
Dropout Scenario in West Bengal: Analytical Views with Special Reference to its Causes

Aparajita Nandi ^{1*}

^{1*} Ph.D. Scholar, Dept. of Economics, Sidho Kanho Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal.

Abstract

With the expansion of education, it is possible to solve all socio-economic problems of a country but school dropout often stands as an impediment in the way. In this article, it is attempted to develop an analytical views of school dropout phenomenon in Primary and Upper Primary level of education in West Bengal that considers a comparative position of West Bengal among states of India, its underlying causes and present situation.

KEYWORDS: School dropout, Average Annual Dropout Rate, impediment, Basu Van luxury axiom, child labour, pull factor, parents' education, school infrastructure, quality education

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most powerful instrument to fight against all evils in the day-to-day human life. It is one of the fundamental human rights and at the same time it is extremely essential for the exercise of all other human rights to fulfill the needs of a human being. Proper education leads to empowerment, freedom and ultimate emancipation from all socio-economic bondage of a person. The more educated a nation is the more powerful will be the country. With the expansion of education technological development can be promoted and strong industrial base in the country can be established. All these will broaden employment opportunities and income levels of the people can be increased. People will be able to enjoy higher standard of living and a better life. But dropout phenomenon stands as an impediment in the way of expansion of education. A school dropout takes place when an ever enrolled person does not complete the last level of education for which he/she is admitted in school. In spite of such importance of education millions of children and adult people in many developing countries including India still remain deprived of access to educational opportunities in real life mostly due to poverty and dropout happens.

The **NFHS-3**, conducted in 2005-06 shows that in India only 75% of children of the age group of 6-16 years were found attending school, nearly 14% of them never attended school and 11% dropped of school due to different socio-economic causes. In most

developing countries people are found to suffer from a variety of problems like poverty, illiteracy, child labour, child marriage, school dropout and so many other socio-economic problems. However, it has been realized that illiteracy and dropout problems are at the root of all. If they are removed the other problems will be solved or minimized to an expected level.

At present school dropout is a very common crisis in almost all states of India. The recent COVID -19 pandemic has magnified the severity of this crisis across the country. However, the dropout problem is not a new one. It has already been there in the country's domain of socio-economic problems and it needs a concerted for its better solution. West Bengal being a state of the country also exhibits this feature. In this article, attempts are to focus on the scenario of West Bengal on the dropout issue in the Primary and Upper Primary levels of education and to identify the underlying factors responsible for causing such dropout problem.

DROPOUT SCENARIO IN THE COUNTRY

India houses more than one hundred thirty eight crore people (138,31,12,050 people) in 2020 [<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/population>; Data source: United Nations - World Population Prospects accessed on 08.10.22]. There were 1516865 schools and 9881059 teachers for nearly 26 crore students belonging to the level of education from the Primary to the Higher Secondary level in 2014-15 (Educational Statistics at a Glance, MHRD, Dept. of School Education and Literacy, 2016, GOI) .

The report of UDSE+ 2019 reveals that the dropout rates at the Upper Primary (class 6-8) and the Primary (class 1-5) levels are 1.8% and 1.5% respectively, while overall dropout rate in the Secondary level in the country is over 17%. These data may be represented in a table form in Table No. 1 below with more details.

Table-1: Country Level Dropout Rate in 2019-20

School levels	Dropout rate		
	Overall	Boys	Girls
In the Secondary level (class 9-10)	17.3%	18.3%	16.3%
In the Upper Primary level (class 6-8)	1.8%	1.4%	2.2%
In the Primary level (class 1-5)	1.5%	1.7%	1.2%

Source: Constructed as per Report of UDSE+ 2019

It is observed from table-1 that overall dropout rate in the primary level is the lowest (1.5%) whereas it is the highest in the Secondary level of education (17.3%) and the same for the Upper Primary is little bit higher (1.8%) than the primary level but much lower than the Secondary level. The table reflects that in the Secondary level the dropout occurs at almost 10 time higher rate than the rates of Primary and Upper

Primary levels. This dropout inevitably results in an increasing number of child labours. It is further noticed that both in the Primary and the Secondary levels the dropout rates for boys exceed that of girls but for the Upper Primary level the case is reverse.

