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**A STUDY ON THE LITERACY LEVEL OF RURAL YOUTH – A CASE STUDY OF KAVANOOR VILLAGE, SOUTH INDIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study was to know the level of literacy of rural youth and to study the educational barriers faced by the students. The area chosen for the study was Kavanoor, an underprivileged village in South India. Data was collected from the youth aged 15 to20. Census method was adopted to study the target group of the village. From the analysis of data, it was found that the rural youth have capabilities of development. If they are provided with the necessary tools, they have the potential to grow as a person and as contributors to the economic development of the country. The majority of the boys opt for engineering courses because the parents think that it is the only income earning and respectable course. The boys were given more preference than the girls for education. Gender discrimination, caste differences, poverty, lack of interest and lack of infrastructural facilities in the schools proved to be some of the major barriers of education. There is unemployment among the rural youth as they do not find suitable jobs. More training programs and vocational skills should be introduced and developed among the rural youth to make them employable so that they can stand on their own legs.*

***Keywords:*** Literacy, *educational barriers*, Rural Youth, South India

**1 Introduction**

Population projections indicate that while the global economy is expected to witness a shortage of youth population by 2020, India will have a youth surplus. While this provides India with great opportunities, it also poses challenges. These young people need to be suitably educated, and appropriately skilled to contribute optimally to the economy. Thus arises the need for a well-designed education.

India, a developing country, has the third largest higher education system, after China and the USA. There has been a noteworthy improvement in the literacy level from 12% at the end of the British rule in India in 1947 to the present rate at 73% as per Census 2011. But still the education system is found to be lacking in certain key areas. Gender discrimination, caste differences, poverty, lack of interest and lack of infrastructural facilities are some of the major barriers faced by the students in getting education, particularly in the rural areas.

67% of India’s population lives in villages out of which 71% are literate. Lack of basics, textbooks, and quality teachers have been an impediment to the advancement of the education of the children in rural areas. Drop outs in schools increase due to the poor quality of education and lack of affordability. And as age increases, they are expected to earn bread for the family. They lose money if they go to school. Hence, the dropouts increase, especially after primary level. Since a large proportion of the population of India lives in rural areas, rural quality education is important not only for the enhancement of life quality of the rural community, but also for the overall progress and development of the country.

**2 Overview of Literature**

Education has been the main focus of many research studies owing to its importance in today’s world. Literacy level has become an indicator of a country’s economic growth and development. India is a developing country and therefore, studying the progress of education is of vital importance. Many studies have identified the constraints and traced the progress of education in rural areas after independence. It has been revealed that the status of education has not been satisfactory in different parts of India.

The growth of education has proved to be a slow process, especially in countries having more rural areas. The disparities in educational facilities provided to urban and rural areas have also been studied. While schools in the urban areas are provided with electricity, the rural schools do not have electricity. Quite a number of schools do not possess a separate library room, separate teacher’s room, drinking water facilities, ventilation, and latrine. The co-curricular activities are not organised in many schools. Another barrier to the growth of literacy level is the gender disparities prevalent among rural communities. Studies indicate that the gender gap between the boys and girls in the rural India is reducing in the estimate for number of rural child population and rural enrolment at elementary stages in different categories of schools. The role of the Government in providing education opportunities to all parts of the country has also been studied.

However, the present paper studies the present barriers faced by the students in education and the infrastructural facilities available to them.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study has the following objectives:

1. To know the family structure, income and employment in the study area.
2. To find the reasons for dropouts of students in schools and colleges.
3. To study the problems faced by rural youth in getting education.
4. To analyse the effect of the chosen socio, economic and demographic variables on the level of literacy.

**3 Methodology**

The scope of study was kept limited to Kavanoor village, located in Madurai West Taluk in Madurai District of Tamil Nadu State, India. The study focuses on the present level of literacy among rural youth in South India. The paper seeks to study the opportunities available for the students in the study area and the infrastructural facilities available to them. The study endeavors to comprehend the interest of the students to learn and the importance, support and guidance given by their parents and also to understand the social, psychological, financial and economic issues that they face in order to get a quality education. Thus the study seeks to learn the level of literacy by conducting a case study in Kavanoor, a typical rural area in Madurai District and understand the problems that the youth face to get education. The period of the study taken is 2015-16.

The whole village was visited to find the location of the target group. The target group selected for primary data was the youth between the age of 15 and 20. The age group has been selected as it is the ideal years of decision making for the career and the life of the individuals. The students studying Std X to the third/final year of college have been covered under this study. A census method was adopted to study the rural youth aged between 15 and 20. Kavanoor village had 33 respondents in the target group.

