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THE ROLE OF THE LEARNER AND THE TEACHER

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is the second optional course on offer, and is meant for the middle and secondary school teacher. Our optional courses are of a practical nature, where we have attempted in real terms to give examples of classroom experience to the teacher. We have suggested new strategies as well as new materials in teaching the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. We have also dealt with new techniques in evaluating these skills.

This practical component of our programme is both a preparation in teaching practice for the aspiring teacher and a refresher course in practical methodology for the more experienced teacher.

Let us assure you that this course is especially designed keeping in mind the ordinary teacher who:

- teaches in large classes with few resources
- follows a set syllabus and text book
- has little time available for lesson planning
- does not have too many teaching aids or equipments.

This course, which is of four credits, consists of four blocks:

Block 1: The Role of the Learner and the Teacher

Block 2: Teaching-learning Listening Comprehension and Speaking

Block 3: Teaching-learning Reading Comprehension

Block 4: Teaching-learning Writing and Grammar

Good luck! We hope you enjoy reading the material and find it useful. We look forward to your comments, which you may send to the Director, School of Humanities.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The focus of our programme is the learner, and learners in their formative years have different needs/problems/aspirations at different stages. In this block we primarily look at the adolescent learner – who is emotionally and physically going through a rather difficult period. This child-adult learner needs sympathy-empathy, and a genuinely humane environment so that a basis can be laid for “an effective, concerned citizen, well informed, competent in knowledge and skills and confident of facing the future.”

The teacher’s role becomes very important, because s/he has to create an environment which is not that of a “know-all” authority, but a vulnerable human being who is essentially a facilitative learner among learners.

So far, we have discussed the ‘ordinary learner’, but, as teachers, we often come across several learners who are socially and economically disadvantaged. It is our duty to integrate these learners into the main stream.

Above all, it is our duty to help all categories of learners to stand on their own feet, and we need to evolve strategies which will help them do so.

Therefore our units are as follows:

Unit 1 The Learner at the Secondary School Level

Unit 2 Teaching the Underprivileged Learners

Unit 3 Helping the Learner to be Autonomous

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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UNIT 1 THE LEARNER AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Developmental Processes
 - 1.2.1 Cognitive Development
 - 1.2.2 Psychosocial Development
- 1.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.4 References and Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- identify Piaget’s four cognitive concepts in your classroom practice;
- describe the features of Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development;
- discuss the shortcomings of Piaget’s stage theory;
- discuss the educational implications of Piaget’s cognitive theory in classroom practices;
- discuss Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective in learning;
- identify the point of difference between Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s theory of cognitive development;
- discuss the psychosocial crisis in human life based on Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development;
- explain how psychosocial development is related to the cognitive development of a child;
- create classroom environment appropriate for the development of a healthy psychosocial individual;
- discuss the educational implications of individual and group learning; and
- explain the significance of curriculum based learning for the child.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

If you reflect on your life you would find that over the years you have acquired mastery of different types of skills more or less in a continuous manner and improved in quality and quantity. This is in essence to the dynamics of learning. Learning is always on the move from rudimentary to higher and from simple to complex. This is true for children as well. It is an ongoing experience for them as they go through different processes of growth and development. In this unit, you are going to learn about the different developmental processes central to the dynamics of child learning. To this effect, we examine Piaget’s cognitive theory of development and the four underlying processes of schema, assimilation,

accommodation and equilibration. Also we discuss Piaget's four stages of cognitive development; the sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, the concrete operations stage and the formal operations stage. We then discuss Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective in learning. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is included to describe the psychological and social development of the child. You know that in children some learning takes place at the individual level and some at group level.

1.2 THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

You know that development is a continuous process ensuing multiple changes. Development means growth, adaptation and change over lifetime. Physical growth happens to be the most visible indices in the beginning, but gradually children demonstrate the acquired language skills, social skills and cognitive abilities. In this section we will discuss various developmental processes.

1.2.1 Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget, a prominent Swiss psychologist has immensely contributed to the understanding of children's cognitive development. He observed children over a period of years, and noted that human behaviour is an act of adaptation to the physical environment.

Piaget's Cognitive Theory

Piaget used four processes of schema, assimilation, accommodation and equilibration to explain the how and why of cognitive development.

Schema

Piaget used the term schema (plural is schemata) to refer to the mental structures which help individuals to adapt to and organize their environment. He believed that the mental structures construct meaning of the new experience and facilitate one's cognitive adaptation to the new experience or environment. For example, if a child cuts his/her finger with a sharp object, a cognitive structure will be created to adapt to this new experience. This schema would be used to adapt to the environment when the child is faced with a similar situation in future. At birth very few schemata exist but as the child grows older and encounters more experiences more schemata are formed to organize the experience. Piaget suggested that the organization of the new experience into schemata occurs through the processes of assimilation and accommodation.

Assimilation

Assimilation is the process through which a child makes sense of experiences and perceptions by fitting them into the existing cognitive structures (schemata). A child who is familiar with cow on seeing a buffalo will adapt to the new experience by adding more information to the existing schemata of the four legged animal (cow). In the classroom, when the teachers introduce new concepts they try to facilitate the process of assimilation by linking these concepts with already existing knowledge (schemata).

Accommodation

When the process of assimilation is not working because the new experiences do not fit into any of the existing schemata, a new schema will have to be developed

to adapt to the new experience. This process of creating a new schema is called accommodation. For example, if you are teaching about four seasons of the year to a class of students in Chennai, they may not have the schemata about winter season as they do not experience winter in Chennai. Therefore, the children will have to create a new schema to organize the new information. As the children go through varied experiences and encounter new stimuli they develop the ability to create numerous schemata that are more complex and increasingly different from each other.

Equilibration

The fourth process identified by Piaget is of equilibration. To Piaget assimilation and accommodation are the two critical processes in cognitive development, and equilibration does the balancing act between them. Think what will happen if a child continued to assimilate new information. The child would have schema containing many bits of information that will be difficult to discriminate. Similarly, if a child continued to accommodate, all new experiences and information would be seen as different and therefore no generalizability. Equilibration is the process of learning that occurs when the processes of assimilation and accommodation interact.

For example, in a math class after teaching the concept of area, the teacher shows a model of rectangle to the students and then changes it into the shape of a parallelogram. She then asks the students to identify which of the figures, rectangle or parallelogram, is larger in area. You will find that students may silently think about or discuss with each other and work out the answer. Piaget calls this a state of cognitive disequilibrium. When students come up with the answer that both the figures have similar dimensions and thus same area irrespective of the shape, they have equilibrated the concept of area. Piaget believed that when children are thrown into a state of cognitive disequilibrium they will attempt to remove the discrepancy between what is perceived and what is understood by assimilating new experiences into existing schemata or by creating new schemata to incorporate the new experience.

We have so far discussed Piaget's theory of cognitive development. He used four cognitive processes of schema, assimilation, accommodation and equilibration to explain how an organism adapts to the environment. In the following section you will learn about the stages of cognitive development.

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

As discussed earlier Piaget observed children from birth to adolescence and maintained meticulous records of their thinking patterns. During his longitudinal research he found that children showed consistency in their thinking patterns within broad age ranges, characterized as stages. He observed that the stages were distinct and qualitatively different from each other. Based on his findings, he proposed four main stages of cognitive development.

Table 1.1: Stages of Cognitive Development

Stage		Age
1	Sensorimotor	0-2
2	Preoperational	2-7
3	Concrete operations	7-11
4	Formal operations	11-16

The Sensorimotor Stage (0-2 Years)

This is the earliest stage of cognitive development, in which the major cognitive activity of the infant is of interaction between her senses and the environment. At this stage the infant has only a few motor abilities like sucking, grasping etc. In the initial days the child may appear helpless to solve any of his/her problems, but a few months later with more development s/he may start engaging himself/herself in purposeful activity. For example, in the initial days the child may have been unresponsive to a toy hanging above the crib, but a few months later may begin to kick and move with the purpose of moving the toy to enjoy the resulting visual scene created by the action. Gradually the child learns to relate the sensory experiences to the external objects and events. Piaget called this developmental process as the infant's understanding of objects and events expands beyond the immediate. In a way the infant begins to understand that objects continue to exist even after they disappeared from his/her view. You must have observed that while a seven or eight-month-old infant can search for his/her toy that is out of sight (often for a brief period), a five month old cannot do. With the development of object permanence, the infant starts using symbols to represent objects without experiencing them through the senses. By the end of the sensorimotor period, children have fully evolved object permanence in place and are able to imagine where a hidden object could be located even if s/he has not seen where the object was placed. At the end of this period children develop simple problem-solving abilities.

