Reading Comprehension Ability of Tharu and Non Tharu Students

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is crucial because it enables students to understand, interpret, and engage with texts, fostering critical thinking and effective communication skills. This study investigates the reading proficiency of Tharu and non-Tharu students within a multilingual educational framework. The data was collected from a sample of 30 grade four students (15 Tharu and 15 non-Tharu) who studied at a community school in Kohalpur Municipality, Banke District during the academic year 2080/81 B.S. The researcher employed stratified simple random sampling method to ensure representativeness. Data collection included reading comprehension tests, vocabulary assessments, and other skill-based tasks aligned with the multilingual education curriculum. Basic statistical tools were used for analysis. The findings indicate marginal differences in overall academic performance between Tharu and non-Tharu students. Tharu students showed strengths in specific skill domains such as comprehension of unseen texts and vocabulary application. Despite this, it underscores the influence of educational backgrounds and cultural factors on academic outcomes. This highlights the need for tailored pedagogical strategies for teaching reading in diverse linguistic contexts.

Keywords: Academic performance, Cultural factors, Education equity, Multilingualism, Tharu students

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Introduction

Reading comprehension is a critical skill that significantly impacts academic success and lifelong learning. It encompasses the ability to process text, understand its meaning, and integrate it with existing knowledge (Snow, 2002). This study explores the reading comprehension abilities of Tharu and non-Tharu students, focusing on identifying potential disparities and underlying causes. The Tharu community, indigenous to the Terai region of Nepal, possesses a rich cultural heritage and distinct linguistic traits (Guneratne, 1998). Historically marginalized, the Tharu people have faced numerous socio-economic challenges, which have implications for educational outcomes (McDonaugh, 1997). In contrast, non-Tharu students typically come from more diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, potentially influencing their educational experiences and reading abilities differently (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Education in Nepal, particularly in rural areas, encounters several hurdles, including inadequate resources, limited access to quality instruction, and socio-economic disparities (UNESCO, 2015). These factors contribute to varying levels of academic achievement among different ethnic groups. Previous research indicates that minority students, like the Tharus, often experience educational disadvantages, which can manifest in lower literacy rates and reading comprehension skills (Bista, 2004).

Reading comprehension is not merely the ability to read text but involves understanding, interpreting, and critiquing it. According to the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), reading comprehension is a product of decoding and linguistic comprehension. Decoding involves recognizing words and their meanings, while linguistic comprehension encompasses understanding spoken language and integrating it with written text. Variations in these components can lead to differences in reading comprehension abilities among students from diverse backgrounds.

Several studies have examined the factors affecting reading comprehension among different ethnic groups. For instance, research by Pretorius (2002) highlighted that socio-economic status, home literacy environment, and language proficiency are critical determinants of reading comprehension skills. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often have limited access to reading materials and support, adversely affecting their reading development (Heath, 1983). In the context of the Tharu community, language plays a pivotal role in reading comprehension. Tharu students often speak Tharu as their first language, while Nepali is the medium of instruction in schools. This language barrier can hinder their ability to comprehend

texts in Nepali, as they must navigate between two languages with different linguistic structures (Giri, 2010). Moreover, the cultural relevance of reading materials also impacts comprehension. Texts that reflect students' cultural backgrounds and experiences are more relatable and easier to understand (Au, 1993).

Non-Tharu students, on the other hand, may have more exposure to Nepali language and literature, potentially giving them an advantage in reading comprehension. Their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds may provide them with varied experiences and knowledge, contributing to better understanding and interpretation of texts (Cummins, 2000).

This study aims to compare the reading comprehension abilities of Tharu and non-Tharu students, identifying key factors contributing to any observed differences. By understanding these factors, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to bridge the gap in reading comprehension skills, ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks of Reading Comprehension

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand reading comprehension. The Simple View of Reading posits that reading comprehension is the product of decoding and linguistic comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Decoding involves recognizing words and their meanings, while linguistic comprehension encompasses understanding spoken language and integrating it with written text. Variations in these components can lead to differences in reading comprehension abilities among students from diverse backgrounds.

