

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC VALUES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract: This study is proposed to find out the feasibility of enhancing the democratic values among the students of English in the Yemeni universities. This was done by using two kinds of research methods, namely survey and action research both of which were used to find out the level of awareness among the subjects of the study (teachers and learners) and their views on the possibility of making English language classrooms more democratic. The findings of the research using different tools of data collection including action research show that all the subjects of the study exhibit a substantial degree of awareness of the role and importance of democracy in English learning. They also show that democratic practices are possible in the English departments in the Yemeni universities situations. The research concludes by giving a number of recommendations to teachers, educators, governmental bodies, parents and students; all are advised to think seriously of the idea and play their role in enhancing the democratic values and practices in their field and range of responsibility.

I. Introduction

1.1 Aims of the study: This paper aims at the following:

1. Finding out if the teachers and learners are aware of the need for democratic style of teaching and learning.
2. Assessing the feasibility of adopting such a democratic style of education at the English classroom situations.

1.2 Problem Statement

In an environment where true democracy is the exception rather than the rule, and where many constraints present themselves in the way of true democracy, there is still a possibility to implement some kind of behavior in the English language classroom that one can claim to be democratic. This study, therefore, is an attempt to find out the extent of the possibility of enhancing democratic practices in the English classrooms in the Yemeni Universities.

The sub problems

1. Are the different parties (teacher and learners) involved in the English language classroom aware of the need for democratic education?
2. Is it possible to implement democracy in the English classes?
3. What are the possible ways of enhancing democracy in the English classroom?

1.3 Hypotheses

1. It is hypothesized that teachers and learners are not aware of the needs for democratic behavior in the English classroom situation.
2. It is also hypothesized that both learners and teachers do not believe that it is possible to make interaction, in the English classroom, more democratic.
3. It is further hypothesized that it is possible to adopt some kind of democracy in the various activities in the English classroom situation.

1.4 Assumptions

1. Teaching and learning in the language classroom is teacher-centered.
2. The teacher in the language classroom is the only person who determines the content and the way of teaching and learning.
3. Students are required to follow their teachers willingly or unwillingly.
4. The students' views when expressed are not often taken into account by the teacher.
5. Learning activities beyond the prescribed handouts and textbooks are rare.
6. Little creative thinking is exercised by the people involved in the classroom activities.

1.5 Delimitation of the study

This study was limited only to the university level and particularly to the Departments of English. This means all that school education as public and private schools and the like were excluded. The focus was on the students and teachers of English in the Departments of English in two main state directed Universities in Yemen. As far as the place of study is concerned, the main focus was University of Ibb where the researcher is teaching. But other

universities in the major cities were also represented for the sake of generalizing of the findings. The study dealt only with democratic practicing involving the teacher and learners in the classroom context. It, therefore, did not touch on other democratic concepts such as equality of opportunity, sex, race, election or any similar terms that come under the umbrella of democracy.

1.6 Definition of terms

Democratic values: Democratic values are the values that are considered democratic such as the collective decision making in the language classroom, respect for the other's points of views and attitudes, the space that is given to the other (here the student) to express his opinion on what and how he wants to learn.

Democratic practices: The actual application of the above-mentioned values in the classroom situations including the student's active role in the classroom. It covers, in addition to that, his role in the solution of other academic and perhaps social problems.

Thinking: It is defined, as an activity that influences who a person is, how he or she lives, and the meaning he or she gives to his or her existence (Gordon, 1988: 55). Thinking: In this research it is taken to mean the activity in which the student is required to use his mind to solve problems real or similar to those of real life inside and out side the classroom context.

1.7 Rationale

The importance of this research emanates from the fact that education in general and English language education in particular should address the different policies of the society whether are they political, social, economic or educational. It also has to be in a reasonable harmony with what is going on internationally. As democracy is both a national and international demand, education should serve this end. It common sense that education itself is ineffective without a real democratic atmosphere in the classroom. Therefore, for effective English learning (in our case English), democracy needs to be enforced; hence emerge the importance of this study in investigating the situation in the language classrooms (lecture halls) and probing the different factors that either enhance or slow down the democratic behavior.

As ever is the case in Yemen, English language has been the spark for other changes in other areas; so, it is expected that other areas in different educational institutions will be affected by the results of this research. In other words, this research might draw the attention of not only teachers but also of the educators and policy makers and make them think seriously about the matter of democracy as a necessary value not only at university level but at all educational levels as well. If schools (the matter is more urgent with colleges) of a democratic society do not exist and work for the support and extension of democracy, then they are either socially useless or socially dangerous (Mursell, 1955: 3).

