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Research Article

ENHANCING STUDENTS' LEARNING POTENTIAL THROUGH SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Students possess infinite learning potential. If it is explored and channelized constructively, it can yield miraculous results. The real challenge lies in to explore the methodology which will discover, cultivate and harness the learning potential of students for the overall well-being of humanity. The secondary school years are considered as the crucial years of life. The focused educational experiences at secondary school level education change the future and viewpoint of the adolescents to a very large extent. Therefore, restructuring the secondary educational process is essential to develop the students' potential up to the level of proximal development with effective teaching learning process. This paper highlights the benefits of social constructivist approach in teaching learning process and of exploring the vast reservoir of invaluable hidden potential of students which otherwise lies woefully unexplored.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, values and competences which enable the individual to live purposefully and contribute realistically for the genuine social development. Education is the mean and human being is the end product. Therefore, learning has to be arranged in such a way that learners can strive to become masters of their own learning. The responsibility of school is to nurture students to learn, to seek out new information, analyze critically and take initiative to meet the challenges of a fast growing world (Krishnan, Phalachandra, 2010).

Secondary school years are considered as constituting the decisive period of life. Students build knowledge, skills and attitude through different types of learning experiences and opportunities provided to them in schools. These educational experiences of the schools shape the character, personality and outlook of the adolescents to a very great extent (Shastry, 2008).

In our country different subjects are taught at different stages of academic progression and each subject has different potential to enable the child for achieving goals in society. However, these subjects are oftentimes taught by conventional method of mug and jug. In this method, students' mind is considered as empty mug which is filled with the jug of teachers' knowledge.

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This type of teaching-learning process restricts flight of imagination and impairs the potential of students' mind for constructing and creating new knowledge. Sood (2008) in his article-Learning Science as a Constructivist / Conceptual change process highlighted three issues in contemporary science education mentioned in NCF-2005. First, science education is not achieving the goal of equity and inclusiveness, second, science education is developing competence, but does not encourage inventiveness and creativity, and third science education is dominated by traditional examination system. There is a need of an equitable science curriculum, in which both the content and the pedagogy are inclusive of all students enabling them to participate in ways that are appropriate for them.

The National Curriculum Framework-2005 developed by National Council of Educational Research and Training recommends a paradigm shift from rote learning to learning by understanding. Its aim is to make the students independent thinkers having capability to solve the problems of everyday life through proper appreciation and evaluation. The traditional teaching in our schools is teacher centered and authoritarian. Therefore, in order to achieve educational objectives in best the possible manner in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain, schools should adopt those teaching learning methodologies which inspire and empower learners to become more progressive and responsible. Therefore more emphasis should be given to those methods of teaching learning which incorporate the technological and other relevant aspects wisely; overcome the handicaps of traditional methods of learning which include lack of motivation, lower

satisfaction and to bring down the degree of failure of e-learning which include lack of interaction with teachers and peers, difficult in facing to use appropriate tools, and high costs for developing courses.

Different philosophers and psychologists viewed construction of knowledge in the teaching learning process differently.

Jean Piaget viewed that knowledge acquisition is a process of continuous self construction. He asserts that children are active thinkers who are constantly trying to construct more accurate and advanced understanding of the world around them. Piaget in his theory of cognitive development describes three essential processes i.e. assimilation, accommodation and equilibration which form the basis on which learning takes place. Assimilation is the process by which schemas are recognized and developed. New information can be assimilated as long as it does not contradict the existing schema. Schemas are altered and restructured when new or contradictory information arises - this is accommodation. Equilibration is a state of balance for a schema when there are no conflicting elements. It is a state which is innately sought by individuals.

Vygotsky expressed the view that knowledge acquisition can't be isolated from social and cultural context and asserted that individual internalises it through sharing, comparing and debating. Learners refine their own meaning and help others in finding meanings. Vygotsky stated that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people and then inside the child.In this way knowledge is mutually constructed. According to him, learning does not simply consist of the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners.

There are two development levels: the level of actual development and the level of potential development, As suggested by Vygotsky. The level of actual development is that the learner had already reached and is the level at which the learner is capable of solving problems independently. The level of potential development (the zone of proximal development) is the level of development that the learner is capable of reaching under the guidance of teachers or in collaboration with peers. The level of potential development is the level at which learning takes place. It comprises cognitive structures that are still in the process of maturing, but can only mature under the guidance of or in collaboration with more knowledgeable others (MKO) who have a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner e.g. a teacher, coach, older adult, peers, computers or any other electronic source of information with respect to a particular task, process, or concept.

Vygotsky also floats the idea of multiple perspectives and says that all learners are distinct from each other in their ways of thinking. They look at the problem from multiple perspectives, so provide them opportunities to discuss their alternative ways of thinking and encouraged them to work in groups in which they can share their opinions on the content related with subject matter with each other and reach at certain conclusion. Scaffolding and inter-subjectivity also play an important role in the process of knowledge construction.

