

School Experiences of Discrimination: A Study among Prospective Teachers about its Levels and Forms

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Abstract:

Inclusive society shall always be a distant dream unless the seeds of inclusive feeling are sown in our schools. All care should be taken to make our school completely discrimination free. The reformation of our school culture will definitely help to realize the vision of establishing inclusive society in India and world at large. Discrimination is a common world: well heard of, often seen being done, probably experienced by almost all. The present study is designed to investigate the prospective teachers experiences of discrimination faced during their school times. So, that their experiences and their sensitivity of the issues can be transformed in the line of inclusive and equal school society. The present study investigates the form, nature and level of discrimination faced by prospective teachers during their school time.

Key words: Inclusive society, School culture, Discrimination, Prospective teachers, Transformation.

Introduction:

Discrimination is a common world: well heard of, often seen being done, probably experienced by almost all. The history of mankind is basically an account of discrimination faced by an individuals or group of individuals. There is no phase of human progress where one can claim it was free of all kinds of discrimination. Further, discrimination may be considered as a universal phenomena being practiced across the globe on several grounds ranging from biological, cultural, environmental, and historical etc.

A number of efforts have been made in the regard to make our society free from all discrimination but it seems to be an elusive dream. Various educational interventions have also been designed to curb such practices but in absence of collective social desire and attitudinal change in post modern world there have been evidence of discrimination in all aspects of human living. In this context, schools which are assumed to be ideal in their practices have also come under scanner to make a school free from discriminatory practices.

Schools have always been an image of larger society where it exists. Thus, apart from formal discourses there are many instances within the school environment where discrimination is perceived by an individual or a group of individuals.

The school personnel come with their own mindsets having particular attitudinal pattern which somehow reflects in their behavior.

There have been many allegations reports in past regarding discriminatory practices towards girls, SC, ST, OBCs and Minorities etc. in a particular social group. Recently introduced RTE- 2009 also recognized this very fact and defines discrimination as

“Discrimination means any distinction, exclusion, limitation, or preference, which, being based on caste, class religion, gender, region, race, family occupation, physical disability, or

any other grounds of a child's identity, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education." (Draft Recommendation Note, NAC Working Group on RTE January 10, 2013)

Discrimination may occur along multiple axes of a child's identity-class, caste, gender, religion, disability, family occupation, region, language, and others, and any combination of these. Discrimination i.e. differential and unfavorable treatment because of a Childs' identity- may manifest itself in any aspect of schooling such as unfavorable seating arrangement, restricted access to facilities including water and mid-day meal, lack of attention and nurturing, discouragement of a child, restricting participation in activities, selectively giving demeaning work, unwarranted disapproval, manifest forms of disrespect to the child's background or identity or any other behavior or action that is demeaning, humiliating or that may cause harm to a child's growth and the development.

The pedagogical consequence of discrimination in our classrooms (including low expectations from some children, lack of attention to their needs etc.) therefore often leads to low learning outcomes. These 'discrimination- induced learning outcomes' may be further reinforced by legitimate forms of assessment which then characterize some children as 'slow learners'. Thus, it is imperative to make our school environment free from all types of discrimination. It is also against the mandate of UNICEF (1990) which says that empowering the younger generation with knowledge and resources to meet their basic human needs and to grow to these full potential should be the primary goal of the national development. As their individual development and social contribution will shape the future of the world (UNICEF, 1990).

It is written that education should be considered the major tool for the development of children. School should be equipped with the potential such that these can foster proper growth and development of the children. But schools should not be viewed

in isolation. The stated function of school is providing education to all.

Are we sure schools are performing this stated function indiscriminately, when we are repeatedly read incidents of discrimination against students of vulnerable groups. Headlines like School Teachers sprinkles cow's urine to 'purify' Dalit kids in Maharashtra (Source: The Times of India dated 21 April 2007), another study conducted in Karnataka reveals discrimination in schools (Source: The Hindu dated Oct 21, 2012). These researches reveal that discrimination is done towards vulnerable students in many forms and the basis of such discrimination is also very wide. Discrimination not only hurts the person who is experiencing it but is also harmful for the person who is doing it. In fact it is a clot on the society in which it exists. School should become a place where equality should prevail. Although it is not as easy to transform the existing inequality of the schools as it sounds. In order to achieve discrimination free education, the crucial element will be teachers. If teachers trained on such dispositions will definitely make education an effective tool for making our society free from discrimination. There arises the need of teacher training for this purpose.

