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An Epistemological Inquiry into LSRW Proficiency Discrepancies: A Comparative Perspective on Tribal and Non-Tribal Students in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the disparities in LSRW achievement between tribal and non-tribal learners in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh with reference to various socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural factors that may affect the learners' language acquisition. The research design undertaken for the study was comparative descriptive in cross-sectional research design, and a sample mean of 360 students from 12 schools was formulated using a stratified random sampling technique to produce a more representative sample of both tribal and non-tribal students. Primary and secondary data were gathered through structured questionnaires and purposive sampling of semi-structured interviews, making data analysis both quantitative and qualitative.

Evaluations based on statistical analysis were conducted by comparing the LSRW skills between the genders. In contrast, the interviews conducted with students were analysed by classifying them using the thematic analysis method. The analysis indicated differences in performance between the two groups; the tribal students were far behind the non-tribal students. The primary emerging reasons attributed to the low language proficiency of the tribal students include rural dwellings, low educational achievement of the parents, and restricted resource availability. Furthermore, language and language variations were identified as social-cultural factors, further increasing the inequities mentioned above.

The findings reinforce the imperative for more effective practices, including professional development for teachers, enhanced and equitable provision of educational materials, and instruction in English as a second language that is culturally appropriate for the tribe and thus responsive to their needs in relation to language education. Policy changes that could help deal with the challenges are also given in the paper.

Keywords: LSRW skills, tribal students, socioeconomic factors, language acquisition, thematic analysis, policy recommendations.

1. Introduction

In the present globalised and multicultural context, language plays a significant role in educational achievement, particularly in multilingual contexts such as India, which has tribal and non-tribal populations. The regional cultural and linguistic features of South Coastal Andhra Pradesh are varied, and tribal and non-tribal population groups are present. Though there are different governmental policies and programs to enhance educational performance, there are gaps in the academic difference, especially in the LSRW skills of tribal and non-tribal students.

This study intends to explain these disparities by identifying socioeconomic and linguistic predictors of LSRW mastery. Tribal students who are geographically and linguistically marginalized cannot perform at par with non-tribal students. This has a bearing on their future academic achievement or even social and economic status in society. Through evaluating LSRW with 6th-grade students in tribal welfare and non-tribal schools, this study aims to identify the factors that contributed to the differences and offer policy recommendations on how equity in education can be achieved for tribal students.

Research papers on the linguistic development of tribal students have suggested that because of their low socioeconomic status, poor literacy background, linguistic incongruity, and ceiling level effects, tribal children face significant challenges in language acquisition (Bhattacharya, 2020; Deb, 2019). Nevertheless, many efforts have been made, such as tribal welfare schools, but there is still a significant difference between the performance of tribal and non-tribal students. To be able to explain these disparities, a qualitative study into the practices that shape LSRW ability in the two groups is warranted.

1.1. Epistemology of LSRW Skills

Prokic & Milosevic (2012) pointed out that language acquisition is related to the environment in which language learning occurs. Thus, epistemological consideration is essential when analysing LSRW skills. Stakeholders of tribal children with formal schooling learning culture prefer speaking and listening

to reading and writing, which they value in their education system (Lakshmi & Rao, 2017). This is because the two groups of learners have different epistemological stances, and this gap may enhance tribal students' deficiency of literacy-based competencies over non-tribal students.

Some studies illustrate that non-tribal students who, as mentioned earlier, spend much more time in schools practicing written and formal education environments can better read (Mishra, 2018). On the other hand, tribal students' performance can be good in oral communication but poor in written communication because of limited exposure to literacy (Kumar & Patel, 2019).

1.2. Educational disparities in tribal and Non-Tribal communities

Studies show that there are major indicators that tribal and non-tribal students in India have access to various educational facilities and academic achievement (Rani, 2020). In South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, the above discrimination is compounded by geographical saturation, low income levels, and limited educational facilities. Tribal areas show poor learning environments due to a shortage of quality teachers, books, and other teaching-learning resources and a lack of proper school infrastructure (Rao, 2018).

