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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SELF ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY LEVEL SANTAL STUDENTS IN WEST BENGAL

Russell Al Farabi¹ and Abhijit Guha²

1. Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, University of Calcutta, Kolkata.
2. Associate Professor, Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur Math, Howrah.

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Abstract

West Bengal hosts a significant Santal population, one of India's largest indigenous communities, who face various challenges in mainstream education due to cultural, linguistic, and economic disparities. This study explored the relationship between self-esteem and academic adjustment among secondary-level Santal students across gender, locality, and medium of instruction. Objectives were to assess self-esteem and academic adjustment among Santal students and examine their correlation. Sample consisted of 723 students from Santali and other than Santali medium schools across urban and rural areas in Purulia, Jhargram, Bankura, and Birbhum districts of West Bengal. Research design employed quantitative methods using Dhar & Dhar's Self-Esteem Scale and Sarsani's Academic Adjustment Scale, analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings showed significant differences in self-esteem based on gender, location, and medium of instruction, with males and rural students reporting lower self-esteem. Similarly, academic adjustment varied by gender and medium of instruction but not by location. A minimal yet positive correlation between self-esteem and academic adjustment suggested external factors may mediate this relationship. These findings emphasize that gender norms, cultural identity, and linguistic alignment with curricula substantially influence indigenous students' self-perception and adaptation to academic settings. Implications include the need for culturally responsive education policies (as advocated in the NCF 2005 and NEP 2020) that recognize indigenous students' cultural identities. Targeted interventions could enhance self-esteem and facilitate academic adjustment among Santal students, supporting both personal development and broader social equity. By fostering inclusive educational environments, policymakers can improve academic outcomes and social integration for Santal students in West Bengal, promoting long-term empowerment within indigenous communities.

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Introduction:-

West Bengal is home to a sizable population of Scheduled Tribe (ST) members, the Santal, who are among India's biggest indigenous communities. Despite government programs aimed at improving education and socioeconomic

Corresponding Author:- Russell Al Farabi

Address:- Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, University of Calcutta, Kolkata.

conditions, Santal pupils often encounter major hurdles in regular school systems, including language barriers, cultural differences, and budgetary constraints (Ghosh & Das, 2018). Perceived cultural bias, a lack of cultural representation in curricula, and educational frameworks that do not align with indigenous students' sociocultural surroundings are all potential causes of their lower self-esteem, according to research (Tripathy, 2016). Because of these challenges, students may have trouble making the academic transfer, which in turn affects their motivation, social integration, and academic performance (Patra & Basu, 2021). An individual's self-esteem is a key part of their self-concept and represents their overall sense of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). There are unique cultural and socioeconomic factors that influence indigenous children's self-esteem. This includes the Santal people of West Bengal. All of these factors come together to form a complex setting in which indigenous students must adjust to their new school in order to succeed academically and socially (Eccles & Roeser, 2009).

Examining the elements that impact Santal students, this study delves into the relationship between self-esteem, academic adjustment, and the overall educational journey. Adapting one's conduct, emotions, and social interactions to meet the demands of school is just one part of the complex process known as academic adjustment (Kulik & Kulik, 1982). Limited access to high-quality education, linguistic obstacles, and socioeconomic disadvantages are some of the structural constraints that indigenous students face (Das & Mukherjee, 2017). It might be especially challenging for Santal children living in rural West Bengal to adjust to a school system that might not respect their unique language and culture (Mahato, 2019). This discord can lead to mental roadblocks that prevent students from fully engaging with and succeeding in their academic work, which in turn lowers their self-esteem (Sarkar, 2020). Academic adjustment, students' emotional health, and their long-term academic success are all negatively affected by a lack of positive academic experiences and social support, (Eccles & Roeser, 2009).

Since people with higher self-esteem are more likely to be resilient, socially integrated, and capable of facing academic challenges head-on, research shows that self-esteem is crucial for academic adaptation or adjustment (Baumeister et al., 2003). Indigenous students' sense of self-worth is strongly related to their cultural identity, the support they receive from family and friends, and the sense of community they have (Chatterjee, 2015). Smith and Varghese (2018) found that students' low self-esteem and inability to adapt academically can stem from schools' failure to recognize and respect indigenous cultures. Santal children in West Bengal can benefit from culturally responsive education that boosts their self-esteem, which in turn helps them adjust better to school and has a positive impact on their learning (Patra & Basu, 2021).

Studies by Chun, Organista, and Marin (2003) and Celenk and Vijver (2011) provide light on the ways in which cultural values and ethnic identification impact adaptability. However, more research is needed to account for the special challenges faced by certain language groups or the impact of regional sociopolitical factors on acculturation. Ghosh (2013) and Ghorbani, Abdullah, and Jomenia (2012) show that the effects of identity style, socioeconomic status, and self-esteem on the mental health and academic performance of students from minority groups are better understood. Ghosh found that indigenous students in Tripura had poorer academic motivation and increased rates of depression when she looked at their self-esteem and academic performance. Tribal education and educational policy in India have been assessed, showing a disconnect between policy goals and actual implementation. Patra and Panigrahi (2018) found that a significant number of Santal students experience difficulties such as far-flung schools, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of qualified educators, leading to high student attrition.

