

DROPOUTS IN ELEMENTARY LEVEL IN WEST BENGAL DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

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ABSTRACT

In almost last two years all on a sudden we all are facing an unknown crisis. A disease named Covid-19 has interrupted the normal functioning of our lives and livelihood, which has been declared as a Pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO). As the outbreak intensified, livelihood of people suffered immensely. It has changed the normal rhythm of our lives and professions. Like other fields, its effects can be felt in the sphere of education too. Regular face to face interactions in classrooms have stopped ever since the lockdown started. In our state i.e. West Bengal, Government has initiated to open the doors of schools for class IX - XII & Colleges in twice. But the severe outbreak of this disease has compelled to close the institutions considering the health issues of the learners. But the physical presence of learners in Elementary Level was totally interrupted from the starting of Lockdown. Due to world-wide Pandemic in Covid-19 virus, the education of whole world somehow affected and the schooling system nearly ruined for near-about two years. Then, we did not know surely when regular classes will be resumed in Elementary Level. In this respect, drop outs are increasing in our Education System. Government has tried to introduce various online teaching platforms. They have been tried to habituate the learners with this digital learning system. Use of electronic gadget and many other modern digital devices changed the scenario of education in today's world. Government of India also introduced the idea of "Digital India" and the digitized education system created a new impact in the field of education too. In near recent times various types of digital platforms like Banglar Siksha Portal, Swayam, Swayam-prabha, E-Pathshala, Bhart Digital Class etc. has also been introduced. Various institutions are applying many online apps to conduct classes, exams or etc. Various E-Content like Moodle cloud, Unacademy Team etc. may be used for digital classroom learning. But a large number of people couldn't access this kind of system gladly due to their financial as well as societal conditions. So, communication gaps had been seen in our system. They might be marked as Digital Glitch. Due to such kind of circumstances, the Drop Outs problems had been raising. In this article,

the presenters try to analyze the reasons behind the Drop Outs of our education system. They also have tried to give some of the initiatives taken by the Government to run the education process at present. The article also concludes that this system is a time consuming matter. All the stakeholders should do the collective works. The success of this process not only depends by the Government initiative or measures but also the will power of all can make it successful in near future.

Keywords: *Drop Outs, Elementary Level, Education System, COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

The education system of the world was affected due to the Pandemic caused by covid-19 virus. The gates of the schools got closed for approximate two years. “We see many of our own young pupil of 14, 15-year-old, leaving school and starting their earnings to help the families which is heart-breaking,”—Bemoans Sriram mentioned in the Hindusthan Times. “A lot of them are struggling because 90 per cent of their parents have lost their livelihoods. They’re in informal sectors and a lot of them are dependent on unskilled works, and working in shops and commercial establishments that were shut down suddenly.” With many schools switching to online system, video-based learning, children from marginalized communities are unable to continue accessing education from home. Many studies have reported that they either do not own the technology or cannot afford to pay for internet data. Each day millions of children do not go to school since they have to earn their livelihood and face humanitarian crises. The outbreak of COVID-19 has compounded the plight of learners in countries affected and set back them to emerging conflict and disaster. While the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) acknowledges the public health decision to close schools, we believe that contingency plans should be replaced and ensure the right to education even at the time of crisis.

Right to Education Act of India (2009) has increased students’ enrolment, but this pandemic situation compelled some of students to go out of school arena and engaged them as child-labors. With more-than 560 million internet users, India has the second largest online market in the world, ranked only behind China. It was estimated that by 2023, there would be increased over than 650 million internet users in the country. Despite the large base of internet users, the internet penetration rate in the country stood at around 50 percent in 2020. This meant that around half of the 1.37 billion Indians had access to internet that year. There has been consistent increase in internet accessibility compared to just five years ago, when the internet penetration rate was around 27 percent.

However, internet accessibility and usage of internet largely varied in the country based on factors like gender and socioeconomic divide. It was estimated that in 2020, there were more than 300 million internet users in rural India compared to 335 million urban internet users. But it is

worth mentioning that the majority of Indian internet users were between 20 and 29 years of age, and a slightly higher proportion of these users were from rural parts. At the same time, there were far more male internet users in the country compared to female users. And this digital gender gap only increased further in the rural hinterlands compared to urban metros.

