

Barriers To Regular And Continuing Participation In Higher Educational Programme As Educational Exclusion Of Scheduled Tribes In Meghalaya

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Abstract

Many students are not able to continuously participate in educational programmes for various reasons such as lack of access to institutions, affordability, time constraints and life demands etc. When they are not able to continuously participate in educational programmes, some students might lose interest in studying or might not be able to compete with others. This study will examine different aspects such as distance from the college, expenditure on education, time constraints, and life demands which act as barriers to regular and continuing participation in higher educational programmes among Scheduled Tribes in Meghalaya. The descriptive survey method was used with the help of a self-made questionnaire constructed by the researcher and administered to 1026 higher education Scheduled Tribe students, and the data collected was analysed using percentages. The study found that students do not continuously participate in educational programmes because of various reasons but one of the main reasons is financial problem.

Key words: Higher Education, Regular, Continuous Participation, Scheduled Tribes.

Introduction

Numerous children are unable to participate continuously in educational programmes because of various reasons, including distance from schools or institutions, inability to pay for continuous participation in an educational programme, inability to attend school due to various life reasons, and a few others. Several students in rural areas are unable to continuously pay for participation such as school fee or college fee or to buy books and other stationaries as many families in rural areas cannot afford to pay those fees (Soe, 2018). Poverty in households also influences dropping out, because even if there is a provision of free education in most of the country or region but there are other non-fee costs of education that many of the parents from poor families cannot afford to pay (Morara & Chemwei, 2013). Lack of finance was one of the main obstacles for students in slum areas to pursue higher education (Awab-us-Sibtain, Usman, & Husnain, 2019). Failure to pay these costs may force a pupil out of school and this leads to less participation or no participation in an educational programme, so this is another kind of exclusion as less participation leads to less learning outcome and when there is learning outcome there is less development.

Many rural institutions lack adequate infrastructure and amenities, such as adequate classroom size that leads to overcrowding, benches and blackboards not being present in some rural schools, a lack of library resources and books, a lack of separate toilets for boys and girls, playgrounds, laboratories, etc. (Nongbri, 2006). The lack of ICT-based teaching and learning resources, internet connectivity, research lab resources, and a sufficient number of books in the library is a problem in many rural higher education institutions (Sonone, 2018). Therefore, when they lack these basic facilities, learning will be affected. Additionally, when these essential basic facilities are not offered to students, they may become discouraged and may not have the interest to continuously participate in education. Further, they may also not be able to compete at a local, national, or international level.

Educational institutions in remote and rural areas are often defined by isolation, long distances between places, and their sparse populations. Many children or students in

remote areas drop-out from the educational programme when they are not able to regularly continue their schooling because of geographical and demographic conditions as many schools are located far from their residential places, these make access to education provisions both more difficult and more expensive as the cost of transportation becomes a burden for them. Because of transportation problems, all children in remote areas cannot go to school. (Soe, 2018). The long-distance between the school and students' homes hinders students' attendance, parents' involvement in school-based activities and students' participation in extracurricular activities (National Centre for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2014). The primary concern was the cost of transportation, but one could argue that this constraint is more related to finances than to transportation. (Spielhofer, Golden, Evans, Marshall, Mundy, Pomati, & Styles, 2010).

Further, students in remote areas are not able to attend school due to various life demands such as food, clothes, shelter and so on. Many families need their children to earn an income for them (Soe, 2018).

Need of the study

According to several studies, students from poor families or staying in remote areas are not able to continuously participate in educational programmes. This may be because they are not able to pay fees or even buy the books or stationery required to participate in educational institutions. In addition to that access to the educational institution and distance also a barrier to the remote area people for regular and continues participation in higher education. Further, some of the students even have to go to work to meet their daily needs and this will have an impact on their education and even lead to their dropping out of school. Scheduled Tribe students in Meghalaya have been facing multiple barriers in regular and continues participation in higher education. In this context the present paper will describe the present status of regular and continuing participation in higher educational programme of students in Meghalaya and recommend adequate measures that will help to make higher education more inclusive and accessible to students. This study will

help policymakers and the government take initiatives to make more inclusive policies and provide facilities to students so as to encourage their regular and continuous participation in education.

