Rise of Humanistic Education: Are Learners "Humans" or Simply "Machines"?

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Abstract

This theoretical paper aims to explore the concept of the humanistic approach in the field of teacher education. Humanistic education is concerned with the study of learners' emotions, knowledge, and experiences involved in their learning process. According to this approach, students should be viewed as "humans," not as "machines" as they are the most crucial part of the education system. The curriculum and syllabus should focus on the students' interests, needs, and overall learning circumstances. In humanistic teaching, students are perceived as active beings, not "robots" who are supposed to follow the teacher's orders without any justification or challenge. Teachers' roles in humanistic education are to cater support to the students considering several learner factors and guiding them to reach the highest point of autonomous learning. Therefore, the humanistic approach needs to be adapted in the academic field for ensuring practical learning and mutual respect between teachers and students. The paper is organized into three sections. First, it explores the origin and evolution of the humanistic movement in education. Secondly, a detailed account of the basic principles and teacher roles in humanistic education is provided. Finally, the paper discusses its implications in ELT and existing complications regarding this approach.

Keywords: humanistic education, machines, learner autonomy

Introduction

The concept of humanistic education has become prominent worldwide over the last three decades. It originated from Humanistic Psychology, which investigates human behavior, feelings, and the nature of motivation from a holistic point of view. It intends to value the essence of a human and recognizes their specific personal needs. Humanistic education stresses the importance of the learner's inner world and puts the person's thoughts, feelings, and emotions at the focal point of human development (Lei, 2007). The major aim of the humanistic approach is to emphasize the needs and independence of the students and ensure flexibility and mutual support on the part of teachers. Thus, the notion of humanistic teaching advocates treating learners as living beings, not as "lifeless objects." The overall learning environment should make the learners confident, enthusiastic, and motivated for

effective outcomes. The basic premises of the humanistic approach to education are to identify the potentiality of students and promote freedom for learning choices.

Origin and Evolution of Humanistic Approach

The humanistic approach was derived from the Philosophy of Humanism in the Middle Ages and followed the principles of Humanistic Psychology. In the 15th century, the early humanistic movement started as a form of protest against the conservative mindset of Christian scholars. In the mid-1950s, modern Humanistic Psychology evolved to study the individual's mental and emotional development as a whole person. It challenged the beliefs of Behaviorism and emphasized human characteristics such as freedom, love, sorrow, choice, faith, creativity, awareness, self-worth, and so on.

Humanistic Psychology maintained its profound influence through various scholarly writings about education in the 1970s and 1980s. In the early 20th century, when Behaviorist Psychology and Freud's Psychoanalysis dominated philosophical thinking, the humanistic approach emerged as a school of psychological thought which conceptualizes human capacities, determination, and self-image. It resumed flourishing in the second half of the 20th century in the United States by developing a particular field of Psychology. Different psychologists and educators contributed to the growth of humanistic development in education.

The two most famous contributors were the American psychologists, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers who established the niche of humanistic education. Maslow (1943) introduced his concept of the "Hierarchy of Needs" in which he presented five levels of particular human needs to realize the importance of the "self" and thus shaped his thought of humanism.
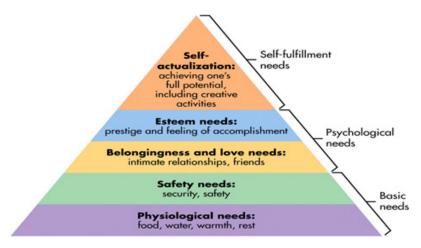

