

Significance of Learner Centered Approach Among Polytechnic Students in Andhra Pradesh to Develop Communication Skills

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Abstract

The Indian education system is undergoing a significant pedagogical transition from a traditional teacher-centred to student-centred approach to teaching and learning. The Indian government expects these educational changes to occur in teaching and learning development in Andhra Pradesh polytechnic colleges and in its technical education system. However, research indicates that there is an ongoing ambiguity in regard to the teaching and learning approaches adopted in Andhra Pradesh polytechnic colleges and in tertiary institutions. This seems to suggest that the introduction of Western concepts such as student-centred learning

models brought about tension and conflict among Indian teachers and students. Moreover, previous Andhrapradesh studies revealed that different cultures have different norms and values, and these cultural differences have a strong influence on educational practices. Therefore, there is a need to examine and develop appropriate pedagogies for the specific educational traditions, rather than assuming that Western ideas are effective and desirable in every context. Thus, the purposes of this study are to explore: (1) Andhra Pradesh polytechnic teachers understanding about teaching, (2) Andhra Pradesh polytechnic students' understanding about learning, and (3) the relationships between teacher and students' perceptions of teaching/learning and their actual teaching/learning practices. This research was conducted in Andhra Pradesh teacher education programme. It employed a case study using a qualitative approach with the adoption of several research methods: Individual interviews; focus group interviews; classroom observations; stimulated recall interviews; and document analysis. Involved in this study, were a total of twenty nine teachers from differing backgrounds of teaching experience, and 59 final year students. The major findings of the study are that: (1) In Andhra Pradesh teacher participants and the student participants had adopted a combination of traditional teacher-centred and student-centred learning approaches because of the benefits that both approaches could offer to them, (2) The Andhra Pradesh teacher participants' understanding of teaching and the student participants' understanding of learning were a reflection of their educational beliefs, (3) The actual teaching/learning practices of the Andhrapradesh teachers and the student participants have been considerably influenced by their beliefs, (4) Several education philosophies are compatible with student-centred learning (Western learning models). (5) The learning perspectives of Indian students are influenced by their religion beliefs, thus differentiating them from other Asian learners (who have been found to exhibit Confucian values in the educational research literature). The findings of my research into Indian teachers and students result in understanding

teaching/learning from a rural college's viewpoint, distinguishing rural teaching and learning from an urban college's environment. The research generates possible significant insight for other countries in the development of language learning strategies. The findings of this study suggest that the Andhra government and its policy makers should be more aware of the appropriateness or otherwise of the Western models for Andhra Pradesh education systems.

Keywords: Learner Centered Approach, Polytechnic Students, Trained Teachers, Urban Colleges

Introduction

Over the past few decades, many universities, faculties, colleges and departments of higher education in many parts of the world have been undergoing a significant pedagogical shift from a traditional teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach to teaching and learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Jansen & Christie, 1999; Lea, Stephenson, & Troy, 2003; Lee, 2002). The traditional teacher-centred approach focuses on the teacher as the expert in transmitting knowledge to the student as the novice (Garfield, 1995; Harden & Crosby, 2000; Moore, 1997; Pratt, 1998; Zohar, 2004). In contrast, the student-centred approach places the student at the centre of the learning process (Cannon & Newble, 2000; Coombs & Wong, 2000; Estes, 2004; Hesson & Shad, 2007) and is generally intended to provide students with the autonomy to actively seek out and construct meaning from information and previous experience (Gibbs, 1992; Harden & Crosby, 2000; Huba & Freed, 2000; Weimer, 2002). This shift in teaching and learning from a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach is crucial; instead of concentrating on instruction (teacher-centred approach), the student-centred approach addresses the construction of learning by the student's own discovery and focuses on student learning outcomes. This global trend can also be seen in the educational

