PROBLEMS FACED BY TEACHERS IN CONSTRUCTIVIST PEDAGOGY AT SECONDARY LEVEL TRIBAL SCHOOLS OF KERALA

M.Jesa,*
Abdu Rahman.M.†

Abstract

Sensitivity to tribal culture and life, recognition of cognitive strength of tribal children and appreciation of their personality qualities are the minimum pre-requisites for addressing tribal education. Educational context must be moulded in the relevant culture of the community by developing content that embraces the local context. Curriculum should be culturally sensitive and it should provide children with economically viable options for life. Tribal school teachers are often undecided about the teaching methodology and they do not feel free to offer flexibility. Researchers have identified the difficulties that these teachers experience in Indian context. The present study is carried out in Kerala on a sample of 38 teachers from tribal schools of three districts using the tool of interview schedule. Seven major areas of difficulties have been identified.

* Associate Professor, Farook Training College, Calicut, Kerala.
† M.Ed Student, Farook Training College, Calicut, Kerala.

Introduction

Education is a highly complex process that is influenced by the social, political, cultural and economic liberations of a nation. In an industrial society, schools provide standardized instructional tasks aimed at transfer of knowledge. The twenty first century demands the skills to process information for social uplift and sustainable development. General education in India functions within certain curricular frameworks to achieve well designed national goals. While focusing on unity in diversity, the curriculum should also cater to the needs of the minority, the marginalized whose potentials are to be channeled in desirable directions. The process of schooling, teacher training, curriculum development and the evaluation are designed with the general stream of students as target group. Even while flexibility is suggested wherever necessary, it is doubtful whether it has been practised.

Tribal education in India

Tribes, similar to other indigenous communities, have their own culture, socio economic and governance system. Sensitivity to tribal culture and life, recognition of cognitive strength of tribal children and appreciation of their personality qualities are the minimum pre-requisites for addressing tribal education. Generally, tribal education in India has been carried out in the medium of a language that is not their own. This prevents them from accessing the benefits of education. The constitution of India under article 350A, affirms that every state must provide adequate facilities for instruction of pupils in their mother tongue. Decades have passed and state governments have ignored this prescription for tribal students. In Kerala, tribal children have limited contact with the regional language- Malayalam and they tend to communicate in their own dialect. Government schools use Malayalam language for teaching and communication. This is most often not familiar to a tribal child at the pre- primary and primary levels. They are thus unable to fully comprehend classroom teaching and activities, read in the Malayalam language or understand the course materials properly. These barriers at the pre- primary and primary levels continue to adversely affect studies at upper primary and secondary levels. Using the tribal dialect as a medium to transact the state curriculum, particularly for the first ten years and introducing the state language gradually as the child becomes comfortable in the school environment can yield positive results. Tribal communities possess strong linguistic capital which needs to be preserved and expanded both inside and outside the education system.

Research in child development and pedagogy has indicated that a young child learns concepts better if they are embedded in contexts that are local and familiar. Educational context should be moulded in the relevant culture of the community by developing content that embraces the local contexts. Curriculum should be culturally sensitive and provide children with economically viable options for life with a view that tribes need to be ‘employable’. Curriculum should incorporate programmes that sustain children in their respective environments instead of forcing them to move out. Sensitivity to tribal culture and life, recognition of cognitive strength of tribal children and appreciation of their personality qualities are the minimum pre-requisites for addressing tribal education. Such attempts can provide tribal children with culturally meaningful, ecologically valid and viable alternatives, by reinforcing the dignity of their culture and identity. Education can include knowledge of
agriculture in all its dimensions, skills of various vocations like carpentry, crafts etc. to enable the child become independent in their own environment.

Mainstreaming through education alone is a difficult task; recognizing the curricular content and the teaching-learning methods to reflect and draw on their environment and knowledge base must be undertaken to develop the response of tribal groups and to increase participation. In addition to the prescribed state curriculum, effective support, learning materials that are contextualized for tribal children such as text books or glossaries in local dialects, and tribal folklore are more lasting ways of educating the children in the mainstream education system. Non government organizations need to help tribal communities to develop this support material. First identifying and documenting their cultural wealth and sharing tribal cultural wealth that currently exists in their communities is essential for transforming education and empowering tribes to utilize these assets, and bring this knowledge to the classroom. Value based education that develops social, moral, and spiritual values through group activities and sports, games, social work etc. need more emphasis for the development of the tribal child. Regular subject teaching must be supplemented with imparting career guidance, tribal/ non-tribal mentoring, exposure visits to mainstream institutions and interactive sessions with local leaders.

