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**DOES SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECT INTELLECTUAL
DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS? A
CASE STUDY OF NADIA, WEST BENGAL**

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ABSTRACT

Students reside in a society, where there are different cultural norms. Some norms expect students to rise and shine through proper education. Other norms believe in gender biases while selecting career choices and preferences. This is an indication of immature thinking, contradicting intellectual development. If students feel in this manner, it means they are not receiving support from family members and teachers. Not receiving support is really striking and unethical on the educators in terms of causing proper development. This lack of support is really harmful for the students in higher secondary schools of rural areas like Nadia, West Bengal. Teachers are to increase activities which enhance high order thinking skills among these students. Students are also to be involved in activities which inculcate critical thinking within the students.

Key words: Social, cultural, intellect, development, higher secondary education, students, Nadia, West Bengal

1. INTRODUCTION

For students, all round development is deemed essential for their performance to flourish amidst others. Parents run a rat race for ensuring development of the students from an early stage. They fail to understand that just running after things will not produce better results in terms of their children's development. If the foundation is not right, then results are bound to be negative. For instance, some parents see an advertisement of mental wellbeing device, and order them or run to the stores to purchase. They do not think whether the device is actually beneficial or a means for extracting money from the customers. Here, importance of education is established which is seen in the mentality of the people in urban areas. There parents select the best for their children. However, Hira, (2019) argued that parents in the rural areas, also intend to select the best, but are incapable of giving best to the children for their development. This is because lack of scope, which deprives the children from gaining proper development and growth in the parameters of intellect, motor skills, emotion, social, political among others. This paper delves deeper into the social cultural factors associated with the intellectual development of the higher secondary students studying in these schools of Nadia, West Bengal.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sociocultural factors

Sociocultural factors basically indicate social and cultural influences which sketch the ways in which think, behave, make decisions, and communicate with others. These influences are felt in all of the domains like health, education, business, relationships, marketing, psychology among others. Dhali and Mandal, (2023) argued that basic sociocultural factors revolve around culture, social constructs, classes, family size and structure, education, religion, language, media, technology, language, peer groups, gender, along with government among others. It is the culture of a person or groups, which dictates them to follow certain beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and norms. These values and beliefs are shared among the people which generates harmony and order within the society. Norms shared among the people influences behavior of the people, their style of communicating with others, food habits, clothing, and attitudes. For instance, in some cultures, people prefer to make decisions after sitting in groups and thinking collectively instead of one person making the decisions.

Social class is another important aspect of the sociocultural factors which comprise of income, education, occupation, and wealth. The class to which a person belongs, sketches their access to healthcare, education, and opportunities. Grageda et al., (2022) stated that the

class also influences lifestyle and purchasing behavior. For example, upper class people can afford costly gadgets like fridge with multiple latest and modern facilities. On the other hand, people from lower classes are marginalized in terms of accessing even the basic healthcare services like diagnosing vaccines. Family structure also comes within the assessment through sociocultural factors. Earlier, families were basically joint. Every member had different needs which were fulfilled by the earning member. However, now people prefer to have nuclear families, separated from the parents. This family size preference is for coping up with the expenses. This family size patterns have been observed to shape values on early socialization, values, and emotional development. Families with strong beliefs, values and support for each other contributes importantly to the improvements of each other's' well-being.

Education is also one of the sociocultural factors. The level and quality of education affects the opportunities, which people are exposed to, in their lives. Education also forms critical thinking skills of the people. Through education, Dacha et al., (2024) was of the view that people gain awareness about their health as in the ways in which proper care is to be taken. People who are aware about their health, prefer healthy foods and generally avoid fast foods. Education is also on the religions followed by the people. This education influences moral values, behavior, dietary practices, and lifestyle followed by the people. For example, students following Buddhism, are compelled to follow Christianity when they go abroad for higher studies. But if they are educated and matured, they will follow their own religion, as a respect and tribute. Religious views affect preconceived and gathered notions on marriage, gender roles, and healthcare decisions. This affectation comes from communication intended with others. Amiri and El Karfa, (2022) stated that the tone in which communication is intended, sketches the social identity of people. Barriers in the form of miscommunication, influences the services. For example, if religious views are miscommunicated, then they feel excluded from the mainstream social activities. This affirms their exclusion within the society.

Media and technology influence the trends, beliefs possessed by the people, and the existing social norms. When people see political debates on news channels, they get to know what others feels about the events taking place in the surroundings. In these debates, cultural norms and political opinions are contradicted, which causes conflicts between the notions and conceptions possessed by the people. Here, Kim and Lee, (2024) mentioned about peer groups, who are especially friends, colleagues, and community groups. These groups, though their behavior and attitudes, influence what others feel, think, and behave. This influence is

mostly felt by the adolescents, when they see others having things which they do not have. For instance, when a child sees others having a costly toy, they also show desire to possess the toy. At this stage, maturity to understand their parental affordability towards buying the toy is not that advanced.

