Changes and Challenges of Literacy Practices:
A Case of a Village in Iran

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Abstract

Granted that literacy is a social practice involving different values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships, this study attempts to examine literacy practices and the potential changes made through a history of forty years. The study was conducted in the village of Cheshmeh, near Mashhad, Iran, where the social definition of literacy emerged. The data have been collected through participants' observation and interviews. The results proposed that literacy progress has been uneven and unequal across countries and within a country or a population despite some achievements gained internationally. This study is a challenge to the idea that literacy is the same thing across all kinds of settings and under all kinds of conditions. In fact, widely varying personal, social, religious, and economic factors imposed their constraints on literacy practices. In the light of the results of the present study, the future literacy effort may achieve better results and increased opportunities of success for all individuals if it takes account of such local social factors.

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1. Introduction

Literacy as an important concept in education has attracted the attention of many researchers (e.g., Heath, 1982, 1983; Rogers, 2008; Street, 1983, 1984, 1995) and undergone diverse changes from cognitive, autonomous, one-dimensional, and modern views of literacy to social, ideological, multi-dimensional, and postmodern perspectives towards it (Pishghadam, Tabatabaeyan, & Navari, 2013). In fact, literacy was first conceived of as a construct residing in individuals' minds, which emanates from schools and books, guaranteeing success in life (e.g., Scribner & Cole, 1981). Later, the concept was heavily put into question by Heath (1982, 1983) and Street (1984), who argued that literacy is a social concept, having varied aspects.

Street (1984) in his influential work *Literacy in Theory and Practice* drew on his own research on literacy in an Iranian village (Cheshmeh) in the early 1970s. He adopted the multiple literacies approach and argued that the literacy cannot be studied autonomously, apart from the larger social 'goings-on' in which it is rooted. In other words, literacies diverge according to different situations, functions, and social relationships. In effect, more developed conceptualization of literacy is needed and this can be seen in the subsequent works in the 1980s and beyond (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Prinsloo & Baynham, 2008; Street, 1983, 1984).

Due to the importance of the social concept of literacy, we tried to focus on Cheshmeh, the village Street (1984) put under scrutiny to come up with the social orientations towards literacy. In fact, in this study we attempted to examine closely the social and cultural practices of literacy in this place after 40 years to pinpoint the possible changes and challenges.

2. Theoretical Framework

The definition of literacy is broadly varied throughout the literature. Research on literacy is traditionally concerned with the recognition of cognitive developments, strategies, and skills required in reading and interpreting the printed texts. Scribner and Cole (1981) defined literacy as "not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use" (p. 236). In this sense, literacy is associated with higher-order thinking and development of cognitive skills, and is more broadly related to social and economic development, political democracy, and even civilization (Graff, 1995). Literacy research also focused on the ways in which literacy is informed and shaped by wider contexts, social situations, communication, and cultural tools which Gee (1992) referred to as "the New Literacy Studies" or NLS. This approach leads to the recognition of multiple literacies and incorporation of the power dimension (Gee, 1999; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

Psychology dominated educational practice until the 1980s and the focus of literacy studies remained upon cognitive and internal processes involved in reading and writing. During the 1980s literacy studies shifted from cognitive psychological-based approach to a socio-cultural perspective. The research was mainly centered on the practical usage and meaning making of language and literacy. The move from psycholinguistic to socio-cultural-informed education was the first main "paradigm shift" in literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

The "Sociocultural" study of literacy typically refers to practice rather than process. Scribner and Cole (1981, p. 236), drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1986), defined practice as "socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks". From a socio-cultural perspective, literacy is not a single de-contextualized skill or one-dimensional construct which can be applied in any situation. Rather, it involves multiple social practices within a particular context and for a specific function. In fact, literacy is not a generalized competence but it is situated, communicative competence embedded in cultural, social, historical, and political contexts in which children have grown up, and is influenced by the thinking of a particular group of people who have directed the children's thinking (Heath, 1982, 1983; Rogers, 2008; Street, 1983, 1995; Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

Given that literacy is located in the social, cultural, and political context in which it takes place, Street (1984) referred to this model of literacy as "ideological," in contrast to autonomous model of literacy. From an autonomous perspective, literacy is a set of practical skills that autonomously affects other social and cognitive practices (Street, 2001, 2005). The Ideological model highlighted that literacy is rooted in power structures in society. Actually, the existing power dynamics is frequently maintained, produced, and reproduced through imposing in the course of schooling, language, power, values, and beliefs of the dominant culture on marginal groups who may not share the same experiences and world-views. Gee (2005) referred to these imposed concepts as "models". "Models are the ways in which history, institutions, and affinity groups think and act in and through us" (Gee, 2005, p.142).

