The Existing Practice of Activity-Based Classroom Instruction in Sainamaina Municipality

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Published: May 2024

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.3126/ed.v33i1.66598

Journal
Education and Development
ISSN: 1816-7691 (Print)
3021-9558 (Online)

Website:
https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/ed

Published By
Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID)
http://cerid.tu.edu.np

Abstract

This study aims at identifying the status of activity-based classroom instruction in the context of government schools in Sainamaina Municipality and analyzes the reasons behind the existing status of the activity-based classroom instruction. It also suggests some strategies for the implementation of the activity-based classroom instruction. Based on qualitative method, the data were generated through classroom observation and semi- structured interview. The collected data were analyzed by using thematic analysis under interpretative paradigm. The study has revealed a poor status of the application of activity-based classroom instruction in the study area along with the issues of teacher development, administration, local needs, examination system and also emphasizes on addressing the development of contextual activity-based classroom instructions.

Keywords: local curriculum, local needs, skill development, activity- based classroom instruction

Introduction

Development of practical knowledge and skills is the outcome of interactive human activities. Relevant activities along with utilization of local potentials, open the door of skill-based practical education resulting high skilled human resources easily adjustable in national and international arena. Education is supposed to develop practical skills in a child through the engagement in task-based activities. It is also supposed to be a process of training a child for enhancing the desired experiences leading to solve the specific problems effectively. According to Dewey (1997), education is a continuous process of experiencing and revising or reorganizing experiences into practical skills through the adjustment in the environment (1916, p.61). For Agrawal (1992), the productive aspect of education enables a person to do things by overcoming each and every problem through practical skills (p. 33). These statements clearly reflect the bases of modern educational ideals that clearly focus

To cite this article (APA):

Bhattarai, T. (2024). The existing practice of activity-based classroom instruction in Sainamaina Municipality. *Education and Development, 33*(1). 111-124. https://doi.org/10.3126/ed.v33i1.66598

on the practical aspects of education, relating it with functional, productive and skill developing aspects. In support of this, Dewey (1997) puts his view that the main aim of education is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared in forms of practical skills which comprehend the material of instruction (p.18). These statements focus clearly on the application of child centered and participatory approach to the classroom instruction. The application of activity-based or task-oriented teaching learning is believed to lead the development of practical skills in students resulting the capacities of solving their day-to-day problems.

Quality of education is supposed to be determined by the approaches, methods and techniques applied by the teachers in the classroom instruction. Generally, child cantered, task oriented or activity-based and participatory approach in the classroom transactions is concluded to lead the education to practical, functional and productive life. Classroom instruction through task based and problem solving activities thus bring the development of practical skills in students leading the entire education system. In this regard, Kuyate (2019) claims that a variety of interactive activities designed based on social constructionist principles had stimulated interest and involvement in the learning process with the positive outcome of seeing students actually participating in the construction of their own knowledge and skills rather than being passive learners. The activity-based classroom instruction is supposed to play a vital role in developing the problem solving capacities in students through skill development. For the same, the teachers need to be creative and adaptive to the local needs relating them to students' needs so that the students get motivated and involve in task based teaching learning activities and ultimately achieve the goal of the respective course.

Practical skills with problem solving capacities and knowledge are advocated to be a real education in scientific sense. The development of experiences in students by involving them in proper learning environment leads to the acquisition of practical skills. In this regard Dewey, (1997) clarifies that a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience through activities (p.26). Dewey's clarification distinctively shows the interconnection of students between activities and experience leading them to skills. He remarks here that skill is the outcome of experience. Adding on the same Dewey (1997) extends his opinion that an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between individuals and their environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talk about being also a part of the situation (pp. 43-44).

The aforementioned statement about the experience focuses a vital role of environment that results experiences in a person and so far as the environment is concerned, it is the world of experience, constantly grows larger and through the activities practiced in a proper environment along with proper instruction. From

these statements, it can be argued that skill based practical education requires the involvement or active participation of a learner in secific activities which obviously is equipped with proper instruction. It can easily be claimed then that the type of classroom instruction determine the type of experience the learners acquires and ultimately the type of experience the learners get determines the type of skills they get.

