

Socio-Cultural Background and English Writing Skills of Tribal Students in Higher Education

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Abstract: *There are many factors which influence writing skills. Those factors are beyond grammar, spelling and sentence structure. Our thinking, attitude, approach and most importantly socio-cultural backgrounds have an impact on our writing. Geographical divisions and various other demographic factors lead to socio-cultural differences as a result of which people coming from various tribes have different socio-cultural backgrounds. Hence, this paper endeavors to study in depth whether there is any impact of socio-cultural backgrounds on English writing skills of tribal population hailing from different tribes. State of Odisha has 62 tribes and this current study involves analysis of 28 different tribes. By English writing skills, we are referring to three stages of writing (pre/during and post). The samples for the study were taken from the students of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, KISS (Deemed to be University) Bhubaneswar through a structured questionnaire. A hypothesis was framed and tested using Chi-Square. From the study, it came to the limelight that there is no significant relationship between socio-cultural backgrounds of students from different tribes with their English writing skills.*

Keywords: *Challenges; English writing skills; Socio-cultural backgrounds; Stages of writing; Tribe.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of civilization, communication has been important to human beings. Language has played a very pivotal role in the communication system. The four wheels of a language are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Research says that there are various factors affecting the writing skills of people. Those factors may have a direct or indirect impact on the English writing skills. India is a non-native user of English language. However, the elite class and upper middle class can afford education in international schools whereas the middle class and lower middle class can afford education in English medium schools. Even if they are non-native speakers of English at least they are exposed to the language. They have an added advantage because English is the medium of instruction in these schools and as they climb the ladder, English becomes language of business or work. Research says that writing is not just about spelling, grammar and sentence structure. Our thinking, mentality, approach, attitude, socio-economic backgrounds, education level of parents, culture and upbringing do have a major contribution in our style of writing. Moreover, in their case the transition takes place from L1 to L2, where L1 stands for mother tongue and L2 stands for English. So, hurdles in transition are few in comparison to indigenous population.

Indigenous people also fall under non-native speakers but their case is not the same. The reason is that they do not grow in an environment where English is commonly used and neither it is medium of instruction in schools. In their case the transition takes place from L1 to L2 to L3. Here L1 is tribal language (which is their mother tongue), L2 is Odia (language of the State) and L3 is English (medium of instructions in higher education). There lies a huge gap between home language and target language. The state of Odisha has a total of 62 tribes from all over the districts. The geographical and economic divisions bring in differences in socio-cultural aspects of different tribes. This brings in the need for study on the fact that whether these socio-cultural differences have any effect on the English writing skills of tribal students coming from different tribes or not.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research says that there exists relation between the socio-cultural backgrounds and writing skills. Some of the related literature has been reviewed below for reference. The language processing areas where indigenous people fall behind are specific. The current circumstances and conditions of the tribal students are not in a very happy state. There are high rates of dropouts or they quit education due to socio economic status, less, or no exposure to the modern world, different mindset in the context of learning, linguistic problems, problems associated with learning English, psychological challenges and indifferent attitude of students, teachers and parents add to the whole thing. (Haseena and Mohammed,2014). The factors which influence the education of tribes are cognitive, social, psychological and linguistic problems. In order to infuse effective communication more stress should be laid on the writing skills in the English language. Writing skills should enjoy importance at high school level, that's when actual learning starts. This study foresees that writing will take the driver's seat in communication with the advent of technology. (Koppolu, 2015).

Being a non-native speaker of English has never been easy and things are really rocky for the tribal population. The plights of the tribal learners in the context of English writing skills have been discussed below.

The L2/L3 writing process of indigenous populations is that they have attained their schooling in vernacular medium either English has been rarely used or not used at all, they then find communication at university level frustrating and land into depression. They drown in low levels of motivation towards English language.

Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.

