

Low Learning Achievements of Children in Elementary Schools of Tribal and Rural Pockets of Odisha

What Do the Teachers Say?

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Abstract

According to several surveys and reports (mainly Annual Status of Education Report), the learning achievements of the students at elementary stage in government schools of rural and tribal Odisha is not satisfactory in comparison to their counterpart private schools. Instead of all efforts made by administration in terms of incentives and interventions, the learning achievement is not up to satisfaction. The study is based on the status of the performance of learners in different subjects according to the ASER 2014. An attempt made to know the factors accountable for the gloomy picture of elementary school students in tribal dominated and rural pockets of Odisha. The opinions of 151 experienced teachers working in these areas from 39 Blocks (4 major tribal districts) were taken into consideration. For data collection, 34 questions were asked to teachers related to the issues on infrastructure, teachers, students, pedagogy, community involvement and administrative matters. The suggestive measures to improve the performance of the learners were also reflected in the present study.

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BACKDROP AND RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

The 10th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014 released by the Pratham Education Foundation in the month of January, 2015, is a pointer to the kind of education the RTE Act has been able to provide. While the act is important to get children enrolled in elementary schools, it is equally important to keep a tab on what they learn and how they use the learning.

Based on a survey in 577 districts and 16,497 villages covering about 3.5 lakh households and 5.70 lakh children, the report is depressing as the previous ones were. While the enrolment rate has remained over 96 per cent, the schools complying with the RTE pupil Teacher Ratio increased from 38.9 in 2010 to 49.3 per cent in 2014. The percentage of schools having useable toilets has increased from 47.2 to 65.2 percent. But there has not been substantial improvement in the students learning skills. The report reveals that 25 percent student enrolled in Class VIII were found incapable of reading text books prescribed for Class II. The number of children, who could not read Class II text books, increased when the lower classes were surveyed. Forget English, the students were not able to read their mother tongue.

A comparison of the current report with earlier ones shows that there is no significant improvement in the reading skills of children during

the last five years in all states except Tamilnadu. As regards arithmetic skills, the picture is equally disappointing. In fact, the ability to solve basic division problems has declined during the last eight years almost in all states except Tamilnadu. There has also been an increase in the number of children studying in class II who cannot recognise number from 0 to 9. It is amply clear students are being promoted to higher classes without their acquiring any value addition in their learning skills. A brief discussion on the learning achievements of students in elementary schools of Odisha is a need of the present study.

LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT IN RURAL ODISHA

The target of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), a mega educational project or movement, is not only to expand the scope of elementary education by providing facilities of universal access, enrolment, retention and participation but also to make qualitative improvement in achievement. But it is seen, the learning competencies of pupils in government schools are not satisfactory instead of all efforts. The ASER 2014, which maps the academic efficiency of the students, shows that the reading levels and arithmetic ability of students in government schools are too fall short of their private counterparts. It is also observed that when the government school students go to higher classes, the ability surprisingly drops sharply

and the gap between them and their private counter parts rises by almost 100 percent.

READING LEVELS OF CHILDREN

According to ASER 2014, the learning achievements of students in elementary schools of rural Odisha in their mother tongue (Odia) are not satisfactory. The report reveals in class III, 8.8% children could not read even letters, 21.9% could read letters but not more, 22.5% could read words but not Class I level text or higher, 13.4% could read Class I level text but not class II level text and 33.4% could read class II level text. The table 1 gives a clear picture regarding the learning competencies of children in their mother tongue.

