



A Case study on the School dropout Scheduled Tribal students of Wayanad District, Kerala

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Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 2nd March 2014, revised 19th May 2014, accepted 29th May 2014

Abstract

Kerala, the southernmost state of India with near total literacy, impressive health indicators, and a vibrant society known to set benchmarks in several avenues of development. The state stands out from the rest of India with 94 percent literacy rate and it has the lowest dropout rate of school students (0.53%) in the country. But Wayanad, a district in the state with a sizeable population of Scheduled Tribes has the highest overall dropout rate in the state. When compared to the total dropout in the district, the tribal dropout was 61.11% in 2007-08 and 5 years later in 2011-12 it rose to 77.23%. This shows the increase of 16.12% of drop out in district's tribal sector alone. The objective of this paper is to unveil the hidden reasons for these increasing school dropouts among the ST students of Wayanad district, with special reference to the Paniya Tribe. Qualitative analysis and case studies were assessed to elicit the reasons for the increase of tribal dropout rate in the district. This study encompasses both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings of this study will be useful in providing adequate solutions to this issue, tribal dropout and and implementation of strong constructivist pedagogy and class-oriented learning approach in the tribal areas.

Keywords: Tribal Dropout, Education awareness, ICT initiatives.

Introduction

Education in the modern society becomes an important instrument in nation building and economic development. The planning commission report on India Vision 2020 observes that the successful education policy would play a major role in the fields of national development in political, economic, technical, scientific, social and environmental. Education is the foundation for a vibrant democracy, growth of productivity and income and employment opportunities¹.

Improved access and quality of primary education is gradually increasing through government initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and other non-governmental initiatives in India to reach the 'education for all concepts' in all the geographical areas. Certain tribal areas (Scheduled tribe) have been covered under the initiatives by both the State and Central governments. "The tribal people being the original inhabitants of India constitute a significant part of the vast nation. They have been dwelling in the forests surrounded by hills for a long period. Their social structure, their culture and their language are quite different from the general people of India.". Majumdar DN quoted in Hasnain adds that "A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes, without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, followed tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration²."

"Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers Scheduled Tribes as these communities, who are Scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by the President through an initial public notification or through a subsequent amending Act of Parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes." (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2011) "Under the Constitution of India certain tribes have been specified as the Scheduled Tribes. It is to be noted that only those tribes which have been included in the list of Scheduled Tribes are given special treatment or facilities envisaged under the Constitution. The Constitution neither defines nor lays down any criteria for specifying the Scheduled Tribes." (Hasnain, 1998)³. The tribal people of India got a diverse socio-cultural life and economic development and live in scattered isolated areas, inaccessible settlements in interior forest and remote hilly areas of the country. These areas lack proper communication systems and transportation facilities like road and transport and also deprived of the basic amenities like medical facilities, electricity and educational facilities.

"The tribal zone in India is generally divided into three zones according to their distribution namely the north-eastern zone, the central zone and the southern zone. The north-eastern zone consists of the Himalayan region and the hill and the mountain ranges of North- Eastern India. The southern zone consists of that part of the Peninsular India which falls south of the River Krishna. The central zone occupies the central belt of the older hills and the plateaus along the dividing line between Peninsular India and the Indo Gangetic Plains"⁴. The tribes of

Kerala mainly settled in four districts viz, Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad and Kasargode. 35.82% of the tribal people are settled in Wayanad district. As per the *Constitutional Amendment by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Act, 2002 (Act 10 of 2003) Part – VIII – Kerala*, 35 tribes considered as Scheduled Tribes. The tribal zones of Kerala are Kasargod tribal region, Wayanad tribal region, Attappadi tribal region, Nilambur tribal region, Parambikkulam tribal region, Idukki tribal region and Thiruvananthapuram tribal region.

The literacy rate among tribes is very low when compared to the literacy level of Kerala. In this process the Government has initiated special educational schemes with flexible development projects. But still the number of the dropout of tribal children is increasing gradually and there are number of reasons behind this, like lack of parental support and interest, inability to understand the medium of instruction due to mother tongue inhibition, lack of schools nearby, teacher absenteeism attitude towards girls etc.