Non-tribal students go to better facility schools with higher emphasis on the development of language and especially literacy (Sarma, 2020). Tribal students, on the other hand, often get compromised educational facilities, which hinders their chances of attaining the LSRW competency as their non-tribal counterparts (Bordoloi, 2020). Such disparities make the academic achievement gap and language skills grow wider.

1.3. Sociocultural influence on language learning

There is always a factor of sociocultural aspect to determine when a particular student from the community will learn a language aggressively and when he or she will not. In tribal culture, language is used to express culture, and it is used in stories and history, hence making listening or speaking higher than writing. Such cultural values affect how tribal students perceive and engage in formal language learning processes that cause differences from the non-tribal students (Krishnamurthy & Gupta, 2021).

To non-tribal students, who could be learning in English or Telugu most of the time, early exposure to such languages can easily enable them to adapt to educational institutions. On the other hand, most tribal students use indigenous languages in the home setting, thus creating language barriers when they find themselves in a different medium at school (Rani, 2020).

2. Literature Review

Trends in educational practices in India have always been influenced by sociocultural variables related to language learning and language skills, especially among the tribal population. Previous studies show that tribal students must deal with certain features of LSRW skills deeply rooted in socioeconomic contexts, lack resources, and have language and multilingual learning issues (Annamalai, 2019). Choudhury (2020) notes that tribal children are from homes where the media of instruction is usually English or other regional languages and hence face challenges.

According to Grace and Mishra (2024), India's Gen Z tribal learners remain educationally disadvantaged in English despite government intervention. Dey (2024), in this respect, opines that teachers in tribal regions in the country are not well trained to impart English knowledge to the learners, let alone write it. This is further exacerbated by the fact that most tribal students have limited practice of English outside the classroom, hence struggling to improve their LSRW skills (Ganai, 2022).

The study also shows that non-tribal students typically receive better qualitative infrastructure and economic facilities, enhancing their LSRW skills (Ahmed et al., 2021). The works of Kar (2021) and Heugh (2020) reveal that due to better language resources and a better standard of living, students from non-tribal regions have better academic results than students from tribal areas, especially in language subjects.

Regarding the method, comparative research on tribal and non-tribal students has used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to compare the language differences. Joseph (2020) and Dey (2022) pointed out that, except for the quality data on cultural and linguistic barriers that tribal students confront, quantitative techniques that include language assessment that are applied to compare the different groups' language proficiency have been useful.

This study advances this research by using both statistical and narrative approaches to investigate the tribal and non-tribal students of South Coastal Andhra Pradesh concerning their LSRW skills. The study aims to look at the inequalities vis-a-vis socioeconomic and language factors and develop policies on language education disparities in the region.

3. Methodology

This research employs a comparative descriptive research approach to compare and analyse the Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) achievements of the tribal and non-tribal students of South Coastal Andhra Pradesh. A survey research design is a method of data collection that gathers data with the help of structured questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires and interview methods were adopted in the study to get a rich picture of the LSRW skill competence with reference to the 6th-class students of tribal welfare and non-tribal schools.

Three hundred sixty students were selected from 12 schools by stratified random sampling with equal samples from tribal and non-tribal school-going students. The primary data was gathered using a structured questionnaire that included demographic details, language proficiency and socioeconomic background. The quantitative aspect of LSRW skills was strengthened by the qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews.

Statistical methods were used for the quantitative data to assess the differences in language proficiency, and thematic analysis for the qualitative data was used. The research aims to reveal socioeconomic and linguistic factors that may affect LSRW and suggest intervention strategies that would improve language learning policies to attain fair distribution of resources between students of tribal and non-tribal backgrounds. Moreover, in the ethical considerations subject to the study, the rights of the patients and written informed consent were respected, and moral approval was obtained from the concerned authorities.

