Language and Learning Opportunities in Tribal School

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Abstract

Tribal schools under tribal sub-plan are running with different names in many states of India. Tribal residential schools known as 'Ashram school' are functioning in tribal populated areas of Maharashtra state. Language is a major cultural aspect of human evolution. Hence it is felt necessary to study the relationship among the language of students, teachers and content of Ashram school. "The schools are cultural transmitter agencies" (Kundu, 1994). Past studies show that learners are more benefitted in their culture friendly environment, and the language is the main aspect in linking learners from known to unknown culture. This paper is based on the study conducted on the tribal ashram school. The study focused on studying teachers' perspectives towards students' language identity. Paper also discusses the major themes that emerged through the analysis of teachers' semi-structured interviews and participatory observation of classroom practices. The analysis of data and conclusion from this study is not the end product, but it's a procedural milestone for further research. The data collected for this paper is part of the pilot study before the main study. The data analyzed here are independent, and the derived conclusion is unique.

Keywords: Teachers' perspectives, Language, Tribal Ashram school, student, teacher, content, school, semi-structured interview, participatory observation.

Introduction

Language is not only a medium of instruction; it's a base of life. The author has discussed the language exist in tribal school with major codes. Discussion is concentrated around the emergent theme 'learning opportunities' formed from the analysis of thick description and levels of coding. The data collected from teacher, students and classroom observation of school. Emergent codes are discussed in detail.

Methodology:- As the Corbin & Strauss (1990) rightly said "the nature of the research problem and purpose of doing research decide the kind of methodology will be used". In the present research qualitative approach is used.

Data Collection:- The nature of the research problem and purpose of doing research decide the kind of methodology will be used. Researcher had prepared a semi-structured interview schedule. Data collection was done with the teacher's individual semi-structured interview schedule which was conducted by the researcher himself. The questionnaire prepared for an interview was having flexible open-ended questions. For conducting more reflective interview, interviewer had used some prompts and hunches whenever required. Responses received from the interview were cross-checked from teachers daily activities. This helped to understand the nature of the interpersonal relationship between teacher and students.

Data Analysis:- Data collection and tool construction was together. The questions which were not supporting the purpose of research were dropped and the question emerged from this study were included in the main study. The qualitative analysis method was used to reveal a result from data. Data received from interviews were transcribed by researcher himself. Field notes based on observation were also sequenced, written with detail. Writing, reading, reviewing, rewriting, re-reading, reviewing techniques were used to find patterns.

field notes were continued with write up, thick description, layers of coding, category formation were used to derive major themes. Methodology and findings of this stage was reviewed before conducting the main study. Meaningful conceptual patterns from qualitative data lead to deep analysis. Classifying code, distilling, and searching for "topics" are associated with the processes to abstraction.

Determinant Code

Standard Language: - Language is the main major component of this study. Language for instruction was considered as a standard language. Language itself became one of the components for research. The individual interviews were conducted for teachers. Classes were observed and analyzed later. Afterward, the collected data analyzed with a qualitative approach. The codes were converted into categories, which form main themes.

Emergent Codes from Teachers interview schedule

This paper focuses on how the teacher's perception, beliefs about learners' language create learning opportunities. The matter of language is seen with the relation between the cultures of the teacher and taught.

Diversity of language: - Tribal schools are formed to fulfill tribal children's academic needs. Ashram schools are perceived for tribal children only. This school is situated in Arjuni Morgaon tahsil of Gondia district of Maharashtra state. In this tribal school students enrolled from nearby districts ex. Deori, Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Gondia, Bhandara. Though Ashram school are established specifically for tribal but as per local demand, some nearly ten percent of non-tribal students are admitted in different ashram school (as informed by teacher and principal of school while interviewing). A student admitted to ashram school mainly speaks Chattisgarhi, Gondi, Marathi, Hindi. There is an impact of geographical and cultural location on the dialect and language students speak. Almost all the teachers interviewed shared that language is the main difficulty in academic performance. High school teachers in complaining words said that those students don't know basic writing in all three languages (Marathi, Hindi, English). Students admitted from Deori, bordered with Chhattisgarh speaks Chhattisgarhi, whereas students admitted from Gadchiroli bordered with Telangana speaks Telugu mixed Marathi. A student admitted from an urban background or nearby school speaks more than one language. One of the teacher said that "Language is the main difficulty" another two TGTs also supported this view and said that because of compulsions for standard language students drop school or give up further education. in the absence of mother tongue, the learning becomes an external force. As a teachers told learning lose its ground in the absence of language support. Compulsory school instructions lead to a formal mechanical process instead of an alive experience This continues in school and higher education. Teachers highlighted that compulsion for the regional, national, and international languages demand for standard grammatically correct language leads to fear and isolation of learner from school education.