Figure: Hierarchy of Needs

The Hierarchy of Needs is a pyramid-shaped diagram that demonstrates five types of needs based on their importance in life. Maslow created the model by starting with the lower level of **physiological** or biological needs which consists of the most common needs of human

beings such as air, food, shelter, water, sleep, and so on. The second level includes **safety needs** suggesting security or protection from any danger and ensuring stress-free physical, mental, and emotional states. The next level is about **love and a sense of belonging**, which indicates a human's desire for love, friendship, and acceptance from the family and society. The fourth level involves **esteem needs**, the desire for respect, achievement, autonomy, competence, recognition, attention, etc. Finally, humans move on to the top and ultimate level: **self-actualization**. It signifies the internal motivation to utilize one's potential and worth to the fullest sense. After the fulfillment of the lower needs, individuals direct themselves towards achieving self-understanding and success within their capacities. Maslow (1987) considers "freedom" as an important precondition of the basic needs before they reach the highest level-self-actualization. According to Wang (2005), unless a person satisfies his physical and emotional needs, he might not progress in language learning.

The Humanistic Psychology of Carl Rogers (1957) had a considerable impact on educational applications. He developed a philosophy of learning that deals with the feelings and experiences of the person. Rogers (1969, cited in Smith, 1999) mentioned some characteristics of the humanistic learning approach: it has a quality of personal involvement; it is self-initiated; it is pervasive; it is evaluated by the learner and its essence is meaning.

Stevick (1990) also identified the following five distinctive human traits which support the view of humanism (p. 23-24): i. **Feelings** (emotions and appreciation of beauty): this quality explains that the humanistic approach tends to reject whatever factors hinder gladness and lead to bad feelings; ii. **Social relations**: this trait supports friendship and mutual aid between peers and dissuades the opposite; iii. **Responsibilities:** it emphasizes the importance of the need for critique, rectification, rejection, and scrutiny from the public; iv. **Intellect** (reason, knowledge, and understanding): It opposes whichever idea that hampers the free exercise of the human's mind, and seizes belief in anything that can be tested intellectually, and v. **Self-actualization** (one's recognition of his/her deepest and true qualities): it believes that liberation is the result of the pursuit of exceptionality.

The field of human psychology paved the way for the development of humanism in education and contributed to the transformation of a "mechanic classroom" into a lively one.

Humanistic Movement in Education

The humanistic movement continued to be influential in the 60s when Maslow, together with another psychologist, founded the Association for Humanistic Psychology in 1961 and published the first issue of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* in the spring of the following year (McLeod, 2007). The original roots of the humanistic movement in education can be traced to 1970 when the Association of Humanistic Psychology was established as an international organization in the USA. Open education programs were organized in English primary schools which popularized the humanistic approach. They emphasized learner-centered classrooms where students were supposed to avail themselves of the freedom to make choices regarding the topic and activities. Teachers had pivotal

roles to facilitate students' work by responding to their ideas and feelings, and minimizing the pressure of tests and assessments.

Moskowitz (1978) states, "Humanistic education is a way of relating that emphasizes self-discovery, introspection, self-esteem, and getting in touch with the strengths and positive qualities of others and ourselves. It lets learning concern more for others and ourselves. In addition, humanistic education is fun" (p. 14).

Mishra (2000) specifies the following aspects of humanistic education:

- A principal purpose of education is to provide learning and an environment that facilitates the achievement of the full potential of students.
- Personal growth, as well as cognitive growth, is a responsibility of the school. Therefore, education should deal with both dimensions of humans – the cognitive or intellectual and the affective or emotional.
- For learning to be significant, feelings must be recognized and put to use.
- Significant learning is discovered for oneself.
- Human beings want to actualize their potential.
- Having healthy relationships with other classmates is more conducive to learning.
- Learning about oneself is a motivating factor in learning.
- Increasing one's self-esteem is a motivating factor in learning.

According to Prabhavathy and Mahalakshmi (2016), the term "humanistic" is defined as the learning approach that takes the fundamental responsibility of the whole person in the process of learning. Jingna (2012) concurs with Rogers that one of the important goals of education is self-actualization. He also emphasizes "self-realization," which turns around the fundamental teaching purpose. DeCarvalho (1991) opines that the purpose of humanistic education is to provide a foundation for personal growth and development so that learning will continue throughout life in a self-directed manner.