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On top of it not many tribal languages have a written script so forget about writing in English, they don't have much exposure to writing in general. Citing examples from Meghalaya where this holds true because there are both internal and external pull back factors related to the learner-achievement levels among tribal students. There are umpteen numbers of courses and programs to enhance oral and spoken forms of English communication but very less numbers of modules, courses and programs have been reported to improve the writing skills. This article also says that the analyzing the English writing skills of tribal population is desired, as not much work has been done on the L2/L3 writing process of indigenous population (Syiem,2012)

Research has brought to forefront that slow learners have specific learning difficulties and also listed the various characteristics of slow learners and how to deal with them. After lot of studies conducted it was deduced that tribal students fall in the category of slow learners. Study on uplifting indigenous people through education says that this sector continues to be a far cry as policies framed by the Government continues to be a victim of vested interests and a very insignificant amount is executed and implemented. Even if it is put to use it has its own sweet pace. Specifically in the context of study on the standard of English of tribal students it was learnt that difference in L1 – tribal language (also mother tongue), L2 – language of the state (Odia) and L3 – language of higher studies and medium of instruction (English), correct ways of introducing English language to the students, no or less knowledge on phonological structure of languages, pronunciation problems due to mother tongue influence, knowledge of grammar, differences in sentence structure of languages, lack of teachers who are not trained to meet the specific needs of slow learners, low levels of interest in learning the language, psychological barriers and mental blocks towards learning, cultural and social factors financial hindrances affect the development of English language skills. There lies a defect in the input output process. Research says that reading is input for writing whereas listening is input for speaking. When we specifically study the English writing skills of tribal learners various aspects like grammar, use of words, lack of reading, conveying sense and meaning, use of punctuation marks, spelling mistakes, wearing a lazy attitude towards use of dictionary, use of right expressions, knowledge of composing processes and formats, significance of change of paragraphs while writing, power to narrate, describe or elaborate a particular text or image, taking down dictations and notes in the class and socio cultural aspects are considered to be some of the hindrances faced by tribal learners during the writing process.

There lies a close connection between indigenous population, non-native speakers of English and slow learners. One aspect is linked to the other and has direct and indirect effect. It is very important to connect the three dots for a holistic understanding of the whole picture. Some of the studies conducted have been cited below. (Farkota,2005) has identified that students who face learning difficulties or under-achievement have cognitive, affective and behavioral problems and in addition to that socio-cultural backgrounds and contexts also contribute to the above mentioned issues.

Studies also say that there lies a close connection between cognition and brain. In an article by (Ken,2006) it was learnt that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are phonemically and phonologically not strong. This is a clear indication of low levels of language development and according to Ken, this has been categorically noticed in non-English speaking backgrounds and he found similar difficulties with indigenous children also. According to the study the reason is that English is second or third language for them. This shows that in the case of non-English speakers the transition from first language to second language or third language is not smooth.

Drawing references from the above points, it is evident that indigenous people are non-English speakers and face similar learning difficulties which have been mentioned above. This brings them in the category of slow learners. Their study also specifically talks how socio-cultural background plays an important role during the language learning process. Some of the areas which highlight the problems of slow learners and how to deal with them are discussed below. Khan (2008) pointed out the causes of slow learning and the problems of slow learners and cited that low emotional growth, environment, lack of growth and opportunities of learning, absenteeism, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, problem of resources, illiterate parents, untrained teachers, shift in priorities as more focus is on survival, violence, family size, health problems, destitute culture and background, poor leadership on behalf of the teachers and selecting the correct teaching methodology, fear complex, psychological problems, medium of instruction and problems of communication are the difficulties faced by slow learners.

Research says that dealing with slow learners calls for a different approach. One cannot put all levels of students on the same platform while teaching. The pedagogy should be tailor made or custom designed. L.D Child has rightly said "If I cannot learn the way you teach, will you teach me the way I can learn?" This quote beautifully explains the plight of slow learners. (Muppudathi,2014) defined slow learning as a concept to talk about a student who possesses the ability to acquire all necessary academic skills but at a rate, speed and depth which is not in pace with an average student. The roles and responsibilities of teachers towards slow learners are greater because they come with their own psychology towards learning. The first step is to build the level of confidence of the slow learners, repeating the same topic and concepts again and again helps the students register in their minds, teachers should encourage other curricular and co-curricular activities, teachers should encourage multi-tasking and applying multiple intelligence, encouraging peer education, introducing new concepts to the monotonous academic routine, more focus should be given to oral form of communication than written so that syntactic, spelling and writing errors can be avoided, teachers have to invest energy and time in finding out the main reason behind the poor performance of weak learners, slow learners require more interaction on a frequent basis, they require extra care

and attention, special teaching learning materials have to be designed for slow learners, cumulative records have to be maintained, a conducive and friendly environment has to be created to facilitate the learning process, the teaching pedagogy used should move from simple to complex process and all the learning should be activity oriented.