Similarly, the learning gap between private and govt. school children is

very acute. As per the report, 82.4% children in Class II in government schools could read at least letters while the percentage in the private schools was 96.2%. Similarly, the percentage of children in Class III who could read at least words both in govt. and private schools were 66.8% and 92.4% respectively. It is a matter of concern that the reading levels of the students in government schools has been decreasing. For example in govt. schools the percentage of children in Class II level who could read at least letter in 2010 was 86.2%. But it was scaled down to 82.4% in 2014. Similarly, in 2010 75.8% children of govt. schools in Class III could read at least words. But in 2014 the percentage was dropped to 66.8%. On the other hand, the performance of students in private schools is

Table 1
Reading Mother Tongue- Odia

Children by Class and Reading level all schools in 2014						
Class	Not even letter	Letter	Word	Level I (Std I text)	Level 2 (Class II Text)	Total
I	31.2	37.5	14.6	7.2	9.5	100
II	15.9	30.0	20.2	11.9	21.9	100
III	8.8	21.9	22.5	13.4	33.4	100
IV	6.6	15.0	17.1	16.6	44.7	100
V	4.2	11.6	14.4	17.9	51.9	100
VI	2.4	8.1	9.9	15.8	64.0	100
VII	1.6	4.7	8.6	13.6	71.5	100
VIII	1.5	4.5	7.1	11.7	75.2	100
Total	9.1	16.8	14.4	13.6	46.1	100

Source: ASER-2014

gradually increasing. The following tables will be able to give clear idea regarding the learning achievements of pupils in elementary schools or rural Odisha.

Let's discuss the performance of student's in all schools (Govt. & Private) in reading and comprehension in English. The survey reveals in

Class V, 11.7% children could not even read capital letters, 11.7% could read capital letters, but not more, 24% children could read small letters but not words or higher, 29.7% children could read words, but not sentences, and 22.9% children could read easy sentences and 22.9% children could read easy sentences.

Table 2

Percentage of Children in Class II and III at Different Reading Levels by School Type 2010-2014						
Year	% Children in Class II who can read at least letters			% Children in Class III who can read at least words		
	Govt.	Pvt.	Govt & Pvt.	Govt.	Pvt.	Govt. & Pvt.
2010	86.2	94.9	86.8	75.8	90.9	76.5
2011	82.8	88.5	83.1	68.4	88.8	69.5
2012	75.1	96.1	76.7	60.7	95.3	62.9
2013	73.3	92.7	75.7	58.0	90.2	60.7
2014	82.4	96.2	84.1	66.8	92.4	69.3

Source: ASER-2014

Table 3

Percentage of Children in Class IV and V at Different Reading Levels by School Type 2010-2014						
Year	% Children in Class IV who can read at least Class I level text			% Children in Class V who can read at least Class II level text		
	Govt.	Pvt.	Govt & Pvt.*	Govt.	Pvt.	Govt. & Pvt. *
2010	60.5	81.6	62.6	45.5	60.7	46.0
2011	57.2	78.0	58.0	38.4	61.3	39.1
2012	58.6	91.8	60.3	46.1	75.7	47.1
2013	56.8	88.6	58.9	53.6	76.3	44.9
2014	59.3	87.6	61.3	50.1	76.7	51.9

Source: ASER-2014

Table 4

Children by class and reading level in English all schools 2014						
Std	Not even Capital letters	Capital Letters	Small letters	Simple words	Easy sentences	Total
I	54.0	19.9	13.7	9.9	2.5	100
II	38.6	18.1	22.8	15.1	5.3	100
III	23.7	19.9	26.3	22.1	8.0	100
IV	16.4	15.9	26.7	26.0	15.0	100
V	11.7	11.7	24.0	29.7	22.9	100
VI	7.0	10.6	21.0	28.6	32.9	100
VII	5.0	6.4	19.2	29.8	39.7	100
VIII	4.8	5.6	17.2	26.6	45.7	100
Total	20.3	13.6	21.5	23.5	21.1	100

Source: ASER-2014

Table 5

% Children by class who can comprehend English all schools 2014		
Std	Of those who can read words, % children who can tell meanings of the words	Of those who can read sentences, % children who can tell meanings of the sentences
I	68.0	-
II	62.1	-
III	67.9	54.0
IV	58.9	52.4
V	55.8	55.3
VI	63.8	56.0
VII	68.2	61.7
VIII	64.2	62.6
Total	62.9	58.1