The Preoperational Stage (2-7 Years)

Children's ability to form mental images to represent earlier experiences during the sensorimotor stage expands further in the preoperational stage. The child cannot yet fully manipulate these mental images. Piaget thus termed this stage, the preoperational stage. Children make vast advances in language development during this period. Their vocabulary expands dramatically and they develop the ability to use grammatical structures although not concerned about language rules. At this stage language development is mostly through imitation. Children who have adults around to interact show significant difference in their language development. With advanced language development and imagination children engage in symbolic or pretend play during this period.

In the preoperational stage, the child's thinking is egocentric. Piaget said that children at this stage cannot see someone else's perspective. They think everyone views the world as they do. The child is central in everything s/he does or thinks. To Piaget child's egocentrism was due to the qualitative limitation in thinking during this period and not because of selfishness. By the end of this period the child becomes less egocentric. Children in the preoperational stage are unable to generalize from what is happening around them. Preoperational characteristics decrease from age five to seven and they begin to show concrete operational thought.

The Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 Years)

This stage is characterized by the child's ability to think logically. They are now able to solve concrete problems. They don't have any difficulty in understanding that the liquid poured from a short fat glass into a tall glass can have the same amount. The child is able to distinguish reality from fantasy. The child at the concrete operational stage develops the understanding of reversibility. Their ability

to reverse operations facilitates the ability to develop conservation skills. Children are now able to classify objects into categories other than shape and colour as they did in the preoperational stage. Another characteristic of this period is the child's ability to organize objects in ascending or descending order by size, volume or area, known as seriation. Following table shows some of the major developmental milestones of the concrete operational stage.

Table 1.2: Concrete Operational Milestones

Milestone	Age
Becomes proficient in the art of persuasion	
Understands play on words	
Comprehends a metaphor	
Begins to estimate accurately how much time is needed to study	8 or 9 years
Classifies according to categories and subcategories	
Successfully plays board games that require turn-taking	

Source: Parsons, R.D. (2001). p. 47

The Formal Operational Stage (11-16 Years)

In the fourth stage of cognitive development, formal operations, the child is able to employ logical thoughts to solve abstract problems. This stage is characterized by the increased ability in reasoning. The formal operational child is able to formulate hypotheses and test them to solve a problem. When presented with a problem, the formal operational child will think of a combination of possibilities unlike the concrete operational child. During this period the child develops the ability to think about what s/he knows. They are able to retrieve information, use retrieved knowledge in combinations in new situations, exercise control over thought processes and monitor the thoughts. They also develop the ability to understand the thoughts of others. Flavell (1985) termed it as metacognition. As adolescents develop understanding of the thoughts of others they realize that others point of view may differ from theirs. They now realize that reality is not always objective and there is subjective reality too. With the advent of metathoughts, adolescents develop the ability to place their thoughts in perspective in relation to the thoughts of others. This is the learner at the secondary level.

Scholars like Arline (1986) have explored the possibility of a fifth stage of cognitive development. Piaget's description of formal operational stage is limited to problem solving. Arline suggested a stage beyond formal operational characterized by the ability to discover new problems, new solutions and new knowledge. Piagetian theory does not address the cognitive development of exceptionally talented individuals (Sternberg, 1985).

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Briefly explain the four cognitive processes in Piaget's cognitive theory of development.

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2) Describe the features of Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development.

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Vygotsky’s Theory of Cognitive Development Process

Piaget described cognitive development through different stages based on the internal development of the child. In fact one of the criticisms of Piaget’s theory is that he overlooked the importance of **sociocultural factors** in cognitive development. Vygotsky provided a sociocultural perspective to cognitive development. He attempted to establish the relationship between the child’s development and the sociocultural context in which the child was situated. His theory of child development focussed on the relationship between “the line of natural development which is closely bound up with the processes of general organic growth and the maturation of the child[and]. . . the line of cultural improvement of the psychological functions, the working out of new methods of reasoning, the mastering of the cultural methods of behaviour” (Vygotsky, 1994, p.57).

While Piaget described child’s cognitive development in stages, Vygotsky centred his theory of child development on times of crisis in a child’s life which he termed critical periods. He identified the following developmental junctures of rapid, profound transformation in mental and social functioning of the child.

- When the child begins to walk
- When the child begins to talk
- When the child starts school
- When the child begins to use conceptual thinking
- When the child gains self-awareness during adolescence

He examined the critical periods from the point of view of children’s meaning making processes and the development of their social relations. He believed that the changes that happen during the critical periods are so profound that they often lead to crises for the child. The critical times characterized by “abrupt and major shifts and displacements, changes, and discontinuities in the child’s personality are concentrated in a relatively short time” in which period “the child changes completely in the basic traits of his personality” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 191).

The onset, duration and impact of critical periods may vary in different children but all children are affected by them. During each critical period new mental structures like language, verbal thinking and conceptual thinking are formed that result in the transition from one age level to the other and determine the character of the next level of development. These mental formations change “in the transition from one stage to another, and the whole structure of the age is reconstructed. Each age has a unique and singular structure specific to it” (1998,

p.197). The new structures formed during the critical periods “basically determine the consciousness of the child, his relation to the environment, his internal and external life, the whole course of his development during the given period” (1998, p.190). The new mental formations propel “the reconstruction of the whole personality on a new base” (1998, p.197).

A core aspect of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework is his analysis of **meaning** and the ways it develops in human social interaction. Vygotsky (1997) said, “Meaning is not the sum of all the psychological operations which stand behind the word. Meaning is something more specific. It is the internal structure of the sign operation. It is what is lying between the thought and the word. Meaning is not equal to the word, nor equal to the thought. This disparity is revealed by the fact that their lines of development do not coincide” (p. 133). He studied infants to analyse meaning-making. Children develop a new formation – autonomous speech – near the end of their first year. He believed that the new formation of autonomous speech is the beginning of a new relationship between speech and thinking which is central to the understanding of all other changes. Vygotsky sought unity of speech and thinking to describe his approach to verbal thinking.

He emphasized, “Since all meaning of a word is a generalization, it is a product of the intellectual activity of the child. The meaning of the word is a unity of speech and thinking that cannot be broken down further” (1998,p.294). When children begin to make meaning through social interaction it is explanatory of the sociocultural situations of development.

The interdependence of the individual’s internal processes and the external social processes in learning and development is the main focus of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework. Child’s social situations of development influence qualitatively their perception, experience, appropriation, internal understanding and memory of interaction in and with their environment. Vygotsky considered this interdependence “as a process that is characterized by a unity of material and mental aspects, a unity of the social and the personal” (1998, p.190). He emphasized the relation between the social and the personal “a completely original, exclusive, single, and unique relation, specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality that surrounds him. We call this relation the **social situation of development** at the given age” (1998, p.198). The meaning constructing activity of the child is situated in the social processes and not isolated from it. Vygotsky argued that “the child is a part of the social situation, and the relation of the child to the environment and the environment to the child occurs through the experience and activity of the child himself; the forces of the environment acquire a controlling significance because the child experiences them” (Vygotsky, 1998, p.294). Each time children reconstruct their conscious personality specific to the given age, Vygotsky argued, they do so within their social existence meaning they are influenced by the social situation of development. The reconstruction process brings in a new relation between the child’s consciousness and his/her social existence “the child, having changed the structure of his personality, is already a different child whose social existence cannot but differ in a substantial way from the existence of the child of an earlier age (1998, p.199). This means the meaning-making process of the child goes through considerable changes when s/he passes through the critical periods - “the essence of every crisis is a reconstruction of the internal experience, a reconstruction that is rooted in the change of the basic factor that determines the

relation of the child to the environment, specifically, in the change in needs and motives that control the behaviour of the child (1998, p.296). It is important for teachers and parents to understand that the child's change in needs and motives reconstructs the internal experiences. When internal experiences are altered, the child's relationship to the social environment also changes. The effect of the environment on the child at various ages, one, three, seven or twelve, is completely different from the other. Vygotsky used a Russian term **perezhivanie**, to explain how children make meaning of their social existence. This term appeared in his article "The Problem of the Environment" (1994). The translators of this article explained perezhivanie; "The Russian term [perezhivanie] serves to express the idea that one and the same objective situation may be interpreted, perceived, experienced or lived through by different children in different ways" (Vygotsky 1994, p.354).

