Systematic analysis of obstacles preventing quality education for children in slum areas

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ABSTRACT:

Education is the basic foundation of the overall development of society and it is also the fundamental right of every child. When it comes to access and quality of education in a developing country like India, it is seen that the most marginalized sections of the society, especially children living in slum areas, are deprived of this right. This paper specifically analyses the immence barriers that stand in the way of quality education for children in slums. Children living in these areas are facing a variety of problems,like enrolling in school because of lack of required documentation, lack of physical infrastructure, adequate schooling, existing poor buildings, toilets and non-availability of drinking water. Moreover, due to weak economic condition of family, children often gets drop out of school to work as labourers or taking up household responsibilities. Socio-cultural factors such as parents' illiteracy, apathy towards education, child marriage, gender discrimination and social stigma also hinder children's learning. At times, children face discrimination, humiliation or even violence in school, which breaks their morale. Shortage of teachers, Defected teacher training programs, lack of teaching spirit among teachers in schools affect the quality of education. The impact of government schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and initiatives such as the RTE Act has been limited, as their implementation is often weak and corrupt. In the era of moving towards digital education, slum areas are deprived of digital facilities, due to which their education comes to a complete halt in situations like COVID-19. In conclusion, it is concluded that mere formulation of policies is not enough to provide quality education to

children in slum areas, but their effective implementation, community participation, teacher training, financial support and social consciousness are essential.

1. INTRODUCTION:

India is a developing nation where Education is considered a powerful weapon for killing backwardness and transforming the society. Under Article 21A of the Constitution, children between the ages of 6 and 14 years have the right to free and compulsory education. But, ironically, for the underprivileged sections of the society, especially children living in slum areas, RTE is still only a paper declaration. The state of education in such areas is extremely perturbing, not only quantitatively but qualittaivly point of view. Even though government initiatives, schemes and campaigns like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-Day Meal Scheme have made a positive impact to some extent, the ground reality still reflects neglection and disparity. Slums are often developed illegaly in urban areas where basic amenities are grossly lacking. The educational environment in such areas is different. Most of the children are engaged in labour or domestic work instead of going to school. Minimum no. of schools, wide learning gap, lack of proper learning material nonavailability of teachers, No updated textbooks, shabby toilet sand no awareness program conduction is pulling children away to education.

According to government reports, educational quality statndard is an issue to take attention that are showing that drop-out rate is not being controlled properly still. Dropout rate in slum areas is even higher than in rural areas. Educational level is extremely low that children are not able to read and write as per the class. The parents of slum children are not educated themselves, due to which they do not understand the importance of education and are not able to motivate the children to educate themselves. They think if their children will go to school they will not be an earnring hand for them. Parents think education is not going to provide them a better standard of living. But any other work during the day hours will give them money. Children's education is also affected by social and cultural factors such as child marriage, gender-based discrimination, alcoholism and domestic violence.[1] It has been observed that girls are particularly deprived of education, who are put to housework or married off at a young age.

The main objective of this research is to identify and systematically analyze the various obstacles in the education of children in slum areas. This is requiste because at present the issues imerged at ground level has not been fully understood & considered in policy formulation and implementation of schemes. Unless these constraints are clearly identified, no initiative could be efficient. This study is trying to understand what are the structural, economic, social, cultural and psychological factors that hinder education. It will also be observed what strategies can be adopted to overcome these obstacles

Socio-economic background and education of slum dwellers:

The rapid expansion of urbanization has increased the pressure of population in India's metros and big cities. This resulted in the creation of slum settlements around urban areas, which became home to mainly the economically weaker sections. These settlements are deprived of basic amenities and the quality of life is minimal. The socio-economic background of slum areas severely affects the dimensions of human development such as education, hygiene & basic health. Especially the educational level of children, their literacy rate, school enrolment and the trend of dropout are deeply linked to this background. A major chunk of the population living in slums is made up of migrant labourers, low-income workers group, daily wage labourers and workers in the unorganised sector.