Gage and Berliner (1991) mention the following objectives of humanistic education:

- Promote positive self-direction and independence
- Develop the ability to take responsibility for what is learned
- Develop creativity
- Infuse curiosity
- Grow an interest in the arts

Based on the assumptions of different educators, the major goals of humanistic education are:

- Identifying learners' interests and purposes
- Providing freedom of choice in the learning process
- Guiding and facilitating learners' academic development
- Creating a stress-free and supportive learning environment
- Developing respect and concern for learners' capabilities
- Building rapport between the learners and the teacher

Principles of Humanistic Education

According to Gage and Berliner (1991), there are five key principles of humanistic education:

- **Students learn best what they want and need to know:** If the learners are given freedom of choice, they can learn more quickly and easily. This implies that students should be allowed certain scopes to choose topics, materials, and types of activities within the prescribed syllabus or curriculum.
- **Knowing how to learn is more important than acquiring a lot of knowledge:** students should be self-motivated and autonomous about their learning progress. Humanistic education intends to boost their confidence and helps to foster learner autonomy.
- **Self-evaluation is the only meaningful evaluation of a student's work:** the humanistic approach emphasizes self-assessment and personal development. Educators believe that grading and objective tests are irrelevant and do not provide constructive feedback. Therefore, meaningful self-evaluation should be encouraged. It is extremely important to develop learners' perceptions and abilities regarding self-regulation and achievement.
- **Feelings are as important as facts:** Both knowledge and feelings are equally important. The humanistic approach does not consider the cognitive and affective domains to be separate. Rather they contribute together to base the learning.
- **Students learn best in a non-threatening environment:** humanistic education advocates that institutions should provide a relaxing and favorable environment so that learners can feel secure and stress-free during the instruction. Only then effective learning is possible.

Roles of Humanistic Teachers

The role of a teacher in the humanistic approach is incredibly important because, unlike other traditional approaches, the teacher has to emphasize the importance of the inner world of the learner and place the individual's thoughts, feelings, and emotions at the forefront of all human development (William & Burden, 1997). Thus, the role of a teacher in humanistic teaching is to make sure students are getting a moral learning climate where they can be involved in both physical and psychological activities.

Khatib et al. (2013) opine that teachers need to act as facilitators of learning and focus more on the process of learning rather than the content. It suggests that a humanistic teacher should show the different ways of learning, not only the topic of learning itself. Underhill (1999) classifies teachers into three types: i. lecturers who have the idea of the topic, ii. teachers who are familiar with the methods along with the topic and stratagems of teaching this topic, and iii. teachers who are also familiar with the psychological learning process and atmosphere besides having a clear idea about the topic. In reality, only the last type best reflects the humanistic approach. In contrast to traditional academic practices, humanistic education emphasizes the social and intellectual atmosphere, which protects students from educational oppression, physical torture, and disrespect (Aloni, 2007).

Therefore, the ultimate target of a teacher is to treat a student more humanely and value his emotions and beliefs.

To ensure humanistic language teaching in a classroom, teachers have to play some major roles. For example, they have to consider students as viable members of society by accepting and valuing their emotions and beliefs. They need to make the classroom learner-centered by maximizing individualized or personalized instruction. To apply a humanistic approach in language teaching, teachers must guide the students to realize their full potential to achieve their goals in life. By doing so, teachers will be able to contribute to the developing process of the students as human beings. By promoting creativity, insight, and initiative, teachers can play important roles in facilitating independent and open-ended learning.

Most importantly, in humanistic language teaching, teachers must consider themselves to be facilitators rather than instructors. Therefore, being proficient in the target language alone is not enough. Rather, humanistic language teachers should be well-acquainted with the learning theories and psychological aspects of the learners..