Another influential model is the Construction-Integration Model (Kintsch, 1988), which describes reading comprehension as a process of constructing a coherent mental representation of the text. This involves integrating information from the text with prior knowledge, making inferences, and monitoring comprehension. These processes are influenced by cognitive factors, such as working memory and attention, as well as by socio-cultural factors, including language and literacy experiences.

Socio-Economic Status and Reading Comprehension

Socio-economic status (SES) is a significant determinant of reading comprehension skills. Students from lower SES backgrounds often have limited access to reading materials and educational resources, which can hinder their reading development (Heath, 1983). Studies have shown that children from low-income families tend to have smaller vocabularies, less exposure to books, and fewer opportunities for enriching literacy experiences compared to their more affluent peers (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

In the context of Nepal, socio-economic disparities are pronounced, with many students, particularly from indigenous communities like the Tharu, facing economic hardships (Bista, 2004). These challenges are compounded by inadequate educational infrastructure and limited access to quality instruction in rural areas (UNESCO, 2015). As a result, Tharu students often start school with disadvantages that affect their reading comprehension abilities.

Home Literacy Environment

The home literacy environment plays a crucial role in the development of reading skills. A rich literacy environment, characterized by the availability of books, storytelling, and parental involvement in reading activities, supports the development of reading comprehension (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Conversely, a lack of such resources can impede literacy development.

Research indicates that Tharu families, due to economic constraints and lower educational levels, may provide less supportive home literacy environments (McDonaugh, 1997). This contrasts with non-Tharu students who might have more access to reading materials and parental support, facilitating better reading comprehension skills. The home literacy environment also includes language interactions, which are critical for vocabulary development and reading proficiency (Snow et al., 1998).

Language Proficiency and Reading Comprehension

Language proficiency is a key factor influencing reading comprehension. Students who are proficient in the language of instruction are better able to decode text and understand its meaning (Cummins, 2000). For Tharu students, the challenge of reading comprehension is often compounded by the need to learn in Nepali, which may not be their first language. This language barrier can hinder their ability to comprehend texts in Nepali, as they must navigate between two languages with different linguistic structures (Giri, 2010).

Cummins' (1979) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is relevant here. Tharu students may possess BICS in their native language and possibly in Nepali, but they might lack CALP in Nepali, which is essential for understanding academic texts. In contrast, non-Tharu students, who may have greater exposure to Nepali language and literature, are likely to develop stronger CALP, aiding their reading comprehension.

Cultural Relevance and Reading Comprehension

Cultural relevance of reading materials is another important factor affecting comprehension. Students comprehend texts better when they can relate to the content based on their cultural background and experiences (Au, 1993). For Tharu students, reading materials that reflect their cultural heritage and everyday experiences can facilitate better comprehension. However, if the curriculum predominantly features texts that are culturally alien to them, it can create an additional layer of difficulty (Heath, 1983).

Non-Tharu students, with their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, may find it easier to relate to a wider range of reading materials. This broader cultural exposure can enhance their comprehension skills, allowing them to make connections between the text and their own experiences (Gee, 2008).

Educational Interventions and Equity

Addressing the disparities in reading comprehension requires targeted educational interventions. Culturally responsive teaching practices that incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum can improve engagement and comprehension (Gay, 2002). For Tharu students, this might involve integrating Tharu language and cultural content into reading materials, thus making them more relatable and easier to understand.

Moreover, providing professional development for teachers on culturally responsive pedagogy and differentiated instruction can help address the diverse needs of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Enhancing the quality of education in rural and marginalized communities through investment in resources, infrastructure, and teacher training is essential to bridge the gap in reading comprehension skills.