Parents' illiteracy: Large Family Large Income – A barrier

The population density is high because of the thought- More people more income. Because of lack of geographical area the family structure is usually joint or semi-joint. Generations are living together at a place causing health issues. These settlements have an average of 5 to 7 members per family, with a relatively high number of children. People living in these area have poor facilities, disrupted standard of living, lack of health services and poor sanitary conditions. For slum population Education is never an issue of priority excluding few exceptional cases, as the struggle to earn a living is the main intention of their lives. Parents' illiteracy and financial crisis hinder children's education.[2]

Enrollment Activity As a Hindrance:

The literacy rate in slums is generally lower than the national average. Many studies have shown that the male literacy rate in these areas is satisfactory to some extent, but the literacy rate of women and adolescent girls is found to be very low remarkably. Parents are not aware about birth certificate importance. Uneducated crowd considers process of Birth-

certificate creation a tough and useless task. So they don't get prepare birth certificates of children. At the time of admission lack of birth certificate hinder admission process.

Knowledge Gap among school children:

The knowledge level of children is not corresponding to their class. Primary school cases are revealing knowledge gaps might include students struggling with basic literacy, behavioural, academic and numeracy skills, Few students with better IQ are not getting exposure to diverse subjects or learning environments, because of less focus on academics advancement which can lead to disparities in academic achievement. When survey teams visits schools, so many cases occured that a child studying in class 5th was not able to do writing or basic mathematical/ calculation work even as per class 2nd student. The quality of schools, lack of teaching methods and irregular attendance, are hindering the educational progress of these children. Such kind of practices are creating a threat to future generation growth. Additionally, many children are engaged in household chores, small-scale occupations, or wage labor, which prevents a sustained connection to education. Although the primary school enrolment of slum children has increased due to government efforts and policies, the continued presence and continuity of education is still a serious challenge. The dropout rate of children in these areas is particularly high between classes 5th to 8th standard. There are many reasons behind this, such as the economic condition of the family, the distance of the school, the apathy of the parents, and the social restrictions for adolescent girls, lack of proper learning material and attraction of social media too.

Defective surrounding as a hindrance-

At times, slum children are forced to work as child labourers to contribute to the family's income, leaving their education incomplete by their families. It has been observed in the context of girls that they are made busy with domestic responsibilities in adolescence, or they are married off early. When adolescence boys become earner by small part time works, they are easily get trapped in addiction like alcohol, Drugs, Smoking, Gambling because of small financial freedom. They are not having cognitive maturity. Though they have attained little financial freedom because of being a small earner this freedom, in lack of proper guidance and motivation, throw them in world of several addictions. So such adolescence boys are easily being victim of various addictions & are getting deprieve of education.

Thus, despite the increase in enrolment rate, ensuring continuity and quality of education, slum education is being a challenge even today.[3]

Physical and infrastructural constraints

One of the major and direct obstacles in the field of education in slum areas is the physical infrastructure. Quality education cannot be envisaged unless the physical basis of any educational institution is intact. The actual situation in the slums shows that there are fewer schools, the location is suitable, and the basic facilities are either inadequate or completely out of place. Building are not properly being maintained and monitored by government officials. If buildings are there then in shabby position. It has been observed that most of the slums do not have a permanent school in the neighbourhood. Many schools are being run in small buildings or in makeshift rooms, which lack the necessary environment for the safety of children, seating arrangements and teaching. Children have to go to school by crossing canals, railway tracks, or wide roads, which affects the situation any may create chances of young children. Difficulty in accessing the school reach on regular basisi is leaving a negative impact on girls' education. Apart from this, the improper of lack of essential facilities like toilets, clean drinking water, electricity supply, and proper seating arrangement can be observed easily in these schools. The absence of separate and safe toilets, especially for girls, forces them to quit the school. Girls safety is a noteworthy reason for high drop-out rate. During High temperature hours, non-availability or minimum availability of electricity and drinking water creates hustle among students, Occassional termination of classes hours, lack of teaching dedication of teachers, negligence, lavk of Inclusive spirit, psuchological or physical punishments, are compelling slum children not to come to schools regulary. It has also been observed that in many schools, several classes are conducted in a single room, which affects the quality of teaching.[4]

