



Problems of Primary education among the slum children of Guwahati.

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Abstract

Primary education is a key to success for every developing nations. As a developing nation, India also gives utmost importance in the field of primary education. In India primary education covers the age group between 6-14 years. Again, in our nation this level of education is made free and compulsory to attain 100% literacy for nation's progress. Slums used to grow in city areas where dwellings are unfit for human habitation. In Guwahati, which is the major city of the North-East India, slums are generally found near the Railway tracks and market areas. The children residing in these areas suffers from various problems which hampers in their studies and other relative activities relating to their primary education. However, this paper is an attempt to find out the major problems faced by the slum children in attaining their primary education.

Keywords: primary education, problems, slum children.

1. Introduction

Education of underprivileged deprived children living in slums continues to remain a challenge. Generally, a slum is defined as a compact settlement with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate and drinking water facilitates in unhygienic conditions. Slums are mainly urban phenomena where poverty gets clustered. One out every seven persons living in the urban areas lives in the slums of India.

A slum, as defined by United Nations agency UN-HABITED, is a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security. Slum areas are growing fast in the metro cities. In Guwahati also, slums are increasing near the Harijan colonies and by the side of the railway tracks. The biggest slums in Guwahati are located at Fatasil Ambari, Solapara where there are Harijan colonies and areas near the railway tracks. A slum population of about 1.6 lakh have been recognised by

Guwahati Municipal Corporation.

Many poverty studies of slums households in India indicate that the urban poverty can be spatially concentrated in slums, although not all slum households follow below the poverty line. However, the poverty and education nexus is complex, partly attributable to the difficulty in distinguishing the effects of poverty on education from the effects of education on poverty. There are a few surveys on slum households in India to investigate educational deprivation of slum dwellers. They suffer from malnutrition, poor accommodation, poverty, hunger, orphaned early in life, etc. They continue to live under the umbrella of diseases, inadequate health services, congestion, poor drainage and sanitation, petty trade, violence, sexual abuse, and un-conducive learning environment. India's performance on the educational sector has not been impressive in the post-Independence era. Statistics indicate that India has lagged behind even countries like Sri Lanka. Family background and domestic

problems create an environment which negatively affects the value of education. Further, students could drop out as a result of a multitude of school factors such as uncongenial atmosphere, poor comprehension, absenteeism, attitude and behavior of the teachers, and failure or retention in the same grade, etc.

2. Significance of the study

Primary education can be considered as the backbone of a nation’s development. The success of every developmental plans, programmes or schemes are highly dependent on this level of education. This is the basic level to consider one as a literate. Illiteracy is one of a major factor which stands as a hurdle in bringing any positive change in the society. Our society is still suffering from many ill practices and superstitious beliefs. On one hand our nation is developing in the technological fields and trying to introduce as ‘Digital India’, while on the other hand we have 26% of illiterate population(as per 2011 census). However, illiteracy is mainly found among the masses living below the poverty line. Generally, in a city we can clearly distinguish between two classes of people one is above the poverty line and the other is below the poverty line. Most of the urban population living below the poverty line are generally found in the slums characterized by compact settlement with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate and drinking water facilitates in unhygienic conditions. Meeting of basic needs become more important than receiving education; as most of them suffers for livelihood. As a result our nation suffers from achieving the target of 100% literacy. Taking into consideration of the importance of primary education, our Government is spending lots of funds in this field. Again, it is

noteworthy that at present primary education is free and compulsory and is considered as the birth right of the children in our country. There is also provision of free mid-day meal. But still we are not being able to get 100% enrollment at this level and not being able to check the drop out level. Hence, in such circumstances the present study becomes very much significant.

3. Statement of the problem

The present study is formulated to study about the various problems relating to primary level of education among the slum children of Guwahati. Therefore the study is entitled as:

“Problems of primary education among the slum children of Guwahati”

4. Objectives of the study

- I. To study the educational status of the slum children.
- II. To find out the causes of school drop out at the primary level of education.

5. Methodology

The present study is based on descriptive study method and purposive sampling technique is used to select the sample for the study.

Due to limited time, the sample has been restricted to 150 slum children 50 each from Marakhali, Bhaskar Nagar and Noonmati(B.G. yard) slums of Guwahati city which is purposively selected.

A self-structured interview schedule has been used to collect the necessary information regarding the problems of primary education among the slum children.

6. Analysis and interpretation of data (objective wise)

Objective No. 1: To study the educational status of the slum children.

Sample: 150 slum children.

of the slum children relating to the objective:

Responses: the following table shows the responses

School going	Drop out	Not enrolled	Total
77	40	33	150

Interpretation: From the above data we can interpret that out of 150, 77 or 51.33% of children are continuing their education. 40 or 26.67% of children

are drop outs and 33 or 22% of children have never attended school.

Objective 2 : To find out the causes of school drop out at the primary level of education.

