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Social Studies Teachers' Opinions on Learner Centered Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Social studies is one of the important programme of study at school education in Nepal. Accordingly, learner centered teaching (LCT) is also widely discussed and researched pedagogical practices in the world. In this context, the present study investigated the views of social studies teachers on LCT. Qualitative research tradition has been employed in this study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respondents, and inductive qualitative data analysis techniques was used to analyze the interview transcripts. The results showed that although the respondents of this study had to face several problems while implementing LCT in their classroom, they had positive attitudes towards LCT which they thought could make pedagogical activities engaging, enjoyable, involving, and relevant to the students' learning. In this respect, there is a need to address the viewpoints of participants on the LCT.

Keywords: Social studies, learner centered teaching; constructivists pedagogy; learning

Initiation of the Social Studies in Nepal

The main concern of the Nepalese education system since time immemorial was social moral ideas. Ancient Nepalese education system had emerged solely from the philosophical traditions of Vedic and Buddhism. First, traditional moral principles, then after the introduction of social sciences and finally social studies in Nepal's education system. During the Ancient and Medieval era, pedagogical practices were based on rote learning. The primary items in the religious education were religious scriptures and selected literature. There was a history of oral transmission of information due to the lack of several copies of the text. There were only a few handwritten manuscripts available before the printed materials had been supplied. Religious schooling, both Buddhist and Hindu, was primarily rote learning, group delivery, and repetition of choruses. *Alexander (2000)* described this form of pedagogy, 'the mode of transmission was oral-through constant recitation and repetition, text committed to memory from teachers and pupils back and forth.'

In 1853, the first Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana established Durbar school, the first primary school of Nepal, for the children of his family and this School used the course of study that was prevalent in India. This course of study comprised of English Language, Vernacular Nepali, Sanskrit, Arithmetic, History, Geography and Drawing. History and geography were Social Sciences

among the aforementioned subjects. This fact clearly indicates that Social Sciences were introduced in the primary education for the first time in 1910. Thus, social sciences have become influential subjects in primary education from the beginning of the formal education system in Nepal *(Shah, 2013)*. Although religious education continued to exist during Rana rule, there was some development of modern type of education during this period. The teaching methods placed heavy emphasis on drill, memorizing and lecturing. In such a method the child without a photographic mind and unusual memorizing ability could not survive in the system and had to drop out. Lack of instructional materials limited teachers in direct teaching.

In Nepal in the early 1950's the need for social studies was felt. The Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) report specifically contemplated the role of people and the duties and obligations to be performed. The report has stated that to meet the purposes and objectives of primary education the curriculum must be provided learning experiences in the common and compulsory for all children *(NNEPC, 1956, p. 89)*. Social studies was one of them to introduce from the grade one to teach how mankind lives. The report has further clarified that social studies experiences should be centered on the social activities of mankind, especially those naturally engaged in by children. The subject matter was proposed as: Grade I-life at school and at home; Grade II-life in the neighborhood; Grade III-life in the region-the valley, the hills or the Terai; Grade IV-life in the other parts of Nepal; Grade V-life outside of Nepal.

Those themes provided for the gradual expansion of the child's vision from his immediate environment to as broad a world outlook as possible for them to comprehend. These theme move from the immediate to the remote, from the concrete to the more abstract. Further, that has capability of integrating bases for developing the skills of other subjects. The route of social studies can be clearly visualized in the early 1950s. The contents were well structured by including major thematic areas of the society. The geography content was focused for social, economic and environmental issues. The Commission has proposed to follow and strengthen the following curriculum themes for social studies *(NNEPC, 1956, p.105)*. Grade VI-how people live (food, shelter, clothing, vocations, etc.) Grade VII-great men and women who have made Nepal; Grade VIII-life in the countries of Asia; Grade IX; social, economic, and political life in Nepal; Grade X-world culture and governments. According to NNEPC, learning should be individual, not en masse. This commission's report clearly demands respect for the individual differences and intelligent adaptation of the curriculum to various local conditions and to the individual differences of children. In effect this is related to learner centred principles. Pedagogical practices suggested by NNEPC were 'to teaching children than covering textbooks', 'use thematic approach', 'arrange both teaching periods and practice time', 'make children take an active part in the learning process', 'follow the activity or project method', 'cooperative teacher-pupil planning', 'method of teaching should be informal and well-adjusted to children', 'cater individual needs of the children', etc.

The *National Education System Plan (NESP)* in 1971-1976 of the His Majesty's Government of Nepal was the first structured curriculum designed to achieve the aims of education (HMG, 2071: 36). NESP (1971-1976) allocated 20 percent of all Class 1 to Class 3 weightings, of the total of 650 marks, 100 maximum marks. Similarly, social studies were given a weight of 13 percent or 100 full marks out of a total of 1000 from class 4 to 7 (lower secondary level). However, at the secondary levels (class 8 to 10) the social studies was replaced with history and geography by 12 percent weightage or 100 full marks out of 900 in total. In the vocational high-school social studies was combined with history, geography and Panchayat but the weightage was the same with general school *(HMG, 1971)*.

