

Reflections on Classroom Climate of Teachers of Pre-University Level

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to reflect upon the classroom climate created by 44 Pre-University teachers from Government and Private Colleges (Arts and Science streams) in Bengaluru. Classroom Climate was assessed through classroom observation. The results revealed that classroom climate created by the teachers was predominantly authoritarian in two thirds of classes and one third had democratic climate. This shows that majority of classroom climate is authoritative. The teachers used various teaching process to facilitate learning. The classroom communication was simple and meaningful for the students to follow. The implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: *Classroom climate, authoritarian, democratic, Teachers' communication*

Creating a classroom environment that encourages students to take the risk of learning. We've known for a long time that when students lack a sense of safety or of belonging or of contribution, learning takes second place to meeting those needs.

-Carol Ann Tomlinson

A place where teacher and pupils come together with the purpose is a classroom. Classroom is an assigned space where teacher facilitates students' learning. A classroom involves a lot of activities related to learning. This environment is planned, prepared and constructed by the teacher to facilitate the learning process. On the other hand, at plus two stage of learning, students are not merely dependent on their teachers as the only source of knowledge but they also use various other sources as they have access to technology with specific reference to internet and other digital resources. The teacher as a facilitator shoulders an enormous responsibility in imparting 3R's in a classroom covering Rigor, Relevance and Relationship which forms the foremost process in learning (Dagget, 2011).

The main question which arises is what forms the basis of learning? The answer to this question is the place, person, and the resources that cater to all the needs of all learners. The formal education of an individual starts in a classroom/school. An environment which is

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encouraging for learning to occur and the way the teacher acts as a medium for learning process. A learning environment acts as a catalyst in accelerating the rate of maturation of learners. Thus, the learning process facilitated by the teacher creates the classroom climate. The terms “classroom climate”, “classroom atmosphere” or “classroom environment” is a broad construct encompassing teacher-student interaction, teachers’ engagement with students, mode of instruction and the student’s reciprocation towards it. Classroom climate is undefined norms and practices that are followed in the classroom to form conducive atmosphere for learning. Classroom or learning climate refers to the “intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn” (Ambrose et al, 2010). Classroom climate is defined as “tangible teacher behaviors or specific sets of instructional practices” (Bardach et.al 2020).

The term classroom climate was coined in 1960’s by Walberg et al who developed the Learning Environment Inventory to assess students’ perception about educational experience (as cited Evans et.al 2009; Goldberg & Kalvir, 2017). Moos (1973) developed the Classroom Environment Scale and measured three broad dimensions such as relationships, personal development and maintenance & change. Many researchers later proposed various dimensions to classroom climate such as “social system organization, social attitudes, staff and student morale, power, control, guidance, support, and evaluation structures, curricular and instructional practices, communicated expectations, efficacy, accountability demands, cohesion, competition, the "Fit" between key learner and classroom variables, system maintenance, growth, and change, orderliness, and safety” (Adelman & Taylor, 2002).

The setup or the layout of the classroom constitutes to physical aspect of classroom climate. The ambience of the classroom includes the colour of the wall, instructional aids, ventilation, seating arrangement, easy accessibility to the study material, projector etc. (Earthman, 2002; Leung and Fung, 2005; Sibiri et al, 2020; Tanner and Lackney, 2006). Taylor (2009) added that “Just as different learning goals require different learning strategies; different instructional strategies require different instructional learning spaces” (p. 134 as cited in Ramli et al., 2014).

