Evaluation Of Socio-Economic Factors Of Dropout Elimentary School Students With Special Reference To Malda District, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT:
The aim of the present study was to find out the factors which result in dropping out from primary schools. The study deals with student's experiences which led to their dropping out from their respective schools. The study was to examine why the number of students who drop out are from impoverished socio- economic backgrounds. It examines the stories of dropout students to analyze their experiences of dropping out. The emphasis is given to the narrative of each student to determine the factors which influenced their dropping out of their respective schools. In this article, socio-economic factors of dropout elimentary school students with special reference to Malda District, West Bengal has been evaluated.

Keywords: Dropout, School, Students, Socio-economic, Malda, West Bengal

INTRODUCTION:

In this study I examined how socio-economic deprivation can affect the decision of continuation or discontinuation of schooling. Each participant's life highlights the situations and circumstances in which a student drops out of school. Through the study, I tried to give a voice to the dropout students to speak what is unspoken. Although it is context specific, but the insights lend a scope of understanding various other contexts much more deeply and prospects for change if we know the underlying issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND INTERPRETATION:

Research Design:

The investigation into the problems surrounding elementary school dropouts took place in the Malda district of West Bengal. A thorough grasp of the people and their behaviour is necessary for this investigation. I had to comprehend the causes of dropouts, portray them

truthfully, and show how they relate to socioeconomic factors. To assure the accuracy and thoroughness of the data, I chose to use a qualitative technique in this study.

When the nature of the research topic calls for inquiry, a qualitative approach is justified. Additionally, a qualitative study enables the researcher to investigate phenomena that are challenging to identify or understand using traditional research techniques, such as emotions or thinking processes. Exploratory and descriptive research can be done through the use of qualitative research methods by using context and setting to look for a deeper understanding of the people being researched. Additionally, qualitative methods seek to develop a comprehensive understanding of human behaviour and the factors that influence it.

Contrary to the positivist tradition, non-positivist approaches contend that because human behaviour is not mechanistic, it is distinct from examining other parts of the natural world.

Additionally, interpretive, naturalistic research, or studying things in their natural environments, is a component of qualitative research. This method likewise emphasises the subjective nature of human life while attempting to comprehend social processes in context. In the current study, I was also curious to learn more about the underlying reality and to observe how students who dropped out were perceived in a particular social setting.

In the present study, I wanted to uncover the underlying phenomenon of dropping out. I wanted to explore the root causes of the dropout phenomenon. The attempt was to understand how the phenomenon of dropping out is occurring in a particular socio economic set up.

The dropping out of children from primary schools is not uniform across any district or state and for that matter it varies across the country. It can be safely stated that the most important reason for this includes the socio-economic impediments and to some extent the geographical terrain. The geographical surroundings and available resources also impinge upon the socio economicconditions. I have tried to explore and explain in the present study how the socioeconomic condition influences the issue of dropping out of schools.

Research Site:

The present study was conducted on a sample drawn from the schools of Malda district (West Bengal). The unit of observation is primary schools. Most of these schools are located in the rural areas where socio-economic problem persists.

Randomly, six blocks have been choosen for conducting this research. The blocks included are Manikchak, Gazole, Bamangola, Habibpur, Englishbazar, Old Malda. Two schools were

chosen randomly from each block. 41 dropout cases could be identified from the official records, out of which 21 could be contacted and they form the sample of the study.

Teachers and Head Masters of the schools from which students dropped out, were contacted for studying their perception.

Participants:

Participants for the study are primary school students of the twelve schools who dropped out of these schools during the school year November 2020-October 21.

Although I had chosen twelve schools for my study, but I had to restrict it to seven schools, as rest of the five schools blatantly denied having any dropout cases. They refused to share any records with me as well. In the present study I have considered just the official record provided by the schools.

I managed to interact with almost all the teachers and the headmasters of the sample schools. Altogether thirty teachers, including seven headmasters were interviewed.

Gaining Access and Entry:

The children whom I decided to interact with are no longer a part of the respective school. So, at first I had to approach the school authorities for their necessary co- operation. I gained adequate support from most of them. Then through respective teachers of the sample schools I gained school records access. It was required to collect data from the school records in order to obtain demographic data to establish contact with the dropout students. Once contact data was obtained, each participant's communication was established. I visited their place as per their convenience.

Data Collection Method:

The study demanded an in-depth understanding of the children, their social set-up and the context. So, I opted for interviews as a basic data collection tool. In-depth interviews are the essence of qualitative research. The advantage is highlighted in the statement. Interviewing's main benefit is that it makes it possible to explicitly focus on the researcher's own experiences as well as those of the interviewees.

The current study focuses on the causes of dropout in a particular setting. I conducted interviews with kids, their parents, and school staff in order to investigate and elucidate the specifics surrounding the kids' decision to quit attending school. In addition to these classroom observations being recorded, the field notes were employed as the main method of data collection. A school information sheet was also produced and filled out to obtain details about each recognised school.

