



## A STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN RELATION TO THE SELF-ESTEEM OF THEIR STUDENTS.

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*The aim of the study was to measure the cultural competence of secondary school teachers as perceived by students and to ascertain its relationship with the self-esteem of students. The findings of the study indicate that the perceived cultural competence of secondary school teachers had significant relationship with the self-esteem of students.*

India is a multicultural society. It is a Union of 28 States (now 29 with the emergence of Telangana as a new state) and 7 Union Territories.<sup>1</sup> Every state is categorized by its distinct geographical features and culture which comprises of different languages, scripts, dressing styles, diet, art forms, paintings, sculpture, architecture, sports, martial arts, dance forms, ornaments, mannerisms, festivals and traditions. Throughout India's history, religion has been an important part of the country's culture. Hinduism is the major religion and Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are the other minor religions followed by the people of India. Each religion with its denominations worships distinct deities with different beliefs, values, traditions, festivals and places of significance.

“To speak of a multicultural society, then, is to speak of a society – a state, a nation, a country, a region or even simply a bounded geographical location such as a town or a school – composed of people who belong to different cultures.<sup>2</sup> Schools can therefore be termed as multicultural in nature. Teachers therefore need to be culturally competent to deal with diverse group of students effectively. Teachers must be capable of including and embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives and experiences.<sup>3</sup>

**Cultural competence** is the ability to effectively respond to students from different cultures and classes, while valuing and preserving the dignity of cultural differences and similarities between individuals, families and communities.<sup>4</sup> According to the **National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)** "*Culturally competent educators* are aware and respectful of the importance of the values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and parenting styles of the children and families they serve. They are also aware of the impact of their own culture on their interactions with others and take all of these factors into account when planning and delivering services to children and their families."<sup>5</sup>

Though the value of 'unity in diversity' is advocated in India but the need of the hour is to "recognize, appreciate diversity and treat members of different groups as equals and to acknowledge rather than ignore cultural particularities.<sup>6</sup> India is proud of its cultural

diversity, but the diversity may sometimes become hurdles to the intellectual, social and personal development of students. Some of these hurdles are discussed as follows:

- Differences in religious practices, beliefs and values result in differences of opinions. These differences in opinions and the communal incidents happening in the country may sometimes be responsible for teachers being sarcastic towards students and also to a certain extent be responsible in teachers developing prejudice towards students belonging to different religions.
- With regards to gender, discriminatory attitudes towards women have existed for generations in India. Women are often underestimated for their capabilities. Girl child is considered a burden because parents have to spend on the girls' marriage and 'dowry'. 'Dowry' and female infanticide are prominent even in the cities. Household work is considered the sole responsibility of the woman. Girls who attend schools may also come from families where they experience gender bias which may affect their mental preparedness for learning at school.
- Some parents have transferable jobs and some parents migrate to the cities in search of jobs and better perspectives in lives. Children of such families face adjustment problems because of the change from rural to urban culture, new school settings, and compulsory regional language as a subject at school, competitive peer and higher level of language.
- It has been observed that people associate proficiency in English language to the intellectual abilities of a person.
- Due to the cultural differences in the country, children at school may become target of teasing and bullying. Children who look evidently different from others are the most targeted. For example, children who have long hair, children dark in color, children whose facial features resemble that of people from other countries, etc.
- Also, when there are differences among individuals, there is stereotyping. Psychologists say that stereotyping is a natural phenomenon in that all humans develop mental categories to help make sense of their environment. In India some cultural groups are stamped as 'miser', 'cunning', 'dumb', etc. Also, some cultural groups are stamped as 'fanatics and violent', 'into conversions', etc. Teachers and often students may involve in stereotyping.
- Due to the affinity towards ones' own culture, a teacher may consciously or unconsciously favour students who belong to their state in India, language or religion.
- For various reasons regional clashes have been happening in India even today. Often students become target of ridicule and mockery by their peer.

### **Need of the Study**

The concepts of multicultural education and cultural competence are relatively new in the field of education. Few studies have been conducted on multicultural education but no studies have been conducted on cultural competence possessed by teachers. Also, cultural competence is not treated as an essential skill where the teacher-trainees have to be trained for.

As a student at school, the investigator can very vividly remember facing several problems associated with cultural differences. Also as a teacher at school, the investigator observed many students suffering psychologically and academically because of migration and

cultural differences. Also, what happens to the self-esteem of students if they are teased by their peer because they look different from others, if they cannot speak English as fluently as their peer, if their teachers' are biased and prejudiced towards them, if their peer and teachers stereotype them and if girls experience gender bias even at school. Therefore, the researcher wants to ascertain the relationship between the cultural competence of secondary school teachers and the self-esteem of students.

### **Research Design**

The investigator adopted the descriptive method utilizing the correlational design. For this purpose a sample of 827 students from Greater Mumbai were selected randomly from schools affiliated to the state board. The investigator constructed a tool to measure the perceived cultural competence of secondary school teachers. The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure the self-esteem of students. The correlation between perceived cultural competence of secondary school teachers and the self-esteem of students was established using the Pearson's Product Moment correlation.

