**Lesson one: Classroom Research**

1. **Definitions**

* **Classroom**

Classroom is defined as “a room in which teachers and learners are gathered together for instructional purposes” (Nunan, 2005, p. 225).

For Van Lier (1988, p. 47), “the L2 classroom can be defined as the gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning”.

Recently by the development of virtual classroom, this term has been changed.

* **Research**

Research simply seeks the answer of certain questions which have not been answered so far and the answers depend upon human efforts. Research answers only those questions of which the answers are not available in literature, i.e. in human knowledge. Thus, we can say research seeks the answer only of those questions of which the answers can be given on the basis of available facilities.

The term research is defined by Woody as “an academic activity. It comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggesting solutions; collecting, organizing and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis”.

As far as Redmen and Morey (1923, p. 10), it is a “systematized effort to gain new knowledge”.

“Research is simply a systematic and refined technique of thinking, employing specialised tools, instruments, and procedures in order to obtain a more adequate solution of a problem than would be possible under ordinary means. It starts with a problem, collects data or facts, analysis these critically and reaches decisions based on the actual evidence. It evolves original work instead of mere exercise of personal. It evolves from a genuine desire to know rather than a desire to prove something. It is quantitative, seeking to know not only what but how much, and measurement is therefore, a central feature of it” (Crawford).

P.M. Cook has given a very comprehensive and functional definition of the term research. It is “an honest exhaustive, intelligent searching for facts and their meanings or implications with reference to a given problem. The product or findings of a given piece of research should be an authentic, verifiable and contribution to knowledge in the field studied”.

Nunan (1992, p. 3) claimed that “it is a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components: (1) a question, problem or hypothesis, (2) data, and (3) analysis and interpretation”.

* **Classroom Research**

Allwright (1983, p. 191) said that “classroom-centered research is just that – research centered on the classroom, as distinct from, for example, research that concentrates on inputs to the classroom (the syllabus, the teaching materials)or the outputs from the classroom (learner achievement scores). It does not ignore in any way or try to devalue the importance of such inputs and outputs. It simply tries to investigate what happens inside the classroom when learners and teachers come together”.

Classroom research is an attempt to answer two fundamental questions:

* How well are students learning?
* How effectively are teachers teaching?

One of the questions asked by researchers in the domain of applied linguistics area is that “what classroom research has to tell us about the relationship between what goes on in the classroom and second language acquisition” (Nunan, 2005, p. 226).

1. **Characteristics of Research**

According to Brumfit and Mitchell (1989, pp. 7-8), research is characterized by being public, systematic, and useful activity. It is public because it needs to be distinguished from simply improving one’s own private understanding: it is not another name for personal study. It needs to be public because private work is necessary inefficient. Public work benefits from having procedures throughout being open to scrutiny by others who will lack the biases of the original researchers, who will bring further understanding to bear on the same problems and who will be able -above all- to offer public criticism as a result of which methods and formulations can be improved upon in subsequent work.

Research must be systematic because it needs to be explicit about its procedures if it is to be distinguished from mere hunch. What kind of systematicity will be sought depends on the question being investigated, but for every question, the means of exploration will be examined exhaustively to ensure that it is the best that can be devised for the time and resources available, and the formulation and interpretation of the research will be systematically examined as rigorously as possible.

Research must be useful, in a particular sense. Justifying a particular area for investigation involves necessarily showing how the study will contribute, directly or indirectly, to improving our understanding of language teaching.

The following characteristics may be gathered from the definitions of ‘Research’

1. It gathers new knowledge or data from primary or first-hand sources.

2. It places emphasis upon the discovery of general principles.

3. It uses certain valid data gathering devices.

4. It is logical and objective.

5. The researcher resists the temptation to seek only the data that support his hypotheses.

6. The researcher eliminates personal feelings and preferences.

7. It endeavours to organise data in quantitative terms.

8. Research is patient and unhurried activity.

9. Research is carefully recorded and reported.

10. Conclusions and generalisations are arrived at carefully and cautiously.

1. **Classroom Research Issues**

In order to do a research in the classroom, two main issues should be taken into consideration: substantive and methodology

* 1. **Substantive Issues**

Substantive researchhas to do with ‘what’ of research. “It seeks to identify relationships between language acquisition and variables such as instructional methods and task types, teacher input (e.g., input, questions, corrective feedback) and aspects of learner behavior such as acquisitional sequences and learner-learner interaction” (Nunan, 2005, p. 227).

