

Social Interaction and Young People's Transition to Higher Education in Varanasi District

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Abstract

Education is a primary source of socialisation and improving the future opportunity of work for young people. But the transition from school to higher education is not smooth for many young people in India. Young people from less economically privileged families face a considerable challenge. Social interaction and interpersonal relations play a vital role in the transition to higher education. The objective of this paper is to examine the socio-economic correlates of difficulty faced by young people in social interaction and its effect in making the transition to higher education in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh. The study is based on a representative sample of 351 young people from eight urban residential colonies in Varanasi South assembly constituency of Varanasi district. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques are used to analyse the data. The results indicate that social interaction varies according to gender, caste group, socio-economic status and parental involvement. In general resources inherent in the form of social relation with teachers, peers, office staff and parents are essential for developing good interpersonal relationships in the institute of higher education. But these resources are not evenly distributed throughout gender, caste and class, and this largely accounts for the marginalisation of women, Dalit youth and youth belonging to lower socio-economic status.

Keywords: Higher Education; Social Interaction; Transition; Young People.

Introduction

Education has a great impact on young people's life; they are primarily produced inside the education system. It is a significant aspect of socialisation of youth and a valuable tool for improving the future opportunity of work. In the changing global scenario, importance of higher education in the creation of knowledge-based society assumes special significance. There is little doubt that higher education is one of the most important indicators of future labour market success and therefore one of the most critical avenues for reducing persistent societal income inequalities (Dickert-Conlin & Rubenstein, 2007). The government in India has also decided to

expand higher education and several steps have been taken. Last two decades have seen a massive expansion of higher education in India. The mushrooming of private colleges and universities in urban and semi-urban India is a visible change in the system of higher education in India (Chalam, 2011). But young people face a lot of difficulty in transition to higher education. Higher education has, in fact, become one of the sources of production and reproduction of inequality in India.

The transition from school to higher education is not smooth for many young people in India. Young people from less economically privileged families face a considerable challenge. While education is available under the rubric of equal opportunity, social origin continues to shape higher education. The state has failed to produce and manage policies that discriminate against lower castes and impede access to quality education (Ovichegan, 2015). Higher castes have deliberately prevented the lower castes from rising to the cultural level of higher castes (Ambedkar, 2013). The control by higher castes of Indian educational structure is predominantly responsible

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for the underdevelopment of Dalits in terms of education (Chalam, 2007a). Many young women, Dalits and youth from lower SES are first-generation students and they expect that higher education will translate into opportunities that will allow them to cross the boundaries of class, race and geography into a place of greater economic stability (Jehangir, 2010) collectively. But they are trapped between the exclusionary environment in higher education and expectations of self and parents. They fail to establish smooth social interaction with teachers, peers and other office staff in the institution of higher education. These first-generation students experience isolation and marginalisation both on campus and in the classroom (Jehangir, 2010; Ward et.al., 2012). For them, transition to higher education is not smooth. The first major challenge for them is interaction with teachers, peers and others.

In this context, the objective of this paper is to examine the socio-economic correlates of difficulty faced by young people in social interaction and its effect in making the transition to higher education in Varanasi district. Although a lot of research have been done in developed countries on this topic, very little studies have been done in the Indian setting. Findings are expected to fill a significant gap in existing knowledge about a poorly researched theme of young people's social interaction in institutions of higher education in the Indian context.

Methodology

The field survey for the study was conducted in a representative sample drawn from eight urban residential colonies in Varanasi South assembly constituency of Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh. In each residential colony, 50 households were selected by systematic random sampling. Within each selected household only one respondent pursuing higher education through regular mode has been chosen for the interview. If more than one respondent was found in the household, one was selected randomly. In case no respondent was pursuing higher education through regular mode than next household has been chosen. Field work was undertaken in October and November 2011. A total of 400 young people were approached, of whom 351 were successfully interviewed with a response rate of 87.75 percent. The interview schedule contained questions on background characteristics such as income, occupation and education of father, parental interaction, and difficulty faced by young people in social interaction in higher education and so on. A

total of 351 respondents constitutes sample used in this paper which includes 161 young women and 190 young men. As the sample is representative of eight residential colonies, the results are generalised to these residential colonies only but it may reflect the situation of young people in any other urban neighbourhood in India.