After the 1990s democratic restoration, the NESP guided education systems were removed and several changes have been made in the education systems too along with major political changes in the country. The National Education Commission (1992) was formed within the HMG of Nepal's Ministry

of Education and Culture and Social Welfare. The Commission had recommended several changes in the education systems of the country. It has again recommended 100 full marks Social Studies course for primary (Grades 1 to 5), Social Education of 100 full marks in lower secondary (Grade 6 to 8) and 100 full marks for secondary (Grade 9 and 10). There were no consistencies in the terminology of the discipline. Somewhere they had used social studies and social education. History and geography were not incorporated in the curriculum. It was indicated in the report of National Education System Plan 1971 *(MoECSW, 1992)*. NESP was not explicit on classroom pedagogical approaches. It just indented to conduct research to improve teaching methods for each subject. The intention was on use of scientific methods *(MOE, 1971).* NESP criticized the prevailing education system as elitist-biased, unclear, unproductive and unsatisfactory.

Educational plan and policies of Nepal revealed that the subject social studies was kept in different modalities. The subject social studies is held in various forms and modalities in the education system of Nepal. The vision of school education was expected to prepare citizens dedicated to promote and protect democracy and human rights. They should possess attributes like dignity of labor, committed to education, enterprising, disciplined, and capable to face the personal, social and national challenges of the twenty first century. The National Curriculum Framework (2007) was framed the visions and goals of national curriculum, policy and guidelines of school level education. The principal learning areas were organized in the process of designing curriculum. The major learning areas and subjects were: social studies, language (local/mother tongue, national and international), mathematics, creative arts, science, health and physical education, population and environment education, information and communication technology, local need based studies, everyday jobs, occupation and trade *(CDC, 2007, p.33).* According to the Framework the basic education (Grade 1-8) was to develop the innate ability of each child through child centred teaching (LCT). NCF's main goal was to create citizens who are loyal to the nation and democracy, and who are aware of their responsibility to the social and natural environment. Students were expected to be competent in communicating ideas, independent, hardworking, and health conscious and morally sound.

After 2005, Nepal has experienced major political shift. The country is now transforming to federal democratic republic system. More power has been supposed to be devolved to the local governance system. Education system is one of such proposed authorities to be devolved to the local institutions for curriculum development, management and mobilization. However, the full-fledged mechanism yet to be developed, the major framework has been envisaged School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) *(MOE, 2016)*. The SSDP has encompassed formal and non-formal education, whereas the formal education has been categorized into one year early childhood education and development, basic education from grade 1 to 8 and secondary from grade 9 to 12. Most of the course layout is still running as envisaged by NCF *(2007)* from the CDC system. The social studies curriculum for the primary level (grade 1 to 3) has been developed by Primary Education Curriculum (2006) framework where social studies and creative arts have been included *(CDC, 2008)*. Despite the primary standard recommended by the *CDC (2008),* the composition of the program is nearly identical up to grade 5. It was expected that the learners were enabled to identify and solve their own problems and thereby based on their own thinking process, skills, ability, interest and choice which foster their ability in different areas to encourage active participation in learning and life skills at large *(CDC, 2008:19)*.

Research Questions

- What do Nepalese social studies teachers understand about LCT?

- What problems and difficulties do social studies teachers face in their classrooms while implementing LCT?

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Literature Review

Different related literature that was reviewed has been summarized in the following sections:

Theoretical framework

What does the concept of learner centred teaching (LCT) mean? What are the characteristic features of LCT? What theoretical frameworks lay the foundation for LCT? How do we come to know and recognise that LCT is being practised? Answering these questions adequately necessitates a conceptual definition of LCT which in turn requires an understanding of the epistemological and theoretical frameworks underpinning LCT. In this respect, LCT can be defined as 'the perspective that combines a focus on individual learners-their inheritance, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, skills and needs-with a focus on learning' *(McCombs and Whisler 1997)*. The instructional approach based on the principles of LCT: emphasises the student as the main agent of learning; makes student learning the principal goal; concentrates on the use of intentional processes on the students' part; encourages teacher-student interaction in which students become more active learners; expects the teacher to act as a facilitator or a guide; focuses on how well students do not learn the frequency of information transmission; and considers the impact of each phase of the instruction on student learning *(Fosnot 1996; APA 1997; McCombs and Whisler 1997; Henson 2003)*

Although the concept of LCT is based on a fluid theoretical framework and subject to change as it is continuously redefined by theorists and applied researchers *(Henson 2003)*, a consensus does exist among the education research community as to the primary characteristics of the models of LCT. The constructivist epistemological stance, constructivist pedagogy, cognitive-metacognitive, affective, socio-psychological, and developmental theories together with the progressive theoretical perspective on education come into play in defining the characteristic features of LCT. LCT is first and foremost based on constructivist epistemology which posits that knowledge is temporary, nonobjective, internally constructed, and socio-culturally mediated *(Fosnot 1996; Crotty 1998; Hendry, Frommer, and Walker 1999).* In other words, constructivist epistemology postulates that information is neither discovered nor passively obtained from the universe or from authoritative sources, but is consciously built as individuals or groups considering their experiential environments *(Maclellan and Soden 2004).* It is assumed that individuals build their own sense and understanding. This meaning-making cycle is assumed to occur through the interplay between established information and beliefs of individuals, and the new knowledge and experiences they come into contact with *(Richardson 1997, 2003; Schunk 2004).* Constructivist epistemology informs constructivist pedagogy, which Richardson (2003) defines as 'the creation of classroom environments, activities and methods based on a constructivist theory of learning, with goals that focus on individual students developing deep understanding of the subject matter of interest and habits of mind'.