A strong impetus for an interest in literacy as a sociocultural practice originated from Heath's (1982, 1983) classic study of south eastern communities in the USA. Heath argued that different ways that children learned to use language hinged on a situated communicative competence rooted in learnt deep cultural knowledge. In effect, children's success and failure required to be identified with reference to wider and deeper cultural practices.

As a useful framework for thinking about literacies, Green (1988) provided the three-dimensional model of literacy, based on a socio-cultural perspective: the operational, the cultural, and the critical. The operational dimension deals with language aspects of literacy. The cultural dimension focuses on the meaning systems of social practice. The critical dimension involves awareness that all literacy practices are socially constructed and ideological. NLS is interested in all of the three dimensions of Green's (1988) model of literacy; and proposes a further three key interconnected aspects of the approach: Multimodality, Multiple Identities, and Multiliteracies. Multimodality is a shift from an identification of literacy with the conventional means of typographical printed text to taking account of different modes of communication – visual, kinesthetic, etc. Multiple Identities mean students often have rich literacy in the areas out of school in which

they have selected to devote their identities. Multiliteracies draw upon the local and global contexts in which literacy is situated, and students' own linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds in literacy learning (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

This perspective shed light on this fact that literacy practice created opportunity and affordance for a group of people and constraints for others. Those practices which did not fit the norm were considered inappropriate or problematic (Sarroub, 2004). As a result, in many sociocultural studies, literacy and language were viewed as forms of "capital" (Bourdieu, 1982; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell et al., 2012) that disposed individuals in certain ways and gave possibilities and resources to those who possessed it. People who have been socialized into these dispositions were able to interpret and creatively engage in the flow of social practices. That is, the ability to engage in valued language and discourse practices is associated with power and access (Foucault, 1981). From this perspective, it is important to study how the value of literacy practices is decided by those who are socially, economically, or politically more powerful (Besnier & Street, 1994).

The implications of this approach for research and practice are manifold. It raises serious doubts among researchers about what constitutes literacy and what it means to people. So, instead of giving advantage to the standard literacy practices, they become aware that other versions of literacy exist and are still being created. It is recognized that as a social practice, literacy varies across cultures and contexts and for that reason, the consequences of the different literacy practices in different circumstances are noteworthy.

Many people who are considered "illiterate" from the autonomous viewpoint to literacy may, within a more culturally sensitive model, be seen to have the ability to use of literacy practices for specific functions and in specific situations. This approach also raises awareness regarding whether the influential literacy practices are accessible to the variety of populations (Cole, 1996; Wagner, 2010).

Literacy studies have often embarked on the full description of particular social activities.

Ethnographers working in the general area of literacy have examined social activities from a particular social and institutional lens. They consider literacy as a social practice that requires studies of this practice in the everyday life of people (Barton et al., 2005).

After all, the chief purpose of this study is to delve into the world of literacy to identify the possible changes and challenges. Developing detailed local ethnographic perspectives seem to be an efficient tool for challenging the existing assumptions and generalizations about literacy. Perhaps, the future literacy effort may achieve better results and increased opportunities of success if the new insights are applied. The basic aim of this study, which is first and foremost exploratory, is to describe the existing situation, to diagnose the major problems and challenges that it may poses, to identify the potential causes of these problems, and finally to propose the solutions which seem most promising. There is also an interest in encouraging researchers to reflect on and try to find out the invisible aspects of literacy practices and its meaning in different contexts in order to promote the status of literacy in the society, amplify our understanding of the effort necessary to fill the gaps between different areas and domains of social life, and better address such challenges in primary and higher education.

3. Method

3.1. Settings and Participants of the Study

The research was conducted at the research site, Cheshmeh in June, 2014. Cheshmeh is a village in Shandiz rural district, near Mashhad, Iran. It is located along the mountainside of Binalod Mountain and at fountain-head of Shandiz valley. The village is about 30 kilometers from Mashhad. This is where Street (1984) was inspired to propose a more developed conceptualization of literacy that resulted in introducing an ideological model of literacy.

