Communication Games Between Teachers and Students at the Tertiary Level: A Study Based on Transactional Analysis Theory
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Abstract

Teaching and learning are often either accelerated or clogged up depending on the rapport and responses of language strokes exchanged between teachers and students concerned. Transactional Analysis (TA), which refers to how people interact with each other, specifically, which ego state in me is talking to which ego state in you, works as a tool to accelerate conducive teaching and learning environment in the classroom and beyond. TA provides a language to explain why certain classroom management techniques are going to be more effective than others and gives permission for the teacher to retain the humanness in the face of adversity. Based on the TA theory, the researcher carried out this study among sixty seven students of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at Green University of Bangladesh and it shows the significant changes in the development of teaching and learning resulting from the teacher’s understanding and application of the features of TA, namely, ego states, transactional analysis proper, strokes, games etc. The findings demonstrate that TA raises consciousness in the teacher, brings greater awareness into the classroom and also creates a conducive learning environment to turn inattentive students into attentive ones and academic failure into academic success. He also urges further research on the same areas which are still unaddressed.

Keywords: communication, teachers and students, Transactional Analysis, learning

Introduction

Communication is an important tool in upholding good rapport and attaining productivity at all levels of life. It makes us understand sentiment and feelings of the others. Based on this communication, feelings of affection and hatred, attitudes – positive or negative – towards others are developed. As Speak (2014) states, “communication is the foundation of all human relationship. At first, strangers start talking and getting to know each other, and then the relationships are formed when they have more interaction and communication” (Para.3). It is actually a process of transmitting information and mutual understanding from one person to another. Communication can be verbal and non-verbal, social and professional, aiming at serving different purposes. Rahman & Mohiuddin (2014) state, “Human beings communicate with each other for many different personal and social purposes” (p.45). The communication between teachers and students is very important to create a conducive learning environment which ultimately helps students to attain

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their academic success. Teacher-student communication is actually a psychological interaction, a psychological verbal game which helps both the parties reach their ultimate goal, successful teaching and learning. The psychological verbal games played between teachers and students play a very important role to control and motivate students for effective learning. Both teachers and students play these psychological verbal games well when they understand Transactional Analysis (TA) and apply it accordingly. TA is “how people interact with each other, specifically, which ego state in me is talking to which ego state in you” (Solomon. 2003, p. 17). Each individual in this universe - may be a truck driver, rickshaw-puller, businessman, servant, official, teacher or student - has three ego states, namely, Parent, Adult and Child. As Kravas & Kravas (1974) observe, “each human being has these three identities and moves in and out of them many times on the same day” (p.195).

The parent ego state refers to some sorts of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that we learn or borrow from our parents and guardians. The parent ego state can be of two types: it can be a) Nurturing or Benevolent, and b) Judgmental or Critical. The Nurturing or Benevolent parent ego state is soft, loving, and permission giving, whereas the Judgmental or Critical ego state contains the prejudged feelings, beliefs and thoughts that we learn from our caretakers or parents. The parent ego state has its own sets of verbal repertoires like "should do" and "shouldn't do" "must do" and "mustn't do". On the other hand, the Adult ego state works like a data processing center which can gather and process extra information important for making productive decision. In fact, each individual has his/her own personality which can process data accurately, which sees, hears, thinks something accordingly and can come up with solutions to problems based on the realities and

![Figure 1: The individual personality and ego states](image-url)
not solely on our pre-judged feelings or childlike sentiments. The Adult ego state comes with the language like – “I can understand what you are saying”, “That alternative seems most probable”, and “I am going to complete this task” (Solomon 2003, p.16). Again, the Child ego state refers to the area of our nature that is based on thoughts, emotions, feelings and memoirs of our childhood. The Child ego state can be divided into two types - Free Child or Natural Child and Adapted Child or Rebellious Child. According to Solomon (2003),

**Free Child:** WOW! Look how tall my castle is!!!!!
**Adapted Child:** I better not get my clothes all dirty.
**Rebellious Child:** I don’t care if I do get dirty!

As each individual whether teacher or student, moves in and out of three main ego states – adult, parent and child many times on the same day, psychological interactions between teachers and students have become regular and remarkable. Teachers need to play the roles of mothers and doctors with their students; they have to read the temperaments and feel the pulses of their students respectively like mothers and doctors for effective teaching and learning. But, if teachers fail to understand their students, are unable to address them well, it becomes difficult for students to receive the most from their teachers as well as out of their education. In the present paper, the researcher shows how TA helps teachers read and technically manage students and classrooms respectively in face of challenges and adversities in the Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh (GUB). The researcher investigates the significant changes in the development of teaching and learning resulting from the teacher’s understanding and application of the features of TA namely ego states, transactional analysis proper, strokes, and games.

