

Demystifying the Reasons of Dropouts in Government High Schools in National Capital Region

Samara Chauhan

Amity International School, New Delhi and

Abstract: This study explores the underlying factors contributing to high school dropouts in government institutions across Delhi-NCR, focusing on the socio-economic, infrastructural, pedagogical, and cultural determinants influencing students' educational continuity. Using primary data collected from selected government high schools, supplemented by secondary literature, the analysis identifies poverty, distance to school, poor academic performance, early marriage, and parental disengagement as significant contributors to dropout behavior. While recent government initiatives—such as infrastructural upgrades and scholarship schemes—have improved retention rates, gaps remain in awareness, implementation, and socio-cultural support. The research highlights that while school facilities and teaching quality have improved considerably, social attitudes, financial stress, and lack of life skills education continue to hinder sustained attendance. The study concludes that holistic reforms encompassing teacher sensitization, digital inclusion, community engagement, and student counselling are vital for improving retention. Addressing these systemic barriers is essential to achieve the goals of NEP 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on equitable, inclusive, and quality education for all.

Keywords: Dropouts, Government Schools, Poverty, Parental Support, Gender, Education Policy, Delhi-NCR.

1. Introduction:

Education is the foundation for human development and national progress. It provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for productive participation in society. Education has traditionally been seen in India as a means of attaining economic progress, fostering social mobility, and lowering poverty. With initiatives like the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Indian government has worked hard to increase access to education since independence. Elementary school enrollment has significantly grown as a result of these programs. However, the issue of school dropouts persists despite advancements in universalizing education, especially at the secondary level in government institutions, where the majority of pupils come from economically and socially disadvantaged homes (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2023).

The term *dropout* generally refers to a student who leaves school before completing a prescribed level of education (UNESCO, 2019). In India, primary school dropout rates are modest, while secondary and upper secondary dropout rates rise significantly. The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE, 2022–23) reports that the nationally average secondary-level dropout rate is approximately 13.8%, with substantially higher rates in government schools that

serve underprivileged and rural communities. Because secondary education acts as a springboard to further study and employment, dropout at this point is especially troubling. Students who drop out of school too soon risk poverty, limited access to economic possibilities, and diminished ability to fully engage in civic life (Tilak, 2020). As a result, the dropout crisis not only signifies a loss of human potential but also provides a significant obstacle to reaching SDG 4, which places an emphasis on inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education for everyone.

In Indian government high schools, poverty continues to be the most important factor influencing dropout rates. Many low-income pupils are forced to drop out of school in order to work or conduct household chores to support their family. Research suggests that financial difficulties raise the opportunity cost of education, or the money lost when a child chooses to stay in school rather than work (Bajpai & Jha, 2019). Even with free tuition, impoverished families still have to pay for hidden expenses like books, uniforms, transportation, and test fees. Nearly 28% of school discontinuation instances among teenagers aged 14–17 was due to financial reasons, according to the National Sample Survey (NSSO, 2020).

Parental education and economic disadvantage are closely related. Parents who are illiterate or only partially literate frequently disregard the long-term benefits of education in favor of short-term financial gain over education (Jain & Agarwal, 2020). Seasonal migration for work also disrupts schooling in rural and semi-urban areas, resulting in sporadic attendance and eventual dropout. Furthermore, poverty and gender-based inequality are intertwined: girls are frequently pulled out of school earlier than boys because of household duties, early marriage, or cultural norms that place a lower value on female education (Kumar & Gupta, 2018). According to UNICEF (2021), teenage girls in rural India encounter several obstacles, including poor sanitary facilities, unsafe transportation to school, and societal expectations of domestic work, all of which lead to increased dropout rates.

Another major factor contributing to the persistence of dropout rates in government high schools is institutional shortcomings. The absence of laboratories, packed classrooms, inadequate digital resources, and poor infrastructure all contribute to an unfavourable learning environment (Bose, 2017). The lack of competent educators, particularly in the fields of science and math, further degrades educational quality. Only 40% of government secondary schools have access to computers, and less than 60% have scientific labs, according to the Ministry of Education (2021). The motivation and involvement of pupils are adversely affected by such infrastructure deficiencies.

Disengagement among students is also a result of pedagogical practices. Many government schools continue to emphasize rote memorization and exams above critical thinking and problem-solving skills in their instruction (NCERT, 2022). As a result, pupils with inadequate intellectual backgrounds find it difficult to handle the heightened expectations of secondary education. This problem is made worse by a lack of career counseling, remedial support, and advice. Mehta and Kaur (2019) discovered that low self-efficacy and a history of academic

failure are important indicators of adolescent dropout. These elements demonstrate how important education's relevance and quality are, just as important as its accessibility.

