

FACTORS AFFECTING THE ENROLLMENT AND THE RETENTION OF STUDENTS AT PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ANDHRA PRADESH – A VILLAGE LEVEL STUDY

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Abstract

There is an imperative need to change the education pattern to achieve universal primary education in India. Even after 60 years of Independence, India faces obstacles in providing Education For All. This study was conducted in a primary school of Errabelly village of Karimnager district of Andhra Pradesh, India. The study revealed that children dropped out of school so as to assist in household and agricultural activities. It also reveals that the dropout rate of girls is more than that of boys. The study recommended that budgetary allocations should be increased so as to encourage the primary school participation and provide some form of financial assistance to the students.

Introduction

At the beginning of the new millennium, more than 880 million adults in the world were illiterate, about 110 million children were not going to school; discrimination against women and girls was common, and the quality of learning for millions of children and adults was not satisfactory. In April 2000, representatives of 164 countries, including India, met at Dakar, Senegal, to discuss and consider these issues. At the conclusion of the Conference, the following six goals were adopted by the international community which have come to be known as the Education for All (EFA) goals:

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensuring that by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and
- complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
- Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education of good quality.

- Improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan's First Joint Review Mission Report, 2005).

In line with the EFA goals, the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002, notified on December 13, 2002, seeks, *inter alia*, to insert a new Article 21-A ("Right to Education") in Part – III ["Fundamental Rights"] of the Constitution. Article 21- A 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". Pursuant to the above, a draft Bill entitled "Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004" was prepared, and views of the State governments were sought on it in January 2004. The subject of the draft Bill was also discussed in the first meeting of the reconstituted Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) held in August, 2004 (*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan's First Joint Review Mission Report, 2005*).

Although, India has the resources and the expertise to plan, the draft bill for the compulsory education and Education For All (EFA) has not yet been made a legislation in the country. The directive to the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children below the age of 14 has not been realised even after six decades (Rena, 2006).

It is to be noted that nearly 42,000 state-run schools still function without buildings of their own, while over 100,000 schools have only one classroom. Basic amenities continue to be inadequate in most schools. Budgetary allocations for education as a whole and elementary education specifically, have risen only incrementally over the decades. According to a recent survey by the National Institute of Education Planning and Administration, only 65.56 per cent of all classrooms are in good condition; the rest are in need of either major or minor repairs. In meeting needs such as drinking water, toilets, blackboards, and furniture, there are major inadequacies. The picture at the crucial entry-level is particularly bleak in the rural areas — and the worst affected are the poor. Thus there is a need to provide the necessary infrastructure in schools to make education meaningful in India (Rena, 2006).

The success of universalisation of primary education depends upon the success of total literacy campaign in India. If the illiterate parents are educated first, they could realize the importance of enrollment and retention of their children at primary school (National Sample Survey Organisation, 1998; Rena, 2006). It is surprising to note that the old system of education, which was introduced to prepare loyal, slavish bureaucrats to serve the purpose and interests of the British colonial regime, has not lost its content or its form even after sixty years of independence.

There is an imperative need to change the education pattern drastically and make it more purposeful. The purpose of education is to prepare the future citizens for carrying out their onerous tasks and responsibilities, to correlate scientific spirit and human aspirations and make the future citizens an essential instrument in ushering in happier and better times (Naik, 1975; Rena, 1995). The purpose of education should be to broaden the outlook and promote cultural levels of the students while enabling them to transgress the artificial barriers of ethnicity and religion.

Education is one of the most powerful instruments in shaping the human race. Education is the only answer to all our socio-economic problems (Tilak, 1987; Rena, 1995). Several global organisations and nations have been emphasizing the need for universalisation of primary education. At the world education in conference at Jomtien, access to education was declared as a human right. The Economics Nobel laureate of 1998, Prof. Amartya Kumar Sen has also pointed out that for sustainable development, even the poorest of the poor should be provided proper education. Accordingly, steps have to be taken to bring primary education to the doorsteps of the rural people, since more than 75 per cent of Indians live in rural areas (Rena, 2006).

Table- 1 Total number of educational Institutions in India in 2002-2003.