Taking into account the socio-cultural and economic issues that impact the experiences of Santal students in West Bengal at the secondary level, this study sought to examine the association between self-esteem and academic adjustment. By investigating how factors including socioeconomic position, cultural identity, and the educational setting affect these traits, this study aimed to inform more effective educational policies and practices that promote inclusive education.

Objectives of the Study:-

The major objectives were identified as follows:

Objective 1: To study the self-esteem of Santal students across various categorical variable, including gender, locality, and medium of instruction.

Objective 2: To study the academic adjustment of Santal students across various categorical variable (gender, locality, and medium of instruction).

Objective 3: To investigate the correlation between self-esteem and academic adjustment among Santal students.

Hypotheses

To achieve the above Objectives following hypotheses were formulated:

For Objective 1:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in self-esteem between the male and female Santali students.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in self-esteem between the urban and rural Santali students.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in self-esteem between Santali Students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium school.

For Objective 2:

Ho4: There is no significant difference in academic adjustment between the male and female Santali students.

Ho5: There is no significant difference in academic adjustment between the urban and rural Santali students.

Ho6: There is no significant difference in academic adjustment between Santali students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium School.

For Objective 3:

Ho7: There is no significant correlation between the scores of self-esteem and academic adjustment of Santal Students.

Methodology:-

Design

Descriptive survey design was employed in the study.

Population

The population of the study was targeted mainly from four districts of West Bengal. The Investigator had decided to collect data from Secondary School students of secondary level (9th and 10th) under academically controlled by the WBBSE (West Bengal Board of Secondary Education) of West Bengal, India.

The Sample

The sample was randomly selected from secondary schools that are academically governed by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE). From Purulia, Jhargram, Bankura, and Birbhum, the four districts of West Bengal, schools were from both the medium, i.e. Santali and other than Santali medium. The selection of schools was based geographic location (rural and urban). Santal students were selected randomly from these schools at random from this. Data were gathered from 770 secondary-level Santali pupils. However, 47 samples were identified as incomplete or outliers during the data analysis. They were therefore removed from the final analysis. Thus, 723 was the sample size. 45 % respondents were Male and 55% were female. 73.6% of students came from rural areas, and 26.4% of students were from urban areas. 46.5% were from respondents attending Santal medium schools, while 53.5% came from respondents attending other than Santal medium schools.

Variables of the Study

In this study, two types of variables were considered. These two types of variables are given below:

Major Variables: (i). Self-esteem of the Santal students as the dependent variable (for comparison) & (ii). Academic adjustment of the Santal students as the dependent as well as independent variable (for comparison).

Categorical Variables: (i). Gender (male & female), (ii). Area of school (urban & rural) & (iii). Medium of school (Santali & other than Santali).

Tools

Self Esteem Scale (SES): To gauge the self-esteem of Santal pupils, the researchers employed the Self Esteem Scale (SES). The study measured both positive and negative feelings about oneself using a 23-item scale created by Dhar & Dhar (2015). Positiveness, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation were the six dimensions that made up the scale. Five-point Likert-type ratingscale was used. With a good magnitude and acceptable alpha of .87, the Self Esteem Scale demonstrated great overall reliability.

Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS): The researcher used Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) by Sarsani (2017) to measure academic adjustment of Santal students. A 25-item scale was used in the study. The scale contained 25 items with 7 dimensions viz Repulsion with school work, satisfaction with school, Exhaustion at school work, interpersonal relations in school, teaching-learning problems, psychological problems at school & Academic

Failures. Three-point Likert-type rating scale was used. The overall reliability of the Academic Adjustment Scale was high with an alpha of .89 (Sarsani, 2017) which was good in magnitude and acceptable.

Analysis and Interpretation

Statistical Techniques Used

The researchers chose parametric tests for the study of quantitative data. The following statistical methods were deemed crucial for the study by the researchers. These included descriptive statistics like mean (M), median (Mdn), skewness (SK), kurtosis (KU), correlation (r), standard deviation (SD) etc. and inferential statistics like the student's t-test.

Testing of Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the self-esteem between the male and female Santali students.