changes occurring in teaching and learning in polytechnic colleges of Andhra Pradesh and in its higher education system. India intends to transform its educational system in line with its Vision 2020. Vision 2020 is a national development agenda with specific goals and objectives for long term development (APJ Kalam, 1993). In 2001, the Indian government unveiled Vision 2020, the targeted year by which Andhra Pradesh would achieve the status of an industrialised and developed country in terms of its economy, national unity, social cohesion, social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence (Mohamad, 1991). Towards achieving Vision 2020, the government has identified strategies to enable the following nine challenges to be met: 1. To establish a united Indian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. 2. To create a psychologically liberated, secure, and developed Andhra Pradesh society. 3. To foster a democratic society. 4. To establish a full moral and ethical society. 5. To establish a mature, liberal and tolerant society. 6. To establish a scientific and progressive society. 7. To establish a fully caring society and a caring culture. 8. To ensure an economically just society. 9. To establish a prosperous society. (Mohamad, 1991, pp. 2-4) The foundation for this educational reform and the fulfilling of Vision 2020 was the establishment of Technology Supported Smart diploma colleges with student-centred learning (Ministry of Education, 1997b). The Andhra Pradesh technical education is defined as "...a learning institution that has been systematically reinvented in terms of teaching-learning practices and college management in order to prepare students for the Information Age". The key aim of this research is to help the country to achieve the aims of the National Philosophy of Education as well as to foster the development of a workforce that is prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Aside from the goal of the research to equip students with IT competence, science and technology (Ministry of Education, 1997a), the research was also designed to bring about a systemic change in education; a change from an exam oriented

culture to a thinking, creative knowledge culture coinciding with a shift to student-centred learning approaches. This new culture which is to be embedded in the education system can be characterised as being one of active learning in the student's approach to learning rather than a passive one. The role of the student will shift from that of a passive receiver of information to becoming a student who "will learn to exercise courage in making decisions and assuming responsibility. will learn to process and manipulate information." Teachers are to be trained in instructional approaches that emphasize thinking. They will learn how to plan teaching strategies that involve problem solving, creative thinking, exploration and decision making (Ahmad, 1997). The teachers are also expected to accept that in the new environment, they will have to play the role of "a guide on the side" rather than their traditional role of "a sage on the stage" In other words, a teacher is no longer the sole knowledge provider in the classroom, but he or she has to also play the role of a facilitator and coach. Moreover, it is documented in the policy that one of the pedagogical implications of polytechnic teaching and learning is that teachers must encourage students to be active learners by adopting elements of the student-centred learning approach in their teaching practices. Andhra Pradesh Government's initiatives to reform the educational system from traditional teacher-centred to student-centred learning (i.e., passive to active learning) have been extended to Higher Learning Institutions through the implementation of soft skill elements in the curriculum (Ministry of Higher Education India, 2006). Soft skills are the abilities of people to interact with others, such as in communication skills, negotiation, change adeptness, flexibility, teamwork, relationship building and listening skills (Chaudhry, Khoo, Wu, & Chang, 2008). These competencies can be better developed through the adoption of a student-centred learning approach (e.g., Hasbullah & Sulaiman, 2002). This approach will ensure that students develop their interests and will also stimulate their quest for knowledge and skill (Lee, 1999). In addition, the growing concerns concerning the

employability of university graduates formed the basis for the implementation of the soft skills that current graduates, to date, have not had the opportunity to learn (Ahmad, 1998; Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005; Idrus, Mohd Dahan, & Abdullah, 2009; Shakir, 2009; Song & Yuen, 2008). Greater elaborations of the soft skills implementation are presented in Chapter 4. Despite constant educational reform such as the introduction of Smart polytechnic colleges and soft skills, and the 22 years of implementation of the Integrated College syllabus Curriculum there are issues in Andhra Pradesh higher education which have not been directly addressed. (1) What do polytechnic teachers and students know of Western learning models? And (2) Do Andhra Pradesh polytechnic teachers and students accept Western learning models? The on-going debate in Andhra Pradesh technical educational literature regarding teaching and learning approaches adopted in Andhra polytechnic colleges and tertiary education seems to suggest that the introduction of Western concepts such as student-centred learning models have brought about tension and conflict among polytechnic teachers and students. Findings from studies (e.g., Ahmad, Mohd Shah, & Abdul Aziz, 2005; Abdullah, & Mohamed, 1999; Mahamood, Lasan, Nik Yusoff, & Embi, 2009; Sidin, 1999) seem to indicate that Western pedagogical models may not be suitable for use in the polytechnic context. The studies suggest that expectations from Western theories might be inconsistent with Andhra Pradesh culture. In addition, findings from several investigations have concluded that many of the learning models developed based on a Western perspective may not be appropriate to an Eastern culture (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Pillay, Purdie, & Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Purdie & Hattie, 2002; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Volet, 1999; Zhang & Watkins, 2001). Before the period of British colonialism (1874-1957),