Activity-based learning refers to the teaching methods that primarily focus on tasks that are offered in the classroom. Active engagement in learning process and students' participation is the fundamental element in activity-based learning (Prince, 2004). Bonwell and Eison (1991) define activity-based learning as anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. This definition reveals the concept of learning through the involvement in certain activities set by the teacher through specific instruction. Following the same vein, Singal et al. (2018) claim that activity-based learning is a student-centered approach which aims to provide challenging learning tasks, engaging and flexible learning for all students. This claim reveals that students are the center of learning in activity-based learning; this also suggests that the students are needed to make key focus of entire teaching learning process. The entire set up of teaching learning should be based on the involvement of student in a relevant setting. As activity-based learning provides scaffolding to students (Deci and Ryan 2000), students construct their own creativities involving themselves in various activities in social environment brought by the teacher in classroom situation. Students learn in collaboration rather than competition; the teacher brings cooperative group and pair works in classroom situation in such a way that the students learn by solving their problems by sharing their experiences with a mutual support and activities. According to Albadi and David (2019) activity-based instruction is an educational strategy that engages student actively in the learning process by including a wide range of interesting activities. The students are fully involved in dealing with their tasks instead of receiving knowledge passively. It is argued that the best learning materials for the students in this approach is the resources available around them related with specific tasks. Bringing the outer world in classroom makes the students interested about learning and willing to study hard by avoiding their dullness based on theoretical or traditional methods.

Some specific learning theories and assumptions are generally found to have been underlying the studies of teaching learning; the principles underlying these theories of teaching learning have greatly influenced education systems and instructional practices. Activity-based learning is grounded in constructivism (Albadi & David, 2019). The constructivist school focuses on the acquisition of the experience with an assumption that students better learn through the involvements in activities in their environment. This assumption is advocated by the progressive

educationist John Dewey in his theory of 'construction and reconstruction of experience'. Dewey's theory of construction and reconstruction of experience presume education as reconstruction or reorganization of experience, which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience (Dewey, 1916, pp. 89–90). His theory directly connects the concept of society to experience, and to education as communication that "all human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). Dewey's emphasis on the social aspect is significant in relation to the purpose, organization, and construction of functioning behavours of human beings, schools as well as to the nature of interactive and productive functions of members in a society. Campbell (1995) highlights Dewey's focus on the social as the interactions of individuals that result in a community of shared values and shared actions for the development of experience (p. 174).

Dewey (1997), regarding the reference for his theory, puts a frame forward, "There is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience; or, that new philosophy of education is committed to some kind of empirical and experimental philosophy. But experience and experiment are not self-explanatory ideas" (p. 25). Dewey's theory at this point focuses on two scientific aspects responsible for the construction and reconstruction of experience as: empirical and experimental aspects that lead to the formation and development of a new philosophy of education which according to Dewey, is supposed to play a vital role in increasing and developing a person's automatic skill in solving particular problem. "Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience" (Dewey, 1997, P.26). Dewey's theory reveals the chain of experience which is constructed and reconstructed in a continuous process termed as "Coherent Theory of Experience." "A coherent theory of experience; affording positive direction to selection and organization of appropriate educational methods and materials, is required by the attempt to give new direction to the work" (Dewey, 1997, P.30). This theory states that "Experience is a means of penetrating continually further into the heart of nature. There is in the character of human experience no index-hand pointing to agnostic conclusions, but rather a growing progressive self-disclosure of nature itself" (Dewey, 1929, p. 3). This theory clearly shows the interconnection among experience, nature and human activities which is continuous and progressive in nature.

