

Activity-based Learning in Tamil Nadu – the Teachers' Attitude

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Abstract

In the context of improving the quality of primary education, a new attempt has been made in Tamil Nadu by the introduction of Activity-based Learning (ABL) in the teaching-learning process. The effectiveness of ABL depends primarily on how the teachers handle the ABL classes which mainly reflect their attitude towards ABL. So far only a few studies have been reported on the attitude of teachers towards ABL. The main objective of this research is to explore the attitude of primary school teachers towards ABL. The study was conducted on a sample of 200 teachers in the Palayamkottai Urban area schools of Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu using a researcher made tool. The key variables taken for this study include age, educational qualification, teaching experience, field exposure, student strength, school category, etc. The data analysis was done using SPSS version 11 for windows using T-test and F-test. The findings of the study revealed that primary school teachers, in general, share the same level of positive attitude towards ABL. It was also found out that teachers working in middle and higher secondary schools have a decreased level of positive attitude towards ABL than those working in primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays an incredible role in the development of the human personality. The process of education starts from the birth of the child and continues till death. At early primary level the objective of education is all-round development of child including physical, intellectual, emotional, personal and social development and development of aesthetic awareness and creativity. The basic learning skills

are also acquired through primary education in addition to the values and attitudes (Rao, 2005).

The National Policy on Education (1986/1992), National Curriculum Framework, 2005 and RTE, 2009 have reiterated the urgency to address the quality concerns in school education on a priority basis. Quality cannot improve by itself. It requires reforms in teacher training; improvements in the facilities and infrastructure in schools; teachers'

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motivation and a change in the style of teaching to make it attractive to the students. For fulfilment of different objectives of primary education, different attempts have been made in this field from time to time. In spite of all the attempts made, the learning level of the students was found to be unsatisfactory. In this context, a novel attempt has been made in Tamil Nadu by changing the methodology of teaching-learning by the introduction of Activity-based Learning (ABL) for Standards I to IV with a shift from the teacher-centred approach to child-centred approach. The clients have different opinion about this ABL method — both positive and negative.

Genesis of ABL

The ABL concept was taken from the Rishi Valley practices in Andhra Pradesh. In 2003 the ABL approach was used in 13 Corporation Schools of Chennai and then in 2004, it was extended to 264 schools in Chennai Corporation. Since 2007, ABL has been rapidly scaled up and is now practised in all of the 37,500 government/government-aided primary schools of Tamil Nadu.

For adopting ABL, the conventional classrooms were completely reorganised by setting up low level boards, and provisions for keeping trays in such a way that gives easy access to ABL cards. The furniture was replaced with simple mats laid on the floor to seat teachers and students in groups. Classes were supplied with

ABL kit containing a ladder, logo cards, group cards, activity cards, etc.

What is ABL?

ABL is a child-centred method of learning where the students can learn at their own pace through the activities they like using different colourful learning cards in a free environment without any compulsion or fear.

The learning ladders provide structure to the curriculum. The whole syllabus for each subject in a standard is represented in the form of a ladder. In every standard, there is a separate ladder for each subject. In a ladder, the syllabus is split up into different units called milestones. Each milestone represents a competency. In each milestone, different activities are represented by different logos of pictures used in the ladder. In the classrooms, achievement chart, students' self-attendance sheet, weather table and health wheel are also used to develop regularity, personal hygiene and environmental awareness among the students. For learning by the ABL method, the student has to first refer to the ladder, specific for the particular standard and subject to be followed by finding out which card he/she has to study, noting down the logo and the card number. He/She has to take out the particular card from the logo tray in the shelf and identify his/her group. The students can get the support from the teacher or peer group in groups 1-5 while group 6 is self-supporting. After completing the

activities given in the card he/she must get it checked by the teacher and replace the card in the tray. Then he/she has to find out the next learning card and the process continues. When one milestone is completed, the achievement must be recorded in the achievement chart.

Features of ABL

The ABL approach is unique and effective. It attracts students to school and enables them to learn with joy. In this method there are activities for each learning unit which facilitate readiness for learning, learning by doing, reinforcement and evaluation. ABL has transformed the classrooms into hubs of activities and meaningful learning. Other advantages of this method include good teacher-student relationship, minimised book load, enhanced individual attention of students and inbuilt examination. The students learn at their own pace and there is a scope for them to know their level of achievement and comparative position in the class. ABL enhances different strategies like self study, peer study, group study and discussion. In ABL, the student has to study from the portion he/she left on the previous day, hence absenteeism does not affect the continuity in learning. Multigrade and multilevels in learning are effectively addressed in ABL.

