

A Study on the Socio-economic Statuses of Students Enrolling Vocational Higher Secondary Education in Kerala

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Abstract:- The present study attempts to assess the socio-economic status of the students joining the Vocational Higher Secondary stream of education after tenth standard in Kerala. Socio-economic status is thought to be an important factor determining the career path of an individual. Vocational education is generally viewed as a low profile option for many students in a number of countries including India. Owing to this and many other reasons vocational education is usually embraced by academically and socio-economically weaker strata of the society who do not want to pursue higher studies but want to generate income for their family immediately after schooling. The situation in Kerala, with its high achievements in the field of education and a different mind-set of students when it comes to pursuing higher studies, resulted in a high percentage of students going for higher studies. Vocational Higher Secondary stream of education is viewed as a bridge course between tenth and higher studies by a large section of the students. This study investigates whether the students pursuing VHSE in Kerala belong to the lower socio-economic strata of the society. A hypothesis was formulated and tested for this purpose. The study also examines whether there exist any significant differences in the socio-economic statuses of the student enrolling vocational higher secondary education in Kerala with respect to gender, type of school, location of school and district. The study also assesses the career plans of the students from different socio-economic statuses post higher secondary stage. The sample consists of 936 VHSE students randomly selected from 39 VHSE schools distributed across three districts of Kerala belonging to the Engineering, Paramedical and Commerce streams. The socio-economic status scale developed by Agarwal et al. (2005) with suitable modifications is used to measure the Socio-Economic Statuses of the students in this study.

Keywords:- Socio-Economic Status, Vocational Education, Vocational Higher Secondary Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

American Psychology Association defines Socioeconomic status as “the social standing or class of an individual or group”¹. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. Since socio-economic status is directly linked to the income, education level and occupation of the members of a family, students belonging to different socio-economic categories are likely to have varying interests, aspirations and opportunities, when it comes to the selection and enrolment in various courses at the higher secondary and higher levels of education. This is more relevant when it comes to vocational and technical education since it is related to immediate and assured (theoretically at least) occupational opportunities and income generation. Vocational Higher Secondary Education (VHSE) is the largest sector of vocational education in India and is different from technical education in the sense that it is vast and is part of the general education stream. It aims at imparting occupational skills to a large chunk of student population at the higher secondary level. A general feeling in most of the countries, especially in developing countries including India is that students joining vocational education belong to the lower socio-economic strata of the society. There are genuine reasons to think so. Kerala is one of those states in India where the achievements in the field of education are said to be at par with many developed countries. A large percentage of students from Kerala prefer to perceive higher studies rather than looking for a job immediately after their schooling. It is not out of place to think that this could have an impact on their selection of courses at the higher secondary level. Considering these facts it would be interesting to know the socio-economic statuses of students joining the Vocational Higher Secondary Education in Kerala. This is an honest attempt to study the socio-economic statuses of the Vocational Higher Secondary students of Kerala.

Key Terms

Socio-economic status
 Vocational education
 Vocational higher secondary education

Variables

Socio-economic status
 Gender
 Type of school
 Locality of school
 District
 Career plan

II. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-economic status (SES) is an indication of a person's or family's economic and social position in relation to others. In the case of a family the attributes of all the family members are considered and in the case of an individual his or her attributes only are considered to arrive at the SES.² There are many indicators of socio-economic status. The most widely used indicators are education, income and occupation. More comprehensive and accurate measurement may adopt additional factors like possession of properties and valuables of different kinds, ownership of vehicles, type and locality of residence, health related aspects, club memberships and many other variables. In short, socio-economic status (SES) can be considered as a measure of one's combined economic and social status and tends to be positively associated with better health and higher living standards.

➤ Vocational Education

Vocational Education provides job skills to students to make them competent to take up occupations or engage in self employment. Vocational Education connects work and education in a complementary way. According to Kazim Bacchus, by Vocationalisation, schools try to impart all the practical skills required by students to make them skilful workers or successful entrepreneurs, (Lauglo & Lillis, 1988). Vocationalisation of secondary education tries to give a practical or vocational direction to students. Vocational Higher Secondary Education was implemented in Kerala in 1983. At present, there are 389 schools with 1100 batches in the state imparting Vocational Higher Secondary Education in 42 courses. The number of students admitted to these 389 VHS schools every year is only 27500.

