



Parent-Teachers and Communities Perspective on Scheduled Tribe Students A study on Secondary Schools in Odisha

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Abstract

This article aimed to study the views and understanding of tribal parents, teachers and local communities concerning the education of tribal children in different regions of the Koraput district. The chapter aims to evaluate the extent of parental involvement in secondary school of tribal students. This chapter focuses on how teachers' attitudes and how it impacts their interactions with children both in the classroom and beyond, as well as teachers' participation in various school activities. Interviews were conducted with participants, focusing on their current perceptions, awareness, and challenges faced by tribal parents, teachers and communities concerning tribal education for their children.

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Introduction

It is a well known fact that parents are the backbone of the education system for their children. Numerous factors contribute to the increasing involvement of families and communities in educational institutions. The engagement of parents significantly boosts students' emotional health (Epstein, 2005). It can enhance school programmes and settings; provide resources and assistance for families; foster social abilities and leadership traits; connect families with others in the educational sphere; and support teachers in their responsibilities (Epstein, 1995). A parent's mindset is intricately associated with children's desire to learn, concentration, perseverance in tasks, language skills, and diminished behavioral problems. Participation of families in education has been acknowledged as an essential component in the learning process of young children (National Research Council, 2001). Increased levels of parental participation in their children's educational journeys at home, including oversight and discussions about school matters, have been correlated with improved academic performance (Epstein, 1991 & Keith, 1998). Additional studies have shown that parental beliefs and expectations about their children's learning are closely linked to children's self-assessments of their abilities and their academic outcomes (Galper, Wigfield, & Seefeldt, 1997). society, schools are supposed to uphold and promote common values, collaboration, compassion, social awareness and social sensitivity. But how well does the residential education system implement these ideas in its teaching- learning process?. Teachers' attitudes also influence the overall atmosphere of the school. In accordance with Karakus (2017), "School Environment" is defined as the "overall atmosphere and experiences within a school". The school environment also encompasses the sense of safety and inclusion felt by students within the school premises. In this study, some of the teachers also viewed how children interact with other teachers who speak their language, illustrating how the inclusion of the children's language fosters a collaborative atmosphere where both students and teachers engage as co-participants in shared activities. A genuine sense of collaboration can only be fostered if both students and teachers, as members of a learning community, can establish a shared goal, engage in activities they find meaningful, and communicate effectively (Matusov, 2000). To engage the community in the educational process, youth tribal educators and community-based tribal teachers can serve as catalysts for transformation. Simultaneously, the local tribal community should be given power and treated as partners so they feel a genuine sense of ownership over the initiative. Constantly exploring new and comprehensive methods of involving communities and/or encouraging community participation is crucial, with the evolving needs of the community in mind.

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers that exist in secondary schools which affect active participation of parents, teachers and the local community to access educational opportunities for tribal children?
2. What kind of steps need to be taken to strengthen the teaching-learning process and communicate with various stakeholders?

Objectives

1. To examine the views of scheduled tribe parents regarding the educational challenges faced by tribal students.
2. To understand the Teacher perspective on tribal students and parents.
3. To study the participation of community and civil society in educational attainment of tribal students at the secondary level.

Review of Literature

One of the major challenges in school education is economic hardship. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2018) states that a significant number of tribal families exist below the poverty line, which hinders their ability to pay for educational costs like school fees, uniforms, and books. Ramachandran (2017) ^[10] study's findings indicated that there is prevalent poverty, illiteracy, and underdevelopment among the tribal communities, accompanied by inadequate infrastructure and unmotivated teachers which leads to low educational performance of tribal students. Wani and Islam (2018) ^[14] research study analysis reveals that families customary livelihood involves raising goats, sheep, and oxen, leading them to involve their children in this work and stay away from school education. Mahapatra (2010) noted in his research that schools should not expect lower-class families to supply their children with linguistic and cultural knowledge and skills that are entirely alien to them. Instead, the education system ought to concentrate on assisting children in closing the gap between their own abilities and the skills that society requires within the educational framework. Bhagi and Nandi (2009) ^[2] carried out an investigation into the education sector for tribal children by consulting with government officials, non-governmental organizations, and education specialists. The research highlights several internal factors such as the language of instruction, teacher attitudes and absenteeism, curriculum content and teaching methods and the limited involvement of the community in educational programmes. Varghese and Nagaraj's (2013) study sought to determine the reasons behind the English language deficiencies of indigenous children. The study was carried out in one of the tribal areas of Kerala's Palakkad District with the lowest levels of schooling. One of the biggest barriers to Schedule Tribe students' education is their poor command of the English language. School milieus in the tribal areas consist of triadic actors, namely tribal and non-tribal students, and teachers. Xaxa (2021) ^[15] has stated that the social interactions between actors are likely to be inequitable, characterized by distrust, blame, shame and stigma. Inequitable interactions influence tribal students to identify themselves with others who belong to their own social groups. Jose (2016), Joy & Srihari (2014) in their research study analysed that tribal group affiliation acts as a source of discrimination for tribal students at schools. Non-tribal students do not include tribal students as equal peers.