Research Question

1. What are the barriers faced by Scheduled Tribe students in Meghalaya in regular and continuing participation in higher educational programme?

Objective

1. To study the barriers to regular and continuing participation in higher educational programme of Scheduled Tribe students in Meghalaya

Methodology

In the present study, descriptive survey method is used. The sample includes 1026 higher education students taken from 22 colleges. The researcher used a self-made questionnaire. The researcher used percentage to study the barriers to regular and continuing participation in higher educational programme.

Analysis and interpretation

Barriers to Regular and Continuing Participation in Higher Educational

a) Distance of College:

Lack of access to transportation and its effect on education

It is clear from the data that 38.4% of the students said that they do not have access to proper transportation to go to college and 61.6% students said that they have access to proper transportation to go to college. It seems for more than one-third of students, access to transportation is a barrier to go to college. About 30.6% of students are absent from college frequently because of distance issues and 69.4% of students responded that generally they are not absent from college frequently because of the distance issue. This demonstrates that nearly one-third of students have frequently missed class due to distance issues. Further, 31.8% of the students said that distance does affect their education, while 68.2% of students said that distance does not affect their education.

b) Expenditure in Education:

Difficulty in paying educational fees and how they manage financial problems

Data depicts 33.2% of respondents said that they do struggle to pay for their education, 42.8% of respondents said that they do not have trouble paying for their education, additionally 24.0% of respondents are not sure whether they have trouble covering their fee costs or not. This demonstrates that the one third of respondents have issue in paying their educational fees.

Further, the data collected also provides answer to financial issues. The information collected shows that when they have trouble paying their fees how they manage and the responses collected are: 77.7% of the respondents said they borrowed money from others to pay for their education, followed by 14.9% who worked for pay, 3.0% who paid their fees in instalments, 1.9% who took out bank loans, 1.4% who received donations and support from family, 0.8% who wrote a letter to the principal, and 0.3% who used their parents' pension. Most of the respondents, it has been noted, that they borrow money from others to pay for their educational expenses.

Afford to purchase educational needs

The data reveals that 11.0% of the respondents cannot afford to buy books, whereas 89.0% of respondents can; 29.6% cannot afford to buy stationery, whereas 70.4% can; 21.1% cannot afford a smart phone, whereas 78.9% can. However, majority i.e., 84.5% cannot afford to buy laptop or desktop, whereas only 15.8% can. The data makes it abundantly clear that majority of the student cannot afford to buy laptop or desktop for their educational purpose.

c) Time Constrains and life demands

Types of work attended for financial needs and time spent for work

According to the data, 37.3% of respondents said that they go to work regularly to support their financial needs and 2.6% said that they go to work only sometimes to support their financial needs. Further, 87.5% of respondents hold part-time jobs, while 12.5% hold full-time jobs. This makes

it obvious that the majority of students hold part-time jobs in a variety of job areas.

The data shows that 18.5% of respondents work three days a week, followed by 17.8% who work two days a week, 15.6% who work five days a week, 15.1% who work six days a week, 14.7% who work seven days a week, 10.1% who work four days a week, and 8.2% who work just one day a week. This data makes it clear that the majority of respondents work more than three days per week.

The data in addition depict the number of hours per day that the respondents work either full- or part-time. It is implied that: 15.6% of respondents work five hours per day, 14.7% work eight hours per day, 13.2% work six hours per day, 10.8% work more than ten hours per day, 10.3% work three hours per day, 10.3% work two hours per day, 8.7% work four hours per day, 8.2% work seven hours per day, 4.1% work nine hours per day, and 4.1% of respondents work more than ten hours per day. According to the data, more than half of respondents work more than five hours per day.