Vygotsky believed that every experience of the child, since birth, is socially mediated. This social mediation shapes the perception, memory, appropriation, emotional experiences and internalization of the child. What characterizes the meaning making process through social interaction is "not the situation in itself taken in its absolute indicators, but how the child experiences the situation" (1993, p.294).

Another contribution of Vygotsky to the theory of child development is his concept of the **zone of proximal development**. As discussed above children passing through various critical periods reconstruct their conscious personality within their social existence. Each critical period causes new mental formations. The meaning making process of the child changes from the earlier period. Vygotsky believed that children were capable of solving problems independently at given ages. He termed this level of ability as the zone of actual development. It is important that children are given opportunity to learn so that they reach the level of zone of proximal development. The support given to a child in learning during the early stages is crucial for the cognitive development. As they grow older, children develop capabilities to guide their learning process, and thus need less support.

Language development begins in children in the late period of sensorimotor stage. Vygotsky viewed language as an important mediator between learning and development. There are different theories that explain how language is acquired. Are humans genetically programmed to learn language(s)? Nativist theorists like Noam Chomsky and Eric Lenneberg argue that children have innate, language-specific abilities that facilitate and constrain language learning. We are familiar with children imitating adults in various aspects of life. Social learning theorists suggest that language learning happens through observation and imitation. Linguists may differ in their views regarding how children acquire language but do not dispute the fact that language plays an important role in development. While learning does not always happen in school or in other formal set up (because one can learn by observation, imitation, experimentation, etc.) it is true that language ability promotes learning. Children are able to solve problems independently. But if they have to reach the zone of proximal development they need to understand the spoken language and the vocabulary. For later development without assistance, children would also need to understand the written language. School as an agency of learning provides organized learning experiences. Language plays a key role in the child's development in organized areas of knowledge.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Point out any three key features of Vygotsky's cognitive theory.

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- 2) What is the point of difference between Piaget's and Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development?

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1.2.2 Psychosocial Development

You are aware of the crucial role of sociocultural environment of an individual in his/her psychological development. In this section, we will discuss Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. His theory describes personality development in eight stages. He also called these eight stages as critical periods of life. Each stage is characterized by a psychological crisis. As the individual attempts to resolve these crises, a healthy personality evolves. Each time a crisis is resolved it adds a new dimension to the personality of the individual. The stages are in sequence and if a crisis remains unresolved in one particular stage it becomes difficult to solve a similar crisis at a later stage. Personality development depends on the person's ability to interact with the environment and resolve the crisis. Each time the crisis is resolved or unresolved, leaves a lasting impact on the person's self-concept. Let us now discuss the different stages.

Stage 1: Trust versus mistrust (birth - 2 years)

The physical and emotional care and warmth given to a new born baby develops in him/her a sense of trust or mistrust. If the infant experiences a predictable care behaviour s/he develops a sense of trust towards the caregiver and the immediate surroundings. If the care behaviour is not predictable and dependable the infant develops a sense of mistrust.

Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (2-3 years)

During this period the child does not depend on the caregiver for physical movement. The child is able to crawl, sit, walk and run and experiences personal autonomy. The child likes to explore the surrounding by himself/herself. Yet complete freedom is not allowed as it may be unsafe for the child. Therefore, both freedom and restraint are in play during this period. The feeling of independence is the positive aspect of this

stage but there can be negative emotional development too. For example, the child likes to exercise his/her independence by exploring the house, drawing out objects and throwing them away. If the child is restrained or punished harshly, s/he may go through experiences of personal shame. On the other hand, if the caregiver overindulges the child, it may result in a self-indulgent personality. There is a tussle between the child's sense of autonomy and sense of self control at this stage. Therefore caregivers and parents need to organize and structure the environment of the child for developing a sense of autonomy and self control.

Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (3-6 years)

This period is marked by the child's increased desire to explore new environment and investigate new challenges. Erikson called this the development of a sense of initiative. During this period children get into tasks of which parents do not approve. They become very inquisitive about their surroundings and ask many questions. They would want to help you with your work. Erikson believed that if the child is discouraged from taking up the initiative, the child would develop a sense of guilt about his/her tendency to explore and investigate. Children in this age group are expected to take up the new challenges like going to school, learning to read and write and such other activities.

Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6-12 years)

Erikson believed, during this period, children attempted to achieve mastery in whatever they do. He termed this a sense of competence or industry. As elementary students, children learn to read, write and compute. They now start using these skills outside school activities like reading a comic book. They now spend more time with others away from home. They get into many activities like gymnastics, dancing, sports, etc. In this stage of development children want to succeed in what they do. Therefore, the term industry. If children are not encouraged to develop a sense of industry during this stage, Erikson believed that they would instead develop a sense of inferiority and feel about themselves as failures in whatever they do. It is important that children get appreciation and recognition for what they do from parents and teachers. In fact recent research has shown that peer group rejection is carried over from elementary to high school and affect academic achievement and lead to adjustment problems in later life.

Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (13-18 years)

This is the period of adolescence. In search of identity, they want to find answer to the question "Who am I?" At the cognitive level adolescents develop a different way of understanding and thinking. Physically they go through several changes. They are confused about their identity and role in the society. They experiment with new ideas and relationships and they are not sure about their attitudes, beliefs and values. Erikson thought that adolescents are in **Psychosocial moratorium**, a period of delay that is granted to someone who is not ready to meet obligations. As adolescents experiment with different identities they may fail or face difficulties. Adolescents who are surrounded by caring adults get protection during such emotional crisis.

Since they search for identity they often imitate people whom they admire. They would like to dress and behave like their hero/heroine. Having not sorted out who s/he is, the adolescent finds it difficult to make a career choice. Erikson argued that those who leave adolescence with these issues sorted out develop a sense of identity.

James Marcia's (1980) identity status theory described the four primary ways in which adolescents resolve the crisis of identity.

Identity diffusion

A situation in which the adolescent has not made any firm commitments to any ideology, occupation or interpersonal relationship and is not currently thinking about such commitments. Adolescents in the status of identity diffusion tend to repress the issue of resolving their identity, because they remained in a state of denial that they had to make such an important decision. In this status, some adolescents develop a negative identity that is opposite to the values and culture they were brought up with. There is also a chance that adolescents with negative identity may enter into antisocial activities and crime.

Identity foreclosure

In this status the adolescent attempts to resolve the identity crisis by accepting the role authority figures and friends choose for him/her. Here, the teen is trying to avoid autonomous choice. The best example of this status is when adolescents choose the profession of their parents without examining the consequences of their choice.

Identity moratorium

This status is when the adolescent considers alternative choices and experiences different roles, but final decisions are not made. Some adolescents use the moratorium status as an excuse to avoid resolving the identity crisis while others use it in a healthy way to examine options.

Identity achievement

In this status, after thoughtfully considering different options, the adolescent develops a sense of commitment to life choices. Achieving this status is not easy for the teen as Marcia found that it contained elements of personal crisis, confrontation and thoughtful decision making.

Erikson's last three psychosocial stages are beyond the usual school going age group. In the sixth stage, **intimacy versus isolation**, the major crisis is the development of a true and intimate relationship. Erikson thought that those who failed to experience this intimacy will develop a sense of isolation and tend to avoid relationships and make commitments. In stage seven, **generativity versus stagnation**, individuals in middle age develop a sense of generativity, which he defined as creativity or productivity, otherwise they experience stagnation. In the last stage of psychosocial development, **integrity versus despair**, those who have adapted to the ups and downs of life develop a sense of satisfaction and acceptance. Healthy resolutions in early stages of crisis develop a sense of integrity and unhealthy resolutions lead to despair.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Briefly describe the first six stages of Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development.

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In the above discussion we have examined cognitive development, moral development and psychosocial development, the developmental processes that determine learning.

1.3 LET US SUM UP

Children pass through different developmental processes in life. We have discussed here these developmental processes with a focus on learning. Piaget argued that humans organize their environment to adapt to that environment. He explained adaptation having four processes: schema, accommodation, assimilation and equilibration. Piaget described cognitive development of children in four stages. In the fourth stage of formal operational stage with which we are concerned, children are able to use logical thought to solve abstract problems. They are able to think of solving a problem in different ways. They also develop the ability to understand the thoughts of others. Vygotsky’s view of cognitive development offered a sociocultural perspective. His theory of child development is centred around the critical periods in a child’s life. He identified five critical periods in a child’s life. Vygotsky focussed on children’s meaning making processes and the development of their social relations. The interdependence of the individual’s internal processes and the external social processes in learning and development is the main focus of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework. Vygotsky considered every experience of the child as socially mediated. Another important concept of his cognitive theory is the zone of proximal development which indicates a child’s ability to solve problems, with help, beyond his/her actual development.