National curriculum framework for teacher education (2009) also recommends that professional development of teachers require that the teachers should be able to influence social attitudes and generate greater commitment to constitutional values and overcome discrimination in the classroom.

In this context it is imperative that we should make aware future teachers in a way where they can be familiar with discriminatory practices existing in the schools. The prospective teachers own experiences regarding discrimination in schools would prove to be a useful data to understand the phenomena at individual level.

Their early experiences about discrimination could well be explained and further ideal practices could be discussed to stop such practices in the schools. Therefore, it was felt that the experiences of discrimination among the prospective teachers should be ascertained so that they may be aware of mental impressions. Such kind of experiences imprint on future learners.

The review of literature revealed that such studies have been conducted by Wakefield & Fajardo 2004; Akar- Vural & Gomlessiz 2010; Benner & Graham 2011; Villar 2011 & Verkuyten & Thijs 2004 to study experiences of discrimination among different minority adolescents groups in school settings. But neither in abroad nor in Indian context no research attempts was seen to study the phenomena of discrimination as experienced by prospective teachers.

Thus looking to such knowledge gap present investigation has been designed to find out the empirical answers of following research questions:

Research Question:

- If prospective teachers had experiences of discrimination during their school education?
- If yes, what the nature of discrimination in school environment was?
- What are different reasons of discrimination in view of prospective teachers?

Objectives of Study:

The primary objective of the study was to explore the status of experiences of discrimination among prospective teachers. The parallel concern was to study the nature of discrimination in school according to its different activities. Further, the probable

cause of discrimination was also studied as perceived by the sample of the study.

Research Design:

In order to achieve the objective of the study mix method approach using quantitative and qualitative method was employed. Since, the variable as such demanded sophisticated responses from the respondents the inclusion of qualitative approach was found to be the demand of the study.

Population:

The population of the study was all the prospective teachers following B. Ed. Program from teacher education department of Banaras Hindu University. Further, the sample of the study comprises 110 B.Ed. Students of Banaras Hindu University and its three affiliated colleges, selected through the Simple Random technique. The proper representation of all categories i.e. category wise, gender wise, subject stream wise, was taken care of in order to avoid biased responses.

Tool:

As the variable has not been studied so far in context of school based discrimination it was decided to construct an interview schedule having few questions named 'School Discrimination Experiences' for measuring and taking views regarding level and forms of discrimination in reference of school discriminatory practices. Looking to the Mixed method approach and the sensitive nature of the data being gathered it was decided to frame open ended questions so that the respondents may give other detail of their discrimination experiences.

Therefore, initially rigorous literature review was conducted to develop familiarity with the concept of discrimination within the school. Further, teachers, students and some parents were also interviewed to study their perception of school discrimination. The exercise was found meaningful to develop authentic and valid items for measurement of discrimination in schools.

It was decided afterwards taking the suggestions of experts that the number of items should also be kept very less to ensure genuine, stress free and unbiased responses of the prospective teachers. In the initial draft of the questionnaire eight questions were placed which were as follows:

1. Did you ever experience any discrimination in school? If yes, describe in detail.
2. Did you experience any discrimination within classroom? If yes, describe in detail.
3. Did you ever experience any discrimination in extension of academic facilities in the school? If yes, give its detail account.
4. Did you ever experience any discrimination in extension of administrative facilities in the school? If yes, give its detail account.
5. Did u ever experience any unfair treatment done to you during your sports day events? If yes, give its detail account.
6. Did u ever experience any unfair treatment done to you during any academic tour? If yes, discuss in detail.
7. Did u ever experience any unfair treatment done to you during the annual cultural program of your school? If yes, discuss in detail.
8. What do you think was the cause of discrimination done against you?

These questions were again given to experts to check specificity, direct connection of the item with the variable being measured, and also if there is any ambiguity in the language.

The experts were in agreement to keep only five questions out of the given eight questions and question 1, 2, 3, 4 & 8 were kept in the final draft of the questionnaire. As per suggestions of the experts some minor changes in certain words and in preciseness of the sentence were also made. The face and content validity of the tool was established taking views of experts from the field of Education, sociology and Psychology.