Lack of easy access to school:

The lack of safe and accessible routes is also a major obstacle. Slums are often located in places where narrow lanes, filth, water logging, and the presence of anti-social elements are common. In such a situation, young children, especially girls & and parents feel insecure for sending their wards to school. It has also been seen during the rainy season, the routes are completely closed, which has a direct impact on the attendance of children. It is thus clear that

unless these infrastructural problems are addressed, it will be difficult to ensure quality and inclusive education in slum areas.

Financial constraints

In India, many efforts have been made to make education accessible and equitable to all, but economic inequalities in slum areas still remain the biggest impediment to children's education. Benefits of Government schemes are not easily accessible to all. Extreme poverty, the challenge of living, and the direct and indirect costs associated with education, make education a burden. For slum area, Higher education is just like a luxury not a basic need. BPL families are struggling to fullfill their basic needs. In this senerio it is naturally difficult to give priority to education. Yuko T.sujita presented opinion to dispersing the education awareness for girls. Idea of better Transportatio facilities, & inclusion of poor children was put for educational opportunity promotion. The families living in slum areas are mainly dependent on daily wage labour, rickshaw-pullers, domestic help, or rag-pickers. Their income is unstable, meagre and uncertain. In such a situation, instead of sending the children to school, the family engages them in labour at an early age to contribute to the household income. Such families do not have the capacity to see education as a long-term investment because they are dependent on immediate livelihood. This compulsion of child labour devours both childhood and education of children. Education in these families is often considered wasteful or unproductive. When parents themselves have never seen the face of the school or have not benefited from education, they are not interested in teaching their children. They also believe that eventually no good job will be found even by reading and writing, so why not put the child to work from now on. This thinking goes on from generation to generation, which clearly shows the lack of culture of education in the slum communities.[5]

Non affordability in Indirect Cost of Education:

In addition to the direct cost, there are many indirect costs in education. Expenses like textbooks, stationery, uniforms, bags, shoes, and sometimes examination fees, etc., are for slum households. They are unable to afford it. Though books uniforms stationery, uniforms, bags are being provided under governmental initiative, still only few are benefitted. After accepting all these educational tools, slum children quit from schools in mid-session. Mid-day meal initiative is also not going to be proven an attractive educational awaremess tool. A lot of children join school and after having meal they flee away from school. Their interest is only

in mid-day meal. They come to school for having lunch and not for being educated. Anyhow government target of education spread gets incomplete yet.

Lack of Digital means:

Moreover, in today's digital age where online education has become mainstream, these children lack resources like smartphones, internet, laptops. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it came to light that the studies of most slum children came to a complete standstill, as they did not have access to digital means. Few exceptional cases are where only 2-3% children-parents are having smartphones. But for them, smartphones are means of entertainment. This situation not only weakens their engagement with education but also adversely affects their educational progress in the long run.

Social and cultural barriers

The neglection of education in slum areas is not limited to the lack of economic or material resources, but social and cultural factors are equally deep-rooted. These obstacles create such invisible barriers in the education of children, especially the girl child, which can be solved not only by plans, but by a change in mindset and attitude. The most prominent social barrier is the illiteracy and lack of awareness among parents. In slum areas, most of the parents themselves have never gone to school or have dropped out after elementary education. Since they have no direct experience or benefit associated with education, they consider it unnecessary or futile. They don't understand how education can change their children's lives. Their priority is livelihood, not education. As a result, they engage in domestic work or labour instead of sending children to school.

Gender Discrimination and Stereotyping:

The next important barrier is the discrimination and stereotyping prevalent in the society regarding the education of girls. Many families still believe that there is no use in educating girls because they have to go to their in-laws' house after marriage. Such thinking limits the education of girls and they are not sent to school even at the primary or secondary level. In addition, the widespread unease in society about the biological changes that occur in the body during adolescence, and the lack of necessary facilities in schools, affect the attendance of girls.[6] Gender roles pervading society also dictate that the role of girls is only within the home, not in school or in careers.