S.No.	States/UTs	Primary/ Junior Basic Schools	Middle/ Senior Basic Schools	High Schools/ Hr. Secondary Intermediate/ Pre-Degree/Jc Colleges	Degree and above levels		Universities/ Deemed Univa./ Institution of National Importance
					Colleges for General Education	Colleges for Professional Education	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Andhra Pradesh	61167	15054	15232	1197	432	23
2	Arunachal Pradesh	1337	360	204	8	1	1
3	Assam	30045	7704	4736	309	70	7
4	Bihar	40511	9783	3826	743	110	12
5	Chhattisgarh	23951	6293	2771	213	37	9
6	Coa	1037	75	425	24	20	1
7	Gujarat	7245	30646	7081	422	230	12
8	Haryana	9619	2263	5082	155	105	7
9	Himachal Pradesh	10868	1902	2139	69	37	5
10	Jammu & Kashmir	10488	3976	1893	73	52	5
11	Jharkhand	17059	4270	1492	132	27	6
12	Karnataka	26254	23643	9588	923	570	19
13	Kerala	6697	2988	3015	186	209	9
14	Madhya Pradesh	54233	27643	8087	513	288	17
15	Maharashtra	40850	25775	17257	1208	653	33
16	Manipur	2552	794	687	58	6	2
17	Meghalaya	5807	1083	641	44	2	1
18	Mizoram	1253	848	388	27	2	1
19	Nagaland	1352	427	279	35	19	1
20	Orissa	36677	11515	7391	567	204	9
21	Punjab	13340	2546	4151	209	135	8
22	Rajasthan	32953	23181	8531	334	172	15
23	Sikkim	497	129	138	2	4	1
24	Tamil Nadu	33394	6544	8421	478	399	27
25	Tripura	2054	435	643	14	8	1
26	Uttar Pradesh	113546	28936	11477	733	497	30
27	Uttaranchal	13902	3471	1827	47	32	7
28	West Bengal	49851	2003	7697	354	134	17
29	A&N Islands	207	56	93	2	2	0
30	Chandigarh	26	7	129	12	12	2
31	D&N Haveli	126	86	24	0	0	0
32	Daman & Diu	50	24	26	1	1	0
33	Delhi	2111	661	1619	63	100	15
34	Lakshadweep	4	20	12	0	0	0
35	Pondicherry	319	133	205	11	22	1
	INDIA	651382	245274	137207	9166	4592	304

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India:

(i) A Hand Book of Educational and Allied Statistics

(ii) Education in India;

(iii) Selected Educational Statistics.

The nation council of Education and Research testifies the fact that 95 per cent of the villages offer primary education within a radius of one kilometer (*see table 1*). In order to achieve the goal of universal primary education, the UK-funded District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) has been implemented for many years. The World Bank funded Operation Black Board Scheme is another important measure taken in this regard. Despite serious steps taken by the government, both at the centre and in the state of Andhra Pradesh, we have not achieved the objective of Education for All (Rena, 1995).

Table -2 Educational Composition of Population by Number of Years of Schooling All India

Year	No Education or less than 3 years		3-6 Years		7-11 Years		12-14 Years		15+ Years		Total	
	Person	Female	Person	Female	Person	Female	Person	Female	Person	Female	Person	Female
Number (Million)												
1971	386.8	214.7	110.5	36.9	33.0	9.0	14.6	2.8	3.3	0.7	548.2	264.1
1981	435.0	247.9	154.5	55.4	56.7	17.6	29.1	7.1	8.0	2.0	683.3	330.0
1991*	480.2	278.7	200.9	78.5	92.8	29.1	57.6	16.9	14.8	3.9	846.3	407.1
Percentage												
1971	70.5	81.2	20.2	14.0	6.0	3.4	2.7	1.1	0.6	0.3	100.0	100.0
1981	63.6	75.1	22.6	16.8	8.3	5.3	4.3	2.2	1.2	0.6	100.0	100.0
1991*	56.7	68.4	23.7	19.3	11.0	7.1	6.8	4.2	1.8	1.0	100.0	100.0

* Estimated

Source: (i) IAMR, National Manpower Accounts Part-III- Activity Description of Indian Population (1971-81).

(ii) IAMR, Estimates of Stock of Different Categories of Educational Manpower upto 2001 A.D.

Courtesy: Institute of Applied Manpower Research, I.P. Estate, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, New Delhi – 110 002.