Findings and Results of the study:

Table-1 Status of experiences of discrimination among prospective teachers

Prospective Teachers had experiences of discrimination in their schools	Percentage of Response
Yes	67%
No	40.5%
No response	2.5%

The above table shows that 67% prospective teachers faced discrimination in their schools activities; the tool of the study encompasses several school activities within and outside classroom. Further, it also elicited responses covering various nature of discrimination within the school. The result also revealed that only 40.5% responded that they never faced any kind of discrimination during their entire schooling period while 2.5% of the sample chosen to remain silent on their experiences of discrimination.

Table- 2 Classroom experiences of discrimination

Classroom experiences of discrimination	Percentage of Response
Yes	70%
No	27.5%
No response	2.5%

The table given above shows that 70% of prospective teachers had some discrimination feeling in the classroom activities whereas, 27.5 % of prospective teachers had no such feeling. The item dealt several classroom experiences like ‘I was made to sit at the back of the class’, ‘Teachers paid less attention on me’, ‘I was mocked at in the classroom” which was responded by 70% of prospective teachers and 2.5% did not respond to such items.

Table- 3 Discrimination in extension of Academic and Administrative Facilities

Discrimination in getting Academic and Administrative Facilities	Percentage of Response
Yes	77.5%
No	22.5%
No response	0%

The above table shows that majority of prospective teachers that is 77.5% experienced discrimination in getting the academic and administrative facilities in their schools, whereas 22.5% reported no experiences of discrimination during their schooling. There are several academic and administrative activities that school extends to students; it has been observed that somehow equal distribution of such facilities could not be ensured which induces feeling of discrimination among students. The result of the study also supports such situation in the schools.

Table- 4 Discrimination in getting co- curricular opportunities in school

Discrimination in getting co- curricular opportunities in school	Response percentage
Yes	80%
No	15%
No Response	5%

Table- 4 once again present a gleam scenario of our schools that 80% of prospective teachers have experienced discrimination in

getting opportunities in co- curricular activities in schools. Apart from curricular activities these activities are very important for the students but, due to ignorance or deliberate efforts of teachers, student become victim of discrimination.

Nature of Discrimination:

The next objective of the study was to study the nature of experiences of discrimination in different domain. The tool consisted of items dealing with students in classroom and out classroom experiences. The table given below present various nature of discrimination experienced by prospective teachers:

Table- 5 Nature of discrimination experienced by prospective teachers.

Nature of Discrimination	Percentages among prospective teachers
Hard marking done to me	32%
Given lower position/rank	35%
Less opportunity to speak in the class	75%
Less chance to ask questions /speak in class	60%
Less attention to what I spoke in class	60%
Less opportunity in classroom activities	89%
Teacher ask more question to me in comparison to others	54%
More scolding and punishment	27%
Made to sit at the back	15%
Personal comments	20%
Ridiculed and mocked always	10%
Inferior treatment	37%
My food rejected	2%
Jokes on caste, gender, religion, language, physical appearance.	45%

Table- 6 Causes of Discrimination as perceived by Prospective Teachers:

S. No.	Cause of Discrimination	Average Rating
1	Caste	3.69
2	Religion	1.65
3	Gender	3.14
4	Language	2.60

5	Skin Colour	2.20
6	Age	1.02
7	Weight	0.62

The above table show that the cause that has been highest rated is caste that is 3.69. It is because while admission in the B. Ed. Course reservation policy is adopted due to which the sample was heterogeneous in nature. Probably this is the cause why it has been rated highest. Sex is rated second highest followed by language, skin colour, religion, which are rated as 3.14, 2.60, 2.20, and 1.65 respectively. Religion is rated low because the sample was Banaras Hindu University, here majority students are Hindus. Appearance wise cause of discrimination is divided into three aspects; these are Skin Colour, Age, and weight that have got the rating 2.20, 1.02, and 0.62 respectively. In India people have fascination for fair complexion that is why skin color is rated high among the three appearance wise causes of discrimination.

Causes of discrimination experienced by the prospective teachers:

The extent of the study was expanded to study forms of discrimination as experienced by prospective teachers. Using qualitative approach, interview was conducted and respondents were asked about the forms of discrimination experienced by them.

Majority of the Prospective Teachers revealed that in class they were made to sit at the back of the class. They also told that they were not allowed to ask any question to the teachers. And teachers always paid less attention to what they spoke. They were meted out with harsher punishment even for small mistakes.