Venkateswar and Naveen (2023) in their research on tribal education in Andhra Pradesh found that most of the respondents feel secondary education is essential for girls and it is important to set up tribal residential schools in every panchayat, located as close as possible to the tribal communities, to encourage these tribes to send their daughters, particularly to the hostel. Das & Halder (2018) ^[4] research findings indicated that the family environment plays a crucial positive role in the educational progress of scheduled tribe women in West Bengal. The study identified several reasons for dropout, including difficulty in accessing quality educational institutions, lack of awareness etc., Puhon (2013) ^[8] has investigated the actual condition of tribal women education and different obstacles on the path of women education. The findings of the study disclosed that the family's positive perception towards education is found mostly among high class families, the study also found negative perception of most of the families due to lack of proper school environment, need-based curriculum and women teachers. Jayaswal (2003) ^[5] investigated how parental support affected tribal school children's academic performance. According to the study, parents of high achievers supported their kids' academic achievements noticeably more than parents of students who performed poorly. Vijayalakshmi (2003) ^[13] research results indicated that tribal students faced greater challenges concerning their parents and family, followed by issues related to personal matters, low social standing of their parents, parental illiteracy, and the cultural backwardness of the family.

Materials and Methods

The researcher utilized a qualitative design and has chosen descriptive narratives aimed at investigating educational participation, lived experiences, activities, and events or understanding school processes of tribal parents, teachers and communities within the school system. The researcher has employed purposive sampling to obtain insights from parents, teachers and community regarding the educational performance of tribal students. The researcher has selected four villages and four schools from the selected blocks (Lakhmipur, Burja, Narayanpatna, Balipeta) which have residential schools with a majority of tribal students in IX and X standard. All of the selected schools have a mixed population of school children, which includes open category, OBCs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Research tools like an interview schedule, questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion were used.

Data/Result Analysis

Socio-economic Background of Parents

The study shows the social category of the parents. It shows that 66.67% of the respondents belong to Scheduled Tribes followed by 33.33% are from non-Scheduled Tribes. The mentioned numbers of respondents are taken as per the requirements and the objectives of the study. 50% of the respondents are illiterate, 20% studied upto primary level, 15% literate upto secondary, 8% undergraduate followed by 7% only as graduates (sources field study 2023). While having interaction with the parents, the researcher found that the majority of the mothers are illiterate and never been to school. The study found that wage labor and agriculture are the primary sources of income and sustenance for tribes. While 43.33 % of the tribal respondents work for pay, 30% of them are in agriculture.

Membership in the School Management Committee

According to India's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, a school committee must be established and updated every two years in every government school. The school committee member should have 75% guardians of school students. But the study reveals that it has not been followed in the school in practice, but only on paper. A small percentage of the total number of parents who responded knew about the school committee, indicating that the majority of parents may not even be aware that there is a school management committee. This implies that the fundamental goal of the education programme, to promote democratic participation, is still a dream far from being achieved in this particular school. Only 35% of the 60 parents included in the sample are on the school committee. This illustrates that the majority 65% of tribal parents are not members of this committee (Sources: Field Work 2023).

Parental Participation in School Management Committee

The study shows that among the school committee members, only 41.7% of guardians participate in school committee meetings. This illustrates how the majority of members 58.3% do not actively participate in the school committee. Furthermore, it has been shown that just a small number of people participate actively in the conversations. Participant observation revealed that although they are few in number and contribute little, there are no distinguishing traits among the participating parents. This further demonstrates that this local school council is only operating as a democratic entity on paper, which means that the 2009 Education Act (equal participation of parents) has failed miserably in practice (Sources: Field Work 2023).

