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11

Thematic Analysis of Parental Involvement and Its Impact on Social Science Learning Among Tribal and Non-Tribal Girls in West Bengal

Abstract

This study examines the impact of parental involvement on the academic outcomes of secondary school girls from tribal and non-tribal backgrounds in West Bengal, India. Through thematic analysis, key themes were identified, highlighting distinct challenges faced by tribal parents, including limited educational backgrounds and time constraints due to agricultural work. In contrast, non-tribal parents exhibited higher levels of engagement, leading to enhanced student motivation and performance. The findings reveal that parental involvement significantly influences students' interest in subjects like social science, with varying degrees of effectiveness based on the parents' educational familiarity and resources. The study underscores the importance of active parental engagement in fostering academic success, particularly for tribal students, who encounter greater challenges. To address educational disparities, targeted interventions are recommended to enhance parental involvement, improve resource access, and implement culturally sensitive support strategies, aiming to create a more equitable educational environment for all students.

Keywords: *Academic Outcomes, Educational Disparities, Girls' Students, Resource Availability*

Introduction

The relationship between parental involvement and academic performance is well-established but complex. While generally positive, the effects of parental engagement, ranging from direct academic support to participation in school events (Wilder, 2013), vary across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Research shows that parental involvement impacts academic performance differently for various demographic groups (Yan and Lin, 2005) and that higher parental education levels often correlate with better academic outcomes (Yulianti et al., 2023). However, some studies report no significant or even negative effects of parental involvement (Coleman and McNeese, 2009), highlighting methodological inconsistencies in the field (Erdem and Kaya, 2020). Similarly, while student interest is generally linked to better academic performance (Kpolovie et al., 2014), exceptions exist (Wong and Wong, 2019), and socio-economic factors significantly influence this relationship (Radhika and Nivedha, 2020). This study aims to clarify these inconsistencies by examining the effects of parental involvement and student interest across diverse contexts and providing actionable recommendations for educators.

Review of Literature

Parental involvement is pivotal in shaping academic performance, positively influencing motivation, performance, and reducing dropout rates across various groups (Barnard, 2004). However, its impact varies significantly across socio-economic and cultural contexts, particularly between tribal and non-tribal communities (Singh & Banerjee, 2019). Tribal students, especially girls, face unique challenges such as economic constraints, cultural barriers, and limited access to educational resources, contributing to higher dropout rates and lower academic performance (Gogoi, 2016).

In contrast, non-tribal parents often engage more actively due to better socio-economic conditions and familiarity with educational systems, leading to improved outcomes for their children (Cashman et al., 2021). Research also suggests that the type and quality of parental involvement—home-based versus school-based—significantly influences academic outcomes, but this varies across contexts (Yulianti et al., 2018).

Despite extensive studies, gaps remain in understanding how parental involvement differs between tribal and non-tribal communities in rural India and its nuanced impact on secondary school girls. Limited research explores

the intersection of cultural, economic, and educational factors specific to tribal students, leaving questions about effective, culturally sensitive strategies to bridge these disparities. This study addresses these gaps by examining the comparative impact of parental involvement on tribal and non-tribal girls in Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that investigated secondary school girls' experiences and perspectives on parental involvement and its educational impact through focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted from June 2023 to May 2024 in the tribal-dominated blocks of Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal, India.

Purposive sampling was used to select 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with an equal number of groups comprising tribal and non-tribal girls. Each group consisted of 8-10 ninth-grade students from local secondary schools. Participants were chosen based on specific study criteria, and consent was obtained from both the students and their guardians.

Data were collected through FGDs lasting 60-90 minutes, held in neutral settings like schools or community centres. A trained facilitator used a semi-structured guide, and discussions were audio-recorded with detailed notes taken. The guide covered parental involvement, challenges, and impacts on academic interest and performance. Thematic approaches were used. Transcriptions were reviewed to generate initial codes and broader themes.

Results

Research questions-based outcomes from FGDs

Research question 1: How do the levels and nature of parental involvement differ between tribal and non-tribal secondary girls' students?

A group of tribal students gathered in their schoolyard, discussing their experiences with their parents and teachers. Meera, one of the students, shared how her mother felt nervous whenever they had to meet her teachers. *"My parents didn't go to school for long, so they feel shy talking to my teachers,"* Meera said. Her mother's discomfort often meant they missed out on important updates about her academic progress.

In contrast, non-tribal students like Aarti enjoyed more active parental involvement. Aarti's parents were frequently seen chatting with her teachers during school events. *"My parents talk to my teachers all the time,"* Aarti said. *"They don't feel awkward because they know what's expected and can follow what's being said."* Despite their busy schedules, non-tribal parents seemed more confident and comfortable navigating the school environment, providing a stark contrast to the hesitancy observed among tribal parents.