This theory assumes that the human activities and experience have undeniable connection of thought and effectiveness of knowledge and purposive action and skill with the body. According to this theory, knowledge or thought is the outcome of the experience which is generated through the human activities carried out from the nature. Regarding the development of skills, this theory states that the skill represents the culminating event of nature as well as the climax of experience (Dewey, 1929, p. 9). This theory as part of progressive education emphasizes student-centered learning experiences and that incorporates learning by doing,

valuing diversity, integrated curriculum, problem solving, collaborative learning, social responsibility, democracy, and lifelong learning; an important feature is the situation of learning within social or community contexts (Pecore & Bruce, 2013, P. 10). According to this theory education system of a society or country must hold the experience oriented instruction focusing the students on active involvement in specific activities with the surroundings, and of active capacities to readjust activity to meet new conditions. This is where Dewey (1915) advocates that a society must have a type of education which gives individuals personal interest and experience in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.

The literature reviewed suggests clearly that the traditionally practiced teacher-centered teaching methods are needed to be replaced with child-centered instruction; teacher-directed strategies are needed to move towards students' need based learning through the application of problem solving activities as Qahtani (2016) characterizes a teacher as facilitator, delegator, personal model and have experiences in teaching method. He advises a teacher to apply a variety of methods and techniques as students have different learning potentialities in order to motivate them in engaging themselves in different activities. Thus the review of related literature shows the significance of the application of activity-based learning strategy in classroom instruction for arousing motivation of learning in students resulting to the development of practical experiences and skills through the involvement of students in problem solving activities.

The related literature reveals that the activity-based teaching learning strategies are effective for the development of learning efficiencies. However, there is a lack of study on the reasons behind not applying activity-based classroom instruction in the schools of Nepal. This study is an attempt to find the responsible circumstances and factors affecting the application of activity-based classroom instruction and fill the gap that lead to the application of activity-based classroom instruction through its findings and recommendations. The findings of this study will be significant to the teachers, educators, policy makers and stakeholders to carry out student-centered teaching learning. Considering the significance of the application of activity-based classroom instruction, this research was conducted to identify the status of activity-based classroom instruction. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

i. To find out the status of activity-based classroom instruction in Sainamaina Municipality.

ii. To find out and analyze the reasons behind the existing status of activity-based classroom instruction in the study area.

iii. To suggest the strategies for the development of activity-based classroom instruction.

Methods and Procedures

In this research, qualitative research approach has been chosen applying hermeneutic phenomenology to find out people's lived experience (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). The aim of researcher through this phenomenology is to explore the hidden meanings of peoples' experiences their practiced knowledge and skills by applying 'interpretive paradigm' which is viewed as a social construction having a central goal of seeking to interpret the social-world (Higgs, 2001, pp.48- 49). For the purpose, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), classroom observation, and semi-structured interview have been applied as research tools. Field notes, photographs and voice recording were also collected as supportive tools and techniques.

The participants of this study were from Sainamaina Municipality of Rupandehi, Nepal. I have chosen this research area considering the inclusion of diverse ethnic groups being involved in diverse occupations. The participants include: 6 teachers (3 males and 3 females), 10 students (5 males and 5 females), 4 parents (2 males and 2 females), 1 SMC member and 2 local representatives (1 males and 1 female) from ward office. The names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

In order to find out if there was any practice of activity-based teaching learning in classroom instruction, classroom observation was carried out. The entire classes, regardless of subjects of grade eight were observed. I carried out my classroom observation followed by some prerequisites as I made a close observation of school surroundings, met some local residents and school committee members as well. I made an interaction with the teachers along with an introduction and explained the situational (Billett, 1996) purpose of my observation making them an assurance of my study relevance. The data were utilized for proper phenomenological analysis and reflection which is meant to serve the purpose of producing categories to unlock meaning through the process of phenomenological interpretation, analysis, reflection, and writing (Stolz, 2023, p. 825).