As per 1991 census the literacy rate in Andhra Pradesh stood at 44 per cent as against 52 percent at the national level. Again, female literacy accounts for 32 percent as against the All India percentage of 39 percent. Further, there are disparities between rural and urban areas in enrollment and retention of children at primary school level. Gender disparities in educational attainment, is another area of concern. In the backdrop of these issues, it was thought important to examine factors affecting the enrollment and retention of students at primary education level (Poramesh, 1994;Rena, 1995).

Method of the Study

To analyse accessibility of primary education at the grass roots level, Errabelly village in Karimnager district, which is far away from the main road and about 80 Km far from the district head quarters, was purposively chosen. In fact, it is a border village between Karimnager and Warangal districts of Andhra Pradesh. The study was conducted during November 10 - December 5, 2004. The survey refers to the academic year 2004-2005. In the next stage, the study covered 39 households of the village to identify the families consisting school dropouts in the age group of 6-14 years.

The survey indicated as many as 39 families reported the said problem. Required information was collected through “Focused group interview” method covering the children and parent group separately. In order to ensure maximum participation of the target group, the services of the local teacher (appointed by the Village community) and the village elders were made use of. A set of questions prepared exclusively for the present study were posed to the parents and to the non-enrolled and school dropout children separately. To make the study more reliable, while conducting the group interview for parents, we ensured no children were present at the interview and similar precaution was taken while interviewing the children group. These two categories were interviewed without much gap in between.

Brief Description of the Study Village:

The Errabelly village has about 3,000 people. This village comes under the Bheemavarapally Mandal (sub-district) where the former Prime minister Late P.V. Narsimha Rao village Vangara is also located. This village is served by the Zilla Praja Parishat (ZPP) school, which was upgraded to grade –X in 1999. The Mandal Praja Parishat (MPP) School (from class 1 to 5) is located in the Schedule Tribe (ST) area of that village, another school run by a private person who has been running it for about 10 years. The survey indicates as many as 264 boys and 83 girls are on the rolls. There are three regular teachers (including the Head Master) and Vidya volunteer serving in the M.P.P school established in 1997. The total enrollment at the private school (up to grade-5) run by a private person consists of 44 boys and 21 girls belonging to the age group of 12 years and above.

There are three rooms in the M.P.P school (including office rooms), where the classes are organized. Other facilities available at the school include 5 black boards, 30 charts and other play materials. The school is also provided with radio, tape recorder and TV. The school also has a small library. The school building was constructed in 2004. In order to encourage the parents of girl students, an amount of Rs.500 per year is deposited

every year in the name of each girl student by the organization. Both the schools (M.P.P and the ZPP School up to grade-5) have their own education committees.

Results and Discussion

Households Reporting School Dropouts and Children Never Enrolled :

The caste-wise distribution of households shows the village to be multi caste. The village consists of 346 school children between the ages of 6-14 years, out of which nearly 30 per cent reported to be the school dropouts/never enrolled children. The proportion of households reported that the school dropouts/never enrolled children was highest in the case of the backward castes (BC), followed by the scheduled castes (SC), and least among the other castes (*see table-3*). It is observed that the village does not have any upper caste community.

Table -3 Caste analysis of population of Errabelly village

Backward Class	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total
1946 (62.83)	733 (23.66)	418 (13.51)	3097 (100.0)

Source: Village administration office records (2004)

Note: Figures in parentheses are the percentages in total.

It is found that though education facility was available within their own village, for various reasons (particularly poverty), a considerable percentage of families could neither enroll their children nor retain them. It is necessary to examine the proportion of dropouts and never enrolled children to the total children in the age group of 6-14 years by gender, in households reporting this problem.

Table -4 Total number of children between 6-14 years of age

Boys	Girls	Total
198 (57.0)	148 (43.0)	346 (100.0)

Source: Primary data and the MPP school Records (2004)

Note: Figures in parentheses are the percentages in total.

