

PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS AND ITS IMPACT ON LITERACY LEVEL WITH REFERENCE TO HUMAN RESOURCE AND MANAGEMENT (DEVELOPMENT)

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ABSTRACT

The concept and phenomenon of education is of modern origin, not only in India, but also in the developing countries and the West. It is only with the emergence of the industrial revolution, that children's education based on school going received a boost in the West. In India too, contemporary education draws from Western origins. In India, the traditional content of education was esoteric and metaphysical, its reach was limited to upper castes and its organization was inscriptive. Modern education, on the other hand, is rational and scientific and open to all groups on the basis of merit. Education is seen as the most influential agent of modernization-apart from industrialization and urbanization in India.

Social behaviour is governed by the norms and values of the society, which are a crucial component of its cultural traditions, continuing over generations. These factors impinge on the entirety of the individual's social life including his or her educational choices and opportunities. Hence, educational decisions of children too are group decisions, taken by the family or the household. These are governed by the socio cultural determinants such as the socialization process within the family, the marriage and kinship patterns, the religious beliefs of the group and the norms governing caste relations within the village community. Numerous empirical studies have brought out the fact that educational decisions are made by the household on behalf of the children. These pertain to issues such as enrolment, attendance and withdrawal.

KEYWORDS: *School Dropouts, Literacy Level, Human Resource & Management*

INTRODUCTION

The concept and phenomenon of education is of modern origin, not only in India, but also in the developing countries and the West. It is only with the emergence of the industrial revolution, that children's education based on school going received a boost in the West. In India too, contemporary education draws from Western origins. According to Yogendra Singh, in India, the traditional content of education was esoteric and metaphysical, its reach was limited to upper castes and its organization was ascriptive. Modern education, on the other hand, is rational and scientific and open to all groups on the basis of merit. Education is seen as the most influential agent of modernization-apart from industrialization and urbanization in India(Singh 1973).

The British laid the foundation of modern education in India. Macaulay's Policy of 1835, Sir Charles Wood's Dispatch of 1854 and the Indian Education Commission were the major historical landmarks. The educational organization that emerged gradually possibly will be classified into primary, high school / secondary school and college / university education. Primary education (taught in the regional language) remained neglected while higher education (taught in

English) received a fillip. The neglect of the primary education continued till it became a provincial subject. Thus, the modern education system in India, started by the British, remained the preserve of the upper castes and the urban, high and rich classes with a heavy slant on higher education. With India gaining independence, the government attempted to extend the reach of primary education to the masses, particularly in the rural areas. Thus, universalisation of elementary education became an accepted concept and a national project.

ECONOMIC FACTORS PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The role of economic factors and their influence on educational decisions of families is widely acknowledged. According to the Probe Report, "education is treated as an investment" (*Probe Report 1999*). Especially in the rural context, under conditions of socio-economic deprivation, costs and benefits of this 'investment' are rationally analyzed in terms of two aspects:

- Expectations of benefits, which may be economic and non-economic in nature.
- The ability of families to sustain both the direct and indirect costs involved in schooling.

The absence of any of these could lead to a situation of educational deprivation characterized by non-enrolment, irregular attendance and discontinuance. Conversely, it has also been found that economic well being facilitates this process of schooling. In order to understand the exact role played by the economic factors in determining access and retention of rural children in schools, the following relevant surveys and empirical studies are examined. After briefly discussing the role of economic indicators in facilitating schooling, a detailed examination of how poverty has been impeding the schooling process is undertaken by examining the interface between poverty, child labour and schooling. Available evidence from studies and statistics reveals that the large majority of in-school children come from economically better off households.

Per capita Income

The income group a family belongs to co-relates with enrolment. Enrolment and participation rates are lower for low income families, while greater household wealth enhances school participation of both boys and girls.

Based on the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) I data, Filmer and Pritchett showed that there is a strong wealth effect on the probability of enrolment. All else being equal, a child from a household from the highest quintile is 31 percentage points more likely to be in school than a child from a poor quintile (*Filmer & Pritchett 1999*).

