



Educational Experiences of Tribal Students at Secondary School in Koraput District, Odisha

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Abstract

The current article examines the viewpoints of students regarding secondary school education, covering aspects such as their enrollment status, the physical resources available in schools, academic performance, organization of extracurricular activities, student engagement in the classroom, and interactions with teachers and administrative staff. The article explains the classroom experiences of students and their participation in the classroom transaction and addresses the challenges linked to the learning experience. It also proposes potential solutions to tackle the difficulties and obstacles that students face in their daily school lives.

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Keywords: Scheduled Tribe, Multilingual Education, Residential school, Remedial class, Dropout

Introduction

A positive student experience in school is vital as it greatly influences a student's educational success, emotional health, and personal growth, helping them feel more involved, encouraged, and driven to learn, which in turn fosters improved academic performance and general contentment; it also creates chances for students to cultivate essential life skills such as leadership, emotional awareness, and social skills through their experiences in the school setting. A constructive experience cultivates a feeling of inclusion, motivating students to engage actively in class and ask for assistance when necessary, which results in improved comprehension and memory of the material.

Research Questions

1. What are the socio-cultural barriers that exist in secondary schools which affect access to educational opportunities for tribal children?
2. What kind of linguistic problems confront the tribal students in the teaching-learning process and communicating with stakeholders?

Objectives

1. To examine the educational experiences of scheduled tribe students in sample schools.
2. To understand the socio-cultural and linguistic challenges faced by tribal students in secondary schools in Koraput district.
3. To study the participation of students in teaching-learning processes at the secondary level.

Review of Literature

Studies have been conducted on different facets of tribal education across the country. Key focus areas in tribal education include: Tribal identity, language, socio-economic and psychological barriers, curriculum and teaching methods, infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, parental perspectives, education for tribal girls, policies and programmes, enrollment rates, dropout issues and

participation, school facilities, and challenges related to schools, among others. Sucharita (2023) ^[11], for instance, analyses the existing formal education regulations to argue that there are no specific legal measures to educate indigenous children in a manner that fulfills their sociocultural needs. They are often grouped together with other disadvantaged populations and regarded as merely beneficiaries of various government aids and initiatives. Panda (2012) ^[8] conducted a study to understand the reasons from the schools as well as the Scheduled Tribe children regarding participation in schooling and the learning activities especially of those students who attend residential schools. These children's involvement in schooling and learning activities remains unsatisfactory despite all the resources and incentives offered in the specifically constructed residential schools. Padhi (2014) ^[7], in a study on tribal educational status in Odisha, found that there is a lack of implementation of educational schemes and initiatives in school education. Pradhan (2011) ^[9] describes that despite special initiatives like Ashram schools, introducing vernacular language at the primary level, and teaching in local dialects, the tribals are still lagging behind the non-tribals. Ghosh's paper (2007) ^[3] provides in-depth literature on tribal education in Jharkhand and West Bengal. He discusses the causes of low literacy among the tribals of "Ho" and "Mahali" in Jharkhand and "Lodha" in West Bengal. He observes that the female enrollment ratio is much lower among these tribals than that of their males. Dar (2017) ^[2] emphasized the difficulties encountered by Gujjar, a tribal group in Jammu and Kashmir, in obtaining educational resources. Many fundamental amenities offered in public schools do not benefit economically disadvantaged students. Mahapatra (2010) ^[4] 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. Sofi (2014) ^[10] conducted a study aiming to undertake an empirical sociological investigation of the current state of education within the Bakarwal tribes. The study indicates that the literacy rate for the Bakarwals is significantly lower than that of other societal groups. Various factors encompass low population densities that lead to extended distances to schools; poor infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, low teacher motivation etc. Bhat and Khan (2021) ^[1] investigated the school advancement, enrollment, inequality, and dropout trends of tribal children attending school in Jammu and Kashmir over time. Maharana & Behera (2018) carried out a study on the condition and issues of tribal education in Odisha. The study found that the dropout rate is high across the districts in the state due to inadequate facilities available in the school.