Neglect of Girl Child in Education:

The study reveals that, there are 148 girl children, i.e. 43 per cent of 346 in the age group of 6-14 years in these households, of which a majority of 30 per cent belonged to the categories of non-enrolled and school dropouts (*see table-4*). The sex-wise analysis brings out the facts that while 57 per cent of the boys of this age group, the corresponding figure for girls was only 43 per cent went to school. Further, out of the 30 per cent of the school dropouts and/or never enrolled children, the girls accounted for the highest share, i.e., 58 per cent. This clearly shows poor performance of girl's education in rural areas. It is revealed by the participants that the problem of discrimination is high against girls in the field of education. The degree of discrimination varies only slightly from one caste category to another, which means the discrimination against girl child pervades the entire rural society.

Reasons Reported By the Parents:

With regard to the never enrolled children, the parents stated that due to their inability to afford education on account of their inadequate income, they have not enrolled their wards at primary school. Again, the parents admitted that they discriminated against their girls. Of the total children in the age group of 6-14 years, only a lesser percentage of the boys were not admitted into the school at all, where as the figure is high in case of girl children. The parents have also revealed that while taking the initial decision of sending children to the schools, they were not in the favour of admitting their girls. Moreover, never enrolled children were not reported in other than the backward castes and scheduled castes. The parents withdrew their girl children from school, since these girl children either help their parents in agriculture and associated activities or take care of other small children in the family.

It was thought appropriate to probe into the reasons for withdrawing their children from school. During our focused group interview, it was clear that the villagers mostly prefer sending boys to the school than the girls. Even while withdrawing the children; it appears that parents tended to withdraw mostly girl children. The parents were of the view that girls need not be provided education on par with the boys. It was also stated by the parents that they have taken the decision of withdrawing their wards from the school, mostly at the class-2 and class-5 level.

It was stated by the parents who have withdrawn their children immediately after the completion of 1st standard revealed that they have experienced certain domestic problems due to the enrollment of children at primary schools and as such they continued for the year (till completion of 1st standard) and afterwards they were withdrawn. The reasons stated by those parents who have withdrawn at the grade -5, are altogether different. They have withdrawn, as these children can help their mothers in *beedi* (local cigarette) manufacturing and earn money for survival as well as for the girls' marriage. Even those parents who can afford such expenditure have mostly withdrawn their girl children from continuation of their studies.

The study reveals that their children were withdrawn from the school so as to get their assistance in household and agricultural activities. Household activities consist of cooking, fetching water and firewood, and looking after the younger children and the home.

The study about the educational level of the parents of the never enrolled and dropped out children reveals that they are mostly illiterate and some who have studied only till upper primary education (VII and below). Thus, the education of the parents is also found to be an obstacle in the way of the education of children.

A few parents have also made it clear that because of their poor economic position, they prefer sending their children for work in agriculture as daily wage earners and in the fewer cases even as attached labourers. Parents who have more than two children send only one or two children to school and deprive the enrollment of others. Family size is thus an obstacle in the attainment of the objective of universalisation of primary education.

The other major reason reported by the parents was poverty. As a result of problem of poverty also parents are unable to send them to school for longer years. Hence, they are forced to stop some of their children from continuing their school education. While doing so the parents had chosen only those who could add only something to the income of the family. With regard to the girl children the parent thinking was otherwise. If their girl children were sent to school, in the guise of studies they (girl children) may not spare time for household work and as a result the married life of those children in future may not be smooth.

It was also felt by the parents of the girl children that by enrolling or retaining the girl children they have to face problem at the time of searching for a suitable bridegroom. These parents were of the opinion that setting down the marriage of an uneducated girl or girl with lesser education is easy than the girl with higher education. Moreover they can perform the marriage of the said categories of girls at an early age, which means reducing their responsibilities.

An educated girl will get married comparatively at higher age, which may be a burden for the aged parents. All this clearly shows that adding to the family income and receiving the help in household activities appear to be their immediate concerns of the parents and not the long-term benefits from education. Frequent failure of crops is also discouraging the farmers either to admit or to retain their children at the primary school level. It has also been observed that some parents become drunkards due to various economic and social problems. They do not send the children since they cannot afford the schools. There are also some parents who send their children to work and take their money and drink. It is surprising to note that this village has highest number of suicide cases in Andhra Pradesh.

The parents belonging to the category of agricultural labour reveal the problem of seasonal migration. These laborers migrate for shorter periods to other places in search of employment, which also comes in the way of continuation of their children's education at primary level.

The number of teachers, and their regularity, seniority and their duties were also considered by the parents in admission and retention of their children.