Cheshmeh is organized in two separate parts, upper and lower Cheshmeh. Most houses, shops, mosques, and important buildings are located in the upper part and the governor's office of the rural district is in the lower part. The total population of the village is about 3000 people in more than 600 families. With respect to the stunning deep valley, river, wild flowers, mature, and bushy trees, this village creates a very beautiful landscape (Figures 1 & 2). The main economic activity of the village is agriculture and gardening. In addition, since Cheshmeh is a tourist spot, commercial activities such as shop keeping are also widespread among people.

Figure 1
A View of the Research Site, Cheshmeh as a Tourist Spot; 1978

Figure 2
A View of the Research Site, Cheshmeh as a Tourist Spot; 2014

The fieldwork entailed several semi-structured or informal interviews, observation, and visits to the schools, shops, post office, governor of rural district office, public health office, and other important buildings in the village in order to see "what is going on" in this place regarding literacy practices. Eighteen people were interviewed and asked about their

experiences on literacy, the perceptions of schooling in the village, and their beliefs and values regarding education. The researchers tried to elicit what literacy looked like through the eyes of different people who lived in the village. Interviews with official figures like school headmaster or the governor of rural district were preplanned and arranged. In the case of interviews with people of varied ages and genders, they all simply arose from what caught the eyes of the researchers. The researchers seized all the opportunities to learn something about people's practices and beliefs, sets of values, and experiences. The interview continued until a point of data saturation was reached and no new information was added to the obtained data (Spradley, 1979).

The fieldwork was commenced with informal conversations with different shop keepers, particularly those who seemed to be successful in their jobs. Then, there was an opportunity to chat with different school-aged children and teenagers about their daily lives, schools, and teachers. Other stories came from post office managers, customers, the oldest man of the village, and a public health worker followed by a chatting session with a group of middle aged neighbors. Then a semi-structured interview was carried out with a local school headmaster to get an in-depth understanding of the status of literacy in the village, school facilities, the students' access, and retention in formal schooling and the factors influencing the participation of students in school. Finally, following a visit to the governor of rural district office, an interview was conducted with the secretary of the office in order to gain formal and exact information about the village population, people's level of education, religious activities, and the status of schools and education in the lives of people.

3.2. Data Collection

In order to examine the literacy within this context, the data were collected from different sources. The first one was composed of asking questions from the participants and listening to the local views. To do this, semi-structured interviews and conversations about literacy were conducted, which were guided by open interview schedules (provided in the appendix 1). The schedules were oriented towards

allowing participants' accounts of their own experiences to emerge. The questions were built up from the background knowledge and experience of the researchers.

It was important to keep the interviews sufficiently open and be led by what the participants mentioned. Whenever necessary the researchers brought back the conversation on track. During the conversation, the researchers' roles were different. Sometimes the researchers were engaged directly to the main topic by interrupting the interviewees. Other times they were completely detached and allowed the conversations to flow uninterrupted. The researchers made eventual comments or questions for clarification at the end. The participants were encouraged to discover and identify local cultural meanings in context and reflect upon their own ideas and values.

The second source of the data collection was observation. There was a need to observe in order to gain an in-depth understanding of what was going on. What was inferred from the observations together with the answers given to the questions, shaped the total interpretation of the situation. Observation helped to assess and evaluate the activities and the relationships of those engaged in them. These observations raised further questions which were subsequently asked from the participants. Part of these observations involved not only listening carefully to the words being spoken, but also noticing the attitudes of the speakers, their actions, verbal and non-verbal behaviors, and facial expressions, which resulted in discovering what people might think and feel as well as what they might tell and do.

Taking photos and videoing the participants, places in the study, and features of the environment relevant to the study were one part of this ethnographic work. In taking the photos and videoing, the researchers tried to highlight and reflect the central facet of the study and its context. The data were recorded through taking notes, audio, and video recording. All these were very helpful to understanding the participants' points of view and validating what they were expressing.