Table-2: School Dropout Rate: West Bengal: 6-11 years old in 11 years (2001-2011)

Year	Dropout Rate (%)
2001	39.860
2002	36.410
2003	33.460
2004	43.650
2005	40.180
2006	30.150
2007	35.870
2008	29.800
2009	20.500
2010	28.440
2011	24.330

Source: <https://www.ceicdata.com>india>...>

Table-2 shows the dropout rate of school children of the age group of 6-11 years old during the period from 2001-2011 in West Bengal. In 2001 the dropout rate was 39.860% which reached an all time high of 43.650% in 2004 and it came down to a record low of 20.500% in 2009 through its ups downs. Again it went up to 28.440% in 2010 and came down to 24.330% in 2011. However, on an average the tendency of dropout rate is declining. From table-2 it is obvious that West Bengal is moving towards better position in respect of reducing dropout rate over the said eleven years (2001-2011).

WEST BENGAL'S POSITION COMPARED TO ALL INDIA AVERAGE AND OTHER STATES

The author has constructed Table 3 to make a comparison among West Bengal and other states in respect of dropout issue in the Primary level during the period mostly from 2001 to 2011.

Table 3: State wise Average Annual Dropout Rate for Boys & Girls together and boys and girls separately of 6-11 years old during the period noted against each state in India

Country/States	Average Annual Dropout Rate for Boys & Girls together in % during period in bracket	Average Annual Dropout Rate for Boys in% during period in bracket	Average Annual Dropout Rate for Girls in % during period in bracket
India	19.800 (1960-2013)	21.200 (1960-2013)	18.300 (1960-2013)
West Bengal	24.330 (2001-11)	27.620 (2004-11)	20.830 (2004-11)
Manipur	44.830 (2001-11)	45.110 (2004-11)	44.550 (2004-11)
Meghalaya	62.870 (2001-11)	65.590 (2004-11)	59.980 (2004-11)

Mizoram	40.780 (2001-11)	41.500 (2004-11)	39.990 (2004-11)
Nagaland	38.540 (2001-11)	38.510 (2004-11)	38.570 (2004-11)
Assam	32.230 (2001-11)	35.650 (2004-11)	28.660 (2004-11)
Arunachal Pradesh	30.870 (2001-11)	32.470 (2004-11)	29.040 (2004-11)
Tripura	26.830 (2001-11)	27.110 (2004-11)	26.570 (2004-11)
Bihar	34.810 (2001-11)	38.010 (2004-11)	30.740 (2004-11)
Chhattisgarh	29.290 (2005-11)	28.770 (2005-11)	29.830 (2005-11)
Jharkhand	42.920 (2005-11)	42.640 (2005-11)	43.200 (2005-11)
Madhya Pradesh	27.390 (2001-11)	31.230 (2004-11)	23.100 (2004-11)
Odisha	15.490 (2001-11)	17.420 (2004-11)	13.470 (2004-11)
Rajasthan	43.300 (2001-11)	43.200 (2004-11)	43.400 (2004-11)
Uttar Pradesh	18.610 (2001-11)	15.340 (2004-11)	22.190 (2006-11)
Uttarakhand	34.760 (2005-11)	35.740 (2005-11)	33.680 (2005-11)
Andhra Pradesh	15.600 (2001-11)	15.920 (2004-11)	15.270 (2004-11)
Gujarat	27.110 (2001-11)	38.130 (2004-11)	8.340 (2004-11)
Maharashtra	9.530 (2001-11)	8.960 (2004-11)	10.160 (2004-11)
Jammu & Kashmir	8.380 (2001-11)	9.790 (2004-11)	6.820 (2004-11)
Himachal Pradesh	3.650 (2001-11)	3.100 (2004-11)	4.27 (2004-11)
Karnataka	4.270 (2001-11)	4.340 (2004-11)	4.190 (2004-11)
Tamil Nadu	0.400 (2001-11)	0.300 (2004-09)	0.400 (2006-09)