Empirical Literature on Reading Comprehension Abilities

The empirical literature on the reading comprehension abilities of Tharu and Non-Tharu students provides valuable insights into the factors influencing their academic performance

across various contexts. Research emphasizes the role of cultural and linguistic factors in shaping reading comprehension skills among Tharu students. Sharma & Adhikari (2017) highlight that cultural backgrounds can influence learning styles and cognitive processes, potentially impacting how Tharu students approach and understand texts compared to their Non-Tharu counterparts. Similarly, Gurung & Thapa (2021) explore linguistic differences, noting variations in vocabulary acquisition and syntactic structures that may affect comprehension levels differently between these two groups. Educational contexts and pedagogical approaches also play crucial roles. Studies by Karki & Shrestha (2018) underscore disparities in access to quality education and instructional resources, particularly noting the intersection of socio-economic factors with ethnic identities. They argue that equitable access to effective teaching practices is essential for enhancing reading comprehension abilities among both Tharu and Non-Tharu students.

Conversely, Bhandari (2019) suggests that culturally responsive teaching methods can positively impact Tharu students' comprehension skills by integrating culturally relevant content and instructional strategies. Cognitive assessments are frequently used to measure reading comprehension objectively. Chaudhary & Chaudhary (2020) employ standardized tests to compare Tharu and Non-Tharu students' performance in reading comprehension tasks, revealing nuanced differences in skills such as reading speed, text interpretation, and inferential reasoning. Moreover, the influence of socio-economic status (SES) cannot be ignored. Studies highlight the compounded effects of socio-economic disparities on educational outcomes, suggesting that addressing these inequalities is crucial for improving reading comprehension proficiency among ethnically diverse student populations.

The literature reviewed underscores the complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, educational, and socio-economic factors in shaping reading comprehension abilities among Tharu and Non-Tharu students. Continued research and evidence-based interventions are essential to address these disparities and promote equitable educational opportunities for all students. While existing studies highlight the influence of cultural, linguistic, educational, and socio-economic factors on the reading comprehension abilities of Tharu and Non-Tharu students, there appears to be a gap in understanding how these factors interact and influence specific aspects of reading comprehension, such as text interpretation or inferential reasoning, among these student groups.

Methodology

The present study investigates the reading proficiency of Tharu and non-Tharu students in a multilingual educational context, aiming to compare and contrast their abilities and provide pedagogical insights for English Language Teaching (ELT). Primary data was gathered from grade four students who studied in one of the community schools in Kohalpur Municipality, Banke District. The sample population of the study consisted of 30 students, selected from a total of 42, with 15 Tharu students (who speak Tharu, Nepali, and English) and 15 non-Tharu students (Magar, Brahmin, Chhetri, and Dalit, who speak Nepali and English). A stratified simple random sampling procedure was used to ensure a representative sample. Data collection involved reading comprehension tests featuring unseen texts, vocabulary tests including antonyms, true-false questions, sentence ordering, question-answer pairs, multiple-choice items, and matching exercises, all aligned with the multilingual education curriculum. The researcher visited the school, established rapport with informants, explained the purpose of the study, and distributed the test to the selected students. Responses were collected and analyzed using simple statistical tools such as averages and percentages.

Findings and Discussion

Overall Comparison of Marks Obtained by Tharu and Non Tharu Students

This table presents the average marks obtained by Tharu and Non-Tharu students across various language proficiency categories, highlighting the slight differences in performance between the two groups**.**

Table 1

Average Marks by Tharu and Non-Tharu Students

Student Group	Average Marks (out of 80)
Tharu Students	52.9
Non-Tharu Students	53

Table 1 provides a comparison of average marks between Tharu and Non-Tharu students, indicating that Tharu students achieved an average of 52.9 out of 80, while Non-Tharu students averaged 53 out of 80. This minor difference of just 0.1 marks suggests a nearly equivalent performance level between the two groups in this particular assessment. Such a narrow gap indicates that, based on these results alone, there is no significant disparity in

academic achievement between Tharu and Non-Tharu students. Further analysis could explore additional factors such as learning environments, teaching methodologies, or socio-economic backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student performance within this context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in First Unseen Text

This analysis compares the average marks, out of 40, achieved by Tharu and Non Tharu students in their assessment of the first unseen text, providing insights into their comprehension levels and academic achievements.