Richardson (2003: 1626) describes the five concepts of constructivist pedagogy as the premises: attention to the person and respect for the context of the students and the creation of understandings and beliefs about the elements of the domain; facilitation of group dialog exploring the element of the domain with a view to developing and sharing a topic; planned and sometimes unplanned introduction of formal domain knowledge into conversation via direct instance; providing opportunities for students to recognize, question, alter or incorporate current beliefs and understandings by participating in activities designed for that purpose; and improving students' meta-consciousness about their own knowledge and learning processes.

Although constructivism is 'a theory of learning not a theory of teaching' *(Richardson 2003: 1629)*, also in relation to teaching*, Fosnot (1996)* elucidates constructivism. According to her, teaching based on constructivism discards the notion that teachers should express meaning to students by symbols; i.e. concepts cannot be differentiated as distinct entities and taught from context. Instead, the constructivist approach to teaching gives the learners the opportunity to engage in meaningful,

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concrete experiences through which they can look for patterns, build their own questions, structure their own models , concepts, and strategies. Teachers assume the position of facilitator, as opposed to that of autocratically acting manager. A constructively guided classroom is characterized by autonomy, reciprocal reciprocity of social interactions, and empowerment. Based on constructivist pedagogy, LCT is an educational framework focused on the individual preferences, desires, needs, abilities, cognitive styles, intellect types and educational objectives of a student within an objective context where situated thought is considered important *(APA 1997; McCombs and Whisler 1997; Weimer 2002)*. A basic tenet of LCT *(Weimer 2002)* is to draw on the expertise, skills, values and attitudes that learners bring to the school. For this reason, LCT approaches instruction design from the learner's perspective, rather than the teacher's perspective. The instructor tailors the curriculum and subject matter to the needs, desires, and abilities of the students *(Dewey 1916).*

Relevant research studies

There are lack of sufficient studies on social studies teachers' views of LCT. *LeSourd (1984)* study indicated teachers' attitudes toward instructional strategies were basically shaped by the diverse intellectual capacities of students, the role of the teacher in implementation, and the expected results of the implementation. *Byer and Dana-Wesley (1999)* studied pre-service social studies teachers' views of active teaching methods and found that students' evaluations of the active methods class instructor were substantially higher than those of the students' evaluations of the passive methods class instructor. Accordingly, research by *Koeppen (1999)* on the reactions of pre-service teachers to issue-oriented social studies involving active primary-grade teaching methods showed that teachers were often uncomfortable with raising controversial issues for discussion with elementary-level students. Teachers felt that it was difficult to create controversial issue-centered social studies curriculum.

Doyle (1997) examined the impact of the teacher preparation programme on preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning as they were in the transition from being a student to being a teacher. He stated that as teachers went through the curriculum, they modified their views of teaching and learning and became more constructivist in their views of teaching and learning. They viewed teaching as a learning facilitation and guidance method. Similarly, they viewed learning as an ongoing phase of development and improvement. Similarly, *Woolley and Woolley (1999)* explored changes in student teachers' beliefs about behaviorist management, behaviorist teaching, constructivist teaching, and constructivist parents through a survey conducted to both student teachers and cooperating teachers. Research findings indicated that most student teachers were more constructivist and less behaviorist than teachers who cooperated. Some student teachers and teachers who cooperated appeared to have ambivalent views towards both theories of learning. Some student teachers modified their beliefs because of their co-operating teachers who inspired them by modeling, feedback, and risk-taking. The researchers suggested that teacher educators should reflect on when to use behaviorist and constructivist theories of learning, rather than seeing either theory as superior.

The research discussed above primarily looked at the views of teachers over teaching and learning in different subject areas. What differentiates this study from earlier research is its emphasis on the views of teachers in social studies about learner-centered teaching and major theories of learning. To fill the gap in research literature, this study explored the views of LCT teachers by seeking answers to the following questions:

Research Design

A short description of the research design is given below:

Research paradigm

This study is based on the qualitative study. A constructivist and interpretativist paradigm is the approach adopted in this study. This particular paradigm follows the foundations of relativism, a

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notion that suggests that reality is subject to change depending on its unique perceptions and conceptualizations *(Cohen, Manion , and Morrison, 2007; Guba and Lincoln, 2005).* Interpretivist social scientists intend to capture the subjective meaning of social action *(Bryman, 2004, p. 13).* This paradigm understands the world of human experience in which the participants view of the world is privileged *(Cohen, et al., 2007).* The interpretive paradigm highlights a number of factors that affect the way things are in the social world. Studies that adopt the interpretative paradigm often aim at exploring and understanding the characteristics, different human behaviors, opinions and attitudes of individuals from within *(Cohen, et al., 2007).*

This study was based on the interpretive research paradigm since the central question of the present study is: how do social studies teachers experience and perceive regarding LCT in Nepal's school? And to provide a detailed account of their experience and perception in regard to the child centered teaching during their classroom teaching. Thus, this research is approached from an interpretive research paradigm using a qualitative approach as it enabled me to understand, discover and explain what happened in social studies classrooms from the participants' perspectives *(Denscombe, 2003). Creswell (2007)* suggests that an interpretive/qualitative research paradigm may be useful to understand the behaviour and the realities of the classrooms and get as close as possible to the participants being studied. *Creswell* further argues that the philosophical assumptions on the nature of reality (ontology) for this orientation are based on their acknowledgement of the notion of multiple realities. These different realities may be interpreted and supported by the use of multiple quotes based on participants' actual words which represent participants' different perspectives *(Descombe, 2003; Creswell, 2007).* This means that the methods used in the inquiry processes are inductive in nature and shaped by the contexts of the study and the researcher's experiences *(Cohen et al, 2007).*

