Literacy Skills of Tribal Students of Wayanad: Influence of Home Environment

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Abstract: Academic results reflect the socio-economic-psychological background of learners. The present study is based on the research done among the tribal high school learners of Wayanad regarding their English language skills. Language skill assessment and collection of personal profile including socio-economic status (SES) were conducted among 200 select students equally from Paniya, Kurichiya, Kuruma, Kattumaicka and Adiya tribes, attending class IX in Wayanad schools. Previous studies had already established that SES affects student’s outcomes. The present study underlines the theory using quantitative and qualitative methods. After analyzing the reading and writing scores, the influence of SES is established using SPSS Pearson Correlation method.

Key words: Home environment, Literacy skills, Socio-economic status, Tribal ELT, Wayanad.

1. Introduction

Skill in reading and writing is the cornerstone of academic success, as academic development of the child is considered to be the primary goal of education. People get empowered through education, thereby improving their ability to communicate, argue, and make rational choices in life. Hence, education sans literacy skills ought not to exist. Quite often, the class room teaching process effects learning in an unequal manner. Along with method, materials and the men (also women), the socio-economic status (SES) of the learner also plays a vital role in the academic achievement of students. Innumerable studies have proven that academic results reflect the socio-economic-psychological background of learners. The present study is based on the research done among the tribal high school learners of Wayanad regarding their English language skills.

1.1. Tribal life in Wayanad

Wayanad is the most backward district in Kerala with the largest tribal population. This is the least populated district of the state, and its population constitutes 2.47 per cent of Kerala’s total population and covers 5.5 per cent of land. Tribe communities form the poorest section of the population of the district and they fall behind the rest of the population of Kerala in terms of literacy, income and health. (Wayanad Initiative, 2006).

According to the survey conducted by KILA, “there are about one lakh tribal families, among them mere 27,416 families have land,…49 per cent don’t have toilets and more than 39850 families don’t possess a kitchen … 98,536 tribal people of Kerala are still illiterates and the number of people who received the formal education is 2.48 lakhs only. The dropout rate among the tribal students is also high in the state, 15393 students in the primary, 12907 students of secondary and 1453
students from the higher secondary dropped out for several reasons… about 2402 families take meal one time in a day and amongst them half are agricultural laborers and 34,092 families only have two meals a day and the number of family members who are having malnutrition is 13,960…The socio economic position of most of the tribals residing in the scheduled area of the state is miserable, Socially they are at the lowest rank of the society…” (Khan, 2012).

1.2. Literacy skills of students

Education, especially the skills of reading and writing, had been the prerogative of the upper caste elite in India, and only after the arrival of the British, school doors were thrown open to the lower castes. Even after 66 years of independence, still many people of the lower castes, especially the tribes, remain illiterate in our country, and in Wayanad. Most of the tribes are still victims of illiteracy, malnutrition, starvation deaths, ill-health, school dropout and stagnation etc.

Reading provides access to other skills and knowledge, facilitates life-long learning, and opens doors to opportunity (McShane, 2005). Learning to read is a fundamental right of children in a changing world. To achieve at school and succeed in the world at large, children need to know how to read and write (Roskos, et. al., 2009). Insufficient literacy levels might lead to dropping out in schools, problems in attaining and retaining jobs, and consequently economic disadvantages and emotional stress.

The deplorable situation of the tribal population in Wayanad, leading a life far behind the mainstream, makes us to rethink and revisit the pattern of learning in the schools generally, and English literacy skills in particular. Failure of the tribals in academic achievement can be due to various reasons. One among the most important reasons is failure in acquiring learning skills, especially language skills like reading and writing.

2. Review of Literature

The SES of a child is most commonly determined by combining parents’ educational level, occupational status and income level. Studies have repeatedly found that SES affects student’s outcomes. (Baharudin and Luster, 1998, Jeynes, 2002, Eamon, 2005, Majoribanks, 1996, Horchschild. 2003). Families with high socio economic status often have more success in preparing their young children for school because they have access to a wide range of resources to promote and support young children’s development. They are able to provide their young children with high quality care, amenities and facilities.

Students who have a low SES earn low test scores and drop out of school (Eamon, 2005; Horchschild. 2003). The low SES affects academic achievement as it prevents access to important resources and creates stress at home. (Eamon2005. Majoribanks. 1996, Jeynes. 2002). Low SES leads to family problems and disrupted home environment and as a result the academic performance of the child. Families with low socioeconomic status often lack the financial, social, and educational supports that characterize families with high socioeconomic status (Chandra and Shaikh. 2013).

Chopra’s (1969) study revealed that there is positive relationship between socio-economic background and achievement in English, mathematics and science. Goswami (1982) found that in both urban and rural areas, the upper socio-economic status group has done significantly better than the lower socio-economic group in the achievement tests. Chandra and Shaik (2013) have established that within the same school, a student who comes from a higher socio-economic group will achieve better test results than a student from a lower socio-economic group.

Asoora (2014) classifies the reasons of educational backwardness of tribal students into three: external, internal, socio-economic and psychological factors The external constraints are related to problems and difficulties at levels of policy, planning, implementation, and administration. Internal constraints refer to problems associated with the school system, content, curriculum, medium of instruction, pedagogy, academic supervision, monitoring, and teacher-related problems. The third set of problems relates to social, economic, and cultural background of tribes and psychological problems of
3. Methodology

English language skill assessment, collection of socio-economic profile, personal interviews, case studies and participant observation were adopted for collecting primary resources for the study. Forty students each from five major tribes were selected from eight schools in different parts of Wayanad district. These two hundred tribal high school students of class IX were administered with the English language assessment in their class rooms, to check their proficiency in reading and writing.