A majority of India's digital population accessed the internet via their mobile phones. Merely 8.5% school students in India have internet access. The disruption in education has suffered second worst condition in South Asia due to COVID-19 pandemic situation. According to UNICEF Report 2021, India recorded 146 days of school shutdown. 60% students do not have internet access in India (A Report by Azim Premji Foundation in January-February, 2021). According to PTI report, the former RBI Governor and eminent economist Dr. Raghuram Rajan said regarding the COVID-19 pandemic situation that "India Needs to do more recovery, as well as a possible lowering of our medium-term growth potential. My greater worry about the economy is the scarring to the middle class, the small and medium sector, and our children's minds, all of which will come into play after an initial rebound due to pent up demand. One symptom of all this weak consumption growth, especially for mass consumption goods." (Monday, 24 January, 2022 through an Interview through email.)

West Bengal government is launching a new project entitled 'Paray Shikshalaya' to bridge the learning gaps of two years and to reduce the dropout rate. Classes IX to XII had been reopened twice during the pandemic but around 80 lakh students in primary sections haven't stepped into school premises, resulting in a rise in dropout rate in the section. According to the annual state of education report (ASER) 2020, the school dropout rate in Bengal declined from 3.3% to 1.5% in 2019 while it went up to 4% to 5.5% at national level.

Paray Shikshalaya is a community-based learning system for primary level students. The main objective is to provide learning support with a joyful open assembly similar to classroom experience. The project has started from February, 2020. An expert committee prepared a structured academic material for the project for children of the age group of 5-9 years.

As the outbreak of Pandemic intensified, the livelihood of people suffered immensely. It has changed the normal rhythm of our lives and professions. Like other fields, its effects can be felt in the sphere of education too. Regular face to face interactions in classrooms have stopped. Everyone cannot access the opportunities of online services. Due to such kind of circumstances, the Drop Outs problems have been arisen.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the following study are stated below :

- To know the status of enrolment, attendance and retention rate in elementary level.
- To know the causes of drop-outs in elementary level.

- To know the initiatives taken by the Government to remove the drop-outs in elementary level.
- To offer suggestions and recommendations on the basis of the findings of the study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For the fulfilment of the above mentioned objectives, following research questions are formulated —

- What is the present status of enrollment in elementary level?
- What is the present status of attendance in elementary level?
- What is the present status of retention in elementary level?
- What are the causes of drop-outs in elementary level?
- What are the initiatives taken by the Government to remove such problems?

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The delimitation of the study are as follows —

- This study has been delimited to the 24 Parganas (North), Purba Burdwan and Hooghly district of West Bengal only.
- This study has been delimited to the Elementary Level Schools only.
- The study has been delimited to the students of Bengali Medium Elementary Schools only.
- The study has been delimited to the government aided Elementary Schools only.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Roy (2011) in a study entitled “A study on the dropout problem of primary education in Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal” emphasizes the relevance of Right to Education act (RTE) and gave more emphasis on free and compulsory education. The researcher critically analyzed the reasons of drop-outs in elementary levels and also gave a clear picture of drop-outs in the block levels of Uttar Dinajpur district. Hati & Majumder (2012) in their study entitled “Proximate Determinants of School Dropout: A study on Rural West Bengal” reveal that the School dropout has emerged as major hindrance to human capital formation in developing countries globally and efforts are on to stem this. The findings of the study revealed that gender differences of dropouts. Mother’s education, distance of school, family size and parental occupation emerge as important factors that affect school dropout. They also gave some suggestions to overcome this problem. Ali (2014) in a study entitled “A comparative study on the dropout problem in Primary Education among Muslim community in relation to gender and economic status” revealed the causes of drop outs Muslim communities in respect to their gender and economic status. Nine Gram Panchayats and two

Municipality areas of Malda district, West Bengal were selected by as the sample area and 400 hundred parents were selected as sample. The researcher revealed that poverty influences the parents to withdraw their wards from school. Sarkar (2015) in his study named “A Study to Determine the Prevalence of School Dropouts and its Association with Selected Factors among Children of 6-19 Years, residing in a Rural Community of West Bengal” emphasizes the prevalence of school dropouts, factors of school dropout and its association with selected factors. Children of 6-19 years were 147 and their 95 parents, who met inclusion criteria, were interviewed. She concluded that the main reasons for school dropouts are “distance of school from residence”. Biswas & Krishnan (2017) in their study entitled “A study on dropout of tribal students at secondary level in Hooghly district, West Bengal” stated the dropout issue among tribal students at secondary level in Hooghly District of West Bengal. A qualitative survey method was adopted. 8 schools from 2 blocks of Hooghly district were selected as sample. School records, questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect the data. The study revealed that the causes of dropouts are poor economic condition, lack of conducive learning environment at home, attitude of parents towards schooling, lack of aspiration and attitude of non-tribal students towards tribal students etc. Das (2020) conducted a study on topic “Educational Status and Dropout Rate of Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal: A Study on Birbhum District”. The study found that some of the problems i.e. lack of interest in study, Economic problem, Health problem, Distance from home to school, Lack of awareness of parents, early marriage, lack of food and lack of proper guidance for drop outs of the Scheduled Tribe of the Birbhum districts. She also gave some suggestions to overcome it.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