### **Definition of the Variables**

#### **1. Cultural Competence of Secondary School Teacher**

*Cultural Competence of a Secondary School Teacher is operationally defined as* the ability of secondary school teacher to **effectively** teach, understand and facilitate students of different cultures. It is focused on how a teacher is for those students who do not share the same personal characteristics or the same cultural background of the teacher. These characteristics include differences in the religion, mother tongue, gender and the states to which students and teachers belong to in India. Cultural competence is comprised of following four components:

- *Culturally Responsive Teaching*
- *Encouraging Culturally Responsive Activities*
- *Reducing Cultural Bias and Prejudice*
- *Cultural Equity*

#### **Self-Esteem**

*Self-Esteem is operationally defined as* a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self (Rosenberg, M., 1965)<sup>7</sup>.

#### **The Relationship Between Perceived Cultural Competence of Teachers and Self-Esteem of Students**

In the mid-1960s, Morris Rosenberg and social-learning theorists' defined self-esteem in terms of a stable sense of personal worth or Worthiness.<sup>8</sup> Many early theories suggested that self-esteem is a basic human need or motivation. American psychologist Abraham Maslow, for example, included self-esteem in his hierarchy of needs. He described two different forms of esteem: the need for respect from others and the need for self-respect, or inner self-esteem.<sup>9</sup> Respect from others entails recognition, acceptance, status, and appreciation, and was believed to be more fragile and easily lost than inner self-esteem. The self-respect or inner self-esteem entails self-love, self-confidence, skill, aptitude, etc. The investigator believes that there may be a relationship between the cultural competence exhibited by teachers and the self-esteem of students because culturally competent teachers act towards valuing and preserving the dignity of cultural differences

and similarities between individuals.

Table 1 shows the r-value for perceived cultural competence of secondary school teachers and self-esteem of students.

**Table 1 Coefficient of Correlation for Perceived Cultural Competence of Secondary School Teachers and Self-Esteem of Students**

Variables	Groups	N	Df	Obtained r-value	Level of Significance
Perceived Cultural Competence of Secondary School Teachers and Self-Esteem of Students	Total	827	825	0.49	0.01

(Critical Value of r at 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance and  $df = N-2$  is 0.081 and 0.062 respectively)

### Findings and Conclusions

The table 1 indicates that the r-value for relationship between perceived cultural competence of secondary school teachers and self-esteem of students is significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, there was a **significant correlation** found between **perceived cultural competence** of secondary school teachers and the **self-esteem of students** for the total sample. The relationship was **moderate and positive**. The positive relationship indicated that the more teachers were cultural competent the higher was the self-esteem of the students.

### Discussion

It can be said that the students who perceived their teachers to be higher on cultural competence had perceived themselves also to have higher self-esteem. The students who perceived their teachers higher on cultural competence agreed to the fact that their teachers on various occasions discussed about different cultural backgrounds of the students. The teachers allowed students to talk of their culture in the teaching-learning process. By doing so the teachers probably made ground for all other members of the class to recognize and respect the cultural background of individual students. Also, teachers encouraged students to learn more about their own cultures such as learning to read/ write their mother tongue, learning more about their own religion and the state to which they belong in India. Teachers were perceived to have recognized specific needs of the students arising due to cultural differences and catered to those needs. Teachers were not biased and prejudiced towards their students. Students agreed that girls were encouraged and considered as competent as boys. By doing so the teachers probably made ground for the students to form a sense of respect towards their own culture. Also, it helped in developing a positive self-image.

On the hand, students who perceived their teachers to be lower on cultural competence had perceived themselves also to have lower self-esteem. Students who perceived their teachers lower on cultural competence perceived that their teachers did not make any cultural connections with the different cultural backgrounds of the students during the teaching learning process. Teachers were unable to recognize specific needs of the students arising due to cultural differences. Students who had language problems, adjustment problems and students who were bullied by their peer probably lost self-confidence without the support and intervention of their teachers. Also, teachers were perceived to have biased and prejudiced attitude towards students. It therefore did not help students to form a sense of

respect towards their own culture or to develop a positive self-image. Therefore, probably there was a significant correlation found between the teachers' cultural competence and the self-esteem of students. It therefore becomes vital for the teachers that they equip themselves towards being culturally competent as it builds the self-esteem of the students and the lack of cultural competence in teachers hampers the self-esteem of students.

### **Educational Implications**

- Though multicultural education has been included as topics in the post-graduation level courses and the B.Ed. course, but policy makers and curriculum framers should device strategies to expose practicing and prospective teachers to the topic of cultural competence.
- Cultural Competence should be treated as an essential skill to be developed in teacher trainees.
- Diversity Training- include programs like diversity training and cultural workshops
- Another important aspect should be to sensitize teachers towards the possible cultural bias and prejudice.
- Workshops on lesson plan- train teacher trainees to prepare lesson plans linking teaching content to the various cultures of students.
- New methodologies such as constructivism, mastery learning, co-operative learning and experiential learning to be used by teachers.
- Bilingual education

According to Bennett, C. I., "Most children who hate themselves act out of self-hatred by kicking the world around them. They are abusive, aggressive, hard to control, and full of anger and hostility at a world which has told them that they are not valued, are not good, and are not going to be given a chance. Such attitudes often continue to cripple an adult life"<sup>10</sup> Therefore, teachers with cultural competence can make a great difference in the lives of children who are the future torch bearers of the country.

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