

Gender and caste wise differences in educational aspirations Among Higher Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Educational aspiration leads to the future academic life of students. Both formal and non formal agencies contribute to the aspirations of students. School provides development and better environment equally to all students to become a good human being. A better school environment provides academic, social and psychological atmosphere which leads to good mental health and inspired for higher achievements. Better school atmosphere directly or indirectly affects student's aspiration. Aspirations foster motivation and goal-setting, driving students to excel academically. This academic achievement helps the individual to contribute the economic development of family and nation. The aim of the study was to explore the educational aspirations of higher secondary school students on the basis of gender and caste. The sample of the study was 161 higher secondary school students. Scale on Educational Aspirations was administered to collect data from the sample. Appropriate statistical techniques were used to find out the educational aspirations of higher secondary school students. The result shows that there are differences in educational aspirations with respect to gender and caste.

Key Terms: Educational aspirations, Higher secondary school students, gender, Caste.

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Human being is a unique creature who needs education to grow and to learn social norms. Educational process helps a person to acquire basic knowledge, skills, values etc. It teaches how to practice a smooth life in a society. It helps the person to deal with others and prepare one to face the challenges of life. It has been considered that one generation educates the next generation to achieve the desired goal. Guidance has an important role to direct a child, who practices what one has taught. To guide the child, there are different agencies of education and each one has its own importance in the life of the child. Thus every agency is a matter in the development of a person by inculcating proper attitudes, aspirations etc.

According to Aristotle "Education is the process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the faculties to the fullest extent as a member of society". Education resonates deeply with the concept of aspiration, viewing education as a transformative journey that empowers individuals to fulfill their aims within the broader context of society. Education should not only nurture intellectual capabilities but also emotional, social, and practical skills. Learning serves as a bridge between an individual's ambitions and their contribution to the collective well-being, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between personal growth and societal progress.

Aspirations are a strong drive to achieve something. It begins to be shaped early in a child's life but is modified by experience and environment. Aspirations may change when they face some reality as success or failure in their life. Educational aspirations are the expectations of individuals' beliefs interconnected with the future educational plans for attaining one's real educational goals, hopes and desires. Aspirations have three distinctive aspects. They are future-oriented, as they involve goals to be accomplished in the future. They act as motivators and drivers of effort, as they allow us to narrow our effort and attention toward accomplishing our goals, and away from less relevant activities. Finally, they require some amount of effort to achieve (Bernard and Taffesse, 2012).

The period of adolescence is very crucial and in this stage the aspiration will guide their choices about the future. For better study, job, or career most of the adolescents need a help. Adolescence is a period of exploration in which individuals start to develop their self-identity and make important decisions about their future, ranging from education, relationships, and entrance into the labor market to health behaviors (Sawyer et al. 2012). There may have differences in the educational and vocational aspirations among adolescents. There is

a challenging life transition in the development of young adults, and many students are inadequately prepared for the psychological, emotional, and academic realities of higher education (Othman et al. 2013).

There are many factors which influence one's aspiration, viz, individual factors (level of education, type of job, status etc), Parents' education, family structure, Socio-economic factors really matter when it comes to making careers (Stebbleton, 2007) and environmental factors (the social environment in which one lives). Family members are more influential in students' career choices as compared to other persons. Parental encouragement and support for learning activities at home combined with parental involvement in schooling is critical to children's education. Effective partnership between parents, families and school will contribute to improved learning outcomes and sustained aspirations. Educational aspiration has much importance especially during adolescence period, as it is time when youth think very much about the opportunities for achieving their future goals. But still there are few communities which remain isolated from the main stream. Large gaps persist across gender and caste, with SC girls being disadvantaged (IIPS and Macro International, 2007, Kingdon, 2007, Mehrotra, 2006). Gender and caste, affects stream choice at the higher secondary level of schooling in India (Kumar and Sahoo, 2024). Scheduled caste is one among such community that still come across such social discrimination. Only when this community understand the importance of education and are provided quality education this problem can be resolved (Bhagavatheeswaran, et al. 2016). Here the researcher tried to point out gender and caste differences in educational aspirations among higher secondary school students.

Need of the Study

From the early stages of childhood, gender often plays a significant role in shaping educational aspirations. Societal expectations and ingrained stereotypes can subtly influence children's perceptions of their potential paths. Boys and girls may receive different cues about what fields of study and careers are suitable for them. Whether through parental guidance, classroom dynamics, or media portrayals, gender-based assumptions can impact the choices children make regarding their educational pursuits. Recognizing and addressing these early influences is crucial for fostering an environment that encourages all individuals, regardless of gender, to explore diverse interests and aspirations in education.