Learners' Roles as "Human"

In the humanistic approach, students need to be enthusiastic and responsible about their learning. They are treated as active human beings in the learning process. Students, regardless of their age, gender, and ethnicity, are given utmost priority in the institutions. Therefore, it creates confidence and a sense of responsibility among them, which inspires them to expedite their academic progress. Neither the teachers nor the institutional authority should impose unnecessary regulations or pressure on them as doing so may hinder students' personal growth. Therefore, students need to be self-aware and proactive in classroom situations. They must express their needs and opinions to develop their learning skills. They must not act like machines, which are operated or controlled. Overall, learners will not be "robots" to function on orders given by the teachers but will rather prove their worth by showing their potential and diligence.

Educational Implications of Humanistic Approach

In the present era, humanistic ideas are not limited to the field of philosophy as a significant amount of research has emerged in the field of education (Ling et al., 2014). A large number of educators and scholars hold positive views about the humanistic approach and suggest adapting it in an educational context.

According to Lei (2007), the humanistic approach as one of the mainstreams of contemporary educational theories has influenced the second language pedagogy over the past two decades and has led to certain implications and applications for the language teachers and learners. Stevick (1990) discusses the implications of the humanistic approach for teacher education. He explains that a combination of cognitive and affective factors in education and a concern for the interpersonal conditions for facilitating significant learning demand changes in the preparation of teachers. Moskowitz (1978) provides several strategies which she termed "humanistic" or "awareness" exercises which might be helpful for the teachers to incorporate humanistic elements in the prevalent educational policies and curriculum.

The humanistic approach has an impact on the learners' attitude and level of motivation. Ghaith and Diab (2008) discover that the use of the humanistic method of teaching can increase students' motivation and class sociability. As humanistic teaching theory is grounded in classroom instruction, it can transform a traditional classroom into a learner-centered and feasible one. Chaudhury (2001) states, "the humanistic approach has important implications for education as it shifts the focus from teaching to learning" (p. 26). She illustrates the point by considering the "learning" of the students as the most important because learners do not always learn from what the teacher teaches but rather how the teacher teaches them. Humanistic teachers need to acknowledge the learners' choices and emotional needs to provide them with the best support.

Moreover, course books, materials, and classroom tasks and activities can be designed by "humanizing" certain elements depending on the topics and concepts. Tomlinson (2013) opines that one of the humanistic ways to design a syllabus is that the teacher incorporates relatable materials into textbooks, which allow learners to obtain and reflect on the experience.

Based on the ideas of Chaudhury (2001), education can be upgraded by creating humanistic classrooms in several ways:

- Teachers should maintain eye contact and adopt a friendly manner when interacting with students.
- If possible, it is better to remember students' names because it inspires them to be more responsible about learning.
- Teachers must be punctual in class and should initiate warm-up activities before starting the main lessons.
- Students' motivation and participation can be increased if teachers move around and monitor their activities.
- Teachers, and even the institutional authority, should make concerted efforts to ask for students' suggestions or recommendations, and know their expectations and problems about the course or subject.
- Group work needs to be encouraged as it develops the interactive and collaborative skills of students. It also helps to create a positive vibe in the classroom.
- Teachers should provide encouragement and appreciation to the students as it can boost their confidence to work harder.
- Learners' differences and proficiency levels need to be taken into consideration.
- Teachers should assist students in ways that benefit both the strong and the weak ones.
- Students can contribute to materials selection, topic choice, and ideas sharing in the class.

In short, the humanistic approach can serve as an effective tool for improving education if educators and teachers ponder over the students' mental and emotional states during learning.

ELT and Humanistic Education

The humanistic approach has a pivotal role to play in language teaching and learning. Arifi (2017) expresses that the consequence of the humanistic approach to teaching foreign languages is perceived as recognizing the value and role of affection in communication and the attachment of emotions in the process of learning, featuring the significance that every learner clarifies the importance and capacity of everybody to have various objectives.