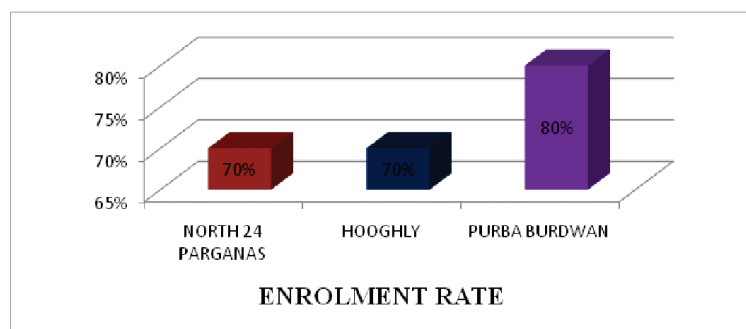
This study is done based on primary and secondary data. The sample area of the study is North 24 Parganas, Purba Burdwan and Hooghly districts in West Bengal. The Researchers has collected data from the Headmasters/Headmistress, Assistant teachers, students and guardians of the selected districts. In the present research work, the secondary data has been collected through books, journals, articles, gazettes and annual reports of the education departments. Through the various questionnaires, interview schedule data have been collected. In the present study, total 30 elementary schools from the selected districts have been taken as samples. In the present study, researcher used purposive stratified sampling for selection of sample. After collecting data present researchers analyzed the data by qualitative content analysis method.

FINDINGS

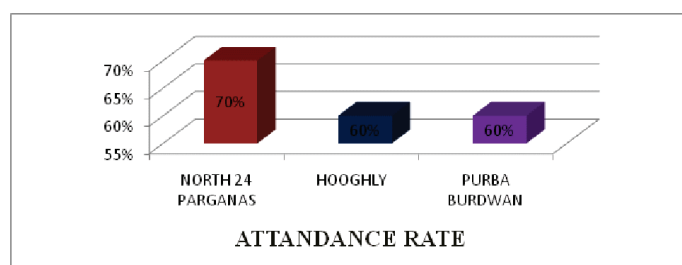
The main findings of the present study are presented below:

* The sign of drop out is seen in 24 Parganas (North) and Purbo Bardhaman Districts, but the drop out is lower in Hoogly district.

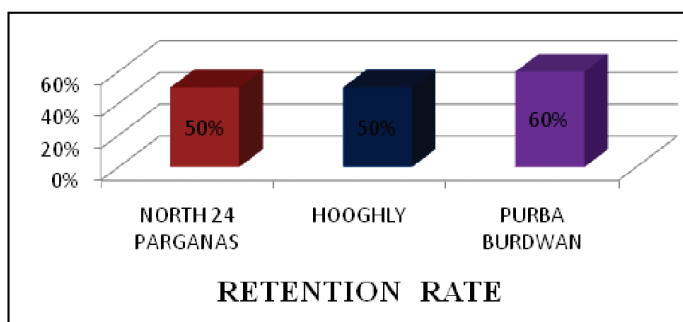
- It was also found that in the rural areas, percentage of enrolment rate of students is lower than urban areas.



- Drop out decreases the rate of attendance of above-mentioned districts. The below table shows the rate of percentage of daily attendance going below both in rural and urban schools of Hooghly, Purbo Bardhaman and the rural schools of 24 Parganas (North). In the schools of urban areas of 24 Parganas (North) district, it is slight higher than the other districts.