➤ Background and Significance of the study

Vocational higher secondary education was implemented in the year 1983 in Kerala. At that time the main option for tenth pass outs for higher studies was pre-degree courses which were conducted in colleges and were part of university education. The very fact that students were more inclined towards college education because of the prevailing circumstances and the common attitude of viewing anything new with suspicion, which was made more severe by the lack of awareness made vocational higher secondary education less attractive to the students and parents of Kerala. Majority of the students embraced it as a last resort either due to lack of opportunities in colleges

or due to economic reasons. Naturally the academic calibre of the students enrolling VHSE was low and there is every chance that majority of these students belonged to the lower middle/lower socioeconomic strata of the society. This was somewhat expected and was in tune with the original objectives of vocational higher secondary education to impart occupational skill to those students who do not want to pursue higher studies and enter job market without any skill set otherwise in which case they are likely to be exploited by the employer. Another interesting aspect was that although the scheme of vocational education was envisioned as a terminal course with no vertical mobility, students were provided with option to pursue optional subjects if they wish and become eligible for higher studies. In many other states only a section of students opted optional subjects and majority pursued it as a terminal course. In Kerala the situation was just the opposite. A vast majority of the students opted optional subjects and later on it almost become mandatory for students to opt optional subjects. Students were even unaware of such an option and nobody bothered to share the fact. There is a story behind that. Beginning of the nineties saw the scheme expanding and finding its foothold in the aided sector, which made it almost mandatory for students to opt for optional subjects to protect the job interest of teachers handling optional subjects. Slowly the scheme of vocational higher secondary education started to be viewed as an alternative to pre-degree for those students wishing to pursue higher studies. This transformation could have changed the attitude of students and parents towards the scheme of vocational higher secondary education in Kerala and naturally students belonging to all sections of the society would have shown interest in the scheme but only a study can tell us the truth. With this backdrop, it is definitely worth making an enquiry into the matter. No study of this kind has been done so far and there is a research gap to fill.

If we take vocational education in India as a whole it can be seen that there are not many studies on the socio-economic status of the students. Saheb (1980) found that socio-economic status did not affect the choice of the stream of study of the students he surveyed. John (1981) in a comparative study found that socio-economic status had direct association with vocational interests of adolescents. Positive and significant relationships, job satisfaction had with age, educational level, vocational attitudes and work values were revealed by Kakar's (1983) study on a group of women. The study also found significant differences in the job satisfaction, work attitudes and vocational interests of women engaged in different occupations. In the same study, age and SES status of a group of girl students showed significant relation with their vocational interests and occupational aspirations.

Srivastava (1988) in a study established that vocational development was related to academic achievement and socio-economic status. He also found that sex is not related to vocational development and different levels of education. Singh and Sengar (1990) established the influence of self-concept and socio-economic status on vocational aspirations of rural students. He found that negative self-concept would

lower vocational aspirations. Akhilesh's (1991) study showed differences in the vocational choice patterns of young urban adolescents belonging to different SES groups and gender but not age. Mishra (1990) found that SES had positive relationship with administrative and scientific interests and negative relationship with agriculture and social service areas of interest.

The present study analyses the socio-economic statuses of the vocational higher secondary students of Kerala

➤ Objectives of the study

- To analyse the socio-economic statuses of the students enrolling vocational higher secondary education in Kerala
- To find out whether there exists any significant differences in the socio-economic statuses of the student enrolling vocational higher secondary education in Kerala with respect to gender, type of school, location of school, district and course.
- To assess the career plans of the students from different socio-economic statuses post higher secondary stage.

➤ Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested to draw conclusions on the population.

- The mean Socio-economic status (SES) Scores of the students of the VHS schools in Kerala are less than 50 (50% of the maximum score) on the Socio-Economic Status Scale used in this study.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive research and uses a corresponding research design. The method used is survey using structured questionnaire. The population of the study includes all the vocational higher secondary students of Kerala. Multistage sampling technique is used. The sample consists of 936 VHSE students randomly selected from 39 VHSE schools belonging to the Engineering, Paramedical and Commerce streams.