Result:-

The mean Self-Esteem scores of Santali male students (M = 88.66, SD = 11.17, N = 325) and female students (M = 90.36, SD = 10.96, N = 398) are found to differ little. A further independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether or not this difference is statistically significant. Observed that the F value and p-value for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances are .532 and .466 ($p > .05$), respectively, which proves that the variances among the groups are equal. The independent sample 't' test result showed that the computed $t_{(721)} = 2.057$ and a 'p' value of .040 ($p < .05$). Therefore, at the 0.05 level, "t" is significant. Thus, Ho1 is rejected, and it is reasonable to conclude that the self-esteem of Santali male students is substantially different from that of Santali female students.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in self-esteem between the urban and rural Santali students.

Result:

The mean self-esteem scores of Santali urban students (M = 88.19, SD = 11.39, N = 191) and rural students (M = 90.10, SD = 10.93, N = 532) are found to differ little. A further independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether or not this difference is statistically significant. Observed that the F value and p-value for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances are .781 and 0.377 ($p > .05$), which proves that the variances among the groups are equal. Urban and rural pupils' self-esteem, with a computed $t_{(721)} = 2.049$ and 'p' value of .041 ($p < .05$). Therefore, at the 0.05 level, 't' is significant. Therefore, Ho2 is rejected, and it is acceptable to say that the self-esteem of Santali urban students differs greatly from that of Santali rural students.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in self-esteem between Santali Students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium school.

Result:

The mean self-esteem scores of Santali medium students (M = 93.70, SD = 9.11, N = 336) and other than Santali medium students (M = 86.03, SD = 11.41, N = 387) are found to differ. A further independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether or not this difference is statistically significant. The obtained F value for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is 20.913 & $p < 0.001$ ($p < .05$). Therefore, equal variances cannot be assumed between the groups. So, df is adjusted to 716.12. The computed $t_{(716.12)} = 10.03$ and $p < 0.001$ ($p < .05$) when comparing the self-esteem of Santali students and other than Santali medium pupils. So, at the 0.05 level, 't' is significant. Thus, Ho3 is rejected, and it is reasonable to conclude that Self-Esteem of Santali students who read in Santali medium are significantly different from Santali students who read in other than Santali medium.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in academic adjustment between the male and female Santali students.

Result:

A minor variation exists in the mean scores of Academic Adjustment between Santali male students (M = 54.23, SD = 6.93, N = 325) and female students (M = 55.46, SD = 6.95, N = 398). An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of this difference. In case of Levene's Test for equality of variances the F value is .068 & p-value is .795 ($p > .05$) which proves that the variances among the groups are equal. For Santali pupils, the academic adjustment of male and female students yielded a calculated $t_{(721)} = 2.364$ and a p-value of .018 ($p < .05$). Therefore, 't' is significant at the 0.05 level. Thus, Ho4 is rejected, indicating a significant difference in Academic Adjustment between Santali male and female students.

Ho5: There is no significant difference in academic adjustment between the urban and rural Santali students.

Result:

A marginal difference exists in the mean scores of Academic Adjustment between Santali urban students ($M = 55.10$, $SD = 7.19$, $N = 191$) and rural students ($M = 54.83$, $SD = 6.89$, $N = 532$). An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of this difference. In case of Levene's Test for equality of variances the F value is 1.151 & p-value is .284 ($p > .05$) which proves that the variances among the groups are equal. For the academic adjustment of Santali students from urban and rural backgrounds, the calculated $t_{(721)} = .454$ and the p-value is .650 ($p > .05$). Therefore, 't' is not significant at the 0.05 level. Thus, H_05 is not rejected, indicating that the academic adjustment of Santali urban students is not significantly different from that of Santali rural students.

Ho6: There is no significant difference in academic adjustment between Santali students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium School.

Result:

A difference exists in the mean scores of Academic Adjustment between Santali medium students ($M = 55.57$, $SD = 7.38$, $N = 336$) and other than Santali medium Santali students ($M = 54.33$, $SD = 6.54$, $N = 387$). An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of this difference. In case of Levene's Test for equality of variances the F value is 4.786 & p-value is .029 ($p < .05$). So, equal variances cannot be assumed between the groups. For the academic adjustment of Santali medium students compared to other than Santali medium Santali students, the calculated t-value is 2.381 with a degree of freedom of 674.91, and the p-value is .018 ($p < .05$). Therefore, 't' is significant at the 0.05 level. H_06 is rejected, indicating that the academic adjustment of Santali medium pupils is considerably different from that of other than Santali medium Santali students.

Ho7: There is no significant correlation between the scores of self-esteem and academic adjustment of Santal Students.

Result:

The correlation coefficient, r , between Self-Esteem (SE) and Academic Adjustment is .197, $p < 0.001$ and $r^2 = 0.04$ which indicates a minimal effect size (Moore, Notz & Flinger, 2013, Page 138). As 'p' value is less than 0.05, so, 'r' is significant at 0.05 level and H_07 is not retained. This signifies a positive correlation between Self-Esteem and Academic Adjustment among Santal students. The researchers found a minimal effect size between Self-Esteem (SE) and Academic Adjustment (AA) among Santal students, as indicated by the R-Squared value.