Source: Constructed from data available with Department of Higher Education

In Table-3 state wise Average Annual Dropout Rates for Boys & Girls together and boys and girls separately of 6-11 years old during the period noted against each state are shown. The table reflects that in respect of dropout issue in the Primary level of education West Bengal holds better position compared to seven north-eastern states - Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura where dropout rates are very high. On the other hand, its position is lower compared to Odisha, UP, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu which have comparatively lower dropout rates than West Bengal. Further, the table reveals that the dropout rate in Primary level education in West Bengal is still lower than that of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Gujarat. But the dropout rate in West Bengal (24.330%) is still much higher than that of all India annual average 19.800% for boys and girls together. This may be due to the fact that there are some states namely Odisha, UP, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu etc. and some Territories (not noted here) that exhibit much lower rates. But this is not the correct explanation for higher dropout rate in West Bengal compared to all India rate. The causes are to be searched elsewhere in the socio-economic spheres. Further, it is found that in most of the states average annual dropout rates of boys are something higher than that of girls except few states and West Bengal resembles to India on this feature. Here dropout rates of boys and girls separately are also higher compared to all India rates.

Percentage of children (boys and girls) of the age group of 6-14 years enrolled in schools/not in schools: 2020

The relevant ASER report 2020 on the Upper Primary education has been tabled in Table-4 which shows the percentage share of enrolled children (boys and girls together) in different schools. It helps us to make a comparison between dropout rates during the period from 2018-2020 and to evaluate progress, if any.

Table-4: Percentage of children (boys and girls) of the age group of 6-14 years enrolled in schools/not in schools: 2020

States	Govt. school	Pvt. School	Others	Not in school	Total
Andhra Pradesh	66.9	26.6	0.1	6.5	100
Assam	65.0	33.4	0.5	1.2	100
Arunachal Pradesh	47.4	48.1	0.0	4.4	100
Manipur	11.7	83.4	0.8	4.1	100
Meghalaya	37.9	50.5	0.0	11.6	100
Nagaland	30.5	63.0	0.7	5.9	100
Bihar	76.9	18.0	1.2	3.9	100
Jharkhand	72.1	22.5	2.5	2.9	100
Chhattisgarh	67.0	30.1	0.1	2.8	100
Uttar Pradesh	49.6	39.4	0.7	10.2	100
Madhya Pradesh	65.2	30.2	0.9	3.7	100
Odisha	81.5	16.5	0.1	1.9	100
Himachal Pradesh	54.1	44.3	0.6	1.0	100
Uttarakhand	50.3	43.8	2.0	3.9	100
Haryana	46.9	48.9	0.5	3.7	100
Punjab	46.4	52.1	0.1	1.5	100
Rajasthan	56.7	36.6	0.1	6.7	100
Gujarat	84.7	13.8	0.0	1.5	100
Karnataka	68.6	25.0	0.2	6.2	100
Tamil Nadu	64.6	27.5	1.6	6.2	100
Telangana	54.8	40.1	0.8	4.4	100
Jammu & Kashmir	52.3	45.0	0.3	2.4	100
Maharashtra	67.9	30.0	0.8	1.4	100
Kerala	60.9	36.7	2.4	0.0	100
West Bengal	88.3	10.1	1.0	0.6	100

Source: Constructed from data available with Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1 (accessed on 27.9.22)

Table-4 reflects that the states (West Bengal, Gujarat, Odisha, Assam, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Maharashtra, J&K, Himachal Pradesh except Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar) where the share (in %) of enrolled children in Govt. schools is larger, the % of children 'not in schools' is lower. The % of children 'not in schools' may be taken as a proxy for dropout from

school. From this point of view West Bengal has the highest share (88.3 %) in Govt. schools and its dropout rate is the second lowest (0.6%) after Kerala. In Kerala dropout rate (share of children 'not in schools') is 0.0% though the share in Govt. schools is not the highest (60.9%). This may be due to its highest literacy rate and high level of awareness of people. Conversely Meghalaya has only 37.9% share in Govt. schools and highest dropout rate 11.6%. Therefore, % of enrolled children in Govt. schools may also be a determining factor in reducing the dropout rate in many states. So, the share in Govt. schools should be increased as much as possible. West Bengal obviously has achieved a milestone in this regard.