3.3. Data Analysis

As already mentioned, the interviews and observations ended up in some forms of field notes, audio, and video records of what was heard and seen in the field. Since the process of qualitative data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic, data analysis in this study was ongoing during the data collection stage. The ongoing analysis resulted in identifying up-coming patterns and themes. However, more systematic analysis was carried out after the data collection was accomplished and the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts of the audio and video records were produced by observing contextualization cues to recognize the themes that were registered in the data (Gumperz, 1982). The material compiled (observed or heard) was collected into major domains which included different views and perspectives on literacy. These domains were further broken into smaller categories. In classifying the domains and categories, all kinds of field notes which had been collected were employed to triangulate the events. The analysis mostly relied on the researchers' subjective intuition and reflexive involvement. The perceptions were allowed to emerge freely from the data. Nevertheless, checking, cross checking, and triangulation were applied to the data to increase the validity of the final conclusions. In the final stage, the analysis of audio records of these interviews made different features of literacy in the field visible.

4. Research Findings

The analysis of the data revealed that there exist conflicting viewpoints among people of the village regarding the importance of literacy and the kind of literacy needed to survive. The question of whether literate people were more effective in their activities in the village was not straightforward. Some people believed that in order to function well in the society, it was necessary to use literacy practices on-the-job, at home, in religious places, in trades, and in the community. At the same time, they thought it was somehow impossible to apply the kind of literacy learnt in the classroom to their everyday lives. Others obviously objected to the underlying message of the schooling and formal education that illiterate people were less knowledgeable than literate ones. They assumed that it was possible to make themselves functionally literate by learning from people and from the environment, without attending any formal literacy programs. Moreover, some people did not consider school courses as inappropriate or irrelevant, their reasons for dropout might be that they were too busy or too old or simply thought "education is not for poor or rural people".

Although the motivations found here were different, we were able to recognize some common patterns. Interestingly, formal schooling was not generally considered as a source of power by people of the village. They even thought that in many cases education was not money making. Formal schooling would be beneficial if and only if it enabled them to gain access to employment, better working conditions, and higher incomes. Moreover, they believed that if the type of literacy students learnt in the classroom was functional in preventing them from being cheated by other people, it would be worth being literate. This was in line with the finding of Nabi, Rogers, and Street (2009) on the role of 'hidden literacies' in people's everyday lives. The status and social relationships which had been carried in schooled literacy were ignored by most people. In fact, they just considered the present time. They did not regard learning at school as an investment for the future that would raise their income levels in the long run or would have the potentiality to transform their lives. They thought formal schooling was somewhat a waste of time, particularly in higher levels; and that it would be better if boys learnt those skills which were useful for their business lives.

According to the Cheshmeh school headmaster, schooling had to lend weight to the idea that literacy could enable students to be more efficient in their roles within the family and work. Practical instructions were needed such as instructing students on better health and hygiene practices, efficient interaction with other people like elders, neighbors, future family, and the ways of participation in the village economic activities or coping with a heavy burden of domestic work. She was of the view that non-formal education for students would be more useful

and practical, deserving more attention. She emphasized the importance of unconscious learning that school would provide for students. In fact, the whole environment, people, context, and tasks can form a learning environment, even if the individuals engaged in learning did not realize they were learning.

They learned by practice and problem-solving, which were similar to what they might face in everyday life and even by looking at the large posters around the schools. The effort would be necessary to build bridges between literacy practices in schools and the realms of social life.

Figure 3
The Secondary School of the Village

Besides, according to the principal, in rural areas, schools had seriously tried not to have the students fail a course even if they were not qualified enough to pass, since it would provoke the students to drop out, while by commuting to school they were provided with the required social education that was considered more applicable than the mere subjects of their books. Thus mastering the content material was not considered as important as peripheral learning that unconsciously might come about by attending school. It was not surprising that many school programs suffered from irregular attendance of students. Sustainable and quality formal education was regarded as very difficult in rural areas (Figure 3).

The obstacles identified included young people's lack of time and heavy workload, indirect costs of school, distance to classes, male teachers (for girls), opposition from other family members (particularly parents), mixed-gender classes, and poor associations with other development inputs, such as income generating programs.

