

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH GENDER LENS

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Gender issues have become the talk of today's educational forum. Although the literacy rate is more among boys than girls; it is quite interesting to observe that girls are securing better rank than boys in almost all academic and other competitive examinations. Academic achievement is considered as a key criterion to judge one's total potentialities and capacities. In the present study, the researcher has analysed and assessed the gender differences in academic achievement of 10th class students in English in Salem and Sankari educational districts of Tamil Nadu. The Ex-post Facto research method has been adopted in this study and the annual examination marks obtained by the students (N=195,941: Boys-1,02,027 and Girls- 93,914) in English in last five years (2007 – 2011) were used as a measure to assess the academic achievement.

KEYWORDS: Academic Achievement, Gender Differences and English Language.

INTRODUCTION

Education, in its broadest sense, may be defined as a process designed to inculcate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to enable individuals to cope effectively with their environment. Its primary purpose is to foster and promote the fullest individual self-realization for all people (Verma, 1990). But

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in our education system emphasis is given on students' scholastic achievement which determines the academic success and the success of learning is judged mainly in terms of quantitative marks obtained by the students in the year end examination. In our secondary school education various subjects such as Languages (Regional and Second language), Mathematics, Science, Social Science, etc. are taught and learnt as compulsory subjects. Unless the students get pass mark in the final examination, they cannot be enrolled in higher classes. English, being a foreign language is taught and learnt as a subject in schools right from the primary level in Tamil Nadu. However, students very often complain that since Tamil (mother tongue) is the medium of instruction they struggle to learn and get high scores in English compared with other subject. Also, studies have shown that there is a difference between boys and girls in their academic achievement. Hence in the present study, the researcher has analysed and assessed the gender differences in academic achievement of 10th class students in English in Salem and Sankari educational districts of Tamil Nadu.

ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA

English in India is a legacy from the British who colonized the country and their language permeated through some of the most important parts of society, the government, the education system, the media, the legal system, and gradually the social sphere as well. India is a vast nation and in terms of number of English speakers, it ranks third in the world after USA and the UK (Aggarwal, 1983). There are large numbers of people in India who learn and use English for a wide variety of purposes. Its importance is on the increase in every walk of life. English, though a foreign language is the only language, which is understood, learnt, taught and used by people in all parts of India. On other hand, English in India is learnt and used as a second language. We call it a second language and not a foreign language because it has become the medium of instruction in higher education and also in schools. We learn not only English but we also learn many subjects through English. Keeping in view this demand for English, the first Prime Minister of our independent nation Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said that "English is our major window on the modern world." (Allien and Campbell, 1983)

French stated that, "It is only through this (English) language that we have distilled essence of modern knowledge in all fields of human activity. Anyone who can read English can keep in touch with the whole world without leaving his own house" (Annika, 2003). The University Education Commission (1948-1949) observed, "English is a language which is rich in literature – humanistic, scientific, and technical information. If under sentimental urges we should give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of

overgrowing knowledge". (Atkinson, Berne and Woodworth, 1983).

Students also need English both for pursuing their studies and communicate in real life situation. English is needed to perform a large number of communicative acts i.e. comprehend and interpret professional material in English, read English books and magazines for information or pleasure and also communicate with speakers of other languages. Our approach to language teaching should then be such that students are enabled to use English for the purpose they would need to use it. English has respectable place in the society and it has an established sociolinguistic fact that no one learns a second language unless there is a need for it. English is perhaps best when it is the medium of instruction and it will improve the language skills and scholastic achievement among the students which is the main basis of admission and promotion into higher class.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

In our society academic achievement is considered as a key criterion to judge one's total potentiality and capability. Hence academic achievement occupies a very important place in education as well as in the learning process. Crow and Crow (1969), defined Academic Achievement as the "extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning i.e., achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him". Academic achievement also denotes the knowledge attained and skill developed in the school subject, usually designated by test scores.

According to Good (1976) the knowledge attained or skills developed in school subjects are usually developed by teachers. The term 'achievement' is defined as "accomplishment or proficiency of performance in a given skill or body of knowledge". The Dictionary of Psychology (Atkinson, Berne and Woodworth, 1988) defines achievement as a specified level of proficiency in scholastic or academic work.