Dropout rates in government schools are also influenced by social isolation, caste-based prejudice, and cultural views. In and out of the classroom, students from marginalized groups—such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)—face structural disadvantages. Peer or teacher discrimination can lead to low self-esteem and alienation (Thorat & Newman, 2010). According to a study by Choudhury (2019), children from tribal and Dalit families frequently experience low teacher expectations, little support, and subtle biases, which eventually cause them to become disengaged and drop out.

Educational aspirations are also influenced by social standards. Education is sometimes seen as less significant in many societies than helping to support the family or getting ready for an early marriage, particularly for girls. Enrollment and retention are still impacted by parental attitudes that place a low value on secondary education, especially for female children (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). Adolescent females are also disproportionately affected by child labor, early marriage, and household duties, which restricts their chances of finishing high school (UNESCO, 2019).

There are still implementation flaws even though the Indian government has put in place a number of initiatives to lower dropout rates, including free textbooks, midday meals, and scholarships. While secondary-level retention has gotten less governmental attention, the majority of schemes have concentrated on primary education (Bajpai & Jha, 2019). Program efficacy is frequently harmed by inadequate monitoring systems, lengthy bureaucratic processes, and a lack of accountability. Furthermore, not enough data-driven interventions are in place to identify and assist students who are at danger of dropping out.

The issue was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Deep digital disparities between students attending government and private schools were brought to light by the shift to online education. According to 2021 research by the Azim Premji Foundation, about 75% of pupils in government schools were unable to attend online courses because they lacked digital devices, internet connectivity, or proper direction. Many students did not return when classes resumed because they had found employment or had lost interest in their studies. This circumstance emphasizes how urgently strong digital infrastructure and focused re-enrollment initiatives are needed.

Psychological and individual factors can have a significant impact on dropout behavior. Teenagers frequently struggle with motivation and emotions, which interrupts their learning. Absenteeism and disengagement might result from peer pressure, bullying, or poor teacher-student relationships (Kumar, 2020). In government schools, a large number of pupils lack mentors or role models who can help them navigate both personal and academic challenges. This lack of support, when coupled with subpar academic achievement, breeds discouragement and feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, the absence of life skills education and counseling

programs limits students' resilience in coping with stress or failure. Schools that fail to provide a nurturing and inclusive environment inadvertently push vulnerable students out of the education system.

Dropout rates in Indian government high schools are a complex problem with profound institutional, social, and economic roots. Inadequate infrastructure, cultural bias, poverty, gender inequity, and gaps in policy execution all contribute to the ongoing dropout issue. Beyond schooling, the ramifications impact national growth, social inclusion, and employability. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates community involvement, gender-sensitive treatments, targeted financial help, and better school infrastructure is needed to address this issue. Strengthening teacher capacity, providing remedial education, and implementing early-warning systems for at-risk students are equally crucial. A comprehensive and inclusive strategy—aligned with the goals of the NEP 2020 and SDG 4—can ensure that every child not only enters but also successfully completes high school, paving the way for a more equitable and skilled India.

1. Literature review:

The pattern of high school dropout is revealed by empirical research conducted in the past utilizing cohort and longitudinal data. While the majority of children enrolled finish the early primary grades, attrition increases significantly after that and is consistently greater for socially disadvantaged groups, according to survival-analysis and cohort-wise research. Caste and community interact with gender and rural residence to produce distinct retention patterns, according to Goel and Husain's (2018) analysis using NSS data. Caste inequalities have shrunk in certain cohorts, but they are still significant in many rural locations and at higher grades. Studies at the panel and household levels also show that poverty and early learning deficiencies are linked to later dropout, with underprivileged caste groups being disproportionately impacted by both low learning and financial pressure to drop out of school. (IHDS analysis; Goel & Husain, 2018).

After adjusting for individual and labor market factors, longitudinal research carried out in the United States showed a significant relationship between school dropouts and adolescent employment (Warren and Lee 2003). Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated that students who work long hours are less engaged in their studies, have lower academic achievement, and are more likely to drop out (Warren et al. 2002, 2003). Additionally, research in North Karnataka revealed a correlation between school dropout among teenage girls and economic issues such household poverty and female migration for employment (Prakash et al., 2017).

According to research by Latif et al. (2015), one of the major reasons why students drop out is financial concerns. Teenage girls are more likely to leave school if they encounter bullying or harassment there as well as an unfavorable learning environment (Prakash et al., 2017). However, in other nations, factors like the distance to school, the lack of basic amenities, the poor quality of education, the unsuitable school environment and building, crowded classrooms,

improper language instruction, careless teachers, and security concerns in girls' schools are the main causes of student dropouts (Latif et al., 2015).