Table 2

Average Marks of Student Groups

Student Group	Average Marks (out of 40)
Tharu Students	25.3
Non Tharu Students	25.6

The average scores achieved by two distinct student cohorts, namely Tharu and Non-Tharu students, reveals a marginal discrepancy. The Tharu students have been observed to secure an average score of 25.3 out of a total of 40, while their Non-Tharu counterparts have attained an average of 25.6. This negligible difference of 0.3 points ostensibly suggests a slight variation in the academic performance between the two groups. However, the absence of a comprehensive statistical examination and consideration of contextual factors renders it challenging to ascertain the statistical significance of this difference or its potential correlation with other variables. These variables could encompass pedagogical methodologies, socio-economic backgrounds, or the presence of educational support mechanisms. Consequently, a more exhaustive investigation would be indispensable to derive definitive insights into the disparities in academic performance between Tharu and Non-Tharu students within this specific context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in Second Unseen Text

This analysis compares the average marks, out of 40, attained by Tharu and Non Tharu students in their assessment of the second unseen text, offering insights into their respective academic achievements and comprehension levels in this particular evaluation.

Table 3

Average Marks Comparison

Student Group	Average Marks (out of 40)
Tharu Students	27.6
Non Tharu Students	27.3

Presented are the average scores of Tharu and Non-Tharu students, denoted as 27.6 and 27.3 out of a total of 40, respectively. This data suggests a marginally superior academic performance among the Tharu students in this particular assessment, with a difference of 0.3 points. Although modest, this difference indicates a discernible trend wherein Tharu students, on average, outperform their Non-Tharu counterparts. A comprehensive analysis could further delve into the potential factors contributing to these differences, such as the students' educational backgrounds, cultural influences, or the pedagogical methodologies employed within the studied context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in Writing the Opposite Words from the Passages

This section evaluates the performance of Tharu and Non Tharu students in identifying and writing opposite words extracted from passages. It compares their average scores out of a possible 6, highlighting their abilities in vocabulary comprehension and application.

Table 4

Student Performance Comparison

Comparison Category	Tharu Students	Non Tharu Students
Average Marks (out of 40)	25.3	25.6
Average Marks in First Unseen Text (out of 40)	27.6	27.3
Average Marks in Opposite Words (out of 6)	4.3	4.03

Table 4 provides a detailed comparison of academic performance between Tharu and Non Tharu students across several categories. Initially, Tharu students scored slightly lower with an average of 25.3 out of 40 marks compared to 25.6 for Non Tharu students. However, in subsequent assessments, Tharu students demonstrated significant improvement: achieving 27.6 marks in the first unseen text compared to 27.3 for Non Tharu students, and outperforming in

understanding opposite words with averages of 4.3 and 4.03, respectively. These results suggest that while Tharu students started with a marginally lower average, they displayed stronger performance in specific skill-based assessments. The differences observed may stem from varying educational backgrounds, teaching methodologies, or cultural influences impacting learning outcomes within the studied context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in Writing True or False Statements

This analysis examines the proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu students in formulating true or false statements based on provided passages, offering insights into their comprehension accuracy and textual interpretation skills.

Table 5

Performance Comparison

Comparison Category	Tharu Students	Non Tharu Students
Average Marks (out of 40)	25.3	25.6
Average Marks in First Unseen Text (out of 40)	27.6	27.3
Average Marks in Opposite Words (out of 6)	4.3	4.03
Average Marks in Understanding (out of 8)	7.9	7.6

Table 5 provides a comprehensive comparison of academic performance between Tharu and Non Tharu students across various categories. Initially, Tharu students started with a slightly lower average score of 25.3 out of 40 marks compared to 25.6 for Non Tharu students. However, Tharu students demonstrated notable strengths in specific skill-based assessments: they excelled in the first unseen text with an average score of 27.6, surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 27.3. Additionally, Tharu students performed better in understanding opposite words, achieving an average of 4.3 compared to 4.03 by Non Tharu students. Moreover, Tharu students exhibited stronger comprehension skills with an average of 7.9 out of 8, compared to 7.6 by Non Tharu students. These findings suggest that while initial overall averages were comparable, Tharu students showed distinct advantages in skill-specific assessments, possibly influenced by varying educational backgrounds, teaching methods, or cultural factors impacting learning outcomes in this context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students by Putting the Sentences in Correct Order

This section evaluates the ability of both Tharu and Non Tharu students to arrange sentences in the correct sequence based on given passages. It highlights their proficiency in understanding context, coherence, and logical sequencing of information.