Some foreign language teaching approaches and methods are fundamentally based on humanism. Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, The Silent, Way, and Total Physical Response are four such ELT approaches that follow the principles of humanistic education. Community Language Learning (CLL), also known as "Counselling Learning," developed by Curran (1976), encourages the teacher to view students as "whole persons" and consider their emotions, responses, and intelligence. Similarly, Suggestopedia, introduced by Lozanov in the late 1970s, emphasizes creating a relaxed class atmosphere to reduce learners' anxiety about learning the target language. Gattegno (1972) founded "The Silent Way" where learners work on the language independently and the teacher remains "silent" most of the time. Total Physical Response, developed by Asher in the 1970s, is based on the learners' listening and comprehension skills through physical activity, requiring students' mental preparation to produce the language. These approaches are innovative in the sense that they turn the focus from a traditional teacher-dominated classroom to a learner-centered one.

Some modern ELT approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language teaching (TBLT) are designed to make learners prepared for meaningful verbal communication. These often choose topics that are practically relatable and useful for the students and, thus, they can make the class quite interactive. Teachers act as facilitators and students are active participants in the class. Humanistic elements are incorporated through sharing ideas, experiences, oral presentations, role-plays, argumentative discussions, etc.

Moreover, teachers can implement a humanistic approach in some traditional approaches, for instance, the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method, by designing particular activities such as freewriting on any topic, incorporating particular grammar items into writing or speaking, preparing short talks of their interest, sharing individual strategies to the peers, etc.

Challenges to the Humanistic Approach

In different traditional approaches, teachers follow a fixed method or a set of designs where students have to fit themselves to acquire knowledge. By contrast, in the humanistic approach, teachers need to cater to students' feelings, emotions, and beliefs first before they can assist them in acquiring knowledge. As a result, teachers need to apply different suitable strategies for each student. So, the Humanistic Language Teaching (HLT) approach is quite challenging because its success mostly depends on the teachers' proficiency, HLT-friendly environment, and learners' interests. The challenges of the HLT approach are given in the following section:

i. Teachers' attitude

The main challenge of HLT lies in the reversal of the traditional teacher-student roles. Having only good academic knowledge is not enough for humanistic teaching. Teachers have to be well acquainted with psychology and learning theories. They also need to be interested and knowledgeable in diverse topics. They have to be patient and compassionate enough to listen to the students. They need to be creative enough to improvise materials when needed. However, it is often challenging to find or train teachers with such qualities.

ii. Lack of learners' autonomy

Being habituated to traditional ways of language learning, students find it challenging to accept themselves in the driving seat as they often do not know or are not sure what they need or what is good for them. Not everyone understands their lackings and needs.

iii. Large and/or Mixed Class

For teachers, giving attention to every student individually can be difficult, if not impossible. It is essential to create a proper environment for humanistic learning. So, performing and conducting activities might be hard to provide for some countries because it is too expensive. Evaluation and assessment of development are also very difficult without a fixed or standardized test and syllabus if there is a mixed ability class which is more likely in developing and overpopulated countries.

iv. Too much focus on psychology

There is no doubt that, to achieve more effective and speedy learning, incorporating personal feelings, emotions, desires, and needs can be highly useful. However, the humanistic approach in ELT tends to focus too much on the psychological and emotional comfort and development of a student. Teachers should focus on the primary needs of students by understanding why they have enrolled in a language class. Students may be driven by a desire for personal growth and development, or to become a better person or human. This needs to be sorted out first.

Implementing HLT in Bangladesh: The Real Scenario

The education system of Bangladesh is mostly teacher-centered and impractical. It does not provide opportunities for students to express their needs, choices, or suggestions in terms of topics or materials. The implementation of humanistic teaching in the classroom is quite challenging in Bangladesh for different reasons such as those listed below:

- Bangladeshi teachers rarely experience a humanistic approach during their student life. Therefore, the lack of practical experience can be a probable reason why teachers in Bangladesh hardly use this approach in their classrooms. Even if some teachers might consider using humanistic elements, in most cases, it fails to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

- In Bangladesh, students of schools and colleges usually learn English through GTM, DM, and CLT. When a new teaching approach appears in the field, it takes time to design a different curriculum by considering several factors such as learner needs, motivation, teachers' attitudes, flexibility, availability of resources, use of technology,

and so on. Therefore, both the students and teachers find it very challenging to cope with the new situation when using a humanistic approach.