**The Rationale of the Study**

Universities contain students with more diverse socio-cultural background than colleges and schools. As universities are the broadest hubs of education and nurture students with various trends and temperaments, strokes, addresses and instructions should be tailored. According to Kabir et al. (2018), “as each student is different and faces different challenges, the instructions and approaches need to be customized according to the students’ learning preferences and personal interests” (p. 2). But, due to lack of knowledge and practices of TA, teachers sometimes become judgmental and show critical parent ego state behavior with students. This makes students feel that they receive no strokes from their teachers and this feeling results in academic failure.
The researcher thus feels the urge of adopting straight transaction policy and providing tailor-made instructions and strokes to create conducive learning environment for academic success. He is interested to address the ways how the university students respond to the various strokes provided by their teachers. The paper will, therefore, investigate the performance and achievement of students based on their responses to strokes. The study, thus, addresses the following questions:

a) How would students respond to the strokes?
b) What will their performance or achievement be?

**Literature Review**

Transaction usually indicates an exchange between two agents. Steiner (2003) defines transaction as an “exchange of strokes”. According to Merriam-Webster (2018), transaction is a “communicative action or activity involving two parties or things that reciprocally affect or influence each other” (Para 1). As Solomon (2003) has stated, “transactions are how people interact with each other, specifically, which ego state in me is talking to which ego state in you” (p.17). This interaction or communication sometimes goes straight and smooth whereas sometimes it gets jumbled, confused, and unsatisfactory. Based on this nature, Solomon has divided transactions into two types- a. Straight Transactions and b. Crossed Transactions.
a. Straight Transactions

![Diagram of Straight Transactions]

Adult: “Will you tell me what time it is?”
Adult: “Yes, it is four o’clock.”
Parent: “You have to go to bed right now!”
Child: “Please … Can’t I just finish this?

Figure 3: Straight Transactions, Solomon (2003)

b. Crossed Transactions

![Diagram of Crossed Transactions]

Adult: “Can you tell me what time it is?”
Adapted Child: “Why are you always rushing me?”
Adult: “Can you tell me what time it is?”
Critical Parent: “You’re always late, anyway, would you even care?”

Figure 4: Crossed Transactions, Solomon (2003)

It has already been mentioned that transactions are exchange of strokes; as a result, both transactions and strokes are intertwined. A stroke is a unit of attention which provides stimulation to an individual (Woollams, 1978 cited in Zhang & Constantinovits 2017, p.6). It is actually what one human being does something to recognize another human being. A stroke is a “unit of human recognition” (Berne 1966, cited in Solomon 2003). Strokes can be of different types and each stroke does not work for everyone, rather different strokes work for different people. As Zhang & Constantinovits (2017) state,

When someone gets a stroke that does not fit in with her or his preferred stroke quotient, she or he is likely to ignore it or belittle it. If people receive strokes from a certain behavior then people are likely to repeat it (p.6).
The different types of stokes are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification results</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Exchange of ideas that occurs through words. This can be both written and oral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Verbal</td>
<td>Through facial expressions, gestures and also thorough postures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Fantasies, self-praise, and other forms of self-stimulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>Strokes from others are important for healthy living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>A positive stroke is one which the receiver experiences as pleasant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>A negative stroke is one experience as painful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>A conditional stroke relates to what you do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconditional</td>
<td>An unconditional stroke relates to what you are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zhang & Constantinovits (2017, P.6)