This can be evidenced from the formulation of the Indian National Education Philosophy in 1988 (Ministry of Education, 1988). The Indian National Education Philosophy holds educational principles and goals that are consistent with the philosophy for

education (Hashim, 1994). Langgulung, 1993). The National Education Philosophy that emphasizes the importance of a balanced and integrated growth for individuals supports the main purpose of education. Education in the context of polytechnic is regarded as a process that involves the complete person, including the rational, spiritual, and social dimension. As noted by Al-Attas (1979), the comprehensive and integrated approach to education in Andhra Pradesh polytechnic syllabus is directed toward the “balanced growth of the total personality through the training of Man’s spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality” . My observation that there has been inadequate study on Indian teaching and learning culture sparked the motivation to focus the study on Andhra Pradesh polytechnic teachers teaching. It is necessary to explore and investigate teaching and learning beliefs and approaches among Andhra Pradesh polytechnic teachers and students in order to analyses teaching and learning from a polytechnic teacher perspective. Such an exploration may uncover some new insights on their beliefs and philosophy of teaching and learning, rather than incorporating Andhra Pradesh polytechnic student’s syllabus with western syllabus in general. The Andhra Pradesh Government’s expectation that teachers and lecturers should employ student-centred models has prompted me to examine the teachers and students’ acceptance and understanding of the models.

Significance of the study

There are several criteria that have been identified as being of significance for this study.

Firstly, I expect this research to contribute to the development of educational theories relating to teaching and learning in Andhra Pradesh tertiary teaching research. There is a need to

critically review those perspectives in the Indian context in order to address the differences between Western perspectives in regard to teaching and learning.

Secondly, my study will contribute to understanding the issues in instances where Western educational models are being introduced into polytechnic educational environments. My study has the potential to promote insights for integrating Andhra Pradesh and Western education theories in the context.

Thirdly, the research has the potential to describe teaching and learning approaches in Andhrapradesh and to identify practical approaches that will enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning. With the Andhra Pradesh Government's expectation for teacher education programmes to implement student-centred learning approaches, this research can provide insight into the dynamics and issues of this process. In addition, I believe that, for the Andhra Pradesh teachers involved, this study will provide an increased understanding of learning experiences.

Finally, the focus of this study has the potential to provide an in-depth understanding of learning experiences among polytechnic prospective teachers from their own perspectives as learners. This has significant implications for finding ways to improve the quality of their learning. The findings of this research may help reveal issues in the education training programme pertaining to approaches to learning that are encountered by students and which prevent them from successfully adopting an interactive approach. This study may also identify possible strategies and support structures that could be adopted more generally in order to promote more effective learning environments

Research Questions

Despite the government policy that expects Andhra Pradesh teachers in polytechnic technical educational institutions to adopt student-centred learning approaches, studies have

revealed various degrees of acceptance to the approaches. While there have been some studies that reveal teacher acceptance of the student-centred learning approach, others showed teacher preference for the traditional teacher-centred approach. This suggests there is still ongoing debate in literature regarding the issue. This condition has stimulated this investigation of the teaching experiences of teacher and the learning experiences of education students in a polytechnic teacher education research. Three research questions have been constructed.