Another cultural barrier is child marriage, domestic workload and family restrictions. Due to poverty and insecurity in slum areas, many families marry off girls at an early age. This ends their education in the middle. Even before marriage, the burden of household chores often falls on the shoulders of girls, preventing them from attending school regularly. Disagreements of male family members or elders also become a major hurdle when they go to school. At times, social pressure and neighbourhood surveillance also compel parents to decide not to send girls to school.[7] These barriers make it extremely difficult to maintain continuity in the education of girls. It is thus clear that unless a change in socio-cultural attitudes is brought about, it is not possible to improve the quality and accessibility of education in slums.

Negative Teaching Attitude: Itself a problem

Teachers are the backbone of the education system, and their role is extremely important in the behavioural, psychological, intellectual and moral development of children. Especially in slum areas, the role of a teacher is not limited to textbooks, but he also plays the role of a guide, enabler and motivator and a mentor. But when one looks at the realities in these areas, it is clear that there are many problems related to teachers hampering the quality of education. The main problem is the lack of trained and motivated teachers. Teachers are happy for their renumeration but they don't want be true to their ethical responsibilities of teaching. In slum areas, teachers are often appointed who are either poorly trained or their selection is a mere formality. They do not have a deep understanding of pedagogical innovations, child psychology, classroom management and value-based learning. At the same time, the desire to work in these areas is low in itself, as the lack of facilities and social status discourages them. As a result, such teachers work only in the spirit of service discharge, which is not enough for the overall development of children.[8]

Another dilemma is the absence of teachers and lack of interest in teaching. It is a common complaint in many slum schools that teachers do not come regularly, and even if they do come, they do not give time & proper attention to class. They tend to bide time, thereby losing both interest and trust in children. This inaction of the teachers, on the one hand, deprives the children of education, on the other hand, the trust of the parents is also broken. They think that it is pointless to send children to schools when the teachers are not paying attention. As a result, the attendance of children falls, and the rate of dropout increases.

Language Differences:

Language and social distancing also become a major barrier between teachers and students. The mother tongue, speech and social behaviour of children living in slum areas are often different from the language and culture from which the teachers come. This cultural difference affects the communication between the teacher and the student. Teachers are unable to understand children's language, background, and lifestyle, leading them to either try to dominate or ignore them. This situation creates inferiority complex in the minds of the children and they start feeling themselves to be disconnected from the school. Girls in particular are more affected by this distance, as they are already subjected to double neglect - on the basis of gender and on socio-economic grounds.[9]

All these problems not only affect the educational level of children, but also raise a question mark on the usefulness of education. If teachers are not trained, sensitised and motivated, education for slum children will remain a mere formality.

Lethal Family Environment: Cognitive, Psychological and emotional problems

Education is not only an intellectual process, but it is also a mental, emotional and social cognitive and behavioural journey. This journey becomes even more challenging, especially for children living in slum areas, as the socio-cultural and economic environment of their lives creates a variety of mental barriers. These barriers adversely affect their learning ability, motivation, and self-perception. Children in slum areas have to repeatedly face violence, fear and stress in their daily lives. Experiences such as domestic discord, parental fights, economic distress, drug abuse, and sexual violence create a sense of insecurity in the minds of these children. Many children are also affected by police interference in their surroundings, street violence or threats from neighbours. School should be a safe place for them, but sometimes they face harsh treatment in the name of scorn, neglect or discipline. In such an environment, the child becomes mentally disturbed and his studies are negatively affected. The availability of guidance and counselling services for such children is essential, but most government or community schools do not have such a system. Neither are there trained counsellors in schools, nor are teachers trained to understand psychological problems. As a result, children continue to struggle alone with their inner emotional problems. When they do not get an opportunity to share their problems, it takes the form of depression, silence or resentment. In such a mental environment, children are cut off from education and their curiosity to learn is lost.[10]