We also talked about Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. He has described psychosocial development in eight stages: trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation and integrity versus despair. The first five stages are of particular interest to classroom teachers. We have also discussed Marcia’s identity status theory that described the four primary ways in which adolescents resolved the crisis of identity. School is another agency of learning, as they take children through organized and structured learning in different areas of knowledge.

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UNIT 2 TEACHING THE UNDERPRIVILEGED LEARNERS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Underprivileged and the Underprivileged Learners
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 - 2.3.3 How to Make the Present System of Education useful for the Underprivileged Learners
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- 2.7 Suggested Readings
- 2.8 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The Unit will help you:

- Understand your underprivileged learners and their problems in learning English;
- Identify the upper class/culture biases in the textbooks and test materials meant for them;
- Adapt some of the text material and tests to the need/level of your underprivileged learners; and
- Develop a healthy/positive attitude towards your underprivileged learners.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In India, as in other underdeveloped/developing countries, we often come across a large number of underprivileged learners in every class. Depending on the location of schools, whether in a rural or an urban area or in a slum or a posh locality, the number of these learners in a class vary. But most of us come across such learners in some of our classes. This justifies the need for this unit.

2.2 THE UNDERPRIVILEGED AND THE UNDERPRIVILEGED LEARNERS

Pre-Reading Tasks

Think for a while over the following questions and jot down the answers on a piece of paper.

- 1) Who are the underprivileged?
- 2) Why are they underprivileged?
- 3) What are some of the characteristics of the underprivileged learners?

2.1.1 Who are the Underprivileged?

The term 'underprivileged' refers to the disadvantaged section of people who are economically, socially and locationally in an unfavourable situation compared to the rest of the population of the society. Thus it is a relative term. They are underprivileged in relation to the middle class or upper class people of their society. Educationists and social scientists have used many other terms such as 'deprived', 'psycho-socially deprived', 'culturally deprived', 'socioeconomically deprived', 'locationally deprived', etc. to describe these sections of the population of a country. On account of their poverty and low social status, they are denied the privileges available to the upper classes. The underprivileged in India include the poor, the ethnic minority groups such as the SCs and STs, the refugee immigrants, and the socially, economically and locationally backward learners.

2.2.2 Why are they Underprivileged?

The causes of the backwardness of the underprivileged are many. However, some very general causes of their backwardness are as follows:-

i) Poverty

Poverty is common to all unprivileged groups. It is the root cause of their backwardness. Most of the opportunities in life are denied to them just because they are poor. Take, for example, the case of education. Poor nutrition prevents unprivileged children from making full use of their intelligence. This is seen more during the early stages of development of poor children. This leads to poor performance in school, which, in turn, reduces the chances of their employment.

ii) Exploitation and discrimination by the privileged

Since the beginning of history, exploitation of the underprivileged by the privileged has been a very common occurrence. With the progress of time, while the visible exploitation is on the decrease, the invisible exploitation of underprivileged by the privileged is on the increase. The education system, for example, is based on the privileged culture. History and other textbooks hardly ever mention the contribution of the underprivileged to the mainstream culture. This causes a negative self-image among unprivileged children and a negative attitude to their own culture which, in turn, contributes to their disadvantaged status.

iii) Locational disadvantage

The underprivileged tend to live either in remote rural areas or in the slums in towns and cities. Their locational disadvantage denies them some of the opportunities available to the privileged people who live in better locations.

iv) Urban-middle class and dominant-culture based education system

The existing schools are based on urban middle class culture. The textbooks, the teaching methods and the system of examination are more suitable for the middle and upper class students. The medium of instruction is often the language of the privileged group. The culture of the underprivileged groups, their life and learning styles are hardly taken into consideration. Thus, for learners who belong to the privileged culture, the school is a continuation of the home. But, for the underprivileged learners there lies a wide gap between the home and the school. This is primarily responsible for their poor performance in school, which, in turn, makes it difficult on their part to rise socially and economically.

v) Low motivation for upward social mobility

Economic, social and locational disadvantages prevent the underprivileged from cherishing long-term goals. They are more present-oriented. They are found to have low self-concept. All these are responsible for their low motivation for upward social mobility. Most of them are found to be satisfied with what they have, with little desire to rise above their present status.

2.2.3 Characteristics of Underprivileged Learners

Present-day psychologists have shown that the idea of some races being more intelligent than others is false. According to them, intelligence is learned rather than inherited. But they agree that the early years of a child's life are very important for his/her intellectual development, to which the home and early social environment contribute a lot. As most underprivileged learners come from similar homes and social backgrounds which are not congenial to learning, they display certain common characteristics which create problems for their education. A number of research studies conducted on underprivileged learners have identified some of the characteristics of the underprivileged learners.

i) Low motivation to learn

The parents of most underprivileged learners are illiterate and, therefore, hardly encourage their children to learn. Their poor socio-economic background has made them more present-oriented, that is, most of their time, energy and means is spent to satisfy their present needs. They cannot think for the future of their children, and fail to have long term goals for them. This is responsible for their children's low educational and occupational aspirations which, in turn, is responsible for their lack of motivation to learn.

ii) Low cognitive abilities

Underprivileged learners have low cognitive abilities. Cognitive abilities refer to those abilities of an individual which are necessary to function at a level of abstraction, and include perceptual, conceptual and linguistic abilities. Underprivileged learners, for instance, tend to learn in a physical

fashion. They can think through a problem only if they can work on it with their hands, whereas most of the advantaged learners learn in a symbolic way-getting a picture of the task and then solving it in their heads. This is mainly due to the fact that the environment of the underprivileged learners lacks the richness required for the development of concepts in them.

iii) Low self-esteem

Underprivileged learners are found to have negative attitudes towards their own people, culture, language and also towards themselves. One's attitude to oneself, as you know, is primarily influenced by what others think of us. People from dominant cultures have negative attitudes towards underprivileged learners. Racial and caste stereotypes (fixed negative attitudes of people of one caste and race towards others) that exist in a society contribute to their low self-esteem.

iv) Poor readers and slow learners

Underprivileged learners are usually poor readers. This is primarily due to the fact that their homes hardly have any books and they get few chances to develop the habits of reading. Their learning style is slow and cautious.

v) Greater sense of independence and responsibility

So far we have talked about some of the negative learning characteristics of the underprivileged learners. But they have also some very positive characteristics. In contrast to the privileged learners, they are often found to possess a greater sense of independence and responsibility. Underprivileged learners from their childhood days learn to make decisions on their own and take up responsibilities. They share household chores with their parents, learn to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. But unfortunately the educational system has not been able to exploit these very positive characteristics of the underprivileged learners.

Let us reflect back and think

Compare your notes (we asked you to make at the beginning of the section) with the information we provided. Did the information help you to become more positive in your attitude towards the underprivileged learners?

Check Your Progress-1

1) Who are the underprivileged?

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2) Why are they underprivileged?

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3) What are some of the characteristics of the underprivileged learners?

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4) Make a list of the types of underprivileged people in India.

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2.3 EDUCATION OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED LEARNERS

Pre-Reading Tasks

Think for a while over the following questions: What has been the history of the education of the underprivileged learners? What is wrong with our current approach to their education?

How can we make our system of education better suited to the needs of the underprivileged learners?

2.3.1 A Brief History of the Education of the Underprivileged

There are three clear stages in the history of education of the underprivileged. These are: Isolation, Assimilation and Integration

i) Isolation

The early stage of education for the underprivileged all over the world was marked by isolation. Separate schools were established for the underprivileged learners. In America, for stance, there were separate schools for the black and the white American children. In India some states had separate schools for tribal children, and in other schools the untouchable learners were made to sit separately from their high caste upper class counterparts.

ii) Assimilation

The second phase of the education of the underprivileged is marked by a tendency to assimilate. Provisions were made for educating underprivileged learners along with the privileged learners in the same school. In India, for some time, there was a stage of isolation-assimilation during which the untouchable, low-caste learners were asked to sit separately from the children of higher castes in the same class/school. But the school and the system of education was based on the dominant or the advantaged group and the aim of education was to assimilate the underprivileged into the privileged culture.

iii) **Integration**

In the third phase of integration, attempts were first made to educate the underprivileged in their own language and culture so that they would develop a positive attitude to their own culture and language.

Depending on these approaches/stages, mainly three theories have been put forth to explain the poor school achievement of the underprivileged learner. Earlier their poor school performance was ascribed to their innate or hereditary qualities (the native endowment theory) and later to their environment (the cultural deprivation theory) and currently the blame is on the school (the institutional deficit theory).

