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Educational Status of Thami Children in Lalbandi Municipality

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Abstract

Thamis are one of the ethnic groups residing in 37 districts of Nepal. They are one of the most marginalized ethnic groups in Nepal. Their educational status is a rare topic of the researches. There are 32,743 Thami people living in Nepal as of the 2021 AD population census. Regarding the total number of Thami residents in Lalbandi Municipality, there are 267 of them in all, living in 63 dwellings in wards 13 and 15. The main purpose of the present study was to determine the existing educational status of Thami children residing in Lalbandi Municipality as well as the different factors influencing their academic performance. Housewives from Thami families, students enrolled in schools, teachers, school principals, and concerned ward representatives make up the study's respondents. In a similar vein, the instruments used for gathering data included questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Primary data was first gathered by the researcher, followed by secondary data, and finally a descriptive analysis of the data was employed. Moreover, it was found through data analysis

that while the number of Thami children enrolled in schools has increased, their overall academic performance is not still satisfactory. Furthermore, it is found that the efforts of different stakeholders are not adequate to improve their educational status. Therefore, the concerned authorities ought to employ better strategies for the academic excellence of the Thami children.

Keywords: Community, educational achievement, marginalized, Thami Children

Introduction

Nepal is a country with a diversified population in terms of geography, language, ethnicity, and religion. Toni Hagen (1961) calls Nepal as “the ethnic turntable of Asia” due to the country’s diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious makeup. Both the Indo-Aryan speaking Caucasoid group and the Tibeto-Burman speaking Mongoloid group comprise the two main ethnic groups that make up these castes and communities. The first group is associated with the Hindu caste system, whereas the second group is part of Nepal’s indigenous ethnic groups. According to the latest National Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2022–2023 study, despite the significant progress especially in poverty reduction of the nation large number of marginalized populations have been encountering challenges related to education, health and shelter.

Since the Gorkha monarchs’ geographical conquest of greater Nepal in 1769 A.D., cultural prejudice, economic exploitation, social isolation, and political tyranny have become the major features of Nepali state politics. Prithivi Narayan Shah proclaimed Nepal as the Ashali Hindusthana, or the real Hindu Kingdom, not long after the country had been conquered. He went on to describe Nepal as the “common garden” of 36 castes and four varnas. In actuality, Nepal never developed into a communal garden. Instead, the so-called high caste elite communities continued to use it as a private vassal. The Panchayat (partyless political system) rule (1960–1990) brought forth new forms of dominance and hegemony for indigenous peoples. Hindu Bahuns, Chhetris, and a small number of Newar elites dominated politics, while women, many indigenous communities, and indigenous peoples were

excluded from national politics. The government employ a policy of speak the Khas language, uphold the caste system, practice Hinduism, and dress in Nepali attire in order to become a citizen of Nepal. The elements of the pragmatic paradigm for developing national culture were Parbatiya Hindu principles. This kind of cultural model, also known as the “nationalistic model” according to Pfaff Czarnecka (1997), forced indigenous and other non-Hindu peoples to share a shared or common culture. Thus, even in the Panchayat period, ethnic identity claims were equated with political insurrection, as they were perceived as a threat to nationalism.

Similar to numerous other indigenous communities in Nepal, the Thami people have long been subjected to marginalization and prejudice. They have frequently been marginalized in terms of access to resources, healthcare, education, and political representation despite being one of Nepal’s indigenous ethnic groups. National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) (2021) reveals that in our country, there are currently 32743 Thami people, who belong to one of the marginalized groups out of 142 total castes and more than 124 local languages spoken.

With regard to status of Thami people in Lalbandi Municipality, they were relocated to Lalbandi from various parts of Nepal and currently reside in 63 houses in wards 13 and 15. There are a total of 267 of them living here. The main income source of Thami community living in Lalbandi Municipality is agriculture and domestic skills. They still depend on farming, wage labor and foreign employment for their livelihood. In ancient times, most of the Thami and still in some places weave Doko (basket), Gundri (mat) and Bhangra (cloth) professionally. Still the elderly Thami people living here do the same old profession. Now-a-days, most of the young people of Thami community are moving to Kathmandu and other cities. The trend of going abroad for foreign employment is also alarming day by day.