A teacher has to be empowered in both content and methodology. Teacher absenteeism in tribal areas is high as teachers most often prefer to live in cities. Children are taught using a "city syllabus", which is less applicable to tribal areas, leaving children in a state of confusion and alienation. At the same time teachers are often confused about the teaching methodology, and they do not offer flexibility and freedom to students. Children are taught by teachers who may or may sometimes be from the tribal community. The presence of tribal teachers, especially from the same community has shown improved school participation of tribal children, as these teachers understand and respect the culture with greater sensitivity. However cases have indicated that special training –on both course materials as well as appropriate conduct with tribal students-has to be undertaken even if the teacher has tribal origins. Training and capacity building have to be undertaken on a sustained basis to ensure continued motivation on the part of teachers. Development of appropriate curriculum is a futile exercise in the absence of appropriate training in the use of resources.

**Constructivism as a paradigm**

In a constructivist classroom student autonomy is accepted and encouraged. By respecting student’s ideas and encouraging independent thinking, teachers help students attain their own intellectual identity. Students who frame questions and issues and then go about analyzing and answering them take responsibilities for their own learning and become problem solvers. In a constructivist classroom teacher asks open ended questions and allows wait time for responses. Reflective thought takes time and is often built on other’s ideas and comments. The ways teachers ask questions and the ways students respond will structure the success of student enquiry. In constructivist classroom higher level thinking is encouraged. The constructivist teacher challenges students to reach beyond the simple factual responses. He encourages students to connect and summarize concepts by analyzing, predicting, justifying and defending their ideas.

In constructivist classroom students are engaged to dialogue with the teacher and with each other. Social discourse helps students change or reinforce their ideas. If they have the chance to present what they think and hear other’s ideas, students can build a personal knowledge base that they understand. Only when they feel comfortable enough to express their
ideas, meaningful classroom dialogue will occur. Students are engaged to experience that challenge hypothesis and encourage discussions. When allowed to make predictions, students often generate varying hypotheses about natural phenomena. The constructivist teacher provides ample opportunities for student to test their hypothesis, especially through group discussions of concrete experiences. The class uses raw data, primary sources, and manipulative, physical and interactive materials. The constructivist approach involves students in real-world possibilities, helps them generate the abstractions that bind phenomena together.

**Need and significance of the study**

Learning is influenced by the factors relating to the environment of the learner: family, culture, society and facilities, resources etc. Considering the tribal students, their environment is quite different from that of the normal school students. At the formation of curriculum the environmental factors of the learners are considered; but curriculum is formed by considering those of the general stream of students. Hence the tribal and non tribal students have to acquire the same curricular objectives. Tribal children have limited contact with the state language, and they have their own local dialect. Schools use state language for teaching and communication; it turns the interactive process of teaching and learning mechanical.

The Government of India has implemented many programmes for the uplift of the tribes in different domains – social, cultural, and educational. Mismatches occur at the implementation stage due to the attitudinal differences and physical hazards. When learning occurs in a socio-cultural context, the tribal school teacher who has to take up additional responsibilities meets with many problems. A review of studies on tribal classrooms reflects that the teacher has to overcome these hazards, especially when every learner in the classroom is to be equally satisfied in the construction of ideas, sharing of thoughts and creation of knowledge. A dialogue with a few tribal school teachers revealed some of the areas of difficulties that the facilitator faces in a constructivist tribal classroom. Thus the present study was taken up by the investigators.

**Statement of the problem**
The problem was titled as, Problems Faced by Teachers in Constructivist Pedagogy at Secondary Level Tribal Schools of Kerala.

**Operational definition of key terms**

**Constructivist pedagogy**

Constructivist pedagogy is an instructional strategy in which students construct knowledge in a social context with teachers scaffold wherever required. This paradigm is developed based on the theory of Lev Vygotsky

**Tribal schools**

Tribal schools are those schools where more than fifty percentage of students are tribes. In the present study the investigators considered the model residential schools and ashram schools where eighty percentage and above students are tribes as Tribal Schools.

**Objectives of the study**

Following were the objectives of the present study

(i) To identify the problems faced by teachers in constructivist pedagogy at secondary level tribal schools.
(ii) To suggest some remedial measures for the problems faced by teachers in constructivist pedagogy at secondary level tribal schools.

Methodology

The investigator adopted the survey method and interview technique for the data collection.