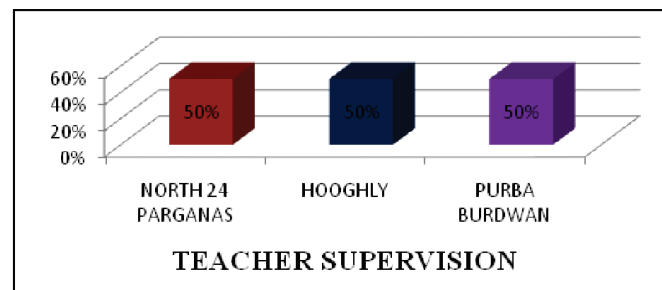


- Retention rate of students as a result of drop out did not increase too much in 24 Parganas (North), Hooghly and Bardwan districts. The retention rate is almost average in all the three districts. Though as a result of drop out the retention rate of students in Hooghly is slightly better than the other two districts.

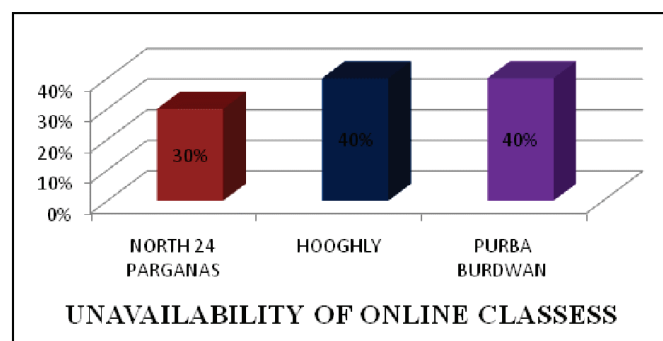


- Another important thing is that many students are engaged in various jobs. Due to pandemic situation many people were facing various problems in their livelihood. So, due

to their poor economic condition in the family, the students are compelled to sacrifice their education due to constraint situation. Practically the elementary education enrolled highest number of students. So, the teachers are not always able to look into these matter carefully due to the scarcity of infrastructure and teachers also. Teachers are not fully aware of the socio-economic condition of all the students. So, a gap is prevailing in this regard. From the data, it can be clearly mentioned that the percentage of teachers' supervision is almost average in all three districts in this respect. Teachers must carefully take up this matter and create a database of the students if required.



- There was another problem which is very much alarming specially in the rural areas which is the problem of early marriage specially among the girl child. Though they get various scholarship like SVMCM, Kanyasree, Aikyasree from the government to continue their education, but in some cases they have to sacrifice their education due to their family related matters.
- Face to face mode of contact in teaching is very much popular in our education system. But due to this unavoidable circumstance, online education system has been promoted and continued to minimize the gap. But in our country, it is very much challenging work specially in the rural areas because most of the students have no mobile phones, laptops or computers etc. due to their poor economic condition. So, they cannot access the system of online education properly. Due to this reason, there prevails a huge gap because many students cannot properly access the digital platform of education. So, they are being deviated from the mainstream.



- Motivation is one of the important factor. Due to lack of motivation from the family members and sometimes from the teachers, they are being deviated from the proper track. Proper care from the family members as well as the teachers is required regarding this matter. A good environment from the family and also from the schools is very much required.

SUGGESTION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT

Researcher gives some suggestions for the improvement of this system. These are stated under :

- First of all, a good co-operation is needed between the teachers and guardians. The responsibility of the teachers is to contact with the guardians and also the duty of guardians is to inform teachers about the development of the children.
- Another important thing is to develop a positive mindset for those children with respect to their condition. A good environment of schools and family is very much important for that. They need not to provide sympathy, but the children give empathy for their betterment from all ends.
- One of the most important things is that more skillful teachers should be appointed in all elementary schools for the better cares of those children.
- Modification of curriculum should be made carefully by an expert group which includes special cares for those children. The curriculum of the children should be more flexible and practical approaches must be the priority for them.
- Proper supervision is needed for the development of the children. Authority should arrange much more facilities for the students and they should impart proper instruction to the students so that the students learn proper usage of the things. Government initiative and financial support should be needed for those children. To minimize the learning gaps of the students during the pandemic times, Government of West Bengal also provided ‘Sikhan Setu’ and ‘Pathan Setu’ – a bridge learning material which prepared under the supervision of expert committee to fulfil the knowledge gap.

CONCLUSION

Drop out is an important issue in our education system. It is not only an easy matter. So, a collective effort is needed from the parts of all the stake-holders. Mid-day meal, Sabuj-sathi, Swami Vivekananda Merit cum means Scholarship etc. may strengthen the education system, and the positive mindset of all people. The initiative of Government can help us to reach us the target point. To remove all such barriers with the help of education, we must provide the free and compulsory education to all and also establish equity as well as equality.

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