A cross-sectional community-based study in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, found that 11% of youth leave school due to poor academic performance (Minz et al., 2015). Social norms and behaviors include things like the value placed on women's education and child marriage. School dropouts are strongly correlated with socioeconomic status, mother education, family violence, parental unwillingness (Minz et al. 2015), and household income (Blue et al. 2004), according to Prakash et al. (2017). One prospective study indicated a significant association between social relationships and secondary school non-completion. For example, the likelihood of secondary school dropout was 2.6 times higher for 18-year-old girls who had difficulty handling family issues. Additionally, children from low-income households were almost three times more likely to drop out of secondary school than their high-income peers (Winding et al., 2015). Previous studies have shown a link between substance abuse (Minz et al., 2015), high school dropout (Hawkins et al., 2013), and dangerous non-academic activities (e.g., drug, alcohol, or cigarette use, delinquency, sexual participation, and unintended pregnancies).

A panel data analysis found that children whose parents did not monitor their homework during the first round, attend PTA meetings, or speak with teachers about their academic progress were more likely to drop out of school into their teens. Poor relationships with classmates and teachers at age 18 accounted for a large percentage of the income-dropout correlation for both boys and girls (Winding et al., 2015). Children who excelled academically and behaviorally in the tenth grade had a lower chance of dropping out in the twelfth grade, per a longitudinal study (Fall et al., 2018).

Numerous additional studies in the field have asserted that dropping out might have a variety of detrimental consequences. One study found that students who choose to drop out of school affect not only themselves but also their families, communities, and society as a whole (Crisle et al., 2007). Young people who drop out of school also experience underemployment and a lower quality of life. Worldwide, a sizable percentage of kids drop out of school each year (Kishore et al., 2012, Sinha et al., 2016). However, a significant number of them are either living in poverty or needing government assistance, or they are either incarcerated, ill, divorced, or single parents of children who are likely to repeat the cycle themselves (Kishore et al., 2012).

Furthermore, criminality (Sweeten et al. 2009) and mental health problems (Liem et al. 2010) are more common among dropouts. However, it is uncertain if risky behavior has a negative effect on academic success and increases the possibility of school dropout (Chatterji and DeSimone, 2005). According to one interesting finding from earlier studies, men who dropped out of school usually worked on family farms, entered the workforce, or pursued vocational training, while girls tended to marry (Rao 2010).

A significant body of research looks at the ways that caste influences dropout risk. Numerous, frequently overlapping channels are identified by studies: (a) economic constraints (poverty in households, the need for child labor, and the cost of education despite free provision); (b) school quality and access (distance to higher-grade schools, teacher availability, and learning environments in government schools); (c) social exclusion and discrimination (direct or indirect caste bias from peers, teachers, or local practices that lower belonging and attendance); and (d) intersectional pressures (early marriage for girls, gendered domestic work, and barriers based on minority religion or language). Evidence from district-level and household studies suggests that caste fragmentation and weak public provision in some districts increase dropout risk because children must travel further or shift to lower-quality alternatives — costs that fall disproportionately on lower-caste families. (Ghosh, 2023; UNESCO pilot studies; qualitative and mixed-methods research).

2.1 Policies in Practice

To tackle the issue of dropouts among SC/ST children, the Government of India has introduced several schemes and policies aimed at improving access, affordability, and inclusivity in education. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 is one of the most significant measures, as it makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14. This legislation seeks to eliminate economic barriers by ensuring that every child, regardless of caste or background, has the opportunity to attend school without bearing tuition costs.

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme has also played a crucial role in improving attendance and reducing dropout rates among marginalized groups. By providing free cooked meals in schools, this program not only addresses the problem of classroom hunger but also acts as an incentive for poor families to send their children to school regularly. For SC/ST children, who often come from economically disadvantaged households, this initiative has been effective in keeping them enrolled at the primary level. Additionally, various scholarship and incentive programs have been designed specifically for SC/ST students. For instance, the Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships help reduce financial pressures on families and motivate students to continue their studies. In tribal areas, Eklavya Model Residential Schools and other hostel facilities provide a supportive environment for children who live in remote locations and otherwise face difficulty accessing schools.