Sample selected

The population of the study was teachers from the secondary level tribal schools of Kerala. There are altogether 18 model residential/ashram schools in Kerala where 80 percentage and above students are from tribal community. The sample for the study constituted 34 teachers working in tribal schools from Malappuram, Palakkad and Wayanad districts.

Tool used for the study

Interview schedule for Tribal School Teachers containing 17 open ended items was used for the study.

Technique for analysis

Analysis of data was undertaken using procedures appropriated for the purpose of the study. The present study being a qualitative study the investigator used the interpretative approach to analyze the data.

Recent researches

The review helped the investigator to understand that the previous studies are mainly about the problems of dialect, content and curriculum and educational facilities available in the tribal schools. Lack of pre-requisites related to classroom activities proved to be another reason for silent members in the class. Tribal school teachers have also made suggestions regarding supervision, and special training. Realizing the fact that tribal school teachers still face many difficulties in a constructivist classroom, the investigators took up the present study to identify the problems faced by teachers in constructivist pedagogy at secondary level tribal schools of Kerala and to suggest remedial steps. To cite a few recent studies, Nundy and Bagai (2009) conducted a study on tribal education – a fine balance. In this study they pointed out that external and internal factors affect the tribal education. The main heads of the study were; language of instruction, curriculum content, teacher training and pedagogy. Nisheeth and Vijay (2010) published an article on the topic “Tribal education: strategies for intervention”. The paper discussed the purpose of education by the help of various definitions of education given by great persons. And it listed out the various programmes and policies such as NPE(1986), Programme of Action (1986), revised policy formation in (POA1992) etc that are initiated by Government of India for the betterment of tribal education. The impact of these programmes on tribal education was analyzed and the data were published by various government agencies. Some strategies for intervention along with the specific areas such as physical location of the villages, potentialities of the teachers, parental involvement in schools, tribal students, study materials and books, and social and cultural issues are also prescribed. Raina (2011) published an article on behaviorism and constructivism. The paper raises some questions to indicate direction processes of quality education ought to be taken in multi-cultural contexts. Questions he discussed in the paper are; should the content reflect the cultural and social location of the child, is local knowledge system related to agriculture, health and medicine, artisanship and whether folk cultural forms have any place in the formal education system. It was contended by many that a constructivist approach

can accommodate the specific cultural roots of the child and be laid in assimilating the child’s knowledge into a larger knowledge system.

**Analysis and interpretation**

In the present study after collecting data through the interview method the investigator transformed the written texts into codes. After coding the texts the investigator clustered similar components. The areas of major problems are categorized into, non participation of students in activities, lack of special training for teachers in tribal schools, lack of resource materials for teachers, difficulties related to creative activities, difficulties in issue based discussions, lack of IT facilities, difficulties related to continuous and comprehensive evaluation. Details of analysis of the components are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Difficulties of teachers</th>
<th>No.of trs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Non participation of students in group activities</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lack of resource materials for teachers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Difficulties related to creative activities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Difficulties in issue based discussions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Lack of IT facilities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Difficulties in continuous comprehensive evaluation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Lack of special training for teachers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty three teachers argued that group activities were not effective in tribal classrooms since majority of the students kept silent throughout group activities. The major reasons pointed out were related to the factors of time, motivation, pre-requisites, language and level of scaffolding.

Among the interviewed teachers, 28 of them pointed out that, it is difficult to teach tribal students following the activities given in the source book. The tribal schools follow the curriculum of general schools. It makes trouble to the teachers most often when they follow the syllabus of general school to teach tribal students. Most of the activities given in the source book are related to the life situations of general stream. Many contexts given in the text book remain strange to the tribal students. Twenty eight were of the view that it is difficult for them to teach the tribal students incorporating the activities given in the source book.

Fostering creativity is one of the major objectives of constructivist pedagogy. Eighteen teachers opined that they never attempted any activity to foster creativity in tribal students, since they feel that there will not be any response for the students. Learning must be life-oriented and the source book discusses many social issues, but such contexts are alien to the tribes. Twenty one teachers are unable to present lessons connecting the content with the life related problems of tribes.

Teachers should present the lessons meant to study in connection with the problems of real life and also should give an idea on the importance of learning it, for that they must seek examples from real life situations. As teachers are unaware of the customs and the living situations of the tribes they meet failure in presenting such problems in the classroom. Twenty one teachers are unable to present such problems linking the lessons with the living conditions of the tribes.

Information technology has become one of the components in scaffolding the multiple phases of learning process. Nineteen teachers argued that the lack of facilities in the school is a hindrance to take IT based classes, even though the systems are being supplied to the schools. Majority of teachers mentioned inadequate classroom requirements as a problem for taking IT enabled classes. Another problem to handle IT based classes was lack of LCD projectors in the school.