❖ Scaling Technique Used

➤ Socio-Economic Status Scale

This particular scale was used to measure the socioeconomic statuses of the students of the VHSE in Kerala. Various SES scales already available were examined carefully like the Socio-Economic Status Scale of Kuppaswamy (Urban, 1976). Most of the scales available were either for urban population or for rural population whereas the sample for this particular study included students from both urban and rural population. Therefore these scales were not suitable for this study. The scale developed by Agarwal et al. (2005) was proved to be reliable for both urban and rural population and this scale was used to measure the Socio-Economic Statuses of the students in this study.

This scale consists of 22 questions on various aspects relating to socio-Economic status like income, occupation, educational qualification, family possessions, number of family members, caste, type of house, locality and tax paid. The minimum score obtainable is 6 and the maximum score obtainable is 100 with a median value of 53. The respondents are classified into different socio-Economic status groups based on the scores obtained according to the table given below in table; 1. The scale was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test and the alpha value was found to be 0.8877. Since the value was above 0.7 the scale was considered as a reliable one and was accepted.

Table: 1 Categorisation of Respondents Based on the Score Obtained on the SES Scale

Socio-Economic Status Group	Score
Upper High	> =76
High	61-75
Upper Middle	46-60
Lower Middle	31-45
Poor	16-30
Very Poor or below Poverty Line	= < 15

❖ Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The SES of students shows a mean of 31.45 with a SD of 6.867. The minimum and maximum scores are 18 and 63 respectively. The maximum possible score is 100. The low SES of the population is indicated by the low mean percentage score of 31.45. The table; 2 shown below gives the values.

Table: 2 Mean Socio-economic Status Score of Students

Mean	Mean Percentage Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
31.45	31.45	6.867	18	63

The following hypothesis is tested to find out the applicability of the observed sample information to the population.

➤ Testing of Hypothesis

H₀: The mean Socio-economic status (SES) Score of the students of the VHS schools in Kerala is 50 on the Socio-Economic Status Scale used in this study.

H₁: The mean Socio-economic status (SES) Score of the students of the VHS schools in Kerala is less than 50 on the Socio-Economic Status Scale used in this study.

One sample z-test is done. The z-value obtained is - 82.626 and the p-value is <0.001 at 5% significance level. The p-value is less than 0.05. The z-value is less than - 1.645. So the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It can be concluded that the Mean

Socio-economic Status Score of the students is significantly lower than the test value of 50.

Table: 3 One Sample z- test of the Socio-economic Status Score of Score of Students

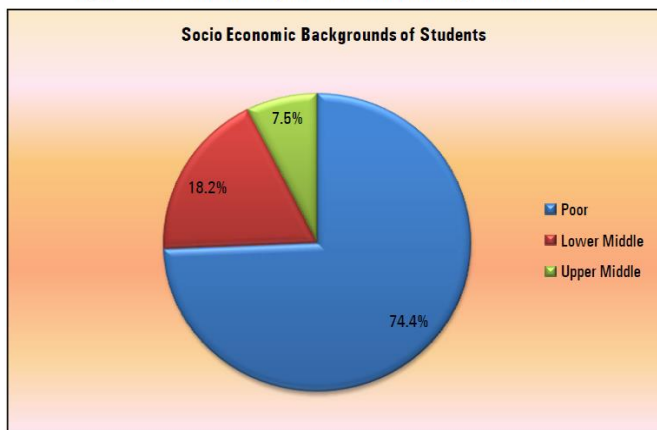
z	Sig. (1-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper
-82.626	<0.001	-18.55	-18.99	-18.11

The SES status categorisation of students in the table; 4 below shows that 74.4% belong to ‘poor’ SES category, 18.2% belong to ‘lower middle’ SES category and 7.5% belong to ‘upper middle’ SES category. It is evident that majority belong to ‘poor’ SES category. It can also be seen that no interest for VHSE is shown by students from ‘high’ and ‘very high’ SES groups.