- Bangladesh is a densely populated country. It is obvious that institutions need to accommodate a large number of students in one classroom. In HLT, teachers need to focus on each student, but due to the large class size, teachers can find it difficult to monitor them individually.

- In some cases, the cultural and religious barriers could be a reason for not implementing HLT vastly in Bangladeshi education, especially in rural institutions. A conservative mindset about the co-ed environment as well as the use of music and audio-visuals in classrooms is still unwelcome in Bangladesh.

- Moreover, most teachers are reluctant to give students a certain amount of autonomy because they fear losing their dominant roles in the classroom. Thus, the rising concern of teachers about risking their position of power in the classroom has become one of the obstacles to implementing a humanistic approach.

Solutions

Although adopting the humanistic approach in language teaching can be quite challenging, it can be done if it is introduced or applied in the classrooms creatively. It is difficult to introduce the four common methods under the humanistic approach namely, Suggestopedia, the Silent Method, Total Physical Response, and Community Language Learning in language teaching in underdeveloped and developing countries and in countries where the classes are usually large and mixed ability ones. However, teachers can take the core and essential elements from the humanistic approach and apply them in their classrooms. In other words, teachers can integrate humanistic teaching techniques with existing and traditional teaching methods. The following steps can be taken to make HLT successful and effective:

1. Teachers' Training

Teachers are the most important prerequisite for HLT. Therefore, effective training courses must be introduced to the teachers who will not only be proficient in the target language but also be familiar with different learning theories and, most importantly, the psychology of the learners.

2. Purpose-driven Education

One of the reasons traditional language teaching methods fail to accomplish their goal is that students find no purpose in their learning process. They do not understand why they are being asked to do and perform certain tasks and hence they think these tasks to be unnecessary and eventually lose interest in learning. The materials should be chosen according to the needs and interests of the learners. This provides them with a specific purpose and their learning will thus be effective if they find that it contributes to their personal growth.

3. Extracurricular Activities

Self-actualization is an important part of the humanistic approach. For self-actualization,

extra-curricular activities are needed. Traditional syllabus and textbooks are not enough for the students to realize their full potential. Extracurricular activities can introduce the learners to the world beyond their four walls and a myriad of possibilities. Drama/theater performances, singing, recitation, quiz competitions, solving language-based puzzles, and spelling bee competitions, for example, can be very helpful in this regard.

4. Personal Involvement

Ensuring personal involvement from the learners' end is necessary for HLT. The learning process becomes more effective and speedy if the learners find themselves personally involved in what they are learning. If the students cannot relate to the materials they are being taught, they fail to take part in the learning process as a whole person and thus their learning remains incomplete and inadequate.

Below are some sample humanistic topics that can easily be taught and integrated into a traditional classroom setting:

    ı.   Aim in life, interests/hobbies, favorite sports/tv-shows/personalities.
    ıı. Childhood memories, places, parents, siblings, best friends.
    ııı. Current and trendy national or international issues.

Conclusion

Students cannot be the lifeless "machines" or "robots" who would blindly follow the academic rules and curriculum. They must be given chances to question and participate in the entire learning situation. Teachers and concerned authorities should show a major concern and humane attitude towards the learners. By implementing the humanistic learning theory, the education system of the country might be improved to a great extent. There are theoretical and practical complications of adapting humanistic education; however, proper planning and thoughtful execution of various strategies can minimize those. In developing countries like Bangladesh where the education system is deteriorating, it is high time to contemplate the adaption of the humanistic approach.

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