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A STUDY OF STUDENT TEACHERS' APPROACHES TO LEARNING

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Abstract:

Student approaches to learning is a primary factor that determines students' engagement and motivation in learning which in turn determines their academic success. The desirable approach to learning fosters self-directedness in learning thereby nurturing love for life long learning. This study was conducted with the aim to study the student teachers' approaches to learning based on their faculty of graduation and college types. It adopted the descriptive method of research. The findings of the study reveal that the student- teachers preferred deep approach as compared to surface approach to learning.

Keywords: *Deep Approach, Surface Approach, student- teachers' preferences for approaches.*

Introduction:

Student approaches to learning is a primary factor that determines students' engagement and motivation in learning which in turn determines their academic success. The desirable approach to learning fosters self-directedness in learning thereby nurturing love for life long learning.

Student Approaches to Learning is a theory that students will take a different approach to how they study, depending upon the course's perceived objectives. The theory was developed from the clinical studies of two educational psychologists, Ference Marton and Roger Säljö, who found that students can be divided into two distinct groups:

- those who took an understanding approach to learning,
- and those who took a reproduction approach to learning

These are commonly referred to as the "deep" and "surface" approaches respectively.

The original work on approaches to learning was carried out by Marton and Saljo (1976). Their study explored students' approaches to learning a particular task. Students were given an academic text to read, and were told that they would subsequently be asked questions on that text. The students adopted two differing approaches to learning. The first group adopted an approach where they tried to understand the whole picture and tried to comprehend and understand the academic work. These students were identified with adopting a deep approach to learning. The second group tried to remember facts contained within the text, identifying and focusing on what they thought they would be asked later. They demonstrated an approach that we would recognize as rote learning, or a superficial, surface approach.

Deep and Surface approaches to learning:

Surface approach to learning: According to Marton and Saljo when students merely accept information and memorize it in order to reproduce it in the

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exmaination, it is said that they have surface approach to learning.

Deep approach to learning: when students find meaning from the underlying concepts, ideas, principles and theories; they are said to have deep approach to learning.

There are several factors which affect learning like interest, motivation, learning environment, teaching strategies, teacher personality, etc. One of the important factors on which students learning is dependent is their approaches to learning.

The issue of Students approaches to learning has attracted many researchers since many years as it is closely related to the academic achievement of students. (Biggs and Moore, 1993; Goh et al., 2012; Kek et al., 2007). These studies reveal that a surface approach to learning is related to poor quality processes and outcomes, whereas a deep approach to learning is related to high quality processes and outcomes.

Rationale of the Study:

It is beleived that deep approach to learning promotes understanding and thus long term retention of concepts. It helps the students to critically analyse the material, apply the knowledge in other similar situations and problem solving in unfamiliar contexts. Where as surface approach to learning leads to superficial retention of material for examinations and does not promote understanding or long-term retention of knowledge and information.

It is important that the future teachers have deep understanding of the knowledge imparted during the teacher training course so that they can apply it when they become teachers. Such teachers will be able to nurture the young minds in a desired way, will be in a position to solve the educational problems they face and thus contribute positively in the feild of education. The teacher with superficial knowledge of the subject as well as pedagogy will end up in imparting superficial knowledge to the students. Therefore it is significant to assess student teachers' approaches to learning. If found necessary than some inputs can be given to promote deep learning approaches among student teachers.

Significance of the study:

Teacher education system aims to develop student teachers as capable, confident, enthusiastic, and progressive learners. Learners with positive approaches to learning with desirable attitudes and behavior tend to become confident, self-regulated and lifelong learners. Thus the overall assessment of student teachers development needs to consider not only the knowledge and understanding but also their approaches to learning.

Also, the student teachers are going to be the future teachers for the young generation. The generation that is filled with curiosity and the quest to learn. To teach such a group of students, teachers need to know the subject matter deeply, and should be able to connect knowledge across fields and to life. This kind of understanding calls for a deep approach to learning. Thus, it is significant to study the learning approaches adopted by the student teachers.

The study will help the government aided as well as government unaided teacher education colleges to know the approaches adopted by their student teachers. It would thus help the colleges in promoting a desirable learning approach among the student teachers.

The study may help the teacher education institutes to know if students of any particular faculty of graduation adopt a particular approach to learning. The institution can than plan to promote a desirable learning approach among those student teachers.

Review of Related Literature:

Negash TT, Eshete MT and Hanago GA (2022) examined Students' learning approaches as a factor of academic achievement at selected public universities:

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A cross-sectional study.