An informal interview was conducted to collect the required information for the study. A well structured questionnaire was used having both closed and open ended questions. The data was compiled on excel sheet manually for the master table. The collected data was tabulated for the purpose of analysis. The compiled data was analysed using SPSS.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) has been calculated to measure the relative access of education to males and females. This index is calculated as the quotient of the number of females by the number of males enrolled in a given stage of education.

To analyse the factors determining the level of literacy in the study area and to estimate the impact of the chosen socio-economic and demographic variables on literacy level, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

The estimated literacy model is given as follows:

Y = β0 + β1X1 +β2X2 + β3X3 + β4X4+β5X5+β6X6+β7X7

Where, The Dependent variable is:

Y = Literacy level (Years of schooling)

The Explanatory variables are:

X1 = Gender of the respondent (Male & Female)

X2 = Average marks scored in exams

X3= Number of years of schooling of father

X4 = Number of years of schooling of mother

X5= Size of the Family (Number of members in the family)

X6= Annual Income of the household

X7= Annual Expenditure on Education

**Co efficient:**

β1, β2, β3, β4, β5, β6 and β7 are the coefficients of the explanatory variables.

Positive co-efficient of the significant variables explain the direct relationship between the explanatory variable and the literacy level and negative coefficients explain the inverse relationship. Higher the value of coefficient, higher is the influence and vice versa.

**4 Results and Discussion**

Table 1 gives the general characteristics of the respondents which is pertinent to understand the socio-economic, demographic and academic status of the child respondents.

**Table 1: General Characteristics of the Respondents**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S.No | Variables | Groups | Percentage |
| 1. | Sex | Male  Female | 69  31 |
| 2. | Age | Adolescents  Late Adolescents | 85  15 |
| 3. | Family Size | Small (less than 4)  Medium (4 to 6)  Large (More than 6) | 27  61  12 |
| 4. | Annual family income | Less than 50000  50000 to 100000  More than 100000 | 46  30  24 |
| 5. | Status of Poverty | Below Poverty line  Above Poverty line | 100  0 |
| 6. | Educational institution | Government schools  Private Schools  Government Colleges  Private Colleges | 37  28  9  25 |
| 6. | Academic Performance  (Average marks) | Less than 40  40 to 60  60 to 80  More than 80 | 9  18  55  18 |
| 7. | Interest in Studies | Interested  Not Interested | 73  27 |
| 8. | Drop outs | Studying  Drop outs | 97  3 |

Source: Primary Data 2016

From table 1, it is evident that the majority of the respondents have a medium size family. The family structure of the study area consists of joint families. The number of members in the family ranges between 4 and 10.

The findings indicated that the literacy level of the youth aged from 15 to 20 is 97 percent while 3% of the target group had dropped out of school. A few reasons for dropouts are:

* Poverty is the main reason behind dropouts. Parents cannot afford to send their children to study.
* The youth are forced by their parents to take up a career path that they find it difficult or simply just not interested in.
* The students are not interested in learning, particularly the boys who prefer to loiter around than stay inside one room for such a long time.
* The girls in rural areas are not allowed to be sent to far-off places for higher education which leads to their dropouts.

The paper also studies the reason why educational opportunities available to the students in rural areas are not being brought into play. The study has brought into light the following crucial problems faced by the rural youth in in South India:

**Economic Issues**

**Poverty:** Nearly half of the respondents belong to the low income groups. The majority of the families have an annual income ranging from Rs.50,000 to Rs.100,000. Their annual average family income is Rs.65000. The standard deviation of their annual family income is Rs.36297. This shows that their family income level is low and the variation in income is high.

Internationally, according to the income-based benchmarks set by the World Bank (2015), an income of less than $1.90 per day per head of purchasing power parity, which is Rs.126.75 in Indian currency is defined as extreme poverty. By this estimate, 100% of the respondents of the study area are extremely poor. The per capita income of the families of the respondents stands at Rs.36 which is well below the poverty line. This proves that the rural youth do not have the necessary financial resources to meet even their day to day basic needs. In order to fight out the poverty faced by the family, the chidren are sent to work instead of schools.