School Information Sheet:

The information sheet was prepared with a view to collect information about the chosen schools. It consists of items such as (a) Name of the school (b) Year of establishment (c) Month from which academic year begins (d) Last month of academic year (e) Type of management of the school (f) Medium of instruction followed and (g) Enrolment in the school (h) Infrastructure of the school (i) Facility of light (j) Water facility (k) Teaching-learning material etc.

Interviews:

Interview is a method which easily depicts subjects' life histories and their experiences. In the present study it was a basic requirement to depict the actual stories of dropout students. So, I chose Interview as a method of data collection. The interviews conducted for this study involved semi-structured interviews.

I was interested in learning about and comprehending a child's mentality. What causes a child to "drop out" of school?

The children talked about their experiences in school, their parents' support for their education, the demeanour of the teachers in class, their daily activities, etc. I also asked for information on their name, age, description of their living situation, their family's composition, the highest degree of schooling their parents or siblings had reached, and the reasons they had dropped out of school. Additionally, parents were questioned regarding their goals for their child, their upbringing, and the significance of school in their ward's life.

Teachers and head masters of the school were also interviewed. They also gave necessary information about the dropout child, his/her performance and behavior in the schools etc. Interviews of the Head of the School includes 15 questions some of which are open ended and some others are close ended. The aim of this interview schedule was to obtain information from the Head about the management of the school, infrastructure of the school, about the teaching –learning system of the schools, the reasons of dropout and measures they took for retaining children in school.

Interview schedule for parents of dropout or guardians were to find out the socio-economic factors responsible for dropout. This includes both close ended and open ended questions. It intends to know their educational qualification, income, view about education, the reason of their child leaving the school.

Interviews of dropout students were a means to find out the factors responsible for dropout. It contains items like educational status of the family, reason for leaving the

school, whether interested to join school again or not and what conditions or facilities are required.

Lastly, interviews of teachers include both open ended and close ended questions. The aim of this interview schedule is to obtain information from the teachers about their perceived reasons regarding dropout and measures for retaining children in the school. These questionnaires or interview schedules were translated from English to Bengali.

Observation:

I also observed the sample schools. I visited each school four times. I especially focused on those schools from which dropout cases were identified. I visited those schools repeatedly. During my stay in the schools I observed the classroom situation, especially the interactions between students and teachers. I observed the school procedures to get an idea of the school processes, norms, people's behavior and activities. The complexities of human behavior can be easily understood by the method of observation.

Field Notes:

The most important aspect of the data collection procedure is taking field notes. Throughout the study notes were taken, it began from the day when the participant was contacted. Extensive notes were taken during the whole procedure about the participant's posture, gesture, and their body languages or even of nuances created by them. Some striking words or sentences of the participant were given special attention, note down in a different diary. During the interview procedure a sincere effort was made to articulate the stories of dropout in their social set up and the school environment. I, as a researcher, tried to keep myself bias free and reflective.

Document Review:

Admission registers and other records of the school provided information about progression from one grade to the next, absences, residential addresses, etc. Although in some of the cases information provided by the participants contradicted the school records.

Besides primary data some secondary data were also collected like various documents, plans and programs materials and reports have been studied and reviewed to understand the depth of the problem.

Table 1: Data Collection Means/tools

Data Collection Means/tools	Details
1. School Information Sheet	Information regarding school: Name of the school, Year of establishment, Month from which academic year begins, Last month of the academic year, school management type, Medium of instruction & enrollment in the school.
2. Interview	Interview of the Headmasters (seven), teachers (twenty one), parents of dropout students (twenty three), children (twenty one).
3. Observation	Visited each school at least four times. Then, I focused on the schools with highest dropout rate. I repeatedly visited those schools and collected information on school procedures, student-teacher interaction.
4. Field Notes	Extensive notes were taken during the whole procedure of data collection. During the interview procedure a sincere effort was made to articulate the stories of dropout in their social set up and the school environment.
5. Document Review	Admission registers and other records of the school provide information about progression from one grade to the next, absences, number of home addresses.

Who Is Considered as Dropout in This Study?

In this study dropout are those students who discontinue their study in between the session or who don't return to the school after "failure". The researcher did not include those, who took a T.C. (Transfer Certificate) from the school.

Research Steps:

For data collection, the researcher visited selected schools & recorded the enrolment and attendance of the students during November 2020 to October 2021 with the permission of Head master/ Head mistress of the school.

After preparing the interview schedules in Bengali I conducted a pilot study in nearby schools to get an idea of the appropriateness of the items prepared for the interactions. I wanted to also assess the time required for final interaction. A few questions which seemed unclear or ambiguous to the respondents were replaced with other more suitable questions.