Sample: 150 responses of the slum children relating to the objective
Responses: the following table shows the in percentage:

Table 2 :

Question Nos.‘!	Responses’!	Yes (in %)	No (in %)
2. Do you work for your livelihood?		30%	70%
3. Do you find time and space to study at home?		68.83%	31.16%
4. Do you think that domestic work hamper your studies?		42%	58%
5. Do you have an academic atmosphere at home?		54.66%	45.33%
6. Do you find the teaching method in school interesting?		90.9%	9.09%
7. Do the teachers use any kind of punishment in the classroom?		38.96%	61.03%
8. Does the fear of punishment affect your regularity in school?		19.48%	80.51%
9. Does the environmental condition under which you live hamper your regular studies?		51.94%	48.05%

The environmental conditions that hamper the regular studies of the students of the slum areas as responded by the students :

Table 2.1:

Responses	Yes (in %)	No (in %)
1. Near market area	42.85%	57.14%
2. Alcoholic parents	24.67%	75.32%
3. Single room house	71.42%	28.57%
4. Any other	29.87%	70.13%

Interpretation: After analysing the data gathered through different items of the interview schedule shown in table:2, the researcher observed that 30% of the slum children were working for their livelihood. 31.16% of the children responded that they didn't have space and time at home to study. Again, 42% of the students responded that domestic work hamper their studies. The 45.33% responded that they had no academic atmosphere at home. Relating to teaching method at

school, 9.09% responded that they were not satisfied with the methods used at classroom. Again, 58.96% responded that the teachers used to practice various types of punishments in the classroom and 19.48% of the students responded that the fear of punishment hamper their regularity in school. 51.94% of the students responded that the environmental condition under which they live mostly hamper their regular studies at home.

Table:2.1, highlights the various environmental factors that hamper in regular studies of the slum children. Here, the researcher found that 42.85% of the students responded that the noisy atmosphere of the nearby market hampers their studies. 24.67% responded that they could not study because of the disturbances created by their alcoholic parents at home. Again, 71.42% responded that due to single room house, they did not get enough space to study. 29.87% responded that they felt disturbances for various factors such as, noisy atmosphere, sound of running trains, loud music played in neighbourhood, etc.

7. Major findings of the study

- a) Poverty: Socio-economic background of the families is the most significant contributor to the continuation or discontinuation of the child in school. Poverty of the parents still remains one of the significant causes for the low participation of children in schooling. 64 percent of the respondents reported that the most significant factor of drop out is poverty.
- b) Home Environment: An important problem faced by some slum children is that they do not get enough time and space at home for regular studies and some had to perform the domestic activities which also hamper their studies. The home atmosphere is not suitable for 54% of students to carry out their studies further. Even the unconducive and polluted environment has also hampered and de-motivated them for the studies. The study also reveals that the children living in slum areas do not have favourable academic environment at home.
- c) Poor understanding at elementary level: It has often been observed that poor understanding at the elementary level is another cause behind drop out at this level. It was noted that around 46% percent of the children stopped going to school after losing interest in their studies due to poor comprehension. Even the remedial classes, though not held regularly, proved futile.
- d) Methodology adopted in school: The students who had dropped out indicated that their reasons for dropping out include– teachers' insensitive attitude, defective method of teaching; and insufficient time to complete class assignments. 38% of respondent have said that defective method of teaching and unconducive atmosphere have result in drop outs.
- e) Difficulty in certain subjects: They found the

curriculum difficult to comprehend the content, especially General Mathematics and General English at the upper primary level. Around 82% percent of children find these two subjects difficult.

- f) Death of the parents: Another factor responsible for dropouts were the sudden or early demise of the parents. This has led the slum children to leave studies and get engaged in some economics undertakings for survival of own selves as well as the family members although there are strict laws against child labour in India. Many of them has the urge to study but the circumstances force to leave their studies.
- g) Corrupt practices: Almost all the individuals of Marakhali slum belongs to Scheduled Caste category. The Government provides various economic schemes for the SC people but still due to some ill practices like commission to the middle man many of them are not being able to get the economic benefits. For this the Government machinery must took the matter seriously to check corruption.
- h) Another significant observation made from the study that these drop outs have engaged themselves in jobs of various kind. Some of them have worked as sales boy in nearby shops, while some are working as sweeper to earn the source of living. Even it has been found that some of these drop outs have engaged themselves in some unhealthy practices like smoking, drug, gambling, alcoholism etc.

8. Conclusion

Education has been considered as the birth right of each and every child of our country. It also includes within its fold the slum children of the country in respect of educating them. Poverty and financial constraint has affected the value of education. Further, certain school factors such as uncongenial atmosphere, poor comprehension, absenteeism, attitude and behavior of the teachers, etc. have also lead to school drop outs. These drop outs have also resulted in certain unhealthy social practices like alcoholism, substance abuse, stealing etc. Besides all the Government plans and policies and efforts, every concerned citizen of India must realise the importance of primary education and work on individual level too to aware the individuals residing in the backward areas about the importance of primary level of education in personal life as well as in nation's growth and development.

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