Source: ASER-2014

ARITHMETIC LEVELS

The ASER 2014 also maps the performance of students of Odisha in Arithmetic Skills. In Class III, 8.6% children could not even recognise numbers 1-9, 28.1% could recognise

numbers up to 9 but not more, 35.2% could recognise numbers up to 99, but could not do subtraction, 21.3% could do subtraction, but could not do division and 6.9% could do division. Similarly, in Class VIII, 9.2%

children could not even recognise numbers 1-9, 21.2% could recognise numbers up to 9 but not more, 29.6% could recognise numbers up to 99 but could not do subtraction, 21.3% could do subtraction but could not do division and 18.8% could do division.

On the other hand, the competency levels of children in Govt. and private schools are remarkably different. For example in 2010, 84.2% children in Class II of Govt. Schools who could recognise numbers 1-9 and more while 94.6% children of private schools could do so. But in 2014, the rate was decreased to 83.6% in Govt. Schools, but the status of counterpart private schools was 95.7%. Similarly, in 2010, 50.8% and 31.3% Class IV and V children in Govt. schools could do at least subtraction and division respectively. Where as that of private schools was 76% and 57.2% respectively. Similarly in 2014, percentage of children in Class IV who could do at least subtractions in both Govt. and private schools were 35.7% and 70.5% respectively. Similarly the percentage children in Class V who could do division in Govt. and Private schools in 2014 were 20.5 and 45.4 percent respectively. Keeping in view this backdrop, the teachers who are working in rural and tribal pockets of Odisha were asked the factors responsible for the low learning achievements of learners in elementary schools. The present paper is the outcome of their responses.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the learning achievements of the learners in elementary schools of Odisha.
2. To study the views of teachers with regard to the factors accountable of low learning achievements of the learners at elementary stage.
3. To find out the suggestive remedies from the teachers to improve the learning achievements of the learners of elementary schools.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study was conducted on 151 experienced in-service teachers of mainly four tribal dominated districts of Odisha.
2. The teachers included in the sample were Graduates, Post Graduates and some were having MPhil and PhD degree.
3. All teachers (sample) were IGNOU BEd in-service teachers of both 1st and 2nd years.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Sample

For the present study, a sample of 151 in-service teachers from four major districts of Odisha and 7 teachers from neighbour state Chhattisgarh were selected. All the teachers were IGNOU, B.Ed students drawn from government and public schools of the states. Out of total sample, 68 % teachers were male and rest 32% were lady teachers. 72 % teachers were graduate, 23%

were Post Graduate (MA/MSc) and rest 5 % teachers having MPhil / PhD degree. But all teachers were working in elementary schools. The teaching experience of the teachers ranged from 5 to 22 years. The detailed distribution of sample is presented in the table 6.

DATA COLLECTION

The required data for the 1st objective were collected through document analysis and record verification. The views and opinions of the teachers regarding the low learning achievements of students of elementary schools were gathered through self-prepared opinion poll (questionnaire form) consisted of 34 statements covering the issues related to infrastructure, teachers,

students, parents and community members, pedagogical aspects and administrative concerns. The teachers had been given 5 options against each statement i.e. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (DA). Besides, the blank space was also given in the tool to give own views beyond the statements, if any. The teachers were instructed to give their valuable suggestions for the improvement of the achievement levels of the learners. Besides, discussion with teacher educators, educationists of the locality, persons associated with SSA were consulted for their suggestions and remedies addressing the issue of low achievement of the learners of different elementary schools of the districts.