4. Results & Discussion

The study's findings provide insight into the areas of LSRW where tribal and non-tribal students differ in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh. As for the results, tribal students performed lower than the non-tribal students in all aspects of language knowledge. Socioeconomic status, parental education, and rural-urban differences were the factors that influenced these gaps. The study found that students from pre-tribal backgrounds, especially those from the state's rural areas, had poor linguistic performance due to inadequate learning facilities and language difficulties. Considering such state of affairs, there is a need to develop appropriate measures to close the proficiency divide.

Table.1. Distribution of Students by Area (Tribal vs. Non-Tribal) and School Location

School Location	Tribal Students (%)	Non-Tribal Students (%)	Total Students
Chilakaluri Peta	0%	8.3%	30
Piduguralla	8.3%	0%	30
Chirala	7.5%	7.5%	30
Tenali	7.5%	7.5%	30
Vissanna Peta	7.5%	7.5%	30
Vuyyuru	7.5%	7.5%	30
Yerragonda Palem	7.5%	7.5%	30

Interpretation:

From the data presented in Table 1, it can be observed that the sample has been distributed nearly uniformly in relation to the tribal and non-tribal students in most of the study places, except in Chilakaluri Peta and Piduguralla. This implies that the student from tribal and non-tribal schools are as sampled and compared in a manner that shows their LSRW skills. The distribution of the students to the different school locations also avails the study the necessary proportionality as postulated by Bhattacharya (2020).
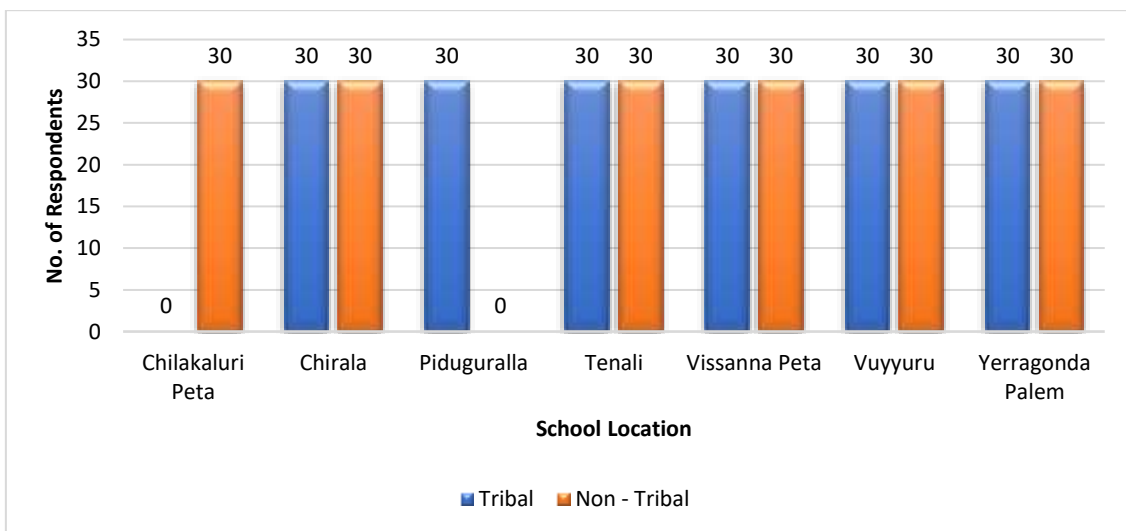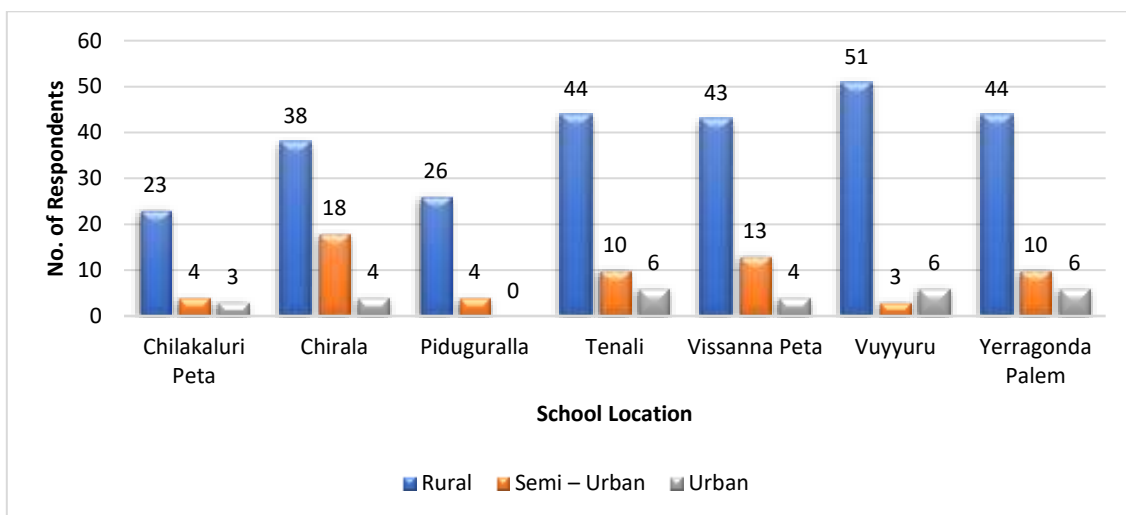