Low literacy rates in tribal communities continue to indicate a need for overarching support that tackles issues from health to attitudes of non-tribal populations. Recognizing that the education system is currently designed for the dominant group, there needs to be investment in creating support mechanisms that supplement the assimilation of tribal children into the formal education system.”⁵ Economic Review Report (March 14, 2013) states that Kerala has 94 percent literacy rate and lowest dropout rate of school students (0.53%) in the country. But Wayanad, a district with a sizeable population of Scheduled Tribes has the highest overall dropout rate of more than one (1%) percentage⁶. From 2007 to 2012, there is a gradual increase in drop out of 6374 Scheduled Tribe students from the schools of Wayanad district⁷.

According to the 2011 census, literacy rate in Kerala is 93.91% where the literacy rate of Wayanad district is 89.32% which stands at penultimate position before Palakkad district (88.49%)⁸. From 2007 to 2012, approximately 6374 scheduled tribe students have discontinued from schooling in Wayanad district, where the total dropout of the district is 9523. This indicates 66.93% (approx) dropouts belong to Scheduled Tribes in this district. This qualitative case study explores the reason of the increasing dropout among the scheduled tribe students in Wayanad district, with special focus on the Paniya Tribe.

Methodology

Qualitative case study research was conducted in three colonies of Paniya and two neighboring Panchayats that come under Mananthavadi Educational Sub District. Dropped out Paniya students from Cheriya Kolli colony which is situated in Padinjarethara Panchayat, Nechattil Colony and Velikkara kunnu Colony of Vellamunda Panchayat. Paniyas, are the

single largest tribe in Wayanad. This feature prompted to choose them as the universe of the study. According to the survey conducted by KILA (Kerala Institute of Local Administration), the total tribal population of the district was 152808 and the population of Paniya Tribe is 69116. They are considered as the single largest tribe in Wayanad and they occupy 45.23% of the total district tribal population⁹. For the research, personal interviews were conducted from dropout students and with their parents as well as teachers of tribal areas and certain cases were analyzed.

Initiatives to reduce dropouts among Scheduled Tribes in Wayanad¹⁰: Two Major initiatives implemented to reduce the dropouts among ST students in the district. i. Gothravelicham, ii. Breakfast

Gothravelicham: The district education department with the help of *Jilla Panchayath* and other local governing bodies and agencies, have implemented the *Gothravelicham project* for the Scheduled Tribal students of Wayanad with a motive to enhance the education for the backward community. The project was initiated in the academic year 2008-09.

The aims of the project are: i. 100% school entry for tribal students, ii. Prevent the tribal dropouts, iii. Ensure quality education to tribal students, iv. Ensure vocational training with education, v. Protection and assurance of Right to Education on the grounds of the socio- economic backwardness, vi. Provide learning equipments and uniforms to the tribal children and ensure their entry to school, vii. Conduct awareness programmes for the tribal people on the importance of education to ensure entry to school and to prevent dropout, viii. To promote the tribal children to the front row of society through education, ix. To enable the tribal children to go for higher education.

Initiatives to restrain tribal dropouts under Gothravelicham Project: i. Colony Visit by the teachers and Tribal Volunteers, ii. Parental Awareness Programmes, iii. Gothrabhasha Parichayam (Learning material in Tribal Language), iv. Padanaveedu (Learning Centre in Colony), v. Counseling and Career Guidance, vi. Gothrafest (Tribal Festival), vii. Tribal Museum, viii. Learning Materials and Uniform, ix. Transportation and distribution of Bicycles, x. Remedial Teaching, xi. Learn and Earn units.

Breakfast: It was identified that most of the tribal children are malnourished and they don't have proper eating habit specially morning. Poverty and the regular drinking habits of the parents are the major reasons why the students don't take breakfast. This difficulty blocked the students from regular school activities. To overtake this hardship, it was decided to give breakfast to all the tribal children. They were asked to have breakfast as soon as they reach the school. The regular school routine begins only after the breakfast.

