



Race and socio-economic status (SES): A comparative analysis

Violina Khakhlari

Department of Education, Bodoland University, Udalguri Campus, Udalguri, Assam, India

Abstract

The present study was conducted to examine the socio-economic status of Tribal and Non-Tribal higher secondary school students and to determine the association between race and socio-economic status. The study adopted the Normative Survey Method. A total of 1062 higher secondary school students were randomly selected from the four districts of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam. In the present study, race was categorized into Tribal and Non-Tribal groups, where Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and General Category students were collectively considered as Non-Tribal. The socio-economic status of the students was measured using the standardized Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by Upadhyay. The obtained scores were categorized according to the norms specified in the tool manual. Frequency distribution, percentage analysis, cross-tabulation, and chi-square test of independence were used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of both Tribal and Non-Tribal students belonged to the Below Average socio-economic status category, with Tribal students showing comparatively greater representation in the lower SES categories. The chi-square analysis further revealed a statistically significant association between race and socio-economic status, indicating that socio-economic status significantly differed between Tribal and Non-Tribal groups. The study highlights the existence of socio-economic disparities among different community groups and emphasizes the need for educational and social interventions to promote equity and inclusive development.

Keywords: Race, socio-economic status, tribal, non-tribal, higher secondary students, BTR, educational inequality

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in the social, economic, and personal development of individuals and societies. It is considered one of the most significant instruments for promoting equality, social mobility, and national development. However, access to educational opportunities and socio-economic resources is not equally distributed among different social groups. Socio-economic inequalities continue to influence educational participation, achievement, and overall quality of life, particularly among marginalized and disadvantaged communities. In India, social divisions based on tribe, caste, class, and community continue to shape the socio-economic conditions of individuals and families.

Socio-economic status (SES) refers to the social and economic position of an individual or family in society and is generally determined by factors such as income, education, occupation, living conditions, and access to resources. SES significantly affects an individual's educational opportunities, health conditions, lifestyle, and social participation. Studies have shown that students belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds often face disadvantages in educational attainment due to lack of resources, limited parental support, inadequate educational facilities, and poor living conditions (Blanden et al., 2022)^[1]. Educational inequality is closely associated with socio-economic inequality, as children from economically weaker sections often have limited access to quality education and learning opportunities.

In the Indian context, socio-economic inequality is also influenced by social identity and community background. Tribal communities, recognized as Scheduled Tribes (STs), are among the historically marginalized sections of Indian society. Despite constitutional safeguards and various welfare measures, tribal populations continue to face

multiple socio-economic and educational disadvantages. Many tribal communities reside in geographically isolated and economically underdeveloped regions where access to educational institutions, healthcare services, employment opportunities, and infrastructural facilities remains inadequate. Research indicates that tribal students continue to lag behind non-tribal students in educational participation and socio-economic advancement due to poverty, social exclusion, language barriers, and limited institutional support.

Non-tribal communities, on the other hand, often experience relatively better socio-economic conditions due to greater access to educational resources, occupational opportunities, and social capital. Although inequalities also exist within non-tribal groups, tribal populations generally remain more vulnerable to economic deprivation and social exclusion. Sengupta and Guchhait (2021)^[4] observed that social identity and community background continue to play a major role in shaping socio-economic inequality in contemporary India.

The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam is characterized by cultural and ethnic diversity, consisting of various tribal and non-tribal communities. Differences in socio-economic conditions among these communities may significantly influence educational opportunities and overall development of students. Higher secondary school students represent an important stage of educational development where socio-economic factors strongly affect academic aspirations, career choices, and future opportunities. Therefore, understanding the socio-economic status of Tribal and Non-Tribal students becomes essential for identifying existing disparities and promoting inclusive educational development.

Several studies have emphasized the relationship between socio-economic status and educational outcomes among

tribal populations. Sucharita (2023) [5] highlighted that tribal students often face structural and socio-cultural barriers within the educational system, which negatively affect their educational participation and achievement. Similarly, Rashmi and Paul (2022) [3] reported significant inequalities in educational well-being between tribal and non-tribal children in India due to unequal socio-economic conditions and early childhood disadvantages.