**Education:** Though all the familiesin Kavanoor village live below poverty line finding difficult to make both the ends meet, majority of the people have understood the importance of education and know that it is the only way to get rid of poverty. That is one of the reasons that 65 percent of the target group go to school and 34 percent to colleges. Their preference is for Government institutions to private schools and colleges, in spite of the poor infrastructure in Government institutions. The main reason for such a preference is the low fee structure in Government Schools and Colleges. The people who cannot afford to spend more money for private educational institutions avail loans from banks. In case they are not able to avail education loans from banks, they also borrow from other private sources at a higher rate of interest. Considering the loan taken for studies, the proportion of income spent on education has been computed using the following formula:

Percentage of income spent on education = (Annual expenditure on education including the loan availed / Total annual family income) x 100

In spite of the low income, parents are willing to spend a higher proportion of income for their children’s education which shows the awareness and accessibility to education for rural children. However, the number of students completing higher secondary education is more than those opting to go to colleges. If parents are not able to send their wards for higher education then all their previous efforts get wasted as completing just secondary education means a low paying job and the person is again struck in the same never ending cycle of money, life and poverty.

**Employment:** The main occupations were farming, cattle rearing and construction works under the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) scheme of the Government of India which provides job for 100 days and pays Rs. 250 for men and Rs. 100 for women per day. The youth in the village are forced to go into these occupations even if they have attained a college degree as they are unable to procure the jobs suitable to their qualifications. This further affects the decision of the people in the village about sending their children to study.

The findings indicate that the one factor leading to low level of employment or unemployment was the herd-like mentality and stereotypical ideas of the parents that “engineering is the only good career path for social status and arts and science streams are of no use” which is being passed on from generation to generation. This is true in the case of urban areas also but not as much as in the villages.

**Psychological Issues**

**Lack** **of Interest:** One of the major factors leading to dropouts of the students is the lack of interest shown. More proportion of boys had less interest in learning than the proportion of girls. The girls had more interest but their education were not given due importance.

**Lack of Freedom:** Another psychological issue faced is the restriction by parents to take independent decisions. Girls reported more problems than boys in the parental domain. This may be related to the fact that girls may experience higher levels of direct parental control, are granted less independence, and are expected to stay closer to home. The parental oversight may be perceived as constricting or stifling.

**Social Issues**

**Gender differences:** The Gender Parity Index of the village is 0.68 which shows that the level of female literacy is lesser than the male literacy level.

Girls from poor families in rural India are not allowed to school due to several reasons like household work and discrimination by the parents even after getting enrolled. Consequently, they lose interest and do not return to school, resulting in dropping out.

Rural girls receive less education than young boys and fewer opportunities for vocational training and they are not allowed to take decisions on their own. Their supposed purpose of getting an education is not to gain a higher level of employment opportunities but to get better prospects of marriage.

**Issues in Educational Institutions**

**Improper Infrastructural facilities:** Inadequate infrastructure in rural schools like school buildings, drinking water and toilets also discourage the children to attend the school resulting in low attainment. 48 percent of the target group attend educational institutions with improper infrastructural facilities.

**Locality of the educational institution:** From the analysis of data, it was found that 66 percent of the students are in rural areas and 34 percent are studying in urban areas. The rural educational institutions are more preferred by the villagers because of poverty. They are willing to study but their parents are not willing to send them to study outside the village. The village has a public primary school but lacks the proper infrastructural facilities required for developing young minds.

Adding to that problem, the school and college going students have no proper transportation facilities which make it difficult for them to attend classes regularly.

REGRESSION RESULTS

From the results of regression analysis, it was found that the significant variables that influence the literacy levels are Mother's Education, Size of the Family, Family income, Expenditure on education and Percentage of Income of the household spent on education. While Mother's Education, and Family income have a positive impact on the literacy level, Size of the Family, Expenditure on education and Percentage of Income of the household spent on education have a negative influence. Thus higher the mother’s education and family income, higher will be the level of education the youth gets. Mother’s education helps the family understand the importance of education whereas the higher family income means higher affordability. On the other hand higher family size and higher expenditure on education reduce the affordability. Thus, it is evident from the results that though there is access to education, it is the affordability that influences the literacy level of the rural youth.

**5 Conclusion**

The foundation to turn India into a strong nation has to be laid down at primary and rural levels and so the quality of education right from the beginning should be excellent. Education and text books in the primary schools should be made interesting. For the rural students, textbooks related to their culture, their traditions and values should also be available so as to create interest in their studies. There should be improvement in the condition of government schools. More amount of expenditure should be spent by the Government for education. There should be improvements in education quality, committed teachers and more salaries to these teachers should be part of development.

The economic development of the youth rests in the hands of the youth as the youth today are the policy makers and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. They must have the required skills and capabilities which can be given only by education.

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