Table-1
Expenses of Gothravelicham project, and Breakfast

Year	Gothravelicham	Breakfast
2008- 2009	Rs. 14748024	Rs. 3501185
2009-2010	Rs. 6199851	Rs. 13575092
2010- 2011	Rs. 2482266	Rs. 13716489
2011- 2012	Rs. 4246298	Rs. 11714380
2012- 2013	Rs. 2812730	Rs. 9129548
Total	Rs. 3, 04, 89, 169	Rs. 5, 16, 36, 694
Grand Total	Rs. 8, 21, 25, 863	

From 2008- 2013, The government has spent **Rs. 8, 21, 25, 863/-** for these two major projects. Wayanad is the only privileged district in Kerala, where the state government is implementing many projects, for the scheduled tribes. But even after the execution of such programs, many of the tribal students are not getting attached to the present educational system. As a result, the district comes first compared to other 13 districts with regard to dropout rate. Government schools, Aided schools and Private/ Unaided schools are the three major sectors of education in the district as well as in the state. This study covers all the three sectors to find out the dropout in the district. In the last five years (2007-2012), the tribal dropout rate has been increasing up to an average of 3.22% per year where as the dropout rate of other communities besides ST, are decreasing. The detailed data are given below.

2007- 2008 academic year witnessed a dropout of 2718 students in the district. Among them 1661 students belonged to Scheduled Tribes. The percentage of the entire dropouts of

this academic year is 2.15% where as the tribal dropout alone comes 6.38%. Besides that among the total dropouts, 61.11% of the students are from the scheduled tribes. This shows more than half of the dropout belongs to scheduled tribe communities.

2008- 2009 academic year possessed an increase of 2.90% in the tribal dropout rate. On the 6th working day of the year, the total number of students in the schools was 126213 where the tribal students alone arrived 27427. By the year end 3365 students left schooling. Among them 2154 students belong to the scheduled tribe community. This is 64.01% of the total dropouts.

2009-10 academic year had a gradual increase of tribal dropout from 64.01% to 72.32% which means a dropout growth of 8.31%. Compared to the previous academic year the number of total dropouts decreased from 3365 to 713 But the percentage analysis shows a gradual increase in the dropout rate.. Among the 713 dropouts, 516 belong to the tribal communities.

2010- 11 academic year had is a slight decrease of 0.14% in the tribal dropouts. It was 72.37% in the previous year where the present tribal dropout rate is 72.23%. But when compared to the previous academic year, the number of total dropouts has increased from 713 to 1264. The tribal dropout also increased from 516 to 913.

2011-12 academic year had an increase of 5.00% compared to 0.14% increase of the previous year. The tribal dropout increased to 77.23% from 72.23% of the previous academic year. A number of 1130 tribal students dropped out from education among the total dropout of 1463.

Table-2
6th Working day Pupil Strength and number of Dropouts in Wayanad (2007-2012)

Academic Year	Total number of students	Tribal students	Total Dropout	Tribal dropout	% of total dropout	% of tribal dropout	Among the total dropout, the % of Tribal dropout
2007-08	126132	26017	2718	1661	2.15	6.38	61.11
2008-09	126213	27427	3365	2154	2.66	7.85	64.01
2009-10	125767	28738	713	516	0.56	1.79	72.37
2010-11	124452	29566	1264	913	1.01	3.08	72.23
2011-12	122816	30179	1463	1130	1.19	3.74	77.23
Total Number of dropout from 2007-12			9523	6374	--	--	66.93