Research question 2: What factors influence the degree of parental involvement in the education of tribal versus non-tribal secondary girls' students?

Ravi, a tribal student, explained how the demanding nature of his parents' agricultural work left little time for involvement in his education. *"My parents are always in the fields. They don't have time to talk about school or help me with my studies,"* Ravi said. Their limited educational background also contributed to their feelings of inadequacy, making them hesitant to engage with school authorities.

On the other hand, non-tribal students like Priya experienced a different reality. Priya's parents, both with higher levels of formal education, were actively involved in her schooling. They frequently attended parent-teacher meetings and offered help with her homework. *"My parents know how to talk with teachers,"* Priya noted, highlighting their familiarity with the educational system and their ability to provide direct academic support.

Research question 3: How does the level of parental involvement impact the Social Science interest of tribal and non-tribal secondary girls' students?

Tribal student Rani felt isolated due to her parents' limited involvement. *"Sometimes I feel like I'm on my own when it comes to school,"* Rani confessed. Her parents' discomfort and infrequent communication with teachers contributed to a lack of support, affecting her interest in subjects like Social Science. The feeling of isolation often translated into a lack of motivation to engage deeply with her studies.

Conversely, non-tribal student Ananya found her parents' involvement to be a source of encouragement. Her parents frequently discussed her academic progress with her teachers and supported her interest in Social Science. *"My parents always ask how I'm doing in school,"* Ananya said. Their active engagement fostered a strong interest in academic subjects, making her more motivated and enthusiastic about learning.

Research question 4: How do tribal and non-tribal secondary girls' students perform in Social Science, and what factors contribute to any observed differences?

Sita, a tribal student from a remote village, struggled with her Social Science performance. Despite receiving a scholarship, she faced difficulties in obtaining essential study materials. *"We got the scholarship, but buying books and other things is still hard,"* Sita explained. The lack of resources and parental support impacted her ability to keep up with the curriculum, contributing to her lower performance in Social Science.

In contrast, Neha, a non-tribal student from a well-resourced school, excelled in Social Science. With access to textbooks, tutoring, and active parental support, Neha had the tools she needed to succeed. *"I have all the materials I need for my studies,"* Neha said. Her parents' involvement and the availability of resources created a stable academic environment, leading to better performance in Social Science.

Research question 5: What is the relationship between parental involvement, student interest, and academic performance in Social Science among tribal and non-tribal secondary girls' students?

In the tribal village of Garhbeta II (Community Development Block), student Lakshmi found her academic performance in Social Science to be intertwined with the level of parental involvement. Her parents' limited engagement and discomfort with the school system affected her interest in the subject. *"When I don't have the right materials, I feel left out and like I can't do as well as others,"* Lakshmi shared. This lack of support not only impacted her academic performance but also diminished her enthusiasm for Social Science.

In a stark contrast, non-tribal student Rhea thrived academically due to the strong relationship between parental involvement and her interest in Social Science. *"My parents are always involved in my education,"* Rhea said. Their active participation and support nurtured her interest and contributed to her academic success in Social Science.

Research question 6: What is the joint contribution of parental involvement and student interest to the academic success of tribal and non-tribal secondary girls' students in Social Science?

In the tribal area of Narayangarh (Community Development Block), student Sunita faced challenges in her academic journey due to the combined effects of limited parental involvement and her own waning interest in Social Science. *"If teachers could make my parents feel more comfortable, maybe by explaining things in a simpler way or being more understanding, I think they would talk more,"* Sunita suggested. Despite her own interest in the subject, the lack of supportive involvement from her parents hindered her academic success.

Meanwhile, non-tribal student Mira experienced the benefits of both strong parental involvement and her own interest in Social Science. *"My parents encourage me to pursue my interests, and they're always there to support my studies,"* Mira said. This supportive environment, coupled with her own enthusiasm, played a significant role in her academic performances, illustrating the positive impact of joint parental involvement and student interest on educational success.

Qualitative insights from thematic analysis

Nature of parental involvement

Figure 1 highlights a clear divide between tribal and non-tribal students in terms of parental involvement. Tribal parents often show hesitation and lack of confidence due to limited educational backgrounds, leading to less active engagement with teachers. In contrast, non-tribal parents, more familiar with the school system, are generally more engaged. Despite these differences, both tribal and non-tribal parents aim to support their children's education, though their effectiveness varies based on their comfort and familiarity with the educational system.

Factors influencing parental involvement

Tribal parents face challenges such as limited education and demanding work schedules, which restrict their involvement. Non-tribal parents, with better access to resources, often use external support like tutors. Both groups face constraints that impact their involvement, but tribal parents' challenges are more related to educational background and time, while non-tribal parents may rely on external resources despite being more familiar with the education system.