CAUSES OF DROPOUT

There were/are a number of factors that caused dropout rate in West Bengal to be higher than all India rate before 2011. These factors may be quantified in the following part of our analysis.

Distribution of schools in the state is a fundamental factor. As per stipulated norms, Primary schools would have to be set up within 1 kilometer in rural area and within 0.5 kilometer in urban area. But in West Bengal these criteria have not always been fulfilled though there are an adequate number of schools. This unevenness in the distribution of schools leaves many habitations without any primary school within the stipulated distance. The report of **Pratichi Institute (2013)** based on analysis of official data and the GIS map reveals that the number of such habitations was estimated to be 1186. The **NSSO 71st Round, 2014** also reported in the same way. As per its report, 7.2% of rural households and 9.5% of urban households did not get access to primary school within the stipulated distance.

Pratichi Institute further reports that available schools were grossly inadequate in number specially in the areas where marginalized and economically backward sections of the society inhabited.

It is observed that the pattern of education is influenced by landholding by the household: higher the landholding is, the lower is the dropout rate which can be regarded as the evidence of 'Basu Van Luxury Axiom.' The 'Luxury Axiom' in the Basu Van model states that parents give more education to their children as their income rises above the level that are enough to meet their subsistence level of consumption (Basu K. and Van P. H. 1998) . But empirical evidence shows that the luxury axiom does not work so smoothly in all areas. In Ghana and Pakistan, Bhalotra and Heady (2003) observed that richer families gave less education to their children. It is a kind of violation of the Basu Van Luxury Axiom. In many relatively prosperous districts of South Bengal the force of luxury axiom is weakened and even reversed in one or two districts. Violation of this axiom also causes dropout rate to increase.

Poor education facilities such as poor schooling infrastructure, poor quality education and teacher absenteeism discourage parents to sustain schooling of their children (Chaudhury et al.,2006). Condition of schools and quality of teaching largely influence parents to determine the school completion of their children in Delhi slums (Banerjee 1997). This is also true for West Bengal. **Jalan (2010)** made a study on quality of primary schooling and students achievements in West Bengal

Another observation reveals that self employed parents are found to employ their own children in their own business/work partly to substitute for their purchased labour and partly to make them trained. Parikh and Sadoulet (2005) have found this as one of the causes of dropout and child labour.

Sometimes alternative employment opportunities counteract the positive effects of landholding on dropout rate. It is found that if a family member works away from home and remits money for family it works as a **'pull factor'** to draw the minors from school leading to dropout. Thus alternative employment opportunities can increase dropout rate by counteracting the positive effects of landholding on it.

It is noticed from Table-1 that in the Secondary level the dropout occurs at almost 10 time higher rate than the rates of Primary and Upper Primary levels. An intense look is required to search for reasons of such dropout. In poor families poverty makes a crunch in their day to day life to make their socio-economic problems more severe. To cope with this many of the teenagers are compelled to drop out of school in search of works and to supplement their family incomes. It is true that as the school children upto the Upper Primary level are not capable of doing any physical work the dropout rates for those children are much lower compared to the Secondary level. Thus poverty might be one of the fundamental reasons for increased dropout rate in the Secondary level in the country as well as West Bengal.

In table-4, it is shown that the **percentage of enrollment** of students in Govt. schools is another determining factor of dropout rate. The larger this percentage is the smaller is the dropout rate.

According to ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) 2020, in West Bengal school dropout rate came down from 3.3% to 1.5% during 2018-2020 while the same at the national level increased from 4% to 5.5% in the same period. Survey was conducted in 52,227 families of 16,974 villages under 584 districts of 26 states. In some bigger states namely Rajasthan, Telengana and Karnataka, the school dropout rates were very high. They were 14.9%, 14% and 11.3% respectively. One of the causes for such low rate in West Bengal may be the maximum coverage of students in respect of supplying books to them. The Survey reveals that West Bengal holds the first position in the country in this regard. In terms of providing Text Books to students West Bengal covered 99.7% of total students while Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh obtained 60.4%, 95%, 88.8%, 34.6% and 79.6% respectively. It is reflected in

the report that West Bengal continued its initiatives for imparting education to students through digital and other electronic modes during COVID-19 pandemic.