These situations have a direct impact on children's self-confidence and motivation. Constant scorn, fear of failure, and a lack of a supportive environment do not allow children to believe that they can do something. They begin to underestimate themselves and gradually turn away from education. Especially those children who are already socially marginalized, like girls, children coming from the depressed class or minority community, they struggle more with the crisis of self-sensitivity. Thus, it is clear that if we want to give quality education to the children of slum areas, then not only the curriculum and pedagogy, but also their mental health and emotional balance have to be given priority. This requires schools to have appropriate counseling services, trained sensitive teachers, and an environment that provides children with safety, support, and self-esteem.

Digital Inequality and Technology Challenges-

Digital education has emerged as a powerful medium in the educational landscape of the 21st century, but this medium becomes a challenge when a large section of the society does not have the necessary resources to connect with it. Education through the digital medium has become a new wall, especially for children living in slum areas, which further distances them from the mainstream of education. This disparity came to the fore more starkly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools were physically closed and education became entirely dependent on online platforms. The economic condition of most of the families in the slum areas is very weak. These families have limited access to digital devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets. Even if someone in the same family has a smartphone, it is used for parental functions, or other household needs. Moreover, the cost of internet data, the instability of the network, and the absence of a regular supply of electricity also make digital education impossible for these children. Many children rely only on verbal information without their mobile phones or TV, disrupting their learning process.[11]

Students are facing a lot of difficulties while attending online classes. On the one hand, there was a lack of technical equipment, on the other hand, the continuity and quality of digital classrooms was also questionable. Teachers were also not technically trained and at times felt uncomfortable in operating digital platforms. Children do not have the opportunity to communicate directly with teachers, which does not solve doubts. This process of education was reduced to a one-way flow of information, which lacked understanding, participation and practice. As a result, the speed of learning of children slowed down and their disinterest

towards studies started increasing. Another important aspect is the status of digital literacy. In slums, not only children, but also their parents are unfamiliar with digital devices and technological processes. They don't understand online class timings, don't know how to open links, don't know how to operate educational apps. Many times, children are left without technical support, due to which they are unable to connect themselves with online teaching. As a result, they are gradually cut off from education and a situation of dropout arises.[12] It is thus evident that digital inequality has further limited the educational opportunities of children in slum areas. If digital education is to be developed as an inclusive medium in the future, it requires not only the availability of technological resources, but also digital literacy, teacher training, and economic support alike.

Conclusion

Education has been considered as a powerful medium of social change and personal development, but for children in slum areas, it is beset with many obstacles. Through this research, it was clearly revealed that the dream of quality education for these children is still unfulfilled, and multifaceted, coordinated and accelerated efforts are required to fulfill it. Talking about the major findings of the research, it was observed that education in slum areas first faces the challenge of meeting basic needs. Schools are few in number, buildings are unsafe, and basic amenities like toilets, water, electricity, etc. are either unavailable or of very low standard. At the same time, factors such as economic inequality, child labour, parental illiteracy, social and cultural biases deprive children of education. Girls, in particular, face problems such as social stereotypes, domestic workload and child marriage, which make them drop out of education early.

In the light of all these findings, it seems necessary to take prompt and effective action to ensure equity in education. Education should not remain a mere policy matter, but should be understood as a matter of social justice, equal opportunity and human rights. For this, government institutions must prioritise transparency, accountability and community participation in the implementation of their policies. Joint efforts are needed towards inclusive education. In this, the role of the government, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, educationists, parents and children themselves is important. Special strategies should be made for slum areas, in which education should be adapted to their socio-economic context. Schools should not only be centres of learning, but also centres of social co-operation

and trust. Therefore, it can be concluded that unless the education of slum children is linked to the overall development of society, the inclusive vision of education will remain incomplete. This is the time for all of us to make united efforts to make education accessible, respectful and effective for all.

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