Innovative Teaching Strategies for Educational Improvement of Scheduled Caste Learners

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Abstract: Scheduled Castes (SCs), also known as Dalits, are among the most disadvantaged groups in India, both socially and educationally. Within the Scheduled Castes, there are several sub-caste groups, including Namasudra, Rajbanshi, Pundra, Chandala, Muchi, Chamar, Dom, and others. The Indian Constitution provides protections and safeguards for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other vulnerable sections of society. These measures aim to promote their educational and economic interests and eliminate social discrimination, either through specific provisions or by ensuring their general rights as citizens. The government has initiated various programs, policies, and schemes to support the educational advancement of children from Scheduled Castes. Teaching strategies refer to the methods and techniques that educators use to facilitate learning. The choice of teaching strategy depends on the subject matter, the learners' level of expertise, and their stage in the learning process. This paper aims to explore innovative teaching strategies to address the challenges and issues faced by children from Scheduled Castes.

Keyword: Education, Scheduled Caste, Innovative Teaching strategy, Learner.

Introduction: Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) represent the two most marginalized groups in Indian society, requiring focused attention. Combined, they account for approximately a quarter of India's total population, with SCs making up about 16 percent and STs about 8 percent. However, the distribution of SCs varies significantly from one state to another. SCs are found across most states in India, with a notable feature being their predominance in rural areas. In 1961, they made up more than 90 percent of the country's rural population, and the trend has not significantly changed over time. For instance, the 1991 census showed that over 80 percent of the SC and ST population resided in rural areas, compared to 73 percent of the overall rural population.

Scheduled Caste groups experience deprivation, but the roots of their deprivation vary. This disadvantage stems from their low status within the Hindu caste system, where they are placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and were historically considered untouchables. To help these groups benefit from the modern education system, it's crucial for educators to have a deep understanding of their background and needs. A teaching strategy refers to the approach used to deliver information to students. It's important to note that a strategy effective with one group of students in a particular year might not be as successful with another group the following year. This variability underscores the importance of equipping teachers with a wide range of innovative teaching strategies to address the diverse needs of their students.

Objective of the Study

1. To find out the present educational scenario of Scheduled Caste.

2. To understand about the Innovative Teaching Strategies.

3. To identify the innovative teaching strategies which are related with educational improvement of Scheduled Caste learners?

Methodology:

The present study employed a secondary survey method, gathering information through a documentary survey that included sources such as census reports, books, journals, and more.

The present educational Scenario of Scheduled Caste

Literacy Rate: Literacy is a crucial indicator of the educational status of any group and is closely associated with various developmental indicators. Between 1951 and 2011, the literacy rate for the total population of India increased significantly from 28.3% to 74%. For Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), literacy rates saw a remarkable rise from 10.27% in 1961 to 66% in 2011. However, women from these groups remain the most illiterate segment. In 2011, the literacy rates for SC and ST women were only 52.6% and 46.9%, respectively, compared to the male literacy rates of 72.6% and 66.8%. There are pronounced regional disparities in literacy across different states and even within districts of the same state. The journey towards equality reveals significant differences among various castes and tribal groups. In 1981, the literacy rates for certain caste and tribal groups were below 1%, whereas for others, such as the Adharmi caste in Delhi (SC) and the Naga tribe in Meghalaya (ST), the rates were much higher, at 70% and 81.9%, respectively.

Enrolment ratios serve as a real-time indicator of educational participation, contrasting with literacy rates which reflect historical performance. There has been a significant increase in the number of children enrolled across various educational levels. For instance, at the primary level in 1997-98, the gross enrolment ratios were 98.6% for boys and 81.8% for girls. At the upper primary level, these ratios were 70.8% for boys and 52.8% for girls. However, for Scheduled Caste girls, enrolment ratios were lower, standing at 76.2% for primary and 44.3% for middle levels. Similarly, for Scheduled Tribe girls, enrolment ratios were 83.3% for primary and 36.6% for upper primary levels. This decline in participation among Scheduled Castes and Tribes as educational levels increase indicates a higher dropout rate within these groups. At higher educational levels, the proportion of Scheduled Castes to total enrolment ranges from 4-6%, and for Scheduled Tribes, it ranges from 2-4%, significantly lower than their representation in the total population. Beyond the quantitative disparities, several studies highlight qualitative differences in infrastructural facilities between deprived and advantaged sections. Sharp rural-urban differences persist in schooling infrastructure. Even within urban areas, Scheduled groups are often concentrated in lower-quality institutions; while more advanced sections have access to superior educational facilities.

