

CAUSES OF ADULT ILLITERACY: A CASE STUDY OF FEROZEPUR DISTRICT

Kulwinder Singh and Ravinder Kamboj

Present research is an attempt to study the social, educational and personal causes of adult illiteracy. Qualitative approach was adopted to evaluate causes of illiteracy. Ferozepur district of Punjab (India) was chosen as the region for conducting this study mainly for its low literacy rate and being a border area of Punjab, from where 60 adult respondents were taken as sample. Data was collected by a self-administered interview schedule, which seeks information regarding causes of non-educability. Findings of the study show that lack of parents interest, alcoholism/drug abuse of father and 'early marriage' have been reported as social causes for illiteracy among adults while in educational causes, adult respondents have enlisted three main causes 'school was far away', 'physical punishment' and 'behaviour of teacher not being appropriate'. Poor economic conditions, no source of income, over workload, hesitation and over-aging emerged as personal causes for discontinuation of the literacy process. It has been suggested that intervention programmes should be introduced in border areas to increase participation in adult education programmes and to remove obstacles in getting education.

KEYWORDS : Adult Illiteracy, Social, Educational and Personal Causes of Illiteracy

INTRODUCTION

As we move into the twenty first century, the problem of illiteracy with its global dimensions poses an urgent challenge to the world community. It is indeed a glaring indignity that one-third population of the world is illiterate. In developing countries one half of the children are denied the opportunity of basic education and continue to enlarge the rank of illiterates. In 1947, when India achieved independence, about 85% of its population was illiterate and hardly 31% of its children in the age group of 6-11 went to schools. While Article 45 of the constitution of India lays stress upon providing universal education, but so far, this promise has not been fulfilled. As a result, we find today that the number of uneducated and partly educated, illiterate and partly illiterate; individuals is on the increase. It is a matter of shame for any country if a large number of its citizens are deprived of the right to education.

There is a big gap between the literacy levels of men and women in our country. At the all India level, the seven states in northern and central India

alone are responsible for 70% of the illiterate people in the country. It is more marked in case of rural areas and further in terms of socially disadvantaged groups. Keeping in view the gender gap in literacy, the HRD ministry is planning to achieve 80% literacy for women by the culmination of the 11th five-year plan (2007-2012) and also introduced the Sakshar Bharat Mission with specific purpose of achieving this goal. With its new slogan - Literate India - the mission has hit the ground in September 2009 in 365 districts of all over India. It would be a joint collaboration between centre and state governments in all the states.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research in adult education is focused on impact of social education on social, political, economic and cultural life of people (Chaturvedi, 1969; Kudesia, 1973) and impact on functional knowledge of adult learners (Panwar, 1978). Further studies in the area of causes of non educability of adults has been studied by Krupadnam, 1993 and Govindappa, 1998, who found that certain socio-economic factors such as age, caste, occupation, economic and literacy background of the family and type of family also had impact on the education of adult rural women. While placement, allocation, size of the accommodation, timing, composition and strength of the adult education centre did not influence the achievement levels of adult learners; the amenities and materials available at the centre, which included lighting equipment, charts, blackboards and other learners materials significantly influences the achievement levels of learners (Mydum, 1993) and untimely supply of teaching materials, lack of mobile literary and non-involvement of people in the programme (Gupta et al. 1994). Puri and Kaur (1990) have reported a change in the development of attitude towards different issues and found that age is no hindrance in the learning process. Kaur (1998) studied the factors which motivate adult females to participate in adult education programme and found that educational factors such as learning to write, read and count motivated large family adults more than small family adults to participate in the adult education programme. It was concluded that adult education has a strong impact on life style (Stelmach et al., 2004). The impact of the adult education programme on learners was more than on the non-learners when the learners were totally illiterate or dropout (Kumar, 1998). Singh and Kamboj (2010) analysed that education brings modification in adult respondents ways of life, attitudes, levels of functionality and develops various technical and professional skills, needed for a better quality of life.

Punjab has a literacy rate of 76.68% against 69.95% at national level as per 2011 census while the male and female literacy rates being 81.48% and 69.65%. There are 1,89,88,611 persons (1,06,26,788 males and 8,36,1824 females) in the

illiterate group (aged 15-35). Literacy movement in Ferozpur district was started in 1996. When the programme was started in 1996 the literacy rate was 48.09%, which has increased to 69.8% in 2001. Which stands at 14th position in total districts of Punjab. Male and female literacy rate is 76.7% and 62.2% while rural and urban literacy rate is 55.75% and 79.22% as per 2001 census. There were 2,25,840 illiterates in 1996, which were 1,44,485 in June 2006. There are a number of studies focusing on adult education in the state (Singh, 2002). These research efforts regarding the identification of problems in implementation of literacy programmes in the state during 1990, were undertaken by selecting a particular area to find out factors promoting/hindering literacy programme for children to achieve universalization of elementary education (UEE) of the children in the age group of 6-14 years and also at adult stage as perceived by teachers, adult education instructors and parents of the children who dropped out.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

It was found that countries where illiteracy is high, per capita income is low, infant mortality rate is high, life expectancy is low, under nourishment is a serious problem, communicable diseases are widespread and number of persons below the poverty line is much more. Adult education is a dire necessity for poverty reduction and life long learning has to keep a close interaction with social change to meet the real learning demands of all (Rehman, 2003; Bhola, 2006; Wang, 2007).