At the time of interview twenty seven teachers opined that continuous and comprehensive evaluation is not possible in tribal schools by strictly following all the criteria. Collections, assignments and projects have high significance in the constructivist approach. The incapability of tribal students in collecting data created problem along with the unsatisfactory library facilities in the schools. Since the learning environment of tribal schools differs significantly from the main stream schools, teachers must be equipped to handle the classes. Twenty eight teachers are of the view that special training should be provided to teach the tribal students. The teachers are not quite aware of the tribal issues and their cultural background. Chances for firsthand experience in these dimensions are rare. Dialect also causes another barrier in classroom communication.

**Suggestions**

With respect to the second objective set for the study, based on the suggestions received from the sample, certain remedial measures have been suggested. The three dimensions of teacher, learner and curriculum need certain remedial steps in order to reduce the level of difficulties of tribal teachers and to ensure learning in tribal classroom with the scaffold provided.

**Teacher dimension**

Following remedial steps have been arrived at the investigators with regard to the teacher dimension.

- Provision of local texts
- Special training for non tribal teachers to work in tribal schools.
- Training programmes for teachers highlighting more of tribal socio-cultural problems
- Developing knowledge about tribal environment and local tradition among teachers.
- Preparation of source book for teachers to develop the tribal knowledge such as folk songs, tales, traditional games, dance, music etc. to impart joy of learning through the folklore and bridge the gap of home culture and living atmosphere.
- Special support to teachers as per need.
- Development of communication in tribal dialect
- Direct experience to the tribal teachers through excursions and field trips

**Learner dimension**

With regard to the Scaffold to be received by the learner,

- The teachers should establish a healthy rapport with the tribal students and create a positive environment for them
- The authorities should take care to supply learning resources at the proper time.
- Give direct experience to the tribal students through excursions and field trips
- Give opportunities to the students to read more books
- Increase vocabulary power of the students by arranging communicative sessions.
Curricular dimension
- Supplementary books should be based on the traditional knowledge and folklore of the tribals
- Create supplementary tribal based learning materials
- Include activities related to the socio cultural background of the tribes
- Include more practical items in the syllabus.
- Suitably adapted curriculum and the availability of locally relevant teaching and learning materials and modules for tribal students.

Conclusion
The major problems faced by teachers in constructivist pedagogy at secondary level tribal schools are: non participation of students in group activities, lack of resource materials for teachers, difficulties related to creative activities, difficulties in issue based discussions, lack of IT facilities, difficulties related to continuous and comprehensive evaluation and lack of special training for teachers in tribal schools.

Major reasons for non- participation of students in activities are: insufficient time allowed for completing the activities, inability of students to complete activities with the scaffolding provided, lack of extrinsic motivation, lack of response of students, lack of initiation from students, lack of individual attention, difficulties in communication, lack of learning resources and lack of pre-requisites. Reasons for non availability of resource materials for teachers are difficulties in preparing teacher made texts based on tribal culture and non availability of local text. Reasons of avoiding creative activities are lack of pre-requisites of tribal students and Lack of responses of students. Reasons for avoiding issue based discussions are unawareness of teachers about tribal culture, social system and issues and problems related to tribes. Reasons of inadequacy in IT facilities are due to inadequate basic classroom requirements and lack of provision of LCD projectors in the schools. Reasons for failure of continuous and comprehensive evaluation are Lack of access to additional resources, unsatisfactory library facilities and Ill equipped laboratory facilities. Reasons for special training for teachers in tribal schools are unfamiliarity of teachers with tribal dialect, unawareness about tribal culture, social system and issues and problems related to tribes.

The remedial measures for solving the problems faced by teachers in constructivist pedagogy at secondary level tribal schools are the following:
- Special training for non tribal teachers to work in tribal schools, including the knowledge of tribal dialect.
- Create supplementary tribal relevant learning materials.
- Include activities related to the socio cultural background of the tribes.
- Include more practical items in the syllabus.
- Give direct experience to the tribal students through excursions and field trips.
- Prepare modules related to the socio cultural background of tribes.
- Teacher preparation programmes should include the training to handle the tribes and other indigenous students, who differ significantly from general students in their socio cultural background.
- Suitably adapted curriculum and the availability of locally relevant teaching and learning materials for tribal students.
Trained persons in socio cultural background of tribes should be appointed for the supervision of tribal teachers.

References