Though historically there are three distinct stages of the education for the underprivileged, this does not mean that one stage came to an end giving way to another – for instance, isolation leading to assimilation. At times it is found that all these three stages co-existed at a particular period of time in some countries.

2.3.2 **What is Wrong with the Current System of Education for the Underprivileged?**

One of the major means of transforming the underprivileged into privileged is education. But unfortunately the current education does not help them much in this regard. This is primarily due to the fact that the current system of education is based on the culture of the privileged. Let us discuss, in some detail, how the different aspects of the current educational system do not help the underprivileged in their hope for transformation of their lives, in spite of the special incentives provided to some of the underprivileged learners (S.T., S.C., and O.B.C) by the Government.

i) **Textbooks**

Textbooks play a very important role in teaching/learning, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries. But these textbooks are often written from the point of view of the culture of the privileged. The history textbooks, for instance, hardly ever mention the contribution of the underprivileged class to nation building. There were not less than a hundred tribal uprisings against the British Rule before the first war of independence in 1857. But most of the history textbooks are silent about these uprisings.

Moreover, most of the textbooks are difficult and packed with too much information. Thus, most of them are suitable for the highly motivated learners. But, as underprivileged learners have low motivation, they fail to make good use of these textbooks.

Besides, when learners of the privileged class fail to make good use of these textbooks, they take the help of private tutors and teaching shops, but the parents of the underprivileged learners cannot afford such outside help.

ii) **Methods of teaching**

Like the textbooks, the methods of teaching are also based on dominant, privileged culture. One of the principles behind most of the methods of teaching learning for example, is reward and punishment – reward for doing well and punishment for not doing well. The children of the privileged class

get trained in this principle as they grow up in the family. But this is not the case in the family of an underprivileged learner.

iii) Testing

A major cause of the poor performance of the underprivileged learners in examinations is the dominant culture biases in the tests and test materials. The content of the question, the instructions, the time factor, in other words the total testing procedure is based on urban middle class culture, which creates problems for the unprivileged learner. It is found, for example, that in the examination students are asked to write essays mostly on urban-oriented themes such as ‘A Circus Show You Have Visited’, ‘Your Favourite T.V. Programme’, etc. Setting up a strict time limit in tests create problems for tribal learners as they have not learned to give great importance to time while growing up in underprivileged families.

iv) Teacher training

Most of the teachers teaching underprivileged learners are from the middle or the upper middle class. They share some of the negative attitudes of the privileged class towards the underprivileged. Some teachers, for example, consider the underprivileged learners as genetically inferior to the privileged learners. Existing teacher training programme do not help them become aware of their negative attitudes. Neither do these programmes help them identify the cultural biases in textbooks, methods of teaching and test materials for the underprivileged learners.

v) Problem of learning language

The language of the privileged class is often used as the medium of instruction in education. But most of the underprivileged learners are speakers of dialects or speakers of some minority languages. In most cases, their language learning load is greater as they have to learn their own language/dialect and also the dialect/language of the dominant groups.

Because of all the problems mentioned above, the school appears alien to the underprivileged learners whereas it becomes an extension of home for the privileged learners.

2.3.3 How to Make the Present System of Education Useful for the Underprivileged Learners

We have observed so far, that the current state of education for the underprivileged is beset with a multiplicity of problems. The problems examined are very complex and their root lies deep. But unfortunately the solutions we offer for these problems are simplistic and do not deal with the deeper underlying causes. For example, to solve the problem of dropouts among tribal children in some states of our country we have extended their stipend for an additional year. But this will hardly have any effect on the dropout rate of tribal children as the causes of their dropping out is very complex – the school, the textbooks, the system of evaluation, the teacher – all based on non-tribal high caste culture. Thus the real solution to prevent the dropout rate is to adapt the school, as far as practicable, to the tribal culture. This is true of other underprivileged learners as well. The current system of education can be adapted to the culture of the underprivileged learners provided positive changes are made in the following important areas of education.

i) Preparation of textbooks

We have observed how the current textbooks are biased in favour of the privileged class. There is, therefore, a need to remove these biases as far as practicable. The subject matter of the textbooks needs to be relevant, interesting and enjoyable for the underprivileged learners. The theme, structure and the cultural content should be carefully graded. The content, wherever possible, should foster in the underprivileged learners a positive attitude to their culture and people.

ii) Methods of teaching

In devising and selecting methods of teaching for underprivileged learners, their learning styles should be taken into account. For example, if we devise methods of teaching for tribal learners who constitute a major section of underprivileged learners in India, we have to take into consideration the tribal style of learning through play, music, memorisation and learning from peers. Taking into account their learning styles we have to select and/or adapt some of the existing methods of teaching/learning. For instance, methods such as oral reading, recitation, group work, role-play, peer-learning can be effective in case of tribal learners. We should also take into account some of their positive characteristics – greater sense of independence and responsibility, for example.

iii) Evaluation

We have observed how the existing tests and test-materials are biased in favour of the privileged class. Underprivileged learners, therefore, lack test-taking skills and perform poorly in such tests. Attempts, therefore, should be made in two directions: reducing the dominant culture biases in tests and training underprivileged learners in test-taking skills. Biases should be removed in all the four areas of tests – content, language, test-taking situation and the time and competition involved. Instructions to the test should be made very clear and, where possible, be given in the language and dialect of the underprivileged learners. Initially the time limit should be relaxed for these learners and they should be trained in the skills of test-taking.

iv) Education through the language and dialect of underprivileged learners

Educationists today agree that it is better to teach a child to read and write in his/her native language before introducing him/her to any other language. They believe that it is easier to develop reading and writing skills in the learners' mother tongue/mother-dialect first, which can easily be transferred to other languages learned subsequently. A learner who already knows how to read in one language, for instance, does not have to struggle with the problems of reading all over again. Where the languages are closely related, there is almost complete transfer of reading ability. Even when the languages are entirely unrelated, the essential process involved in decoding graphic symbols remains the same. Thus attempts, wherever possible, should be made to use the language/dialect of the underprivileged learner in education. Language, as we all know, is a vital element of culture and the loss of language is a major step towards loss of culture.

v) **Teacher preparation**

The role of teachers in teaching underprivileged learners is very important. The changes suggested in the areas of textbook preparation, evaluation, methods of teaching and use of the language/dialect of the underprivileged learners are, due to various reasons, not always possible. But, if the teacher is willing and capable, she can implement some of these changes at his/her level. For example, if the textbook has privileged class bias the teacher can remove these bias while teaching. Similarly, s/he can use the language/dialect of the underprivileged learners in the classroom even when the system of education has made no provision for these language/dialects. Unfortunately, the conventional teacher training course/programmes do not help teachers develop these skills. Thus special teacher training programmes should be designed for teachers teaching underprivileged learners, to equip them with these skills.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) We have, in some states in India, separate schools for the tribal learners. Does this go well with the current approaches to the education of the underprivileged?

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- 2) List some of the problem areas in education for the underprivileged?

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- 3) Out of the five solutions suggested which one needs to be done first. Why?

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2.4 TEACHING ENGLISH TO UNDERPRIVILEGED LEARNERS

Pre-Reading Task

Think over the following questions:

- 1) What are some of the special needs for learning English for the underprivileged learners?
- 2) On the basis of our discussion so far, can you predict some problems that underprivileged learners are likely to face in learning English?
- 3) Can you think of some ways of making teaching/learning of English enjoyable, interesting and useful for them?

We have seen how the current educational system makes provision for teaching underprivileged learners. So does ELT (English Language Teaching). There exists a variety of special English programmes for underprivileged learners around the world. In most of the developed world there are ELT programmes to teach English to the ethnic minorities who are disadvantaged in relation to the majority culture. Reading materials, methods of teaching and testing procedures in English teaching have been adapted to the needs of underprivileged learners. Thus, like EST (English for Science and Technology), ESP (English for Specific Purposes), TED (Teaching English to the Disadvantaged) has become a current movement in ELT.

2.4.1 Why should Underprivileged Learners Learn English?

The underprivileged learners' need for education is greater than their privileged counterparts. So also their need for learning English is greater.