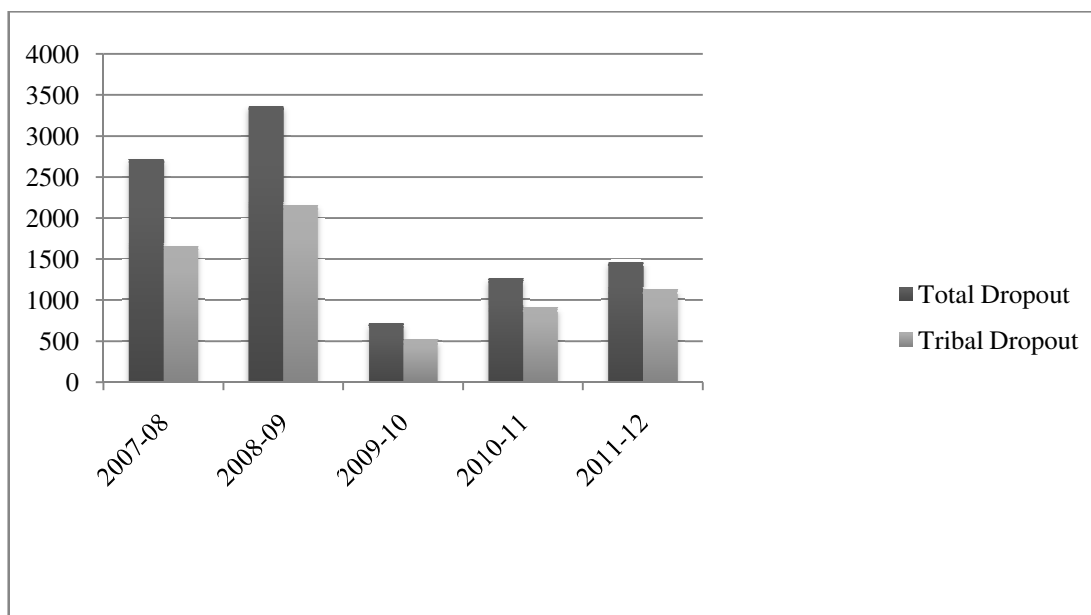


Figure-1
Average total dropout of tribal students (2007-2012)

From the academic year 2007 to 2012, there is a gradual increase in the tribal dropout among the total dropouts in the district. It was 61.11% in 2007-08 where the tribal dropout of 2011-12 is 77.23%. This shows the increase of 16.12% of drop out only in the tribal sector. An average increase of 3.22% dropout has been taking place in the last five academic years. This is what clearly shows that projects implemented so far for the enhancement of tribal education was not effective and failed to reduce the dropouts.

Percentage analysis shows there is a considerable increase in the tribal dropout rate in each year. However, the frequency analysis shows an uneven pattern in the number of tribal dropout. In the academic year 2008-09, the reported tribal dropout was 2154 (64.01%) but in the year 2009-10 it decreased to 516 (72.37%). Though the number of tribal dropouts had decreased when considering its frequency, its proportion is increasing in line with the total dropout rate. At this context it is noted that, from 2007 to 2012 there was a considerable increase in tribal enrolment in schools as 26017, 27427, 28738, 29566, and 30179 respectively. But present academic year (2012- 2013) has a slight decrease in the pupil enrolment as it is 29560.

At current academic year on 6th working day, total pupil strength of Wayanad district is 118960. Among them 29560 are from scheduled tribes. As per the information received from the authorities of education, this year witnessed even higher number of dropouts considering the previous years. This is what shows still the dropout rate is gradually increasing. There should be more concentration on tribal education sector to reduce the tribal dropout rate.

Discussion

Reasons for Dropout: The research studied 20 tribal children who are recent drop outs from the district and their class division ranges from 1 to 10. They belong to the traditional tribal community, Paniya. The questions were asked to both the parents of the dropouts and their teachers. They indicate some reasonable issues that lead to the early drop out.

Most of the dropped out children are living with their family. As per the study signifies, majority of their parents do not have proper education and they are early dropouts. The reasons for their dropout were subjected to poverty and unemployment. But now the situations changed a lot. The parents of the dropped out assert that poverty and finance are no more the issues for their children's drop out. The parents are aware that the projects and plans that are being implemented for the benefit of tribal uplift. As far as the parents are concerned, the reasons for the dropping out are purely related to individual attitude on education.

