

The languages of education in multilingual India: exploring effects on reading and mathematics

1st dissemination event: 12–13 July 2018, New Delhi, India

Session summary:

How appropriate is student-centred learning in the Indian context and which features of this approach can be most effectively used?

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In this session, the group shared their experiences of being at primary schools as students and compared this with the scenario in schools at present. It was felt that not much has changed in classrooms for the past several years in terms of pedagogy, materials and learning processes and outcomes. Teacher-centred pedagogy continues to be the dominant practice in many schools across the country.

The group then discussed the need for change and the possible ways of bringing change in classrooms. It was felt that student participation and active involvement must be at the centre of any classroom pedagogy.

The important characteristics of student-centred pedagogy were then elicited and discussed in small groups. The group presented the following as the characteristics of student-centred learning:

- Interactive classroom
- Participatory-oriented approach
- Addressing of unique strengths and weaknesses of each child
- Giving 'control' and 'voice' to students
- Student's age and level considered while developing learning materials
- Classroom processes centred around student's needs and immediate context
- Teacher to facilitate learning process by using differentiated techniques
- Promotion of student autonomy
- Adoption of inclusive pedagogy
- Viewing the classroom as for the students, not for the curriculum
- Activities to be based on student's knowledge and experience
- Linguistic landscape of the classroom to be explored before teaching
- Students' home languages to be accommodated in the classroom
- Higher-level skills such as critical thinking, creativity, etc. to be developed by reducing the time spent on memorisation and rote learning.

A definition of student-centered learning was then discussed at length:

'In student-centred learning, students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. This learning model places the student (learner) in the center of the learning process. The instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skills they need to do so effectively. The approach includes such techniques as substituting active learning experiences for lectures, assigning open-ended problems and problems requiring critical or creative thinking that cannot be

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solved by following text examples, involving students in simulations and role plays, and using self-paced and/or cooperative (team-based) learning. Properly implemented student-centred learning can lead to increased motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes towards the subject being taught. (Collins and O'Brien, 2003)



There was a vibrant discussion on which of the above characteristics of student-centred learning are appropriate in the Indian context. Some participants felt that in a large classroom of 70 to 80 students, student-centred learning may seem an ideal thing to achieve. It may be difficult to connect to them on a 'one on one' basis though technology may help in building better connectivity, rapport with and increased participation of individual students.

It was also pointed out that basic infrastructure is lacking in many public schools in India and hence creating a student-centred learning atmosphere may be difficult. Even in schools where there are adequate facilities, some of the participants mentioned that students have no free access to use computer labs or libraries which can reduce learner autonomy. It was felt that building good infrastructure and providing access to a range of resources are important in adopting student-centred learning.