Parent Teacher Meeting

Parent-teacher conferences in the schools being examined were infrequent, and many tribal parents characterized them as a mere formality and an occasion for teachers to deliver lengthy speeches. Neither the students nor the parents felt that the teachers showed much understanding or compassion in their interactions. A number of parents who were worried about their children's education mentioned that they had ceased attending these meetings due to the teachers' abusive behavior or their tendency to overlook them. A prominent tribal figure from Balipeta village elaborated, "The tribal people are uneducated and backward, and including them in the parent-teacher meeting would be pointless". There is no organized group to encourage or motivate them to take part in school activities. Our involvement is driven solely by our interest as parents. The study further elaborates on the creation of school funds, the management of school fund accounts, the preparation of the school budget, and the involvement of community/parent members in utilizing these funds for various aspects of school development. The field research indicated that none of the parent members in the PTAs are informed about the financial use of school funds.

Parents View on Boy/Girls Education

The study shows that predictable gender differences were found when parents' opinions on the advantages of schooling for male and female offspring were analysed. 70% of the respondents opined that male education is necessary and primarily significant for job, according to the majority of parents, it primarily provides superior knowledge. Given that education for male children offers career prospects and

knowledge that can better shield them from being exploited by money lenders, in particular, both inside and outside the community. While it comes to the scenario of girls education, only 33.33% of parents thought that education for girls or daughters was excellent for opening up certain career opportunities. The research shows more than 66% of parents claimed they were not even interested in their daughters' education. The majority of respondents were against girls' education, partly because they worried about their daughter's safety from sexual harassment if she attended a school farther from the house (Odisha Diary, 2013). One additional factor cited is also the perception that higher education forces the parents to pay higher dowries for their daughter. The general consensus was that their daughters will be occupied with domestic duties after marriage, thus they are not interested in girls' education (Purohit & Patel, 2022) ^[9]. Similar conclusions have been observed by Breen & Goldthorpe (1997), who noted that parents willing to enroll their daughters in co-educational schools were typically literate, particularly the mothers. The study also found that mothers who have attained education at least up to the primary or elementary level possess the knowledge and understanding of the significance of educating girls. Parents stated that unsafe travel conditions, insufficient security measures, and a lack of female teachers contribute to feelings of insecurity among female students in the school setting. Bourdieu (2018) ^[3] also emphasized on cultural capital and family background of parents in educational achievement of children. The study also reveals that parents overwhelmingly agree that the surrounding environment greatly impacts the educational development of tribal girls. Similar conclusions were drawn by Basu (2015), who noted that the family environment significantly affects the educational progress of tribal children.

Teachers View on Tribal Students

To be sure, teachers are not immune to their own biases and preconceptions which they share with the students through various interactions. The study revealed that the classroom fails to transform into a space for collaboration, as the contributions of multiple individuals neither enhance nor oppose one another at any moment. The environment does not evolve into a "social learning" space in any significant manner. When considering the incorporation of a child's cultural background, the interviews revealed that this inclusion tended to manifest more as content rather than as a pedagogy tool that fosters collaborative practices. Cultural activities and experiences present immense opportunities to enhance academic dialogue, as effectively illustrated in a study by Panda (2007). The students viewed that classroom interaction is more teacher-centered, i.e., the personal belief of the teacher has a significant impact on the students. This results in an interaction pattern that is based on the 'individual personality' rather than the pedagogy of the teacher. In this way, the hidden curriculum perpetuates social inequalities and the dominant values system of the time. The study found that most of the teachers have bias and social prejudices against tribal students. They often view tribal students as socially inferior and incompetent and the tribal students are used by teachers for their personal work. According to Subrahmanian (2005) in almost all state-run schools, teachers display severe forms of stereotyping tendency towards the learning potential of tribal students or disadvantaged students. This low expectation is indirectly

expressed through words, gestures and symbolic recognition. Such low expectations and differential treatment have significant consequences on the students' personal and academic performance (Sources: Field work 2023). Surprisingly, 80% of the teachers were pessimistic about the future of tribal students at a time when they should be encouraging and supporting them in their learning. About 80 % of the teachers said that the ideal qualities for a student are to be humble and obedient rather than to have a curious mind. Worse, the school encouraged tribal students to greet their teachers with folded hands, as if they were "God to be worshiped and served but never asked questions". The interviews with the tribal students revealed that some teachers stay after school hours to provide paid help to students through private tuition. This indicates that tribal students have low expectations of success and are expected to be second-class members of mainstream society. A science teacher in Narayanpatna school has opined that even outside their classroom and school, some of the tribal students were hesitant to speak their native language; which they think will separate them from their non-tribal peers and others. Such tribal students set bad examples to their own community. Some teachers mentioned that tribal children can be quick learners and are capable of mastering any subject. But overall, most teachers seem to have a negative outlook, while a few feel they don't hold any biases against tribal children. Past studies by Mishra (2015) ^[6] found similar issues and suggested that we need programs to help teachers improve in this area. The study showed that because teachers often have a dismissive attitude towards tribal kids, they hardly ever use audio-visual tools or creative teaching methods in their classes, similar result found by study of Pati & Hamari (2022). When asked about how their attitudes and behavior affect students, teachers said they try to create a space for students to express themselves, innovate, and connect culturally. But the study showed the opposite of that, students viewed they are not given enough freedom and space in the schools. Many times teachers behave harshly and ignore their concerns.