The Known studies are:

* **The method comparison studies**

These studies “compared different methods, teaching techniques, and programs in order to determine which were more effective” (Nunan, 2005, p. 227).

**Example:**

Researchers investigated “whether Audiolingualism, which was then coming in to vogue, was superior to the traditional grammar-translation approach” (Nunan, 2005, p. 227).

* **Focus on teacher: input factors**

Tsui (2001, p. 121) claimed that classroom research has focused on three different aspects of the pedagogical environment: input factors, interaction and output.

“inputfactors that has been investigated include the amount and types of teacher talk, teacher speech modifications, questions, instruction, and error correction and feedback” (Nunan, 2005, p. 227).

* **Focus on the learner (morpheme order studies and output)**

Morpheme order studies are those studies that are based on the contrastive analysis hypothesis, which focuses on “acquisition order based on contrasts between a learner’s first and second languages” (Nunan, 2005, p. 229). These methods led to improve a new type of methods that focus on unconscious acquisition rather than the conscious learning (Krashen)

**The methodological focus should shift from learning to acquisition**

This leads to what is called ‘output hypothesis’ which argues that input comprehension is good but not sufficient. Swain argued that “in comprehending input, learners can ‘bypass’ the syntactic system and go straight for meaning. However, in producing and speaking, the learner must ‘syntacticize’ his or her utterance in order to be understood” (Nunan, 2005, p. 230).

* 1. **Methodological Issues**

On classroom research, the distinction is made between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Whether:

* The data collected through an experiment or non-experimental overall design,
* The data are qualitative or quantitative (type of data)
* The data are analyzed statistically or interpretively (type of analysis)

Through years and years, researchers in this domain search for which of these types of research is more effective in getting explanations for differences in learner output.

“A major dilemma that has bedeviled classroom research for years is how to capture differences in what goes on at the level of the classroom” (Nunan, 2005, p. 232).

“The need for ways of documenting and quantifying classroom interaction led to the development of observation instruments of different kinds”.

1. **Approaches to Classroom Research**

Ellis (1989, p. 54) described two approaches for investigating the relationship between instruction and second language learning.

**3.1 The Linguistic/Psycholinguistic Approach**

Research based on the linguistic/psycholinguistic approach has sought answers to three key questions in recent years:

* To what extent is it possible to teach learners grammatical structure? This question relates to the role of instruction when the focus is on form.
* What kind of communication promotes L2 acquisition in the classroom? This question relates, in particular, to the role of instruction when the focus is on meaning.
* Is L2 grammar learned more efficiently through a focus on form or a focus on meaning?

**3.2 The Educational/Pedagogic Approach**

The last few years have seen a growth in research based on the educational/pedagogic approach. Long (1987) identified a number of issues that have attracted the attention of researchers. These include:

* The effects of teacher question types on student production.
* Language use in lock-step and small-group work.
* The relationship between practice and achievement.
* Teacher treatment of error.
* The effect of task type on learners production.

1. **Major Options in Language Classroom Research**

The major options in language classroom research include the following:

* Studies of language learning based on the observed performance of individuals in typical classes. These may be longitudinal studied of individuals throughout their school careers or studies of achievement of classes as groups.
* Comparisons of learners’ language experience inside and outside the classroom setting.
* Analyses of the relationship between theoretical ideas, teaching materials and syllabuses, and classroom practices.
* Analyses of different teaching styles relating to factor such as materials used, types of learners, size of class, etc.
* Analyses of the beliefs of teachers about their practices and needs, related to actual classroom practice.
* Analyses of the beliefs of learners about the practices and need related to their degree of success.
* Case studies of classrooms in particular contexts, attempting to draw upon and synthesize elements of all the above.

(Brumfit& Mitchell, 1989, p. 12-14)

**5.Classroom Research Steps**

Classroom research goes through different steps:

1. Collect information or the issues the researcher wishes to investigate (it is called expert opinions taken from literature and earlier researches). This step is considered important as it:

* helps the researcher see the issues that have already been thought about and investigated which leads him or her sort out more precisely whatever s/he eventually decides to investigate.
* gives the researcher some information about how these issues were investigated which can help him/her make more informed decisions about how to start and do his/her own research.

1. Data collection and analysis: since the research is done in the classroom, the data should be collected from a record of what happened in a particular classroom(s). The data can be collected either from a direct observation or from a questionnaire or interview.