At a broader level, initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and its successor, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, have sought to universalize elementary education by improving school infrastructure, recruiting teachers, and promoting inclusive education for disadvantaged groups. More recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes reducing dropout rates by strengthening early childhood care, encouraging mother-tongue-based learning, and adopting a more flexible, skill-oriented curriculum. Through these measures, the government is not only addressing the economic and social factors behind dropouts but also working toward creating a

more inclusive and equitable education system. However, the success of these policies depends greatly on their proper implementation and on ensuring that discrimination, poverty, and lack of awareness are tackled at the community level.

2.2 Factors affecting High Dropout Rates

One of the major reasons for high dropout rates among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students at the primary level is poverty and economic pressure. Many families from these communities live below the poverty line, and children are often compelled to work as laborers or assist in household chores instead of attending school. Even though education at the primary level is free, hidden costs such as uniforms, books, and transportation make it difficult for poor families to sustain their children's schooling.

Another important factor is social discrimination. Despite legal safeguards, caste-based bias continues to exist in classrooms. SC and ST students often face exclusion, neglect, or even bullying, which lowers their confidence and makes the school environment unwelcoming. Lack of parental education further deepens the problem, as illiterate parents may not understand the importance of formal schooling and are unable to guide or motivate their children in academic matters.

Poor school infrastructure also contributes significantly to dropouts. Many government schools in rural and tribal areas suffer from inadequate facilities like proper classrooms, toilets, and teaching resources. The absence of separate toilets for girls becomes a major barrier, leading to higher dropout rates among female students. Similarly, language barriers affect tribal children, as the medium of instruction is often Hindi or English, while their home language is different, creating difficulties in comprehension and learning.

The problem is further compounded by teacher absenteeism and negative attitudes. In some cases, teachers carry prejudices against SC/ST students, treating them unequally, which discourages children from continuing their studies. Additionally, many SC/ST students, especially girls, drop out due to early marriage, sibling care, and gender bias within families. Cultural practices and expectations place household responsibilities on young girls, limiting their educational opportunities.

Lastly, the distance to schools in remote and tribal regions becomes a practical challenge. Many villages lack nearby schools, forcing children to walk long distances daily. This discourages regular attendance and often results in complete withdrawal from school, especially among younger children.

In short, the dropout of SC/ST students at the primary level is shaped by a mix of economic hardship, social exclusion, inadequate facilities, and cultural pressures. Addressing these issues requires holistic interventions that combine financial support, inclusive teaching practices, improved infrastructure, and awareness campaigns to encourage families to value education.

Although much is known about patterns and correlates, researchers identify persistent gaps that future work should fill. These include: (a) finer causal evidence on the relative importance of social discrimination versus economic constraints in producing caste gaps in dropout; (b) rigorous randomized or quasi-experimental evaluations of anti-discrimination and inclusion interventions in government primary schools; (c) more mixed-methods work to explain why some districts/blocks succeed in reducing caste gaps while others do not; and (d) longitudinal tracking that follows children from early grades into adolescence to link early learning, caste-specific experiences of exclusion, and later labour market or marriage outcomes. Filling these gaps would better inform targeted policies to keep disadvantaged caste children in primary government schools through completion.

2. Methodology

The analysis of the paper comprises of the pie charts that have been developed by the researcher after critically collecting data from the teachers and principals of government high schools located in Delhi -NCR. The school samples were carefully selected by keeping into mind all the different areas of Delhi NCR based on location, kind of students coming etc. The respondents were first briefed about the academic significance of the research and on their consent the data was collected from them. Later after checking the validity of the data, the data was critically analyzed using pie chart diagrams. Based on the same the conclusions of the study were drawn. The researcher considered nine important parameters for high school dropouts like school infrastructure, knowledge skills, societal skills, financial responsibility, castism, distance from school, early marriage and teaching pedagogy. The following were the responses of the high school students.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The teachers and principals of the government school in Delhi NCTR were asked numerous questions on the reasons why the students drop out of school / do not wish to continue further in the school. Some of the faculties even refused to answer, where as some of them were very vocal and had lot of suggestions for the school administration and the overall system as a whole. There were some participants who were satisfied and praised the Government for the efforts. The first question that was asked from the teachers and principals were about the perception given to the students by their parents related to the fact that caste limits education's value. There were only 22 percent who believed in the fact and out of them also merely 5.6 percent strongly believe in it. On the contrary majority of the teachers said that the students were indifferent and about 19.4 percent were of the opinion that there is no relationship between caste and education's value. Similarly, when asked about the role of the parents in students education, 37.5 percent of the teachers believe that there is a significant role of parents in education and lack of parental support leads to reduced interest in studies. Fig I and 2 below shows the replies of the respondents on both the questions.