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Democratic education

Democratic education is not a modern concept as one might think; it is as old as the civilization itself. The Greek and Romans scholars demanded that the teacher should respect the individuality of the pupil because the latter knows as much as his teacher does (Al-maktri, 2002: 39). Plato says that the function of education is to discover what fits each person and what that person is able to master perfectly (Dewey, 1916: 272). The concept of democracy in the form of consultation is an Islamic value (Qura'an: V.32 Chap. 27). It is presented as a comprehensive rule in different aspects of life including, of course, education, which is fundamental in the Islamic literature (Qura'an: Chap. xcvi). It was Rousseau who first stressed the concept of democracy as the right of the child to learn according to his needs and demands (Dewey, op. cit.: 35). Dewey fought relentlessly for democratic education; for him it is the "democratic faith" (Apple and Beane 1999: 5). The loyalty of democracy to education is real and common; and the simple interpretation for this is that the government, which depends on the general election, cannot succeed unless those who elect and obey their rulers are educated (Ibid.: 81). There is a strong link between education, national building, life and democracy. Beane affirms, "Education is life itself" (op. cit.: xvii). And we say that democracy is a way of life; the two, therefore, are inseparable. Educational institutions and particularly schools have a role to play in expanding the democratic way life (ibid.: 5). Democracy then should be part of the daily life of the young generations in the different educational institutions. A democratic individual is abler to cope with the impending demands of the society and he is, therefore, in a better position to help in the reconstruction of his nation. Dewey maintains that if the people are to secure and maintain a democratic way of life, they must have opportunities to learn what that way of life means and how it might be led (Ibid.: 8). Shah (1999: 74) points out that democratic values should be initiated right from the

home, the curricula and universities. Al-Maqtari, referring to the situation in Yemen, believes that:

... due to the role of education in the nation building, democratic training in schools (more imperative at universities) will have its impact on the social as well as the political levels. He adds, if the school brings up its pupils with the democratic practices, this will result in individuals who are self-dependent, creative and active members of the society; individual who can face the demands of the rapidly developing society... (2002: 8).

2.2 Democracy and teachers' role

Dewey best describes a situation similar to that of the Yemeni teacher as follows:

The teacher intelligence is not free; it is confined to receiving the goals and objectives. It is very rare to find an individual teacher who is free from the dictation of the supervisor, authoritarian inspector, the book of teaching method, or the syllabus...etc, so that he lets his mind come closer to that of the pupil and to his school subject. The mistrust on the teacher's experience shows the lack of trust on the pupils...(Dewey, op. cit.).

Regarding the role of the teachers of English in imbuing the students with the democratic values, Shah is of the view that teachers are the most important influencing factors and they, therefore, should reflect an ideal model for their pupils in behaving and thinking democratically (1999: 74). He also argues that discipline by means of curricula can only be established when the teachers themselves internalize the democratic values and demonstrate those values through their overt behavior (ibid.: 75). To succeed in developing his pupils' autonomy, the role of the teacher and the relationship of the teacher to the learner are of crucial importance (Tumber 1991: 25). Altman maintains that there are few, if any, prerequisites for individualization [as step in democratic training] except for the willingness of the foreign language classroom teacher to individualize (1977: 75). Gordon believes that in a democracy where little thinking exists, a teacher can still educate for democracy. But he puts some conditions:

1. He should be an active participant in the public space.
2. He should have a sense of justice.
3. He should be willing to think and should endeavor to pursue activities that are worthy in themselves such as striving for justice, beholding beauty, establishing friendship.

4. Underlined these demands, he should be a courageous person (Gordon 1988: 56).

2.3 Democracy and effective learning

Since it is the learner who eventually will determine his own learning, he is supposed to be active in the classroom particularly in a foreign language classroom. There is convincing evidence that people who take the initiatives in learning [pro-active learners] learn more things and better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be taught [reactive learners] (Knowles, 1975: 92). Wakefield is against a teacher who directs instead of guides his students. For him, such a teacher takes away the students' opportunities to develop autonomy and to learn how to direct themselves confidently (Wakefield, 1993: 140). Piaget argues that for the students to achieve autonomy they need to have repeated opportunities to make decisions and think about the consequences of their moral and intellectual decisions (ibid).

2.4. Democracy, learning and thinking

As there is a very intimate and close relation between education and democracy, so is the case with thinking and democratic learning. It is said that thinking is the way of intelligent learning (Dewey, op. cit.: 144). The only way towards a continuous improvement in the teaching and learning method is focusing on the conditions that require and examine intelligence (loc.cit.). Gordon confirms this, saying that thinking is essential for democracy to continue to exist (Gordon, loc. cit: 52). He continues, " For thinking to emerge, one must have political freedom to begin with (ibid.: 55). Of course, there could be democracy without thinking on the part of people as is the case with many countries of which Yemen is one. In such a situation, persons in power are basically ineffective because they strive to transform political discussion into quagmire of insipid platitudes, which serve the mediocrity of their own political interest (op. cit.: 54).