1. How do Andhra Pradesh polytechnic English teachers understand learner centered approach in teaching in a polytechnic college syllabus?
2. How do polytechnic students understand learning in college's teacher centered approach through reading comprehension?
3. What are the relationships between teachers and students' perceptions of teaching/learning and their actual teaching/learning practices?

Literary reviews:

Barraket, J. (2005). Teaching research method using a student-centred approach? Critical reflections on practice. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 2(2),
Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Research methodology:

In my research context, I employed multiple research methods. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main source of evidence. They were then supported and triangulated by other sources, i.e., document reviews (such as Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Higher Education's (MOHE) policies; faculty and departmental course

materials and lecturers’ lesson plans), classroom observation and stimulated recall interviews. Silverman (2001) claimed that interviews, questionnaire, observation and analysing documents are always combined in qualitative research as these methods are powerful in their provision of in-depth and detailed description, understanding and knowledge of particular phenomena from the participants’ perspective (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). The application and combination of several research methodologies contributes to triangulation in research. Triangulation is a powerful strategy in qualitative research that enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). In my study, classroom observations that were backed up by stimulated recall interviews and other sources of data provided me access to the teacher ’ interpretations of their actions, cognition activities and perceptions. As mentioned earlier, my study employed multiple data collection methods. The data collection methods for this study consisted of five stages. The overall data collection framework that emerged from the case study research is presented in the following Table.

Stage	Purpose	Research methods
1	Obtain information about teacher teaching experiences and form the basis on next stages investigation.	Semi-structured individual interview (teacher educators)
2	Obtain information about students learning experiences based on individual.	Semi-structured individual interview (polytechnic students)
3	Obtain further information about education students learning experiences in groups	Focus group interviews (polytechnic students)

	to construct meaning collectively.		
4	Obtain additional information about what is actually happening from observation, rather than relying on merely perceptions of what is happening.	Classroom observation (focused on polytechnic teaching practices)	Document analysis (Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, faculty, teacher educators, students and own written field notes)
5	Obtain further elaboration from teacher educators about specific elements of teaching approaches observed in the classroom to obtain their tacit thinking and the explicit and elicit cognitions underlying their observable actions.	Stimulated recall interview (teacher educators)	

Data Analysis

My study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the experiences of teaching and learning in a polytechnic colleges. There were a total of 19 participants involved in my study, i.e., seven teacher educators and twelve education students. Data for the study were collected with the use of several methods: 1) Individual interviews; 2) Focus group interviews; 3) Classroom observations; 4) Stimulated recall interviews; and 5) Documents. Classroom observations were conducted after the individual and focus group interviews. There were five classrooms involved for the observations carried out in the study. The

stimulated recall interviews were held with the ten teachers after the completion of the classroom observations. Documents from the faculty and research participants (e.g., programme reports, course pro forma, lesson plans, course outlines and guidelines relating to teaching and learning approaches), and those from the ministry (e.g., policies and reports, acts, and ordinances) were reviewed and analysed. In this study, the M & H's Interaction Model for Qualitative Data Analysis was employed to analyse the data within and across each data source (individual interviews, focus group interviews, observation and stimulated recall, and document analysis). The data analyses were also carried out with the assistance of the computer listening program, computer software for qualitative data analysis. There were 3 stages in data analysing process: 1) Stage 1: manual review and reflection; 2) Stage 2: coding and computer listening; and 3) Stage 3: interpretations of the data. From the data analysis process, several major themes emerged.

Conclusion

This study concludes demonstrated that learner centered approach models maybe successfully adopted in the India at Andhra Pradesh context when the appropriate environment is developed and are commensurate with polytechnic education. The findings may change the negative perceptions of Indian students, who are stereotyped as passive learners. Polytechnic teachers and students hope for a transformation in the education system that can utilize learning theories that suit with their cultural and belief in the context. Although there may be criticism of using a Western educational concept such as constructivism in an India at andhrapradesh in the context, the influences of education can be the bridge to draw the two traditions (Indian national and Western) together and to actually promote similar educational approaches and goals.

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