The educational outcomes of SC/ ST students often lag due to a lower aspiration attitude. Several factors contributing to this reduced aspiration level which is elucidated in cultural reproduction theory, health selection theory, and cultural theory. The term "Scheduled Caste" is constitutionally standardized in the Republic of India, referring to the depressed section of the population. Coined by the Simon Commission and embedded in the Government of India Act,

1935, this classification initially used the term "depressed class" before 1935. Non-scheduled caste individuals, those other than the scheduled caste, include some occupying higher strata in society, particularly in government administrative and other service areas. While some among them face economic backwardness, others benefit from the status of Other Backward Class (OBC) with government support. The societal advantages enjoyed by non-scheduled caste individuals contribute to measurable and appreciable performances in comparison to their scheduled caste counterparts (Roy, 2018). Schools function not merely as neutral institutions for knowledge but also for personal and social development. Children from privileged backgrounds possess cultural capital such as language proficiency, social etiquette, and knowledge of mainstream cultural norms, tend to navigate educational systems more smoothly. Children from marginalized backgrounds may face obstacles in adapting to the cultural expectations. School ensures equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-cultural background. Hence school should apply different theories for appraising their standards. Cultural reproduction theory helps in making it possible.

The cultural reproduction theory provides valuable insights into the dynamics of educational aspirations, particularly in the context of marginalized communities like SC/ST students. According to this theory, societal structures and cultural norms are transmitted from generation to generation, influencing individuals' aspirations and opportunities. In the case of SC/ST students, cultural reproduction may manifest in persistent barriers to educational advancement, as historical prejudices and stereotypes are perpetuated over time. Limited exposure to diverse educational and career options, coupled with societal expectations, can contribute to lower educational aspirations among SC/ST students. Breaking this cycle requires addressing the deeply embedded cultural influences that shape the educational landscape, fostering an environment that encourages diversity, and providing equal opportunities for all students to explore and pursue their academic goals.

Scheduled Caste students are the depressed section of population. (Pandey, 1986). They faced challenges in achieving their desired positions due to the need to contribute to family responsibilities, leaving their basic necessities unmet. This historically disadvantaged group encounters barriers such as social discrimination, limited resources, and lack of support, hindering their educational aspirations. Research into their aspirations at the higher secondary

level can unveil factors influencing goals and motivations. Understanding these challenges enables targeted government interventions to improve educational outcomes. Special attention to Scheduled Caste higher secondary students is essential, fostering awareness of the link between academic achievement and job aspirations. Empowering them with this knowledge can pave the way for achieving professional goals, emphasizing the importance of higher education and career opportunities. Education has a role in the development as individuals and provided them opportunities to establish their potential before their families who then made adjustments in the prevailing norms of the society and allowed them to continue higher education and take follow their career. Study on aspirations is crucial for promoting inclusion, empowerment, and academic success within this marginalized group (Noreen, and Khalid, 2012). Hence the study is **GENDER AND CASTE WISE DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.**

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows

1. To find out the educational aspirations among higher secondary school students for the total sample and sub samples based on gender and caste
2. To find out whether there exist any significant difference in the educational aspirations among higher secondary school students based on gender and caste

Hypothesis

There exists significant difference in the educational aspirations among higher secondary school students based on gender and caste.

Methodology

The research method adopted in the study was Descriptive survey. The study is focused on educational aspirations among higher secondary school students. Scale on Education aspirations was used to collect data for this study.

Sample of the study

Sample of the study includes 161 higher secondary school students from Kozhikode district. Representation was given to gender and caste. The sample was selected randomly.

Tool used in the study

Scale on Education Aspirations was used to collect data from the sample. The scale was prepared based on cultural reproduction theory. Parents motivation and involvement, individual's knowledge, abilities and skills were the selected components of the instrument. There were 30 items in the tool. The responses were given in the form of a five point scale with strongly agree, Agree, No opinion, Disagree and Strongly disagree.

Statistical Techniques used for the study

1. Preliminary analysis
2. Test of significance of difference between means
3. Analysis of Variance

Results and Discussion

1. Gender differences in educational aspirations

Educational aspirations of girls and boys were compared and the data and results are given in table 1.