3. Procedures

3.1 Data and data collection

3.1a. Primary data

1. Action research: the researcher is actually a teacher of English teaching students in classrooms where real problems are confronted. In other words, he is in a situation where an action research is required because we are dealing with English Language learning, an educational situation, and

research is essentially practical in nature: its aims are to solve
 ing about changes and get changes done (Nunan 1989: xi). It
 served that democratic practices are absent in the interaction
 hers and learners so the researcher has tried to examine the
 making classroom interaction more democratic; he found
 h the best way to test that possibility.

ire: The second source of primary data was the students' and
 onses to some specific questions. Both teachers and students
 the same versions of the questionnaire. The versions
 o learners were translated into Arabic to facilitate their
 and avoid possible ambiguity.

Some of the primary data were also gathered by means of
 random samples of students.

Primary data

Primary data consist of the different materials written on this and
 they include books, articles and theses and Internet resources.

Method

Research was conducted at the tertiary level of education. It was
 teachers and students of the English Departments of both
 females. The sample was selected randomly at all different
 of the institution [university] and the level of individual
 ample. While Ibb University was the actual place of the
 had fallen on Sana'a to represent other Yemeni cities. As
 members were concerned they were chosen according to
 n the attendance list. The sample consisted of 45 students
 n the four levels of the four-year course. Five of these
 . The purpose of including different level of students is to
 ference between fresh students (level one) and those who
 experience (level three and four). As there was more than
 ng the data, the sample of 45 was found to be sufficient
 n of the data the researcher was looking for, by the tool
 he selection of teachers, however, was not based on
 cause the number of teachers was small so all those who
 ie time of administering the questionnaire were taken.
 he sample of the questionnaire in the department of
 ersity; as for the other universities [Sana'a] only five

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Tables (1 & 2) below:

Not sure	Disagree				Notes
	T	M	F	Y	
3	0	0	0	0	
10	0	0	0	0	
2	0	3	3	3	*
3	6	1	1	27	
6	14	8	7	15	
4	5	1	6	16	*
3	10	9	1	20	*
1	3	1	1	2	
1	5	1	1	2	

10.	Helps to improve spoken English	14	12	26	3	2	5	1	1	2	
11.	Develops the different skills of lang. Learning	15	12	27	5	2	7	0	0	0	
12.	Invites students to think creatively	13	13	26	3	1	4	3	0	3	
13.	Helps the teacher to be creative and innovative	15	15	30	3	0	3	0	0	0	
14.	Enables the teacher to identify the individual differences	12	13	25	5	2	7	1	0	1	
15.	Enables learners to know their abilities	11	17	28	3		3	1	0	1	*
16.	Wastes the teaching/learning time	2	2	4	5	5	10	9	9	18	
17.	Causes disorder and encourages indiscipline	2	2	4	4	4	8	1	1	22	
18.	Makes little use of lecturing	5	6	11	8	4	12	8	5	13	
19.	Brings fun and increases motivation	14	14	28	3	1	4	0	1	1	
20.	Saves students' time and effort (e.i. in rote learning)	13	7	20	4	7	11	1	0	1	*
21.	Helps the teacher to discover talents	16	14	30	2	0	3	1	0	1	
22.	Trains students in decision-making	14	14	28	3	0	3	1	1	2	
23.	Enriches the teaching learning process	15	14	29	2	1	3	1	0	1	
24.	Lessens monotony and boredom in the classroom	12	14	26	1	4	5	0	1	1	*
25.	Prepares students for real life situations?	9	7	16	6	5	11	2	1	3	*
	Adopting democratic practicing										*
26.	Students are not prepared to cope with it	2	3	5	6	5	11	9	8	17	
27.	Teachers are not ready to implement it	1	2	3	7	7	14	9	7	16	
28.	It is needed and essential	12	16	28	3	1	4	1	0	1	
29.	Society does not encourage such instruction	6	9	15	5	3	8	7	3	10	
30.	It is ideal and impractical	5	6	11	5	4	9	6	7	13	

Keys: m= male F=female T= Total *Number of subjects absent

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Table (2) Teachers' responses