Impact on interest in social science

For tribal students, limited parental support often leads to isolation and reduced motivation, negatively impacting their interest in Social Science. Non-tribal students benefit from regular encouragement, enhancing their motivation and interest in the subject. Parental involvement affects interest in Social Science for both groups, but the positive impact is more pronounced for non-tribal students.

Performance in social science

Tribal students face financial and resource constraints, negatively affecting their performance in Social Science. Non-tribal students, with better access to resources and parental support, generally perform better. Performance is influenced by support and resource availability, with tribal students facing more challenges.

Relationship between parental involvement, student interest, and performance

Tribal students experience strained relationships due to limited parental involvement and resources, which affects their performance and interest. Non-tribal students benefit from positive reinforcement and involvement, leading to greater interest and success. The impact of parental involvement is more positive for non-tribal students.

Joint contribution of parental involvement and student interest

For tribal students, socio-economic constraints and discomfort with the educational system limit the combined impact of parental involvement and student interest. Non-tribal students experience significant positive effects from both parental support and personal interest, leading to better academic success. The joint impact is more pronounced for non-tribal students due to fewer constraints and higher engagement.

Network analysis based on a thematic approach

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that parental involvement directly influences levels of support and relationships, affecting challenges, resource availability, and ultimately academic success. Factors like hesitation vs. comfort and educational background vs. familiarity play critical roles in determining parental involvement and its effectiveness. Time constraints and familiarity with the education system significantly impact the level of involvement and student outcomes.

Table 1 – In-depth network analysis based on the findings from the thematic approach.

From node	To node	Nature of relationship	Details	Implication	Sign
Parental involvement	Lack of support vs. Encouragement	Influences	Parental involvement shapes the level of encouragement and support given to students.	Higher parental involvement generally leads to more encouragement.	→
Parental involvement	Strained relationships vs. Positive reinforcement	Influences	The level of parental involvement affects the quality of relationships with teachers and the nature of reinforcement.	Positive reinforcement is more likely with higher involvement.	→
Hesitation vs. Comfort	Lack of support vs. Encouragement	Affects	Hesitation due to a lack of education may reduce the level of support and encouragement parents provide.	Hesitant parents may offer less support, impacting student motivation.	→
Educational background vs. Familiarity and resources	Strained relationships vs. Positive reinforcement	Affects	Parents' educational background influences their comfort and effectiveness in interacting with teachers.	Parents with higher educational backgrounds tend to have better interactions.	→
Lack of support vs. Encouragement	Challenges and limitations vs. Support and resource availability	Impacts	Lack of support leads to increased academic challenges and limitations in accessing resources.	Low support can exacerbate difficulties in performance.	→
Strained relationships vs. Positive reinforcement	Challenges and limitations vs. Support and resource availability	Impacts	Poor relationships and low reinforcement result in reduced resource availability and increased challenges.	Positive relationships improve access to resources and reduce challenges.	→
Challenges and limitations vs. Support and resource availability	Limited vs. Significant positive impact	Contributes Influenced by	The level of support and resources available directly affects the extent of positive academic impacts.	Better support and resources lead to greater positive impacts.	→

Parental involvement	Educational background and time constraints (tribal)	Influenced by	Tribal context, including limited educational background and time constraints, affects parental involvement.	Parental involvement may be less due to these constraints.	⬅
Parental involvement	Educational familiarity and resources (non-tribal)	Affects	Non-tribal contexts with more educational familiarity and resources lead to higher parental involvement.	Higher involvement is typically observed in non-tribal contexts.	⬅
Educational background	Parental involvement	Affects	Parents' educational background influences their ability to be involved in their children's education.	Better educational background often results in higher involvement.	→
Time constraints	Parental involvement	Affects	Limited time available due to work or other responsibilities reduces the level of parental involvement.	Time constraints often lead to reduced parental involvement.	→
Familiarity with the education system	Parental involvement	Affects	Greater familiarity with the education system enhances the ability of parents to be involved.	Increased familiarity often results in higher parental involvement.	→
Resource availability	Impact on performance	Affects	The availability of resources impacts students' academic performance directly.	More resources lead to better performance.	→
Resource availability	Impact on student interest		Access to resources influences students' interest in their studies.	Greater resource availability can enhance student interest.	→

Note
- **Nature of Relationship:** Defines the type of interaction between the nodes, such as influence, affect, or impact.
- **Details:** Provides specific insights into how the relationship operates.
- **Implication:** Describes the potential outcomes or effects of the relationship on students and parental involvement.

→**:** Indicates a direct, positive influence where an increase or improvement in the **From Node** leads to an increase or improvement in the **To Node**.

