holistic approach. Education should be treated as an integrated phenomenon, a complete idea, a total experience rather than

disintegrated sets of fragmented images. Language teaching including ELT should also be conducted in a relative, gestalt and holistic context and teachers should be oriented towards the idea of relativism, holism through meaningful and focussed discussions, workshops, seminars, action research projects, and hands-on-experiences.

REFERENCES

- PALIWAL, A. K*. *Teacher Education: Need for a Crusade*. In a national seminar *Souvenir on Quality Concerns in Teacher Education*. 23-24 Jan 2006. CASE, M.S. University. Baroda.
- PASSI, B. K. AND PALIWAL, A. K. 2007. Holistic Teacher Education. In *University News*. Vol.45. No.06. Feb 05.11.