Variables

Difficulty in social interaction is a dependent variable. It is measured by the experiences of young people's interaction in class, interaction with teachers, staff and other students in the campus. Specifically, young people were asked whether they face difficulty in attending class, whether they face difficulty in interacting with teachers, whether they face difficulty in approaching office staff, and whether they face difficulty in mixing with other students in the campus. The level of difficulty in social interaction is measured by the number of affirmative responses to these four statements. Hence, the measure ranges from zero to four; more the measure more the difficulty in social interaction. Zero means no difficulty in social interaction while four means maximum difficulty in social interaction. So greater the measure greater the level of difficulty faced by students in social interaction in institutions of higher education.

To identify factors correlated with dependent variable described above four independent variables have been considered. These are gender, caste group, socio-economic status (SES) and parental involvement. Gender takes on two values - women and men. As there is no tribal respondent in the sample, caste group takes three values - Forward caste, Other Backward Castes (OBC) and Dalits. Similarly, SES of youth is determined through the establishment of socio-economic background indicators based on three variables: educational level of the father, occupation of father and per capita household income and it takes on three values - lower, middle and upper SES.

A series of four items are used here to measure the extent of parental involvement. These four items are: How often do you discuss choice of courses with your parent(s)? How often do you talk about grades/ marks with your parent(s)? How often do you discuss job prospects with your parent(s)? How often do you discuss troubling things in your life with your parent(s)? The five options for answering these items are coded as (1) almost never, (2) seldom, (3) sometimes, (4) often and (5) almost always. The composite score on these four items gives the extent of parental involvement which range from four to 20;

larger the measure more the extent of parental involvement in young people's life.

Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques are used to analyse the data. Descriptive data give comparative figures of respondents along key social, economic and demographic variables such as age, gender, caste, SES, parental involvement and difficulty in social interaction. Frequency (Freq) distribution is used for categorical variables while mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are used for interval level data. Multiple linear regressions are used to identify factors correlated with the level of difficulty faced by young people in social interaction in higher education. Significance level (p-value) is set at 0.05.

Results

Descriptive statistics of the sample of 351 young people on selected variables of interest are presented in Table 1. The mean age of respondents comes out to be 21.79 years. This means that the paper deals with a relatively young population in Varanasi district. The mean level of difficulty faced by young people in social interaction in institutions of higher learning comes out to be 1.25 with a standard deviation of 1.36. Similarly, mean level of parental involvement comes out to be 15.73 with a standard deviation of 1.83. Frequency distribution according to gender, caste group and SES is also shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Description of young people on the variables of interest (N = 351)

Variables	Freq/ M	SD
Difficulty faced in social interaction	1.25	1.36
Age (in years)		
Gender	21.79	1.99
Women		
Men	161	
Caste group	190	
Forward group		
OBC	255	
SC	59	
SES	37	
Lower	61	
Middle	196	
Upper	94	
Parental Involvement	15.73	1.83

The bivariate statistical analysis is also conducted to find the influence of gender, social group and SES on the difficulty in social interaction. The results are shown in Table 2. t test is performed to assess the effect of gender on social interaction. The result indicates that there is significant difference between difficulty faced by women (M = 1.61, SD = 1.40) and men (M = 0.95, SD = 1.25); $t(349) = 4.63, p = 0.00$.

Similarly, one-way ANOVA is also performed to see the influence of social group and SES on social interaction. It is found that there is a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level in difficulty in social interaction faced by young people belonging to forward caste (M = 0.98, SD = 1.28), OBC (M = 1.73, SD = 1.31) and Dalit (M = 2.40, SD = 1.21); $F(2,348) = 25.19, p = 0.00$.