Materials and Methods

The researcher utilized a qualitative design and has chosen descriptive narratives aimed at investigating educational processes, lived experiences, activities, and events or understanding the broad culture-sharing behaviors of tribal children or groups within the school system. The researcher has employed purposive sampling to obtain insights from students regarding the school environment and culture. 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 Analysis/Result

Table 1: Total Enrollments of Scheduled Tribes and Non- Scheduled Tribes in Selected Secondary Schools

Years	Total ST & Non-ST Enrollment IX + X	Total ST Enrollment IX + X	% of ST Enrollment IX + X	Total Non-ST Enrollment IX + X	% of Non-ST Enrollment IX + X
2016-2017	429	275	64.10%	154	35.89 %
2017-2018	552	387	70.10 %	165	29.89 %
2018-2019	561	311	55.43 %	250	44.56 %
2021-2022	492	366	74.39 %	126	25.60 %
2022-2023	516	359	69.57%	157	30.42 %

Sources: School Administration, 2022

The table shows that the enrollment percentage of Scheduled Tribes students is higher in all the years compared to the enrollment percentage of non-Scheduled Tribes students across all the schools studied. The ST enrollment percentage in 2021-2022 was the highest at 74.39%, whereas the ST enrollment percentage in 2017-18 increased significantly from 64.10 % in 2016-17 to 68.47% in 2017-18. The increase in enrollment in these years can be attributed to several government initiatives such as national scholarship for ST students to study abroad, national fellowship and scholarship for ST students in school education, funding support for Non-Profit Organizations aiding ST welfare, enhancing education for ST girls in areas with low literacy rates, support for the development of Especially Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), remedial classes and coaching initiatives for ST aspirants etc. (Narayan, 2018) ^[6]. Rupantar is a teacher training initiative designed to help educators adopt a non-

judgmental approach, reduce ethnocentrism, and avoid dismissive attitudes during classroom interactions in tribal regions. The study also reveals that while enrollment increased, educational achievement and attainment are low. Over the years, there have been a large number of dropouts for various reasons. In the study, socio-economic factors play a major role in low enrolment, absenteeism and dropout in the study area.

Multilingual Education

The study shows that most of the students in our study sample speak a local dialect called Desia, which is not taught in schools. As a result, there is a multilingual environment in almost all the schools in the district and the students face difficulties because they are learning in a language that most of them don't know. The majority of students (87.5% of boys and 75 % of girls) reported that they speak and understand

the Desia language, which is the main tribal language in the area. The state language Odia, which is the medium of teaching in the sample, is spoken by only a small percentage of students (20% of boys and 25 % of girls).

Infrastructures

The school building of Lakhmipur is well-built with hostel facilities and both male and female children are accommodated in the hostel. The basic amenities such as water and toilets are provided within the premises. There is sufficient space for a playground with a compound wall. Students are provided with food, uniform, and free study material. However, the residential schools in the areas of Burja and Balipeta village do not provide enough furniture, library, comfortable rooms, toilets and sports kits for the students' recreation. The school still does not provide basic amenities of the classroom. Apart from the Lakhmipur school, the other residential schools have some facilities, but they are either in poor or non-functional condition. The poor school infrastructure in the school is primarily due to a combination of factors, including geographical remoteness, lack of basic amenities like roads and electricity, inadequate government funding, and the socio-economic challenges faced by tribal communities, which often prevent them from sending their children to school consistently, leading to a lack of demand for better facilities in these areas; this results in poorly equipped schools with limited access to proper learning environments.

Reasons for Joining Residential/Ashram Schools

The study indicates that the majority of respondents (85%) reported receiving financial benefits, such as free admission, food, accommodation, and scholarships; 75% reported getting educational advantage, 65% viewed the basic infrastructure of residential schools as beneficial in providing educational opportunities. Furthermore, about 38% of students highlighted the availability of subject specific/good teachers in residential schools. The girls appreciate getting toiletries like sanitary napkins and cosmetics. The students have learned things like teamwork, discipline, cleanliness, and time management. They can't get all these benefits at home. When it comes to teaching and education materials, secondary schools are provided with basic needs such as Blackboards, Books, Maps, Charts, Creative Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) and a TLM fund for teachers, but it was found that the fund was hardly used for its intended purpose. In Residential Schools, educational material was not sufficient. There was no proper infrastructure built in place to provide adequate physical space and several classes were held in a single classroom.

