



Educational Aspiration and Cultural Capital: The Indispensable Factors of Educational Attainment in Kerala

Aswathi Kunjumon¹



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ABSTRACT: Social disparity referred to as social differences that continue within each sector of the society. The paper highlights the linkage between disparity in educational attainment and the role of cultural capital towards the aspiration for education. Educational outlook and exposure can be varied depending on certain factors like the location where they reside, education and occupation of parents, socioeconomic status of the family, and amenities provided by schools. The overriding factors which contribute towards educational aspiration are the parental education and occupation. As education is the leading facet for an individual towards their expectations for existence, these factors bring constructive and unconstructive outputs. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) argues that individuals are endowed with durable cognitive structures and a dispositional sense of action that directs them to appropriate responses to given situations, which refers to as cultural capital, i.e., the familiarity of prestigious aesthetic culture, such as high arts, literary culture and linguistic ability which helps the individual to make comfortable in the formal school setting. It was found that in Kerala, the most influential cultural capital which added advantage to the basic education is the parental occupation rather than literary culture, and linguistic ability. It lessens the true picture that, a new emerging society of Kerala lacks the value of literary wealth as part of the commercialization of education. The Higher secondary students (final years of basic education) were the respondents, and the samples are drawn from rural, semi-urban and urban areas of Ernakulam district, Kerala using interview schedule.

Keywords: Disparity, cultural capital, aspiration, parental education, parental occupation, aesthetic culture, linguistic ability, literary wealth, commercialization.

1. Introduction

Contemporary society defines education, to the learning of a particular profession than its value. The aspiration for education is something forte which grabs our desire for achieving a more goal in life. It is just how much we strive for it and how much we desire to learn something new, which involves the development of skills, knowledge, and ability to live, interact with and within social groups. In the technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another and it aims not merely to impart knowledge in some subjects but to develop those habits and attitudes with which one can successfully face the future. For Durkheim, education was the mechanism through

¹ Senior Research Fellow, Department of Sociology, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, India

which the child learned to exercise strong control and restraint in order to become an "ideal adult" and thus ensure the survival of a differentiated society (Durkheim, 1961). So, an ideal adult could be the ultimate result of an education process in society.

The primary task in educational order is to train, instruct, the school individuals in a variety of aspects like culture, especially the elements of its formal stocks of knowledge: society's accumulated learning skills, beliefs, traditions, and wisdom. In western societies, this includes an ability to read and write in one or more languages, an elementary knowledge of mathematics and the sciences, as well as an appreciation of the society's history, geographic and physical environment. Even in Kerala society, the primary task of education remains the same. The educational order attempts to ensure that children acquire the basic skills necessary for interaction and participation in society (Knuttila, 1996). In fact, this could be achieved by the process of socialization.

The born instincts of the children have to be properly directed so that their satisfaction may be socially acceptable. Educative process is nothing but directing the children to have worthy interests in the various phases of life and create an environment which is stimulating to develop desirable attributes of the individual as well as social personality. It must open out to the people a wide universe of worthy objects. In education and sociology, Durkheim put forward his broadest interpretation of the link between education and society. Durkheim reserved the term "education, to mean the influence exercised by adult generations on those not yet ready for social life, in other words, the methodological socialization of the young (Durkheim, 1961).

In the words of J.Krishnamurthi (1953), "if we are being educated merely to achieve distinction, to get a better job, to be more efficient, to have wider domination over others, then our lives will be shallow and empty. If we are being educated only to be scientists, to be scholars wedded to book, or specialists addicted to knowledge, then we shall be contributing to the destruction and misery of the world. In our present civilization, we have divided life into so many sectors that education has very little meaning, except in learning a particular technique or profession. Instead of awakening the integrated intelligence of the individual, education is encouraging him to conform to a pattern and so is hindering his comprehension of himself as a total process. To attempt to solve the many problems of existence at their respective levels, separated as they are into various categories, indicates an utter lack of comprehension" (p. 4). Here the relevance of the term aspiration comes. The term frequently used in our everyday interaction. Aspiration can be described as a strong desire to achieve the goal. It is strongly associated with achievement. Aspiration level of an individual was said to be the product of the social and cultural environment.

Today the most important detector for higher education is IQ or merit/credit system, and these essential aspects influence various other matters too. Higher education becomes increasingly commercialized; the criterion of profitability being the overriding concern and values which higher education symbolized earlier become absolute in the globalized world. Higher education is being viewed more as a private good both by society as well as the government. The aspect of inequality that becomes more pronounced via between students belonging to different economic strata. Foreign education which is far more expensive can be adopted by the wealthy only. As it promises higher earnings, a wider gulf is created between students coming from different economic

backgrounds. The initiatives were taken by the state and center, an education system in India has expanded exponentially over the past five decades, but its current achievements are grossly inadequate for the nation to realize its potential greatness. The net enrolment rate in primary schools and secondary schools is not satisfactory. The dropout rate was 34.9% at the primary level and 62.6% at the high school level in 2002-2003 (Pajankar & Pajankar, 2010).