The concept of Innovative Teaching Strategies: Innovation in education stimulates both students and teachers to engage in research, exploration, and the utilization of various tools to discover new knowledge. Kuboni, Lentell, McIntosh, Victor, Webb, and West define innovation as "the process of making changes to something established by introducing something new.

Teaching strategies encompass the methods and techniques employed by educators to support their pupils or students throughout the learning process. An educator selects the teaching strategy that best aligns with the subject matter, the learners' expertise level, and their current stage in the learning journey. Innovative teaching refers to the practice of employing novel and contemporary methods and techniques to enhance the effectiveness of learning among students or learners.

Important of innovative teaching strategies: Innovation in education motivates both students and teachers to research, explore, and utilize various tools to discover new insights. It entails adopting unique perspectives for problem-solving and enhances the educational experience by challenging students to apply advanced thinking skills for tackling complex issues. Additionally, innovative strategies aid students in comprehending

the learning process itself, enabling them to navigate around their weaknesses and perform to their full potential.

Innovative teaching strategies which are related with educational improvement of Scheduled Caste learners: The significant increase in enrollment reflects a strong demand for education among Minority, SC, and ST communities; however, access to basic schooling remains a considerable challenge. Although there has been an increase in school participation rates, attendance at the elementary level is notably low, and it further declines at the secondary stage. SC and ST students are disproportionately affected by dropout rates, failures, and low academic achievement compared to their peers from the general category.

Many schools now host a significant number of first-generation learners who rely solely on the educational system to develop reading and writing skills, cultivate a love for reading, and acquaint them with the language and culture of the school. This need is especially pronounced when the language spoken at home differs from that used in school. Additionally, these children may be more susceptible to the adverse conditions prevailing in their home environments. The integration of such a diverse group of students into schools contributes to lower school completion rates. There are also evident gender disparities across all educational indicators, highlighting the under-education of girls. Gender, class, tribe, and caste are critical factors of exclusion. Moreover, there are substantial disparities between states, regions, and rural-urban areas within many states and regions. Differences within castes and tribes are pronounced, revealing that the more marginalized sections within the SC and ST communities face severe educational disadvantages. Scheduled Tribes, in particular, tend to be more disadvantaged than Scheduled Castes in most states, except in the North-Eastern regions, where specific socio-historical contexts play a role.

The school curriculum and teaching methods should create opportunities for every child's learning and facilitate their free, creative, and comprehensive development. The unique culture and experiences that children from SC or ST backgrounds bring to the school should be an essential part of an egalitarian teaching and learning process, aiming to achieve the goal of providing meaningful education for all children.

Some innovative Teaching strategies which are related for educational improvement if Scheduled Caste learners

Mind set: The transformation in a classroom's mood, mindset, and overall atmosphere begins with the teacher. From the moment students walk into the classroom, it's the teacher's duty to set the tone. Demonstrating enthusiasm for the subject matter can significantly motivate students to become more involved. It's essential for teachers to be genuinely passionate about their subjects. However, the method a teacher uses to develop and deliver their content plays a crucial role in promoting innovation in education. Traditionally, teachers have been taught to approach teaching primarily from their own viewpoints. To bring innovation and make the classroom environment more engaging, teachers should start to see students as leaders and act more as guides rather than merely providing information for students to memorize for tests.

Self-Reflection: Self-reflection offers teachers the opportunity to evaluate their instructional methods, comprehend the rationale behind their strategies, and observe their students' reactions. Considering the intricacies of the teaching profession, self-reflection serves as an essential opportunity for educators to pinpoint both the successes and shortcomings in their classroom. Through reflective teaching, educators can examine and enhance their teaching techniques, focusing on what works best. Skilled teachers understand that there is always potential for advancement in their teaching methods, delivery styles, and in achieving educational success.