From the literature it was noted that attitude of teachers was highly related to their own perceptions of the teaching practices (Seah, 1980). The teaching

strategies that teachers used depended upon a range of factors such as attitudes, confidence, views of the nature of the learner and perceptions of themselves as practitioners (Rajeshkumar and Krishnakumar, 2008). Under ABL, teacher became enthusiastic observer of learning and has increased his accountability to the children (Manivel and Inbaraj, 2007). It was observed that ABL was need-based as well as learner-based which led to joyful, easy, concrete and complete learning. This would pave the way to create an integrated society for the future (Ahmed, 2007). It was also found that 95 per cent of the primary teachers showed contempt for the system (Nagavalli, 2008). Sixty five per cent of the teachers accepted the fact that self learning took place and 94 per cent assured the skill attainment of the learners. But 85 per cent revealed difficulties in forming groups while sixty five per cent opined that it was not suitable for multigraded teaching and large classes. Seventy per cent of the teachers opined that their workload had increased.

Significance of the Study

According to NCTE (1998), enlightened, emancipated and empowered teachers lead communities and nations in their march towards better and higher quality of life. In general, the teacher plays a crucial role in influencing the student learning. Hence, attitude of the teacher plays a major role in the student learning. So there should be some

measures to study and assess any new approach or intervention for changing the attitude of teachers.

In ABL, the main role of the teacher is changed from the central authority for the transmission of knowledge to multi-faceted roles as facilitator, friend, guide, coordinator and motivator at different stages of learning. Teachers have to play the role of a counsellor also when they meet the parents who approach the school with doubts about ABL. The success of this system depends mainly on how the teacher coordinates the class. The teacher has to plan and prepare well for the successful running of the class. For the effective reach of ABL to student community, teachers must understand the system very well and must possess a positive attitude towards it.

During informal discussion with teachers of elementary schools, serious concerns were expressed by them regarding ABL. As the scheme is a changeover, there are also concerns at parental level. As per the literature available, it was evident that not much prior study has been carried out in the area of ABL and attitudes of primary school teachers towards ABL in Tamil Nadu. The investigators undertook this study with following objectives in view.

Objectives

- (i) To find the attitude of primary school teacher towards ABL approach.
- (ii) To find the difference, if any, in the attitude of primary school teachers towards ABL with regard to selected background variables.

The background variables selected for the present study were age, educational qualification, teaching experience, field experience, strength of students, clubbing of standards, category of school, type of management, type of school and number of teachers.

Method

Survey method adopted for this study is as follows:

a. Population and Sample

The population of the study includes the primary teachers working in 39 schools in the Palayamkottai Urban Block, Tamil Nadu where the ABL method was adopted. Two hundred teachers were taken as the sample by stratified random sampling technique.

b. Tool used

An attitude scale on ABL with 27 statements, developed and validated by the investigators was employed for the study. The coefficient of reliability of the tool was 0.43.

c. Statistical technique used

F-test and t-test were employed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 11.0.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Positive Attitude of Primary Teachers Towards ABL Methodology

Background Variable	Category	High		Average		Low	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Age (in years)	Below 40 yrs	10	16.1	44	71	8	12.9
	40-49	18	20.9	55	64	13	15.1
	50 and above	10	19.2	36	69.3	6	11.5
Educational Qualification	Required	22	16.3	94	69.6	19	14.1
	Additional	14	21.5	43	66.2	8	12.3
Teaching Experience	Below 15	9	14.3	48	76.2	6	9.5
	15-20	14	21.5	42	64.6	9	13.9
	Above 20	9	12.5	52	72.2	11	15.3
Field Experience	Handling ABL	29	17.9	113	69.8	20	12.3
	Not handling ABL	7	18.4	27	71.1	4	10.5
Students' Strength	Below 40	23	16	103	71.5	18	12.5
	Above 40	12	21.4	36	64.3	8	14.3
Clubbing of Standards	I-IV	9	14.3	43	68.3	11	17.4
	I-II-III-IV	24	19.8	85	70.2	12	10.9
	I-II-III-IV	3	18.75	10	62.5	3	18.75
School Category	Primary	30	19.4	107	69	18	11.6
	Middle and Higher	5	11.1	35	77.8	5	11.1
	Secondary						
School Management School type	Government	6	15.8	26	68.4	6	15.8
	Aided	30	18.5	109	67.3	23	14.2
	Co-educational	30	18.3	109	66.5	25	15.2
	Girls only	6	16.7	28	77.8	2	5.5
Number of Teachers	Below 5	7	16.7	27	64.3	8	19
	5-10	8	18.2	29	65.9	7	15.9
	Above 5	24	21.1	79	69.3	11	9.6
Attitude towards ABL		36	18	137	68.5	27	13.5

Table 2: F-test on the Scores of Attitude of Primary Teachers Towards ABL Methodology