Academic achievement has become an index of students' future in this highly competitive world. It has been one of the most important goals of the educational process. It is also a major goal, which every individual is expected to perform in all cultures. Academic achievement is a key mechanism through which adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are an important part of developing career aspirations (Lent; Brown and Hackett, 2000). Assessing student's progress means identifying what he has achieved. Acquiring skills in academic matters is important as a means of attaining complete realization. In this study academic achievement is measured from the results of 10th grade annual examination of the students conducted by the state government of Tamil Nadu. The annual examination marks of students for five successive years from 2007 to 2011 have been taken as

academic achievement scores. Since the public examination scores are taken, there is no need to convert this as standard scores.

GENDER AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Gender issues have become the talk of today's educational forums. Although the literacy rate is more among boys than girls; it is quite interesting to observe that girls are securing better ranks than boys in almost all the academic examinations. It is very absorbing to find that the girls figure to be more often in top two ranks in tenth class annual examination from the preceding ten years in Tamil Nadu.

The performance of every individual is not equal. There is a lot of variability and dispersion. In common pupils' parlance there exists terms such as "bright student", "average student" and "dull student". The variability cannot be attributed to a single factor, but it is the outcome of number of factors as intelligence, study habits, self-concept, creativity, aptitude, interests, socio economic factors, area etc. Along with these, gender of the students also plays an influencing factor on academic achievement. Academic achievement of students depends upon the sustained training and interests.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Gender has been found to play an important role in influencing students' academic activities. The related studies on gender differences in academic performance of students report that gender has an effect on the children's academic achievement. The studies on gender differences in academic performance are highly controversial. Vijayalaxmi and Natesan (1992) assessed the academic achievement of the subjects among 11th class students and found that girls had a higher mean score in academic achievement compared to boys. However, Kaur and Gill (1993) revealed that achievement in English and total achievement was independent of sex, but boys scored higher than girls in achievement in Punjabi, Mathematics and Science.

Agarwal (1983) disclosed that females showed a higher reading ability and academic achievement than males. Begum and Phukan (2001) conducted a study to analyse the relationship between academic achievement and intelligence in boys and girls. Findings showed that there is a correlation between academic achievement and intelligence of the students and the correlation was greater in case of girls than boys. Yun (2001) investigated gender differences in verbal and mathematical skills among Chinese adolescents and found that the males scored higher than the females. Ching (2011) studied the academic achievement of secondary students in relation with gender and year level and results revealed that significant gender differences exists in academic performance of students. Suneetha and Mayuri (2001) stated that boys and girls differed significantly in drill, interaction and

language. Verma (1996) studied the effect of study habits on academic achievement in Hindi and English among students of X class and found that students possessing good study habits scored higher than students possessing poor study habits in these courses. Wangoo and Khan (1991) conducted a study on the socio-economic status and academic achievement the results of which revealed that government and private school students differed significantly in their academic achievement.

The academic achievement stands as a base for a better future of the student in the society which reflects the total knowledge, abilities, attitude, behaviour and skill of the students and also it lays the foundation for higher education. It is revealed from the studies that gender has been found to play an important role in influencing student's academic activities along with different factors such as intelligence, study habits, self-concept, creativity, aptitude, interests, socio-economic factors etc. Observing this, the present investigation carried out to analyse and assess the academic achievement of the students in English at secondary level through gender lens. Like using a pair of glasses to correct our vision, gender lens will help to focus our attention on gender differences and identify problems and remedial measures from a gender perspective in educational attainment that require further research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To analyse and assess the academic achievement of secondary school students (10th grade) in English (2007-2011).
- 2) To find out the gender differences of secondary school students in the academic achievement in English with respect to the following demographic variables:
 - a) Year wise (Quinquennial)
 - b) Educational District
 - c) Community
 - d) Type of School
 - e) Locality of School

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- There exists a gradual growth rate in the academic achievement of secondary level students in English.
- There is no significant gender difference in academic achievement in English with respect to the above mentioned demographic variables.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this study the investigator adopted an Ex-post Facto Research method to analyse the gender difference in the academic achievement of secondary school students in English in which the population included all the students studying in class 10th (N = 195,941 students: Boys- 1,02,027 and Girls- 93,914) in Salem and Sankari educational districts of Tamil Nadu state over five years (2007-2011). Academic achievement of students in English is measured from the marks obtained by the students in 10th grade annual examination. Data were analysed using statistical techniques such as Mean, Standard Deviation and differential analysis (t-test) were used to analyse the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1

Year-Wise (Quinquennial) Analysis of Gender Differences in Academic Achievement in English