Some other social factors that can induce dropout rate are larger family size, family belonging to minority community etc. On the other hand, higher level of parents' education can largely reduce the dropout rate.

CONCLUSION

At present school dropout is a very common crisis in almost all states of India. West Bengal is not an exception. Table-2 shows that in West Bengal the dropout rate in primary level came down from 43.650% in 2001 to 24.330% in 2011 showing a fall of 55.738% in 11 years. It is obvious that West Bengal has moved to a better position in respect of reducing dropout rate over the period.

In Table 3 a comparison in respect of average annual dropout rate in the Primary level is made among West Bengal and other states during the period mostly from 2001 to 2011. West Bengal holds better position compared to seven north-eastern states while its position is lower compared to some states in central and southern India. Further, it is noticed that the dropout rate in West Bengal was still lower than that of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Gujarat. But the dropout rate in West Bengal (24.330%) was still much higher than that of all India average annual 19.800% for boys and girls together. Of course this was due to some socio-economic reasons already discussed.

ASER report 2020, in Table-4 shows that in the elementary level (6-14 years of age) of education the % of children 'not in schools' is lower in most of those states which have the larger share (in %) of enrolled children in Govt. schools. If the % of children 'not in schools' is taken as a proxy for dropout rate West Bengal has the highest share (88.3 %) in Govt. schools and its dropout rate is the second lowest (0.6%) after Kerala. Conversely Meghalaya has only 37.9% share in Govt. schools and highest dropout rate 11.6%. Therefore, % of enrolled children in Govt. schools may also be a determining factor in reducing the dropout rate. So, the share in Govt. schools should be increased as much as possible. West Bengal obviously has achieved a milestone in this regard.

According to ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) 2020, school dropout rate in West Bengal came down from 3.3% to 1.5% while the same at the national level increased from 4% to 5.5% during 2018-2020. In some bigger states namely Rajasthan, Telengana and Karnataka, the school dropout rates were very high. They were 14.9%, 14% and 11.3% respectively. The low rate in West Bengal may be due to its maximum coverage of students in respect of supplying books to them. It is reflected in the report that West Bengal continued its initiatives for imparting education to students through digital and other electronic modes during COVID-19 pandemic in spite of its onslaught

on socio-economic spheres. It is true that entire removal is never possible but it could be reduced to a negligible rate. This will be possible when the factors responsible for dropout will be mostly eradicated.

REFERENCES:

1. Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1 (accessed on 27.9.22)
2. Banerji, Rukmini (1997): Why Don't Children Complete Primary School? A Case of a Low Income Neighbourhood in Delhi, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXXII, No.32, August 9, pp. 2053-63.
3. Basu K. and Van P. H. (1998):The Economics 'of Child Labour', *American Economic Review*,1998, 88, 412-27
4. Bhalotra S. and Heady C. (2003): Child farm labour: The wealth paradox. *World Bank Economic Review*, 2003, 17: 197-227
5. Chaudhury, Nazmul, Hammer, Jeffrey, Kremer, Michael, Muralidharan, Karthik and Halsey, Rogers F. (2006): Missing in Action: Teacher and Health Worker Absence in Developing Countries, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter, v. 20, iss. 1, pp.91-116
6. Department of Higher Education
7. Educational Statistics at a Glance, MHRD, Dept. of School Education and Literacy, 2016, GOI, New Delhi .
8. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/population>; Data source: United Nations - World Population Prospects accessed on 08.10.22
9. <https://www.ceicdata.com>india>s...>
10. NFHS-3, 2005-06
11. NSSO 71st Round, 2014
12. Parikh Anokhi and Sadoulet Elisabeth (2005): The Effect of Parents' Occupation on Child Labor and School Attendance in Brazil, ResearchGate, RePEc, 2005, see [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net), accessed on 17.10.22
13. Report of Pratichi Institute (2013)
14. Report of UDSE+ 2019