It is therefore evident that adult education is important for social development because it helps in bringing positive effects on illiterates and dispel their misgivings about various superstitions, dogmas, child marriage, education of girl child, dowry etc. Adult education also plays an all-important role in the economic development of a nation because economic development of a country depends upon human factors. It has been found that there is correlation between development and rising rate of literacy. A meaningful participation is development however acquisition of knowledge and literary has been rightly included as one of human development indicators (HDR, 1996:132). Hence it is important to promote the efficacy of an individual. Adult education helps the illiterate to develop positive attitude towards development, readiness to adopt new methods of production and application of science and technology and prepare rural people that they should take a commercial or economic view of one's economic activity.

In a nut shall, it may be stated that literacy and education are the key words in development process, not only in developing nations like India, but all over the world, keeping in view the necessity of human development. So there is need to understand and causes and factors which work as hindrances in educability of adults. Keeping in view the problem of illiteracy and non-

educability in border area of Punjab, it was thought worthwhile to undertake the research present research study.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to study the social, educational and personal causes of illiteracy and dropouts among adults.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study was restricted to only Ferozepur district of Punjab.
2. The demographic features of the Ferozepur district was based on the information available from secondary sources and there limitation was kept in mind.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach was adopted in the conduct of present study to evaluate the views of adult respondents towards developmental issues, causes of illiteracy, and perceptions towards role of education in their life and adult education programmes as perceived by adult respondents of Ferozepur District of Punjab. In present investigation a case study approach was followed.

AREA OF THE STUDY

The study area chosen for the study was Ferozepur district of Punjab because of its low literacy rate and being the border area of Punjab. Fazilka tehsil was selected from five tehsils of Ferozepur district and Pencha wala, Jokri Kankar Wala, Shama Khan Ka villages of Fazilka tehsil were selected as area of this study.

SAMPLE

60 adult learners from three villages, who are taking adult education in Sahara Naari Uthaan Sanstha, Painchan Wala were selected as sample. Among them 35 were male and 25 were females.

RESEARCH TOOL

Primary data was collected with the help of an interview schedule administered on a selected sample of respondents to seek information regarding causes of illiteracy/dropout/non-educability. The interview schedule was pre-tested on 15 respondents for its finalization. The response format was modified and put up in categories for clear responses of adults.

The content of items constructed was also shown to the sociologists and educationists along with objectives of the study in the process of validation. On the basis of feedback from experts, the language, content of some questions were revised. Since the interview schedule is purpose specific and situational specific only validation process was considered for its standardization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The adult respondents were requested to spell out causes of illiteracy and non-educability of children as classified according to social reasons, educational, personal causes along with giving reasons for discontinuation of education.

SOCIAL CAUSES OF ILLITERACY

On the basis of respondents listing of social reasons of illiteracy taken as a whole for the total sample as well as separately for male and female groups in terms of percentages of occurrence of reasons are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Social Causes of Illiteracy

Reasons	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Parents were not interested	16	45.71	19	79	35	58.33
Early marriage	9	25.71	6	24	15	25
Death of parents	7	20.0	4	16	11	18.33
Untouchability	4	11.42	2	8	6	10
Domestic conflicts	3	8.57	4	6	7	11.66
Due to social evils	1	2.85	3	12	4	6.66
Alcoholism/ Drug abuse of father	12	34.28	11	44	23	28.33
Other reasons	1	2.85	11	44	12	20

Note: The respondents have given multiple reasons and hence the number exceeds the sample size.

From Table 1 it is evident that among social reasons 'parents were not interested', 'alcoholism/drug abuse of father' and 'early marriage' have been reported to be the important reasons for illiteracy among adults in general. The other significant reason, which emerged in the study that mostly people, do not want their girls to study. Social environment prevailing at that time was not conducive of girl education. In case of male respondents the prominent

social reasons related with illiteracy are that parents were not interested (45%) and Alcoholism and Drug abuse of father (34.28%) along with early marriage (25.71%). While majority of the women reported that their parents were not interested for the study and early marriage, Alcoholism and Drug abuse of father, death of parents and domestic conflicts are reasons. Female also reported some other reasons like step mother, illiterate parents which never allowed them to go to school.