Community and Stakeholders Participation in Education

The SRUJAN programme is a village awareness-raising programme of the government of Odisha. SRUJAN aims to promote school-community interaction by organizing storytelling festivals, art and crafts exhibitions, dance and music festivals in the school. The aim of the programme is to reduce dropout rate and ensure regular attendance of the already enrolled children. In the study, the community participation was composed of Gram panchayats, School Management Development Committee and Alumni members who contributed to the development of their respective schools. Community involvement in the schools was through informal events, like storytelling festivals that took place as part of Srujan events. The study also shows that the respective Gram Panchayats and Alumni of the sample schools are provided long-term financial support for the infrastructure development such as labs with modern equipment, smart classrooms and e-modules to make the learning environment more attractive. Gram panchayats facilitate communication between the government, schools, and the community, thereby promoting children's right to education. They strive to improve health care, Anganwadis, and schools for children

of tribal communities. Around 80% of teachers said that the parents are cooperative. They said that they are cooperative in the sense that most of them don't interfere with school matters and student performance due to lack of ignorance or time. Around 60% of teachers said that the members of the SMC are cooperative. Around 40% said that they are not cooperative and interfere unnecessarily in the school's activities. They gave a mixed response on the role of the PTA and MTAs. Local civil society organizations South Odisha Voluntary Action (SOVA) has created various types of books such as word books, sentences books, story books and picture books written in 3 tribal languages (Kandha, Paraja & Gadaba) and presented them in conjunction with the current school language Odia with the help of community members and teachers, tribal people and PRIs. Another civil society organization Sikshasandhan has created needs based cultural curricula, primers, and village libraries for tribal children. Barriers to SMC functioning include cultural barriers, corruption, political pressure, and lack of communication. They do not have a training programme on PTA and are not aware of financial grants. Local elitism and lack of interest from political leaders and bureaucrats sluggish the school development programmes.

Discussion

It is recommended that successive governments take action to raise educational awareness in tribal areas. They should develop various initiatives aimed at encouraging tribal parents to enroll their children in school. The study concludes that in addition to structural reforms, there is a need for specific long-term local strategies aimed at enhancing the capacity of community members to encourage active participation in the School Management and Development Committee (SMDC). The study also found that there is no ownership of the programme at school/community level through the SMCs/Gram Sabhas as is meant to be the case, in order to guarantee accountability and quality. The scheme is prone to delays and mismanagement at various levels, and there is no proper monitoring at regular intervals by independent bodies. The governance has adopted a programmatic approach, with no ownership and assertive capacities from communities or local bodies. More community based programmes like SRUJAN should be developed to facilitate the participation of community members in the education of tribal students. Participation in civil society organizations should be encouraged to a greater extent.

Conclusion

In the current study, it has been observed that parental engagement in these tribal regions is not as optimal as anticipated, highlighting the need for significant efforts to improve various factors for academic success. Emphasis should be placed on fostering collaboration between parents and schools to help parents gain a deeper understanding of their role in their children's education. After examining these points, it can be concluded that literate tribal parents exhibit a more positive attitude and perception towards their children's education compared to illiterate tribal parents. Likewise, tribal parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to have a more favorable attitude than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The discussions

with teachers indicated that while the incorporation of language is consistently regarded as beneficial for the teaching-learning process within the classroom, its application is still limited to a traditional transmission model of education. Teachers were often found to struggle with viewing themselves as active partners who could utilize the home language of the children not merely to convey textbook information, but rather to foster a mutually enriching conversation with the students. Although teachers found it relatively easy to connect with tribal children and comprehend their challenges, this understanding seldom evolved into a truly interactive academic dialogue. Consequently, the aspiration for a collaborative classroom where both teachers and students engage in joint learning remains a commitment that has only been partially fulfilled. Community involvement is falling short of the standards set by educational policies and programmes designed to engage the community in the educational advancement of tribal students.

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