USING LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACHES TO ENHANCE THE STATUS OF TRIBAL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This paper tries to analyse the condition of the tribal education in India with respect to language teaching with special reference to NCF (2005). The analysis is based on the recommendations given by the NCF (2005) in relation to guidelines for language education, curriculum syllabus, and teaching practices. Some statistical data is also provided to throw some light on the situation of tribal education. The paper also suggests some of the steps to be taken to improve the status of tribal education with special focus on making learning more relatable and inclusive in nature.

Keywords: Tribals, Education, language, Teaching

Introduction

English is a linguistic capital. "It is the world's way of communicating internationally and interculturally just as the Christian calendar is the world's way of tracing time, just as the Arabic numbers are the world's way of counting, and first as the metric system is, for the most part, the world's way of measuring" (Huntingdon, 1996: 6). The changing role of English, the liberalization of the economy, the opening up of the market and the increasing employment opportunities for English knowing educated Indians have made the language acceptable to a majority in contemporary India. English is a key factor for social mobility of a community.

India has the largest tribal population in the world. They make up to 8.6% (10.45crs) of the total population in India. Tribal people in India are marginalized, underprivileged, and deprived in numerous forms. They are still not able to savour the fruits of modernisation and technological development. Only education could enable them get rid of oppression of centuries and get into socio economic and political development.

Learner-centred approach

The change in understanding of how languages are learnt have led to an essential shift in language pedagogy through the 1950s to 1980s. As opposed to the traditional approaches of the 1950s which see language as "a system of rule-governed structures hierarchically arranged" and language learning as "habit formation" (Nunan and Lamb, 1996:14), CLT defined language as "a system for the expression of meaning" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:71), the dominant function being communication and interaction.

The introduction of new methodologies in relation to language teaching have made a shift from teacher being the sole knowledge provider to teacher being a facilitator to the student; from language as a set of rules to be taught to language as a social process which happens through social interactions and communication. In the1980s with the advent of communicative language teaching, the focus was more on communication and it led for the development of learner centred approaches in language teaching:

...Another trend in recent years which has stemmed from CLT has been the development of learner-centred approaches to language teaching, in which information by and from learners is used in planning, implementing and evaluating language programmes. While the learner-centred curriculum will contain similar elements and processes to traditional curricula, a key difference will be that information by and from learners will be built into every phase of the curriculum process. Curriculum development becomes a collaborative effort

between teachers and learners, since learners will be involved in decisions on content selection, methodology and evaluation (Nunan, 1989:19).

NCF 2005

The National Curriculum Framework provides the guidelines for making syllabi, textbooks and teaching practices within the school education programmes in India. The NCF (2005) document draws its policy basis from earlier government reports on education like *Learning Without Burden* and National Policy of Education 1986-1992 and Focus Group Discussion. Most of its recommendations focus on rural schools and shift from teacher-centred pedagogy to learner-centred pedagogy. The syllabus and textbooks based on it are being used by all CBSE schools, as well as by many State Schools.

The NCF (2005) suggests a paradigm shift from the traditional approaches of teaching to learner-centred approaches. It also advocates for an across-the-curriculum approach for English to break the barriers between English and other subjects and English and other languages. It emphasises the use of mother tongue as a resource in education to enhance learning among students. The language part provides a renewed approach to implement three language formula, along with focus on children's mother tongue, including tribal languages as the best medium of instruction.

At the policy level the NCF 2005 emphasises on mother tongue based education and shift from teacher-centric models to learner-centric models, however in reality the system of teaching and learning is far away from what the policy advocates for.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA

A nation's progress is related to accessibility, availability, and opportunities to avail education by its people. Since Independence, special assistance has been provided for the education of tribals. Article 46 of the constitution states that, the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of Scheduled Tribes; Article 154 (4) empowers the state to make any special provision for the advancement of socially and educationally backward scheduled tribes; Article 350 A states that "it shall be the endeavour of every state and local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother tongue at the primary stage of education to the children belonging to the minority and tribal groups".

But unfortunately despite these constitutional provisions and safeguards with various welfare schemes not much has been achieved in terms of tribal education.

Table-1

Comparative literacy rate of scheduled tribes and total population(in percent)						
Census	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
All social groups	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	72.99
ST s	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96
Gap	19.77	18.15	19.88	21.61	18.28	14.03

Source statistic of school education- 2001-2011

The Table indicates that the literacy rate of tribals increased along with all Indian literacy rate, but a cause for concern is that the percentage difference of literacy rate between the two groups is 14.03% in the year 2011.

Table-2: Dropout rates (in percentage)

Class	ST (Boys)	All (Boys)	ST (Girls)	All (Girls)	ST (Total)	All (Total)	Gap
Class – I-V Primary stage	37.2	28.7	33.9	25.1	35.6	27	8.6
Class- V-VIII	54.7	40.3	55.4	41	55	40.6	14.4

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Middle stage							
Class – IX-X Secondary stage	70.6	50.4	71.3	47.9	70.9	49.3	21.6

Source statistic of school education- 2010-2011

Dropout is an important indicator through which the number of students pursuing their education in different stages is measured. Rate of dropout among tribals when compared to the all India rate is very high.

Suggestions and conclusion

In almost all the states, official/regional languages and English are used as the medium of instruction. Education becomes a burden for tribals as these languages are different from their mother tongue. The language of the school is alien and culturally non-relatable to the tribal learners. This becomes the root problem for the learning of the tribals.

To improve the status of education of tribals, culturally relatable textbooks have to be developed, as a child learns fast when his classroom learning is reinforced or made available in his immediate environment. Instead of using examples that are alien to the students, they should be able to relate it with their environment. For instance, a beginner's text would associate alphabets to words that are unfamiliar to the tribal population (A for apple, B for Balloon etc.), instead they should introduce the alphabets to words in terms of their everyday experiences (A for ant, B for banana etc.). NCERT and state board textbooks are non-inclusive and do not share the experience of the tribals.

Tribal languages and tribal history has to be included in education to develop cross-cultural sensibility as language and culture are interrelated, it will also make tribal learners feel connected to learning. Three language formula should include tribal languages and special provisions and financial aid should be provided for the development of tribal languages.

Learner-centred pedagogy and collaborative approaches to language teaching should be encouraged, as collaboration is a dynamic process which involves learners to cooperate, negotiate and interact with other learners. Teachers who understand the tribal language of the learners should be recruited in tribal majority areas. Proper training has to be given to teachers to deal with the special needs of the tribal learners.

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