As the focus of the research was on discovering how do social studies teachers experience and perceive regarding LCT in Nepal's school? It was essential that it be conducted in their real working life setting, without any controlled variables. To understand fully what primary level social studies teacher believe and what they do in their classrooms, in-depth data are needed. Furthermore, the beliefs of social studies teachers and their classroom practices cannot be quantified. Hence, the present study relied on the social studies teachers' views of the situation being studied' *(Creswell, 2009, p. 8)* and attempted to understand the complexity of the phenomenon. Additionally, this study was not based on a particular hypothesis, since my intention was to 'make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world' *(p. 8).*

Strategies of inquiry

Case study is a strategies of inquiry involving an in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject of study, as well as its related contextual conditions. In doing case study research, the case being studied may be an individual, organization, event, an action, existing in a specific time and place. It might be a person, group, location, organization, event, a family, a social group, or even a single organization. The study of one single individual (person); generally using several different research methods; the study of a single distinctive set of people (group); such as a family or small group of friends; the study of a particular place (location); and the way that it is used or regarded by people (location); the study of a single organization or company (organization); and the way that people act within it; and the study of a particular social or cultural event (event); and the interpretations of that event by those participating in it (event) are some examples of case study. Accordingly, a case could be a single program, an organization, a classroom, a group of people, or even an individual person. In order to qualify as a case, the number of persons or organizations involved within that system must be limited. Therefore, a case study refers to the study of the singular, the specific, the unique *(Simons, 2009).*

Methods

Sample

For recruiting participants for the study a purposeful sampling procedure was used. The number of years teachers had taught social studies in high schools was the key criteria for choosing participants. As argued by *Cuban (1991)* and *Entwistle et al. (2000)*, teachers with a great deal of teaching experience are in the best position to assess, judge and articulate their teaching practices. The second criterion was educational level of the participants. The complexity of the research topic with its emphasis on learning theories suggested that teachers hold at least bachelor's degree, M. A., M. ED. Therefore, teachers with at least ten years of teaching experience and advanced degrees in education were the samples of the study. The participants were selected from three basic schools in three cities in Kailali District, Far Western Province, Nepal. Each teacher has been given a fictitious name to protect the identities of the teachers.

Description of the participants

Sandhya: Sandhya is a 45-year-old female social studies teacher at a high school located in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan city, Kailali District, Province no 7. She has been teaching social studies, as a permanent teacher, for 10 years, holding M. A. and M. ED. degree in Geographical Education. She has been pursuing Ph. D. in the field of education.

Narendra: Narendra is a 40-year-old social studies teacher at a primary school in in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan city, Kailali District, Province no 7. He taught social studies for five years. He teaches classes in economics. He holds M.A. Degree in Economics, Master's in Geography Education from the Tribhuvan University, respectively.

Ramesh: Ramesh is an ex-social studies teacher of 51 years. He taught high school social studies for 13 years. He completed his undergraduate arts education. He holds a Bachelor of Education in Political Science. He has plans to seek Ph.D. Same degree in field. As indicated by another role that he plays, Ramesh is very interested in politics. He is a mayor in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan city, Kailali District, Province no 7.

Procedures

The main method of data collection was interviewing. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with the participants of approximately one hour in length were conducted individually. Concerned with getting rich and detailed answers to the research questions, interview questions asked participants to express their views on; three major theories of learning; i.e., behavioral, cognitive and constructivist; LCT; problems and difficulties in implementing LCTs. Interview questions were designed in a broad way so as not to affect the experiences of the participants. For example, in order to get the views of the participants on behavioral learning theory and LCT, they were asked respectively: please tell me your opinion on behavioral learning theory, 'Tell me about your beliefs on LCT in social study teaching and learning.' Based on the answers provided by each participant to general questions, different questions have been put to answer them. To ensure comparability between the responses of the participants, the same questions were posed to all the participants. But depending on each participant's responses, different probes were used to help them both deepen their responses and give more relevant answers to the research questions.

Methods of data analysis

The inductive qualitative data processing methods and approaches were used to analyze the transcripts of the interviews *(Miles and Huberman 1994; Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Marshall and Rossman 1999).* The researcher first read each interview transcript in detail in order to get a general sense of the whole interview and then reread each interview transcript to start the formal coding in a