YEAR	BOYS			GIRLS			t
	N	MEAN	SD	N	MEAN	SD	
2007	19587	45.02	17.40	17579	49.42	17.59	24.22 *
2008	19759	49.52	19.68	17790	54.92	19.44	26.72 *
2009	20457	51.66	18.46	19119	55.55	17.82	21.34 *
2010	20801	50.36	18.96	19607	54.52	18.67	22.17 *
2011	21423	53.26	20.12	19819	58.50	19.19	27.12 *

* Significant at 0.01 Level Maximum Score 100

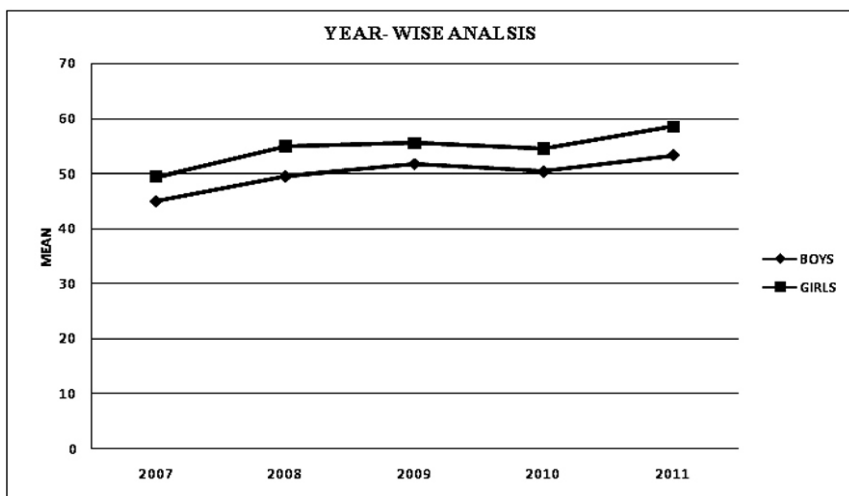


Figure 1 Mean Scores of Boys and Girls in English (2007-2011)

Table 1 shows that the academic achievement of the students in English over the years 2007 to 2011 has been average. The data also shows that all these five years significant gender differences in academic achievement in English exist. Girls' performance in English is found to be better than boys. There is a gradual increase in the mean scores of the boys from 45.2 (2007) to 53.26 (2011). This shows that the performance in English has increased over a period of time. Likewise the mean scores of girls have also increased from 49.42 (2007) to 58.50 (2011). The quinquennial analysis of academic achievement in English reveals the fact that the students' academic achievement scores in English has increased, but it is still not up to the mark.

Table 2

Gender Differences in English Achievement in the two Educational Districts- Sankari and Salem

Educational District	YEAR	BOYS			GIRLS			<i>t</i>
		N	MEAN	SD	N	MEAN	SD	
SANKARI	2007	7867	43.99	16.48	6396	47.58	16.72	12.85 *
	2008	8024	47.65	18.21	6550	52.74	18.61	16.56 *
	2009	8406	49.52	17.70	7097	54.19	17.45	16.49 *
	2010	8420	49.31	17.75	7268	53.65	17.71	15.28 *
	2011	8857	53.22	19.28	7376	59.02	18.47	19.53*
	2007	11720	45.71	17.79	11183	50.48	17.98	20.05 *
SALEM	2008	11735	50.79	20.55	11240	56.19	19.79	20.28 *
	2009	12051	53.16	18.82	12022	56.36	17.98	13.49 *
	2010	12381	51.08	19.72	12339	55.03	19.19	15.96 *
	2011	12566	53.28	20.69	12443	58.20	19.60	19.30 *

* Significant at 0.01 Level

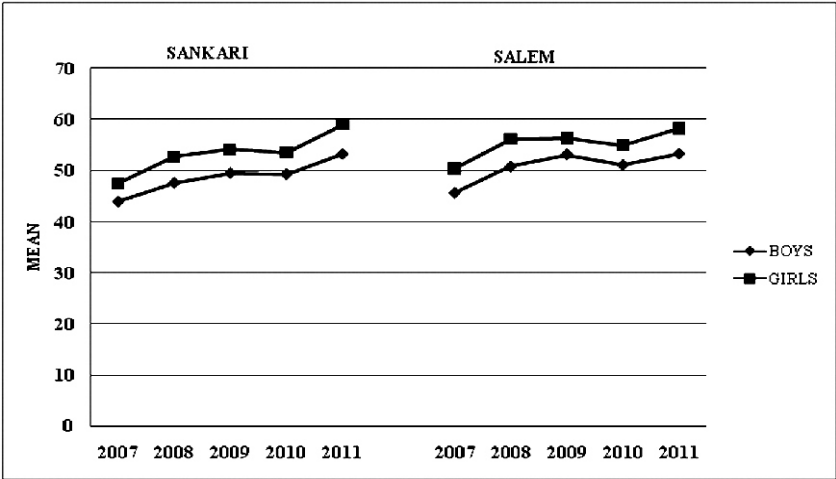


Figure 2 Mean Scores of Boys and Girls (Educational District Wise).