Despite the fact that the group under study are indigenous and are slow learners, we should not forget that most importantly they are adolescents. As per (Nandwana and Joshi,2010) adolescents need to be treated with love, emotions and humane touch is essential. Emotional intelligence should be used to handle the situation. Taking care of their emotions will generate a healthy learning environment and hence enhance output. In a research article it came to our knowledge that dynamic methods of teaching are evolving and the changing trends says that activity centered approach is used to teach English as second language and impressive improvements have been noticed in examinations and when the same method is used to teach English to slow learners then the situation calls for specific diagnostic tests to be conducted to learn about the specific areas of language in which the slow learners make mistakes or language disorders. The work is still on to see whether or not these methods will bear fruitful results.

From the study already conducted in the past it is evident that socio-cultural backgrounds have an impact on the writing skills of tribal population. However, this topic of concern lacks extensive research and gives us a very general picture. But this current study categorically focuses on whether there is any relationship between socio-cultural backgrounds and English writing skills in different tribal communities. Hence, the researcher studied different tribes to learn what happens in different stages of writing skills and whether or not socio-cultural backgrounds influence the writing skills of different tribes. The reason behind this is that different students of different tribe will have different socio-cultural backgrounds. Till date no such study has been done which categorically focuses on the different stages of English writing skills of students from different tribes. By various stages we are referring to pre, during and post stages of writing. Analyzing the different stages of writing would help us in knowing the demographic factors, sociolinguistic aspects and their status in English writing while transiting from one stage to the other. The most common stages of writing are pre, during and post writing stage.

The pre, during and post writing stages call for a different approach altogether. All the three stages cannot be kept on the same basket. They demand different angles while thinking to transit from pre to during to post. The strategy in pre writing stage involves creating a structure or outline before writing. In the second stage of writing which is during writing or is also known as drafting stage the writer should not try and come up with a perfect write up in the first draft, rather the focus should be on writing the main ideas of the text and the gradually working on improvising the write-up. This also does not involve proof-reading. The third stage is the post writing stage. In this stage the writer has to read the text to give it a complete shape and proof-read it in order to generate a flawless text.

Writing in itself is a challenge and the above mentioned aspects make it more challenging. The transition from pre to

during to post stage is not smooth and non- native speakers find it difficult. Tribal students fail to understand that reading is input for writing hence they find it extremely difficult to analyze, interpret, comprehend and assimilate a text or a write-up.

Objective of the study

- To study about the socio-cultural backgrounds of the tribal students from different tribes.
- To analyze the different stages of English writing skills of the students.
- To find out whether there is an impact of socio-cultural factors on the English writing skills of students from different tribes.

Hypothesis

H₀ – There is no significant relationship between socio-cultural backgrounds and English writing skills of students from different tribal communities.

H₁ – There is a significant relationship between socio-cultural backgrounds and English writing skills of students from different tribal communities.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, KISS (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar. Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, KISS University is the largest tribal university in the world offering free education to students from KG to PG. It is a home for 27,000 tribal children all across the state and from nearby states like Bihar and North East. It provides holistic education along with vocational training. The whole idea is to help them in getting jobs after formal education. It is a prototype of tribal Odisha representing 62 tribes, including 13 primitive tribes. The present study is delimited to KISS as a case study and the data has been collected from undergraduate students from all the tribes and streams.

The researcher deemed it to be the best platform for study because all the 62 tribes are available under one roof and are getting world class exposure which otherwise would have been a dream if they would be still living in the forests or Maoist infested areas. KISS University offers a window of opportunities to indigenous population and lends a helping hand towards constructing their career. KISS is called the prototype of tribal Odisha as it embraces 27,000 students from all the 62 tribes.

