Student-Centered Pedagogy – Lessons from DPEP

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ABSTRACT

India has always been a center of education from the glorious era of Nalanda and Thakshasila. The last three decades have witnessed some remarkable transformations in the traditional environment of teaching learning. The subject-oriented and teacher-oriented methods have given way to the student-oriented approach. One of the major breakthroughs in the reforms was the introduction of the District Primary Education Program. This concept revolutionized the entire primary education field. This article illustrates the design concepts and implementation strategies of the program, along with the impact on the teaching learning environment. This also elucidates some of the serious concerns about this activity-oriented approach.

KEYWORDS

Activity Based Learning, District Primary Education Program (DPEP), Joyful Learning, Student-Centered Learning

INTRODUCTION

India has acquired remarkable improvements in primary level classes by increasing enrolments and with intensifying schooling facilities. But, the low achievement level of students along with the stump retaining rates remained stationary. Therefore, apart from the enrolment drives, the consideration is gradually moved to tactics to advance the retention and the learner achievement. The last three decades have witnessed several historical efforts headed for school reforms in India, in particular through large-scale government-led programs of primary schooling like District Primary Education Program (DPEP).

The DPEP was started in November 1994, in 42 districts of 7 States - Haryana, Assam, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (DPEP, 2000). This was an aspiring attempt for addressing the existing challenges and to provide a significant thrust to transform and universalize the quality of primary school education. DPEP project duration was seven years. With the positive responses from the 42 districts, the program was expanded to 110 districts. These reforms include providing physical access to schooling, involvement of the surrounding community, specific pedagogic interventions, training of teachers, establishing systemic academic support structures, textbooks and training modules development, etc. The central concept that led the pedagogical renewal process was ‘child-centered education’. This paper centers on the student-centered perspective of DPEP.

The National Policy of Education of India (NEP, 1986, p .15) refers to ‘child-centered approach’ as “a warm, welcoming and encouraging approach, in which all the concerned share a solicitude for the needs of the child. A child-centered and activity-based process of learning should be adopted at
the primary stage.” The various school reformation programs like DPEP implements this concept with different components of school intervention, like developing ‘child-centered’ textbooks, building ‘child-friendly’ classrooms and designing ‘child-centered’ methods of teaching. DPEP program was conceptualized based on the experiences possessed by the country and by various international agencies involved in the arena of primary education (MHRD, 2003). DPEP does not develop uniform plans for implementation. The district level implementation plans were formulated at the district level itself, with flexible parameters. But the flexible plans should confirm to national interest, priorities and concerns.

The objectives of the DPEP are the following.

1. To provide access to all children to primary education through formal primary schools or its equivalent alternatives
2. To boost up the achievement levels by 25% points over and above the measured baseline levels
3. To reduce overall dropouts at the primary level to less than 10%
4. To reduce disparities of all types to less than 5%

DATA SOURCES FOR THE STUDY AND ANALYSIS

The analysis and review were done based on the primary and secondary data obtained from various sources.

Primary Data Sources

The primary data sources for the study are given below.

- Authors’ own experiences as DPEP resource persons.
- Interviews and discussions with teachers to find the implementation difficulties, suitability of teaching material and aids, adequacy of training programs, classroom experiences, evaluation issues, students’ attitude and improvements, overall virtues and drawbacks of the program etc. 60 teachers were interviewed with the prepared questionnaires which spanned over the mentioned aspects. They belong to different schools in Ernakulam and Alappuzha districts of Kerala State. These teachers were handling different subjects in the DPEP curriculum.
- Collected information from the students about the program, syllabus, teaching methods, implementation, effectiveness and improvements, through structured questionnaires. 200 students were chosen randomly as the sample space.

Secondary Data Sources

The secondary data sources mentioned below were used to get empirical inferences about the impact of the program and directed to obtain major conclusions in the analysis.

- Census of India 2001
- Seeking Quality Education for All, Experiences from the District Primary Education Programme, Occasional Paper by The European Commission, June 2002
- Report on the Impact of DPEP Interventions on Demand for Education by National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, Govt. of India, June 2003
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