- 1) Learning English in India, because of historical and practical reasons, has become essential for every educated person. It has developed into a variety in its own right – 'Indian English'. Besides, English in India plays an important role in education, particularly in Science and Technology where it is the medium of instruction. It forms a major subject for selection tests for prestigious jobs both at the state and the national level. An adequate command of English is also necessary for getting a good job in the private sector. In view of all these factors, the need for learning English on the part of underprivileged learners is really great if they are to join the mainstream. It is largely because of their poor command of English that their representation in class I jobs is very low. In fact underprivileged learners joining All India Institutes of Science and Technology on the basis of reservation are found to dropout partly because of their poor command of English.
- 2) Underprivileged learners have some special needs for learning English. English in India is associated with elite culture. It has a high status symbol. Thus, an adequate command of English on the part of underprivileged learners will raise their social status. It will act as an agent of status equalisation for them.

2.4.2 Underprivileged Learners' Problems in Learning English

While the underprivileged learners' need for English is great, their proficiency in English is found to be very low in comparison to their privileged counterparts and they have more problems in learning it. Some of their major problems in learning English are as follows:-

i) Fear of English as a subject of study

For various reasons underprivileged learners have a great fear of English which comes in their way of learning it. Their fear of English is partly due to the association of English with the elite culture in India and partly due to the inappropriate, ill-prepared text-books and teaching methods. The teachers of English who are often the members of the privileged class are also responsible for creating this fear in their underprivileged learners.

ii) Language load and poor reading skills

Underprivileged learners in India are often the speakers of a non-standard variety of a language or of a minority language. Education through their language and dialect has not been possible so far. Reading skills are easy to develop in learners through their first language. As this has not been possible for most of the underprivileged learners in India, they are poor in reading skills. But reading skills in English are very important in India as reading constitutes the most important resource for exposure to English.

iii) Inappropriate textbooks, teaching methods and testing procedure

English textbooks are biased in favour of the privileged class. So also the methods of teaching and testing. The content, characters and even the pictures in English textbooks, for example, are all biased in favour of the privileged learners. The characters one finds in an English textbook are from the upper class culture. Similarly the test materials and testing procedures are based on upper class culture. Underprivileged learners, as said earlier, lack test-taking skills (see 2.3.3). All these factors need to be taken care of when teaching English to underprivileged learner.

2.4.3 Some Tips for Teaching English to Underprivileged Learners

Given below are some tips for teaching English to underprivileged learners. Although these tips are equally useful for teaching any other subject or other kinds of learners, they are especially important for teaching English to underprivileged learners.

- i) Take your underprivileged learners into confidence and try to understand their problems in learning English from their point of view.
- ii) Be generous in giving them feedback. Praise them for partly answering a question.

Move close to them, touch and pat them to encourage them to learn. They need your help most.
- iii) Allow them to answer in a word, a group of words. Do not insist on full sentences.

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- To begin with, ask them easy questions which can be answered by ‘yes/no’.
- iv) Allow them to answer in their first language when they fail to answer in English.
 - v) Do not concentrate your attention only on the privileged learners. Rather the underprivileged learners need your attention and help more.
 - vi) Underprivileged learners tend to occupy back seats in the classroom. Encourage (but do not force) them to occupy front seats. Make them sit close to some of the best students of the class and encourage them to learn from these students.
 - vii) Provide them with more clues when your underprivileged learners fail to answer. For example, ‘The answer is in the fourth line’.
 - viii) Protect your underprivileged learners from bullies. See that the privileged learners do not make fun of them.
 - ix) Tolerate their errors. Instead of public correction, choose a time and place where you can correct their errors privately.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Within ELT (English Language Teaching) TED (Teaching English to the Disadvantaged) has become a movement. Is there a need for such a movement in the field of ELT in India? Provide reasons.

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- 2) State two very important reasons for learning English for the underprivileged learners in India.

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- 3) State briefly some of the problems of underprivileged learners in learning English.

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we made you aware of the problems and different needs of the underprivileged learners. Since in almost every classroom there are students who are deprived due to certain socioeconomic reasons, it is essential that a teacher understands both their emotional as well as academic problems.

In this unit, we have very meticulously outlined the characteristics of underprivileged learners, and the educational flaws in dealing with them.

To rectify the scenario, we have given suggestions to improve the situation, with special reference to English.

2.6 KEY WORDS

cognitive : any mental process which learners use in learning. This may include mental processes such as thinking, remembering, perceiving, recognizing, classifying, etc.

dialect : variety of a language, spoken in one part of a country or by a particular social group, which is different from other forms of the same language in the pronunciation, lexicon or syntax.

motivation : the factors that determine a person's desire to do something.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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2.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The underprivileged are people who are socially, economically, educationally and locationally backward. These include the poor, the ethnic minority groups, the refugees and the immigrants.
- 2) Some of the causes of their underprivileged status is their poverty, exploitation and discrimination by the privileged people, dominant culture-based educational system and their low motivation for upward social mobility.
- 3) Some of the characteristics of underprivileged learners are low motivation to learn, low cognitive abilities, low self-esteem, poor reading ability. But at the same time, they have a greater sense of independence and responsibility.
- 4) The poor, the STs and SCs, the refugees and immigrants. (Your list may vary depending on your locality/state.)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) As the present approach is integration, separate schools for tribal learners do not go well with the present trend.
- 2) The main problem areas in education for underprivileged learners are textbook preparation, methods of teaching, evaluation and teacher training.
- 3) It is always difficult to solve all the problems at one go. But if the teachers are properly trained, they can at their level, adapt the text books, teaching methods and the system of evaluation to suit their underprivileged learners. Teacher training is, therefore, the most crucial factor.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In view of the large section of underprivileged learners in India and their great need for English for upward socio-economic mobility, there is a huge requirement for a movement like TED in India.
- 2) English language skills open up avenues of employment in India. It is also a status symbol in this country.
- 3) Some of the major problems of underprivileged learners' learning English are (i) the underprivileged learners fear of the language, (ii) inappropriate textbooks, methods of teaching and testing (iii) the underprivileged learners' load of learning languages, and (iv) lack of suitable training of teachers.

UNIT 3 HELPING THE LEARNER TO BE AUTONOMOUS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Autonomous Learning: Teacher's Role
- 3.3 Procedures for Supporting Autonomous Learning
- 3.4 Materials to Encourage Autonomous Learning
- 3.5 Evaluation Procedures for Autonomous Learning
- 3.6 Authentic Materials and Autonomous Learning
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will be:

- Shifting the focus from 'what' to 'how'
- Examining 'how to do' procedures for learner autonomy
- Suggesting material and evaluation procedures for learner autonomy

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Deepthi is an autonomous learner. She has the willingness and capacity to learn on her own. She is in class 8. One day, the teacher gave her class a task. In groups of four, the students had to discuss who their favorite woman leader was and tell the class about her. The focus was on justifying their choice from among four leaders. There were cue cards that included a few biographical details and two quotes each by the four women.

When it was Deepthi's turn, she summed up Mrs. Gandhi's life and concluded it by linking her life to what Mrs. Gandhi had said. One of the quotes was about forgiving the sinner. Deepthi said that Mrs. Gandhi must have had a number of enemies because of her position and she must have forgiven them. And hence, what she said must have come from her own experiences.

The class teacher said, "next", and moved on. Quite a few students simply read or summed up what they had found in their cues. Then, it was Nalini's turn. She spoke about Mother Theresa. She too related what the holy nun said meant in her life.

To be autonomous, the learner has to know what to learn and how to learn it too. They must also feel responsible enough to learn which involves a good deal of **willingness** and a **readiness to take risk**.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Is Deepthi's teacher an autonomous learner? How could she have facilitated and encouraged autonomous learning?

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2) Is Nalini an autonomous learner?

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3.2 AUTONOMOUS LEARNING: TEACHER'S ROLE

In the situation we just examined, only two learners understood learning in the right sense.

Although the teacher did not appreciate or comment on what Deepthi had done, Nalini learned how she might approach the task from her classmate. She could perceive the difference in the quality of the presentations made by Deepthi and the rest of her class. Then, she made a conscious choice and chose to do something similar to what Deepthi had done.

The example illustrates how an autonomous learner demonstrates: (i) a willingness to learn, (ii) a realization that learning is their own responsibility, (iii) an ability to make choices, and (iv) the courage to take risk. Neither Deepthi nor Nalini might be able to consciously analyze what they have done. But, they constructed effective discourse. This shows their awareness of the parameters for not just the presentation but communication itself. They need guidance to become conscious of what makes their response appealing. It will help them transfer the knowledge to other areas of communication. Only an autonomous learner-teacher can give this kind of support.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Does autonomous learning involve choices?

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2) Does autonomous learning mean learning without help?

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3.3 PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORTING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

What is ‘learning’? In the context of a language classroom, learning may be understood as becoming aware of certain cognitive processes and demonstrating the awareness through language use.