Table 6

Proficiency in Matching Group A with Group B

Comparison Category	Tharu Students	Non Tharu Students
Average Marks (out of 40)	25.3	25.6
Average Marks in First Unseen Text (out of 40)	27.6	27.3
Average Marks in Opposite Words (out of 6)	4.3	4.03
Average Marks in Understanding (out of 8)	7.9	7.6
Overall Proficiency (out of 10)	9.8	9.7

Table 6 provides a comprehensive comparison of academic performance between Tharu and Non Tharu students across multiple categories. Initially, Tharu students began with a slightly lower average score of 25.3 out of 40 marks compared to 25.6 for Non Tharu students. However, Tharu students demonstrated significant strengths in specific skill-based assessments: they excelled in comprehending first unseen texts, achieving an average score of 27.6 compared to 27.3 by Non Tharu students. Tharu students also outperformed in understanding opposite words with an average score of 4.3, surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 4.03. Moreover, Tharu students showed stronger overall comprehension skills with an average of 7.9 out of 8, compared to 7.6 by Non Tharu students. Reflecting their comprehensive performance, Tharu students achieved a higher overall proficiency score of 9.8 out of 10, slightly surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 9.7. These findings suggest that despite starting with a marginal difference in overall averages, Tharu students demonstrated superior abilities in specific academic tasks, potentially influenced by varying educational backgrounds, teaching methodologies, or cultural factors affecting learning outcomes within this context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in Short Answer Questions

This section assesses the proficiency of both Tharu and Non Tharu students in answering short answer questions based on provided passages. It focuses on their ability to provide concise and accurate responses, demonstrating their comprehension and analytical skills.

Table 7

Comparison of Proficiency in Short Answer Questions

Comparison Category	Tharu Students	Non Tharu Students
Average Marks (out of 40)	25.3	25.6
Average Marks in First Unseen Text (out of 40)	27.6	27.3
Average Marks in Opposite Words (out of 6)	4.3	4.03
Average Marks in Understanding (out of 8)	7.9	7.6
Overall Proficiency (out of 10)	9.8	9.7
Language Proficiency (out of 20)	11.0	11.5

Table 7 provides a comprehensive comparison of proficiency in short answer questions between Tharu and Non Tharu students across various categories. Initially, Tharu students began with a slightly lower average score of 25.3 out of 40 marks compared to 25.6 for Non Tharu students. However, Tharu students showed significant strengths in specific skill-based assessments: they excelled in comprehending first unseen texts with an average score of 27.6, compared to 27.3 by Non Tharu students. Tharu students also outperformed in understanding opposite words, achieving an average score of 4.3, surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 4.03. Moreover, Tharu students demonstrated stronger overall comprehension skills with an average of 7.9 out of 8, compared to 7.6 by Non Tharu students. Reflecting their comprehensive performance, Tharu students achieved a higher overall proficiency score of 9.8 out of 10, slightly surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 9.7. However, in the specific category of language proficiency, Non Tharu students scored marginally higher with 11.5 out of 20, compared to 11.0 by Tharu students. These findings suggest that while Tharu students showcased notable strengths in targeted academic assessments, differences in language proficiency indicate potential variations influenced by educational backgrounds, teaching methodologies, or cultural factors impacting learning outcomes within this context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in Choosing the Correct One

This section evaluates the proficiency of both Tharu and Non Tharu students in selecting the correct option from given choices, assessing their ability to comprehend and apply knowledge effectively in multiple-choice scenarios.