Social Constructivist Approach

Social constructivist approach is an approach in which knowledge is constructed amongst the students and between the students and the teachers collaboratively. Social constructivism focuses on the need for collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is a method of peer interaction that is facilitated and designed by the teacher. It requires the students to collaborate and critically analyze the task designed by the teacher. In collaborative learning students are working towards a common goal and are responsible for another's learning as well as their own. It is therefore a jointly carried out activity rather than an individual experience. This collaboration in tasks and discussions allows learners with different skills and backgrounds to arrive at a shared understanding of the truth (Duffy and Jonassen).

Strategies used in Social Constructivist Approach

Khan (2014) in his research on Constructivism: An Innovative Teaching Method in science teaching emphasized that constructivist pedagogy does not consist of a single teaching strategy. Instead, it has several features that should be attended simultaneously in a classroom. Social constructivism is not a unique specified doctrine, rather a bunch of related studies representing different versions of the general approach (Detel, 2001)

To put in other words, Social Constructivist Approach can be considered as an umbrella under which different teaching strategies which follows the principles of social constructivism e.g. concept mapping, reciprocal questioning, games and simulation, jigsaw classroom activities, situated learning, structured controversies, activity based learning, project based learning, inquiry based learning, problem solving learning etc. can be experimented with to obtain optimal learning gain on enduring basis through which we can enhance the learning potential of students. Different objectives like knowledge, understating, application and total achievement in biology were significantly attained by both boys and girls through multimedia teaching (Satyaprakasha and Sudhanshu, 2014)

Role of Teacher in Social Constructivism Approach

The role of the teacher is multifarious in social constructivist learning environment. The teacher instead of the sole dispenser performs as a guide, facilitator, motivator, stimulator and also acts as a resource person.

Classroom in Social Constructivist Approach

Classroom in Social Constructivist Approach can be created by adopting 7E Learning Cycle. Eisenkraft (2003) profounded seven salient elements: elicit, engage, explore, explain, elaborate, evaluate, and extend as the key components of the said model. It is an instructional design model recommended by the NSTA (National Science Teacher Association). 7E instructional model was more effective than the traditional instructional model in terms of students' achievements (Shaheen and Kayani, 2015). 7E learning cycle is a useful model and is recommended for instructional approach in science curriculum and in today's science curriculum scenario the instructors or the teachers should be encouraged to incorporate this model into their teaching (Balta & Sarac, 2016).

In social constructivist learning environment, the learner find himself in a totally different environment. The focus shifts

from the teacher to the students. The teacher instead of the sole dispenser follows 7E learning cycle for giving a practical shape to this approach. Teacher divide the students into different groups each consisting of 4-5 students and personally interacts with each students in every group to facilitative and solidify the learning process. The learners are impressing upon to be actively participated in their own learning process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researches established that social constructivist approach has been much successful than the traditional methods of teaching-learning.

Akyol and Fer (2010) studied the effects of social constructivist learning environment (SCLE) on the 5th grade primary school learner. Analyses showed that learners gets new information through group work and multimedia and concluded that SCLE design has a positive effect on learning outcomes.

Bay, Bagceci and Cetin (2012) investigated whether there is a significant difference in the learners' problem solving skills and meta-cognitive levels when the authentic task-based social constructivist approach and found that that the task-based social constructivist approach has positive effect on teacher candidates' problem solving skills and meta-cognitive levels.
Panda (2012) in his article entitled "Collaboration Learning-An Approach in Constructivism" regarded collaborative learning as one of the pedagogical model under constructivist approach.

Khan (2015) in his study on constructivism towards a paradigm shift in classroom teaching and learning established that constructive method of teaching science have been much more successful than the traditional methods. He also found that use of online animations, virtual labs; computer software and sensors have increased test scores significantly.

Sharma and Sankhian (2018) throw light upon the 7E learning cycle model and review the different research studies related to it. Research studies support that with this model students' problem solving ability, achievement level and scientific process skills can be enhanced.

Benefits of Social Constructivist Approach

Social Constructivist approach is a multidimensional approach which aims at up scaling the learning potential of individual through integration of collaborative activities in the classroom. As a result of this process the learning gains acquired by the students in terms educational objectives: cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains become more enduring and are assimilated by the students in an easier and less stressful manner This approach is more beneficial for the teacher as well as students because through mutual discussion and exchange of views, both sides tend to acquire new perspective related to the subject matter and get mature understanding. In this collaborative venture, the learning potential of students is enhanced and they assimilate more knowledge in an easy and facile manner. They become intrinsically motivated because they acquire mastery experiences through social constructivist approach.

CONCLUSION

To sum up it can be affirmed that social constructivist approach is the most facilitative and rewarding approach of broadening the horizon of learning potential of the students. This approach is all the more beneficial for learners having different level of potential and self efficacy. They tend to drive the maximum advantage in terms of learning gains through this approach by getting exposed to mastery experiences and vicarious experience in groups. This method is particularly useful in converting knowledge into wisdom as the learner through this approach enhance their learning potential related to the subject matter being taught through social constructivist approach in the class.

In view of the overwhelming benefits offered by social constructivist approach in enhancing the learning potential of students, the policy makers should aim at making this approach the cornerstone of education policy and strive to design the curriculum in such a manner which provide adequate opportunities to the students to reach acquire learning gains through exploring and constructing ideas in social context put across to them through social constructivist approach.

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