No.	Item	Agree			Not sure			Disagree			Notes
		V	H	L	V	H	L	V	H	L	
1	Enhances teacher's self-confidence	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2	Enhances students' self-confidence	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
3	Improves relationship between teacher and students	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	Puts down teacher's dignity	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	4	
5	Puts the teacher in a difficult position	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	
6	Demands much from the teacher	0	3	3	1	0	1	1	0	1	
7	Degrades the teacher's personality	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	5	
8	Strengthens teacher-student mutual trust	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
9	Increases the level of achievement	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
10	Helps to improve spoken English	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
11	Develops the different skills of lang. Learning	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
12	Invites students to think creatively	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
13	Helps the teacher to be creative and innovative	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
14	Enables the teacher to identify the individual differences	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
15	Enables learners to know their abilities	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
16	Wastes the teaching/learning time	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	
17	Causes disorder and encourages indiscipline	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	5	
18	Makes little use of lecturing	1	2	3	0	0	0	1	1	2	
19	Brings fun and increases motivation	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
20	Saves students' time and effort (i.e., in rote learning)	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
21	Helps the teacher to discover talents	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
22	Trains students in decision - making	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
23	Enriches the teaching learning process	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
24	Lessens monotony and boredom in the classroom	2	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	
25	Prepares students for real life situations?	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	

B	Adopting democratic practicing									
26	Students are not prepared to cope with it	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	3
27	Teachers are not ready to implement it	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	2
28	It is needed and essential	2	3	5	0	0		0	0	0
29	Society does not encourage such instruction	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	1	1
30	It is ideal and impractical	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5

Keys: m= male F=female T= Total *Number of subjects absent

4.2 Results of the questionnaire (Sana'a)

The sample here consisted of three teachers and five students; all of them share those of Ibb the same attitudes and they gave almost similar responses to those of Ibb. That is why there is little need to present detailed results here for economy and to avoid repetition.

4.3 Results of interviews

The sample of the interviews was confined only to students from different levels in the English Department in Ibb University. Two students of both sexes were randomly selected from each level. They were asked the following four main questions:

1. Whether they preferred democratic teaching or else.
2. If there were teachers who were more democratic than others.
3. To provide examples of what they understood by democratic behavior.
4. If there was a need for democracy in the English classroom at all

In their answers to these four questions the subjects of the study who were interviewed said they preferred a democratic style of teaching. All of them opted for the idea of the necessity for democratic education. The examples they gave (question 3) were like: taking students' opinion, involving them in the activities inside the classroom and the like.*

5. Discussion

5.1. Action research

From the findings given above [see section 4.1 of the findings above], it can be easily said that the students reacted positively to the activities

* N.B. Detailed presentation of the interviews and action research were found rather unnecessary and time consuming.

suggested by the teacher. The students found themselves free to say what they long wanted to say but for some reasons they could not. Now they found the chance and are so enthusiastic to be critical and to express their feelings. As a result of their critical observations, the teacher researcher modified not only his way of teaching but also reconsidered many other things such as the time of the lecture, and whether the lessons were interesting to the students or not and the like. The most striking observation, however, was discussing social problems like the status of education in Yemen and how to improve it. The students demanded such discussion to continue and they did not show any sign of boredom or lack of interest. In a nutshell, the hypothesis that it is possible to establish a democratic atmosphere in the English classrooms was accepted [hypothesis 3, see section 1.3].

5.2 Questionnaire

For convenience the questionnaire responses are put under two main categories namely:

- a) Awareness of the respondents of the democratic practicing: Items (1) to (25).
- b) The views on the possibility of adopting such kind of practice: items (26) to (30).

A.1 Students' awareness

Looking at the results under group A (see table 1), one can see that there is unanimity among the respondents that democratic practicing enhances both students' and teachers' self-confidence (Items 1,2), leads to better achievement (9), improves students spoken English (10) develops different learning skills of the learners. (11), helps them to think creatively (12), and enables teachers to be creative and innovative. The entire sample agrees that democratic training enables teachers to identify the individual differences while it helps learners to be aware of their abilities (14 &15). Most of the subjects do not agree with the idea that democratic practicing is a waste of time or a source of indiscipline or disorder. (16 &17) For the remaining items under this group (18 -25), the responses show almost unanimous agreement on all the items (See table 1).