In the primitive days, the society was not as complex as it is today. It was, therefore, very simple for society to transmit its experiences to the new generation. Today's society being complex in its knowledge and skills, it cannot itself transmit all these directly to the rising generation. There is a need for an organized formal institution to impart the essential knowledge and fundamental skills. But the establishment of a school does not preclude the role of other educational agencies like home, church, radio, press and several other influences of the environment. The school is only a selected and controlled environment. In the educative process the phrase 'social environment' should not be taken in the narrow sense. It has a wider connotation (Tanuja, 1990). Article 45 under the directive principles of state policy in the Indian constitution stresses promoting universalization of elementary education. This was reiterated in 1968, by the resolution on the national policy in education. During the last three decades, the number of educational institutions in India has increased with 74% of the total educational institutions being primary schools (Mukhopadhyay & K, 2001).

1.1 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital means the forms of knowledge; skill; education; any advantages a person has which give them a higher status in society, including high expectations. Parents are children's first and most important teachers and have the most powerful influence on them (Raja, 2007). They provide children with cultural capital, the attitudes, and knowledge that make the educational system a comfortable, familiar place in which they can succeed. Because the education system translates everything learned into wealth and power. Parenting involves implementing a series of decisions about the socialization of one's children. This section deals with analyzing the cultural capital of the students and their family concerning their aspiration for education.

The study included the cultural capital such as, students and parents interest in literature and artistic works, importance given to education both by the parents and children, role of parents in selecting the stream for higher secondary education, students awareness about the higher education possibilities, students confidence to achieve goal and the effort given, influence of parents, home environment for education, the most influencing mentor in the family, role of financial background towards the higher education, the parental influence in the students education such as the facilities provide for education, availability of study materials, monthly subscribing magazines, tuitions, computer, parental assistance in study matters, their suggestion and decisions etc. These aspects vary with respect to the ones own socio-economic background, education and occupational background of the parents, type of family, sex, religion, place of residence and whether occupation or education of the parents adds more towards the aspiration for education. The parent's education and occupation act as the major cultural capital here. Gunjan and Joshi's (Gunjan & Joshi, 2011) study aims at investigating the impact of parental occupation on the parental-child relationship. The result is also varying with respect to these mentioned variables.

The paper tries to analyze the distribution or development of the concept of cultural capital in the current education system in Kerala. Whether the concept fruitful to the maximum in Kerala's educational scenario? As it could be the most prominent aspect, which can reduce the unequal situation in the society, whether the parents are the concern in transmitting these capitals to their children? Whether any other elements can play a major role in the current educational system of Kerala?

2. Methodology

The study aims to analyze the influence of the possession and transmission of cultural capital by family members towards their children's' aspirations for higher achievements in education. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Since the available secondary data alone are not adequate to carry out a research, and the researcher also collected the primary data through a structured interview schedule and in-depth interviews. The researcher also conducted direct observation and semi-structured interviews to collect the data. Generally, in Kerala, the schooling ends with higher secondary level education. Therefore students studying in plus two were found to be the most potential category, which would be able to reflect on the topic under study.

The students were asked to give their observations and views on education, life ambition, and perspective on social issues. The students are selected randomly from different types of schools in Ernakulam district, such as those studying in the State, CBSE and ICSE syllabus. Mostly, students from the low financial background go to the government or state syllabus schools. The infrastructural facilities and the curricula that are available to students vary substantially according to the differences in the syllabus. To find out the role of social class in creating these differences, the schools which follow different syllabuses were also included. It was also aimed at finding out the differences regarding rural and urban locations. Different types of schools were selected from the corporation, one municipality and one panchayath in Ernakulam district. The sample size was 145. Five students were chosen randomly from the attendance register in each of these streams. Therefore, 15 students from each school were interviewed. Even from those schools, where social science stream has been absent, 15 samples were selected, giving importance to the size of the sample rather than the discipline. The researcher also interviewed some of the teachers to validate the data received from the students about the practices of both teachers and students. Key informants were interviewed, and their expertise was sought during the process of research.

3. Findings and discussions

Cultural capital is the concept explained by social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. He developed the concept to demonstrate the ability of elite managers and professionals to transmit their privileged status to their children, a process he referred to as social and cultural reproduction. Here the study analyses the cultural capital towards the educational aspiration in terms of the certain aspects like parental cultural participation, their involvement, influence, parental education and occupation, student's interest in cultural activities, socio-economic background of the family. The cultural activities can be explained in terms of the interest in literature, museums, and concerts; TV shows such as discussions and debates, interactions with parents about the topic that parent have read or are aware of. The findings also prove with the statements of the theories such as better social and financial background influences students to have high aspiration than others.