Discrimination in school on the basis of caste and gender:

There were many students who reported they have faced extreme discrimination based on their caste and gender few examples of the statement reported by prospective teachers are as follows: prospective teacher of SC category reported that his math teacher mocked the caste of student and was used to of saying 'chamaar will die, if I ever lied', 'विद्यालय में मेरी जाति को लेकर मजाक बनाया जाता है, मेरे गणित के अध्यापक हर बात में कहते थे कि झूठ बोलू तो चमार मरे।' Another prospective teacher wrote that one of their teachers used to say that 'soop (a instrument used for separating tiny particle from grains), drum, shudra, and wemen deserves beating'. 'सूप, ढोलक, शुद्र और नारी, चारों पीटन के अधिकारी'

Another prospective teacher reported that 'my so called closed friend rejected to take my food' 'मेरे तथाकथित दोस्त ने मेरा दिया खाने से माना किया' .

One of the male prospective teacher also added that 'behavior based on feeling of caste and gender by few teacher can often be seen in the class , boys were severely punished for their small flaws while girls of their class were forgiven even when they did some major misbehaviors and mischief' 'कुछ खास शिक्षकों द्वारा जातिगत, लिंगगत भावना को मन में रख कर व्यवहार, कक्षा में प्रायः ही देखने को मिल जाता था| लड़कों को छोटी गलती के लिए कठिन दंड और लड़कियों की बड़ी गलतियों के लिए माफ़ी दी जाती थी'

Another student reported that in school his social science teacher used to ask about students' caste and behave to students according to his preferences of the caste. The teacher was OBC and he preferred OBC students for any school event.

Discrimination in school on the basis of language:

A prospective teacher wrote that 'my accent was different from other children due to which i was regularly mocked and ridiculed and this behaviour by others is still done to me and it hurts'. 'मेरे उच्चारण में क्षेत्रीयता के प्रभाव के कारण जब भी मैं कुछ बोलता था तो लोग हसतें थे, मजाक उड़ाते थे..... आज भी मेरे साथ ऐसा होता है..... मुझे इस कारण बहुत दुःख होता है।' Another in

the same line wrote that 'I have always been looked down upon my inability in speaking English language'. 'अंग्रेजी भाषा बोलने में असमर्थ होने पर मुझे हेय दृष्टि से देखा जाता रहा है'

One of the Prospective teachers recalled his memory of experience of discrimination, done to him and others by a female teacher in the school. He reported that 'those students who wrote and spoke English were valued more as compared to those who wrote or spoke better Hindi'. 'विद्यालय में अंग्रेजी बोलने वाले विद्यार्थियों को ज्यादा महत्व दिया जाता था मैं जानता हूँ कि मैं उन बच्चों से ज्यादा जानता था..... पर अध्यापिका को केवल अंग्रेजी ही अच्छी लगती थी..... उनको केवल अंग्रेजी में लिखी हुई चीज पसंद आती थी, वो विषयवास्तु नहीं देखती थी'

Discrimination in school on the basis of Appearance:

A female prospective teacher recalled that 'due to my poor physical appearance i was made to stand at the back of the group while performing in the schools annual function'. 'मुझे याद है कि विद्यालय के वार्षिकोत्सव में मुझे समूह गान में पीछे खड़ा कर दिया गया था, क्योंकि मैं दिखने में अच्छी नहीं हूँ'

My classmate called me names like 'battery', 'lantern', 'four eyed' because I used spectacles. सहापाठी मुझे बैटरी, लालटेन जैसे नामों से चिढ़ाते थे, क्योंकि मैं चश्मा लगता था|

Many prospective teachers claimed that discrimination is done on the basis of appearance. One of the female prospective teachers recalled that female teachers admired the girls in the school who were beautiful and at the same time ignored her presence. 'मैडम मेरी सहेली जो बहुत सुंदर थी उसको बुला के बहुत बात करती थी और एक बार हमारे एनुअल फंक्शन के दिन हम दोनों खड़े थे, उस दिन उन्होंने उसको कहा कि वो बहुत सुंदर लग रही है| जब मेरी सहेली ने कहा कि मैं भी अच्छी लग रही हूँ, तो टीचर ने कहा हाँ पर इसके दांत थोड़े बाहर हैं|'

Forms of discrimination experienced in school by the Prospective Teachers:

• In getting opportunities in schools:

During the qualitative analysis the prospective teachers revealed that they got less opportunity in leading the schools. Some of them even told that they were even not allowed to take

part in any school activities like drama, debate, or any cultural program organized in the schools. A boy reported that mujhe. A prospective teacher reported that 'only a particular student was always given the responsibility even though he was not at all responsible, he never did his works and always befool the teacher'. 'एक ही छात्र को हमेशा जिम्मेदारी दी जाती थी जब कि वो जिम्मेदार हीनहींथा..... वो अपना काम नहीं करता था और अध्यापक को बेवकूफ बनाता था |

