

CHAPTER VI: THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS

1. WHAT IS LEARNING SITUATION?

An effective learning experience can only be had in a well-structured and skilfully executed learning situation. The essential role of the extension agent is to create learning situations that stimulate and guide learning activity. A good extension agent is one who can create and manage learning situations in which learners have effective learning experiences.

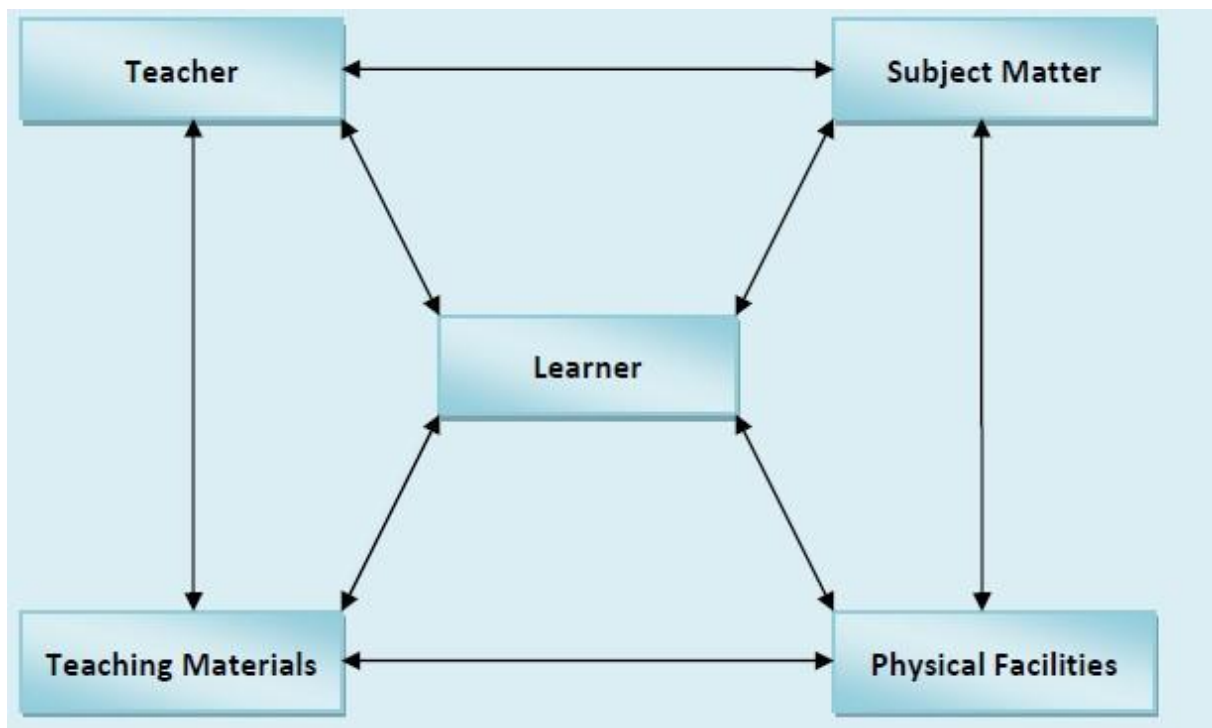
2. ELEMENTS OF LEARNING SITUATION AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Extension teaching requires learning situations that includes five major elements. The five elements necessary to constitute an effective learning situation and important characteristics about each are presented below.

2.1. Learner

Person who wants and needs to learn is the learner. In an effective learning situation, a learner occupies the most important central position and all efforts are directed towards him/her.

Learners should :



Diagrammatic Representation of the Elements of a Learning Situation
(Woolfolk, 1995)

- i) be capable of learning
- ii) have interest in the subject
- iii) have need for the information offered, and
- iv) be able to use the information once it is gained.

In the extension education, the farmer, farmwoman, and rural youth comprise the learner. To explain the learning situation, we take an example in which dairy farmers who need to increase milk production are learners.

2.2. Teacher

Many trainers are fond of quoting from the work called the prophet by Khalil Gibran (1991: 76): "if the teacher is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind". This issue created a dilemma in the minds of educators. Is teaching about the transmission of knowledge from teachers to student, or is it about creating conditions in which, somehow, students learn for themselves?

In recent years, under the influence of humanistic and communicative theories a great emphasis has been placed on ‘learner-centered’ teaching, that is the teaching which makes the learners’ needs and experiences central to the educational process. In this framework, it is the students’ needs and learning experiences which drive the syllabus and should be at the heart of a language course.