Land Owning Patterns and Enrolment

Land owning status, which is the main determinant of economic position in rural areas, exerts a great influence on enrolment as can be seen by higher enrolments among families with larger land holdings. Children of families with small / marginal land holdings face a problem, as their children are often withdrawn to work on land (*Reddy Shiva et al 1992*). Jeemol Unni points out that as the size of cultivated land increases, the proportion of girls attending school increases (*Unni 1996*).

Nature of Occupation

The main occupation of households in rural India also affects school participation of children. Studies show that non-

agricultural households have a greater chance of children attending school compared to agricultural families. Within agricultural groups, the children of labourers are least likely to get enrolled and studies have found a high degree of illiteracy amongst them. Shiva Reddy's study of Andhra Pradesh finds that, a village where the majority of population depends on non-agriculture for their livelihood was one of the best enrolled villages at all levels of education (Reddy Shiva *et al*, 1992). The study conducted by Pandey and Talwar on educational attainment of children in Uttar Pradesh, shows that the occupation of the father is closely associated with child's literacy status. It was found that fathers working as agricultural labourers have the largest percentage of illiterate children while fathers in service had lowest. Also, children of agricultural labourers often had to discontinue schooling to engage in some job for improving the economic status of the family.

Parental Motivation for Son's Education

A wealth of evidence is available from literature on primary education, to show that an overwhelming majority of parents attach great importance to the education of their children. However, this educational motivation is highly gender-specific. While the parental motivation for the son's education is high amongst all social groups, a commitment to female education is still rather inadequate. This differential motivation is a result of the differences in the perceived benefits from the education of boys versus girls. The overwhelming reason for the high parental interest in sons' education, as brought out by various studies, is 'economic'. This refers to the economic returns accruing to the family, from the employment the son may get. Moreover, educating sons is also important for providing parents with financial assistance and security in their old age. Caldwell *et al*, in their study of rural Karnataka, show how at the end of elementary school, if the son does well and shows scholastic interest, the family considers educating him further, anticipating substantial returns to their investment (Caldwell *et al*, 1985). Indian families prefer to invest in the son's education since returns of this investment remain within the family. In contrast, returns of the investment in daughter's education typically flow into her husband's family (Dreze and Saran 1993; World Bank Report 1997). This predominantly economic reasoning for educating sons leads to prioritizing boy's education over that of the girl's, since he is regarded as the potential breadwinner for the family. Apart from the economic benefits, parents also realize the social benefits of educating the son, leading to improvement in one's social status and increasing his own confidence and self esteem, apart from providing the family with avenues for social mobility.

Analysing the economic returns to elementary education, the Probe Report, quoting from a number of studies in India, found that the earnings of adults with primary education were twice as high compared to illiterates. Compared to mere literacy, primary education enhanced a person's earning by 20 per cent (Probe Report 1999).

ECONOMIC FACTORS IMPEDING PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTAINMENT

While traditionally it had been assumed that poverty hindered enrolment and completion of primary schooling by children, recent research, based on surveys and studies shows a positive trend of high enrolments even among the poorer sections in rural India. Regular attendance and completion of primary schooling, however, still remain as issues. The fact that poverty is a hindrance to schooling should not be looked at in absolute terms. Inter-regional variations in educational achievements between UP and Kerala, for instance, show that while both the states had an average of 45 per cent, people below the poverty line, Kerala had a literacy rate of 90 per cent, while UP's literacy rate was only 40.5 per cent (Bhatta 1998).

Other empirical studies also show that among the very poor landless labourers, in poor economic conditions, parents send their children to school more easily, as they are not needed for productive work on the farm. Narayan (1984) found that a harijan village in Tamil Nadu, with abject poverty, had a literacy rate of above 99 per cent for males and

females (quoted in Bhatta 1998). These instances and exceptions go to show that the relation between poverty and schooling must be seen in the proper context and not in isolation.