Table: 4 Socio-economic Status Categories of Students

Socio-Economic Background	Number of Students	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Poor	696	74.4	74.4
Lower Middle	170	18.2	92.5
Upper Middle	70	7.5	100.0
Total	936	100.0	

Figure: 1 Pie Chart showing the Socio-economic Statuses of Students



More analysis shows (Table: 5) a mean of 32.51 with a SD of 7.41 for males and a mean of 30.84 with a SD of 6.46 for females. The mean percentage scores are 32.51 and 30.84 for males and females respectively. The higher value for males is statistically established by independent sample z-test. The z-value is 3.608 and the p-value is <0.001 at 5% significance level. The p-value is less than 0.05. The z-value is higher than 1.645. Therefore it can be concluded that the Mean Socio-economic Status Score of male students is significantly higher than that of the female students.

Table: 5 Independent Sample z-test of the Socio-economic Status Score of Male and Female Students

Gender	Mean	Mean % Score	Std. Deviation	z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	32.51	32.51	7.41	3.608	<0.001
Female	30.84	30.84	6.46		

Table: 6 shows a mean of 31.74 with a SD of 7.40 for students from private schools and a mean of 31.32 with a SD of 6.61 for students from government schools. The mean percentage scores are 31.74 and 31.32 for students from private and government schools respectively. The scores are low for students from both private and government schools. The z-value is 0.859 and the p-value is 0.390 at 5% significance level. The p-value is higher than 0.05. So it can be concluded that the Mean Socio-economic Status Scores of students from both private and government schools are not significantly different.

Table: 6 Independent Sample z-test of the Socio-economic Status Score of Students from Private and Government Schools

Type of School	Mean	Mean % Score	Std. Deviation	z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Private	31.74	31.74	7.40	0.859	0.390
Government	31.32	31.32	6.61		

District wise comparisons in table: 7 show respective mean SES scores of 31.55, 31.21, 31.60 for Kollam, Thrissur and Kozhikkode districts with standard deviations of 7.11, 6.30 and 7.19. The corresponding mean percentage scores are 31.55, 31.21 and 31.60 which are low showing poor SES statuses of students from different districts.

One-Way ANOVA results in table: 8 show an F-value of 0.280 and a p-value of 0.756 at 5% significance level. Higher p-value (higher than 0.05) indicates that the differences among the SES scores of students from different districts are not significant.

Table: 7 Mean Socio-economic Status Scores of Students from Different Districts

District		Socio-Economic Background Score
Kollam	Mean	31.55
	Mean % Score	31.55
	Std. Deviation	7.11
Thrissur	Mean	31.21
	Mean % Score	31.21
	Std. Deviation	6.30
Kozhikkode	Mean	31.60
	Mean % Score	31.60
	Std. Deviation	7.19
Total	Mean	31.45
	Mean % Score	31.45
	Std. Deviation	6.87

Table: 9 Mean Socio-economic Status Scores of Students from Schools in Different Localities

Location of School		Socio-Economic Background Score
Panchayath	Mean	31.44
	Mean % Score	31.44
	Std. Deviation	6.87
Municipality	Mean	32.36
	Mean % Score	32.36
	Std. Deviation	6.80
Corporation	Mean	31.12
	Mean % Score	31.12
	Std. Deviation	6.90
Total	Mean	31.45
	Mean % Score	31.45
	Std. Deviation	6.87

Table: 8 ANOVA based on the Socio-economic Status Scores of Students from Different Districts

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Socio-Economic Background Score	Between Groups	26.448	2	13.224	0.280	0.756
	Within Groups	44069.484	933	47.234		
	Total	44095.932	935			

Table: 10 ANOVA based on the Socio-economic Status Scores of Students from Schools in Different Localities

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Socio-Economic Background Score	Between Groups	77.602	2	38.801	0.822	0.440
	Within Groups	44018.330	933	47.179		
	Total	44095.932	935			

Locality wise comparisons in table: 9 show respective mean SES scores of 31.44, 32.36, 31.12 for Panchayath, Municipality and Corporation with standard deviations of 6.87, 6.80 and 6.90. The corresponding mean percentage scores are 31.44, 32.36 and 31.12 which are low showing poor SES statuses of students from all localities.