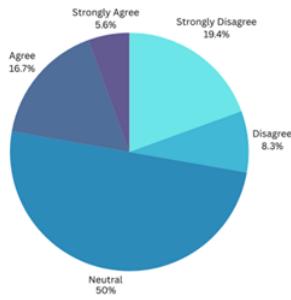


Fig 1: Parental perception that their caste limits education's value

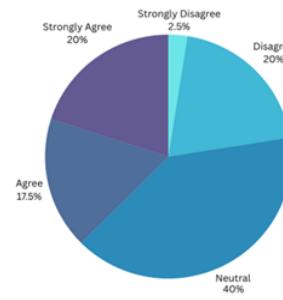


Fig 2: Lack of Parental Interest

The next question that was asked from the respondents was that on distance of school from home. A whopping 40 percent of the teachers strongly believe that the long distance of school from their home is one of the strong reasons for missing classes and ultimately leading to drop out by the students. On inquiring about the awareness and sensitivity of teachers as one of the reasons to continue the school or drop it in between, a similar number of teachers opined that if the teachers are sensitive, empathetical towards the students the chances of their continuity towards attending the school will increase. The same can be seen in figure 3 and 4 below.

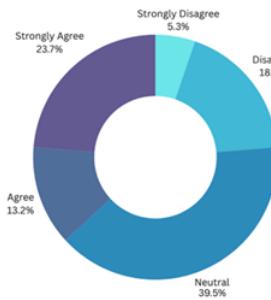


Fig 3: Distance of school from home

Fig 4:
Aware
ness
and
sensi
tivity
among
teacher
s

Poor academic performance and early marriage are two important barriers to complete the education as suggested by the literature. When asked from school teachers of Government

schools of Delhi NCR they expressed a very strong opinion about the same. The results of the study coincide with the literature as 46 percent of the respondent agree that there is a strong impact of poor academic performance and drop out as seen in fig 5. Similarly, an equal no of respondents advocated early marriage as a prominent reason for drop out shown in fig. 6

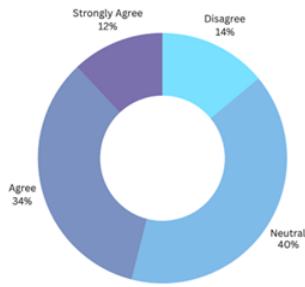


Fig 5: Poor Academic Performance

Fig 6: Early Marriage/ Engagement

The next important parameter that was asked from the respondents was lack of engaging teachers and safety concerns and harassments due to caste. Towards both the aspects the respondents said that their engagement with students in their school was good and there was minimum to no cases of harassment. It seems that the teachers are well trained academically and well sensitized towards caste-based harassment and discrimination. This can be conformed strongly because barring few teachers, all respondent denied the reason as one of the factor to dropout the school. The results can be seen in fig 7 and 8 below.

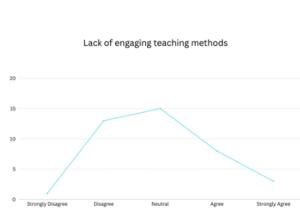


Fig 7: Lack of engaging Teaching Methods

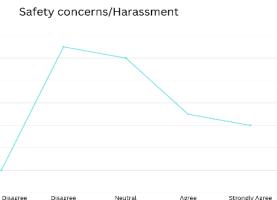


Fig 8: Safety concerns/ Harassment

The next important factor that was highlighted in the literature was lack of school infrastructure and availability of work or job opportunities. When asked about the factors from the respondents, the results are shown in the fig. 8 and 9 below shows the results of the data collected. About 40 percent strongly believe that school infrastructure is an important reason for drop out. The school infrastructure was not in a good shape earlier but the AAP government have worked significantly

into this aspect. The respondent seems very satisfied related to this factor. However, the equal number of them said that school infrastructure is not very important factor. They said that good teaching methodology and skill enhancement is more important. As far as the availability of work or job opportunities are concerned, only few opined about 25 per cent opined that it was significant factor that lead to school dropout.

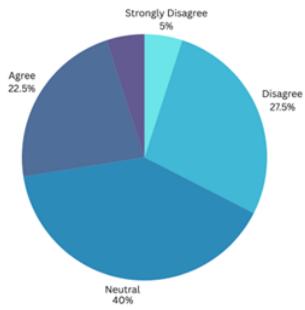


Fig 9: Lack of school Infrastructure

Fig 10: Availability of Work/ Job Opportunities

The next questions asked from the respondents were about discontinuation from formal education presuming lack of Jobs for their students due to caste barriers and perceived low quality of education. Fig 11 and 12 below shows the results of the study do not corroborate with the literature. The respondents very strongly believe that, barring few cases the reason for their drop out was not lack of job opportunities due to caste barriers and perceived low quality of education. This shows that the respondents were quite satisfied with the quality of education delivered to the Government school students in Delhi.