- Children are engaged in domestic or productive work in the household or family farm thereby contributing economically. Thus, the poor families cannot spare their services.
- The direct costs of education are unaffordable for poor families. Thus, poor children are educationally disadvantaged compared to the children of the wealthier households.

The fact that poverty leads to educational deprivation is supported by large-scale survey-based statistics. In a study of 15 states conducted by National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in 1994, it was found that the children of poor families are less likely to be enrolled in schools than children of better-off families. It showed that the enrolment rates in the lowest annual income households was, on an average, 25 percentage points lower than the rates for the highest income households.

The disadvantage of being poor is more pronounced in the higher age group, with discontinuation rates being higher for children in the 11-14 age group in low-income households, compared to those in high income households. The survey also shows that states or regions, which are poorer, have larger number of out-of-school children, such as Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, the disparity in enrolment rates between high and low-income groups is wider in states with poor enrolment rates and with greater number of poor. States like Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have lower enrolment in the last two income categories, while states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra show the difference in enrolment rates across different income groups.

Discontinuation rates for the poorest children are also two times higher than for children from the higher income households. The World Bank report on primary education, quoting NCAER household survey data of 1992-93, states that, the dropout rate for poorer children, from families with below Rs. 3000 per capita income, was on an average four times higher than for the children of richer households with above Rs. 10,000 per capita income (*World Bank 1997*).

The Context of Out of School Children in Relation to Poverty and Child Work

Typically, the phenomenon of out of school children is linked to two factors - poverty and child labour. In the rural context, these out-of-school children comprise those who are never enrolled.

The nominally enrolled with irregular attendance and those who joined but discontinued or dropped out. In rural India, poverty is essentially linked to the nature of agriculture, which is the main source of livelihood for people and is often subsistence based. Being rain dependent it is characterized by low productivity and uncertainty of returns. Land distribution is unequal, with concentration in the hands of a few. Majority of the people possess small and marginal land holdings, while others are the landless labourers. There is also absence or inadequate livestock holdings and a high dependence on wage work (*Jha and Jhingran 2002; Subramanian 1999; Vasavi and Mehendale 2003*). Studies show how the context of poverty and deprivation in poor households is characterized by, amongst other things, instability, uncertainty, indebtedness, food insecurity, short term survival strategies, engagement of children in work and illiteracy in the family.

Such a set of economic conditions significantly affects the lives of children in rural India. Jha and Jhingran point out that since hiring labour for agricultural activities proves uneconomical for families with small land holdings, family labour is utilized. Children in poor families are thus engaged in a variety of economic activities for their family - domestic

chores, sibling care, cattle grazing, farm work etc. The implication of this is that they are unable to attend full time regularly.

SUGGESTIONS

- The government should come forward to set up a school in every village and / or upgrade the levels of the existing schools.
- The existing facilities in the government need to be enhanced enormously in order to retain the students, particularly the female students.
- It is always important to iron the cause of the problem, rather than the consequence. Hence, the major reason for drop out, viz., poor family income should be tackled immediately, to arrest any further increase in drop out.
- The gender phenomenon of drop out, i.e., dropping out of more female children than male children, should be given more attention in order to increase the literacy level of the female children.
- Drop out needs to be plugged immediately as it has led to declining literacy levels among the sample households and particularly among the female children.

CONCLUSIONS

This study clearly brings out the nature and extent of the problem of drop out among the sample households in the district of Kanchipuram. It is concluded that the nature of occupation, level of income, educational levels of the parents and also the place of residence of the parents play the most significant role in deciding the extent of drop out among the children. Moreover, the distance of the existing school, particularly that of the higher level of school and also the facilities extended at the schools work as impediments or the problems faced by the dropped out children. Hence, the government should come forward to improve the levels of the existing schools and also to reduce the distance of schools by creating more schools in the rural areas.

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