The main economic activity of the village is agriculture and gardening. Every one of the people in these jobs had some experience of literacy. Some may be totally non-literate in formal terms but all the same, they had developed many different skills on their jobs,

had mastered the ways of managing literacy and numeracy, and in some cases they had discovered their own methods of recording calculations and financial dealings, a feature of local literacies that Street (1984) noted in the same village 40 years ago. Regarding economic activities such as shop keeping, older people maintained positions of authority and were respected for their experience and age within their communities, without learning school literacy. In fact, they learned the literacy skills necessary for their jobs. The key issue here was a matter of relationships – informal but close, sharing, and hard work. Besides, Shop keepers and self-employed workers had their own informal literacy and numeracy practices. They had not been to school or adult literacy classes. These so-called 'illiterate' people managed their jobs in a satisfactory manner, in fact often to a better standard than some of those who attended formal schooling.

Many old people still thought learning to read a religious text particularly Quran, keeping the accounts in a small shop or in agriculture activities, and performing their tasks in banks and offices are all that they needed from the educational system. In fact, it was discovered that different literacy practices were employed by different people for different purposes (Street, 1984) – for example, religious

literacies or workplace literacies as well as the formal school-based literacies. All of these literacies had their own functionality. It is worth mentioning that using digital technologies was widespread among younger generation of the village in the same manner as anywhere else, although differently from the period when Street did fieldwork there. According to Street (1984, 2013) there were also certain identities associated with particular practices. Although some changes have taken place in the past forty years, the situation has not fundamentally altered. In fact, informal literacy practices are still significant in the social and economic life of the village. Religion is considered very important and religious people are more respected and have a better chance to succeed in their jobs due to their higher social status. While *Qur'anic* or *Maktab* literacy still exists, it is much less widespread than in the past,

because schooled literacy is mainly practiced among the younger generation. In the past, people at a higher level of education were regarded as an out- group and were seen to be oriented outwards and "lacked the integral relations to everyday village life" (Street, 2013, p. 2). This situation has not changed so far.

It seems that few people planned to pursue their study in university. For boys the only functionality of studying at university was obtaining employment in the formal sector and none of them expected to look for such employment. For girls, who mostly get married in teen years, education could not help them to do their domestic chores (Figure 4). There was a considerable gender gap in this regard in literacy rates among people. Most of the teenage girls had been excluded from schooling due to economic and social factors.

Figure 4
Girls of the Village Who are Expected to Marry and Leave Home in Young Age

Parents' attitudes toward schooling were different considering the gender of their children. They wanted their sons to have full schooling and even in certain cases they tried to persuade their sons to continue their education, but at the same time they felt going to school was not a useful activity for girls and would be a waste of time. The point is, since the girls were expected to marry and leave home, it was seen as a poor investment to educate them. Religious factors also have an impact on girls' school enrolment. Moreover, most women in the village were poor and self-employed, working in occupations such as selling vegetables, snacks, weaving, tailoring, and domestic works. The rate of illiteracy was higher among women than men in the village. The primary roles of women were helping

with family economic activities, domestic labor, and care giving.

5. Concluding Remarks

Over the history of literacy studies (Green, 1988; Heath, 1982, 1983; Street, 1983, 1984, 1995), a broader understanding of what 'literacy' means to individuals in differing social, political, and cultural contexts has been realized and this has brought about a deeper analysis of the role of schools. A vital first step in setting up curriculum and schooling objectives is recognizing what being literate or illiterate means to people in specific cultural contexts. Considering the fact that informal and everyday literacy practices are very different from the more academic literacy taught in schools, there is a wide gap between

the everyday and the formal literacy of the classroom. That is why so many of these literacy activities have not been recognized as Literacy, even by those who employ them – what Nabi et al. (2009) referred to as 'hidden literacies' in her Pakistan study. Literacy in fact, in many situations, is being carried out unconsciously, set in some ordinary activities of life such as shopping, cooking, playing sport, social interaction, etc. This, yet, emphasizes the importance of regarding literacy as embedded in a wide variety of social practices within a specific context and for a specific purpose rather than as a single de-contextualized skill which is relevant in any situation.

Such research results have resulted in a growing recognition that being "literate" has differing meanings according to cultural and social context. Indeed, the education and literacy practice can only be empowering and cost-effective if planners are inspired by the wider definition of skills and build up a more holistic approach. The term multi-modal literacies has been introduced by some scholars (Robinson-Pant, 2004; Street, 2001) which means that literacy activities are done for many different reasons such as religious activities (engaging with Quran, for example), commercial or job-related work (keeping notes of stock or credit given in a shop, for example, or paying bills), personal or family purposes (letters or lists, using a calendar, etc.), or practical reasons (filling in forms, or for bank accounts) (Street, 1984).