The target group selected for the study was undergraduate tribal students pursuing Arts, Science and Commerce courses at KISS University. Data was collected by randomly distributing questionnaires to the students in their hostels, classrooms and through their mentors. Questionnaires were distributed to students of 62 tribes and data were received from 28 tribes. Out of 28 tribes, 5 tribes were selected for the study. The data collected was tested and validated using chi-square test. The study was conducted through proper data and the primary data was collected from the strategically designed and structured questionnaires which were distributed to the students.



Discussions, interviews and class observations were done to gather first-hand information from the students and the people who are both directly and indirectly involved with the students. The secondary data was collected from the annual reports of the organization, reviewing related literature, magazines, research articles, websites and blogs. The government of Odisha has identified 13 tribes as PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) on the basis of their vulnerability. Some of the factors which decide vulnerability are geographical isolation, population, current stage of development, economic conditions, food habits, mode of earning a living so on and so forth. The important tribes of Odisha are Santal, Munda, Ho, Kandha, Gond, Saura, Oram, Gadhaba, Juanga and Kolha.

Table. 1 Sample of respondents from each tribe

Tribes	Girls	Boys
Kandha	63	50
Santal	42	24
Sabar	23	12
Gond	18	14
Saura	8	7

Out of 62 tribes, data was received from 28 tribes and further 5 tribes were selected for the study. I have selected 5 tribes for my study because KISS Deemed to be University has maximum population of students from the 5 tribes mentioned above. Questionnaires were randomly distributed to 1100 students (of all 62 tribes) and received 310 filled in questionnaires from 28 tribes. Further, analysis was done on 261 questionnaires from 5 tribes. The names of those 5 tribes along with a break up of boys and girls have already been mentioned above. Hence the total numbers of girls were 154 and boys were 107 and total numbers of respondents were 261. Along with the 5 tribes mentioned above the total of all the 3 stages (pre, during and post) of writing were considered. The structured questionnaire contained demographic details of the students and 3 sections with 5 questions in each section. It had a rating from 1 to 5, where 1 was the lowest and 5 was the highest. The 3 different sections were designed with the intention of analyzing the stages of writing in English of students coming from different tribes and to find out whether or not socio-cultural backgrounds have any influence on the English writing skills of students from different tribes. The 3 sections and 5 questions were combined and the total was calculated respectively with the help of SPSS.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data so collected through a structured questionnaire covering all the aspects of English writing skills which, was processed and analyzed with the help of SPSS v 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and advanced statistical tools like Chi-square test were used to analyze the data.

Chi-square test

Parametric and non-parametric tests have been used to explain the hypothesis and chi-square test is used to verify the statistical significance of observed association in a cross

tabulation and to analyze the data. The chi-square is the most common test for the significance of the relationship between categorical variable. To identify whether or not the socio-cultural factors influence writing skills of the various tribes taken for study, a chi-square test was done and the formula is given below:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{O-E}{E}$$

With degree of freedom (D.F) = (c-1) (r-1), where

O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

c = Number of columns

r = Number of rows

Chi-Square Test

Tabular Representation of Pre-Writing Stage

Table. 2 Tribe*Pre Stage

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	87.991 ^a	80	.253
Likelihood Ratio	92.087	80	.168
Linear-by-Linear Association	.377	1	.539
N of Valid Cases	261		

a. 91 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

Assumption in table is bigger than 2 x 2, is 20 % of the expected count is greater than 5.

In table 2 the following was found:

- The value of the test statistic is 92.087
- The footnote for this statistic doesn't pertain to the expected cell count assumption (i.e., 86.7 % have expected cell counts less than 5): 91 cells had an expected count less than 5, so this assumption was not met. As a result we are taking the likelihood ratio for our study.
- Because the test statistic is based on a 5x21 cross tabulation table, the degrees of freedom (df) for the test statistic is 80
- The corresponding p-value of the test statistic p = 0.168 Since the p-value is greater than our chosen significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), we do not reject the null hypothesis. Rather, we conclude that there is not enough evidence to suggest a significant relationship between the different tribes and the pre writing phase.