Several studies have been conducted on transactional analysis theory in various contexts and settings by different researchers. Barrow (2018) conducted a research where he raised the questions for whom the teacher is and for what the teaching is. The author revisited one of his previous articles, which presented an inverted conceptualization of the ego state model, and considers that model with a new, specific focus on implications for teachers and educational practice. He addressed related themes, including the concepts of grown-up-ness and eldership. The author suggested that although emancipation has been a recurring theme in educational discourse, an alternative perspective, and experience of freedom, is possible in the context of a reframed Parent ego state position. The paper presented case material to illustrate what is primarily an existential account of educational purpose. Barrow (2015) in his another paper considered the application of transactional analysis (TA) in the field of education, particularly in the classroom, staffroom and beyond. He focused on the use of TA in reducing conflict in the classroom and staffroom before offering observations about its broader relevance to contemporary UK schooling. Concepts covered included the ego state model of personality, functional fluency, psychological game-playing and contracting. Finally, the author considered issues raised in considering the application of a psychodynamic framework in the context of education. Mei (2010) investigated, through empirical research, the relationship between education in Transactional Analysis theory and the Locus of Control of college students. Two questionnaire surveys were conducted before and after the Transactional Analysis classes, and personal narrative reports by the students were collected. It was found that psychology education in Transactional Analysis correlated with a reduction in scores for the External Control proclivity of the 81 students, and their assignments displayed similar proclivity. Transactional Analysis knowledge was shown to help students discover and explore their own potentials and liberate their creativity. It is proposed that an increase of transactional analysis theory in the education of college students
should be considered. Stuart & Agar (2011) presented the findings of a case study on the use of Transactional Analysis (TA) in schools in England in their paper. The paper provided a brief overview of TA and its relevance to secondary education – for pupils, teachers and school improvement. They argued that self-awareness and understanding of others enable individuals and groups to develop effective and powerful communication and a better climate in the workplace. They found that children, young people and teachers with TA skills have better self-awareness, increased understanding of others and, as a consequence better relationships and can demonstrate impact on attendance, attainment, personal and professional lives and school climate overall. Panichi (2018) in his paper showed how the application of Eric Berne’s Transactional Analysis theory to teacher-student interactions in the foreign language classroom can provide useful insight for teachers. The paper provided examples from the monolingual language classroom at university level in Italy within a non-compulsory educational setting. It was argued that an increased awareness of how teacher discourse affects student engagement in the learning process can, in turn, lead to more effective teaching. The analysis examined a string of typical teacher-learner interactions that occur over a specific period of time using Berne’s PAC (Parent-Adult-Child) transactional model. In addition, by illustrating the complexity and potency of classroom interactions, the examples provided a greater understanding of the implications of classroom dynamics in terms of learner development in general through the ongoing activation of learner autonomy, critical thinking and pro-active behaviour. The outcomes of the analysis were considered to be relevant to the theoretical fields of Language Awareness and Learner Advising in Foreign Language Education and to intersect with the broader field of Learner Counselling in education. While this paper is based on dynamics of the foreign language classroom, the analysis can be viewed as being relevant to teacher-student interactions in a variety of educational contexts as well.

The papers reviewed above have their own urge, interest and context; at the same time, the present paper differs from the others for its selection and uniqueness. Barrow (2015) applied transactional analysis (TA) in the classroom, and staffroom in reducing conflict before offering observations about its broader relevance to contemporary UK schooling whereas Barrow (2018) presented an inverted conceptualization of the ego state model, and considered that model with a new, specific focus on implications for teachers and educational practice. Mei (2010) investigated the relationship between education in Transactional Analysis theory and the Locus of Control of college students and argued that the knowledge of Transactional Analysis helps students discover and explore their own potentials and liberate their creativity. Stuart & Agar (2011) provided a brief overview of TA and its relevance to secondary education – for pupils, teachers and school improvement while Panichi (2018) in his paper showed how the application of Eric Berne’s Transactional Analy
sis theory to teacher-student interactions in the foreign language classroom can provide useful insight for teachers. But the present paper is exclusive and different from the other papers as it investigates the application and impact of TA at university education in the context of Bangladesh.

Methodology

The researcher conducted the research in a very natural classroom setting at Green University of Bangladesh. For the credibility of the paper, he adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected by direct observation, from documents maintained for both the experimental and the control groups before and after the midterm examination. The researcher also adopted all sorts of carefulness to receive biasfree and authentic data.

Participants

The study was conducted among 67 students of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), EAP 102 Course. Among them, 37 students were male and 30 were female but all of them had at least twelve class education. The students belonged to two different sections: D2 and D4; the D2 was the control group, a group which was not brought under experiment whereas the section D4 was the experimental group, a group which was brought under experiment to conduct the research. The students had to attend two classes and needed to submit one assignment once a week for this course. They are 18 to 22 years old and belong to diverse socio-cultural and socio-economic background. As each respondent was different in his/her temperament, interest, approach and appreciation, data was varied, genuine and impartial.

Data Collection

As it has already been mentioned, the researcher selected two sections namely D2 and D4 of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Course, a course to develop basic English Language skills for the third semester students of various departments at GUB. While conducting the classes of the experimental group (D4), the course teacher as a researcher applied his knowledge of TA, namely, ego states, transactional analysis proper, strokes, and games in the class. On the otherhand, the teacher used to conduct the classes of the control group (D2) without applying his knowledge of TA. In the classes, the researcher maintained two different attendance sheets as documents for both the sections. Another document was also maintained to keep the record of weekly submission of assignment for the control and experimental groups. He also carefully observed the participation and performance of the respondents of the two sections to receive data. The researcher took four
weeks to conduct the study. Although all the students had almost the same level of education, there were differences in their understanding, responses and results.