Dimensions	Source of Variance	df	Sum of squares	Mean Square	Calculated F value	Remarks
Age	Between Groups	2	74.11	37.05	0.40	NS
	Within Groups	197	18182.18	92.30		
Experience	Between Groups	2	135.08	67.54	0.73	NS
	Within Groups	197	18182.21	91.99		
Clubbing of standards	Between Groups	2	332.29	166.14	1.83	NS
	Within Groups	197	17924.01	90.99		
Number of Teachers	Between Groups	2	208.47	104.24	1.14	NS
	Within Groups	197	18047.81	91.61		

* Table value for df 2, 197 = 3.07 NS – Not Significant

Table 3: t-test on the Scores of Attitude of Primary Teachers Towards ABL Methodology

Dimensions	Category	No.	Mean	SD	df	Calculated F value	Remarks
Qualification	Required	135	72.90	9.45	198	0.38	NS
	Additional	65	73.45	9.90			
Field Exposure	Yes	161	73.47	9.51	197	0.92	NS
	No	38	71.89	9.60			
Strength of students	< or = 40	144	72.61	9.47	198	1.11	NS
	> 40	56	74.28	9.84			
Category of School	Primary	155	74.23	9.47	197	3.11	NS
	Middle, Hr. Sec.	44	69.25	9.00			
School Management	Government	38	74.52	8.14	198	1.03	NS
	Aided	162	72.74	9.88			
Type of School	Co-educational	164	73.18	9.72	198	0.33	NS
	Girls	36	72.60	9.03			

* Table value = 1.96

NS – Not Significant

S – Significant

Finding and Discussion

The attitude of primary teachers towards ABL indicated that 68.5 per cent of the teachers had an average level of positive attitude, 18 per cent had a high level and 13.5 per cent had a low level of positive attitude towards ABL. It shows that teachers in general had a positive attitude towards ABL which motivates the teachers to accept and implement ABL in their classrooms. This was reflected by the changed scenario in primary classes. This was a positive step in the attempt to make the primary education child-centred and child-friendly. The negative attitude was found to be meagre which was the reflection of less involvement of the teachers and would change as they understand the method better.

There was no significant difference in the attitude of primary teachers towards ABL methodology in relation to age, experience, clubbing of

standards and number of teachers, educational qualification of the teachers, experience they have in handling ABL classes or not, strength of the students in the class, type of school and type of management of the school. This implies that these variables did not interfere in adopting a change in the methodology of teaching. Hence, for the sake of the students, teachers irrespective of these factors were ready to accept a change in the methodology for the benefit of the students.

But there was significant difference in the attitude among primary, upper primary and secondary teachers towards ABL methodology. The mean scores show that teachers in primary schools had more positive attitude towards ABL than teachers in middle and higher secondary schools. It indicated that teachers in middle and higher secondary schools were less

willing to accept the change in methodology. This may be due to the fact that not much priority was given for the primary classes in those schools.

The Joining Review Mission report and the reports in newspaper daily revealed that Tamil Nadu has taken a quantum leap in primary education by introducing ABL. It is an innovative method which uses child-friendly educational aids to foster self-learning and allows child to study according to her/his skill or aptitude. It has created a visible improvement in children's learning and psychology and also develops the scholastic and co-scholastic aspects. Learning environment has been changed to become democratic, congenial, satisfying and co-operative. In ABL, teachers can develop competency in teaching as they get experiences and perspectives in teaching through different ways. This also helps in the development of different types of skill, personality, self-discipline and creativity of students.

Suggestions

In middle and higher secondary schools priority is not given to the primary section. This has to be considered seriously and immediate steps should be taken by the government to strengthen primary education as it is the basic stage for laying the foundation of education. Infrastructure facility is an essential component of ABL and steps must be taken to provide this facility in all classrooms. Administrators should monitor the

primary classes which will make teachers pay more attention to primary classes.

Administrators must supervise whether all the teachers are following ABL methodology procedurally and motivate those who are not adopting ABL methodology. Parent-teacher meetings may be organised to get the support of the parents in implementing this methodology.

Teachers should accept ABL methodology wholeheartedly and try to be aware of its finest details. Even though there are many problems in the field, teachers should have the will to overcome those problems. They should accept the views of the administrators and management and follow their instructions to implement ABL successfully. They must be always ready to help the students and their parents.

Parents must cooperate with the teachers and the school management in all the school activities. It is their privilege to know the system of education followed in the school and the different activities going on there. For this, they can approach the teachers and get necessary details. They must participate in all the school activities for which they are invited. Parents must consider it a duty to attend the parent-teachers' meeting and share their thoughts. They must appreciate and motivate the teachers in their activities and be ready to help the teachers and the management, whenever required.

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