We as Teachers may use different procedures and supportive material that encourage this approach.

For example, we can develop a few paragraphs on the blackboard together with the class if we want to teach them paragraph writing. Students soon take charge if we:

- give them time to think,
- comment on and justify choices, and
- value their contributions.

The accompanying discussion will familiarize them with the parameters for evaluating their own paragraphs. We can also start the activity after giving the students a checklist for writing a paragraph. Students may also select paragraphs from any subject and discuss them in class.

Such activities guide the learner to appreciate the cognitive processes involved in developing their potential to think and communicate independently as well in collaboration with others.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) How does collaborative writing support independent learning?

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- 2) Does the ‘how to do’ activity in the class help students learn beyond the classroom?

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3.4 MATERIALS TO ENCOURAGE AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

Miss Devi likes to experiment with different kinds of materials. One day she read a story to the class and asked them to write it in groups of three. She gave two sample beginnings and told them to share their first sentences with the class. Her examples were:

It would never have happened if he hadn't been to his friend's birthday party.

Do you ever wonder what happened to the passenger you met on a train journey last year?

In ten minutes, students began to respond and the teacher got six different beginnings on the blackboard. The discussion focused on how the stories should be continued.

Such classroom procedures illustrate how we may shift our focus from 'what' to 'how'. Consider the following activity as another case in point.

The textbook included a speech and a few comprehension questions which addressed only the content of the text. To teach the class the 'how' of a speech, Miss Devi designed a few activities which included the following questions:

The speaker narrates two experiences to drive his point home. Can you replace them with your own to give the same message?

If you are giving a speech will you give the message or a story first? Or, will you alternate a story with the message throughout the speech?

Can you think of any famous people's sayings or lines from poems that may be appropriate? Where will you insert them, in the speech?

Only a few of her students are willing to take responsibility for their learning now, and Miss Devi knows it. Like many other teachers, she also thinks that the others must be shown the direction now.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What aspects of learning do such practices highlight?

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- 2) What kind of activities encourage self-monitoring?

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3.5 EVALUATION PROCEDURES FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

Formative Evaluation, as we all know, informs us about how individual students are progressing in relation to the target learning outcomes. What is most often neglected is, how it may be used to teach the learner what to learn and how to learn it. In other words, formative evaluation procedures, if designed and implemented to help students, can guide them to learn independently. Instead of treating them as testing tools, we may use them to support learning.

The following situation and the teacher’s response helps us understand her attitude to formative evaluation.

The teacher evaluated and returned the answer scripts. Quite a few students thought that they had done their internal assessment reasonably well and felt disappointed by the marks they were given. When the class was over, a few of them followed her to the staff room. After a good deal of hesitation, one of them came up and asked the only question they all wanted to ask, “Teacher, I expected a higher score for this question. Have I not answered it correctly?”

The teacher said, “The answer is correct. But, you have not organized it well”. Her other comments were on vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing, handwriting etc. The students felt discouraged and no wiser. She also carefully defended and justified all her evaluation procedures; she discussed every response, answered all their questions patiently, and added a few marks here and there. They left feeling better.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Examine how the teacher’s response reflects the power relations inherent to a teacher-dependent context.

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- 2) Does the teacher’s response help them prepare for their next internal assessment?

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3.6 AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

Most often, learning does not happen as soon as something is taught. Students may do what is expected of them, in terms of answering questions or writing an essay, without actually realizing its significance. They may not be able to relate it to the other things that they have already learnt although the textbook planners expect them to. There are other times when we introduce a new point of learning, and students happen to understand something that we had ‘taught’ some time ago. Learning does not happen in a linear fashion. More so, in a language learning context. Consider the following examples.

The student stood up, and said excitedly, “Now, I know when to use the past perfect tense”. The teacher was surprised because she had taught the tense more than a month ago and she scored one hundred percent in her grammar test soon after that. So, the teacher asked her to explain what she meant. And this was her reply, “For my history project, I read an essay on our struggle for Independence and in the geography class we read about the continental drift. I learned about them and learned the past perfect too”.

The incident shows that the teacher’s instruction made sense only after the learner had the opportunity to notice the use of the tense in materials outside the English classroom. It also illustrates, among many other things, the joy of independent learning.

Indeed, the opportunities we create in the classroom are restricted in number and nature too. Therefore, the focus has to be on the *how* of learning and this can not be done without depending on the authentic material that is available outside the classroom. Identifying the source of learning and the points to be learnt are the two kinds of guidance the learner will find useful. This is best done when we focus more on discourse and less on discrete elements. Learning to use vocabulary is more important than learning about words in isolation. Similarly, learning to use tenses appropriately is more important than learning the rules. Authentic material creates innumerable opportunities for showing the learner the right direction. The more we relate such material to their background knowledge the richer the student’s autonomous learning, beyond the classroom. And, the classroom has to be the lab where they experiment with their learning in a productive form with the teacher and peer support. Here is an example of how we may bring different kinds of discourse, activate cognitive processes, and shift them from the path of autonomous comprehension to autonomous production.

Read the beginning of the poem *Granny’s tree climbing* by Ruskin Bond and try to think of the usual questions that follow it:

My grandmother was a genius. You’d like to know why?
Because she could climb trees. Spreading or high,
She’d be up their branches in a trice. And mind you,
When last she climbed a tree, she was sixty-two.
Ever since childhood, she’d had this gift

For being happier in a tree than in a lift;
And, though, as years went by, she would be told
That climbing trees should stop when one grew old
And that growing old should be gone about gracefully
She'd laugh and say, 'Well, I'll grow old disgracefully'.

Our students usually answer questions such as the following:

- 1) Why is the poetic persona's grandmother a genius?
- 2) How old was she?
- 3) What does she like to do?
- 4) What gift did she have?
- 5) What do people tell her? Does she agree with them?

Now, reflect on the following question:

This is a news report on Lata Khare who participated in a marathon. Imagine that she is your grandmother and write a story or poem on her. If you would prefer to, imagine that you saw the marathon and write a letter to a friend. Whatever you write, your purpose is to highlight what you admire in the winner.



<http://relax.life/true-inspiring-story-elderly-woman-ran-marathon-barefoot-won.html>

Retrieved on 17 July 2018

The next day, Baramati Marathon was about to commence. Everyone lined up geared up in their sports shoes, snazzy shorts and tracks, sweat absorbing tees. And there she was, the 65 year old Lata Bhagwan Khare, wearing a torn Saree (Indian traditional wear), bare footed, tears in her eyes.

She argued with the organizers. They were not ready to break rules and let her participate in the marathon. She pleaded, she begged, and her sincere emotional appeal touched their hearts and they decided to approve her participation just for a lark, not even giving her a ghost of a chance to win.

The organizers playfully cheered her, ‘Go for it Aunty!’ The Marathon started and she hitched her saree just above her ankles. She ran like a wizard, truly a dream run, like a 16 year old. People standing alongside the path were totally taken aback by this sprightly old lady sprinting and broke into a loud cheer.

Lata Khare leaves all other senior citizens far, far behind

She ran like someone possessed. She could just see her husband’s life hanging by a slender thread and the winning amount in front of her eyes. She didn’t care about the hard gravel and pebbles on her way. Her feet bled, but she just ran and ran.

Check Your Progress 6

- 1) Give any three reasons for supplementing the textbook with authentic material for encouraging autonomous learning?

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- 2) How does mixed – genre – approach guide independent learning?

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

Learning involves a great deal of cognitive processing and it is a lifelong process. If we learn about how to do something we will acquire the confidence to do it. The awareness reduces anxiety and helps us focus on the task on hand. We will be able to improve our performance over a period of time, and transfer our learning to doing other things too.

In this context, the first step a teacher takes is, understand the various steps necessary for participating in a communicative event. Then, she evolves procedures to raise the students’ consciousness of the steps. Thus, the whole process is set in motion helping the learner to be autonomous. In other words, the teacher has three responsibilities: become a conscious learner, break down learning the ‘how’ into teachable steps, and create activities to nurture responsible learning. An autonomous learner-teacher appreciates them, and adopts independent learning practices.

3.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The teacher could have appreciated the nuances in Deepthi's presentation and given her feedback on how she connected the different points and created a perspective on Mrs. Gandhi's life. Instead of repeating what she had read, Deepthi highlighted an aspect of the leader's personality that she admired. This made the portrait comprehensive and coherent.

Analytical feedback serves two purposes. First, it encourages learners to continue to take risk while learning something new. Secondly, it helps the class become conscious of how they may approach the task using the given information.

