

# **Inefficient Education and High Dropout Rates of School Children in Indian Slums**

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the problems arising in government schools and the education system, which is responsible for high dropout rates among students primarily in the Indian slums. The existing education policies have been reviewed to make relevant recommendations. It has been assumed that a lack of quality education is responsible for the dropouts. The paper emphasizes the need for the Right to Education (RTE) to safeguard all children under the age of 18 to ensure that no child is denied access from this inalienable right. It underlines the state of execution of the RTE act as well as other related schemes.

The various factors contributing to high dropouts have been explored and relevant solutions have been mentioned. Furthermore, SWOT analysis of the recommendations was carried out to check their effectiveness. They were found to be efficient with the only threat being improper implementation from the concerned authorities end. The result was that dropouts are due to legal, political and social factors in addition to inadequate quality of education. Also, an appeal has been made to the government to increase the education sector budget allocation to ensure proper infrastructure and technologically advanced learning in the slums.

**Keywords:** Education, Right to Education, Implementation, Schemes, Dropout Rates

## **Introduction**

Education is a major element that plays a vital role in the development of an individual's personality; such an intrinsic component should be ensured to all humans. This construct was taken forward by the Eighty-Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of India by introducing Article 21 A 'Right to Education.' It states that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine." Therefore, the assenting of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 has made the standard process of gaining knowledge in schools a fundamental right of all children between the age group of 6 years to 14 years. However, the implementation of the same along with other education policies such as SMSA and Mid Day Meal has been found to be shallow and contributing significantly to the dropouts.

Over the years, the importance of education has also been recognized by both the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While MDG 2 - 'Achieve Universal Primary Education' focused on increasing student

enrolment, SDG 4 - 'Quality Education' emphasized on improving the quality of education provided in schools. One would believe there to be great progress in the field of education in India with such initiatives in place, however, the current situation rather shows the dismal reality of our country and its slums.

The condition of Indian slums is far from being better. Although the government has initiated various policies, the basic problem in slums and the inhuman living conditions still prevail. One of the most important aspects to improve the state of people in slums is to provide them with a better education. Almost 17% of the Indian population dwells in slums, of which children constitute a major part.

According to the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 75.83% of eligible children were enrolled in schools at the elementary and secondary level, leaving 24.17% of children out of schools. The average annual dropout rate at the secondary education level was 19.89% reported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development

Such levels of dropouts create a long term inefficiency in the whole system and hence a significant threat. Since every social issue and its aligning SDG is related to one or the other, addressing the dropout rates also caters to numerous problems; educating every single person is the best way to overcome many related social evils like gender-based inequality, domestic violence, and crime rates. With people being educated and able to earn a livelihood, the problem of poverty as well as hunger can be tackled.

### **Methodology**

The paper is based upon Qualitative Research and explores the various faults and inefficiencies in the education policies and RTE that contribute significantly in the large dropout rates. Faulty execution of these programs along with other aspects that resulted in students deviating from education in any way were identified and relevant arguments were constructed and presented to support the same. All the factors contributing to the inadequate implementation of these policies have been mentioned in the findings. Secondary data has been used to support the observations.

The findings and other parameters on which the policies have failed have been analyzed and mentioned in a tabular form. Keeping the problems in mind, relevant recommendations that would ensure an efficient education system have been brought up. These suggestions are practical enough that they can be executed by the government with the help and support of the concerned authorities to reduce the dropouts rates. Further, SWOT Analysis of the recommendations has been done to support their effectiveness considering the various social, political, economic, financial and quality factors.

## **Quality of Education and School Factors**

- **Quality of Curriculum** - Dropout rates are alarmingly high because the education curriculum does not interest the students. It focuses majorly on the theoretical aspect and relies heavily on textbooks, which are often problematic as they aren't regularly updated. The content at times is also misleading as many depictions and incidents in the prescribed textbooks tend to support racism, sexism, and body shaming. There is also a lack of laboratories which hinder practical knowledge. Even if these facilities exist, teachers don't conduct the practicals as and when required. Skill training is missing and the traditional concept of focussing on just Science, Maths, and English education remains dominant. There needs to be a special focus on vocational and entrepreneurial skills along with civic awareness. Another reason for children dropping out is the lack of 'sex education' in the curriculum. As children hit puberty, changes take place and curiosity about the opposite gender develops. Due to a lack of awareness, they get involved in unhealthy pursuits, which lead to drastic consequences. Such incidents are also a reason why parents are reluctant to send their children to school; students need to be educated on the same.
- **Scarcity of Resources**

According to the RTE which states "schools need to maintain an optimum pupil-teacher ratio of 30:1 at primary and 35:1 at the secondary level of schooling, have proper furniture, provide proper infrastructure like school building, other learning equipment, and provide basic necessities", it can be consistently seen that most schools still don't have fit for use furniture and well-lit classrooms.

The infrastructure is a huge problem. Firstly, the number of schools do not suffice with the need and demand. Secondly, the condition of existing school buildings is disgraceful and unsafe. Basic necessities like furniture, hygienic washrooms, safe drinking water, medical rooms and electricity, internet, lab and sports equipment, rainwater drainage system are also missing and lacking

All these factors have led to the degradation of the quality and experience of education provided in the schools. Even if children are somehow retained in schools, lack of infrastructure would force them to drop out. These conditions are neither suitable for the students nor the teachers.