In view of the above discussion, the present study attempts to examine and compare the socio-economic status of Tribal and Non-Tribal higher secondary school students in the four districts of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam. The study also seeks to determine whether there exists a significant association between race and socio-economic status among the selected students. The findings of the study may contribute to a better understanding of socio-economic disparities among different community groups and may help educational planners, policymakers, and administrators formulate suitable intervention strategies for promoting educational equity and social inclusion.

Objectives

1. To compare the socio-economic status (SES) categories between Tribal and Non-Tribal participants
2. To examine the association between race and socio-economic status

Hypothesis: There is no significant association between race and socio-economic status categories among the participants

Methodology

The present study was conducted by adopting the Normative Survey Method. The method was considered appropriate as the study aimed to investigate and compare the socio-economic status of higher secondary school students belonging to different racial groups and to examine the association between race and socio-economic status. The population of the study comprised all higher secondary school students of the four districts under the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam. A total of 1062 higher secondary school students were selected as the sample for the present study through the random sampling technique from the four districts of BTR. The present study included the following variables: Race was categorized into two groups: Tribal and Non-Tribal. In the present study, students belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and General Categories were collectively considered under the Non-Tribal group. Socio-economic status was considered as another major variable of the study and was categorized into: Low, Below Average, Average, Above Average, and High. The categorization was done according to the norms prescribed in the standardized SES scale. The socio-economic status of the students was measured using the Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by Upadhyay. The tool is standardized and widely used for assessing the socio-economic status of individuals based on various socio-economic indicators. The obtained scores were categorized according to the norms provided in the tool manual. The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and cross-tabulation were used to compare socio-economic status categories between Tribal and Non-Tribal groups. Further, the Chi-square test of

independence was employed to determine the significant association between race and socio-economic status.

Analysis and Interpretation

Objectives 1: To compare the socio-economic status between Tribal and Non-Tribal participants

To compare the socio-economic status categories between Tribal and Non-Tribal groups, frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and cross-tabulation were conducted. The socio-economic status of the participants was assessed using the standardized Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by Upadhyay, and the categorization of participants into different SES levels was carried out according to the norms presented in Table 1. The results obtained by participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Norms for Interpretation of Socio-Economic Status (SES) Raw Scores

Category	Raw scores
High SES	77 and above
Above average SES	67 – 76
Average SES	54 – 66
Below average SES	44 – 53
Low SES	43 and below

Table 2: Distribution of Socio-Economic Status (SES) Categories between Tribal and Non-Tribal Groups

SES categories	Tribal n (%)	Non-tribal n (%)	Total n (%)
Low	49 (4.61)	49 (4.61)	98 (9.22)
Below Average	412 (38.79)	268 (25.23)	680 (64.02)
Average	147 (13.84)	107 (10.07)	254 (23.91)
Above Average	11 (1.03)	19 (1.79)	30 (2.82)
High	-	-	-
Total	619 (58.27)	443 (41.7)	1062 (100)

Note: n = frequency; % = percentage

Table 2 presents the distribution of socio-economic status (SES) categories among Tribal and Non-Tribal participants. The socio-economic status of the participants was assessed using the standardized SES scale developed by Upadhyay, S.K., and categorization was carried out according to the norms specified in the tool manual, which is presented in Table 1.

The findings indicate that the majority of participants from both Tribal and Non-Tribal groups belonged to the Below Average SES category. Among the Tribal participants, 412 individuals (38.79%) were classified under the Below Average category, whereas 268 participants (25.23%) from the Non-Tribal group also fell within the same category. This suggests that a substantial proportion of the study population belonged to relatively lower socio-economic backgrounds.

In the Average SES category, 147 Tribal participants (13.84%) and 107 Non-Tribal participants (10.07%) were represented. Comparatively fewer participants belonged to the higher SES categories. In the Above Average category, only 11 Tribal participants (1.03%) and 19 Non-Tribal participants (1.79%) were observed, indicating limited representation in comparatively higher socio-economic conditions.

The Low SES category showed equal representation between the two groups, with 49 participants (4.61%) each among Tribal and Non-Tribal respondents. Notably, no participants were classified under the High SES category,

suggesting the absence of highly privileged socio-economic conditions within the sampled population.