I interviewed the teachers and collected necessary information from them. While interviewing the teachers I also collected information about the location of the children's houses. Teachers are well informed about their houses because according to them they have taken the pains to visit the residences of the children to persuade them to rejoin the school. Many of these children live in hutments which are difficult to locate through the address mentioned in the school records.

While visiting each houses an apparently "casual approach" was maintained and interviews were conducted in an informal yet sensitive tone. Once rapport was established, the contents of the interview were discussed with care. The parents and the children were made to feel free to express their views.

Information was collected regarding their household possession, facilities available in localities like electricity, water, accommodation, toilet facilities, source of drinking water, animals reared etc. Also data were collected about the socio-economic, cultural and political involvement of the family. Information was gathered about important village festivals and the participation of families in rituals. Moreover, the researcher took into account infrastructure facilities available in school, instructional language used in school and facilities required in school. Also the researcher took the view of the parents about advantages and disadvantages of education, their aspirations related to their children, constraints faced to send their children to school. After collection of required information the investigator expressing her gratitude to the respective parents for their help.

Not only this I also maintained a personal diary throughout the field visit. In this diary I noted down all the necessary information which was not mentioned in the interview schedule. I also recorded some information which was not directly provided by the respondents, but could be elicited from their body language.

Data Management and Interpretation:

Data analysis and datamanagement techniquesare of immense importance for any research. The validity of research is dependent on this. In the present study I needed to

thoroughly study the dropout behavior and to portray their stories accordingly. In qualitative research data collection and analysis goes on side by side. In a qualitative study data analysis is not a mechanical task, but a creative one.

I maintained separate folders for separate schools and their participants. After completion of data collection procedure documents were read as a whole.

For data interpretation, primary codes & themes were developed based on the collected data. The backdrop of interpretation of data is dropout phenomenon occurring in a special society set up. Certain words and ideas were picked out of the whole set of data which stood for initial codes. It helped to categorize the large set of data in a specific manner. Then other codes and themes were also generated to see whether they fit into a particular framework or not. In the present study some prominent codes which emerged include: family structure, education of parents, education of siblings, parental aspiration, experience of schools, etc. The initial codes helped me to categorize the data further i.e. the themes. Themes are actually segments of data grouped in one category. After that, I analyzed these themes and it helped me to give a detailed description of each case. The emergent themes were written into narrative passages so that a logical finding can be given based on the responses of the participants. In the light of these themes I tried to explain the factors associated with dropping out behavior as stated by the participants. I put special emphasis on participants' view, their expectations for future practice. Throughout the process of interpretation multiple data sources were analyzed for data triangulation. After the analysis a draft of the findings was summarized.

Shortcomings of the Study:

The present research work has been delimited to the seven primary schools of Malda district, West Bengal. Due to constraints of time and finance the researcher had to satisfy herself with the findings of these schools only. The scope of the study is also limited to particular contexts.

The participants are from socio-economically deprived section. So, the study focuses only on a particular group of students.

Researcher has omitted the students from the list of dropout who has already taken T.C. (Transfer Certificate) from their schools. If the researcher would have considered those cases, she might have got some more names as dropouts. The assumption is that, they have already taken admission in any other school, but there is a possibility that some may not have taken admission in any other school.

Impediments:

It is very difficult for a researcher to give a bias free opinion. Bracketing views and opinions helped the researcher to remain bias free. A memo was useful to keep the biases within the bracket. To keep myself bias free I maintained a diary. I have noted every detail, whatever I saw or spoke about. I was also apprehended there could be a problem in some places, so for that I kept a modest frame of mind and took consent as and when required from the headmasters, the school secretaries, the teachers or parents of the dropout students. Most importantly, regular minute detailed notes helped me keep genuine evidence of the facts I observed, information gathered.

Ethical Issues:

Participants were well informed about the research and it was also clearly stated to them that it being conducted to understand their life experiences. It was also shared that their identity would not be disclosed under any circumstances. So, here pseudo names have been used to maintain their privacy. Informed consent helped to resolve the ethical issue. Also the risks and benefits were stated with clarity.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

The reasons of dropout are many. Of the different factors, relating to the phenomenon of drop-out which emerged, some are general and others context specific.Before, I started my journey into the interiors of Malda district as an investigator, I had an idea about the climatic conditions, the land quality, terrain and related commuting difficulties in the district. Still, when I ventured into the micro interiors of Malda for my study, I felt hurt, disturbed and distressed observing plight and pitiable condition of the people. The real scenario, I found, was gloomier than what I had expected. Interviews with the dropout students, their parents, teachers of the schools and related insights provided me the direction to understand the root cause of the dropping out phenomenon prevailing in the area. There are various reasons of dropping out of the children from schools. A single reason does not explain the phenomenon. The factors resulting in dropping out are found to be overlapping to each other and entwined to the context. The causes can be categorized into: structural, cultural and attitudinal.The cultural background of the social group may at times hamper the progress of the children. This includes the time devoted to communal functions, ceremonies and rituals. The kinship bonds are given much importance and lot of time goes into celebration of joys and sorrows together.In case of Malda, if the school is at the prescribed distance, then also it becomes difficult for the children to attend the school. Many areas are unfavorable to commute. In rainy seasons it becomes more difficult for small children to reach the school, as the routes become muddy. In some areas there are paddy fields and it becomes difficult even for adults to navigate their way. A child, Gopal Soyali, left the school because he found it difficult to negotiate the distance daily.