The data analysis in Table 2 reveals that the academic achievement of the students in English is average in both Salem and Sankari educational districts. Over these five years (2007 – 2011) gender differences is found to be significantly high and performance of girls is better than boys. It shows that there is a gradual improvement in the mean scores of the students but not very high in English.

Table 3

Community Wise Analysis of Gender Differences in Academic Achievement in English

Community	YEAR	BOYS			GIRLS			t
		N	MEAN	SD	N	MEAN	SD	
OTHER COMMUNITY	2007	215	57.70	17.87	199	62.34	18.75	2.57**
	2008	209	60.52	21.05	183	68.69	17.33	4.21**
	2009	225	63.13	20.14	175	68.36	17.24	2.79**
	2010	202	60.60	19.51	189	65.26	18.58	2.42**
	2011	173	63.49	20.36	186	69.65	17.41	3.06**
BACKWARD COMMUNITY	2007	5405	50.80	18.21	5320	56.18	17.83	15.46 *
	2008	5604	55.64	20.37	5284	61.97	19.04	16.76 *
	2009	5635	57.56	18.91	5402	61.99	18.25	12.52 *
	2010	5555	56.39	19.85	5532	61.20	18.85	13.08 *
	2011	5453	59.32	20.33	5336	65.37	18.85	16.04 *
MOST BACKWARD COMMUNITY	2007	9495	43.48	16.35	8019	47.65	16.54	16.69 *
	2008	9525	47.87	18.66	8297	53.04	18.62	19.45 *
	2009	10090	50.18	17.81	9203	54.09	16.99	15.62 *
	2010	10517	48.98	18.14	9349	53.11	17.90	16.15 *
	2011	10986	51.92	19.75	9485	57.55	18.62	20.96 *
SCHEDULED CASTE COMMUNITY	2007	3910	40.83	16.64	3532	43.90	16.07	8.08 *
	2008	3836	45.12	19.00	3593	49.42	18.77	9.81 *
	2009	3924	47.27	17.35	3810	50.65	16.49	8.79 *
	2010	3946	45.79	17.82	4034	49.29	17.61	8.82 *
	2011	4252	49.24	19.30	4212	52.95	18.48	9.02 *
SCHEDULED TRIBE COMMUNITY	2007	562	39.65	15.39	509	40.10	15.34	NS
	2008	585	42.58	17.43	433	44.55	17.18	NS
	2009	583	45.40	15.29	529	46.24	14.92	NS
	2010	581	44.89	16.68	503	45.24	14.93	NS
	2011	559	47.72	16.70	600	48.19	15.60	NS

* Significant at 0.01 Level

** Significant at 0.05 Level

NS- Not Significant

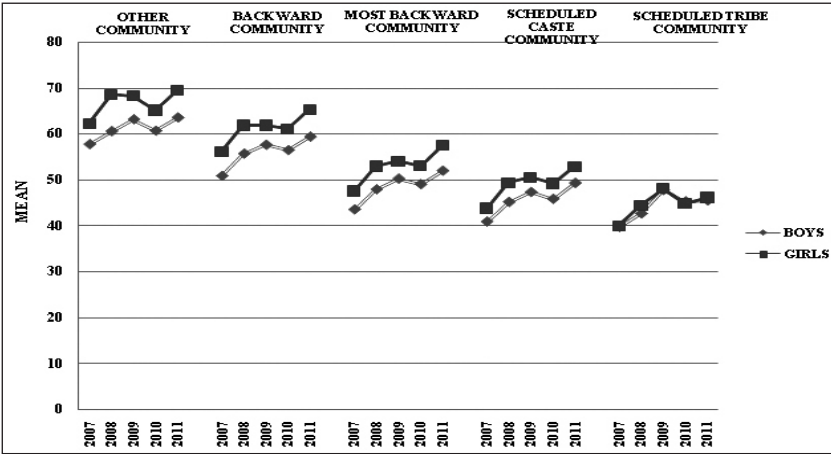


Figure 3 Mean Scores of Boys and Girls (Community Wise)

Results given in Table 3, point out that the academic achievement of students belonging to Other Communities is above average, Backward and Most Backward Communities are average, whereas below average among students belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities in English. The community wise analysis shows that the performance of girls is higher than boys in all the communities over these years (2007 – 2011), and it is found that there exists a significant difference between boys and girls in their academic achievement in English excluding students from Scheduled Tribe community.