EDUCATIONAL CAUSES OF ILLITERACY

The adults gave a number of educational reasons, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Educational Causes of Illiteracy

Reasons	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
No school in village	8	22.85	6	24	14	23.33
School was far from home	15	42.85	18	72	33	55
Behaviour of teacher was not appropriate	7	20.0	5	20	12	20
Study was not interesting	2	3.33	4	16	6	10
Physical activities	1	2.85	3	12	4	6.66
Physical punishment was given	10	28.57	5	20	15	25
Other reasons	1	2.85	3	12	4	6.66

Table 2 shows that adult respondents have spelt out the main reason for illiteracy is 'school was far away', 'physical punishment' and 'behaviour of teacher was not appropriate'. There is no major difference in the responses of male and female respondents. The reason may be that in border area there is a lack of schooling facilities. Another reason may be lack of effective teaching-learning methods and physical punishment, which lead the learners to discontinue leading to illiteracy in adults.

PERSONAL CAUSES FOR NOT GOING TO SCHOOL

The adult respondents who drop out of school gave a number of reasons for their illiteracy and discontinuation in studies. The reasons are arranged in

order of magnitude for the total group as well as separately for male and female respondents. The reasons are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Personal Causes for not Going to School

Reasons	Male		Female		Total	
	Rank	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	Number
Poor Economic condition	1	26	1	19	1	45
More Children at home	3	6	2	9	3	15
No Source of income	2	14	3	7	2	21
Indebtedness	4	8	4	5	4	13
Other reasons	5	3	5	4	5	7

Table 3 shows that 'poor economic condition', no source of income' and more children at home are the main important personal reasons viewed by male respondents for drop out and not going to school while female respondents think that more children at home and poor economic conditions are main reasons. The other reasons include being in debt, marriage of their siblings, and lack of company to school. While looking into women specific issues in case of drop out phenomenon, it may be noted that poverty and large number of children in family are the main reasons. Because of limited source of income and large size of family it is not possible for children to continue their studies. They were to engage in domestic work and family responsibilities and play role of bread earner for their family.

CAUSES FOR DROPPING OUT FROM LITERACY CLASSES

The adult respondents who dropped out from literacy classes gave following reasons for discontinuation of their studies which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Reasons for Dropping out from Literacy Classes

Reasons	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Over work load	3	8.57	2	8	5	8.33
Feel hesitation	5	14.28	2	8	7	11.66
Over age	5	14.28	28	8	7	11.66

The reasons of dropping out from literacy classes included over workload, feeling of hesitation and over aging. A good number of them were willing to re-join literacy classes, provided the conditions were right.

CONCLUSION

1. Social Causes: Among social causes lack of 'Parental interest', 'alcoholism/drug abuse of father ' and 'early marriage' have been reported to be the important reasons for illiteracy among adults in general. The other significant reason, which emerged in the study that mostly people do not want their girls to study. Social environment prevailing at that time was not conducive of girl education. In case of male respondents the prominent social reasons related with illiteracy are that parents were not interested and Alcoholism and Drug abuse of father along with early marriage. While majority of the women reported that their parents were not interested for the study and early marriage, Alcoholism and drug abuse of father, death of parents and domestic conflicts are reasons enlisted by women respondents. Females also reported some other reasons like step mother, illiterate parents which never allowed them to go to school.

2. Educational Causes: Adult respondents have spelt-out three main causes that is 'School was far away', 'physical punishment' and behaviour of teacher was not appropriate'. There is no major difference in the responses of male and female respondents. The reason may be that in border area there is lack of schooling facilities. Another causes may be that lack of effective teaching-learning method and physical punishment that leads to discontinuation of education.

3. Personal Causes: 'Poor economic conditions', 'no source of income' and more children at home are the main important personal causes viewed by male respondents for drop out and not going to school while female respondents think that more children at home and poor economic conditions are main reasons. The other reasons include being in debt, marriage of their siblings, and lack of company to school. While looking into women specific issues in case of drop out phenomenon, it may be noted that poverty and excess number of children in family are the main causes. Because of limited source of income and large size of family it is unable for children to continue their studies. They were involved in domestic work and family responsibilities. They have to play role of bread earner for their family.

4. Causes for Dropping out from Literacy Classes: The causes of dropping out from literacy classes included over workload, feeling hesitation and over aging. A good number among them were willing to rejoin literacy classes, provided the conditions were right.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In the light of the conclusions pertaining to the views and perceptions regarding causes of illiteracy among adult respondents selected from

Ferozpur district of Punjab, following recommendations may be made for strengthening the educational programmes vis-à-vis development programmes of the rural people.