So far as the educational status of Thami people living in Nepal is concerned, like other indigenous groups in Nepal, their educational status has long lagged behind the national average. This is caused by a number of variables, such as socioeconomic marginalization, language hurdles, and restricted access to educational materials. In

the past, because of the remoteness of their villages and the lack of schools nearby, Thami communities used to frequently lack access to formal education. School attendance was also hampered by poverty and the requirement that children help out around the house. Apart from these, many Thami children are still facing obstacles to an education, such as socioeconomic factors, a shortage of trained teachers, and poor infrastructure.

The existing educational status of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality is unsatisfactory. Due to societal norms that prioritize agricultural work above schooling, poverty, language barriers, and, most crucially, cultural conventions, Thami children have limited access to formal education. In addition, Thami children's educational attainment has been hampered by discrimination and social isolation as well. Therefore, it is imperative that the local governing bodies keep supporting initiatives that focus to improve access to high-quality education, address socioeconomic disparities, foster cultural inclusion in the educational system, and gives Thami communities the power to actively participate in educational decision-making in order to fully address these challenges.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study were as follows:

- To find out the educational status of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality
- To indentify the obstacles and challenges that Thami children face in Lalbandi Municipality

Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited to:

- Assess educational status of Thami children residing in Lalbandi Municipality ward no. 13 and 15.

- Qualitative research design
- Questionnaire, interview and observation as the data collection tools

Significance of the Study

The current study, which focuses on a marginalized group inside Lalbandi Municipality, fills a major research gap in schooling. The need to guarantee all children, regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds, fair access to education is the driving force behind this research. Children from the Thami children are marginalized group who have been encountering various difficulties in obtaining high-quality education, frequently because of differences in socioeconomic status, cultural obstacles, and social isolation. This study aims to identify these obstacles and encourage actions and policies that support inclusive education by looking at their educational level.

Promoting social justice and equity in education requires an understanding of the educational status of Thami children. In addition to being a basic human right, education is also an effective means of resolving various sorts of injustices and strengthening marginalized communities. This study attempts to identify regions where Thami children may be particularly disadvantaged by examining variables including literacy rates, school enrollment, and educational facilities in Lalbandi Municipality. The research recommends for focused initiatives to meet the unique needs of Thami children and adds to larger discussions on social justice by bringing attention to these inequities.

Ultimately, the study on the educational status of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality is meant to be a wake-up call for educators, stakeholders, and legislators to give inclusive and equitable education as its top priorities. This study advances the larger objective of creating a more equitable and inclusive society where every child has the chance to reach their full potential through education by addressing the difficulties experienced by Thami children.

Literature Review

Given their significance for social justice and equitable development, many researchers have focused more and more on the educational status of marginalized communities. With a main objective to identify important themes, gaps, and policy and practice implications, this review of the literature examines the various researches related to the topic of the present study.

Regarding the barriers to educational access especially to the marginalized groups, many research studies demonstrate the complex obstacles that marginalized communities including indigenous groups face when trying to obtain high-quality education (Bista, 2019; Subba & Chhetri, 2018). Divergences in educational access and achievement are caused by a number of factors, including poverty, remote location, poor infrastructure, and prejudice based on cultural identity (Shrestha & Gurung, 2017). Linguistic and cultural hurdles may exacerbate the difficulties that Thami children, as a marginalized indigenous minority in Lalbandi Municipality, may encounter (Tamang & Rai, 2016).

With regard to cultural relevance and inclusion of marginalized group, encouraging educational equity for indigenous children requires cultural relevance and inclusivity (Tamang, 2019). Academic scholars argue that integrating native languages, customs, and knowledge into the curriculum can improve student performance and create a feeling of community (Banks, 2018; Lama & Limbu, 2020). It is still unclear, nevertheless, how much Lalbandi Municipality's educational policies take Thami children's cultural needs into account.