- 2) Nalini is an autonomous learner for quite a few reasons.

She did not follow the class. In choosing to learn from Deepthi's answer, she demonstrated that she could take decisions, select from available choices, and take risk. She paid attention to the details of the other presentations and monitored her own performance. She knew what to learn. Students like Nalini and Deepthi make invaluable contributions in collaborative learning environments.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Content and language both offer innumerable choices. While participating in any communicative event, the learner has to think about what is appropriate. At every stage, s/he also pays attention to what s/he understands. This, in turn, is determined by her/his own background knowledge and her/his readiness to learn something new. For example, when the teacher is developing a paragraph on the blackboard, the learner may choose to focus on vocabulary, sentence formation, coherence, or cohesion. While participating in the discussion, a few learners, in fact, may be thinking about communication in other subjects like science or geography. The personality of the learner, her/his needs and most importantly her/his willingness to learn play a key role in the choices a learner makes. Not everyone likes to take risk. Some learners are prone to anxiety. Even adult learners, sometimes, cannot cope with the stress that accompanies the choice to learn. **Taking these factors into consideration, a teacher needs to create opportunities for learning.**
- 2) No. We take help from teachers, peers, and others around us. We also have sources such as books and the internet to learn and seek help from. And, the responsibility to show the direction lies with the teacher. Guiding the learner to identify and examine meaningful choices, providing constructive feedback, and offering guidance during the process of learning are some of the ways in which the teacher can nurture autonomous learning.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) A collaborative classroom supports learners both emotionally and academically. The teacher's guidance lowers their anxiety levels and builds

their confidence to think towards the communicative goals. As different responses are considered and discussed, students become aware of the various choices they have. Discussions with the teacher help them reflect on what is relevant to a context and sharpens their ability to take decisions. They learn to think critically, examine content and language, focus on the nature of discourse to appreciate coherence and cohesion, and develop as language users.

For example, consider describing a character. In this context, the first question for us teachers to think about is, what do learners need to know in order to do it? The answer may be found in samples of authentic communication, sometimes available in the textbook itself. It is also possible for the teacher to ask the class to look for descriptions of characters in the books they read.

This may be followed by the teacher analyzing a few descriptions together with the students. Eliciting responses to questions such as:

What does the writer say about the character?

What do you think about the character?

What does the character think about himself or herself?

What do other characters think about him/ her?

How do they behave in different situations?

Is there a change/growth in the character during the story? Where does it happen?

At this stage, the focus must be shifted to the use of appropriate discourse. The class may examine the samples available to them and choose which they prefer. The teacher may draw their attention to various lexical and grammatical choices too.

Noticing different choices, considering and examining them during the process of writing will help the learner grow to be independent, especially when supported by the teacher

- 2) Yes. The activity directs them towards what they must 'notice'. It will show them how to learn it in collaboration with others. Soon, they will be able to notice what is relevant to their own learning and grow aware of how to learn it too. More importantly, they begin to find new ways of learning on their own. What they learn in the language class they may apply in their subject classes. They will be able to think across languages since most of them know more than one language.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Practices that operationalize learning and approach it in terms of manageable goals address learning as a cognitive process. They also illustrate the teacher's understanding that the cognitive processes are stimulated by affective and academic factors.

They make learners realize that learning involves decision making at every stage. And, hence, they are encouraged to know that they may learn not just from the teacher or the textbook but other sources including their peers. They are equally encouraged to notice what they must learn, take risk and participate in the activity, make mistakes, accept constructive criticism and

try to learn. The fact that they are shown the direction through authentic samples and analysis and given the parameters for evaluating their work shows them that they have the responsibility to learn to do better. Evidently, teacher's constructive feedback given during the process of developing a text, puts them on the path of responsible learning.

2) Activities that encourage self-monitoring:

How do I do something?

How do I evaluate what I have done?

Guiding the learner to find answers to these two questions is central to helping them to be autonomous.

The process of learning begins with answering the first question. One of the ways in which this may be done is, help the learner identify the small manageable goals/ steps inherent to a communicative task. It is similar to preparing the route map to a destination. For example, if the learner has to discuss pollution, they will need:

Ideas

A perspective

A template/format/discourse

Language (topic-specific vocabulary, some awareness of sentence construction)

Necessary support may be drawn from authentic material, print or online which familiarizes them with what is expected of them and reinforces any previous learning. This conceptual and linguistic guidance must be followed by a class discussion to build their confidence and guide them to produce something meaningful. Without this scaffolding, they will be able to learn very little.

All these activities – comprehension, examination, selection and justification of choices involve cognitive processes that happen simultaneously along with an equally challenging process, decision making. And, decision making involves evaluation. The ability to take informed decisions depends upon the learner's awareness of the parameters for evaluating the choices in any specific context. Therefore, a collaborative environment that gives the learner the confidence and courage to take risk, through classroom activities, creates the right forum for helping the learners to be autonomous.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Situations mentioned in the Unit illustrate how students are programmed to believe that the teacher's response is the only acceptable response. This discourages them from any critical thinking. Even those students who may have an opinion choose to remain silent because they do not want their self-respect hurt. Language learning has to be synonymous with becoming aware of infinite possibilities. If the content is put in a straitjacket by the teacher, the students will be left with no choice but to learn everything by rote. What is equally unfortunate, this style of learning gets transferred to the learning of the other subjects like sciences or social sciences and students become more and more dependent on memorizing. They stop thinking.

- 2) No, what helps any learner is the awareness of how they may approach a question. Not the teacher's answer. They must appreciate how their response has to meet with the requirements inherent to the question. This understanding is a pre-requisite to answering any question effectively. At the same time, the teacher also has a responsibility; she should make the question one hundred percent clear. Consider the following simple questions:
- a) What are the most important differences between them?
 - b) What are the three most important differences between them?

Even when we specify the number of differences it will still be challenging to evaluate the response objectively. We need to consider questions such as, are we going to accept the differences in any order? Do we, as examiners, rate one of the differences more important than the rest and hence expect it to be presented first? How much value do we attach to the introduction and conclusion? Will we give any extra marks for any unexpected but relevant details? In case we find a response that discusses their importance explicitly and describes the differences in a specific order, are we willing to give it higher score? If the contents are presented in ungrammatical English, what should we do?

These are all our concerns. If the learners, too, becomes aware of them they will be on the path of independent learning. They will know how they may approach the question and what to include and how to include it in their answer. This kind of conceptual knowledge demands a great deal of cognitive processing. It is transferrable too. Acquiring it in one context, the learners use it across subjects and languages. They will be better prepared for any assessment because they begin to think about the possibilities the content and language offer.

If formative evaluation is used to help students realize that the question itself determines what the answer should be, it will serve the right purpose – learn what to learn and how to learn it too.

Check Your Progress 6

- 1) We will discuss three reasons here. There may be more, depending on the context.

Texts are selected with a specific level of proficiency in mind. Rarely are all our students at the same level. Some of them may be able to work with 'advanced' material in terms of both concepts and English. Others may need guidance with the language of the prescribed texts. There may also be first generation learners like Deepthi and Nalini, who are independent learners in spite of the fact that they are from economically backward families and receive no academic support outside the classroom. Therefore, we use authentic texts and enhance the relevance of the prescribed instructional material. Students will become aware of where to learn from and how to learn it.

Secondly, the ability to communicate in any situation includes an awareness of the contextual parameters such as formality or informality, purpose, relationship between the interlocutors, format or structure, and the language among many other things. Each topic or subject demands topic- specific

vocabulary and a reasonable command of its use. If the teacher directs the learner's attention to the material available outside the classroom, some of them try to learn from it. The teacher may strengthen and facilitate their learning further. The spinoff is, what independent learners do which enhances the quality of the work in the classroom.

Thirdly, comprehension precedes production. If students can be encouraged to read different texts outside the classroom, their class time can be used for sharpening their production skills. Spending most of the class time on comprehension jeopardizes the opportunities essential for active practice, which in turn, will encourage rote learning.

- 2) We can express the same thought in different genres and forums. For example, the textbook may include a poem on bullying. The learner can have an introduction to a wide array of texts that present the concept – formal and informal complaints, essays, letters, news stories, notices, pamphlets, and stories - followed by a discussion of the differences. This helps them understand the significance of the nuances of communication. It will also guide them to notice the features of language use in academic situations which is most important in our Indian context where English is used more for academic than non – academic purposes. Once they notice what they have to learn, they may try to learn it with the teacher's support.