Many of the male and female teachers reported that they did not got equal chance to say something in class. One of the prospective teacher wrote that 'I was never given chance to speak in the class'. 'मुझे कक्षा में बोलने के अवसर से वांछित रखा गया|'

There were few students who reported that discrimination was also done on the basis of studying in the teachers' coaching centers. Those who studied there were given more attention, and more marks. One of the prospective teacher said that 'a teacher never extended his help to me in understanding the lab works, as I did not study in his coaching center'. 'एक शिक्षक के यहाँ कोचिंग ना पढ़ने के कारण वे प्रयोगशाला में मुझपर ध्यान नहीं देते थे, वे उनपर ध्यान देते थे जो उनके कोचिंग में पढ़ते थे|'

Discrimination in getting Academic and Administrative facilities:

Many students alleged that they were not allowed to use laboratory as frequently and comfortably as many other students. A prospective teacher wrote that 'my science teacher paid more attention and explained more to female students'. मुझे विद्यालय में ऐसा लगता है साइंस वाले सर लड़कियों को ज्यादा समझाते और ध्यान देते थे|'

One of the female prospective teachers wrote that 'my librarian did preferential treatment in extending library facilities to good looking girls'. लाइब्रेरी वाली मैडम हमेशा उन लड़कियों को किताब इशू कर देती थी जो सुंदर होती थी| कभी कभी वे लाइन भी नहीं लगाती थी , कहती थी मैं किताब निकाल कर रखूंगी, कभी समय हो तो आ के ले जाना और बहुत देर तक उन लोगों से बात करती थीं हम लोग खड़े हो कर लाइन में वेट करते थे कुछ बोलने पर हमेशा डाट देती थीं.....|'

Conclusion and recommendation of the study:

The present study has lots of implications not only for school education but also for teacher education. The findings of the study suggest that a reasonable degree of discrimination does exist in our schools, which need to be remediated. Providing a congenial and ideal environment is not only the task of the school but, it should be a mission for the whole society, although, school and particularly teachers have to spearhead this movement.

If a teacher desires to be the agent establishing equality, a foundation of knowledge must be established around the complexities of inequalities within educational contexts. This knowledge and understanding will inform and guide pedagogy, thus leading the teacher toward transformational practices within their field of action. Following suggestions are put forward for making our educational scenario discrimination free which is based on the outcomes of the present study:

1. Shawn (2011) states that within every classroom there exists the potential for inequality in various forms. As transformation of inequality should be the desired outcome, the teacher must understand the complexities of inequality and the external factors that inform and shape it, such as class, race and gender. Internal factors such as meritocracy, individual habitus, social marginalisation and social capital should also be considered if the teacher is to adopt pedagogy and practice that will transform inequality within educational contexts.
2. A sense of equality and dignity for all should be inculcated in prospective teachers, so that they can transfer these values in their students.
3. Discrimination free school culture should be developed, so that the students and teachers learn cooperation, trust, mutual growth, dignity, and respect from the culture of their schools.

4. The finding of the study also calls for the proper inservice and preservice intervention in teacher education. Awareness towards discrimination within the school and its ill effects should be generated so that all school personnel may be sensitized about such serious issues.
5. A transparent and inclusive policy be framed and implemented at school level, in which needs of the students be taken proper care. Participation of each individual and particularly identification of isolates within and outside the classroom be stressed in such policy.
6. It is also observed while interacting with the teachers that they are not familiar with inclusive school practices. Proper skill development program in light of inclusive teaching learning practices be organized for present and prospective teachers.
7. All the school personnel should take care of making school climate inclusive in totality. Whether it is administrative, curricular, co- curricular, or any other school practices, recognition to all social groups be ensured from all the school units particularly from teachers.
8. Classroom management practices also need to be carefully designed. Students sitting arrangement, formation of groups, selection of group leaders, selection of participants for various events, classroom and school interior should be designed as such where no individual should feel discriminated.

To sum up, it is recommended that an inclusive society shall always be a distant dream unless the seeds of inclusive feeling are sown in our schools. All care should be taken to make our school completely discrimination free. The reformation of our school culture in the above line will definitely help to realize the

vision of establishing inclusive society in India and world at large.

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