Analyzing the obtained data, the researchers concluded that people of the village considered themselves marginalized within the educational program, finding the curriculum irrelevant or not being able to attend schools, because classes were held at the nearby towns or at times when students were needed at home or work. Literacy programs for school-aged children which have been implemented in the rural areas have often been characterized by high drop-out rates and low achievement. This is caused by the lack of social circumstances in which students are either motivated to obtain knowledge or are actually capable of applying this knowledge in their everyday lives. It seems that minor changes in the outlooks of individuals have been made in the past forty years of literacy development by

considering the fact that people in these regions are still struggling with some of the basic necessities of life, and education is a sort of luxury in their lives which can easily been ignored.

People of the village like to apply literacy skills in their everyday lives. However, there is a gap between policy makers' objectives of education, the kind of curriculum provided and students and their parents' reasons for enrolling at schools, a theme that is also evident across many countries (Rogers & Street, 2012). This conflict is the main reason for high drop-out rates for many students among the local population. Since formal education fails to meet people's need to survive in the poor village, the dropout rate is drastically high. People feel that such education leads nowhere. The course content needs to be more creative, skills-based placing more emphasis on practical activities, as the principal stated. Above all, education should include vocational-technical training, as Rogers (2008) demonstrates from an international perspective.

Over the past decades, Iranian policy makers attempted to raise the status of education in the society through improving school facilities and employing knowledgeable and skillful teachers. Children everywhere, boys and girls alike, have to complete a full course of primary schooling. Contrary to all the effort that has been made, some school programs in Iran fail specifically when targeting the poorest groups in rural areas. At the same time, girls' subordinate position is evident. In fact, schooling reinforces women's second class status within educational and work contexts and multiplies the effects of discrimination. Many girls face significant difficulty because of their limited mobility. Limitations such as location considered as one of the main reasons for school dropout. The long distance from the school can in some cases result in them not feeling safe going to school. Moreover, parents' concern about girls' safety is higher compared to the boys'.

All in all, planners need to respond to people's own purposes for wanting to learn literacy and participate in schools. This also entails that curriculum planning should be more participatory, considering not only the visible

barriers, such as timing or location, but also the relation of school programs to their everyday literacy practices. Achieving this aim and finding out why people in rural areas want to acquire literacy or how it could be useful in their lives is not easy. Planners have often not taken the differences of students in different geographical areas and varied economical and cultural status into account. Concerning females, planners need an investigation of the roles that girls and women currently play. This includes how they use or draw on other forms of support for literacy in their everyday lives and they have to try to incorporate literacy skills relevant to women's lives into school programs.

Planners should identify required skills for people living in rural areas and try to build on these skills. At the same time, they need to provide opportunities for people to go into new areas of work. This also involves an awareness of differences along with social, cultural, and economic background. A one-size-fits-all program using a standardized textbook cannot meet the many different experiences and motivations which exist in society. We see in many cases that school curriculums make many students and their parents disappointed. Different approaches will be needed for different learning needs and experiences. Much greater flexibility is required to meet the expectations of people. The school curriculum and program should help and support students in developing greater confidence to handle many different situations as they arise. Literacy with practical empowerment needs to be coupled to promise of long-lasting impact on the society.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule (Issues Discussed in Interviews)

- Financial issues in the village, ways of earning money,
- Social and cultural context of the village,
- The religious character of the village,
- The ways in which the village relates to the city,
- School-related issues such as physical condition, school facilities, and teachers.
- factors affect the decision to quit school,
- Which varieties of literacy are more influential and mostly employed in the village,
- Whether the different literacy practices identified with specific social activities or not,
- The relationship among education and power, income-generating activities, employment, working condition, and social status,
- How people of different ages think the education affects their future,

- What is difference between girls and boys in the village regarding school and literacy,
- People's dreams about the future and possible changes that may occur,
- Whether children remain in the village or go to the city for further education/ jobs,
- People's ideas about the importance of education, literacy, and the kind of literacy needed to survive,

- People's ideas about the quality of education in the village compared to the other places,
- The status of women and girls in the village? Do they study? What is the average age of marriage for girls? Do the fathers and husbands generally agree to woman education? How do women participate in village economic activities?