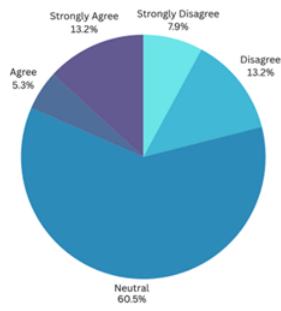


Fig 11: Lack of Jobs due to caste barriers

Fig 12: Perceived Low quality of education

The next important parameter covered in the study was that of Feeling of being Marginalized by students with reference to peers due to caste and Inability to avail Govt. Scholarships. Fig 13

and 14 below discusses the results of the data collected. It can be clearly seen that only 15 percent feel it to be a reason to opt out of formal schooling by the students whereas 28 percent strongly disagree to the fact that the students of their school have a feeling of being marginalized by their peers. Unexpectedly 23 percent respondents strongly agree that inability of their school students to avail government scholarships due to specific caste of student is an important factor that led to dropout from the formal school. Despite there is so much promotion of all the Government scholarship schemes, the teachers feel that the students are unaware about the schemes.

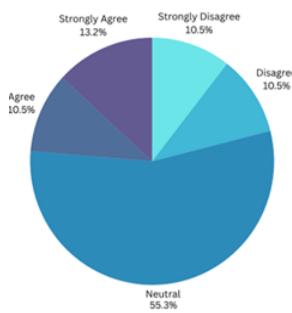


Fig 13: Feeling of being Marginalized by peers due to caste

Fig 14: Inability to avail Govt. Scholarships

The last aspect that was important for the study was differential treatment received by the students by friends and bullying by fellow students. The results are indicated in fig 15 and 16 below. Only 13 percent of the government school teachers and principals strongly agree that the differential behavior by students and bullying by them is a reason that will lead to school dropout. In fact, 29 percent of the respondents very categorically said that bullying is one of the least reasons for them to drop out.

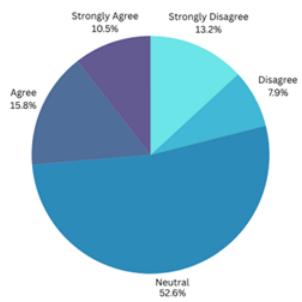


Fig 15: Differential Treatment

Fig 16: Bullying by Fellow-students

Based on the above analysis and the discussion that followed the researcher suggested the following policy to the education department and the administration of the government schools. All though the government is doing considerable efforts in improving the quality of education but there is always a scope for further improvement for which the following policy recommendations can be considered.

4. Policy Implications

Addressing the problem of high dropout rates in government high schools requires a multidimensional and inclusive approach that goes beyond infrastructure or financial support alone. A sustainable solution must integrate economic, pedagogical, social, and psychological interventions designed to retain students, particularly those from marginalized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The government's existing measures such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan have significantly expanded access and enrollment at the primary level, but the challenge of retention at the secondary level calls for policy innovation and targeted reforms. Based on the findings of this study, a series of policy recommendations can help strengthen the education ecosystem and reduce the dropout phenomenon in Delhi-NCR's government high schools.

First, there is a need for an **early identification and intervention mechanism** within schools to track students at risk of dropping out. Regular monitoring of attendance, academic performance, and behavioural changes should be institutionalized using digital tracking systems. Teachers should receive training to identify early warning signs such as irregular attendance, poor academic engagement, or emotional distress. Once identified, these students should be provided with remedial classes, counselling, and family outreach to prevent disengagement. The use of technology-driven data systems at the district and block levels can ensure timely reporting and action.

Second, **financial barriers** remain a major determinant of dropout behavior, particularly among low-income and SC/ST families. While free education and scholarship schemes exist, their implementation and awareness remain limited. The government should simplify application procedures, ensure transparency in disbursal, and conduct periodic awareness drives through schools, local panchayats, and digital platforms. Providing direct benefit transfers (DBTs) for scholarships and essential school supplies such as uniforms, books, and transportation would reduce hidden educational costs. Additionally, the introduction of conditional cash transfers linked to attendance and performance can motivate families to continue their children's education.

Third, **school infrastructure and the learning environment** require continuous improvement. Although Delhi's government schools have made visible progress, disparities persist across different areas. Ensuring clean sanitation facilities, especially gender-segregated toilets, safe

drinking water, adequate classrooms, libraries, and well-equipped laboratories are vital for retention. Schools should also establish safe transportation facilities for students who travel long distances. Beyond physical infrastructure, creating a psychologically safe and inclusive environment—free from discrimination, bullying, or caste-based bias—is equally critical. The inclusion of anti-discrimination policies and grievance redressal committees at the school level would encourage students from marginalized groups to continue education without fear.

