

Issues and Concerns of School Dropouts in India

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Preamble

Child development assumes significance in a civilized society because children require safety, security, education and other developmental opportunities. The children have certain fundamental rights such as – right to survival, right to development, right to protection and right to participation. The children have very special and distinct needs which can no longer be overlooked by the state, civil society, NGOs and other stakeholders of child development. The NGOs have ventured into several developmental endeavors including human development. The role of NGOs in the educational development becomes crucial in a developing country like India. The school dropout scenario in India is extremely high. Karnataka state also has a sizable number of school dropouts due to several social and economic constraints. The present investigation was carried out on the role of NGOs in mainstreaming school dropouts in Mysuru region. The salient features of the study such as intervention of NGOs in development, issues and concerns of school dropouts in India, school dropouts in Karnataka, NGO initiative in the inclusive educational development, significance of the study, statement of the problem and objectives of the study are amplified in this chapter.

School Dropouts in India

There are several factors which are responsible for the school dropouts in India. The school dropout indicates continuous absenteeism of a child to school. But the duration of absenteeism varies according to the adopted frame of time. The reasons like child health, parental or child disinterest to attend the school for a period of more than 30 days is required to be verified by the local teachers and corrective measures are to be initiated to make the child attend the school regularly. There are number of ways through which retention and dropout are measured. Hundred minus retention rate is termed as gross dropout rate which includes repeaters. The enrollment, attendance marked by the teachers and actual attendance of children in a class are important and provide some basis to estimate the level of absenteeism of students in a school.

School dropout is influenced by several independent factors such as social status, economic status, cultural factors, psychological factors, academic environment, quality of teaching, parental attitude, attitude of children and political environment. The dropout indicates continuous absenteeism of a child to school. The teachers are responsible for initiating suitable action for regular attendance of the students in the schools. Hundred minus retention rate is termed as gross dropout rate which includes repeaters. Retention of children is as important as enrollment in the school. Retention can be ensured by managing the internal factors and can be controlled by initiating suitable action within the educational institutions.

Schooling has been made compulsory for all children under fourteen. The government spending on education in India has been raised to six per cent of the GDP. A large number of children in India remain out of school. Many of them are those who do not get enrolled at all. Some of them are those who drop out at one stage or other. The reasons for dropping out include poverty, unemployment, failure in academics, non-availability of schools, inaccessibility of schools and inadequate skill development opportunities. The dropout rate is the ratio of enroll children of a particular stage who drop out of school before completing the stage to the total number of enrolled children.

Issues and Concerns

In the post-independence era, the upper caste people living in the urban areas utilized the educational benefits as compared to tribals, Dalits, minorities and other backward sections of society in India. The educational status of parents has significant association with the school dropouts according to empirical evidence. The National Educational Policy 1986, emphasizes the fact that all the eligible children are to be covered by mainstream learning activities and those who are non enrolled are to be covered through alternative learning processes, designed to suit the needs of various types of children.

The Article 45 of the constitution proposes to provide free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6-14. The Government of India ratified the UN Convention of other Rights of Children (CRC) in 1992. The 83rd Constitutional Amendment bill, 1997 seeks to provide free education for all children up to the age of 14 years as a Fundamental Right. National Policy on Education (NPE) 1992 redefined the educational priorities and made an attempt to address the issue of access, quality and equity in educational processes. The school dropout is influenced by a series of independent factors (variables), namely school environment, socio-economic and socio-psychological factors, prevalence of child labour, age of the child, negative attitude of parents towards education and need to earn livelihood at an early stage of life among certain sections of children.

The Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India has given priority for universalization of education in order to enrich the human resources. The various policies and programmes of the Ministry have successfully enabled the access to quality, inclusive, affordable and meaningful education to children and the people in the country. New initiatives with fresh approach were taken by the government in the new millennium in India. Enrolment of all eligible children of school going age is an important step towards achieving 100 percent literacy.

The Millennium Development Goals have emphasized the need for universalization of primary education and promoting gender equity in education. The National Policy on Education (1986) emphasized the importance of social justice and economic equity through inclusive education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched in India in 2001 to ensure quality oriented education to children in the age group of 6-14 years. This programme has been implemented in partnership with the state governments / union territories and local – self governments. But, the stakeholders of education in India face the challenge of retaining the children in schools and reducing the magnitude of out of school children.

The pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) in primary and upper primary schools in India fell to 28:1 and 30:1 respectively in the recent times. According to the Right To Education Act, the PTR of 30:1 for primary classes and 35:1 for upper primary classes has to be followed. About 30% of primary and 15% of upper primary schools have PTRs higher than 30:1 and 35:1 though the numbers are not specified.