With all the above, the underlying determinant of classroom climate is psychosocial aspects. This includes teacher characteristics such as instructional style and behavior management (Chapin & Eastman, 1996; Evans et al, 2009). The unique climate in the classroom is formed based on student-teacher interaction, his/her rapport with the students and teacher’s attitude and beliefs about teaching. The teachers’ belief influences their teaching style. Teachers’ beliefs in a way impact the behavior and interaction patterns with the students in the classroom. The confidence teachers hold about their individual and collective capability to influence student learning forms an integral part of belief system (Klassen et al., 2011). According to Kagan (1992) “a teacher’s beliefs tend to be associated with a congruent style of teaching that is often evident across different classes and grade level” (p. 66). Various factors that affect teaching were considered as an integral part of teacher’s behavior from mid-1980’s. The four factors according to Kagan (1995) that effect classroom climate was as follows: “(1) teachers’ beliefs about classroom, students, school, and learning; (2) teachers’ decisions for designing and presenting a teaching activity; (3) teachers’ perceptions on classroom-teaching affairs; and (4) teachers’ roles and their self-images” (as cited in Valcke. et al, 2010)

From the above, it implies that teaching is an important aspect in defining student’s classroom participation and student’s academic achievement. Schooling acts as a catalyst in

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accelerating the rate of maturation of learners. The output of schooling process is judged by the performance of learners through their Academic achievement. The classroom dynamics of different stages of schooling differs. Classroom climate created by teachers also vary. In the above back drop, the present paper attempts to reflect upon on Classroom Climate created by teachers at Pre-University level in Bangalore, Karnataka.

Research Questions:

- What is the nature of classroom climate created by teachers at Pre-University level?
- What is the role of communication in creating the classroom climate?

Research Objectives:

- To study the nature of classroom climate created by Pre-University teachers.
- To study the role of communication in creating the classroom climate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative method for data collection to assess classroom climate among Pre-University teachers in Bangalore. The sample consisted of 44 teachers form government and private colleges (20 arts and 24 science teachers) who were selected using disproportionate stratified random sampling technique. The classroom climate of the Pre-university teachers was assessed through classroom observation.

The classroom transactions of all 44 teachers were observed for duration of 30 minutes each, on identified four dimensions such as: (1) Democratic/ Authoritarian (2) Participatory/ Non-Participatory behavior of a teacher (3) Teaching Process and (4) Clarity in communication. On each of the above, observations were also rated on a five-point scale to emphasis on the intensity from 5- Completely Seen, 4- Seen Mostly, 3- Sometimes seen, 2- Rarely seen, and 1- not seen at all.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed dimension wise. The results are discussed based on research questions and objective wise as follows.

Research Question1: What is the role of teachers in creating classroom climate at Pre-University level?

In order to answer the above research question, the following objective was developed.

Research Objective 1: To study the nature of classroom climate created by Pre-University teachers.

The qualitatively collected, and tabulated data falls into the following categories.

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Table 1 showing the frequency and percentages of observed Democratic/ Authoritarian classroom climate dimension of Pre-University teachers

DIMENSION: DEMOCRATIC/AUTHORITARIAN								
DEMOCRATIC		Completely (5)	Seen	Seen (4)	Sometimes Seen (3)	Rarely Seen (2)	Not at all seen (1)	Total
11	Teacher always encourages the students to answer	21 (6%)		7 (2%)	12 (3%)	4 (1%)	0	44 (12%)
22	Teacher considers students opinion before coming to a conclusion.	16 (5%)		4 (1%)	15 (4%)	9 (3%)	0	44 (13%)
33	The teacher emphasizes on student's strengths.	16 (5%)		5 (1%)	10 (3%)	12 (3%)	1 (.25)	44 (12.25%)
AUTHORITARIAN								
44	Teacher is not supportive of student attempting to answer	5 (1%)		6 (1%)	13 (4%)	18 (5%)	2 (0.5)	44 (11.5%)
55	Teacher questions and answers himself/herself.	13 (4%)		7 (3%)	11 (3%)	11 (3%)	2 (0.5)	44 (13.5%)
66	Teacher has complete decision-making authority.	21 (6%)		5 (3%)	15 (3%)	3 (1%)	0	44 (13%)
77	The teacher projects the student's weakness.	6 (2%)		2 (0.5%)	9 (3%)	2 (0.5%)	25 (7%)	44 (13%)
88	Teacher takes away a lot of time in talking.	15 (4%)		5 (1%)	18 (5%)	6 (2%)	0	44 (12%)
	Total	113 (32%)		41 (12%)	103 (29%)	65 (18%)	30 (9%)	352 (100%)
	Democratic	53 (15%)		16 (4%)	37 (10%)	25 (7%)	1 (0)	132 (37%)
	Authoritarian	60 (17%)		25 (7%)	66 (19%)	40 (11%)	29 (8%)	220 (63%)