*Table 1
Data and result of educational aspirations between boys and girls*

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Educational Aspiration					
Boys	82	97.46	18.14		
Girls	79	104.49	16.93		

2.54*

From the table it is evident that the mean scores of educational aspirations are 97.46 and 104.49 with a standard deviation of 18.14 and 16.93 respectively for boys and girls. The independent t test ($t=2.54, p<0.05$) shows that there is significant difference in mean scores of educational aspiration of boys and girls at 0.05 level. From mean scores, it can be inferred that the educational aspiration is significantly high among girls as compared to boys.

2. Data and Results of the analysis based on the caste wise differences in the educational aspirations among higher secondary school students.

Preliminary analysis was done for the variable Educational Aspirations for the total sample and subsample based on caste is given in table 2.

Table 2

Data and results of the preliminary analysis of educational aspirations among higher secondary school students for the total sample and subsample based on caste.

Sample	N	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D	Skewness	Kurtosis
Total	161	100.91	104.00	106.00	17.85	-1.05	1.02
General	45	110.29	111.00	112.00	9.15	0.10	-0.19
OBC	51	106.00	106.00	106.00	11.82	0.04	-0.32
SC	34	94.38	101.50	104.00	21.22	-0.35	-0.74
ST	31	86.10	94.00	84.00	19.94	-0.75	-0.98

Table 2 shows that the mean score of the total sample (N=161) was 100.91 with a Standard deviation of 17.85. The mean score and standard deviation of general category was 110.29 and 9.15 respectively. For the OBC category the mean score was 106.00 and SD was 11.82. The mean score of Scheduled Caste was 94.38 with a S.D. of 21.22. For Scheduled Tribe the mean score and standard deviation were 86.10 and 19.94 respectively.

The table reveals that the mean score of the variable educational aspirations of general category is higher than the other three categories. The mean score of Scheduled Caste students are higher than the Scheduled Tribe students.

3. Analysis of Variance to find out the difference in mean scores of educational aspirations among students based on caste.

To find out the difference in the educational aspirations among students of different caste categories –general, other backward class, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, Analysis of variance was done and the results are given in table 3.

Table 3

Data and results of mean difference in educational aspirations based on caste

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13530.799	3	4510.266	18.90	.001
Within Groups	37463.984	157	238.624		
Total	50994.783	160			

Table shows that there is a significant effect of Caste in educational aspirations among secondary school students. As the F value is significant further analysis was done with Scheffe's test.

The result of the Posthoc analysis was done and its results are given in table 4.

*Table 4
Data and results of PostHoc analysis*

Variable	Category				
Mean Difference					
Std. Error	P				
SC	general		15.91	3.51	0.00
SC	OBC		11.62	3.42	0.01
Educational Aspiration	SC	ST	8.29	3.84	0.20
	general	OBC	4.29	3.16	0.61
		ST	24.19	3.61	0.00
		ST	19.90	3.52	0.00

Table 4 shows that the mean difference is significant between, general and Scheduled Caste students, general and scheduled tribe students, OBC and Scheduled Caste and OBC and

Scheduled Tribe at 0.01 level. But it is also evident from the table that the difference between SC and ST students and general and OBC students are not statistically significant at any level.

Discussion

There is gender difference in educational aspirations among the higher secondary school students. The analysis indicates that educational aspirations of SC and ST are low compared to the forward caste and Other Backward classes. The low educational aspirations of SC and ST categories may be due to a number of factors like individual factors, family factors and environmental factors.

Conclusion

The results of the study proved that there are differences in educational aspirations among students based on gender. It was also found that there are caste wise differences in educational aspirations among higher secondary school students.

Suggestions to improve educational practices based on the study

In India there are different categories of castes and these are entitled like this because of their status in the society. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes face social and economic deprivation and are eligible for reservation benefits in education and employment. From the results of the study some suggestions are given below for improving the educational practices for the betterment of SC's and ST's.

- Parental involvement and empowerment – It is to be ensured the involvement of parents in the education of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students. Strategies to empower their parents are essential to motivate them for the improvement of educational aspirations of students.
- Career guidance and support- Give career guidance to SCs and STs and their parents.
- Community engagement and involvement- Involve the students and parents of SC and ST communities in all activities of the school and thus enhance their engagement in the community.
- Inclusive and culturally sensitive curriculum
- Awareness on scholarships and other welfare schemes- Make aware the students and their parents on scholarships and other welfare schemes.
- Counselling-counseling is to be given to the needy students.
- Remove the barriers of language and technological knowledge- More programmes are to be given to improve the language skills and technological skills.

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