1. Education facilities should be provided in these border areas because mostly respondents are illiterates. New opportunities of jobs should be created to achieve sufficient levels of income. Only education can save them from poverty, ignorance and illiteracy.
2. Parents should be made aware about girls' education and it is the duty of government that they should provide proper schooling facilities.
3. Adult education centres should adjust proper time table, when all learners are free and should arrange before and after harvesting season is over.
4. Learners should be motivated to learn with attractive incentives to make them complete the programme. The incentives could be awarded such as certificates for successful learners and prizes for outstanding learners. These incentives will also reduce the rate of dropouts.
5. Women learners should be mobilized to create interest in learning to make fancy articles, sewing, embroidery, handicrafts, cane-basket and chair making and other useful articles needed in their day-to-day life.
6. New methods of learning should be used in adult education centres because these methods were unsuitable for adult education centres as the programme of adult education is more flexible in nature. The methods of teaching in Adult Education Centre should be followed as per the recommendations of policy statement on Adult Education by the Government of India.
7. The social awareness component—health, hygiene, conservation of precious natural resources, use of energy saving devices and knowledge of cultural heritage- calls for incorporation in the curriculum at the adult education.
8. The use of modern technology devices, like radio and television need entry in the ordinary classroom for facilitation of the teaching learning process with initial emphasis being on exposure and increased consciousness rather than mere literacy. The literacy skills develop automatically with the exposure to the world of knowledge.

REFERENCES

- Bhola, H.S. (2006). Adult and life long Education, Poverty Reduction: A Critical Analysis of contents and conditions. *Review of Education*, 52(3-4), 231-246.
- Chaturvedi, S.C. (1969). Impact of Social Education on the Life and Living of the People in Block Areas in Districts of Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Lucknow and Mathura. Ph.D. Thesis in Social work. Lucknow University, Lucknow.

- Govindappa, K. (1995). Impact of National Literacy Mission in Andhra Pardesh. *Sixth Survey of Educational Research (1993-2000)*, NCERT, New Delhi, 2, 558.
- Gupta, J.L. (1994). The Impact of Literacy on Social-Economic Condition of Rural People. *Sixth Survey of Educational Research (1993-2000)*, NCERT, New Delhi, 2, 537.
- Gupta, S.P. (2011). Census of India – 2011. Chandigarh: Ess Pee Publication.
- Kaur, P. (1998). Factors which Motivate Rural Female Adults to Participate in the Adult Education Programme in Relation to Some Selected Socio-personal and Economic Factors. Ph.D. Thesis in Education, Punjabi University, Patiala.
- Krupadanam, A.O.A. (1993). Women's Education- A study of Impact of Certain Socio Economic Factors on the Education of Adult Rural Women. Ph.D. Thesis in education Osmania University, Osmania.
- Kudesia, U.C. (1973). The Role of Social Education in a Rural Development of Madhya Pardesh. Ph.D. Thesis in Education. Sagar University, Madhya Pardesh.
- Kumar, R.V. (1998). Impact of Adult Educational Programme on Rurals in Concern Small Family, Child Health and Hygiene. *Sixth Survey of Educational Research (1993-2000)*, NCERT, New Delhi, 2, 568.
- Mydum, R. (1993). National Adult Education Programme in Warangal District. *Sixth Survey of Educational Research (1993-2000)*, NCERT, New Delhi, 2, 552.
- Panwar, J.S. (1978). Effect of Short Duration Agricultural Training on Farmers learning. Ph.D. Thesis in Education, Udaipur University, Udaipur.
- Puri, K., & Kaur, N. (1996). A Study in to the Nature of IPCL Primers and their Efficacy in Imparting Basic Literacy Skill to Adult Illiterate. Regional Resource Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
- Rehman, S.A (2003). Poverty and Adult education: The Experiment in Pakistan. Quoted from Preace, J. and Singh, M. (Eds.) (2003), *Adult Learning and Poverty Eradication*. Report on the Work Shop held at CONFINTEA Mid Term Review conference, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Singh, H. (2002). A Critical Study of Development of Adult and Non Formal Education in Punjab During 1972-1997. Ph.D. Thesis in Education, Punjabi University, Patiala.
- Singh, K. (2002). Impact of Formal and Non-formal Education on Life and Culture of Tribal People of Himachal Pradesh, A Research Report, Institute of Tribal Studies, Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.
- Singh, K., & Kamboj, R. (2010). Literacy and Socio-Economic Development of

Rural Community : A Case Study of Ferozepur District. *Edusearch*, 1 (2), 64-75.

Stelmach, W., Kaczmarczyk, C.K., Bielecki, W., & Drygas, W. (2004). The Impact of Income Adult Education and Health on Life Style in a Large Urban Population of Poland(CINDI Programme). *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health*, 17(3), 393-401.

Wang, C.Y. (2008). Enhancing the Inter Active Relationship Between Life Long Learning and Social Changes to Carry out a Learning Society in Taiwan. *International Journal of Life Long Education*, 27(5), 535-542.