Table 2: t-test and one-way ANOVA showing the influence of gender, caste group and SES on difficulty in social interaction

Variables	M	SD	t/ F Value	p-Value
Gender				
Women	1.61	1.40	4.63	0.00
Men	0.95	1.25		
Caste group				
Forward group	0.98	1.28	25.19	0.00
OBC	1.73	1.31		
SC	2.40	1.21		
SES				
Lower	3.02	0.94	160.36	0.00
Middle	1.25	1.19		
Upper	0.12	0.32		

Results further shows that there is a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$ in difficulty in social interaction faced by young people belonging to lower SES ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.94$), middle SES ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 1.19$) and upper SES ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.32$); $F(2,348) = 160.36$, $p = 0.00$. So Dalits and OBC face more difficulty in social interaction as compared to forward caste youth. Similarly youth belonging to lower SES face more difficulty in social interaction as compared to middle and upper SES youth.

Pearson correlation coefficient is also conducted

to find the association between parental involvement and difficulty in social interaction. The correlation coefficient comes out to be -0.63 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance and shows that there is a strong negative correlation between parental involvement and difficulty faced in social interaction. This means that parental involvement in young people's life reduces the difficulty in social interaction. This means that more the parental involvement, less the difficulty faced by young people in social interaction.

Table 3: Results of multiple regression analysis showing correlates of difficulty in social interaction in institutions of higher education

Variables	B	SE	p-Value
Gender (ref. Women)	-0.62	0.09	0.00
Caste group (ref. Dalits)			
Forward group	-1.06	0.15	0.00
OBC	-0.60	0.17	0.00
SES (ref. Lower)			
Middle	-1.52	0.12	0.00
Upper	-2.10	0.16	0.00
Parental Involvement	-0.21	0.03	0.00

Note: Adjusted $R^2 = 0.667$ ($N = 351$)

Results of multiple linear regressions assessing the correlates of difficulty faced by young people in social interaction in institutions of higher education are presented in Table 3. The p values are less than 0.05 for all four variables of interest. Gender and caste group are ascriptive factors that are found to be associated with difficulty in social interaction. Young men are less likely to face difficulty in social interaction than women (regression coefficient = -0.62). As far as caste group is considered both OBC, as well as forward castes, are less likely to face difficulty in social interaction in comparison to Dalits (regression coefficients of -0.60 for OBCs and -1.06 for forward castes). Family background or SES is also significantly associated with difficulty in social interaction. Middle SES youth, as well as upper SES youth, are far less likely to face difficulty in social interaction in comparison to lower SES youth (regression coefficients of -1.52 for middle SES and -2.10 for upper SES youth). As far as parental involvement is concerned, it is negatively correlated with difficulty in social interaction (regression coefficient of -0.21). This means that as the parental involvement in young people's life increases their difficulty in social interaction decreases. All these four variables explain about 66.7 percent variance in difficulty in social interaction in institutions of higher education.

Discussion

The findings of this study are similar to studies of

young people in other settings. These studies have also reported that young people belonging to upper class easily establish interpersonal relations with teachers, peers and others at the institution. They involve themselves in an informal discussion with peers about the topic taught in class. They also gain in their critical thinking skills and a variety of other learning outcomes (Gurin et al., 2002). Theoretically, Gurin et al. (2002) advocate that complex social structures can produce opportunities for interpersonal contact that change the way young people think and behave. Complex social structure gives students a chance to interact with unfamiliar people and encounters people who hold different expectations. Complex social structures have more potential to enhance educational outcomes if students use 'active thinking' or what Langer (1978) calls conscious mode of thought (Langer, 2011). This study confirms that benefits of complex structures go to privileged youth. These privileged youth either come from forward castes and upper class. These young people develop a good interpersonal relation with teachers, peers and other people in the institution of higher learning. In this process of interaction, they acquire new ideas and ways of processing information useful for their academic and future career. They develop faith and belief in their capabilities to manage and accomplish the courses of action required to make a smooth transition to higher education.