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systematic way. Since the analyst should first determine the unit of analysis for the pre-coding data *(Patton 2002)*, sentences and phrases were chosen as the units of analysis (line by line analysis). Coding in-depth line-by-line interview transcripts is one way of staying open to the data and of recognizing both tacit and explicit questions and comments of the participants *(Charmaz 2006).* After selecting the unit of analysis for the data, the researcher began analyzing each transcript of the interview using open or low level codes with little abstraction. The main purpose was to understand the data from the participants' perspective, so the researcher tried to stay close to the participants' own words, phrases, and phrases, or what's called 'indigenous terms,' making some comments about the possible codes relationship. In this initial coding phase, what is known as 'emic analysis' was done by 'in-vivo codes,' i.e. coding the data on the basis of the participants' own words as a bottom-up approach to comprehensive data analysis. When the participant's own words were not adequate to code what resulted from the data, 'sensitizing codes' was used. If a significant section of text was identified in the transcript, either an in-vivo or a sensitizing code was assigned to denote the section in question. This procedure was followed before segmentation of the entire interview transcripts and completion of the initial coding. Once all the interview transcripts were marked, cross-case comparisons were made which is generally called the empirical process of 'constant comparison.' The participant's answer to the same question was compared with each other on the basis of both indigenous and sensitizing principles and then similarities, discrepancies, patterns and themes were established through the results. Member controls were carried out to enhance the credibility of the research study *(Lincoln 2001).* The researcher sent the participants the results of the study, asking them to make comments or suggestions about the explanations and interpretations of their answers. None of the teachers in this research study disagreed with the presentation of their viewpoints. Finally, a university professor also read the findings of the research and offered some minor changes for category constructions.

Research Findings

Findings of the present study presented in the following sections:

Teacher's understandings of LCT approach

   Sandhya showed a diverse understanding of the LCT approach. The teacher had the view that LCT is a kind of teaching approach focused on engaging learners in the classroom and thus building the learning capacity amongst students. The teacher felt that in LCT environment, the work of the teacher is to facilitate students in the process of knowledge construction. According to the teacher, students make sense of what they learn by linking what they already know with what they ought to learn, that is, the subject matter. *Narendra* conceived LCT as a cooperative teaching technique whereby a teacher asks questions and students discuss the questions in groups under the guidance of the teacher. According to *Narendra*, LCT requires empowering students in the teaching and learning process such as students being free to critique the teacher's reflection on the subject matter. *Narendra* had the view that under LCT, learners are given opportunities to reflect and share what they know regarding what is taught. According to *Ramesh*, LCT is a teaching approach which gives students learning authority. In this process act as a facilitator in the teaching learning process. *Ramesh* presented that the teaching approach requires students to engage in the teaching and learning process by following teacher's guidance. *Ramesh* however perceived LCT as Westernised instructional approach which transfers power from the teacher to the students. Participant of the present study revealed that they understood LCT is a teaching methods wherein students are placed at the core of the teaching learning process. At the same time, students' backgrounds, needs, and opinions are acknowledged and incorporated within the teaching learning process. LCT as teaching that places the learners are considered as focal point in the teaching learning activities, that it involves a variety of teaching methods and that it assists all learners equally.

Attitude toward LCT

The data analysis reveals that LCT strategies are enjoyable, challenging, and relevant to students' lives. Most of the teachers views LCT positively because LCT is an active and engaging teaching learning methods. Teachers think that getting students involved in lessons can be done better by using those teaching strategies that encourage students to use their minds and engage in their learning. In articulating his philosophy of teaching and learning, *Sandhya* said:

> *I do not give any instructions. My point of view is that I'm here to ask students to try to get them engaged and they're going to want answers instead of getting them from me. The best expression I've ever used to describe is that I'm not a stage performer but a side guide. I am also a reference for checking my students to learn.... I think [students] learn more when they play, when they have the chance to make things, when they have the opportunity to experience them.*

Emphasizing the importance of developing active, productive, and successful citizens, *Ramesh* contended that academic information may not stay with students in their life, 'but, learning to think critically helps them to be successful in life'. He felt that students would have the opportunity to go further and form their own opinions, to think independently, and to explore topics through reason and practice-centered teaching. Commenting on the future career development of the students, he said, 'exploration helps them in their careers'. *Narendra*'s perspective was also congruent with the other two teachers. He said, 'they students need to be able to… think critically. They need to be able to do that. They need to learn how to critically view media'. And he continued to display her positive view of LCT by saying, 'LCT is more effective. It lasts longer in things like remembering the learner and applying the learner's ability'.

Deliberation provided above reveals that these teachers are committed to helping students become lifelong learners, independent thinkers and self-directed learners so that they can formulate questions and find information to find answers to their own questions. Therefore, these teachers emphasis on learning through learning, self-direction or independent learner are important elements that they use to explain their teaching goals in conjunction with their LCT ideas.

Difficulty of relating learning theories to instructional practices

The three teachers in the study were in favor of constructivist learning theory and identified themselves primarily with a constructivist orientation to teaching. *Sandhya* took pleasure in practicing constructivist learning theory because she felt it would provide students with different ways to learn; makes teaching and learning enjoyable and more consistent; helps students stay active; and students are more engaged with their lessons. *Sandhya* clarified these points:

> *I have often enjoyed the constructivist approach because it makes teaching interesting, learning is important. In seeking to incorporate them into the lesson you can involve students more when you implement a creative approach. So I think it would be more fun for them, and more welcoming to me. I hope students liked it for me from personal experience, and were more involved. We are keen on learning. I believe that they do more of a constructivist approach.*

Narendra emphasized a constructivist approach to teaching as well. He said, 'I am constructivist…. students have freedom to investigate… manipulate information'. *Ramesh* also stated that he applied constructivist theories in his social studies classrooms. He said, 'I usually practice constructivist teaching practices like teacher-led discussion, role-playing, and simulation when developing lessons. *Ramesh* especially likes playing the role of the devil's advocate. He explained that he takes various positions on a number of contentious topics depending on the characteristics of the students in his classrooms. For example, he said, 'If students oppose the affirmative action I will support it. Whether it's sponsored by the minority students I would be against it.