This study assessed students' learning approaches and their relationship with their academic achievement at two selected public universities in Ethiopia. The study revealed that students mainly follow deep approaches to learning, and there were no statistically significant differences between the groups on most of the learning approach measures and academic achievements. Entrance exam results, positive perception of the definition of learning, and a deep approach to learning were found to be positive predictors of academic achievement.

Senemoglu (2011) conducted a study on College of Education Students' Approaches to Learning and Study Skills. The purpose of this study was to determine and compare the approaches to learning and study skills of students in colleges of education in the US and Turkey. This study involves American and Turkish students in colleges of education. Data were gathered from 206 American and 806 Turkish college freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors who volunteered to participate in this study and whose major fields of study were early childhood education, elementary education, secondary education-humanities, secondary education-math and science. The results of ANOVAs revealed that the American students preferred deep and strategic approaches significantly higher than surface approach as compared to Turkish students. The findings further showed that Turkish students prefered slightly higher level of all three approaches- deep, strategic, and surface- than American students.

Chong et al(2013) studied Assessing students approaches to learning using a matrix framework in a Malaysian public university. This study aimed to evaluate the learning characteristics of students using a matrix framework of learning approaches (MFLA) in a Malaysian public university. A survey form based on Biggs's study process questionnaire (SPQ) was distributed to a total of 350 students. This study employed a descriptive correlation research design to address the research objectives. In this study, the existing SPQ designed by Biggs (1987) was adapted and used to collect the research data from respondents. Findings indicated that the learning approach most preferred by students was the "achieving approach" ($M = 3.07$), followed by the "deep approach" ($M = 2.94$) and the "surface approach" ($M = 2.28$). The findings indicated that "achieving motive" and "achieving strategy" were the most popular learning approaches among students in Malaysia.

Aims and objectives of the study:

The major aim of the study was as follows:

To study the student teachers' approaches to learning on the basis of their faculty of graduation and college types.

In order to achieve this aim the following specific objectives were formulated:

Objectives of the study:

- To study the student teachers' approaches to learning
- To study the student teachers' approaches to learning based on their faculty of graduation
- To study the student teachers' approaches to learning from government-aided and government-unaided colleges of education.

Research Design:

Methodology of the Present Study:

The present study has adopted the descriptive method. This method is adopted as the research aims to study student teachers' preferences for approaches to learning and also to study approaches to learning of student teachers coming from different faculty of graduation and student teachers coming from government aided and government unaided colleges.

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Sample:

Sample of the study:

In the present study the population comprised of student teachers of English medium teacher education institutes situated in Greater Mumbai, affiliated to the University of Mumbai.

The sample selected for the present study consists of 374 student teachers – both boys and girls, graduated from different faculties of graduation and belonging to Government aided and unaided colleges.

Sampling Technique:

The study adopted stratified random sampling technique where in the first stage the colleges were selected from the Mumbai region using incidental sampling technique. In the second stage the colleges were selected on the basis of two strata viz government aided and government unaided colleges using stratified random sampling technique.

Size and Composition of the Sample:

The sample comprised of student teachers doing B.Ed course- both boys and girls from Government-aided and Government-unaided schools affiliated to the University of Mumbai and situated in Greater Mumbai. Initially the sample size comprised of 394 student teachers. After editing for completion of the tools, the total sample amounted to 374 students. 20 forms were discarded on account of incomplete information.

The following table shows composition of sample of the number of student teachers from different B.Ed colleges:

Name of the College	**Type- Aided/Unaided**	**No. of Student teachers**
Smt. Kapila Khandvala College of Education	Aided	89
St. Teresa's Institute of Education	Aided	66
GSB's Surajba College of Education	Aided	57
Pushpanjali College of Education	Unaided	59
Rizvi College of Education	Unaided	59
Thakur Shyam Narayan College of Education	Unaided	44
Total		**374**

Number of students from:	**Number of student teachers**
Government- Aided	212
Government- Unaided	162
Total	**374**
Commerce Faculty of Graduation	123
Science Faculty of Graduation	118
Arts Faculty of Graduation	133
Total	**374**

Tools of Research:

The following are a list of tools, which were employed by the researcher for the study:

1. **Personal data form:** The student teachers were required to give personal information such as their name, name of their college, type of college (aided/ Unaided), Faculty of Graduation (B.Com/B.A/ B.Sc) and gender.
2. **Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F)** by Biggs et al 2001:
   This tool was used to ascertain student teachers' preferred approaches to learning. The Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) was developed by Biggs in 1987 but was revised in 2001. The final version of the SPQ

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comprised of two main scales Deep Approach (DA) and surface approach (SA) with four subscales with four sub-scales, Deep Motive (DM), Deep Strategy (DS), Surface Motive (SM), and Surface Strategy (SS).