Results of language assessment conducted for 200 students from the five major tribes of Wayanad- Paniya, Kurichiya, Kuruma, Kattunaicka and Adiya are analysed. The analyses of their reading and writing skills are made using the SPSS Anova and influence of socio-economic status is done through Pearson correlation analysis.

4. Test Results and Discussions

Four factors of reading- identification, substitution, logical inference and re-creation are assessed. Table and graph present a total picture of their performance in reading skills.

### 4.1 Analysis of reading skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paniya (5x40)</th>
<th>Kurichiya (5x40)</th>
<th>Kuruma (5x40)</th>
<th>Kattunaicka (5x40)</th>
<th>Adiya (5x40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Creation</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribe Total</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20.17%)</td>
<td>(23.5%)</td>
<td>(29.83%)</td>
<td>(21.17%)</td>
<td>(19.83%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The graph shows that all tribal students are generally weak in reading skills. The highest tribe-wise total score is for Kuruma tribe- 29.83%. The lowest score in reading is for Adiya group with 19.83% and Paniya with 20.17%. No tribe has scored above 30% for reading skills. Identification is the skill in which tribes are most backward. Most tribes appear best in substitution and inference skills.

### 4.2 Analysis of writing skills

Four factors of writing- spelling, vocabulary, grammar and syntax are assessed. Table and graph present a total picture of their performance in reading skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Skills - Total Score of 40 Students</th>
<th>Paniya (5x40)</th>
<th>Kurichiya (5x40)</th>
<th>Kuruma (5x40)</th>
<th>Kattunaicka (5x40)</th>
<th>Adiya (5x40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.75</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(10.38%) (13.5%) (20%) (18%) (10.63%)
The highest percentage is only 20% and the lowest is 10.38%. It is very clear that all tribal groups are very weak in writing skills. The marks shown above are out of 200 (5 marks each for all four skills, for forty students of one tribe group). Kuruma group seems leading in all skills with 20% score in total. Kattunaicka appears to be the second best in writing skills with 18%. Kurichiya keep the middle position with 13.5% while Paniya (10.38%) and Adiya (10.63%) are at the lowest position. Of the four skills, syntax seems to be the weakest skill for all the five tribes.

4.3 Analysis of literacy skills using ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>score</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>97.758</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24.439</td>
<td>2.319</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2055.431</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>10.541</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2153.189</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total scores of all five tribes were tested. The significant value is .058. Hence null hypothesis is rejected. Inference is that there is significant difference between total score of different tribal groups. That is to say, some tribes have done much better and some have done very badly. Hence we need to analyze the reasons behind the low scores and high scores of various tribal groups.
4.4 Testing of SES using Pearson Correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Skill Score</th>
<th>SES Score-1</th>
<th>SES Score-2</th>
<th>Psycho Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.876</td>
<td>-.460</td>
<td>.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>.544</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation coefficient ranges between -1 and +1. As it approaches -1 it indicates high negative correlation, mean variables are in opposite direction. When it approaches +1 the relationship between variables indicates high positive correlation, and in the same direction.

It is clear from the above analysis that the score of literacy skills are directly proportionate to the SES score of all tribes. SES-1 considers elements such as parent’s education, family’s land holding status, house ownership status, electricity, TV, phone, newspaper, gas, vehicle etc. SES-2 includes the negative factors such as alcoholism, smoking, tobacco chewing, gambling, drugs etc. Psychological factors consider encouragement for study, aim in life, joy to learn, opportunity to travel, awareness about society, respect by others, respect by teachers, recognition by friends, respect for other communities, attitude towards hard work, saving for future, happiness in the family etc.

SES-1 shows high correlation to their literacy achievement (.876). It means learning of tribal students are strongly influenced and affected by the family’s SES. Those with a higher SES did better in the test, while those with a poor SES did badly. SES-2 shows the negative effects of social habits like alcoholism, smoking, tobacco, gambling etc. These are negative variables; hence the coefficient is -460. The psychological variables get a coefficient of .367, again, to show the positive correlation of students’ psychological background influencing their learning achievement.

5. Conclusion

The current research clearly proves that the low SES of tribal learners affects their learning process. Those with land, houses, educated parents and other facilities at home do better in language acquisition. Social habits like consumption of alcohol, smoking, tobacco chewing and gambling make a negative impact in academic achievement of tribal students. Positive psychological well-being is a boosting factor in achievement levels. Bearing all these aspects, we need to analyze the lacunae which impair the academic growth and development of the tribal learners of Wayanad. Policy makers and education activists should be aware of these constraints so as to effectively design a new curriculum for tribal ELT.

Today is an age of educational parentocracy. But the tribal are just the opposite. Home-based environment factors negatively influence their studies, and as a result, and they lag behind in languages, and academics in general. In the context of Wayanad, where parents are least educated, the government agencies and educational activists have a lead role to play. They need to understand what benefits and what hinders the learning process of the tribal students. At least to a limit, teachers can create an academically favorable environment. Only a teacher, who becomes acquainted with the problems of the learner, can become a successful teacher. Teacher becomes more than a teacher in taking up her/his profession as a call to touch student’s life in its integrity.
References


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