Are we Really Providing Quality Education to the Marginalized?

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Abstract

Children are the future of any nation and therefore they should be protected. This can ensure future of a nation. The objective of this paper is to explain the barriers to quality education especially for the children in primary school from backward socio-economic communities. This paper focuses on children living in the slums of Pune, a city in the State of Maharashtra in India. This paper will underscore the significance of quality education for children's overall growth and well-being. For accomplishing the objective of the study, qualitative unstructured interviews were undertaken. Based on qualitative research, this result shows how these children struggle to get quality education. It demonstrates how their socio-economic background, home environment, social environment and prejudices of teachers hinder and affect educational attainment and overall growth. Conceptual framework of this study is socialization, mobility, exclusion, cultural capital.

Keywords: Childhood, quality education, socialization, cultural capital, barriers, caste, mobility, drop out, exclusion.

Introduction

Dropout rates of school children in India are a topic of worry for policy makers, civil society activists and educationists. "A child is any person below age eighteen years". "Childhood is an integral part of life with a value of its own" (NPC, 2013). Childhood is a not simply a stage of biological immaturity but is also socially constructed in various ways in different societies in different historical periods (Scott, 2014)The child population under 18 years in India is 448,314 that is, second largest after China (SCI, 2018).The happiness, success and fulfillment that we achieve and enjoy in later part of life, largely depends on positive childhood experiences. Children are future of any nation. It is important that they are supported in every possible way. Only then the future of nation is secured. One way to secure the future is to ensure access to quality education to all children. Care should be taken that no section of society should be deprived of education.For this, we need tremendous political willpower, comprehensive educational policies, efficient systems to implement them precisely, and excellent facilities.

Through education, members of a society transfer their knowledge, skills and values to the younger generation. Thus knowledge, self-preservation and continuity are guaranteed through the process of socialization. In this sense, education is understood as a process of socialization in which the roles of three institutions are unique among social institutions: interaction with friends, family relationships, and school. Through which individuals learn to follow rules, get rewards for their work, and learn how to behave in public

(Rawat,2007).Millions of children go through school and come out without basic literacy and numeracy (ASER, 2018).

The objective of this paper is to explain the barriers to quality education especially for the children in primary school from backward socio-economic communities living in the slums of Pune City, Maharashtra. It highlights factors that affect the quality of life of children and reasons why there are barriers to access to quality education despite comprehensive laws.It should be remembered that these are not the only issues which tend to threaten the childhood in India. Numerous issues in quality education can jeopardize a productive childhood (Kumar,2004). In this paper I analyze childhood from the perspective of quality education.

Quality Education and Its Importance:

Education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. Education not only offers to better understand social reality but also shapes the personality of child, instills moral and democratic values, broadens knowledge, and bestows talents (Bates, 2019). According to Paulo Freire, education is a process of emancipation as well as of knowing the world. Education is a broader process than literacy. A system of education aimed at developing capacities for personal and social emancipation can make the future of the underprivileged promising. Achieving 'emancipation' at the dual level of individual and society is achieved through education as a revolutionary process. Inequality, exploitation are the scourges on the road to liberation. (Savale, 2017).

According to UNESCO "Quality education specifically entails issues such as appropriate skills of development, gender parity, provision of relevant school infrastructure, equipment, educational materials and resources, scholarships or teaching force".According to UNICEF India, education isthat process which helps children to acquire basic literacy and numeracy, enjoy learning without fear and feel valued and included irrespective of where they come from. Attaining quality education is the key factor that can break the cycle of poverty. SDG Goal 4 - Ensure Quality, Access, Equity and Inclusion. (SDG 4, UN, 2015)To achieve SDG 4, India is implementing a number of educational missions, like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.Right to Education Act, 2009 lays down provisions for free and compulsory education for all and NIPUN Bharat is also focusing on basic skills.