Level of Comfort in Sharing Non-Academic Issues with Teacher

The study reveals that the majority of tribal students said that they do not share non-academic issues with their teachers. In addition to academics, students need mentoring on non-academic issues like counseling and guidance on personal matters. According to their statements, the teachers didn't pay attention to their academic issues, let alone their other issues. As a result, they don't build good relationships with the teachers. The study reveals that 76.66% of students did not agree that they felt comfortable talking to teachers in the

languages they knew; 75% of ST students also reported feeling neglected in the classroom by their teachers. When they tried to answer questions, they were ignored and 71% were not even given attention by their teachers in the classroom, let alone cleared up their doubts.

Comfortable Communicating with Officials in the School

According to the study, 50% of the tribal students disagreed with comfortable communication with the officials. They have faced difficulties while dealing with administrative issues in the school. They have been insulted and humiliated for petty issues. Because of this, tribal students tend to avoid or delay administrative work related to school. The study has also shown that there have been instances where tribal students were fined unnecessarily and did not receive help when they needed it. These incidents led to awkwardness in communication with administrative staff, library in-charge etc.

Remedial Coaching for Scheduled Tribe Students

The study shows that the majority of students are not availing the remedial classes and a few are availing them. Students have viewed that they are not availing because classes are not held regularly in their study location and most of the teachers stay away from the school after the school period. Students also have opined that the volunteers are often not available in their locality. Students viewed that extra coaching and remedial classes are very much helpful for them since it allows them to have interaction and discussion comfortably with teachers, which is a friendlier learning environment than school with other non-tribal students.

Technology and Tribal Students

Access to online mobile education became a distant dream for many tribal students in the remote area of Koraput. The assistant block education officer of the school and mass education department of Lakhmipur block revealed that "Only 15% tribal students in the Koraput district can access online classes" offered under the "Suvidha Mission" due to poor mobile networks and lack of smartphones. In many places, due to poor networks, students have to look for places to study every day. Most of these kids do not have any newspaper, map, atlas, periodical, dictionary and books at home to keep them engaged in learning. Educationists have highlighted that the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE) approach has been ignored while designing the module for online learning.

Discussion

Special attention should be given to the weaker students in the class and allow them to take part in various activities in the classroom. Teachers should perform regular tests, review test results, provide career counseling to students in elementary education, and properly evaluate elementary-level students. Otherwise, they will not be able to cope up with the syllabus of high school. Teachers should be free from other school responsibilities and focus more on studies and additional coaching and remedial courses. First-generation learners especially need systematic training and study facilities in all subjects, preferably at least partially in their native language. This will help them to pass into formal

education without failure. Mother tongue creates a warm and safe learning environment where children feel proud of their cultural and language identity. Addressing the embedded deep prejudice and poor thinking among the teachers is essential. Poor thinking reduces the effectiveness of both the teacher and the students. The teacher operates on the self-perception that there are “fewer opportunities” for these students to succeed. Ensure proper implementation of Government schemes and programs. Provide adequate infrastructure such as library facilities, computers, playgrounds, water, electricity, etc., and properly maintain it.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the research investigates the socio-economic circumstances of tribal students in the selected schools. They continue to fall short in their involvement in various activities such as cultural participation, social participation, leadership roles, and community involvement. Nonetheless, the alarming drop-out rates among tribal children are attributed to numerous factors like financial challenges, disinterest in academics, limited access to educational institutions, socio-cultural barriers, domestic responsibilities, inflexible school hours, and others. Many tribal students express dissatisfaction with the educational facilities available to them, including essential amenities, financial support, hostel conditions, school administration, and internet access. Consequently, to foster a socio-economically integrated and healthy society within the state, tribal communities must enhance their socio-cultural and educational standards.

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