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Although *Sandhya* and *Narendra*, both of whom strongly advocated a constructivist approach to teaching, appeared to downplay behaviorist teaching methods, *Ramesh* preferred to use mixed methods to teach his subject as evidenced by his own words 'possibly a mixture of all learning theories... various teaching methods.' *Ramesh* stated that he makes use of a behaviorist approach while introducing new concepts 'over and over again' through direct instruction. Repetition is the key word *Ramesh* used to highlight his preference for behavioral theories at the initial stages of instruction. But, when developing lessons, he said that he prefers to apply cognitive and constructivist approaches in his social studies classrooms through LCT practices. On the other hand, *Sandhya* disregards the behaviorist learning theory because she thinks that it is inflexible and limited in scope, and does not fit every lesson or situation. She also claimed that it does not address diversity and complexity in the student population, nor can it accommodate individual student differences such as different learning styles, needs, and interests.

Respondents pointed out that the constructivist approach to teaching is difficult to practise in social studies classrooms. For instance, *Sandhya* said, 'I think students learn better when they are engaged, active, and involved. It's really hard to do that from the constructivist viewpoint. According to *Sandhya*, hardship involved in practising a constructivist approach stems from the nature of history itself 'because it is hard for students to really connect with events that today, they don't think it has any effect on them.... It's very hard to relate them to past events'. *Narendra* similarly pointed out, 'LCT is more effective… Getting the learners to see what they have learned in these situations… That's another frustration'.

To illustrate this, *Sandhya* did not recognize how his instructional practices relate to cognitive learning theories. When asked about his view of cognitive theory, *Sandhya* waited 10 seconds before giving his answers. After I asked the same question twice and provided a brief explanation about cognitive theory, *Sandhya* said, 'I don't really have a strong opinion on how cognitive theories of learning really fit in with what I do in the classroom. I wasn't the cognitive theories deep base of awareness. Maybe something I should know about'. Likewise, when I asked *Nanrendra*'s view of learning, He said initially, 'that is a difficult issue. I didn't know what I was doing, really. I just knew what I wanted to achieve. I had no idea behind those myths of learning'.

This finding is consistent with the results of previous research that many teachers do not know consciously what theory of learning informs and guides their teaching practices. Instead of being explicit, teachers retain tacit beliefs and thus find it difficult to express their behaviors within a theoretical context. Study results indicate that the participants did not have a base of knowledge on at least one of the theories of learning. As a result, they had trouble describing how their instructional practices apply to learning theories, especially cognitive ones. Hence one of the themes emerging from the data is the difficulty of teachers articulating their perspectives on learning theories.

The impact of the culture on teachers' views and practices

Culture also affect the teachers' view and practices. On the basis of the cultural beliefs decide their instructional priorities; and plan and implement their lessons. Although it was not the focus of the research study, there is another important theme from the data. That is the impact of the community on the way teachers view their role. *Sandhya* made reference to characteristic nature of the community in which she teaches. As she sees the community as very traditional and regional, she places great priority on the goal of seeing students from multiple perspectives. *Sandhya* said:

> *There's a very conventional culture I teach ... Hence the students' mind is normally fixed. And, to say that my classroom work is the other viewpoint ... To put them in a place and to ... Start thought.*

In the same respect *Narendra* said:

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> *The bulk of our school's students come from the rural areas. Acting with them in my neighborhood and in the field where my students come from LCT. I think there are many aspects to this because we're a very rural town and these students are going out and doing it. I love to work with their hands. We are fond of learning things, so teaching with imaginative practice is innovative.*

A careful scrutiny of the data reveals that these teachers' views of the three learning theories (i.e., behaviorist, cognitive, and constructivist) are affected or shaped by: the way they view their roles and responsibilities as a teacher; the nature of the subject matter; types of students or student population they have to teach; types of community which interacts with types of students; and academic training.

Barriers to learner centred teaching

Participants of the present study mentioned various types of barriers regarding the LCT. In this regards, *Sandhya* said:

> *LCT needs much time for the teaching learning process.... But we don't have enough time to do all those things. And so the challenge. One classroom comprises a large number of students and it is very difficult to handle them. These are some of the major problems which prevail.*

Sandhya further mentioned that there is another factor that affects teaching learning process. That is the culture of school. Teachers and students have been following this culture for a long time. In this respect, *Narendra* was concerned with how the principal viewed his teaching style. He said:

> *You want to do it, but you think it could be too high, or it could cause a little confusion in the classroom, and you don't want your principal to come and think Ha! 'It's a wild party.' You like ... Would like to be seen in the teaching class. You know, students in their classrooms, and they chat and get involved, and there is a lot of learning going on. And to me [that] is not a complete lesson. Rather, you just want to make sure that the teacher knows you are teaching anyway.*

Pointing out how difficult it is to involve students in discussion, *Narendra* said, 'During these activities, all get mad. They do not think of another worldview but their own '. *Ramesh* also brought identical problems into attention, focusing on social loafing, time constraint, state mandated curriculum, standardized tests, and the principal's notion of how an orderly classroom looks like. He pointed out:

> *It is too time-consuming. You've got to cover 40–45 goals. For a LCT, it's hard to meet such goals ... Now we're doing standardized performance test ... You might have management problems. Often teachers, or anyone outside the class, might believe students are not formally learning. It is expected that students should read the chapters, review the chapters, complete the handouts and then encourage them to test them.*

These teachers have positive attitudes toward LCT, prefer constructivist learning theory to behaviorist learning theory, and experience a host of dilemmas, difficulties, and challenges in practicing a LCT. Using interviews, small group discussions and flexible teaching as a classroom teaching strategy with large numbers of students within a short period of time, both teachers and students found the learning process boring and would not enjoy teaching and learning most of these cases. Teachers have expressed concern about the lack of time, space and other resources.

> *We are trying to use these approaches in a 40-minute span of over 40 students in small classrooms with a few teaching aids; that's not right ... sometimes we're only teaching subjects in the classroom and we can't concentrate on person.*

Time, space and resources are very important factors in LCT along with teachers' knowledge, skills and expertise and these all factors are interconnected and have a huge impact on learners. However, working with such limited resources is a challenging and exasperating situation rather than enjoying the teaching and learning. In such a situation, the community quality education standards do

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not match with the evidence of actual practices. This huge gap between ground realities and the claims of the provision of quality education to community school children puts a big question mark to the policy makers and all stakeholders. In addition to lack of resources, another problem in community schools was found to be misuse of the classroom resources. The sharing of school building with religious education centre, operating in the evening shift, etc. were found to be the main causes of resource dependency and misuse.

Views of teachers reveals that there are numerous barriers to LCT. These barriers are: lack of time on tasks, smaller rooms with fixed furniture, fully packed classes with students, less access to computer lab and misuse of classroom resources, less experienced and new teachers, and a lack of support from school administrators to take action, etc. In such a complex situation, only a few teachers who are highly skillful and have expertise can handle LCT in their classes but majority of teachers blame poor resources and insufficient support as challenges. This type of situation gives teachers the opportunity and excuse to switch to a teacher-centered teaching mode. In the end, students have to suffer terribly and not be able to get the education that school participants call for in their vision.

Respondents of the present study reported that they confront dilemmas, difficulties and challenges while practicing LCT in their classrooms. Most of the challenges teachers face are related to the formation of a school and classroom organization. The participants mentioned the following elements as obstacles to implement LCT successfully : physical condition of classrooms; large class size; social loafing; lack of resources; time constraint, more teachers' time and effort; dilemma of assessment; technological constraints; the present emphasis on accountability and achievement; standardised tests; lack of training; principals' concerns with students' control; the anonymity of students in constructivist teaching methods; and a lack of parental interest and involvement in student learning. Accordingly, they further mentioned that social loafing, coverage-orientated curriculum, lack of training, time restraint, and principals' concerns with classroom control were also some other obstacles.

Discussion and recommendation

There is a need to shift classrooms in social studies from TCT to LCT and educators in social studies need to be informed with how to change the conventional teacher approach to teaching. For this end, we need to consider how LCT is viewed by students. Once we come to learn more about the views of teachers on LCT, we would be in a stronger place to deal with the problems of teaching social studies efficiently and effectively. The present research tried to resolve this need by exploring the views of teachers of social studies on LCT and theories of learning. This is why this research is important in terms of its potential for adding to the literature gap. As stated by *Cuban (1991)*, the approaches to teaching the subject by social studies teachers were influenced by behaviorist theory of learning and associated instructional practices. Nevertheless, the participants in this study regarded LCT very favorably and believed in the school settings for its educational benefit. This fascinating study finding seems to contradict previous analysis findings. Because this study used a small sample, it may be the case that the optimistic views of the LCT participants and their propensity to follow theory are only an exception to the views and instructional activities of most teachers in social studies. However, the participants of this study quite positively viewed LCT and believed in its educational value in school settings.

This interesting finding of the study seems to be inconsistent with previous research results. Since this study used a small sample, it may be the case that the participants' positive views of LCT and their tendency to implement constructionist theory are just an exception to the views and instructional practices of most social studies teachers. Perhaps the recruitment of the participants, who were all more educated than the average teacher of social studies, was the reason for their tendency towards LCT. It is because social studies teachers have begun to rejuvenate their methods of teaching. Regardless of the effects of educational discourses in recent years on the validity of the constructivist model of teaching,

the classroom habits of teachers may have changed over the last decade and a half. That is, the teaching of today's social studies that vary from the teaching of the past in many ways, including the values of teachers and the teaching practices. Furthermore, instructor conceptions of teaching are more fluid than static. On the basis of their interactions in a variety of contexts, teachers constantly alter, adjust, redefine or add to their teaching conceptions. Of this purpose further research will be conducted to shed light on the issue of whether or not the educational values and behaviors of teachers of social studies have changed.