The school dropout scenario in India is extremely high as over 80 million children do not complete the full cycle of elementary education according to UNICEF. Even though India has achieved almost 100 percent access to school for its children at the primary level, it has a high 40 percent drop-out rate at the elementary level. India has failed to meet the target set in the 12th five year plan that is reduction in dropout rates from 40 percent to 20 percent at the elementary level. The findings of the study carried out by Child Rights and You (2013:05) reveals certain disturbing features as follow.

- 1 in 4 children of school-going age is out of school in our country-99million children in total have dropped out of school (Census 2011).
- Out of every 100 children, only 32 children finish their school education age appropriately (District Information System for Education (DISE 2014-15).

- Only 2% of the schools offer complete school education from Class 1 to Class 12 (District Information System for Education (DISE 2014-15).

The policy makers have failed to provide right type of education to the right people at right time which is the key to human resource development. There is a need for high rate of school retention and more educational participation in a developing country like India. Many children still today are out of schools due to one or more reasons despite the enactment of Right to Education in 2012. The initiatives for encouraging children for education have resulted in overall enrollment ratio which is not satisfactory. It has become a difficult task to retain the children in formal schools after they come out of the informal centers run by the *Serva Shiksha Abhiyan*.

The dropout increases considerably when the number of children increases. The level of dropouts comes down when size of the landholdings increases according to empirical evidence (Sengupta and Guha, 2002:21). The communities that took to education earlier had the advantage that was passed on to the next generation (Borooah, 2003:03). In India, more girls than boys drop out, resulting in a widening of the gender gap between primary and secondary and between secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios. The gender differentials in school enrolment and school attendance persist in all the states (Rao and Mohanty, 2004:18).

The low level of literacy within the Muslim community is traditionally explained in terms of the conservative values characterizing Muslim society (Husain, 2005:13). The school dropout is high among SC, ST, minorities and backward children who represent the marginalized sections of society in India. Higher illiteracy or educational backwardness of Muslims is a legacy of the past. Consequently in urban India, following independence, upper caste Hindus were in a better position to take advantage of opportunities for secondary education than Muslims who lagged behind in primary education and literacy (Bhat and Zavier, 2005:02).

It was found that school systems with high rates of repetition also have high dropout rates over the primary cycle. India spends just 3.5 percent of its gross domestic product on education, way below China. It is estimated that at least 35 million children aged 6–14 years are not in school in India due to social and economic constraints of their parents. As students move from primary school to a higher stage of school, the chance of dropping out of school increases 2.7 times (Choudhury, 2006:06).

The revision of the content of education and the planned programme of research into pedagogic innovation involving a number of national educational institutions ensured the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers (Mohan and Vaughan, 2008:14).

The standard of living index also shows significant association with the educational enrollment and progress of the students. The household size, number of living children, and parental education are also the most important predictors of school dropouts in India (Frances, 2008:09). The problem of school dropouts is deeply rooted in the socio-economic structure of the country. The improvement of school infrastructure, quality of education and adequate investment in school education certainly reduce the extent of school dropout.

There are several reasons for dropping out such as failure in academics, non-availability of schools, inaccessibility of schools, pushing out due to teachers' behavior / school environment, financial problems etc (Reddy and Shantha, 2010:19). The rural children are more likely to drop out of school than children living in urban areas due to inadequate livelihood opportunities and infrastructural facilities (Govindaraju and Venkatesan, 2010:11).

The literacy rate in India is well below the world average literacy rate of 84%. India currently has the largest illiterate population of any nation on earth. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India. The ability to calculate the student drop-out rate should be a key to educate planners but this is one key which does not seem to be in the hands of the

Education Department. The main reason for dropping out was financial difficulties for both girls and boys. The domestic duties compel the girls to become school dropouts in addition to the financial backwardness of the parents.

There is a great need for meaningful, multipronged mass action for literacy drive. A further reduction in gaps between males and females in enrolment and retention can be achieved by understanding dynamic of interactions among household work, paid labor, and female education. To address the huge problem of dropouts, policy makers need to look at the factors that lead children to leave school at various stages (Rani, 2011:17). The inefficiency of the formal schooling system has caused the incidence of school drop outs.

The education of girls is lagging behind the boys at all level of school education. Their enrolment is low and dropout rate is higher than boys at all levels of education. The dropout rate is one of the negative indicators of educational development. It is found to be very high among the backward population (Devi and Mahesh, 2011:07). The formal and informal schooling systems have failed in developing academic interest among the students in the absence of innovative techniques. The child marriage in most of the northern states of India has also worsened the situation.