## **Social factors**

- **Discrimination**

India has itself never been able to remain free of disputes and conflicts happening in the name of class, caste, creed, language, and gender and the situation is the same with the education system. The RTE does protect everyone from these forms of discrimination in its section 8 (a) subclause (c), so the problem should not persist. However, there have been numerous incidents where the RTE has been denied and slum children are still

discriminated against, by their peers and teachers following which they choose to drop out.

- **Violence and Bullying**

Violence and bullying are prevalent all over India and includes personal insults, name-calling, slurs, racial and sexist statements. Low scorers are usually ridiculed for their marks and boys are made fun of for crying or not participating in sports. Constant remarks lead to immense psychological harm to the victim students which may lead to feelings of resentment, loneliness, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. When affected students try to raise their voice against this injustice, they also face physical assault by the bullies. In the age of various anti-bullying laws, we still come across some surveys that show that as many as 42% of students of Class 4 to 8 and 36% of Class 9 to 12 are subjected to harassment by peers on school campuses.

- **Illness**

The scheme of school health services is an economical and powerful means of raising the community health and more importantly the health of the future generations

### **Mid Day Meal Scheme**

Mid Day Meals Scheme was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August, 1995 with a view of enhancing enrolment, retention, and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children. 25 years down the line, even after several revisions, the scheme poses major challenges with its defective implementation and existing corruption.

Even after fixing a nutritional standard for the meals, instances show how the quantity and quality of food still lacks and doesn't even provide the basic nutrients to the students. Storage of grains, measures and precautions taken while cooking and inspection of the quality of food, have always been major issues. The Bihar 2013 midday meal tragedy, in which 23 children died of food poisoning after eating a midday meal is one such example. The cooking oil used for the food had been stored in a container formerly used to store insecticides.

While the scheme and its execution has severe loopholes, one of the biggest drawbacks of the program is that it doesn't treat students of different ages equally. From its inception till 2006, the scheme only catered to lower-elementary students; only in 2007, it was revised to provide free meals to upper-elementary students i.e. class sixth to eighth. However even today, 13 years after revision, pre-elementary, secondary, and senior secondary students are still not included in this scheme. Its exclusivity gives more the reason to slum students to drop out of school

### **Household Factors**

- **Family and Individual Issues**

The illiteracy of the parents of slum children results in their general apathy towards education. Parents often believe that going to school is a waste of time and their child should rather earn some money to support the family. Various issues in the family like

disputes, alcohol abuse, drug dependency of the parents are also major obstructions in the schooling of youngsters.

- **Gender-Based Discrimination**

The girl children in slums are imprisoned by gender roles and are considered to be inferior to the male gender, who more likely have a say in their education status. Girls are made to drop out of school to support the household, take care of siblings and family members, take up paid jobs, or simply beg. They are also married off early. According to UNICEF India, the prevalence of girls getting married before age 18 was at 27%.

- **Financial Instability**

With the absence of a legal safeguard like RTE, the families of rural poor and slum children by no means can finance secondary or higher education and the added expenses of school fees, curriculum and additional course books, stationery, uniform and transport. Schooling becomes an expensive affair and students drop out

### **Recommendations in Existing Schemes and Programs.**

The Mid Day Meals scheme had much potential, however, it failed due to its faulty implementation and corruption. The examination of the transportation of the grains and its quality and quantity, hygiene standards adhered to while storing ingredients, cooking, and serving food and the cleanliness of the utensils used must be strictly done. Also, the scheme should be extended from the elementary level to all school education levels. These possible solutions might help in decreasing the dropout rates of slum children and help in boosting enrollment rates.

### **Awareness Programs**

As discussed, the huge dropout rates of slum children are also a result of the parents' disinterest in education. The Central and State Governments in collaboration with several NGOs and student bodies must conduct sensitization drives regarding the importance and benefits of education in both government schools and slums. Awareness program conducted for both children and their parents would make them conscious about the value of knowledge in having a stable career and leading a life of dignity and respect. All people at slums need to be made aware about the rights of all children, including the girl child who must be treated equally as boys, their right to free and compulsory education and various schemes and upcoming policies for the smooth functioning of their rights. These drives should also focus on disseminating information about various opportunities that are provided to the weaker sections like different reservations, scholarships and financial aid. Career counselling in schools would also help in strengthening students' trust in education, their potential bright future and in reducing dropout rates.

### **Conclusion**

By the end of our research, we realised that the alarming rates of dropouts, especially of slum children from schools was because of a variety of reasons; our hypothesis was only partially true.

Understanding that along with the quality of schooling provided and the structure of curriculum taught at the academic institutions in India; legal and political factors like the faulty implementation exclusivity of the RTE and several other schemes; social factors like discrimination, violence, abuse and illness; household factors like family issues, gender discrimination and financial instability; all contribute towards the dropping rate of students studying at schools.

In the hope to change the same, we suggested some recommendations which must be taken up by governments, different authorities as well like mind people for further research. Our belief of educating one person creating a ripple effect and leading to an impact from a micro to macro level can only be accomplished once opportunities and proper conditions are given to slum children. Education is always a profitable investment for the country; after analysing our appeals and solutions, we aspire to influence a change in the current education and dropout scenario, and in the lives of children living in slums.

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