In order to eliminate educational gaps among marginalized communities, policy actions that are effective are essential (UNESCO, 2020). Enhancing educational results can be facilitated by policies that fund inclusive education, give special resources to underserved communities, and encourage community participation in decision-making processes (Khanal & Gurung, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2021). On the other hand, different contexts may require different techniques to implement these rules in order to meet the requirements of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality.

From the above-mentioned literature reviews, the researcher finds there is still a significant gap of research on Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality, despite the abundance of literature on educational justice and inclusion. Studies that already exist frequently do not provide thorough information on the educational experiences and outcomes of Thami people, which limits our comprehension of the difficulties they encounter and the best ways to overcome them. In order to close this gap and offer a useful contribution to the wider area of education research, this study analyses the educational status of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality in detail.

Methods

The present study adopted qualitative research design to explore the educational status of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality and to gather the required data on the socio-cultural elements influencing educational outcomes in the Thami community, qualitative methods were employed. At the same time, to gather data and capture a range of viewpoints, the study included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire as the data collection tools.

Participants were chosen from the people who were living in Lalbandi Municipality adopting purposive sampling. In order to ensure representation across gender, age ranges, and socioeconomic backgrounds, the required information/data were elicited from teachers, community leaders, Thami students and some parents of Thami community. Those who were either personally involved in the teaching of Thami children or had knowledge of it fell under the criteria for selection as research participants.

Interview: Semi-structured interview was adopted to explore the educational status of Thami children. The interview was conducted with Thami parents, local community leaders, and teachers to elicit the required information about existing educational status of Thami children.

Open-ended Question: In order to collect the data and evaluate the overall opinions of Thami parents and community members regarding educational access, quality, and obstacles, open-ended questionnaire was used.

Observation: The researcher was fully immersed in the everyday routines and educational environments of Thami children through the use of participant observation. To record observed behaviours, interactions, and environmental elements influencing educational practices, field notes were obtained during school visits, community activities, and household contacts.

With the assistance of local liaisons and interpreters to ensure linguistic and cultural sensitivity, questionnaires were distributed to Thami parents and community centers to start the data collection process. After that, required information were gathered for mutually convenient semi-structured interviews; prior written agreement was obtained and audio recordings were made. Throughout the course of investigation, participant observation took place, and the researcher actively participated in educational activities, schools, and the Thami community while making the study purposeful and objectivity.

Thematic analysis was applied to the accurate transcriptions of qualitative data obtained from observation, questionnaire and interviews. Similarly, existed theory concepts were followed in the coding, categorization, and continual comparison to identify themes and patterns and achieve required insights.

Finding of the Study

The Thami parents are mostly illiterate. A few are just literate. The majority of them work in brick chimney. There are 64 children of school going age. Out of them 49 children are enrolled in the schools. Among them, 31 are girls. Only 30 students are promoted (See Table 1). Of the out of school children, nine are boys and 6 are girls. The parents are mobile wage labourers. The children accompany their parents and during the time they are absent in schools. Comparatively, girls are better performers. They tend to be regular in schools.

Educational Status: The following table reveals the educational status along with achievement of Thami children studying in different schools of Lalbandi Municipality:

Table 1: *Distribution of Thami students by their GPA and average attendance days*

S.N.	School's Name	No. of students	Average learning achievement	Average attendance (days)
1.	Basic School, Lalbandi-15, Satbhaiya	9	GPA 2.3	158
2.	Basic School, Lalbandi-15, Pataharkot	6	GPA 1.89	111
3.	Dim Janata Sec. School, Lalbandi-16, Parwanipur	14	GPA 1.63	140

Source: Field study, 2023.