The National Sample Survey Office (2007-08) reveals that universal enrolment, retention and completion in both elementary and secondary education can only be achieved by improving quality and mitigating financial constraints, especially for the lower classes in India (Mukherjee and Sikdar, 2012:15). Employment creation and income generation for the adults have been inadequate in India. The adults are forced to leave the schools for want of livelihood opportunities in the country.

A concerted effort with economic growth, poverty eradication and expansion of elementary education going hand in hand is the need of the hour (Mukherjee, 2011:15). The dropout rate is low in states with better educational and economic progress. The household and parental characteristics primarily influence the school dropouts (Satadru and Anit, 2012:20). The lack of basic amenities in the existing schools also matters in the increasing of school drop outs. The shortage of teachers in the primary schools also leads to increase in school dropouts.

The tribal people have lagged behind education despite nation's efforts to ensure constitutional equality, dignity and development. They have experienced both external as well as internal constraints regarding their educational development. A large number of tribal schools do not have teaching-learning materials, or even blackboards. The authorities and educators have not made serious attempt to change the content and curriculum to suit the tribal context.

The uniform structure and transaction of curriculum has put tribal children at a disadvantage. These constraints force them to drop-out their education at very early levels and higher education is only a dream for them (Haseena and Mohammed, 2014:12). Adequate teachers, infrastructural facilities, teacher-students rapport, quality education and counseling of parents can play a vital role in the reduction of school dropouts.

The economic exploitation of children is an insult to humanity. The children are forced to work by putting at stake their education, their health, their normal development to adulthood, and even their lives in India. The girls are indeed the worst victims of circumstances. Girl education naturally increases girls' socioeconomic status and earning potential. The education gives them the skills to negotiate in their lives (Chandramohan, 2015:04). The intensity of poverty is an important factor for the persistence of school drop outs in India.

The lack of financial resources to pursue education is the most dominating reason for dropouts across the country. Lack of infrastructural amenities and negative perceptions of the parents also are responsible for dropouts in schools. To sojourn dropouts carefully designed

policies, identification of prospective dropout students and effective policy implementation is necessitated. Increased enrolments are just the necessary condition to enhance the opportunities of an equitable access to education. Curbing dropouts as a sufficient condition is imperative to the success of the education system in India (Ahir, 2015:01). Hence, employment generating schemes for the parents would be helpful in combating the problem of school drop outs. A decentralized approach of income generation is the need of the hour to create an enabling atmosphere.

A recent report released by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has pointed out that India accounts for a third of the world's child brides. There is a link between child marriage and drop-outs due to the socio-economic causes. The rights of the children need to be revised to cater to girls between the ages of 15 and 18 (Education News Agency, 2016:08).

The share of incidences of school drop-out is still alarmingly high in India. Of all children enrolled into primary school, only about 66% of the school children in India reach grade. The school dropout is seen as a major challenge in universalizing elementary education in India. There is a need for transmission of structures of inequality and poverty between generations. The parental education level may act as a major tool for inter-generational social upward mobility. The private and municipal schools, under the direction of the government, should incorporate their own drop-out rehabilitation and recovery systems (Gloor et. al, 2016:10). Governmental intervention and civil society support are required to prevent child marriage, child labour and other adverse circumstances.

Conclusion

The Right to Education Act (2012) serves as a building block to ensure that every child has the right to attain a quality elementary education without any direct or indirect costs borne by the child or his/her family. Experience reveals that a large number of children are not completing the basic cycle despite the growing demand for primary education. The government should meet the target of ensuring adequate infrastructure, teachers and other facilities for inclusive educational development. But, the states have failed to meet the goals due to lack of political will and social responsibility. This tendency has brought about increasing school dropouts in the country. It is necessary to re-orient the operation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in order to adopt transforming and facilitating approaches to education in India. The cultural, regional, social and economic dimensions should be taken into consideration to rejuvenate the basic education system in India.

The issue of high dropout rate in rural and urban schools has been plaguing the Indian education system for a long time now. The need for employment generation has been a major reason for dropping out of schools in India. The formal and informal school systems are not properly equipped with the skill development and vocational training opportunities. India is also facing the problem of an acute shortage of skilled labour. Skill development therefore needs to be carried out alongside academics in schools to bring about a positive change. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras with schools at the district level would help in improving the status of vocational education in the country. This initiative would also arrest the problem of school dropouts and motivates the children to remain in the schools and equip themselves with necessary learning and earning opportunities.

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