Findings and Discussion

Data gathered from documents and observations reveal some important and informative results. The researcher, as a teacher, behaved usually, communicated traditionally with the students of the control group and provided no stokes to them. On the other hand, he adopted straight transaction and applied adult ego state approach in the section D4 that is experimental group. Also, the researcher provided positive and conditional stokes to the same group students. Based on these behavioural aspects, the attendance sheets of both the groups give the following results.

The figure 5 shows that the students in control group attended the classes on an average and the percentage ranges from 70% to 72%. This control group represents the tradional classroom of this university and the students of the control group received neither straight transaction nor conditional stroke nor positive stroke. On the contrary, the figure 6 shows the attendance status of the experimental group where the presence of students increased gradually from 70% to 80% in four weeks. As they received straight transaction, adult ego state behaviour and positive strokes, they attended the classes with interests, motivation and expectations and the percentage becomes 10% more than the first class within four weeks. Thus, the knowledge, practice and application of TA make a teacher effective to support students and facilitate the learning process.
As Essays (2018) says,
For a teacher to improve their performance, appropriate psychological theo-
ries should be studied and utilised, and the theory of Transactional Analysis
offers teachers and trainers a means through which they can better under-
stand what happens within the classroom on a social level. (para.1)

According to the practice and policy of the course, students need to
submit assignments on the Newspaper Reading once week. The record of the
assignment submission reveals that students feel motivated to prepare and submit
assignments when they receive straight transactions and conditional ego state. The
following graphs show the status of assignment submission of both the groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Submission Record: Once a Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Figure 7: Assignment submission of the control group" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure 7 reveals that the students in control group submit their assign-
ment in a consistent percentage; in the first week it was 50% and in the forth week it
was again 50% although it was 52% in the third week. But, the figure 8 shows that
in the first week 50% of the students submitted their assignments, in the second
week it was 55%, in the third week it was 59% whereas in the forth week it was 62%.
Thus, it is very clear from figure 8 that continuous conditional strokes and straight
transactions motivate students to submit their assignment regularly and ensure the
submission of increasing and larger number of students. From observation, the
teacher noticed the following scenerio-
Control Group

Crossed Transactions
Parent: You must submit your assignment each Monday.
Child: Silent (Rebellious / Adapted)

Experimental Group

Conditional Strokes
Teacher: a) If you don’t submit your assignment regularly, one mark will be deducted for week.
b) If you submit your assignment each week, you will have one mark bonus for regular submission.

Straight Transactions
Adult: I think you have prepared your assignment.
Adult: Yes Sir, (started submitting)

The findings, thus, unveil the fact that communication is a reciprocal way to read, understand and recognize one another. In classroom settings, if a teacher has the knowledge of TA and he/she applies his/her knowledge and competence, it will help the teacher to know himself/herself as well as his/her students. It will also make both the parties learn which ego state in one is talking to which ego state in other. The knowing and understanding of each other, particularly students and teachers lead them to build rapport between them, play a very fruitful communication game resulting in creating a conducive teaching and learning environment. According to Human Kinetics (2018),

A positive learning environment is created when you value participatory teaching and learning and when there is trust and rapport among students and between yourself and students. To establish trust that leads to true participation and engagement in learning, you first need to set the stage by establishing a learning environment in which all students feel valued, safe, and supported. (Para.1)

So, to be a good teacher and to produce good students, teachers should learn and apply TA. Moreover, teaching-learning would be more fruitful if teachers apply and adopt adult and nurturing ego states, positive and unconditional strokes more than other states and strokes. The combination of these states and strokes can turn inattentive students into attentive ones and academic failure into academic success.
Based on contexts and culture, conditional strokes can work well and the researcher in this paper adopted conditional stroke. But the researcher strongly argues that either conditional or unconditional stroke is much better than no strokes. Because, stimulation comes from strokes and unless there are strokes, there will be no inspiration and insight. The researcher finally recommends the knowledge, practice and application of TA for teachers of all level as well as parents and guardians of students.

**Conclusion**

Teaching-learning is a continuous process, and it invites and embraces continuous stimuli from teachers, students, environment and surroundings. To leverage all the conducive agents of teaching and learning, teachers, parents and guardians should have theoratical knowledge and practices of different ego states and preferable storkes for students. When a good combination and the application of all these agents can be ensured, teaching-learning will be enjoyable and effective. Transactional Analysis Theory plays a vital role to make this enjoyment, success and effectiveness happen. As TA contributes to creating a favourable teaching-learning environment, to education, to the society, to the nation, the learning, practice and application of TA should be wide-spread and widely-practised. Thus, the educationists and the policy makers concerned should ensure the exercise and
implementation of TA country wide. If it is necessary, the authority concerned can include TA as a content in the existing training manual for teachers at all level of formal education.

References