Negative attitude towards schooling: Many of the dropouts are having an in favor attitude towards education. They consider education as a boring process. They still are not convinced of the need of education for their livelihood. They are aware of the allowances from the government for their education. But the negative attitude towards education makes them stay back to their colony surroundings than going to school.

Peer influence: Many of the dropouts and their parents admitted that peer group influence is the reason for their decision to leave schooling. They were influenced by their friends who stopped education. So they also put a full stop.

Some stop education, because any of their siblings would have discontinued education.

Alcoholism of parents: The teachers agreed to state that the alcoholism of parents is a convincing reason for the dropout. They agreed that the children are not getting a presence of mind at home in evenings when his father/ brother/ mother/ relatives/ friends come drunk. This will result in the children to move away from education. At home, they are not given an atmosphere to study and sometimes nothing to eat too.

Early Responsibility: Vinod, 18, a drop out from 9th standard was an example of shouldering the family responsibility at an early stage. He discontinued from education when his father died. His only brother is paralyzed and his mother is sick. The family finance and stability is a valid factor that leads to the dropout of tribal children. He wanted to continue education, indeed it's impossible. There are many tribal students in the selected region like Vinod, who had to leave education to shoulder their families.

Caste related issues: Some of the dropouts agreed that, to an extent, caste issues were the reasons to stop education. The teachers who associated with this study also state that caste is a major issue for the problem. They agreed, some of the students feel reluctant to sit with a lower caste student or upper caste student and to share the physical properties of learning. This orthodox attitude could be cited as a reason for dropout.

Health issues: Healthcare issues resulted in the dropout of some tribal students in the district. The dropouts pointed out that adequate medical care was not given when it was needed. It made the dropout rate increasing. Many of the tribal students who are dropped out pointed out that they were not given proper medical care while they were sick.

Conclusion

The 11th five year plan of 2007-12 (December, 2006) says, dropout rates of disadvantaged groups are noticed to be going up as the level of education goes up. To reduce the rate of dropouts amongst disadvantaged should become the focus of the Eleventh Five Year Plan¹¹. This paper analyzed 2007-12 academic year dropout rates in detail from the tribal populated district of Wayanad. The major reason coined out for the increased dropout rate is the lack of awareness on the value of education among the scheduled tribes. From this situation, it is obvious to implement effective awareness and motivation programs for the tribal people to acknowledge the value of education. With the advent and pervasiveness of information communication technology (ICT), the Internet has been widely accepted as an important tool in life and education in recent decades¹².

Active diffusion of information technology through investments in national information infrastructures and education has

become a world trend which can play as a catalyst to decrease the dropout rate of students and enhance the education system of the tribal village. Curtis, 2001, GLEF, 2001 postulates that Project-based learning (PBL) is a constructivist pedagogy and class-oriented learning approach. Unlike traditional learning which is short-term, subject independent, teacher-focused, and mostly constrained to classroom settings, PBL involves long-term, theme-based learning and student-centred activities that focus on daily life problems and allows learners to use an inquiry-based approach to engage with issues and questions that are real and relevant to their lives. When conducting PBL, teachers encourage students to choose topics of their own interest, and set specific questions in a well-planned framework that is wider than the immediate task at hand. Students can gain knowledge, ask questions, and find solutions during the research process.

The advent of computer and the Internet-based educational methods offer an exciting new learning medium that can literally transform our concept of school and classroom from physical into virtual realities³. Illiteracy and all major contagious diseases will have disappeared by 2020. School enrolment from age 6 to 14 will near 100 per cent and dropout rates will fall to less than one in twenty¹³.

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George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF, 2001) reiterates ICT benefits the students, including¹⁴: i. Deeper knowledge of subject, ii. Increased self-direction and motivation, iii. Improved research and problem-solving skills.

It becomes a major responsibility of the central and state government not only to provide ICT access but to implement a strong constructive pedagogy and class-oriented learning approach in the tribal areas of Wayanad to reduce dropouts.

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