Table 4
Gender Differences in Academic Achievement in English Based on Type of School.

Type of School	YEAR	BOYS			GIRLS			t
		N	MEAN	SD	N	MEAN	SD	
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL	2007	13880	41.68	16.16	13672	46.38	16.52	23.83 *
	2008	13914	45.76	18.41	13731	51.65	18.51	26.50 *
	2009	14298	47.98	17.32	14878	52.81	17.02	24.01 *
	2010	14595	46.57	17.86	15408	51.40	17.84	23.39 *
	2011	14432	49.34	19.31	15223	55.47	18.66	27.79 *
GOVERNMENT AIDED SCHOOL	2007	2945	52.31	17.35	2958	60.10	16.93	17.47 *
	2008	2931	55.73	19.82	3386	66.12	17.60	21.85 *
	2009	3510	58.89	18.26	3419	64.69	17.12	13.65 *
	2010	3002	56.47	18.23	3393	65.56	16.57	20.76 *
	2011	3387	58.14	18.76	3748	67.02	17.16	20.77 *
MATRICULATION SCHOOL	2007	2762	54.00	18.00	949	60.01	17.42	9.08 *
	2008	2914	61.18	19.33	673	65.26	21.91	4.45 *
	2009	2649	61.95	17.91	822	67.14	17.43	7.40 *
	2010	3205	61.89	18.35	805	67.61	18.80	7.74 *

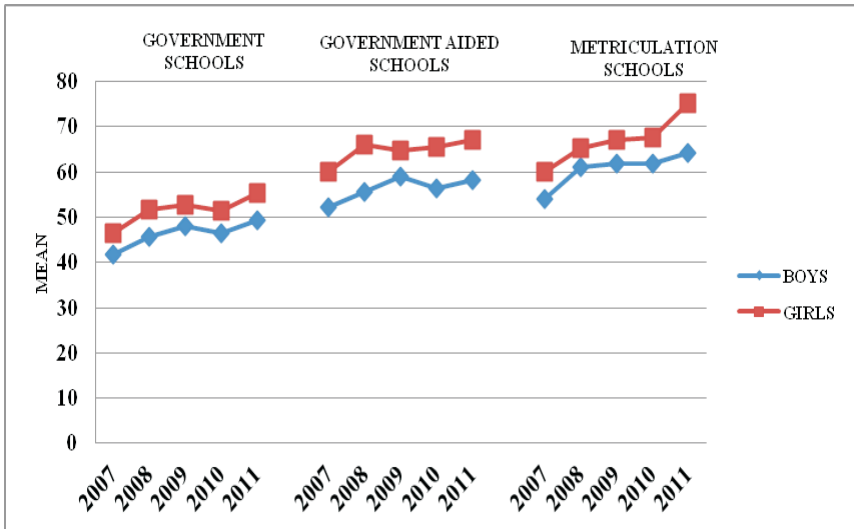


Figure 4 Mean Scores of Boys and Girls in English (Type of Schools)

Table 4 shows that the academic achievement of students studying in Government Schools is average whereas above average in Government Aided and Matriculation schools. In all these years gender differences in academic achievement in English are found to be high. Performance of Girls' in English is found to be higher than boys in all the five years and it is revealed that gender differences are found to be significantly high in the academic achievement in English among Government, Government Aided and Matriculation schools.

Table 5

Gender Differences in Academic Achievement in English Based on Locality of School

Locality of School	YEAR	BOYS			GIRLS			t
		N	MEAN	SD	N	MEAN	SD	
RURAL	2007	11939	44.40	17.15	8988	46.37	16.38	8.45 *
	2008	11925	49.26	19.28	9217	51.48	18.57	8.49 *
	2009	12730	51.41	18.28	10188	52.90	16.90	6.39 *
	2010	13157	50.17	18.87	10569	51.71	18.05	6.41 *
	2011	13495	53.94	20.05	10693	56.11	19.06	8.59 *
URBAN	2007	7648	45.98	17.77	8591	52.62	18.24	23.45 *
	2008	7834	49.91	20.28	8573	58.61	19.67	27.84 *
	2009	7727	52.07	18.74	8931	58.58	18.35	22.56 *
	2010	7644	50.69	19.13	9038	57.80	18.84	24.05 *
	2011	7928	52.09	20.18	9126	61.32	18.97	30.60 *