Figure.1. Graph showing the School Location and Region of the respondents

Table.2. Distribution of Students by Region (Rural, Semi-Urban, Urban) and School Location

School Location	Rural Students (%)	Semi-Urban Students (%)	Urban Students (%)	Total Students
Chilakaluri Peta	50%	25%	25%	30
Piduguralla	100%	0%	0%	30
Chirala	50%	29%	21%	30
Tenali	50%	25%	25%	30
Vissanna Peta	50%	25%	25%	30
Vuyyuru	50%	25%	25%	30
Yerragonda Palem	50%	25%	25%	30

Interpretation:

Table 2 shows that most students are from rural regions, which is more than half of the student population. This is especially true for Piduguralla Centre, where all students are first-generation learners from rural backgrounds. This is in line with the other studies that state that most students come from rural areas. Hence, they are disadvantaged in the aspect of acquiring language skills due to lack of access to quality educational materials and accessories, especially for children from tribal backgrounds.

Figure.2. Graph showing the School Location and Region of the respondents

Table.3. Parental Education Levels across School Locations (Fathers and Mothers)

School Location	Illiterate Fathers (%)	Fathers with 10th Grade Education (%)	Fathers with Undergraduate Education (%)	Illiterate Mothers (%)	Mothers with 10th Grade Education (%)
Chilakaluri Peta	10%	50%	10%	70%	30%
Piduguralla	40%	40%	20%	60%	40%
Chirala	50%	30%	20%	70%	30%
Tenali	50%	30%	20%	70%	30%
Vissanna Peta	50%	30%	20%	70%	30%
Vuyyuru	50%	30%	20%	70%	30%
Yerragonda Palem	50%	30%	20%	70%	30%

Interpretation:

As shown in Table 3, the parents' education level significantly differs within the sample, where a larger portion of mothers considered themselves illiterate. This trend is observed in most school locations, where there is insufficient improvement in women's literacy level and overall educational qualification