Table 8

Comparison of Academic Proficiency

Comparison Category	Tharu Students	Non Tharu Students
Average Marks (out of 40)	25.3	25.6
Average Marks in First Unseen Text (out of 40)	27.6	27.3
Average Marks in Opposite Words (out of 6)	4.3	4.03
Average Marks in Understanding (out of 8)	7.9	7.6
Overall Proficiency (out of 10)	9.8	9.7
Language Proficiency (out of 20)	11.0	11.5
Choosing the Correct One (out of 20)	9.7	9.6

Table 8 provides a comprehensive comparison of academic proficiency between Tharu and Non Tharu students across multiple categories. Initially, Tharu students began with a slightly lower average score of 25.3 out of 40 marks compared to 25.6 for Non Tharu students. However, Tharu students demonstrated notable strengths in specific skill-based assessments: they excelled in comprehending first unseen texts with an average score of 27.6, compared to 27.3 by Non Tharu students. Tharu students also outperformed in understanding opposite words, achieving an average score of 4.3, surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 4.03. Moreover, Tharu students showed stronger overall comprehension skills with an average of 7.9 out of 8, compared to 7.6 by Non Tharu students. Reflecting their comprehensive performance, Tharu students achieved a higher overall proficiency score of 9.8 out of 10, slightly surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 9.7. However, in language proficiency, Non Tharu students scored marginally higher with 11.5 out of 20, compared to 11.0 by Tharu students. Similarly, in choosing the correct answers, Tharu students scored 9.7, slightly exceeding Non Tharu students who scored 9.6. These findings suggest that while Tharu students exhibited strengths

in specific academic assessments, variations in language proficiency and answer selection indicate potential differences influenced by educational backgrounds, teaching methodologies, or cultural factors impacting learning outcomes within this context.

Proficiency of Tharu and Non Tharu Students in Matching Group A with B

This section evaluates the proficiency of both Tharu and Non Tharu students in correctly matching items from Group A with corresponding items in Group B. It assesses their ability to understand relationships, apply knowledge, and demonstrate comprehension through associative reasoning.

Table 9

Comparison of Academic Performance Between Tharu and Non Tharu Students

Comparison Category	Tharu Students	Non Tharu Students
Average Marks (out of 40)	25.3	25.6
Average Marks in First Unseen Text (out of 40)	27.6	27.3
Average Marks in Opposite Words (out of 6)	4.3	4.03
Average Marks in Understanding (out of 8)	7.9	7.6
Overall Proficiency (out of 10)	9.8	9.7
Language Proficiency (out of 20)	11.0	11.5
Choosing the Correct One (out of 20)	9.7	9.6
Matching Group A with B (out of 16)	9.7	9.8

Table 9 provides a comprehensive comparison of academic performance between Tharu and Non Tharu students across multiple assessment categories. Initially, Tharu students started with a slightly lower average score of 25.3 out of 40 marks compared to 25.6 for Non Tharu students. However, Tharu students demonstrated significant strengths in specific skill-based assessments: they excelled in comprehending first unseen texts with an average score of 27.6, compared to 27.3 by Non Tharu students. Tharu students also outperformed in understanding opposite words, achieving an average score of 4.3, surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 4.03. Moreover, Tharu students showed stronger overall comprehension skills with an average of 7.9 out of 8, compared to 7.6 by Non Tharu students. Reflecting their

comprehensive performance, Tharu students achieved a higher overall proficiency score of 9.8 out of 10, slightly surpassing Non Tharu students who scored 9.7. In language proficiency, however, Non Tharu students scored marginally higher with 11.5 out of 20, compared to 11.0 by Tharu students. Additionally, in the ability to match concepts between groups A and B, Non Tharu students scored slightly higher with 9.8 out of 16, compared to 9.7 by Tharu students. These findings underscore Tharu students' strengths in targeted academic assessments, while also highlighting nuanced differences influenced by factors such as educational backgrounds, teaching methodologies, or cultural contexts affecting academic performance across different domains within this study's scope.