Language of the First Generation: - The pattern of language also has a variation with social background. "Access to effective education is highly influenced by inequality based on differences in the social background" (Girod & Education, 1990). Ethnic groups are at high risk to preserve and flourish their language. Differences in social, cultural background construct students position in school society. Differences in the knowledge of languages create differences in learning opportunities. The socio-economic background makes an impact on the educational opportunities in society.

One high school mathematics teacher told that "many students are the first-generation learner". Still, the family is not aware of the education system. Nobody is literate from the student's family. The concept of ashram school is to keep children in a residential school so that their education will not stop due to lack of food, health or any other basic life needs. Teachers are aware that majorities are first-generation but they

avoided their own role in the learning process. teachers in the majority blamed parents and tribal department for learning outcomes.

Mother Tongue verses Medium of instruction: - One mathematics teacher told that he "likes to teach in Ashram school". Another high school teacher for language and social science told that "we need to adjust with them (tribal student)". Further, he told that if we listen in a friendly manner they share their personal and academic issues. One common thing shared by all teachers is that girls share more than boys. Teachers told that students' mother tongue should be used while teaching content, but in classroom rarely they were seen using difficult words, proverbs, jargon meaning from the tribal mother tongue. Content-based on the upper class and caste lifestyle or traditions unable to link children from forest background. Out of five teachers who were observed regularly, except one nobody else belongs to the tribal community. All the teachers who are interviewed attempted to establish themselves close to tribal culture but while discussing learning style and ability, they push genetic factors for all learning backlog. Some teachers quoted that a culturally homogeneous group is also responsible for poor academic performance. Due to the similarity of experiences, lack of competition value, lack of awareness, students are not encouraged for further higher education or career. The teacher informed researcher that tribal culture practices cooperation, sharing, loyal with group/community, strong faith in traditions.

Nature of content and relevance with students experience: - The content in the textbook Represent mainstream majority experience. Its symbols, examples, images, stories, or icons far from students' personal experiences. In the absence of these students lose interest in text learning material. In language, the focus is on learning grammatically. "Good student", "Knowledgeable" "Sharp" "capable" like words used to describe students having a good command of language. The reason for learning language lies behind and the only content becomes a priority for parents, schools, teachers, and students.

Notebooks correction: - Correction of homework is one routine practice at the beginning of class. This practice is also important to know the progress of the student in the subject. When teachers in school enquire for homework few students good in speaking response and their notebooks. The majority of tribal students just wait for the completion of correction for the submitted notebook. Notebook mostly contains the questions and answers which were copied from the guide.

Evaluation: - The mainstream Marathi language is used for developing question papers. The students from a middle class, upper-middle-class receive indirect training of assessment. Tribal culture value system denies competition whereas the new evaluation system assesses children with competition values.

Distribution of resources, and assigning duties: - The distribution of resources and duties will be assigned by the teacher daily basis. This depends upon the language compatibility of a student. Girls and boys show different capabilities regarding language-based activities. Tribal hostellers were called

backward in language compatibility, whereas the non-tribal day scholar were called advance in communication and language-based activities.

Inside & Outside the class: - The teacher interacts with a student with formal language, but the same person speaks the local language outside the class. The students didn't ask any questions inside the class, but they asked many questions outside the class.

The teacher expressed their view that whatever philosophy or pedagogy used in the whole year, but at the end of the year, the pattern of examination will take away all labor. Whatever we practice the whole year but at the end, the examination requires knowledge of the standard language. The syllabus, evaluation is according to mainstream culture. Syllabus, evaluation is like Due to language incapability, they avoid expressing themselves. Tribal students won't speak much with the unknown. Mostly they speak with their

group members students only. The whole school system focuses on a score in the examination. Therefore teachers and students use rote memory for all subjects.

Classroom Observation

Hindi class (second language): Questions aroused from analysis of classroom observation are as follows,

Is it allowed to participate in the learning process?

Teacher has asked question, but only front seating a few students raised their hands. What about the remaining students. Only four to five girls students were ready to read. Why other students not ready to read? Why boys were not interested in loud reading. Why teacher satisfied with the responses received for loud reading and questioning for the front few girl students only? Why not for all? Is this reading chance is going to make any sense in students' realization of their position in the class. Is this loud reading process has any significance with students' background. Which factors were different between the front benches students and others?

Class processes were one way from teacher to student. Either they know or not, but always front seating students raise hands and show readiness for participating in class processes. Students themselves have segregation based on participation in classroom practices. Some students consider themselves superior/ elite than other students. The student who used to speak mainstream Marathi in class could interact and participate more in school. This students were considered superior/ elite than other students. School and teachers' selective preference has created internal hidden differences among students.