⬅**:** Indicates an influence from the **To Node** on the **From Node**, or a bidirectional relationship where the **To Node** impacts the **From Node**.
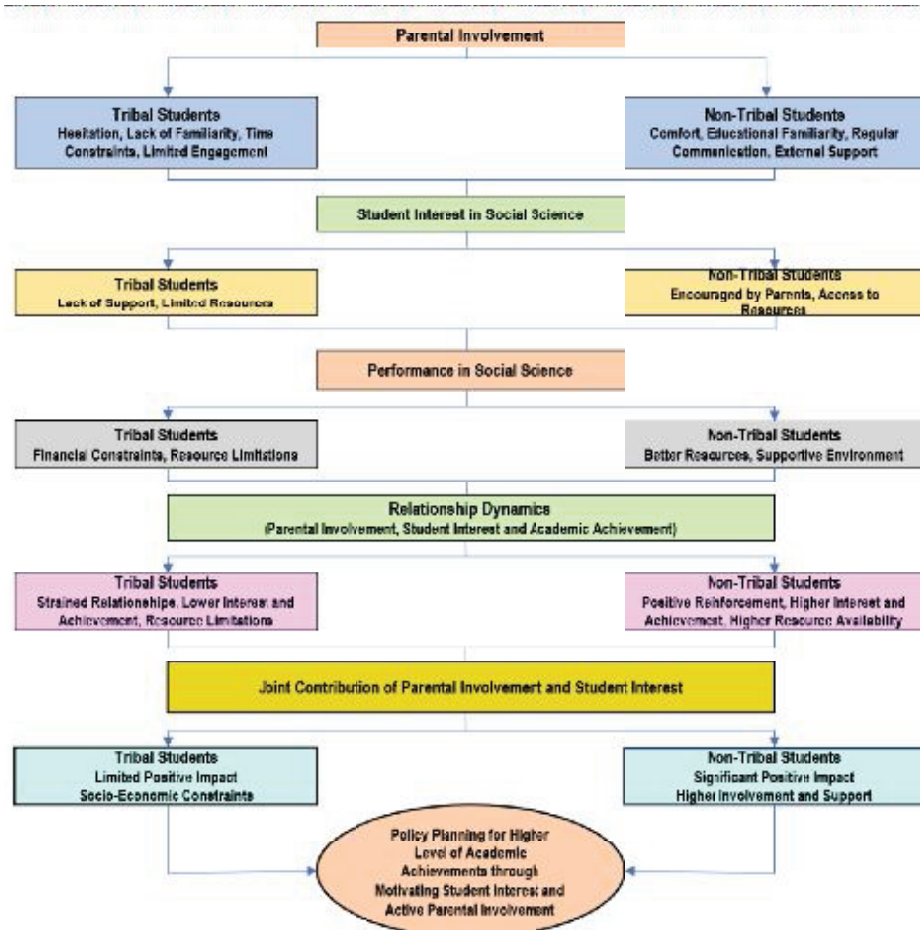
Figure 1: Representation of the network analysis based on findings from the thematic approach.

Discussion

Parental involvement plays a critical role in shaping academic outcomes, revealing distinct challenges for tribal and non-tribal parents. Tribal parents often encounter barriers such as limited education and time constraints from agricultural work, which diminish their engagement and negatively impact their children's motivation and performance (Jeynes, 2003). In contrast, non-tribal parents, benefiting from higher education and better resources, demonstrate greater confidence and involvement, fostering enhanced student interest and success (Wang and Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Research emphasizes that higher

parental education correlates with increased involvement, positively affecting academic performance (Jeynes, 2022). Educated parents are more likely to engage with teachers and support their children's learning, leading to improved academic results (Levinthal de Oliveira Lima and Kuusisto, 2020). Tribal students, however, face significant challenges due to limited resources and support, exacerbating educational disparities and contributing to lower academic success compared to their non-tribal peers (Wang and Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Active parental engagement, including effective communication with teachers and fostering a supportive home environment, is essential for boosting student motivation and achieving better outcomes (Jeynes, 2022). Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions to enhance parental involvement, particularly in tribal communities.

Conclusion

The analysis highlights significant disparities in academic outcomes between tribal and non-tribal secondary girls' students, driven by differences in parental involvement, educational background, and socio-economic factors. Tribal parents often struggle with limited education and demanding work schedules, which hinder their engagement in their children's education and contribute to lower student motivation and performance. In contrast, non-tribal parents benefit from higher educational levels and better resource access, leading to more effective support and improved academic success for their children. Socio-economic constraints exacerbate these challenges, reinforcing a cycle of educational disparity. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions to enhance parental involvement, increase resource availability, and implement culturally sensitive support strategies, aiming to foster a more equitable educational environment and improve outcomes for all students.

Acknowledgement

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