An analysis of Table 1 showing the democratic and authoritarian climate created by teachers of the study indicates that 37% of the classes are democratic while 63% of the classes are authoritarian. It means, around one third of the classes are democratic, while around two thirds of the classes at PUC level are authoritarian in their nature on the whole. In terms of the intensity of democratic and authoritarian climate created by teachers, in around 19% of the classes democratic climate was seen, while in around 34% of the classes authoritarian climate was seen. Theoretically, and ideally, it is desirable to have democratic climate and not authoritarian climate, while the obtained results from the observations indicate otherwise. According to Cooper (2002) good classroom climate should be “productive rather than disruptive” which helps in learning (as cited in Ekpo et al. 2009). A democratic classroom aims at “free expression of your own thinking, without any limits, without suspicion in other’s saying, resistance to the teacher, learning from the mistakes, teacher’s objection or bad grade. The teacher must not force the student to listen, to observe, to memorize and to reproduce what has been told or shown to him. He should organize and design the process of learning and to meet student’s needs” (Kocoska, 2009). A democratic climate is desirable for above reasons, while the result is otherwise.

The obtained results are consistent with research literature that support authoritative classroom climate as beneficial. “Disciplinary Structure and Student Support” are the two main dimensions of such class climate (Gregory and Cornell, 2009; Gregory et al., 2010; Konold et al., 2014; Cornell and Huang, 2016). Cornell, D., Shukla, K., & Konold, T. R. (2016) emphasized that authoritative classroom climate is important for academic achievement of the students. This aids in students’ well-being where the students are not succumbed to misbehaviors like “bullying and negative bystanders” responses rather this classroom climate invokes “warm, caring, supportive, controlled, demanding, and cohesive classroom climate” (Thornberg, R., Wänström, L., & Jungert, T. (2018).

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Table 1b showing the frequencies and percentages of Participatory / Non-Participatory behaviour of teachers at Pre-University level

Participatory/ Non-Participatory behavior of teachers							
	Non participatory behaviour of teacher	Completely Seen (5)	Seen (4)	Sometimes Seen (3)	Rarely Seen (2)	Not at all seen (1)	Total
11	Teacher expects students to work without his/her assistance'	15 (9%)	12 (7%)	11 (6%)	6 (3%)	0	44 (25%)
12	Students are given responsibility to finish an assignment.	13 (7%)	13 (7%)	12 (7%)	6 (3.5%)	0	44 (25%)
Participatory behaviour of teacher							
13	Teacher motivates students to understand and complete assignment.	14 (8%)	11 (7%)	12 (6%)	7 (4%)	0	44 (25%)
14	Teacher gives feedback on the assignment submitted.	13 (7%)	12 (6%)	11 (5%)	8 (5%)	0	44 (25%)
	Total	55 (32%)	48 (27%)	46 (26%)	27 (15%)	0	176 (100%)
	Non Participatory behaviour of teacher	28 (16%)	25 (14%)	23 (13%)	12 (7%)	0	88 (50%)
	Participatory behaviour of teacher	27 (15%)	23 (13%)	23 (13%)	15 (9%)	0	88 (50%)

An analysis of Table 1 b showing the participatory and non participatory behavior of teachers indicate that on the whole, it is apparently equally divided on its nature. Non participatory behavior included expecting students to work on their own, while participatory behaviour observed covers motivation to students by teachers to understand and complete assignment and teachers also gave feedback to learners about their work. Covering both, the picture is very clear that teachers prepare students by way of motivating them to understand and undertake assignment responsibly. After the completion of the assignments, teachers also give feedback to students. This picture looks quite encouraging as it suggests that teachers are preparing students to be responsible and autonomous learners. Ideally, this is what can be expected at plus two level. However, the present finding contradicts the study of Gill & Kusum (2017) who found that "Learners presumed to be passive and copious recipients of knowledge from the teacher". In another study the use of participatory methods like brainstorming, workshops, role plays, labyrinth are found beneficial and increases student participation in the classroom (Kucharcikova & Tokarcikova, 2016).