Through an analysis of three schools—Basic School in Satbhaiya, Basic School in Pataharkot, and Dim Janata Secondary School in Parwanipur—the study examined the educational achievement of Thami children in Lalbandi Municipality. Results show that these schools differ significantly in terms of learning attainment and attendance rates. The Satbhaiya Basic School has the greatest attendance rate (158 days) and average GPA (2.3). In contrast, with an attendance rate of 140 days, Dim Janata Secondary School in Parwanipur demonstrated the lowest average GPA of 1.63. The Pataharkot Basic School was in the middle, with an attendance rate of 111 days and an average GPA of 1.89.

These results highlight the variation of educational achievement found in Lalbandi Municipality and highlight the necessity of focused initiatives to alleviate inequalities and advance special educational package for the betterment of Thami children in education.

Identification of Some Common Influencing Factors on Education of Thami Children

Socio-Economic Status: The educational status of Thami children is found to be greatly impacted by socio-economic factors such as home income, parental education level, and resource accessibility. Higher socioeconomic level families are found to be better to pay for extracurricular activities, tutoring, and educational resources, which have improved learning outcomes. On the other hand, children from low-income families have encountered with obstacles including poor nutrition, restricted access to learning materials, and having to help out with household expenses, all of which could prevent them from achieving their full potential in the excellence of Thami children.

Cultural Practices and Beliefs: The Thami community's cultural practices and beliefs have affected their educational outcomes as well as attitudes towards learning. School attendance and educational aspirations, for example, are impacted by cultural norms around gender roles, marriage, and conventional livelihoods. The community's efforts to preserve its traditional customs and languages may also have an effect on the curriculum, the way that education is taught, and how relevant education is to the lives of Thami children.

Access to Quality Education: The educational status of Thami children noticed to be greatly affected by differences in their ability to obtain quality educational facilities: qualified teachers, and instructional materials. The provision of quality education may be hampered by issues including poor infrastructure, a lack of teachers, and restricted access to instructional technologies in schools in rural areas. To ensure that all Thami children have fair access to school, addressing these disparities will require investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and sufficient resources.

Community Support and Engagement: The educational outcomes of Thami children are also influenced by community support and engagement with the educational system. A positive learning environment can be created, and student

motivation and academic achievement can be increased, with strong community involvement including parental involvement, support from local leaders, and collaboration between schools and community organizations. On the other hand, children's academic development may be hampered by a lack of community support, disengagement, and unfavorable attitudes towards education.

Government Policies and Initiatives: The educational environment that Thami children experience is greatly influenced by government policies and initiatives. Education funding, curriculum creation, hiring practices, and affirmative action policies are some of the policies that might affect educational equity, quality, and access. According to consolidated equity strategy of Nepal government (2014), they are being provided token amount (NRs. 500 per year). Providing such a meager amount cannot solve the diverse problems they face. Enhancing the educational status of Thami children and fostering educational equity in Lalbandi Municipality require the effective implementation of inclusive policies that cater to their unique needs and obstacles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers important new information about the status of Thami children's education in Lalbandi Municipality. The study has highlighted important possibilities and problems that Thami children face in their educational journey by looking at aspects like socioeconomic position, cultural influences, access to excellent education, and community support. The necessity for focused interventions aiming at removing socioeconomic barriers, boosting community engagement, and raising educational standards is highlighted by differences in learning achievement and attendance rates among the examined schools. In order to create an inclusive and fair learning environment where every child has the chance to succeed, government organizations, educational stakeholders, and the Thami community must work together. Therefore, it is realized that cooperative efforts between governmental bodies, educational establishments, community organizations, and the Thami community are crucial to establishing an inclusive and

equitable learning environment where every Thami children can do better in their educational journey.

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About Author

Dharma Raj Ghimire, is an emerging researcher currently affiliated with Janajyoti Multiple Campus, Lalbandi, Sarlahi. Ghimire is passionate about exploring researches in the field of education, and aims to contribute new insights to the field. He is enthusiastic about collaborating with other scholars and continuing to develop expertise in the related field.