Table 6
Distribution of Sample

Districts	No of Blocks	No. of Trs	Gender		Educational Qualification			Teaching Experience (in Year)		
			M	F	Degree (+3)	PG	MPhil/ PhD	Up to 5	6-10	11-22
Koraput	12	53	34	19	36	13	04	19	16	18
Rayagada	10	41	27	14	29	10	02	15	16	10
Nawarangpur	10	32	25	07	27	04	01	08	18	06
Malkangiri	4	18	12	06	14	04	00	04	10	04
Others*	3	07	04	03	03	04	00	01	05	01
Total	39	151	102	49	109	35	07	47	65	39
Grand Total	39	151	151		151			151		

*Others refer to 7 teachers belonged to Chhattisgarh state (from the blocks of Dantewada District)

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Infrastructural Facilities

Better infrastructural facilities are the assets of any educational institutions. It helps teachers and other members of the school to plan for organising activities for holistic development of the students. Here, infrastructural facilities in schools refer to the minimum resources for smooth functioning of the schools in order to attain the goals of education. In the study, the focus was on adequate number of class rooms, well furnished office, well equipped library, adequate Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) and necessary science equipments, required number of trained teachers, safe and secure boundary, play ground, drinking water facilities and joyful learning environment. In this

regard, four questions were asked to the teachers. Out of 151 teachers, 115 (76.15 %) teachers strongly agreed that infrastructural facilities were not good in schools. Similarly, 134 (88.74%) teachers said low learning achievements of the children in tribal pockets of Odisha is due to inadequate numbers of the teachers available in the schools. Besides, 75% teachers replied insufficient TLMs and 87% teachers said lack of well equipped library and laboratory facilities are accountable for low performance of children in elementary schools of tribal and rural districts of Odisha. Above all, most of teachers (83%) felt lack of better infrastructural facilities in schools (Govt. Schools) is one of the prime factors responsible for low learning achievement of learners in tribal areas of Odisha.

Sl. No.	Statements	Response of Sample Teachers				
		S A	A	UD	DA	S D
1.	Infrastructural facilities are not good in schools	26	89	03	03	30
2.	Adequate number of teachers are not available	79	55	04	00	13
3.	Sufficient TLMs are not available in schools	36	77	2	9	27
4.	Lack of library and laboratory (if yes, not usable)	47	84	1	5	14

*SA>Strongly Agree, A>Agree, UD> Undecided, DA>Disagree, SD>Strongly Disagree

ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHERS

Teaching is a noble but an exacting profession. It demands much from the self, from the resilience and integrity of the person within. It always needs the positive attitudes and passions of teachers towards their profession and commitment towards teaching as a function. Their competency, commitment, creative and constructive efforts and elegant intensities glorify the school, society and state as a whole. Without the outstanding contribution of teachers, all assets (building, classroom,

library, laboratory, play ground, garden, teachers, students, SMC members etc) will be meaningless and worthless. Keeping in view the role and importance of teachers for better learning achievements of the learners 13 questions were asked concerning the competencies and motivational techniques of teachers, methods and tools used during classroom transaction, their dedication, workload, etc. The teachers who were working in the tribal and rural pockets of Odisha stated their views in the following ways.

Sl. No	Statements	Response of Sample Teachers				
		SA	A	UD	DA	SD
1.	Teachers are not competent enough	02	53	06	11	79
2.	Teachers are competent but not dedicated	23	77	12	5	34
3.	Irregularity of teachers attending schools	07	49	07	25	63
4.	Teachers are not serious about students' learning	14	57	14	06	60
5.	Teachers are very much interested to engage in other assignment like tuition	14	35	14	18	75
6.	Teachers are heavily work loaded. (other than Teaching -Learning i.e., official and government Works).	66	65	03	02	15
7.	Teachers are not competent enough in Mathematics	05	57	10	18	61
8.	Poor vocabulary stock of teachers in English	18	82	06	10	35

9.	Wrong pronunciation of teachers while teaching English	12	69	10	12	48
10.	Irregular correction of note-books	16	75	7	5	48
11.	Teachers do not use required TLMs in class	10	63	4	8	66
12.	Motivational techniques of teachers are not Satisfactory.	09	79	13	07	43
13.	Teachers are serious to complete course ignoring students interest and standard	23	88	3	9	28