The researcher has tried to know reasons for differences in behavior between front seating and back seating students. Qualitative analysis of classroom observation revealed that class room seating arrangement and students behavior/participation was influenced by their socio-economic and cultural background.

Emergent codes from Classroom Observation

Teacher's preparation:

The teacher was not determined with the framework for Hindi as a second language class. The steps followed to develop the Hindi language class were missing. In Hindi class the teacher even didn't bring his textbook. He borrowed a book from a student to take a class.

Language Teaching:

Loud reading is one skill of language learning. When the teacher asked students to read a paragraph, the few students seating in front row initiated and started reading loudly. There was continuous interaction between students seating front row. The teacher asked students to read paragraphs. When students were reading a paragraph, he was writing some meaning of difficult words. He asked students to note down the meaning of difficult words in their notebook. Once the student finished reading one paragraph teacher explained the content. He asked two questions while talking about content, which created interest in students. The basic steps of language teaching-learning were ignored. Introduction of the author not done. The message from the author behind the lesson not discussed in with students. The teacher himself made judgmental statements about the discourse created by the author.

Transcription from running class given below,

Teacher: Who is the doctor for cows?

Students: Veterinary doctor ("Dhor" doctor).

Here in this question, the teacher asked students who is the doctor for a cow? Students replied in their local Marathi language. Students said that "Dhor doctor" is the doctor for the cow. Here "Dhor" means animal. "Dhor doctor" means veterinary doctor.

Teacher: Who is Laxmi?

Students: (together) Sir Laxmi means money, asset.

Students answered in common. Though the reading of paragraphs from chapter completed, still students were not familiar with characters in the given story. The teacher explained the correct meaning of the word "Laxmi". The teacher explained that "here Laxmi is not money or asset but its name of the cow. In this lesson Ramjan Ali and his wife Ramjani is rearing one cow named Laxmi".

In the textbook story, the main character Ramjan had a dilemma whether the old cow should be sold to the slaughter house or not. He was hesitating because the cow was given to him by his friend Mr. Ghyan Singh after his retirement. He was taking care of cow as a memory of his friend. Hindi teacher took discourse on the next level he told students that, "Today cow rearing is mostly done for slaughterhouse and less for farming. The cows are sent to the slaughterhouse. The complete discourse in chapter attributed to love for animals. The cow is used as a symbolic animal. Cow has distinct place in Hindu religion and community. The main character Ramjan Ali doesn't want to sell his cow to the slaughter house because If he sell the cow his friend might sad, his friend's faith might have disturbed. As a result Ramjan's deep respect and love for his friendship stop him from selling cow. The lesson was trying to knot bonding between two communities by sharing responsibilities of respect for each other beliefs.

The teacher remark on food habits were directional. The teacher made one sentence with a linking chapter story. The teacher might have assumed that he was trying to support the discourse developed in the chapter.

Language and Learning Opportunities

Language is an effective phenomenon that determines learning opportunities for the child in school. Asking questions: when students were observed in running classroom situations, only two or three front seating girls and boys were asking a question related to content. Students never countered any concept explained or statements made by the teacher. The majority of students were neutral about the content, they were only busy with writing questions and answers in a notebook. As knowledge commission and NCF 2005, 2020 said the school should generate questioning skills among students, but here schools are busy with the routine formalities. Teaching-learning remained less ethical but more artificial. In the Hindi period, mostly front seating girls were interrupting teachers in between classes. Most of front seating girls belong to a non-tribal group, and they are day scholars. Remaining eighty percent of students, boys and girls were belonged from tribal group didn't ask any question.

Though tribal school is built for considering the needs of the tribal community. Tribal ashram school comprises a mix population of different languages like Marathi, Hindi, Gondi, Chhattisgarhi, etc.. Within tribals there is variation in their culture and languages. Marathi, Gondi, Chhattisgarhi, Hindi, or mix, languages belong to the tribal and non-tribal students. When we analyze the teachers' interviews, we found that learning backwardness is linked with students' incapability in the standard school language. Sometimes it is felt that knowledge of language becomes the deciding factor for students' existence in the school system. It is observed that asking questions, providing learning resources, involving in activities, assigning tasks are mostly given to front seated non-tribal students. Teachers also ask details from this first row students and taking next decision for whole class (Bankar C., 2019 unpublished). To stop dropout and popularize tribal school programme nearly all national commission for scheduled tribe recommended recruit teachers from local tribal communities. School become important for learning opportunity when the children are coming from

disadvantaged marginalized group. Particularly when child is nurtured in residential school from very first standard to tenth, the more responsibility lies on the teachers and school system.

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