In the present study, the low family income is the most prominent factor influencing dropping out of the children. Affording two square meals of dal-rice per day seems like a luxury. Thus, all members of a family contribute in some way or the other towards subsistence. Education, ration card, drinking water, electricity are just unthinkable. In some families condition may be a shade better, but not enough to encourage their children to go to school. SapanTudu, Phoolkumari, LakhiramHembram are examples enough. Malda display the picture of wanton poverty and distress. Most people are either unfed or half-fed. Clothing are strikingly scanty, the living accommodation consists of a kuchhahouse comprising of 1 or 2 shabby rooms with no electricity and proper drinking water. There is no scope of separate sanitary condition or cooking space in the houses. The problem becomes more critical when it is conjoined with apathy or teachers' indifference: This emerges as a major problem. The teachers seem to treat their work like a clerical job which has to be done with. They somehow pass their time in the school and assume their duty is over. The teachers were found lacking in passion, emotions and intellectual drive. In certain schools where there are two or three teachers one of them is found to be, unsurprisingly, on leave. This happens in rotation. They seem to have a mutual understanding between them. Reasons for this are various; some have small businesses, farm land, or some are involved in supporting Panchayat-member of their family. A few teachers are members of teachers' union and they feel they are not answerable to anyone! The politics often involves merely politicking which is a major issue in rural West Bengal. Teaching community is actively involved in the union, Panchayat or the state level politics. This adversely affects the time they are able to devote to teaching in schools. The Joint Review Mission, 2013 also talks of perceived biases in teacher recruitment. [1-3]

The reasons for dropout are multiple and complex. Most tribal students like Sreetama Soren, ModhuKisku find it extremely difficult to comprehend text in Bengali. As mentioned earlier the tribal children speak Santhali, and Santhal teachers are very rare.

Many or most teachers are from general, OBC and are very few are schedule caste and schedule tribes. The children and their parents perceive discrimination on part of the teachers. The perception of discrimination can play a havoc with children's self-esteem. The teachers also construct children as backward and think that education is not their cup of tea. They look down upon the children from tribal background. Another studiesconfirms that compared to children from privileged castes, backward class student is 3.2 times more likely to dropout. [4-5]

The infrastructure and other facilities in the school add to the problem. Most of the sample schools lacked adequate number of decent classrooms, seating arrangement, lighting and fans etc. There is no separate toilet facility for girls. In some schools there is no boundary wall or gate outside the school. The children can come and leave the school premises easily while the school is on.Death of parents is also a cause of dropping out as the present study

revealed (LakhiramHembram, Sanatan Das). Death of parent not only cause deprivation from parental care but sometimes the child has to shoulder the household responsibility as well. Such children find it difficult to cope with multiple responsibilities at such a tender age and drop – out of schools.

The children in the study area are undernourished; most of them stay in unhygienic conditions so they become susceptible to different diseases. This is due to economic backwardness. Ill health of the children and lack of medical attention compels a child to leave school as was seen the case of SubalBaske.

The study also shows that irregular attendance is precursor of premature withdrawal from school. There are various reasons (ill health, assisting parents in agricultural or household work, sibling care, time devoted to cultural festivals etc) for which children remain absent from the schools for long periods of time. On rejoining school they are not able to catch up with ongoing lessons in the school. This results in losing interest in studies and the decision to drop out.Moreover, what happens in the classroom is of crucial importance. Neither the content nor the pedagogy of interactions is motivating enough for the children. No attention is given to meaning-making and comprehension. The content, as evident in classroom observations, is transacted in a piece-meal manner. Unless the children understand the linkages of what they do in class with their everyday life the school life will lose its significance for them.Teachers' accountability system is also not in place in the region. In the schools that I visited I hardly found all the teachers present in the school. The attendance of the children was also found to be poor. But the attendance register of both the teachers and the children shows barely any absenteeism in the schools. Inspectors who are supposed to check, keep vigil, turn up once in blue moon that too pre-informed.All the above factors sum up the educational backwardness in the Malda region. Since societal and educational structures are majorly responsible for the children's drop-out from the schools, it needs to be termed as PUSH-OUT!

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