Another important reason put forth by the parents group was that they are under the false impression that the government-supported school may not provide quality education and as such they have no interest in admitting their wards to such schools. On the other hand, they also admitted that they cannot afford private education, as it is costly. This is a peculiar situation as the parents neither prefer sending the children to the local school nor can afford private education, ultimately depriving their children of even education up to primary level.

Apart from the reasons given by the parents, other reasons for the present state of affairs are lack of proper motivation and knowledge about the importance of education. Soon after attainment of puberty, in case of girl the parents withdraw them from the school, due to social stigmas. Disbeliefs, negative attitudes and misconceptions about the need for education were also acting as powerful obstacles in the universalisation of primary education. It is also observed that the poor parents consider education a luxury meant for the rich.

Reasons Reported by the Children:

While the parents of the concerned dropouts revealed their reasons, it was also important to examine the problem from the children's point view.

According to the children, the indifference of their parents towards education was coming in the way of their enrollment. This was indicated mostly by the girl children. The illiteracy of their parents was another reason. The children were utilized to fetch water, fodder and firewood and to take cattle for grazing as well as to look after the house during day time. A few children have also revealed that they are taking care of the younger children of their family.

A majority of the children interviewed, particularly girls, stated that to meet family expenditure they have to earn and thus dropped out from school. Interestingly a few children without any fear referred to the problem of the irregularity of teachers, the tough curriculum offered and the teaching methods which influenced their withdrawal from school. Due to sickness of parents, children are forced to give up their education and shoulder the household responsibilities.

Only one girl child reported that she had no interest in attending the school and hence dropped out. Children of both categories (never enrolled and dropped-out) are reluctant to go to school. When probed, these children revealed they were under the impression that by sitting patiently and listening to the teachers they will be foregoing their play time and moreover they have to read and even write after school hours, which they feel it is a troublesome task for them. Since their parents are illiterate, they could not get any help in reading and writing. Some students revealed that they are afraid of teachers because they beat them frequently.

Problem of child labour: The problem of child labour is a corollary to the problem, and is creating hurdles in the universalisation of education. It was interesting to note that the parents have been using their male and female children to work as child laborers due to poverty.

Conclusion

On the basis of the study and analysis, it may be concluded that gender disparities continue to exist in elementary education in the entire rural society irrespective of caste. Girls continue to be discriminated against by the parents first with respect to enrollment in school and later in providing higher as well as better education. The child laborers consist of more girls than boys and the girls were forced to take up either household responsibilities or economic activities at a younger age when compared to boys. This situation is prevalent in spite of the education facilities provided within the Errabelly village.

Hence there is a need for providing gender training to the parents, which must be made an integral part of the programs for the development of poor families. The Education for All (1990) states that “there cannot be educated people without educated women. If general education has to be limited to men or women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most surely be passed on to the next generation” still carries significance in the light of continued gender disparities in primary education.

The success of universalisation of primary education depends upon the success of the total literacy campaign. If the illiterate parents are educated first, they could realize the importance of enrollment and retention of their children at school. Organizing self-help groups for women belonging to poor households and undertaking capacity building programmes to enable them to pursue income generating activities on a sustainable basis appears to be one solution to this problem.

Parents of girl children must be encouraged to enroll their offspring in school and they must be prevented from withdrawing their children from the school. This can be achieved by offering certain economic incentives like free supply of uniforms, books to the poor students thus parents are encouraged to enroll their children at the primary school.

The curriculum at the upper primary and high school levels must help in not only spreading knowledge but also in formation of skills. Appointment of more lady teachers may encourage the parents of girl children to enroll/retain their children at least at primary level.

Budgetary allocations should be increased so as to create attractive infrastructure at the primary school. The teacher should be made to stay at place of work by creating the congenial environment. Existing *Balwadies* (pre-primary schools) should be established to take care of the preschool children so that the parents may not hesitate to send their children to schools. School committees need to be strengthened and they have to play an active and important role in enrolment and retention of children at primary education level.

Further, the officers in-charge of education at the grass roots level (*Mandal, Taluk* level) should periodically convene meetings of parents to identify the practical problems in the way of enrolment and retention of students. If all these measures are implemented in letter and spirit, the objective of univesalisation of primary education can be attained in near future. If not, it will become a myth.

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