They are having more advantage than others in education.

For Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in three forms : in the embodied state ,i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body ; in the objectified state ,i.e. in the form of cultural goods such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). Here the major cultural capitals which can be found among these students are in the form of objectified state, i.e., the educational qualifications. The better educated and occupied parents are financially stable to provide better education to their children than others. For this, they depend on the better educational institutions especially private organizations rather than the government.

It was found that the children whose parents had better education and occupation background, choose highly financial occupied schools more, than the government schools. And most of the students in government or aided schools belong to the working class category, as those students have a poor financial or educational background. In the case of these schools, the amenities provided are really different. So the significant differences among these schools are that in the private schools' services are provided on payment and in government schools, only option is to receive what the authorities offer. So educationally and occupationally occupied parents could demand the services for their children and others may not. This could reveal a wide social disparity that exists in the current schooling system in our society.

While analyzing the amenities provided by these schools, it completely varies in nature. Most of the schools giving prior importance to covering the syllabus or portions and less significance are given to other activities. The privately managed schools are giving extra hours for extracurricular activities, while government schools are giving extra time for arts or crafts. So these differences in the provision of extracurricular activities also reveal the social disparity.

The parents of privately managed schools agreed to the statement that government faculties are highly educated, but again they are satisfied with the teachers in private schools. For this, they explain that now the private schools are also giving focus on selecting the faculties too. While coming to the government schools, the teachers are highly qualified and capable. They are giving interest in not only syllabus education but also tries to guide students to make independent. Even the syllabus itself promotes the child to be more independent. And now the government is also funding to these schools to equip with enough facilities too. This is the case of parents who live in the urban area. As we move to the rural or semi-urban areas, the situation is worse.

There, the government schools are found to be feeble. As the faculties are educated, but the social situation or schools environment is not appropriate. The parents argued that most of the teachers were not comfortable with them. As the parents were poorly educated, they were not able to communicate with teachers properly. Some of the teachers were not ready to accept the social situations of the students. As these parents can't afford extra tuition or class to their children in weak subjects, the teachers too not respond positively to them. Parents are children's first and most important teachers and have the most powerful influence on them (Raja, 2007). But in the case of these students, the teachers could only play the role of teachers as their parents are poorly educated. And the teachers were also not giving concern towards these children. One of the

major reasons behind the less interest in the schooling of these children was the teacher's rudeness and unequal treatment (Padmanabhan & Komath, 2012). If, this is the situation, who will take responsibility for these children? The society itself giving sanction for the reproduction of these disparities in school. As education aims equal opportunity or equality, how could it stand for these children? Most of them were not able to get rid of their current social position. As a result, they were forced to choose their parents occupation and results into the same social class forever.

Bourdieu (Boudieu & Passerson, 1997) explains the relevance of aesthetic art and literature in one's educational field. While analyzing the reading attitude of children and the parents, it was found that most of the parents irrespective of the syllabus schools are not giving importance in it. All of them are giving concern only to read or study the subjects rather than any other materials. Educated parents also control children in reading other materials than subject books. Even though the parents are interested in reading books, they were not interests in transforming this skill to their children in schooling periods. Instead, they are giving keen interest in entrance exams or securing high marks. The commercialization of education is the most important reason for this. In order to occupy a seat in professional education, which is considered as one of the status symbols today, securing high marks is the only option for them. Even the financial position also plays a significant role in this; the children of the poor financial background are again suffering to the maximum.

The roles of cultural capital transformation as Bourdieu (Boudieu & Passerson, 1997) mentioned are practicing only a very small extent. According to him, the cultural capital is the one which can contribute one's educational aspiration, but in Kerala, the findings clearly give a diverse picture as Becker insists, i.e., the scholastic measurement is according to the profit through time and cost of schooling (Becker, 1964). The period during schooling and the profit earns in future is the major scholastic measurement today. The commercialization and the scope in professional education make the parent get rid of the aesthetic culture and stick on to the mark oriented formal education system. As a result, the parents are giving more concern to scoring marks oriented education in order to gain more profits in the future. That is the reason, the majority of the students agreed that their parents are highly encouraging or interested in making available of the guides like study materials to their children. Also points that, reading habits stick on to newspapers and the dramatic and poetic interest are not seen among them. It reveals that the cultural capitals of the embodied state are deteriorating day by day; which could be the essential cultural wealth for educating a child. The role of highly influential internets also makes less space between children and books.

Aspiration is a significant factor in determining the career of a child. As analyzing the aspiration towards education, most of the student's irrespective of class, school, grade, and the degree is different. Social class is feeling to be an important factor in educational achievement. As Hatcher (2004) points out, terms such as socioeconomic status and social advantage and disadvantage are often used rather than class. The surveys which included class as a significant category have indicated that, by just about every criterion of achievement, middle-class pupils in maintained schools do better than working-class children (Bartlett & Burton, 2007). As Lionel Page (page, 2005) stated in his study "Aspiration levels and social inequality in education" that the children from high social backgrounds have higher aspiration levels. This is true to a very extent.