Gender roles significantly account for social and cultural affectations for the people. It is the society, which decides the roles differently for men and women. Being within the social norms, helps people to achieve success in career choices, family responsibilities, and opportunities. For example, it is generally observed that women are confined within the household chores and wellbeing of husband and children. Yılmaz and Temizkan, (2022) were of the view that if they intend to transgress towards the role of men, then they are considered as not following the social norms. However, in the postmodern society, women are successfully managing office and household works, in spite of receiving taunts and mocking. For ensuring law, order and harmony among the social constructs, government introduces social policies. There are governing bodies which influence the actions of the people through laws, welfare systems, and public policies. These systems and policies regulate education access, functions of healthcare systems, and employment opportunities offered to the people.

Sociocultural factors are important to be considered as they demarcate minute differences in behavior across social constructs. Through sociocultural factors, people can detect the inequalities in health systems, structures and policies on the services. Cananau, Edling, and Haglund, (2025) were of the view that significant sociocultural factor, especially household and family structure help in sketching consumer buying patterns. Culture in the social also ropes in education and conflicts, which cannot be placed together. This is because poorer strata of the society may not be educated, but they are responsible towards communal wellbeing, and not selfish like the upper classes, always concerned about fulfilling their own needs.

2.2 Sociocultural factors affecting intellectual development

Sociocultural factors are significant even while defining development of intellect among individuals. There are certain social and cultural conditions, which contribute to the thought processes, reasoning, communication, and skills on resolving problems. Here, arguments of Lev Vygotsky can be brought in, for understanding the formation of cognitive development through interaction among the social constructs, based on the cultural norms.

Mahmudulhassan et al., (2024) was of the view that if parents interact with children, they get to know about the right and wrong doings. As a result of this, they could express maturity towards performing the actions. These interactions reflect emotional support and stimulation, which is transferred from parents to children. Now, children are exposed to various study materials, which they like to study. This is because of the ways in which they are presented. These books and materials are available online, which they can access from anywhere. Parenting style leads to cognitive growth. If children are exposed to concrete conversations, they feel encouraged to develop strong language and reasoning skills.

Socioeconomic status (SES) includes income, parental education and the access which people have towards resources. If parents are lowly educated, then children are deprived of basic education and knowledge. It also aggravates complexities towards accessing resources. Higher SES indicates better schooling provided to children by the parents. High on education connotes access to enough study materials and engagement in extracurricular activities. On the other hand, Jessiman et al., (2022) argued that lower SES exposes students to cognitive stimulation, which affects academic achievement. If the teachers use strategic teaching methods to teach students, then their leadership skills increase. These teachers are concerned about proper wellbeing of students, which organizes the classroom environment. Supportive and stimulating educational settings are created by the teachers to promote critical thinking and problem-solving among the students.

Exposure of students to vocabulary and complex conversations, then their intellectual develops from the speeches initiated by others. This exposure is effective when students come from bilingual or multilingual environments, or are habituated of working with these environments. The type of speech initiated by the students directly affects the thought processes, aspects memorized, ability to deal things with rationality and logic. Here, Hira, (2019) stated that cultural beliefs and values are also considered for assessing their impact on education. It is these values and beliefs which sketches cooperation and independence to be decided for education. Values, especially trust composes the achievement which student preconceives towards achievements in education. In most of the cultures, students are asked to memorize what they are taught. Other cultures emphasize creativity and debates on memorizing the lectures provided.

Peer interactions and group discussions generate cooperative learning among the students.

These discussions also improve problem solving among the students. This is because interaction with peers enhance reasoning and perspective formation among the students. After seeing the programs on media and television, students engage in discussions with their colleagues, batchmates and peers. They come to know about the digital learning tools learning tools which are in trend. Here, Dhali and Mandal, (2023) argued that another aspect is the screen time balance, which the students are to maintain for avoiding problems with eye sights. Appropriate educational technology has been observed to enhance intellectual growth among the students, as in, which tool or technology is to be used for getting the better results. Excessive reliance or consumption could cause hindrance in formation of intellectual maturity. Social and cultural aspects also influence intellect in terms of nutrition and health. If students of higher secondary grade, has access to nutritious food, but consume fast food, then they are low on intellectual development. Same goes for healthcare availability. If students have access to healthcare, but do not avail them, then malnutrition is bound to occur. Untreated health issues also demarcate immaturity and low intellectual development. However, for some students, lacune is genuine, as they cannot afford. Grageda et al., (2022) cited that immediate result is negative affectation in the form of brain development and concentration.