The Cronbach alpha values are 0.73 for DA and 0.64 for SA in the sample, which are considered as acceptable.

Scoring of the Scale:

The scoring was done using five point rating scale. All the items of the scale were positively worded. The scoring was done as follows:

Response Category	Never or rarely true of me	Sometimes true of me	Half the times true of me	Frequently true of me	Almost or Always true of me
Score Value	1	2	3	4	5

The scoring was done in the following manner:

Statements Pertaining to Deep Approach: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 17, 18,

Statements Pertaining to Surface Approach: 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20.

The sum of scores of statements pertaining to Deep approach gave scores of deep approach preferred by a student teacher and vice versa. The minimum possible score for deep approach and surface approach was 20 respectively and maximum possible score was 50 for each approach. The total score was calculated for each student teacher for both the approaches to learning.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The table gives the numerical data for preferred approach to learning by student teachers.

Numerical Data For Preferred Approaches to Learning by Student Teachers

		Deep Approach		Surface Approach	
	N	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
STAL	374	31.54	7.30	22.52	6.83
STAL from Commerce Faculty of Graduation	123	31.28	7.02	23.02	6.86
STAL from Arts Faculty of Graduation	133	31.15	7.40	22.5	6.84
STAL from Science Faculty of Graduation	118	32.53	7.44	21.96	6.80
STAL from Government Aided Colleges	212	31.55	7.17	21.59	6.52
STAL from Government Unaided Colleges	162	31.72	7.49	23.72	7.05

The mean scores in the preceding table reveal student teachers preferred approach to learning. The mean score for the deep approach is higher than the mean score for the surface approach. This means that the student teachers prefer a deep approach to learning as compared to the surface approach.

In analysis of data pertaining to student teachers from different faculties of graduation, it is observed that the mean score of students teachers coming from commerce, arts and science faculty is higher for deep approach as compared to the surface approach.

The mean score of student teachers coming from government-aided and government-unaided colleges is also high for the deep approach in comparison to the surface approach.

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Discussion:

The findings of the present study reveal that the student teachers prefer deep approach to learning as compared to surface approach. The student teachers belonging to different faculties of graduation also prefer deep approach to learning as compared to surface approach. The student teachers belonging to government aided as well as government unaided colleges also prefer deep approach to learning as compared to surface approach. This could be because of the following reasons:

- The student teachers have chosen this profession for themselves. Their motivation and enthusiasm is high about this entire program. Therefore, they prefer deep approach to learning.
- Maturity is an important variable in the preference of learning approaches. The student teachers entering a B.Ed. program are either graduate or postgraduates. With so many years of education they become less knowledge reproducing and more meaning oriented and thus inclined towards a deep approach.
- B.Ed. course affiliated to University of Mumbai has an equivalent component of theory as well as practice. This provides the student teachers many opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge gained in practical situations. this might be promoting a deep approach among student teachers.
- Another reason for student teachers preferring deep approach to learning could be that the B.Ed. course of University of Mumbai is relevant to the needs of the student teachers which in turn results in optimum learning.
- Teacher educators play an important role in affecting learning approaches. By increasing various teaching approaches which are more student-focused than teacher-focused, involvement and engagement of student teachers can be enhanced. Thus learning might be more meaningful to them.
- Formative as well as summative assessments in a B.Ed. course help the student teacher in getting prompt, detailed and personalized feedback. This helps them in knowing the strengths and weaknesses of their assignment and performance in detail. This exercise helps them to add meaning to their work thereby improving its quality rather than just perceiving it as a requirement to complete the course.

Conclusion:

- The findings of the present study reveal that the student teachers prefer deep approach to learning as compared to surface approach.
- Student teachers from all the three faculties of graduation viz, Commerce, Science and Arts also prefer deep approach to learning as compared to Surface approach.
- Student teachers from Government Aided as well as Government Unaided colleges prefer deep approach to learning as compared to surface approach.

These findings are substantiated by some earlier studies where American students from college of Education preferred deep and strategic approaches significantly higher than surface approach (Senemoglu 2011) and where students of both the gender scored high on deep strategies the most and achieving strategies over surface strategies (Cheong et al 2004). However there is a need to explore this area of study further.

These findings indicate that the pre service teacher training program, the learning environment and assessments should be designed to promote deep learning approach among the student teachers.

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