Tabular Representation of During-Writing Stage

Table. 3 Tribe*During Stage

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	92.923 ^a	80	.153
Likelihood Ratio	107.361	80	.062
Linear-by-Linear Association	.179	1	.672
N of Valid Cases	261		

a. 93 cells (88.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .11.



In table 3 the following was found:

- The value of the test statistic is 92.923
- The footnote for this statistic doesn't pertain to the expected cell count assumption (i.e., 88.6 % have expected cell counts less than 5): 93 cells had an expected count less than 5, so this assumption was not met. As a result we are taking the likelihood ratio for our study.
- Because the test statistic is based on a 5x21 cross tabulation table, the degrees of freedom (df) for the test statistic is 80
- The corresponding p-value of the test statistic $p = 0.062$ Since the p-value is greater than our chosen significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), we do not reject the null hypothesis. Rather, we conclude that there is not enough evidence to suggest a significant relationship between the different tribes and the pre writing phase.

Tabular Representation of Post-Writing Stage

Table. 4 Tribe*Post Stage

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	90.885 ^a	80	.190
Likelihood Ratio	101.100	80	.066
Linear-by-Linear Association	.012	1	.914
N of Valid Cases	261		

a. 91 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

In table 4 the following was found:

- The value of the test statistic is 101
- The footnote for this statistic doesn't pertain to the expected cell count assumption (i.e., 86.7 % have expected cell counts less than 5) 91 cells had an expected count less than 5, so this assumption was not met. As a result we are taking the likelihood ratio for our study.
- Because the test statistic is based on a 5x21 cross tabulation table, the degrees of freedom (df) for the test statistic is 80
- The corresponding p-value of the test statistic $p = 0.066$ Since the p-value is greater than our chosen significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), we do not reject the null hypothesis. Rather, we conclude that there is not enough evidence to suggest a significant relationship between the different tribes and the pre writing phase.

From the review of related literature we learn that socio-cultural backgrounds do have impact on the writing skills which holds true for each and every segment of the society but however from the above study we learnt that there is no significant relation between socio-cultural backgrounds and English writing skills of students from different tribes. It has been found the same in the case of all tribes. Irrespective of the fact that different tribes have different socio-cultural backgrounds still it does not have any impact on the English writing skills of students from different tribes. The

performance and standard of the students in English is the same irrespective of their different tribes. The impact of socio-cultural backgrounds is a blanket effect and does not necessarily have any effect on any tribe in particular. From the study it was known that since KISS (Deemed to be University) is curating a balanced field and exposure for the language development of the students since its inception hence there is no significant relationship between socio-cultural backgrounds and English writing skills of students hailing from different tribes. The reason is that all the students are getting the same opportunity and same platform. It was also found that they have almost the same grasping power. Hence, despite differences in demographic profiles the impact of socio-cultural backgrounds on English writing skills is the same on students from different tribes.

From this we can deduce that our 1st hypothesis H_0 – There is no significant relationship between socio-cultural backgrounds and English writing skills of students from different tribal communities has been accepted and H_1 has been rejected.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

KISS runs many English language development programs like English Access Micro Scholarship Program, by US State Department and TCS Employability Training. These programs help in honing the skills of the students and generating confidence in the students. With the intervention of these programs and a creative and progressive syllabus in English and Communication these tribal students have an edge over others. These are worth emulating and can be practiced elsewhere too. Launching similar language development programs with specific objectives of working on individual skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing will improve both receptive and productive skills of the students.

On studying the socio-cultural backgrounds of the tribal students we get to know about the differences in the demographic profiles of all the students. It contained information about their tribes, villages, districts, annual income and occupation etc. The different stages of English writing skills had questions related to the pre-writing, during-writing and post-writing stages of writing skills. The different tribes were studied with respect to their writing skills in English and it was learnt that there is no significant relation between the two. However, an important fact cannot be denied that definitely socio-cultural backgrounds do have impact on writing skills in tribal community but not on individual tribes per se.

The study in focus is only on writing skills hence other skills have been excluded in order to avoid information overload and the target group is from the state of Odisha and the field for study was KISS (Deemed to be University), Odisha. Hence other states or tribal countries like Africa have not been considered for the study. This creates scope for further research in order to serve an extensive work in the domain of tribal language skills and education.



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