Still there is a section of young people, particularly of lower socio-economic status, who face a lot of

difficulty in higher education and get marginalised. There are various reasons for the marginalisation of poor young people in higher educational institutions. Some of them don't enjoy the education because of their exclusion from active participation in classroom activities and beyond. This finding is similar to (Bernstein, 1977) who concluded that working class family life fosters the development of restricted codes which further translate into the educational vulnerability of poor youth. Since speech is an important medium of communication and learning, educational success may be related to differences in speech patterns. In general young people from poor families are limited to restricted codes. Such young people have an inbuilt barrier to learning in school and colleges. Their style departs from that of the youth from upper SES. Teachers also adopt an elite pedagogy much to the disadvantage of young people from lower SES, who fails to grasp the meanings embedded in teacher's grammar and accent.

Poor young people also face inadequate support and motivation from peers. Most of them hesitate to interact with peers from upper SES. Young people from lower SES appear to be more vulnerable in higher education. Although these youth and their families perceive educational attainments as the primary means of social mobility, yet they lag behind in educational attainment. Due to lack of self-efficacy, these youth miss the complex social environment that exists at more prestigious institutions. They learn little from their experience which limits their career prospects. Low SES youth also has limited access to counsellors. Low level of parental support, negative campus experience, inadequate personal resources and reduced access to support system are some of the reasons that poor youth get marginalised in higher education. They develop low expectations from education and their transition to higher education is not smooth.

Gender is also an important factor that influences social interaction in institutions of higher education. During the last couple of decades, Varanasi experienced an impressive growth of women participation in secondary education and higher education. Although more and more women are entering in different streams of education, yet they face a lot of problems in social interaction at the educational institute, which put them at a disadvantageous position as compared to men. Some studies have indicated that informal interaction is problematic for females because of lack of critical mass in some streams of education (Gupta, 2007). Other studies have pointed out that a low number of women leads to 'heightened visibility' (Kanter, 1977). The

findings of this study also confirm that women face more difficulty in social interaction in campuses of institutions of higher learning. Women prefer to restrict their space of interaction for the sake of etiquette. Informal interaction with teachers is considered significant as it affects the level of mentoring. But young women only interact formally with teachers for their academic work. Their interaction with office staff and others is also limited. All this put young women in a disadvantageous position at the educational institute. They bear the consequences of maintaining decorum and the disadvantage of gender segregation (Gupta, 2007). Gender stereotyping still operate to segregate and restrict social interaction among young women.

As far as parental involvement is concerned, some studies have confirmed the significant effect of parental involvement on developing interpersonal relations at the institution of higher learning (Park & Palardy, 2004; Kumar, 2012). Findings of this study also lend support to this assertion. Parent's personal involvement in their children's education has a much stronger effect on social interaction on the campus of institutions of higher education. Such parents always ensure that best possible facility is available to their children. It represents a positive parental attitude toward knowledge and learning. Those young people who develop better interaction with parents also interact smoothly with teachers, peers and others and this help them to make a smooth transition to higher education. Better interaction results in better interpersonal relations which further give rise to a network that provides resources (Portes, 1998) for use in making a smooth transition to higher education. But these resources which are inherent in social relations and which get strengthen through social interaction is unequally distributed throughout gender, caste, class and this accounts for inability among women, Dalits and poor youth to make a smooth transition to higher education.

Conclusion

Social interaction and interpersonal relations play a vital role in transition to higher education. But social interaction varies according to gender, caste group, SES and parental involvement. Gender stereotype restricts the space of social interaction for women in institutions of higher education. In general resources inherent in the form of social relation with teachers, peers, office staff and parents are important for developing good interpersonal relations in institute of higher education. But these resources are not evenly

distributed throughout gender, caste and class, and this largely accounts for the marginalization of women, Dalit youth and youth belonging to lower SES.

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