Results and Discussion

Classroom observation was carried out throughout the whole school days entering the classroom before the first teacher entered and remaining in the entire classes until the last teacher went out. Each class was observed applying Resource-based Learning Theory (Beswick, 1977). From my observation for three days, I found (see Table 1) the status of the application of activity-based classroom instruction as follows:

Table 1

Application of Activities in Classroom Instruction

Subjects/ Possible Activities	Application of Activities in Classroom Instruction	Remarks
English Discussing Interacting/sharing Listening/speaking Explaining Reading/writing Comparing/contrasting Identifying Correcting/modifying Reporting Describing events Messaging news Criticizing Seeking answer etc.	Day 1 Text: single/plural subject Teaching: by defining and exemplifying; a boy/boys (deductively) Text: first person Teaching: Just telling 'I' and 'we' are first person (very deductively) Day 2 Text: writing a short paragraph Teaching: the teacher asked all students to write a few sentences about a game they like the most. Students start writing while the teacher dictates some supportive sentences. Day 3 Text: writing a paragraph using somebody, nobody, everybody etc. Teaching: by giving a few examples and asking them to write a paragraph	Application by: Writing activity
Nepali Listening to others Role play Making comprehension Telling local history Dialogue delivery in Nepali language Discussing Interacting/sharing Questioning/answering Explaining etc.	Day 1 Text: Drama (Setting of drama) Teaching: by reading the text and explaining Text: "raddi" (boring) Teaching: by defining Text: "Parichaya" Teaching: by definition Text: "Relgadi Khel" Teaching: by bringing the students in front and making them like a rail (train) and make them move in class like rail. Day 2 Text: 'Parichayaya' Teaching: by calling a student in front of class and asking to give his introduction to the class. Text: 'Matha' (head) Teaching: synonym and demonstration(showing his own head) Day 3 Text: drama Teaching: by reading lines and explaining , teachingvocabulary by defining	Application by: Involving students in role play
Mathematics Project work	Day 1 Text: 'Samakon' (right angle)	No application

Pair work Listing Comparing Identifying Calculating Ranking Sequencing Drawing Demonstrating etc.	Teaching: by defining only (very deductively) Text: Exercise Teaching: by applying the rule (very deductively) Day 2 Text: h2 = p2+b2 Teaching: by writing rule on the board and giving example by solving a problem (Deductively) Day 3 Text: Exercises based on Pythagoras theory Teaching: by writing a rule on board and asking the students to solve problems given in exercise	
Social Studies and Population Education Discussing Sharing Interacting Project work Weather prediction Socializing Demonstrating Delivering speech Motivating others	Day 1 Text: foreign trade Teaching: by defining with a background of tourism Text: status of foreign trade in Nepal Teaching: by reading the text and explaining with a few examples Day 2 Text: Activity exercise Teaching: only by reading the activity question and asking them to do it at home and other exercises in the same way DAY 3 Text: currency Teaching: explaining about currency, reading the text and explaining.	No application
Science and Environment Project work Field visits Observations Demonstrations Presentations Group works Discussions Interactions etc.	Day 1 Text: Environment Teaching: by defining simply Text: Environmental Pollution Teaching: by giving examples of vehicles, brick factory etc. Text: “Guitha”, “Dhond”, “Chhwali” Teaching: just by reading the text, ignoring Day 2 Text: air pollution Teaching: by definition Text: affects of air pollution Teaching: just by reading the text lines and explaining simply Day 3 Text: land pollution Teaching: by definition Text: causes/effects of land pollution Teaching: reading by lines and	No application

	explaining	
Health and Physical Education Observations Field activities Games Demonstrations Participations Project works Presentations Group works dramatizations Interactions etc.	Day 1 Text: 'Kabaddi' (a game) Teaching: by asking students if they know about 'Kabaddi' or not. Text: raider/anti-raider Teaching: by explaining on the basis of text lines. Making a diagram on board, reading text and explaining on how to play 'Kabaddi' Day 2 Text: playing 'Kabaddi'(practical in field) Teaching: by making a midline, end line, giving a short instruction and let the students play Day 3 Text: 'Kho Kho' (a game) Teaching: introducing it by reading the text lines and explaining. Text: chaser/runner Teach: by translating into Nepali	Application by: Games (taking the students into the field and making them involved in playing/practicing Kabaddi).
Occupation, Business and Technology Education Field works Project works Demonstrations Observations Group works Pair works Discussions Interactions etc.	Day1 Text: making gardens Teaching: the teacher divides students into four groups and gives each group a topic; asks students to read the text and speak on the given topics. (Doesn't relate the garden located in front of class.) Day 2 Text: seed Teaching: by definition Text: protection/storage of seeds Teaching: defining the terms and reading the text lines and explaining the lines. Text: use of flowers Teaching: just by reading the text lines and explaining them Day 3 Text: practical activity on gardening/producing flowers Teaching: just by asking students to read the text at their homes and do given activities at home.	No application
Moral Education Listening to others Sharing/exchanging Socializing Requesting Begging Helping Cleaning surroundings Group works	Day 1 Text: peace and friendship Teaching: by defining Text: setting of lesson Teaching: by reading the text and explaining Text: a speech on peace and friendship Teaching: by reading the text lines, defining and explaining	No application