The total sample consisted of 1062 participants, of which 619 participants (58.27%) belonged to the Tribal group and 443 participants (41.7%) belonged to the Non-Tribal group. Overall, the distribution pattern demonstrates that both Tribal and Non-Tribal groups were predominantly concentrated within the lower and below-average socio-economic categories. However, Tribal participants showed relatively greater representation in the lower SES categories compared to Non-Tribal participants, while Non-Tribal participants showed slightly higher representation in the above-average category. These findings indicate the continued prevalence of socio-economic disparities across racial/community groups.

Objective 2: To examine the association between race and socio-economic status

Hypothesis: There is no significant association between race and socio-economic status categories among the participants

To determine whether there was a significant association between race and socio-economic status, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Chi-Square Analysis showing the association between race and socio-economic status

Variables	χ^2 Value	Df	p Value	Result
Race \times Socio-Economic Status	10.035	3	.018	Significant

Note: χ^2 = Chi-square value; df = degrees of freedom; p = level of significance

Table 3 presents the results of the chi-square analysis examining the association between race and socio-economic status among the participants. The obtained chi-square value was 10.035 with 3 degrees of freedom, and the associated p value was .018, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that “There is no significant association between race and socio-economic status categories among the participants” was rejected.

The findings indicate that socio-economic status significantly differed between Tribal and Non-Tribal groups. Tribal participants were found to be more concentrated in the lower socio-economic categories, whereas Non-Tribal participants showed relatively greater representation in the average and above-average socio-economic categories. This suggests the existence of socio-economic disparities across the two groups.

Major findings of the study

1. The study found that both Tribal and Non-Tribal participants were predominantly concentrated in the Below Average socio-economic status category, with Tribal participants showing comparatively greater representation in the lower SES categories.
2. The chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant association between race and socio-economic status, indicating that socio-economic status differed significantly between Tribal and Non-Tribal groups, $\chi^2(3, N = 1062) = 10.035, p = .018$.

Educational implications of the study

1. The findings of the study highlight the need for educational institutions to provide equal learning opportunities to students belonging to different socio-economic and community backgrounds.
2. Special academic support, scholarships, and financial assistance programs should be strengthened for students from lower socio-economic and Tribal backgrounds to reduce educational inequalities.
3. Schools and colleges should adopt inclusive educational practices that promote social equity and reduce discrimination based on race or socio-economic status.
4. Teachers and educational administrators should be sensitized to the socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized groups so that supportive and student-centered learning environments can be created.
5. Educational policies should focus on improving access to quality education, learning resources, and technological facilities for economically disadvantaged communities.
6. Career guidance, counseling services, and skill development programs should be provided to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to improve their educational and occupational opportunities.
7. The study emphasizes the importance of community-based educational interventions to enhance educational participation and socio-economic mobility among Tribal populations.

Suggestions and recommendations of the study

1. Government and policy-making bodies should implement targeted socio-economic development programs for Tribal communities to reduce existing socio-economic disparities.
2. Greater access to quality education, employment opportunities, healthcare facilities, and financial assistance should be provided to socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
3. Community-based awareness and empowerment programs should be conducted to improve socio-economic conditions among marginalized populations.
4. Educational institutions and social welfare agencies should work collaboratively to support students and families belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds.
5. Future researchers may conduct similar studies with larger and more diverse samples to obtain broader generalizations regarding race and socio-economic status.
6. Further studies may also include additional variables such as education, occupation, income, gender, and locality to better understand the factors influencing socio-economic disparities.
7. Longitudinal and comparative studies may be undertaken to examine changes in socio-economic status across different communities over time.

References

1. Blanden J, Doepke M, Stuhler J. Educational inequality. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022.
2. Pandey BP, Sugandhe AS. What restricts the tribal education in India? Evidence from National Sample Survey. ResearchGate, 2023.

3. Rashmi R, Paul R. Early childhood circumstances and educational wellbeing inequality among tribal and non-tribal children in India: Evidence from a panel study. *Scientific Reports*,2022;12:9839.
4. Sengupta S, Guchhait SK. Inequality in contemporary India: Does caste still matter? *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2021, 37(1).
5. Sucharita V. Tribal education in India – Reviewing the progress and the way forward. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 2023, 60(4).
6. Tripathy JP. Refining a socio-economic status scale for use in community-based health research in India. *Indian Journal of Community Health*,2016;28(1):47–49.