Major Findings**Objective 1**

- Significant difference found between male and female Santal students in respect of their mean score in self-esteem.
- Significant difference found between rural and urban Santal students in respect of their mean score in self-esteem.
- Significant difference found between Santali students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium school in respect of their mean score in self-esteem.

Objective 2

- Significant difference found between male and female Santal students in respect of their mean score in academic adjustment.
- No significant difference found between urban and rural Santal students in respect of their mean score in academic adjustment.
- Significant difference found between Santali students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium school in respect of their mean score in academic adjustment.

Objective 3

- Significant correlation found between the scores of self-esteem and academic adjustment of Santal Students.

Discussion:-

The research revealed significant differences in self-esteem associated with gender (male and female), geographic location (urban versus rural), and medium of school (Santali compared to other than Santali medium). This corresponds with extensive research indicating that socio-cultural factors significantly influence the self-esteem of indigenous students. Findings of the present research also support the focus of the research done by Chatterjee (2015) who emphasized the significance of cultural identity in influencing self-esteem among Santal students, positing that gender and cultural congruence within educational frameworks is essential for the self-perception of indigenous students. The significant difference in self-esteem between male and female Santal students may indicate socio-cultural expectations. Indigenous societies frequently possess unique gender norms that might differentially affect self-esteem in boys and girls, as indicated by studies on indigenous educational experiences (Smith & Varghese, 2018). The significant difference in self-esteem between rural and urban Santal students indicates that environmental and resource inequities may be influential factors. The findings of the present research also support the focus of the research done by Ghosh and Das (2018) who examined the limited access to educational resources for rural Santal students, which may contribute to diminished self-esteem resulting from this inequity. The disparity in self-esteem between Santali students of Santali medium and other than Santali medium school reflects the finding of research done by Sarkar (2020), who identified that language significantly influences the self-esteem of indigenous students. Enrolling in a Santali-medium institution may reinforce a student's cultural identity, hence enhancing self-esteem.

This study indicates that while there are gender and language-related disparities in academic adjustment, there is no substantial difference between rural and urban students. The noted disparity in academic adjustment between male and female students corresponds with the findings of Eccles and Roeser (2009), who proposed that students' engagement and adaptability to academic settings frequently differ by gender. In indigenous contexts, traditional norms may impact the significance and methodology each gender attributes to academic adaptation, thereby influencing performance and motivation. The lack of substantial difference in academic adjustment between rural and urban Santal pupils suggested that their ability to adapt to school expectations is less influenced by geographic location. This finding diverged from Das and Mukherjee (2017), who posited that rural Santal pupils encounter more significant obstacles in assimilating into mainstream education due to inadequate educational infrastructure. Nonetheless, it may indicate that within the examined sample, both groups have cultivated analogous coping strategies for academic adjustment. The medium of instruction in school significantly influenced academic adjustment, corroborating Tripathy (2016), who discovered that indigenous pupils educated in their own language exhibit superior integration into academic settings. Students learning in Santali medium may experience enhanced inclusion and cultural alignment, facilitating a more seamless academic adjustment.

The Study indicated a notable, although little, correlation between self-esteem and academic adjustment ($r^2 = 0.04$). This study indicated that although self-esteem and academic adjustment are interconnected, self-esteem may not be well connected to academic adjustment for these Santal students, and maybe influenced by other mediating factors such as socio-economic conditions or community support. The findings of the present research with limited effect size in correlation corresponds with Baumeister et al. (2003), who observed that although self-esteem favorably affects psychological and social adjustment, its direct influence on academic adjustment may fluctuate based on external support systems and cultural environment. The academic adjustment of Santal students may be shaped by a combination of resilience development within their cultural communities and school-level interventions, rather than exclusively by self-esteem.

Conclusion:-

Gender and cultural identity have a significant impact on educational experiences, since societal standards influence differences in self-esteem and academic adjustment between male and female students. The language used in education is critical, serving not just as a tool of learning but also as a foundation for personal identity, increasing self-esteem and aiding academic adaptability. The relationship between self-esteem and academic adjustment is clear, although both appear to be influenced by a variety of external influences within indigenous schooling contexts. By helping indigenous students adjust to school and boost their self-esteem, we can improve the lives of individuals and create a more welcoming classroom for all students. This will provide indigenous communities like Santals a better chance at economic and social empowerment. Addressing these factors through targeted policies and interventions can create a more supportive educational environment for Santal students. By promoting gender equity, improving rural education infrastructure, and implementing culturally responsive language policies,

educators and policymakers can help Santal students develop a healthy sense of self-worth, enabling them to overcome socio-economic barriers and achieve academic success. These steps are essential not only for individual growth but also for promoting social equity within West Bengal's diverse educational landscape.

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