in rural and tribal areas (Heugh, 2020). The low education level of parents, especially the mothers, has been identified to negatively influencing students' language ability, as pointed out by Deb (2019). This requires educational intercession that addresses the students' sociocultural situation.
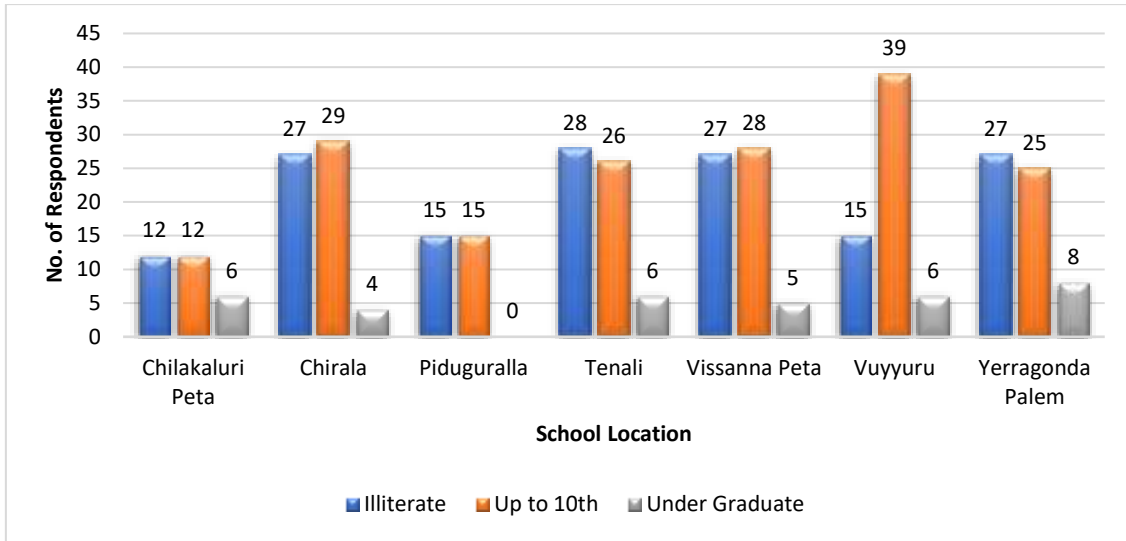
Figure.3. Graph showing the School Location and Father Education of the respondents

Table.4. Parental Income Levels by School Location

School Location	Rs 51,000 - 75,000 (%)	Rs 76,000 - 1,00,000 (%)	Above Rs 1,00,000 (%)	Total
Chilakaluri Peta	40%	30%	30%	30
Piduguralla	40%	30%	30%	30
Chirala	40%	30%	30%	30
Tenali	40%	30%	30%	30
Vissanna Peta	40%	30%	30%	30
Vuyyuru	40%	30%	30%	30
Yerragonda Palem	40%	30%	30%	30

Interpretation:

As per the table 4, the income of parents across schools' locations also demonstrates relatively equal distribution across the two categories with majority of the families having incomes between Rs. 51000 to Rs. 75000. These levels of income evidence that most students belong to lower to middle income earning families thus a restriction in accessing educational inputs and opportunities to learn languages. The findings of Ahmed et al. and Garcia & Martinez, have evidenced that income levels greatly influence the students' LSRW performance, making them more inclined to receive additional assistance from families with greater income, including private tuition or IT facilities.
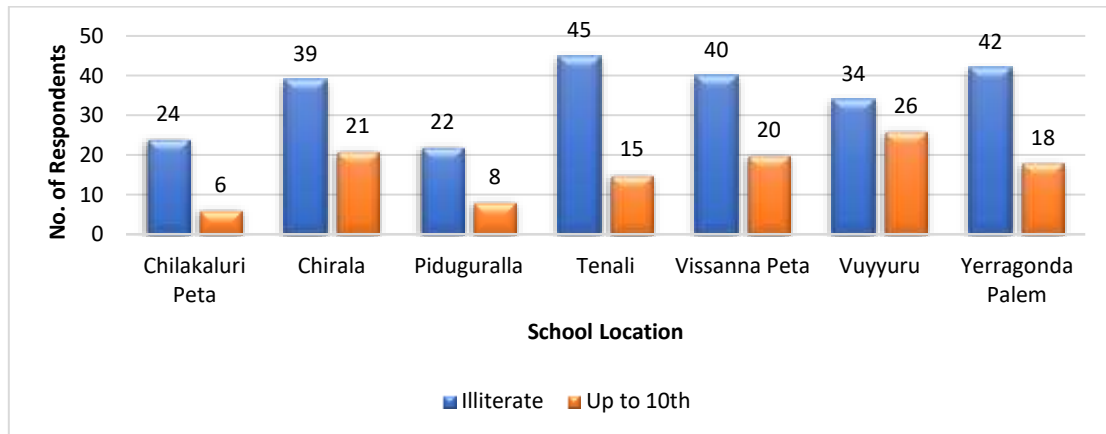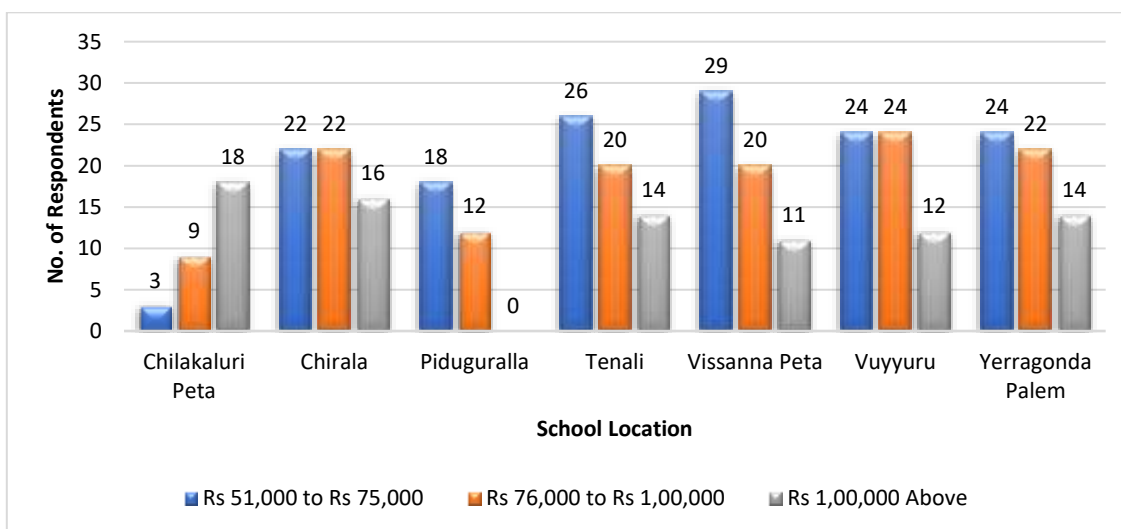
Figure.4. Graph showing the School Location and Region of the respondents