Barriers in Quality Education:

The prevalence of serious inequalities and lack of sensitivity of schools to the economic and social realities that children experience in their daily lives. The fact that schools have failed to provide adequate academic support to dalit and adivasi children, a majority of whom come from non-literate and poorly educated homes, is also a factor that is usually ignored. (Nambissan,2000).Many reports have shown the inability of large numbers of boys and girls in the primary grades to read and write simple sentences. The non-detention policy followed by most state governments at the primary level often hides the real progress of students as they are promoted regardless of their performance.(Chanana, 2006). Also, everyday practices of exclusion in educational institute or authorities also prove as barriers to education for SC, ST and other children from marginalized backgrounds. In this paper we are focusing on barriers in quality education of children in primary schools run by the Pune Municipal Corporation from backward socio-economic communities living in slums.

Methodology:

The qualitative data was collected using case study, unstructured interview and observation method. We have interviewed children (15), their parents (15), and teachers (15) of Pune Municipal Corporation primary schools.

Enjoying Quality education: Barriers and Issues

A.   Socio-economical background of the children:

Children from different socioeconomic backgrounds and with different parental educational levels differ from one another (Sandoval.,et al, 2016). According to Bourdieu children from elite class or middle class are always seen to be higher in education than children from proletariat, workers, socio-economic weaker sections due to their cultural capital; he identified three sources of cultural capital: objective, embodied and institutional."economic barriers are not sufficient" to explain the disparity in educational attainment of children from different classes, but cultural habits and family dispositions above and beyond economic factors are fundamentally important for school success (Gunn, 2005).

A boy respondent said that, *"I go to work at 5:30 am to deliver newspapers. At 8 o'clock I come home and go for exercise and then sit in the school completing my homework from 11 am to 12 pm. I go to play after school and then help my mother with her work till 8pm."*.It indicates that due to the poor socio-economic conditions he has to work part-time at a young age. Also I observed that due to lack of cultural capital respondents cannot experience childhood as in the elite class. Poverty whether, it is absolute or relative, destroys different aspects of childhood. (Mukharjee, el at, 2019). A girl respondent said that, *"I often can't finish my homework because my mother takes me to her workplace"*.It means she cannot perform well in her school. Low family socioeconomic status is often associated with children performing poorly in school (Gabrielli, el at, 2022).It was observed that the children get enrolled in schools but are unable to attend the school regularly. It may result in increasing children dropout rate from the schools, a child is classified as dropouts if she/he discontinued her/his studies in past or was absent for more than 45 working days from school (RTE 2009).Social-economic status affects psychological and educational growth of the children.

B.   Family environment:

The family plays an important role in his/her social, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and economic well-being in their childhood. Parents are the first socializing factor so the behavioral environment in the home influences the children.It builds a child's reaction toward his life. (Ali.,et al,2005).Socio-economically disadvantaged individuals often have physically demanding jobs with limited autonomy, low job satisfaction, and poor or no health insurance. All may directly or indirectly increase chronic pain rates. (Poleshuck., et al, 2008). It results in a number of addictions, indebtedness, psychological stress and it is a directly effect of the socio-economic problems in the family.

A majority of the respondents openly shared information about the family environment, one of the girls responded that, "*Father drinks alcohol. He fights with the mother, beats her, everything else is fine*". Another response was from a girl, *"my father was alcoholic and used to beat my mother on suspicion, and he has left us. Now mother takes care of the house*". It was observed that the majority of the fathers were alcoholic. Turbulent environment at home leads to negative effects on educational growth of child and it affects their experiences of childhood. Also, the parents go to work for the whole day, so taking care of siblings, fetching water, cleaning, cooking, largely falls on the girl child. Parents are often absent for meetings of the Parents' Teachers' Association (PTA) in schools and they are also unable to pay attention to children's homework and

schooling. It results in lack of children's regularity in completing their homework. ASER (2018)report states that, "in grade 5 after more than four years of schooling, only half of all children could read grade 2 level texts fluently".
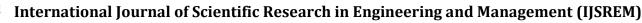
C.   Social environment:

People of different caste-religion and culture live together in the slum. But the thread that binds them together is their place in social stratification, and common problems. Parent respondent said that, "*The conducive social atmosphere in our settlement has deteriorated. Older children have dropped out of school. Now they are addicted in various ways like smoking cigarettes, playing cards, and mobile phones. Seeing this, children are deliberately misbehaving in school, so I do not allow my grandchildren to go out of the house at all"* . This indicates that neighborhood patterns of behaviour of older children or youth in the neighborhood affect the attitude and orientation of the school going children. leads to drop out from school. Children who dropped out from schools are addicted. Since the respondent does not allow his grandchildren to go out of the house, they feel suffocated. Her grandchildren are unable to enjoy playing with friends and learning the necessary social skills.As stated by Paul Willis in "Anti-Educational Culture", school boys and girls in these communities seem to give more importance to the responsive roles of the peer group without following the values, authority, rules of the school (Hargreaves, 2012).It leads to problems like not studying, being absent from school, not following the instructions of the teachers are seen. therefore, it is seen that boys and girls are progressing towards degradation without making educational progress. According to Sorokin "By social mobility is meant any transition of an individual from one position to another in a constellation of a social group and strata" (Nazimuddin, 2015). Given the current educational status of the respondents, it seems that the type of social mobility that these children will most probably experience will be downward mobility.

D.   Prejudices of teachers:

Even among teachers who do not believe they hold any explicit biases, implicit biases are associated with differential judgments about and treatment of children by race, gender, ability and disability, body type, physical appearance, and social, economic, and language status all of which limit children's opportunities to reach their potential (Staats.,et al, 2017). A teacher respondent stated that, "*98% of children are from slum areas. Their comprehension ability and lack of consistency in studies are because they are from lower castes. Therefore, children could have to face problems such as not being able to read, write, and do calculations*". It is a fact that India represents a divided society based on caste system and elite class has become very dominant especially in the urban areas (Datta., Mukharjee, 2019). Another teacher respondent said that,"*No matter how many messages are sent for the parents' meeting, many parents do not come at all, but when they hear thatthe government is going to distribute some 'things' in the school, the parents crowd the school*".Another teacher exclaimed, *'these parents living in slums are like that only!'*The teacher's comments further imply that "these parents are ignorant, uncaring, and 'these people' will never improve". These are the prejudices of the teacher towards the working-class uneducated parents living in slums.

Although teachers are an important link in the implementation of educational policies like 'Right to Education Act 2009' which aims to promote and ensure inclusion of children from SC. ST. DTNT, OBC and minority communities. If teachers have such a prejudice against parents and children living in slums then it is questionable whether 'Right to Education Act 2009' will be implemented effectively or not. Teachers' prejudices result indirectly in denial of fundamental right to education and access to quality education. It is social exclusion of the children in process of learning. Social exclusion is the process by which individuals are

deprived of various rights, opportunities, and natural resources that are normally more readily available to members of a community than too socially, economically, and culturally disadvantage groups in the community (Byrne, 2005).

Conclusion:

Poor quality education is leading to poor learning outcomes in India, ultimately pushing children out of the education system. This forces children into child labour, abuse and violence. Poor socio-economic conditions, turbulent family environment, unsustainable social environment, and prejudices of teachers are the barriers for children to get quality education. Children are deprived of acquiring life skills. It adversely affects their cognitive, socio-emotional and language development of children. It leads to stimulate the power of imagination, children unable to learn basic educational skills like reading, writing, math's calculations etc. it may cause alienation from the learning process and leads to dropout from the school. This has increased the risk of falling victim to evils like crime, drug addiction, human trafficking, child labor, child marriages etc. Awareness regarding safe and secured childhood among the parents, teacher is still absent in the society at large. The issues which are highlighted above are the just few evils that plague the childhood. In fact, the issues can be infinite so far, the inadequacy of measures is concerned.

Barriers in quality education are affecting childhood of the respondent children. Slum communities do not have cultural capital. School is an important factor for the socialization of children but here this factor seems to be failing to fulfill its role. Therefore, children are deprived of quality education. It results in exclusion of the children from quality education. It seems that educational status of backward socio-economic community in columnar type of social mobility will become downward mobility.

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