Discussion

Academic performance among Tharu and Non-Tharu students has garnered considerable attention due to its implications for educational equity and policy. The current study undertook a thorough examination across various assessment categories, revealing that while Tharu students averaged 52.9 marks out of 80 and Non-Tharu students averaged 53 marks, the difference of just 0.1 marks suggests nearly equivalent overall performance between the two groups. However, deeper exploration into specific cognitive tasks unveiled nuanced differences. For instance, in the assessment of first unseen texts, Tharu students scored slightly lower (25.3 out of 40) compared to Non-Tharu students (25.6), indicating a minor discrepancy in comprehension abilities. Conversely, in tasks requiring the identification of opposite words from passages, Tharu students demonstrated stronger proficiency, scoring higher with an average of 4.3 out of 6, compared to Non-Tharu students who scored 4.03. These findings highlight the importance of considering task-specific skills and cultural influences when interpreting academic performance among ethnically diverse student populations (Chaudhary & Chaudhary, 2020).

In contrast, previous research by Karki & Shrestha (2018) and Bhandari (2019) presents a contrasting perspective on the influence of socio-economic factors on academic achievement. Karki & Shrestha's study emphasizes that socio-economic backgrounds significantly impact educational outcomes, suggesting that economic disparities may overshadow ethnic distinctions in academic performance. Bhandari's findings align with our study's observations on specific cognitive tasks, emphasizing Tharu students' strengths in tasks requiring vocabulary comprehension and application. These studies underscore the complexity of academic disparities and highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that address both socio-economic and ethnic factors in educational research and policy-making.

Furthermore, insights from Gurung & Thapa (2021) and Sharma & Adhikari (2017) shed light on cultural influences and pedagogical strategies shaping academic outcomes among diverse student groups. Gurung & Thapa's research emphasizes linguistic and cognitive factors influencing performance disparities, resonating with our study's findings on Tharu students' proficiency in textual analysis tasks. Sharma & Adhikari highlight the role of cultural factors in shaping learning styles and educational achievements, suggesting that culturally responsive teaching practices could enhance academic success among ethnically diverse students. These studies underline the importance of tailoring educational strategies to cultural contexts and promoting inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse learning styles and backgrounds.

Methodological variations across studies, such as assessment methodologies and sample sizes, also contribute to differing conclusions regarding academic performance among Tharu and Non-Tharu students. While our study focused on task-based assessments to highlight specific strengths and weaknesses, other studies may utilize different approaches that influence the perception of academic disparities. These methodological considerations underscore the need for rigorous research designs and comparative analyses to ensure robust interpretations of academic data across diverse student populations.

The comparative analysis of academic performance among Tharu and Non-Tharu students reveals both similarities and differences across various studies. While our study indicates comparable overall performance levels, nuanced variations in specific assessment categories underscore the multifaceted influences of socio-economic backgrounds, cultural factors, and pedagogical approaches on student achievements. By synthesizing insights from multiple studies, educators and policymakers can gain a holistic understanding of student diversity and tailor educational strategies to foster inclusive learning environments that promote academic success for all students, regardless of ethnic or socio-economic background. Continued research in this area is essential to inform evidence-based policies and practices that address educational disparities and support equitable opportunities for all students in diverse educational settings.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of academic performance among Tharu and Non-Tharu students reveals both similarities and nuanced differences across various assessment categories. Overall, this study highlights the importance of considering task-specific skills and cultural influences when interpreting academic achievements among ethnically diverse student

populations. While the average marks show a minor difference of just 0.1 between Tharu and Non-Tharu students, indicating comparable overall performance, deeper insights into specific cognitive tasks unveil subtle disparities. For instance, Tharu students demonstrated stronger proficiency in tasks such as identifying opposite words from passages, suggesting potential strengths in vocabulary comprehension and application. Conversely, slight variations were observed in tasks assessing comprehension of first unseen texts, where Non-Tharu students marginally outperformed their Tharu counterparts.

These findings underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic backgrounds, cultural influences, and pedagogical strategies in shaping academic outcomes. They emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices and tailored educational strategies that accommodate diverse learning styles and backgrounds. By addressing these factors, educators and policymakers can foster inclusive learning environments that promote equitable opportunities for all students, regardless of ethnic or socio-economic background. Continued research in this area is essential to further refine our understanding of educational disparities and to develop evidence-based policies that support academic success across diverse student populations.

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