Fourth, **teacher quality and sensitivity** play a decisive role in motivating students to stay in school. Teachers should not only be academically competent but also empathetic and inclusive in their approach. Professional development programs should be designed to enhance teachers' awareness of social inequalities, gender sensitivity, and classroom engagement strategies. Rewarding teachers for improved student retention, inclusive teaching methods, and community involvement can incentivize positive practices. Incorporating mentoring systems, where teachers or senior students mentor at-risk students, could also provide emotional and academic support.

Fifth, **parental and community engagement** must be institutionalized as part of school governance. Many parents in lower-income groups undervalue formal education due to limited awareness of its long-term benefits. Regular parent-teacher meetings, awareness campaigns, and community education programs can help bridge this gap. Schools can collaborate with NGOs and local self-help groups to conduct counseling sessions for parents on the importance of continuing education, particularly for girls. Empowering School Management Committees (SMCs) to involve community members in monitoring attendance and learning outcomes would promote collective accountability.

Sixth, **curriculum flexibility and relevance** are essential for retaining adolescents who often find school learning disconnected from real-life applications. Integrating vocational training, digital literacy, and skill-based modules into secondary education can make learning more engaging and career-oriented. Linking school education with employability through partnerships with industries and skill development agencies can motivate students to continue their studies. The NEP 2020's emphasis on experiential learning and multiple entry-exit points should be effectively implemented in government schools to reduce rigid academic structures.

Finally, **psychological and counseling support** should become a core component of school education. Adolescents face emotional challenges such as peer pressure, family stress, and low self-confidence, which contribute to dropout tendencies. Each school should have at least one trained counselor to guide students through academic and personal difficulties. Counseling units should coordinate with teachers and families to provide consistent emotional and social support.

In conclusion, the challenge of high dropout rates is not merely an educational issue but a social and developmental concern. A comprehensive, data-driven, and inclusive policy framework—integrating financial, pedagogical, infrastructural, and emotional dimensions—is necessary. Such policies must be aligned with the NEP 2020 vision of “equitable and inclusive

education for all,” ensuring that every child in a government high school receives not only access to education but also the opportunity to complete it with dignity and confidence.

5. Conclusion

The phenomenon of school dropouts in government high schools across Delhi-NCR is a reflection of deeply entrenched socio-economic inequalities, infrastructural deficiencies, and policy implementation gaps. Through programs like the RTE Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and several scholarship programs, India has significantly improved access to education; yet, retention is still a problem, especially at the secondary level. This study's empirical and literature-based analysis shows that poverty, gender bias, parental disinterest, inadequate infrastructure, early marriage, and the limited value of education in relation to students' goals all play a complex role in school dropouts.

The results of the study after discussion of numerous parameters from the teachers of government school gave some insightful information. While most students at Delhi's government schools value the recent reforms, including better infrastructure and more accountability for teachers, there are still some areas that require immediate attention. The distance between home and school, the lack of transportation options, and family financial limitations are real obstacles to attendance for a lot of pupils. This problem is made worse by low parental involvement and ignorance about government scholarship programs. The findings also demonstrate that adolescent girls continue to be disproportionately impacted by caste-based discrimination, social stigma, and early marriage, which causes them to place a lower value on education.

The study also emphasizes how students' capacity to deal with social and academic pressures is hampered by the lack of career counselling, individualized mentoring, and life skills instruction, even though academic instruction has improved. Beyond standard instruction, many students—especially those from marginalized communities—need psychosocial support networks. For students to stay motivated to pursue their education, it is essential that there be sympathetic teachers, encouraging peer groups, and easily accessible counselling services.

From an institutional perspective, school dropout is a sign of structural flaws in accountability and governance. Programs and regulations frequently fail because of poor monitoring and localized adaptation rather than because of design errors. Continuous review, community involvement, and adaptable reforms that address the many circumstances faced by children in urban and semi-urban government schools are essential components of effective policy implementation. According to the report, a large number of students continue to view education as unrelated to their current problems and potential career paths. Thus, education can become more practical and relevant by integrating skill development, vocational training, and digital literacy.

In summary, the government high school dropout problem in Delhi-NCR is not intractable. At every stage of the educational ecosystem, it necessitates dedication, cooperation, and empathy. The region can get closer to achieving the goal of universal secondary education if policies are successfully put into place and tailored to local conditions to address both structural and cultural issues. In addition to being an educational objective, ensuring that every child enrols in and successfully completes high school is a social necessity for creating an inclusive, egalitarian, and forward-thinking India.