* Significant at 0.01 Level

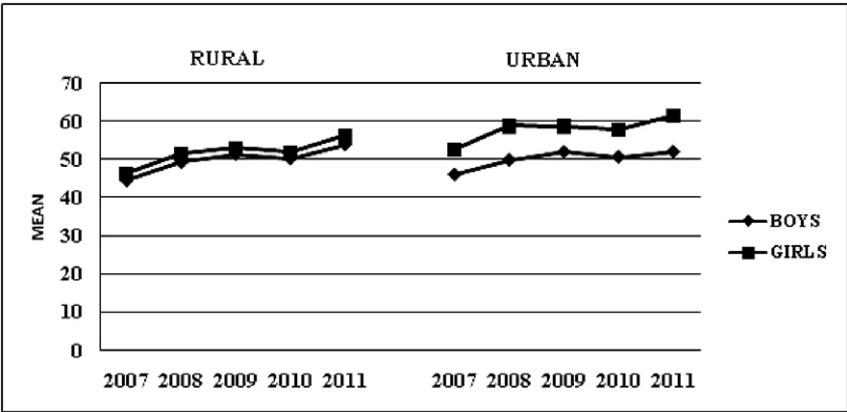


Figure 5 Mean Scores of Boys and Girls in English as per Locality.

Results from Table 5 show that the academic achievement of rural and urban school students in English has increased. In all the five years performance of girls' has been higher than boys in both rural and urban schools. The analysis, based on the locality of schools revealed that statistically, there was a significant difference between boys and girls in their academic achievement in English.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it is revealed that in all the five years academic achievement of the students in English is average and there is a gradual improvement in the mean scores of the students in their academic performance in English language. Thus, the hypothesis 1 i.e. there exists a gradual growth rate in the academic achievement of secondary level students in English is accepted.

The analysis based on different demographic variables revealed that the girls had a higher mean score compared to the boys in their academic achievement in English over these five years (2007-2011). This gives an indication that the girls performed better than the boys in English Language. In both the educational districts (Sankari and Salem) girls showed higher academic performance in language than boys. From the community wise analysis it is found that girls showed better performance except in scheduled tribe community. No significant difference exists between boys and girls in their academic achievement in language among the scheduled tribe community.

It is also observed from the analysis that gender difference exist in the academic achievement in English in relation to all the demographic variables. Thus, the hypothesis 2, there is no significant gender difference in the academic achievement in English among secondary students is rejected

except in Scheduled Tribe community students' academic achievement in English.

The boys in the schools need to be motivated more than their counterpart to achieve better results in English Language. Their academic performance in language has to be improved and to be balanced with the performance of girls. Student's gender would have affected their performance. Teachers may need to be more sensitive with the different needs of the male and female students. Hence, caution has to be placed when teaching both genders.

When the public results are declared, it is noticed that many students used to achieve 100% in English language and many schools showed 100% results. But this analysis and assessment shows that the academic achievement is average in English which remains as a hurdle to enhance the quality of education. English, being a second language determines the future life of the students to enter into world of work. Hence the Teachers, Chief Educational Officers (CEOs), District Educational Officers (DEOs) and the Directorates should take care to enhance the level of academic achievement and they have to concentrate on balancing the gender gap in academic achievement in English.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The educational implications of the study are as follows:

- From the findings, the investigator found that the academic attainment of students in English is average in all the five years. Teachers should give appropriate attention to increase the academic attainment in English language.
- The academic performance of girls is higher than boys with respect of their Community, Nature of School and Locality. So the boys in the schools need to be motivated more than girls to achieve better performance in English Language. This gap can be bridged by the school authorities and teachers by providing special training to the students in their schools.
- The academic performance of students belonging to scheduled tribe community is below average in English. This may be due to many reasons such as poverty, socio economic status, etc. They should be given more attention and special coaching / remedial coaching has to be arranged for their improvement.
- Language attainment of government school students is substandard than matriculation school students. So special care and appropriate attention should be given by the government and school authorities to improve the standard of government schools.
- Teachers should motivate the Students to develop their own study habits irrespective of the Community, Nature of School and Locality, which could lead the students towards betterment Academic Achievement.

- Measures should be adopted by the teachers and administrators such as special/ remedial coaching classes, training and make use of different methods to enhance the academic achievement of the students.

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