The teachers in the study had trouble in articulating their teaching practices in terms of theoretical structures or in putting into words how learning theories apply to their teaching practices, as is the case with other teachers and educators who have identified lacking adequate analytical discourse or vocabulary to explain their teaching and learning perceptions *(Kagan 1992; Entwistle et al. 2000).* One reason teachers struggle to accurately explain their concepts is that much of their understanding of various teaching and learning elements is implicit or tacit, and stems from experience rather than from analytical structures *(Fang 1996; Entwistle et al. 2000).* To draw attention to this question, *Kagan (1992)* noted that 'a lot of what teachers know or believe about their skills is tacit: for instance, teachers are sometimes unaware of their own beliefs, they don't always have vocabulary to explain and mark their beliefs' *(77)*. One of the reasons for teachers' failure to adequately describe their conceptions is the fact that much of their knowledge about different components of teaching and learning is implicit or tacit and derives from experience rather than from conceptual frameworks *(Fang 1996; Entwistle et al. 2000)*. To draw attention to this issue, *Kagan (1992)* noted, 'much of what teachers know or believe about their craft is tacit: For example, teachers are often unaware of their own beliefs, they do not always possess language with which to describe and label their beliefs.

Another explanation closely linked to the former is that teachers are not given ample opportunity to evaluate or comment on their deeply held convictions and perceptions about teaching and learning. Preservice applicants, as shown by a vast number of observational studies, have well-established personal values and preconceptions regarding what it takes to teach and learn before joining teacher education programs *(Feiman-Nemser et al. 1988; Weinstein 1989; Kagan 1992; Korthagen 1993; Taylor 2003).* Such preconceptions are created by thousands of hours of teacher observation, good and poor, over the intervening 15 years or so *(Clark 1988:7).* While some of these preconceptions may have pedagogical value, others may be irrelevant, misconceived, and unproductive. When student teachers will not analyze and assess such personal preconceptions, they will most likely remain unchanged for years to come *(Posner et al. 1982; Kagan 1992; Richardson 1996).* In reality, student teachers 'tend to leave their university programs with the same views they brought to them... rather than altering their initial prejudices' because in part many of them are not encouraged to analyze or test their preconceptions and views *(Kagan 1992:76).*

When teachers want to become conscious of their misconceived, incomplete, scattered, and pedagogically unproductive preconceptions and beliefs, teacher educators will provide them with plenty of opportunities to explore, assess, and challenge their deep-seated, firmly held personal beliefs and pre-conceptions. Teacher educators may also help pre-service teachers make their tacit assumptions clear and open to critique and reflection by questioning and challenging certain beliefs. In this end, teachers who are pre-service will be required to maintain a record of reflection (journal keeping). Throughout the context of approaches, they may be asked to analyze and reflect on important aspects of teaching and learning throughout relation to their epistemic (views of knowledge), normative (views of positions, duties and relationships), and procedural beliefs (tactices and techniques used in teaching), all of which are considered to play an important role in the creation of a teaching perspective *(Pratt 1998).*

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In order to become conscious of their assumptions and implicit beliefs, in-service teachers may also use reflecting writing or journal keeping to document what they felt and did while preparing, implementing, and reviewing their teaching. The results of the study also bring the connection between the essence of the subject matter and the form of instruction to attention. Although the analysis of the teacher conceptions of teaching by previous studies recorded the constraints and dilemmas before the constructivist approach to teaching, the challenge of teaching social studies through constructivist instruction has never before been stated. The participants of this study pointed out that it is difficult to practice the constructivist approach to teaching in classrooms of social studies due to the difficulty involved in connecting students to the events in the past. Throughout the report, teachers find it very difficult from the constructivist viewpoint to help students see the impacts of past events on their lives. Teachers in their classrooms can solve this issue by using historical empathy. Defined as 'the ability to see and assess the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mindset, contexts, views, principles, motives, and behavior of historical agents using a variety of historical facts' *(Yilmaz 2007: 331)*, historical empathy has great potential to help students come to see the connection between the past and the present. Exercising historical empathy allows students to look into the complexities of the histories, personalities, attitudes, ideals, motives and actions of individuals. Engaging with the past in this way lets students see historical significance to their lives. Community history research and the use of oral and family history programs in schools can also help solve this issue.

Whether it is difficult for the other strands of social studies to practice a constructivist approach should be further investigated through follow-up studies. Since social studies are a composite topic of the school, the views of teachers on constructivist teaching may also be elicited in relation to history, civics, geography, political science etc. In order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between teachers' views of LCT and social studies, I would also suggest exploring the link between teachers ' perceptions of social studies as a school topic and their views of LCT. It appears that LCT is used for different purposes among specific categories of rural, conservative, community and student population. This research has found that the culture and student groups have an effect on instructional perceptions of teachers. For example, while one teacher employs LCT because it fits very well for his students who are used to experiencing things in their rural areas, the other teacher uses the same teaching model as it allows her to apply different world views to students who live in the rural conservative community and who usually have one mentality. Therefore, this study indicates that research studies should be planned to explore more closely the relationship between LCT perception of teachers and the form of culture in which schools are embedded.

Finally, there is a need to address the viewpoints of teachers and educational experts on the LCT. Practically all educational authors are LCT supporters. They urge teachers to keep in touch with the up-to-date theories of teaching learning. Yet the teachers do not always agree with their beliefs as professionals. Teachers emphasize the importance of keeping in touch with the realities of the classroom, and recommend that academics pay attention to their circumstances. Needless to say, in the hands of teachers the ideas and hypotheses developed by educational academics or theorists are translated into reality in the classroom. A new research may analyze comparatively the LCT views of these two distinct groups to account for similarities and differences in their viewpoints, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice in education.

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