Project works Discussion Demonstrations Dramatizations etc.	Day 2 Text: a speech on peace and friendship (contd.) Teaching: by defining reading the text lines, and explaining Day 3 Text: reading a story and explaining Teaching: by asking students to read the whole text and answer the question followed by the text. Text: activities (practical) Teaching: by asking students to read it at their homes and do accordingly.	
Computer Science Working on computer	Day 1 Text: Microsoft power point Presentation Teaching: by asking the students to create slides in computer and assisting them practically (in lab). Day 2 Text: RJ45 Teaching: just defining and giving full form Text: protocol Teaching: defining and explaining Text: binary Teaching: 'two aspects' giving example of bicycle Day 3 Text: Micro Soft Power point (contd.) Teaching: reading the text lines and explaining, just defining new words. (less effective)	Application of: Knowledge of text practically in the lab

A number of key issues emerged from the findings of this study as the findings shows very little application of the activity-based classroom instruction. Although there were many possible use of activity-based teaching-leaning in the classroom, the teachers were found to have followed traditionally practiced deductive and theoretical instruction in the classroom. As one of the instances I observed, there was a garden just in front of the classroom and the teacher was teaching the topic "Gardening" just by reading the textual lines from the textbook. The teacher here, could easily have taken his students just out of the class and make them observe the garden and create the situation to involve them there by providing a relevant task in pairs or individually. And the irony I found the garden in a neglected condition. All these made me raise questions like: Are the teachers really unknown about the use of practical activities in the classroom instruction? Haven't the teachers got any orientation regarding the conduction of activities relevant to the course content? Haven't the teachers realized the need of the activity-based instruction? Why are they still practicing traditional strategies in the classrooms? What are the

responsible factors behind not practicing activity-based classroom instruction? And so on. In order to find out the answers to these questions, semi-structured interview was carried out. The data collected from semi-structured interview; the following themes emerged which are presented below supported by the participants words.

Teachers' Attitudes and School Environment

Asking the teachers their opinion on activities in the classroom, if they were really unknown about the use of practical activities in classroom instruction, I found that they had already set their mind in their own conventional way. As they were happy and satisfied with their own way of classroom practices and they didn't think of making any changes in their mindset. One of their excerpts goes like this:

> We know that we should make an interactive environment in our classrooms. We are aware of the importance of activity-oriented teaching-learning but we automatically use traditionally practiced methods in the classrooms. This is because we have been doing so and almost every teacher does so. Frankly saying, the most influencing factor is that we feel easy in doing so and students are satisfied too (Saket Bhandari, a teacher: 13/06/2022).

Exam Focused Trend in Classroom Instruction

Seeking further reason behind not applying the activity-based classroom instruction I found another argument from the teachers that the teachers were very sensitive about the completion of the course in time and they are found to have been exam focused and result-oriented. One of the participants said:

> We need to finish the courses in time and obviously applying activities in the classroom is a lengthy process and requires a lot of time. The course content needs to be completed in time so we are often in a rush to complete the course. Moreover, our examination is based on paper pencil to a large extent. We are obliged to follow exams focused trends in classroom instruction (Sun Kumari Khanal, a teacher: 13/06/2022).