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Table 1 C showing the frequencies and percentages of teaching process of teachers at pre-University level

I	Teaching Process	Completely Seen (5)	Seen (4)	Sometimes Seen (3)	Rarely Seen (2)	Not at all seen (1)	Total
11	Teacher takes interest in friendly feedback about the class.	9 (2.0%)	8 (1.8%)	11 (2.5%)	15 (3.4%)	1 (0.2%)	44 (10%)
12.	Teacher uses only traditional ways of teaching	15 (3.4%)	11 (2.5%)	5 (1.1%)	12 (2.7%)	1 (0.2%)	44 (10%)
23.	Implements new instructional strategies in classroom	11 (2.5%)	7 (1.6%)	8 (1.8%)	17 (3.9%)	1 (0.2%)	44 (10%)
24	Teacher explains the concepts without examples.	15 (3.4%)	6 (1.4%)	8 (1.8%)	1 (3.0%)	2 (0.5%)	44 (10%)
25	Teacher uses humor to explain certain concepts.	10 (2.5%)	4 (1.6%)	11 (1.8%)	16 (3.0%)	3 (0.7%)	44 (10%)
26	Teacher listens carefully to student's problems.	9 (2.0%)	9 (2.0%)	10 (2.3%)	16 (3.6%)	0 (0.0%)	44 (10%)
27.	Teacher gives examples while teaching.	13 (3%)	9 (2%)	9 (2%)	13 (3%)	0 (0%)	44 (10%)
88	Teacher employs various methods when the students find it difficult to understand.	11 (2.5%)	7 (1.6%)	13 (3.0%)	12 (2.7%)	0.2% (0.2%)	44 (10%)
29	Teacher understands the student's familiarity of the concept before explaining.	11 (2.5%)	9 (2.0%)	9 (2.0%)	13 (3.0%)	2 (0.5%)	44 (10%)
210	Teacher allots appropriate time to explain concepts.	12 (2.7%)	7 (1.6%)	12 (2.7%)	11 (2.5%)	2 (0.5%)	44 (10%)
Total		116 (26.4%)	77 (17.5%)	96 (21.8%)	138 (31.4%)	13 (3.0%)	440 (100%)

An analysis of table 1C showing the classroom processes indicates that in around 44% of the classrooms the following were seen predominantly. From among 10 different pointers teachers use favourable mode excepting that in around 6% of the classrooms where teachers predominantly used traditional ways of teaching and in around 5% of the classes, teachers predominantly explained concepts without examples! Excepting these two aberrations, there

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are favourable processes found among teachers. In around 4% of classes, teachers took interest in friendly feedback about the class, in around 4% of classes, they implemented new instructional strategies in classroom, in another 4% of the classes humor was used to explain concepts, in another 4% of the classes, teachers listened carefully to students' problems, in another 5% of the classes teachers gave examples while teaching, in another 4% of the classes teachers changed methodologies to explain suiting the levels of learners, and in another 4.5% of classes teachers attempted to understand the familiarity of the concepts before explaining and in another 4% of the classes, teachers also allotted appropriate time to explain concepts to students. Therefore, it suggests that teachers predominantly are pro learners and worked towards making teaching process relevant to learners.

The success of classroom learning is dependent on the instruction and delivery pattern used by the teachers (Scrivener, 2011). The teacher's ability to reach out to the students and explain the concepts concisely is considered as one of the important factor of a good teacher (Ur, 1996).

Research Objective 2: To study the role of communication in creating the classroom climate.

Table II shows the frequency and percentage of the items for the dimension role of clarity in communication in creating the classroom climate.