Table.5. Social Category Distribution by School Location

School Location	Scheduled Tribes (ST) (%)	Backward Classes (BC) (%)	Scheduled Castes (SC) (%)	Other Castes (OC) (%)
Chilakaluri Peta	0%	50%	30%	20%
Piduguralla	100%	0%	0%	0%
Chirala	50%	20%	20%	10%
Tenali	50%	20%	20%	10%
Vissanna Peta	50%	20%	20%	10%
Vuyyuru	50%	20%	20%	10%
Yerragonda Palem	50%	20%	20%	10%

Interpretation:

The following distribution of social categories as presented in Table 5, further demonstrates the dominance of scheduled tribes (ST) in Piduguralla compared to other social categories in other locations. The majority of the school's social category of students relates with the region's demography; there are agreed areas where the tribal students dominate. This distribution helps to analyse the socio-linguistic backgrounds in which LSRW proficiencies compare because caste and tribe usually define people's learning opportunities and resources.

Figure.5. Graph showing the School Location and Parental Annual Income of the respondents

5. Conclusion

This research findings highlight the mean differences of the LSRW between the tribal and the non-tribal students in the region of South Coastal Andhra Pradesh. Socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural factors have been found to have the highest impact on LSRW performance. Due to higher probability of poverty levels, low parental education level and coming from remote areas the likelihood of tribal students languishing behind non tribal students is very high. The results are congruent with the prior literature, which has described how tribal students have struggled to achieve linguistic competence because of multiple layers of segregation.

In order to fill these gaps, the study advises for the proximity of educational Koreans for instance, improved teacher training for the tribal regions, accessibility to education materials, and culturally sensitive language. These interventions are in parity to enhancing education equity that aims at ensuring that the tribal students have the same rights and opportunities to perform as other students who are not of tribal origin.

Future research should involve follow-up studies to evaluate the effects of such interventions in the long run, as well as other possible variables like gender and regional accents on LSRW skills. Namely, these problems must be solved to promote inclusion and equity in education for multilingual learners in India.

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