Culturally inclusive: Culturally inclusive teaching means linking the curriculum to the varied cultural backgrounds of the students. Teachers should start by getting to know their students, including their cultural heritage and key aspects of their cultures. After gaining this understanding, educators can then weave the curriculum into the students' cultural contexts using pertinent examples and activities, thereby enriching the learning experience.

Ask Open-Ended Questions: Open-ended questions cannot be answered merely with facts directly lifted from textbooks. When educators ask open-ended questions, they invite a wide range of answers and viewpoints. Such questions encourage strong collaboration among students, provoke stimulating conversations, ignite new thoughts, and enhance leadership abilities. This method also helps students uncover talents and capabilities they may not have realized they possessed. Moreover, open-ended questions motivate students to make connections with their own experiences, relate to various stories, or associate ideas with real-world scenarios.

Create Flexible Learning Environments: As teaching methods become more varied, how classroom space is used emerges as a key factor for educators. The flexibility to easily adjust classroom furniture can greatly improve student learning by tailoring the environment to different educational needs. Contemporary teaching requires classroom spaces to support individual work, peer interactions, and group collaborations. However, despite these changing requirements, numerous classrooms are still overcrowded, disorganized, and loud, which obstructs mobility, communication, and focus. To adequately facilitate a range of learning activities, such as one-on-one sessions, collaborative projects, solo study, and group discussions, classrooms should be designed for adaptability and flexibility.

Peer Teaching: In jigsaw activities, students achieve mastery by teaching or explaining concepts to their peers. Encourage them to pick a topic within the subject area that interests them. Allow them to independently research their chosen topic and prepare a presentation. Dedicate class time for these students to share their research, thereby teaching their classmates about their topics. This method of peer teaching not only enhances understanding of the subject but also cultivates essential skills in independent research, presentation delivery, and confidence enhancement.

Use of ICT

Blended Learning: Blended learning integrates in-person and online educational experiences, offering students greater autonomy over when, where, how, and at what speed they learn. For a comprehensive understanding, refer to our previous post on blended learning. What makes blended learning particularly appealing is its combination of traditional classroom settings with digital tools and opportunities for learning. It doesn't require a full commitment to one method over another, but technology plays a crucial role in making it relevant for students in today's world. Blended learning's versatility allows students to tailor their learning approaches—for instance, they might watch lectures online at home and participate in peer groups for group work, or they might choose to attend virtual classes for lectures and complete their assignments on their own.

Feedback: Feedback is pivotal in the learning process. It's vital for students to become adept at both providing constructive feedback and accepting it gracefully. To support this, implement a feedback mechanism in your teaching strategy that enables students to express their opinions. In a virtual classroom environment, utilizing tools like polls or emojis can create efficient channels for immediate feedback. Motivate students to expand on their feedback and then encourage those with alternative perspectives to explain their views. This method promotes a feedback-friendly environment while also encouraging critical thinking and conversation among students.

Active Learning: The cutting-edge teaching approaches we've discussed mainly classify as active learning strategies. Active learning encourages students to immerse themselves through discussion, contribution, participation, exploration, and creativity. This method stretches learners by asking questions, requiring problem-solving skills, and cultivating critical thinking. Importantly, active learning places students in the driver's seat of their education, guaranteeing their engagement and interaction in the classroom environment. Students who take an active part in their learning journey are generally more successful in your course.

Conclusion: Innovative teaching strategies play a pivotal role in advancing the education of Scheduled Castes, providing them with the means to overcome obstacles and succeed academically. To foster the educational upliftment of Scheduled Caste students, several essential strategies have been highlighted: minimizing or removing the opportunity costs and fees associated with higher education to enhance its accessibility; offering increased financial aid and scholarships to students from socio-economically

disadvantaged backgrounds; and creating bridge programs to assist students from less privileged educational backgrounds in catching up and excelling in their academic pursuits. These strategies are designed to equalize opportunities and ensure that Scheduled Caste students receive the necessary support and resources to thrive in higher education.

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