A.2 Teachers' awareness

Teachers' responses are much different from those of the students (see table 2). There is 100% agreement among the teachers in the first three

questions that democratic practicing enhances self-confidence of both teachers and learners and that it improves relationship between teachers and students. (See items: 1,2,3). All of them believe that it does not put down teacher's dignity or degrades his personality (4 & 7). This is almost in harmony with what the students believe. Like the students, teachers do not think that a teacher is put in a difficult situation in a democratic atmosphere (5). However, they differ with students over item (6) that democratic application demands a lot from the teacher. About 50% of the teachers see that this democratic behavior is demanding. More than 50% of the students of all levels, however, do not agree with that. It should be noted that none of the teachers is Yemeni. Yemenis are either not sure or disagree. This is the only indication that may explain the reason why teachers have been avoiding implementing such practice so far. The students' reaction, however, may simply mean that they are not sure of this, as they have not yet been put in a situation like that [democratic practice]. Or they might merely speculate that this should not be so. Items (8-25) show correspondent responses to those of the students with a majority agreeing with ideas expressed (see the questionnaire in table 1 above). In short, almost all respondents, whether teachers or learners, show considerable awareness regarding democracy and democratic practicing. So, one can say that the first hypothesis that teachers and students are unaware of the advantages of the democratic behavior in the classroom is rejected [hypothesis 1]. The alternative hypothesis is thus accepted. Why then democracy is not practiced is something that could be attributed to the fact that teachers find it a little bit demanding as compared to other traditional approaches (Item 6).

B.1 Students' views on the possibility

Coming to the second category, of the possibility concerning applying democracy in the English classroom in future [items (26 to 30)], about half of the respondents disagree with the claim that students are not yet prepared to cope with democracy. Those who believe that they are not prepared make only 20% of the total sample. More than 60% also think that teachers are ready to implement democratic practicing. Again those who think that implementing democracy is not practical and too ideal to be used are less than those who are not.

B.2 Teachers' views on the democratic possibility

As far as teachers' responses are concerned, 60% of the subjects see that it is possible because the students are prepared to cope with it. Only 20% believe that students are not yet ready to understand and internalize it. The

remaining 20% are not sure. However, they are divided over whether teachers are ready to cope with it. All the members of the sample are of the view that democratic practicing is not too ideal to be implemented.

5.3 Interviews

Generally speaking, one is in a position to say that democratic practicing is possible in a situation like that in Ibb University. The second hypothesis [see section 1.3] is, therefore, rejected as both teachers and learners see that democracy is possible and practical.

Again, the results of the interviews are in harmony with the results of the action research and the questionnaire. It confirms the three different hypotheses and therefore, there is no need for spending time on any further analysis.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

From the above discussion the following conclusions are reached:

1. The action research makes it clear that it is feasible to implement democratic activities in the language classroom in Departments of English.
2. Both teachers and learners are aware of the advantages of democratic practicing in the English classroom context.
3. Most of the subjects of the two different samples (teachers and learners) agree with the idea that it is possible to behave more democratically in a situation like that of Yemen.
4. Teachers seem to show that they can be put in a difficult situation if democracy is adopted for it is demanding. The students' attitude is different, however.
5. There is no significant difference among teachers or students in respect of the type of city they represent. All teachers in the study sample, in Ibb and Sana'a, share the same attitudes towards promoting democratic behavior in English classroom situations.
6. There is no significant difference between male and female students in the different universities and in the different levels in the same university.
7. All different tools of data collection have yielded almost the same results of awareness and positive attitudes towards democratic education as far as English is concerned.
8. Some teachers have already exhibited some democratic practices in their classes.

6.2 Recommendations

1. The teaching staff in the different departments (professors and teachers) should:

- Start thinking of taking the matter more seriously regarding democratic education.
- Take into account their students' needs and interests by approaching them in a democratic manner and allowing them express these needs and interests openly and freely.
- Build the different courses on the basis of these needs and interests.
- Come down to learners and discuss with them the advantages and disadvantages of the current courses and the teaching methodology.
- Encourage students to be critical and show their views on what they learn or want to learn.
- Train students to accept others' views objectively prudently and wholeheartedly.
- Introduce them to the ethics of democratic behaviors such as objectivity, tolerance, flexibility, acceptance, fallibility, modesty, and respect of others' opinions and beliefs.
- Move from the four-walled environment of the classroom to the wider social and political one to sensitize them to the real world of democracy.
- Show them real examples of what democracy yields: its benefits, as the case in America, Europe and other democratic countries.

2. University authorities and government institutions should consider the idea seriously as an advantage and not to take it as a threat to the government but rather as an educational and social necessity which in turn will help the government in performing their tasks properly easily and successfully.

3. The Government should play its role through different means including the mass media in establishing democratic education not only at the tertiary level but also at the school levels.

4. Students should make the best use of any democratic opportunity in expressing themselves and pronouncing their problems and needs. They should abandon all that is related to pompous and showing off behavior and work cooperatively with their teachers towards the goals of better education.

5. Parents' awareness is necessary, and the media has a crucial role to play in creating and enhancing that awareness so that an integrated task is the main concern of all political and social institutions of which the family is one.

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