References

- Azim Premji Foundation. (2021). *Loss of learning during the pandemic: Findings from field studies*. Bengaluru: Azim Premji University.
- Bajpai, N., & Jha, R. (2019). *Policy perspectives on secondary education in India: Challenges and opportunities*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Blue, D., & Cook, J. E. (2004). High school dropouts: Can we reverse the stagnation in school graduation. *Study of High School Restructuring*, 1(2), 1-11.
- Bose, A. (2017). Infrastructure and quality in government schools: An assessment. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(8), 43–51.
- Chatterji, P., & DeSimone, J. (2005). Adolescent drinking and high school dropout.
- Choudhury, P. (2019). Social exclusion and school dropout: A study of marginalized communities. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 19(2), 89–104.
- Goel, S., & Husain, Z. (2018). Gender, caste, and education in India: A cohort-wise study of drop-out from schools. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 58, 54-68.
- Government of India, Ministry of Education. (2023). *Educational statistics at a glance 2023*. New Delhi: Government of India Press.
- Hawkins, R. L., Jaccard, J., & Needle, E. (2013). Nonacademic factors associated with dropping out of high school: Adolescent problem behaviors. *Journal of the society for social work and research*, 4(2), 58-75.
- Jain, M., & Agarwal, R. (2020). Parental education and school dropout among adolescents in India. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 9(1), 12–24.
- Jha, J., & Kelleher, F. (2006). *Boys' underachievement in education: An exploration in selected Commonwealth countries*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

- Kishore, A. N., & Shaji, K. S. (2012). School dropouts: examining the space of reasons. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine, 34*(4), 318-323.
- Kumar, A. (2020). Psychological factors in school dropout: A study of adolescents in India. *Indian Journal of Psychology and Education, 10*(1), 55–68.
- Kumar, P., & Gupta, N. (2018). Gender dimensions of school dropout: Evidence from rural India. *International Journal of Social Sciences, 7*(3), 144–156.
- Latif, A., Choudhary, A. I., & Hammayun, A. A. (2015). ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF STUDENTS' DROPOUTS. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management, 3*(6), 1511-1518.
- Liem, J. H., Lustig, K., & Dillon, C. (2010). Depressive symptoms and life satisfaction among emerging adults: A comparison of high school dropouts and graduates. *Journal of adult development, 17*(1), 33-43.
- Mehta, R., & Kaur, S. (2019). Academic challenges and school dropout among adolescents. *Journal of Educational Research, 63*(4), 78–92.
- Berke, D. S., Kline, N. K., Wachen, J. S., McLean, C. P., Yarvis, J. S., Mintz, J., ... & Strong Star Consortium. (2015). Predictors of attendance and dropout in three randomized controlled trials of PTSD treatment for active duty service members. *Behaviour research and therapy, 118*, 7-17.
- NCERT. (2022). *National achievement survey: Secondary education report*. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.
- NSSO. (2020). *Household social consumption on education in India: NSS 75th round (2017–18)*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.
- Prakash, R., Beattie, T., Javalkar, P., Bhattacharjee, P., Ramanaik, S., Thalinja, R., ... & Isac, S. (2017). Correlates of school dropout and absenteeism among adolescent girls from marginalized community in north Karnataka, south India. *Journal of adolescence, 61*, 64-76.
- Sinha, P., & Singh, S. K. (2016). A Study On Dropouts Among Socially Disadvantaged School Students Of Bihar. *Int. J. Nov. Res. Humanity Soc. Sci, 3*.
- Sweeten, G., Bushway, S. D., & Paternoster, R. (2009). Does dropping out of school mean dropping into delinquency?. *Criminology, 47*(1), 47-91.
- Thorat, S., & Newman, K. S. (2010). *Blocked by caste: Economic discrimination in modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2020). *Education and development in India: Critical issues in public policy and planning*. Singapore: Springer.

- UNESCO. (2019). *Reducing global school dropout: Policy guidance for education systems*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNICEF. (2021). *Re-imagining education for every child in India: Annual report 2021*. New Delhi: UNICEF India.
- Warren, J. R., & Lee, J. C. (2003). The impact of adolescent employment on high school dropout: Differences by individual and labor-market characteristics. *Social Science Research*, 32(1), 98-128.
- Winding, T. N., & Andersen, J. H. (2015). Socioeconomic differences in school dropout among young adults: the role of social relations. *BMC public health*, 15(1), 1054.