V	Clarity in communication	Completely Seen (5)	Seen (4)	Sometimes Seen (3)	Rarely Seen (2)	Not at all seen (1)	Total
21	Teacher's instructions are clear.	13 (7.4%)	14 (8.0%)	11 (6.3%)	5 (2.8%)	1 (0.6%)	44 (25%)
22	Teacher uses simple language	15 (8.5%)	12 (6.8%)	9 (5.1%)	7 (4.0%)	1 (0.6%)	44 (25%)
33	Teacher's questions are simple and clear	16 (9.1%)	11 (6.3%)	9 (5.1%)	7 (4.0%)	1 (0.6%)	44 (25%)
34	Students are able to answer the questions aptly	17 (9.7%)	9 (5.1%)	9 (5.1%)	8 (4.5%)	1 (0.6%)	44 (25%)
	Total	61 (14%)	46 (10%)	38 (9%)	27 (6%)	4 (1%)	176 (100%)

An analysis of Table 2 showing the clarity in communication of teachers suggests that all the four observed indicators are positive and suggesting desirable elements seen among teachers. Predominantly, it is seen that in around 15% of the classes, teacher's instructions were always clear. In another 14% of the classes teachers always used simple language. In another 15% of the classes, teachers' questions were simple and clear in all classes. Very importantly, in around 15% of the classes, students were able to answer aptly to the questions asked by teachers in all classes. A summative picture indicates that the classroom communication was simple and meaningful. It is also interesting to note that the teachers were pleasant in all cases with their students. This indicates a very healthy picture of PUC classrooms in Karnataka context.

Mora-Menjura (2017) conducted a study on how teachers and students communicated in the language classroom and found that teachers helped students to organize ideas and initiate an utterance. Sometimes, students do not participate because they do not know what to say, or

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because they do not know how to say it. (Fredericks, B., & Alexander, G., 2021) found that Teachers' effective communication written and oral aids learners' performance, comprehension, and learning. Communication is two-way process, so that the learners are being able to interact and answer the questions asked by the teachers becomes an integral part of forming classroom climate (Fashiku C.O. 2017). Fredericks, B., & Alexander, G (2021) also stated how ineffective communication leads to a communication breakdown, misunderstanding and poor learner achievement. Wahyuni (2017) stated that students' academic performance basically depends on teachers with good medium instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn based on the research questions raised.

1. Classroom climate created by the teachers was predominantly authoritarian in two thirds of classes and one third of the classes had democratic climate. This shows that majority of classroom climate is authoritative.
2. The teaching process indicated that the teachers were pro learners predominantly using many different contributors: covering giving friendly feedback to learners, implementing new strategies of teaching, use of humor, patient listening, giving examples, teaching concepts based on the understanding levels of learners, and allotted appropriate time to explain concepts. While, two aberrations were also found such as using traditional methods in some classes and teaching without examples taking it to around 20% on the classes on the whole, while 80% of the classes had favourable conditions.
3. The importance of clarity in communication in classroom was observed. The teacher used simple language and asked questions that were precise which the students could answer. The teacher provided a positive classroom climate which encouraged students to participate in the class.

Implications

The present study has following implications for different stakeholders.

1. Since, a large majority of classes are authoritarian; there is a need to organize teacher training programs to plus two teachers of Karnataka to train them persuasively to understand the implications of being democratic and to also understand the possible consequences of being authoritarian. This requires participatory discussions and careful negotiations with teachers than giving directions.
2. It is also necessary that in these training programs, Karnataka PUC teachers also need to be told about the need for being completely participatory and yet work towards making their learners autonomous.
3. Perhaps, it would be very meaningful and relevant that the PUC teachers of Karnataka are trained to be reflective practitioners, who should be able to use action research as a part of their teaching. This will help them to reflect upon their own practice and improve the quality of their own teaching as they need to be relevant to all learners.
4. In the context of NEP 2020, which is being implemented, plus two will be a part of secondary education. Therefore, it is to be ensured that all those teachers who are not trained needs to be trained on a mission mode. This is expected to make them better, even if they are best now. Quality has no limit. If a teacher is best, s/he can better her/his best by being a reflective practitioner.

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