However, this learner-centeredness was not accepted uncritically. For instance, Robert O’Neill (1991), a trainer and materials’ designer, wrote an article whose title expressed his disquiet since he called it “the plausible myth of learner-centeredness”. In his article, he declared that the learner’s total reliance in gaining knowledge on his own with teacher, intervening when needed, would lead to neglect. But in many educational situations, both teachers and learners, find learner-centeredness difficult to come to terms with; because the teacher in many cases finds it necessary to be at the front of the class to motivate, instruct, or explain something to the whole class; as the same time, there are also many activities where encouraging students to solve their own problems on their own, will have enormously beneficial effects both on learning, and on the dynamics in the classroom. This questions, in fact, is not a matter of either...or, instead it depends on many issues such that the teacher behavior, the type of the activity, and who the students are and how they feel about what they are asked to do.

221. The roles of the teacher

The teacher’s role may change from one activity to another or from one stage to another. Below the different roles that a teacher may play in the classroom will be highlighted where we will discover that the more the teacher is fluent at making changes the greater his effectiveness as a teacher is enhanced (Harmer, 2003: 56-63)

222 Controller

Teachers are in charge of the class and the activity taking place. Controllers take the roll, tell students things, organize drills, read aloud, and in various other ways exemplify the qualities of a teacher-fronted classroom.

223. Organiser

Organising students to do various activities is one of the most important roles that teachers have. It involves giving the students information, defining the work forms in the classroom and organising teaching material. Skilful classroom management involves the following areas:

a- Organising the environment: it means decorating the walls of the classroom with culture-related posters, maps, flags etc. and arranging the desks and chairs so that the students can learn in different work-forms (in group-, pair-work etc.);

b- Organizing the students: according to language proficiency or language abilities;

c- Organizing activities: So that the ideal balance of skills and activities should be maintained. After each stirring activity a settling activity must be planned, and various skills should be developed in different work-forms;

d- Organizing time: In an average lesson maximum five minutes must be devoted to a warm-up activity, which is followed by the so-called 3Ps (presentation, practice and production with about ten-fifteen minutes spent on each). The last period of lesson is to be spent on revision and giving feedback to the students;

e- Organizing resources: is as important an area as the ones mentioned previously, because all types of teaching material such as the course book, the workbook, handouts, cassettes etc. must be kept in a well-organised way so that the teacher can use them smoothly without making a chaos;

f- Organizing records:

It is considered to be a crucial element of classroom management all the teachers have to think of as their handling not properly can have legal consequences as well;

224. Assessor

A major part of a teacher's job is to assess the students' work, to see how well they are performing and how well they have performed. The different types of error correction must be distinguished. At the accurate reproduction stage, where the teacher is totally in control, s/he must be correcting each student error or mistake.

Where students are involved in immediate creativity (at the production stage of the lesson) gentle correction or delayed correction should be used lest the teachers should make students inhibited.

A distinction between two kinds of feedback must be made content feedback concerns an assessment of how well the students performed the activity as an activity rather than as a language exercise. Form feedback, on the other hand tells students how well they performed in terms of the accurate use of language. Content feedback should usually come first and the teacher must decide when form feedback is appropriate and when it is not. It is vital for the teacher to be sensitive and tactful to his/her students in his/her role as assessor and to start assessment always with the positive feedback.

225. Prompter

In this role the teacher needs to encourage students to participate in a role play activity or needs to make suggestions about how students may proceed in an activity. The role of prompter has to be performed with discretion because if the teacher is too aggressive, s/he will take over the jobs from the students and he will make the students lazy and passive.

226. Participant

Teachers should not be afraid to participate in certain activities as a partner but s/he should not get involved in pair-work or group-work because it will prevent him/her from monitoring the students and performing other important roles.

227. Resource

Teachers used to be the only resource of information but this role cannot be performed these days as it was done several decades ago. Students have an access to the Internet and other important sources so teachers can add only some pieces of information to the ones gained from other sources. Teachers are supposed to organize and coordinate the process of acquisition, to act as a catalyst.

3. SUBJECT MATTER

It is the content or topic of teaching that is useful to the learner. The subject matter should be:

- i) pertinent to the learner's needs,
- ii) applicable to their real life situations,
- iii) well organised and presented logically and clearly,
- iv) consistent with the overall objectives, and
- v) challenging, satisfying and significant to the learner. Here, the subject matter is increasing milk production.

4. TEACHING MATERIALS

These are appropriate instructional material, equipments and aids. The teaching material should be:

- i) suitable to the subject matter and physical situation,
- ii) adequate in quantity and available in time, and
- iii) skilfully used.

In the present example, teaching materials may be improved breeds of bull or semen and fodder seeds suitable for the area, appropriate medicines, audio-visual aids relevant to the topic etc.

5. PHYSICAL FACILITIES

It means appropriate physical environment in which teaching learning can take place. The physical facilities should be:

- i) compatible with objective,
- ii) representative of the area and situation, and
- iii) adequate and easily accessible.