Clash of college timing and work hours and how they balancing

Based on a multiple response question, 22.4% of the respondents expressed that their working hours clashed with their class schedule, whereas 77.6% of respondents indicated that their working hours do not clash with their academic obligations.

With respect to the management of time by the respondents, adjusting their working hours, getting up early, and working in the morning were the top three responses from the respondents, followed by 20.4% who said they used to be absent from college, 15.1% who said they worked after class, 11.8% who skipped some classes, 5.4% who said they worked on holidays, 4.3% who said they occasionally attended class, and 3.2% who said they used to be late at work/go to work late and get back home late, 2.2% said they work less with less payment. That the majority are adjusting their college and working schedule.

Major Findings:

1. More than one third of the students have no access to proper transportation to go to college. The data also reveal that 30.6% of the students have been absent from college frequently because of far distance issues. Besides, it is also found that 31.8% of the students responded that distance from college affects their education
2. It was observed that 33.2% of the responded that their parents have difficulty in paying their fees. Further, it has also been observed that in such situations they obtain loans from others or banks, do some part-time job, pay in instalments, talk or write an application to the principal etc. and it was found that the majority of them acquire a loan from others rather than banks.
3. It was found that 11% of the students are not able to buy books, 29.6% are not able to buy stationaries, 21.1% are not able to buy smartphones and the majority of the students i.e., 84.2% of the students are not able to buy laptop or desktop that shows that most of the students can afford different items such as books, stationeries, smartphones. However, majority of the student cannot afford to buy laptop or desktop for their educational purpose.
4. It was found that more than more than one third of the students have to go to work to support their family's financial needs. Further, it was also found that those who are working, majority are doing part time job and few full-time job. It was also revealed that most of the students are working 3 days a week. Furthermore, it was also found that the majority of the respondents works 5 hours per day.
5. Out of those students who respond that they have to go to work to support their financial needs, almost one fourth of the students responded that their working hours clash with their college hours and they manage their work by adjusting their timing either waking up early in the morning or working at morning time and there are also some students who are absent from college, skip some of their classes.

Discussions of Major Findings:

Around one third of the students responded that their parents find difficulty to pay their educational fees. This data signifies that because of low-income, higher education is unaffordable. Further, data shows that 11.0% are not able to buy books and 29.6% are not able to buy

stationaries and 21.1% are not able to buy smartphones or have smart phones. These findings corroborate with the findings of Chavez (2022), who found that students difficulties included a lack of smart phones and the ability to pay for phone credit refills. This shows that these students are lacking quality education because there is less participation in education.

Data showed that more than one third of the students does not have proper transportation to go to college. Further, 30.6% of the students have been absent from college frequently because of far distance issue and for 31.8% of the students felt that distance from college affect their education. Many colleges in Meghalaya especially at rural areas are located at distant places and parents are not able to pay for their transportation which is an extra burden especially after the hike in fare after pandemic.

The findings shows that more than one third of the respondent are engaging in work to support their family and out of that majority of the respondents work for part-time jobs where as few works as full-time worker. This finding is consistent with the finding of Soel(2018) who found that many families in rural areas need their children to earn an income for them. Further, it was found that 22.4% of the student working hours clash with college hours and they manage that by adjusting working hours, skip some classes, being absent from college, used to be late for work and so on. This shows that these students are not able to participate continuously in higher education.

Conclusion

This study was able to find that many times situations such as extreme poverty, educational institutions too far away to attend regularly, inability to attend college due to various life reasons, etc. overlap with other factors, such as poverty, which often leads to dropout and reduce the opportunity for access and quality education. The study implies that there is an urgent need of establishing a greater number of colleges in the rural areas, improve the transport facilities to the remote areas and uplift the economic status of the Scheduled Tribes of Meghalaya. Hence the government and policymakers should take the initiative to improve access to education and create adequate opportunities for

continuous and affordable quality education at every level of education particularly at higher education level in order to increase Scheduled Tribe students' continuous participation in higher education.

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