Most of the students of private schools aim for a highly professional career, at the same time students of government schools choose more to the profession as they afford. Only a very small in number reveals their wish to join for a professional career as money and merit would stand as a limitation forever. So to overcome this situation, there are various factors which affect it. The socio-economic background of the family covers the social class, education of parents and home environment can contribute one's educational output. And it is true that if we are having good economic and home environment, we should have more benefits.

Most of the parents have given high importance to education irrespective of the nature of their job. The other major observation which brings varied responses in developing educational aspiration related to various factors. The major observations are children of parents who have teaching as their occupation has given the highest response and importance to education. Because 100 percent of the parents whose teachers were are giving high importance to their children's education. The reason might be those parents who are teachers are able to mentor their child or can give more care in the studies as well as in their other personal developments. It shows that the teachers respect the value of education and its sacredness in the modern era where teaching is just a safe profession. Students' attitude toward education also differs from the parent's occupation. The children of small and large-scale entrepreneurs are not giving much importance or value towards education. As the parents are either educationally backward or their busy work schedule may not allow them to involve in the child's education. The nuclear family is most giving importance to education. As the family members are less, they are able to enjoy all the facilities without sharing it with anybody and also the parents can involve in the educational matters too. At the same time, the majority of joint and extended family also value education, but there are students from such families giving less importance to education. Most probably it can be because these students are not getting enough opportunities and disciplined environment for their studies. Another finding is the religious influence. It is found that out of all the religions in these areas the Muslim communities have given less importance to education.

The major streams in higher secondary in Kerala are science, commerce, and humanities. Most of the students have chosen their stream on their own. It is a positive attitude towards education. The influence of fathers and mothers depends on occupation, education and financial status. The professionally qualified parents influence their children more.

Moreover, the influence is the same, but in the lower income group, it is the mother who gives more guidance and support. In the lower income group, mothers are having high educational and occupational status than the fathers, so they try to acquire the middle-class values as a result of the contacts with middle-class mothers. This reflects in the support and guidance given by the mothers with low income. As the educational qualification increases, the support and guidance are given by the parent also increases. It's also given a picture that most of the middle-class family, women have power in decision making while compared to men than in the upper-class category.

The above findings prove that parental education, occupation, and income level play a major factor in determining the educational aspiration. As educational aspiration can be analyzed on the basis of socio-economic background too, it is found that these factors are positively related to the aspiration for education. About the educational and occupational aspect, it is found that both are added advantage to the child. While analyzing it more, it should be the education of

parent which contributes more than occupation. But the situation in Kerala gives a diverse picture that, it's the occupation of the parent plays a prominent role in their children's education as in the form of money and social contacts rather than education, which could be in the form of books and other aesthetic interests. There is no wide difference between the contributions of education and occupation of the parent. Because, educated parents can contribute intellectually and financially, and better occupation can provide enough facilities for the child in developing the aspiration for education.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, as an aspiration for education is the most prominent factor to gain the essential wealth in the society, this aspiration has been reproducing social inequality too. The study aimed to find out the influence of cultural capital and educational aspiration and the findings prove that social structure of the society is constructed in a way that the rich become richer and poor becomes poorer because of the unequal distribution or availability of these capitals. As cultural capital is the major element in reproducing this social inequality, the only way to reduce this is the equal distribution of cultural wealth with regard to social class. The hereditary transmission of cultural capital depends on various factors, as it has to reduce to the maximum, every category of the people can think about their future. Again there are limitations in every sector of the society to generate and transmit these cultural capitals to their future generation's upbringing; it is the duty of schools to develop it to the maximum. They should take initiatives in order to give maximum social space for their students. The cultural capital is not only in the form of institutionalized state, the embodied and objectified state is also an added advantage in reducing the social inequality. The disparity in the distribution or availability of cultural capital makes drastic differences in the educational output of the society. Again in Kerala, current education system stands for Bourdieu's economic capital rather cultural capital.

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How to cite this article:

APA:

Kunjumon, A. (2019). Educational aspiration and cultural capital: The indispensable factors of educational attainment in Kerala. *Journal of Social Work Education and Practice*, IV(1), 67-75.

MLA:

Kunjumon, Aswathi. "Educational aspiration and cultural capital: The indispensable factors of educational attainment in Kerala." Journal of Social Work Education and Practice IV.1 (2019): 67-75.

Chicago:

Kunjumon, Aswathi. "Educational aspiration and cultural capital: The indispensable factors of educational attainment in Kerala." *Journal of Social Work Education and Practice* IV, no. 1 (2019): 67-75.