The above data reveals the issue related to teachers' role for the low learning achievements of the learners in different subject areas mainly in language and mathematics. According to the above information, the competency and commitment of teachers in rural and tribal pockets towards their profession is think worthy. Whatever may be the reason, irregularity of teachers in the schools of rural and tribal areas is a major problem. About 50% of the teachers agreed that the teachers are not serious about students learning while 73.5% participants said teachers are serious to complete their course ignoring the interest, mental ability and standard of their learners. This show completing a syllabus is the prime target of teachers. Similarly, 60% teachers replied the note books of the students are not evaluated regularly. But 62% teachers rejected the general allegation against them that teachers are very much interested to do private tuition. It is noteworthy

that 87.5 teachers said they are work loaded due to other assignments excluding teaching. Like that 58% teachers said the teachers are failed to motivate the learners towards schools because their motivational techniques are nor appealing and satisfactory.

FACTORS ASSOCIATING STUDENTS' CONCERN

Learners and teachers are the two poles of the learning process. The active participation of both makes learning successful, lively and joyful. It is said, the teachers chalk out strategies of learning according to their students' standard, need, interest and attitude. Thus in the process of learning, the role of learners is very vital particularly in child centric and learning centric approach. But it is revealed in the study that the students of tribal and rural pockets of Odisha are not regular in schools. Around 74% teachers said poor attendance of

students in schools is a vital factor accountable for their poor learning achievements in different content areas. Similarly, 63% teachers said that students in elementary schools of rural and tribal areas are first generation learners. Besides, 58 % teachers said that students in their areas come to schools to avail facilities (free dress, mid day meal, stipend, etc) not for learning. But responding the statement that the children are not interested towards learning, 50 % teachers did not agreed with the statements. During discussion, they said students are interested for learning but the factors like non-cooperation and illiteracy of parents, irregularity and incompetency of teachers, massive absent in schools for supporting parental profession or caring younger members of the families are discouraging them. The responses of teachers on issues associating with children are given.

PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS

The teachers were asked eight questions concerning pedagogical aspects which are responsible for low learning achievements of the students in rural and tribal districts of Odisha. 62% teachers said that they are not provided regular orientation while about 61% teachers stated that they are not provided the need based training. Similarly, 68% teachers admitted that the traditional chalk and talk i.e, teacher dominated methods are still practiced in schools instead of activity based and student friendly methods of teaching. 62% teachers admitted that activity based methods of teaching are symbolic in schools. Like that, most of teachers agreed that teachers in these areas emphasised on students' attendance not on better learning. They are very serious to complete prescribed courses ignoring students need, interest and standards. Neither

Sl.No	Statements	Response of Sample Teachers				
		S A	A	UD	DA	S D
1.	Poor attendance of students in schools	30	81	02	05	33
2.	Most of the students are first generation learners	34	61	12	06	38
3.	Children are not interested in learning	11	53	10	16	61
4.	Students come schools to avail facilities not for learning	20	68	08	16	39

S. No.	Statements	Response of Sample Teachers				
		S A	A	UD	DA	S D
1.	No regular orientation to teachers	24	70	05	07	45
2.	Need based training is not provided to teachers	27	65	06	05	48
3.	Traditional methods of teaching are still practiced	27	75	06	07	36
4.	Activity based method is symbolic in schools(rarely used)	22	81	14	03	31
5.	Focus on students attendance not on better learning	21	73	12	06	39
6.	Serious to completing course ignoring students Interest and standard	23	88	03	09	28
7.	Teachers do not give individual attention to students	17	64	05	07	58
8.	Remedial classes are not organised for weak students	28	68	05	05	45

remedial classes nor individual attention to students are given. The opinions of the teachers relating to pedagogical issues are stated in the table below.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENTS

Active community participation and involvement of parents in both scholastic and co-scholastic activities help the school authority for smooth conduct of any programme. Their participation encourages the teachers and other staff member to do something innovative as the society (parents, villagers, etc.) with

them. Any sort of misunderstanding, misconception, conflict, complexity and disturbances relating to school administration, pedagogical intervention and financial matters can easily be solved if there is good rapport between school and community, teachers and parents. The challenge of hundred percent attendance and participation is easily possible if the parents and community members support the teachers. The spectacular achievements of schools in any aspect cannot be practicable only due to hard labour, efforts and commitment of teachers. It calls for the support of parents,

S. No.	Statements	Response of Sample Teachers				
		S A	A			
1.	Parents are not cooperative	29	88			
2.	SMC members are not supporting teachers	16	74			
3.	No relationship between parents, teachers and community	16	66			
4.	Parents and children are indifferent about learning	09	79	13	07	43

SMC and community members. It is seen the grand success of private managed schools in academic and non academic spheres is due to the collective efforts of teachers, students along with the supports of sensitive and serious parents (towards the education of their wards) and committee members. Relating to the role of parents and SMC for holistic growth of schools, four questions were asked. Responding the first question, 75% teachers said the parents are not cooperative.

ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS

Good administration is also one of the pre-requisites of quality education. Regular monitoring, supervision and inspection to schools by competent authority not only strengthen the education system but also bridge the gap between education authorities and teachers. Any sort of difficulties, problems and loopholes can be checked or overcome through regular and judicious administrative intervention. The teachers were asked two questions associating the administrative factors.

S. No.	Statements	Response of Sample Teachers				
		S A	A	UD	DA	S D
1.	The performance of teachers are not assessed and monitored properly and regularly	30	84	09	05	23
2.	Low salary and no promotional facilities discourage Teachers for quality teaching	21	73	12	06	39

Responding the first question, 75% teachers said the performances of teachers are not assessed and monitored regularly and properly which impact quality education. As a result learning achievements of students hamper severely. Similarly, 62% teachers replied that low salary structure and no effective promotional facilities discourage teachers for quality education in schools which severely impact on performances of the learners.

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings and recommendations of teachers, the following suggestions and implications have been made

1. The infrastructural facilities of schools should be developed as per Right to Education Act.
2. The multi grade teaching strategy should be discouraged or abolished as it is not suitable for children of rural areas. It has to be used their teachers need to be prepared accordingly.
3. Regular Head Masters should be appointed in each school for better and smooth working of the schools.
4. Adequate number of teachers should be appointed in single teacher schools and other schools where the vacancy position is very acute.
5. Teachers should be made free from official burden, mid day meal, different surveys and others. So that they can devote more time for academic improvement of the learners.
6. To increase the attendance in schools, the regular visit of teachers to discuss/convince the parents will be more fruitful in rural and tribal areas. So the teachers should visit the homes of the parents to strengthen the relationship between school and community.
7. The teachers should stay nearby the locality of the schools (villages where the schools are located) for easy going to schools. But due to several reasons, the teachers do not like to stay in nearby villages. So residential facilities for the teachers should be made available with all necessary facilities.
8. Regular and continuous monitoring and supervision by competent authority should be done.
9. Provision of need based orientation and training should be organised to update and refresh the teachers. This will help the teachers to come across innovative teaching practices and address the issues related to children, school, teaching learning and evaluation strategy.
10. Reward and appreciation certificates should be given to dedicated, competent and disciplined teachers through

- appropriate evaluation and judgement.
11. Textbooks and other study materials should be supplied to schools on or before new session.
 12. Strict and constant transfer policy should be executed and all teachers should be made compulsory to work at least 5 years in the remotest villages. Those who have not worked in remote areas should not be given promotion or bonus point with financial benefits/ incentives should be given to the teachers who worked in remotest and inaccessible areas particularly in tribal pockets.

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