

Dissertation Abstract

At the dawn of Indian planning regime (1950), the Government of India was constitutionally committed to ensure education for the children belonging in the age group of 5-14 years within 10 years. Having failed to achieve the goal of education for the children, the Indian parliament amended the Constitution by making education a Fundamental Right of the child between the ages 6-14 years (The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002).

India is the second largest populous country in the world sharing more than 17% of world's total population. Considering this substantial strength in the sheer number of persons, it becomes important to examine the qualitative nature of the population with respect to educational achievement as well as to make an assessment of the failure to achieve the same. For this, the study leads to an enquiry into the nature and causes of not achieving the target of universal elementary education in the country in spite of considerable economic growth.

It is from this background the present research work has been undertaken firstly with a view to make an assessment of progress of India's educational development. Special reference has been made to the state of West Bengal and Uttar Dinajpur district of the state in particular. Thus the study is carried out to identify and measure the nature and extent of educational backwardness in India at various disaggregated level. Literacy development and achievement of elementary education have mainly been emphasized. To carry out the study it has been hypothesized that lower educational attainment may primarily result from higher incidence of poverty/low level of income, female work participation, dependency on agriculture, job opportunity of children and proportion of socially disadvantaged people. While the above factors are mainly hoe hold related, enabling factors incorporated in the study are proportion of female teachers in schools, better coverage of school, pupil-teacher ratio, parental level of education, secured and regular income of the group of population. Apart from this, some micro level issues are also addressed in the study.

The study commences with the relevance and significance of the research, methodology used for collecting and analysing the data, and review of available literature. A historical background of educational development in India has been examined drawing a trend of development between the periods 1950-51 and 2000-2001. In order to comprehend the educational variation within the region of the country, a state level analysis of educational development is briefly discussed. From the review and analysis of the state level literacy trend and educational development, West Bengal has been found as one of the educationally backward states in India. Again, for the purpose of identifying the educationally deprived area of West Bengal, an inter-district analysis has been carried out. This analysis also makes an attempt to correlate the underlying factors of regional variation at district and sub-district level by analyzing the secondary data. Among the 18 districts of the State, Uttar Dinajpur has been identified as the most backward district in respect of literacy development and achievement in elementary schooling. Accordingly, a detailed analysis of the educational pattern (both enabling attributes and achievement attributes) is carried out at sub-district and mouza level. Here an attempt has also been worked out to identify the factors held responsible for such a lower educational performance of the district using the secondary data. Finally, a supportive micro level study is carried out in four villages of the district with a view to identify the major factors for educational backwardness of the study area.

Two specific econometric techniques namely, Multiple Regression Analysis with OLS method and Logistic Regression Analysis with MLE method, that have been applied for the analysis of data at micro level study are also detailed out for understanding of the usefulness

and justification of the specific methodology for the selected study. A comparison of micro level findings with those of the macro level study is also provided for better understanding of the problem of educational backwardness in the state in particular and in the country in general.

The study identifies critical areas of concern based on differential achievement in education in rural India and amongst females. It is thus suggested to formulate a holistic policy for Indian females, especially in the rural area for a balanced educational development in India. The present study advocates for raising the public expenditure on education gradually to 6% of GDP over the 11th plan period (2007-12) for achieving the MDG and EFA Goals within 2015. It raises a severe discrepancy in respect of school availability on the ground that there is an imbalance in the ratio of primary to upper primary schools in India. Acute shortage of stage-integrated school at elementary level and considerably low proportion of female teacher at primary level of education in India have remained as two of the main problems of school education in the country. These twin issues are found to be more prominent in West Bengal. As such establishment of schools having the facility of education from grade-I to at least Grade-VIII (i.e., primary with upper primary schools) especially in remote areas, may be fruitful for completion of eight years of schooling. A comparative study reviewing the educational development of elementary school children belonging to stage-integrated and stage isolated schools may throw light on some better directions.

The district level analysis of literacy trend and analysis of school education system in West Bengal categorically identifies the five districts of northern part along with three other districts of south-western part as the low performed districts that need special attention. The present study has empirically tried to find out the causes of such an educational deprivation in one district only, i.e., Uttar Dinajpur. Similar, micro-level study may be undertaken in future in the other deprived districts too for understanding of the root of the problem. In West Bengal, educational deprivation is mostly found among two sections of population, namely, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. These critical areas have to be specially handled.

The empirical findings on rural West Bengal show that educational achievement at household level has positive association with the proportion of income spent on children's education rather than merely with level of income. In this respect, providing cash incentives to the households who are sending their children to school may be an attractive policy measure for the guardian living below poverty line (BPL). TLC is suggested in this district as because the success of the programme has been quite satisfactory. Better educational attainment is found to be higher among the cultivators compared to the agricultural labourers. Both secondary and primary data analysis supports the finding. Accordingly, review and re-strengthening of the State Government's popular measure of land reform may bring about shift in the occupational pattern of workers from predominantly agricultural labourers to cultivators. Although a negative effect is observed at district level secondary data analysis, female work participation remains inconclusive at micro level study. By comparing the relative magnitude of regression coefficients, it is found that the educational level of mothers is really doing most of the works in explaining the overall (PLR) and female literacy rate (FLR). Child schooling is found to be low in those households where the children is found to be working. Thus policy against the engagement of child labours needs to be strengthened in the area.

In the process of carrying out this research, several new areas of research came to light which have also been suggested. In a nutshell, the work raises issues that have to be reconsidered, makes some suggestions for policy initiatives and finally opens the scope for further research in the related issues.