Teachers' Responsibility and Accountability

The responses from the students revealed the weak aspects of school administration system and teachers as the teachers were not properly trained, and they were not insincere and irresponsible to their duty and politically affected; most of the teachers were careless, didn't complete the course in time and miss classes too. One of my informants says as follows:

> Most of the teachers look quite indifferent about making students motivated and treating them individually. They are often rushing to finish

> the course at the end of the session. Most of them don't seem to be well planned and well prepared. They are not worried about their delivery. Some of them lack punctuality; they come late in class and leave the class before the period bell rings. The head teacher too turns his blind eyes in this regard (Bisal Giri, a student: 13/06/2022).

Refreshment Trainings and Regular Supervision

Based on the responses of the students and parents, the issue of supervision and teachers' preparedness was found to be one of the main reasons behind carrying out the traditionally practiced teaching techniques in the classroom instruction. Having realized this, one of my informants, a head teacher stated as follows:

> Almost all the teachers are trained, oriented and well known about the participatory and activity-based classroom instruction. Moreover, most of them have got the degree in Education. But the irony is that only very few of them have been found to carry out activity-based classroom strategies. It is the big question regarding teachers' dutifulness and professional responsibilities. The administration is ready to provide them refreshment trainings if they demand. In my opinion we might be lacking regular and strict supervision (Komal Paudel, the head teacher: 13/06/2022).

Teachers' Priority

As teachers are supposed to be one of the most responsible factors in proper management and dealing with the students, the teachers' role has been found as one of the burning issues in this study. Seeking the response from local administration officials, I found that one of the main reasons behind not using practical activities in classroom is lack of teachers' priority. One of my respondents, a representative of local government claimed as follows:

> I appreciate the woks of our teachers. Some of the teachers are really sincere, dutiful and responsible towards the future of their students. But most of them have forgotten their roles and responsibilities. Some of them are in the influence of political parties and acting as the agents of those parties. Such teachers have forgotten their priorities. In such cases schools have become a platform for doing political movements. Therefore, the teachers are primarily responsible in creating interactive environment in classroom and school administration is secondarily responsible for monitoring, managing and following-up for the same (Govinda Pokhrel, ward chairperson: 13/06/2022).

Inclusion of Local Needs in Curriculum and Development of Working Culture

The responses from social workers have been found different and related to policy level issues. In order to create activity-based environment in the classroom, the curriculum should also indicate such activities so that the teachers automatically engages their students in different activities. In addition, without developing working culture and respecting the work, bringing various activities in classroom environment would be impossible as one of my respondent states:

> Openly saying we don't have working culture. Neither we respect labor nor do we value the work. We all including our leaders, have corrupt mentality. Such trend has affected all the sectors, and departments from the top to the bottom level including schools and entire education system. So developing of labor respect, schooling for working culture and identification of local needs, inclusion of such local needs in curriculum in my opinion, have long term influence for the development of practical work oriented (Binaya Kharel, 13/06/2022)

Conclusion

As activities bring a real learning situation in the classroom, activity-based instruction undoubtedly develops practical skills and work efficiency in students. Activity-based instruction leads to the development of practical education resulting skilled human resources not only required for the nation but also salable in the global market. Regarding the responsible causes for the poor status of the activity-based instruction in classrooms in the study area, mainly teachers' attitude, exam focused instruction, lack of teachers' responsibility and accountability and lack of the inclusion of local needs or potentials in curriculum have been found through the interview. Curriculum should address the local needs and local potentials. When local potentials based on local resources are incorporated in curriculum, the environment of interactive activities is automatically emerged in classroom. The contents or matters for the working activities in teaching-learning appear automatically from their surroundings. Then the students naturally get the opportunity to make interactive activities with the locally available resources. As a result, students enjoy participating in activity-based classroom instruction. Moreover, teachers' sincerity, responsibility, accountability and continuous follow-up of administration with scheduled supervision, conduction of relevant trainings or timely orientations seem to be considered for the proper implementation of activity-based methods and techniques in classroom.

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