Community and social environment ensure safety and stability among the students. This stability is needed as students are exposed to violence or stressful situations. Community learning opportunities are provided, which the students can avail. Sometimes the programs cause chronic stress, affecting memorization, attention, and executive functioning as a whole. Based on these aspects, it can be asserted that intellectual development is determined through the domains of biology, social interactions, culture, economics, education, and environment. All these domains have equal role in sketching cognitive growth.

2.3 Sociocultural factors affecting intellectual development of higher secondary students

Sociocultural factors also affect intellectual development of higher secondary students (ages ~15–18). Dumchak et al., (2024) was of the view that these factors are social and cultural influences which shape thought processes. The process here indicates components of critical reasoning, abstract thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. All of these aspects are significant in late adolescence. Sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky is important here for understanding the patterns of learning and cognitive growth which evolves from social interaction and cultural contexts. This idea is especially relevant at the higher secondary stage

of education.

One of the factors is education. Parental education level influences students' academic guidance and expectations. If the parents are highly educated and guides the students at higher education level, then students are motivated towards pursuing higher studies, which leads them to their academic goals. Amiri and El Karfa, (2022) was of the view that this is possible only if there are quiet study spaces at home, which is filled with enough study materials and uninterrupted internet connection. These resources support concentration among students, assisting in the development of higher-level thinking. Perceptions are that only privileged class students have these supports in their home, but not all. Due to the presence of this support, their status is acknowledged in society. These students are also put into tuitions and coaching classes. Other students rely on reference books, some basic webpages for getting the necessary information. Sometimes, students do not get the necessary information, which causes stress among them. As a result of this, they get distracted from their academic focus. Actually, Kim and Lee, (2024) stated that it is the financial stress experienced by their parents for not being able to support students in their academic performance.

Quality of schooling also matters in developing intellect of students. Discussions in between lectures instead of rote learning is helpful for instilling practical learning among the students. Engaging the students into library readings and digital resource access indicates proper channelization of their thoughts. Mentoring the performance of students enhances teachers' awareness on whether the students are performing according to their expectations. Debate, inquiry, and project-based learning are essential for promoting effective analytical and abstract thinking skills among the students. Yilmaz and Temizkan, (2022) stated that mentoring is also needed for peer influences which are imposed on students. Grouping the students in peers with same mentality encourages intellectual growth. Within the groups, if some students try to manipulate others, then it affects their academic engagement. Increasing group discussions help students to think with reasons, from which they learn to take stands for the issues.

According to some cultures, education is dealt with trust, honesty, and transparency. Teachers and students are expected to be accountable for the decisions undertaken. In case of higher education, teachers are to strive for excellence for paving the way of academic establishment and preparation for professional life of the students. In some cultures, parents expect students to go to the professions especially doctor, engineer, civil services among others. Here, gender-

based expectations and stereotypes are there, as in, boys are to choose subjects like science, engineer, and girls are to choose arts subjects. In this context, Cananau, Edling, and Haglund, (2025) stated that medium of instructions carries significance for polishing the vocabulary of the students. This polishing of language adds flexibility to the cognition. This flexibility comes from practical application of the gained knowledge from online study materials. However, if this access is not there, then rolling educational videos and research tools seem insignificant. This lack of access is seen among the students in higher secondary schools of rural areas. Here, one of the negative aspects is excessive social media usage, which deviates students from the information of online study materials. Students, if acting according to routines, gains balance between technological learning and critically thinking of using the social media.

Psychological and social environment in which the students are placed, also shapes their intellect. If students face support from family members and teachers on controlling emotions, then their emotional intelligence develops. Now, Mahmudulhassan et al., (2024) stated that it is the time of competition regarding selecting professions and achieving goals. Every student in the higher secondary grade, is in a rat race for progressing others. They always feel tensed and a pressure hanging over them to perform better. Immediate impact of this is stress, anxiety, and mental health issues, which adversely affects memory, attention, and performance in exams. For these students, a community which is academic focused is needed for stress management and reduction. If the community members or classmates are not supportive enough, then they are exposed to violence which makes concentration and motivation unstable.

3. METHODOLOGY

Deductive approach is apt for deducing sociocultural factors which play an important role in shaping intellect of higher secondary school students in the arena of Nadia, West Bengal. For exploration, both survey and case study analysis are justified. Cases add to the survey responses from the students. Analysis of the survey responses through tables, charts and graphs, alarm the awareness on sociocultural influences in the formation of intellect and its development.

4. CONCLUSION

From the reviewed literature and aspects, it can be concluded that at the higher secondary

level, intellectual development of the students in rural areas of Nadia, West Bengal, is sketched by intelligence, family support, household, family structure, income, language, school quality, peer influences, cultural expectations, and emotional well-being. Positive sociocultural environments are a motivation for the students enriching their higher-order thinking skills. Non-supportive environments obstruct academic potential.

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