One-Way ANOVA results in table: 10 show an F-value of 0.822 and a p-value of 0.440 at 5% significance level. Higher p-value (higher than 0.05) indicates that the differences among the SES scores of students from different localities are not significant.

When we look at the career plan of students, it is evident that (Table: 11) 69.8% want to go for higher studies, 10.6% want to engage in wage employment and 6.1% want to do self-employment. Wage employed and self employed together constitute only 16.7%. The undecided proportion is 13.6% (127 respondents). It is evident that majority of the students want to pursue higher studies. This may not go well with the very essence of the programme.

Table: 11 Career Plans of Students

Career Plan	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency
Higher Study	653	69.8	69.8
Self-Employment	57	6.1	75.9
Wage Employment	99	10.6	86.4
Not Decided	127	13.6	100
Total	936	100	

A comparison of the career plans of students from different socio-economic statuses in table: 12 shows that 78.6%, 69.8% and 65.9% of the students from 'upper middle', 'poor' and 'lower middle' SES categories respectively want to go for higher studies. The percentage is higher for students from 'upper middle' category when compared with the lower SES categories.

Different results are seen when it comes to self-employment. The percentages of students wanting to do self-employment are 5.7% and 10.0% for 'poor' and 'lower middle' SES categories respectively. No one from the 'upper middle' category want to do self employment (SE). It

can also be seen that SES category wise differences are not very big with respect to wage employment with percentages of 10.20%, 11.20% and 12.90% for 'poor', 'lower middle' and 'upper middle' categories respectively. A good percentage of students belong to the undecided category with percentages of 14.20%, 12.90% and 8.60% for 'poor', 'lower middle' and 'upper middle' categories respectively. Chi-square test results show a chi-square value of 5.603 and p- value of 0.231. The p-value is above 0.05 and we can conclude that there are no significant differences in the career plans of students from different Socio-economic statuses.

Table: 12 Career Plans of Students from Different Socio-economic Status Categories

Socio-Economic Status Category		Career Plan				Total
		Higher Studies	Self-Employment	Wage Employment	Not Decided	
Poor	Count	486	40	71	99	696
	& within SES Category	69.80%	5.70%	10.20%	14.20%	100.0%
Lower Middle	Count	112	17	19	22	170
	& within SES Category	65.90%	10.00%	11.20%	12.90%	100.00%
Upper Middle	Count	55	-	9	6	70
	& within SES Category	78.60%	-	12.90%	8.60%	100.00%
Total	Count	653	57	99	127	936
	% within Total	69.80%	6.10%	10.60%	13.60%	100.00%

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study revealed that

- Socioeconomic statuses of majority of vocational higher secondary school students are low.
- None of the vocational higher secondary school students belongs to the high SES categories.
- No significant differences are seen in the SES of vocational higher secondary school students from private and government schools, from different districts and from different localities.
- Significant differences are seen in the SES of male and female vocational higher secondary school students. Male vocational higher secondary school students have better SES when compared with females.
- There is no significant difference in the future plans of vocational higher secondary school students with respect to employment and higher studies from different socio-economic statuses

V. CONCLUSION

The study has been able to provide a clear picture of the profiles of the students of Vocational Higher Secondary Education in Kerala with respect to their socio-economic statuses. The results of the study are in compliance with the general trend in the enrolment of students in vocational higher secondary education in the country. Majority of them are from socio-economically

lower strata of the society. But irrespective of the low socio-economic status majority of the students want to pursue higher studies which substantiates the assumption that VHSE in Kerala is viewed by students as an alternative to plus-two for gaining eligibility to undergraduate courses. It is also interesting to note that socio-economic status of male students is better than that of female students. This may be because of the fact that male students are able to exercise more freedom when it comes to selection of their course of study when compared to female students. To conclude, it can be said that socio-economic status do play a role when it comes to the selection of VHSE as a stream of study at the higher secondary stage but it is not a decisive factor while determining the career plans of the students.

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