



Research Article

Problem of School Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper critically reflects on the issue of rural school education in West Bengal through the lenses of structural, pedagogical, socio-economic, and cultural aspects. The research design is descriptive and is purely grounded on secondary data, which has been gathered through academic sources, government reports, policy documents and organisation reports like Pratiche Trust. The data has been analysed and interpreted through a documentary survey method to enable systematic analysis of the information. The results show that there are several challenges that are interconnected challenges that influence rural education in West Bengal. The lack of infrastructural amenities, such as poor classrooms, the absence of sanitation, and access to basic amenities like electricity and access to digital resources, contributes to the poor learning environment. The lack of adequate training and qualified teachers and the imbalance also undermine the quality of instruction. The gap between access and quality is that, in spite of the rise in enrolment, the learning outcomes are still poor. Poverty, child labour, and illiteracy of parents are some of the socioeconomic constraints that have a great impact on the attendance, retention and academic performance. Education access is also limited by cultural elements such as gender bias, early marriages, and curriculum-local context mismatch, among others, especially among marginalised groups. Besides, conventional teacher-centred pedagogy and the absence of contextualised teaching practices are barriers to effective learning. The research highlights the importance of a holistic policy-based approach that combines infrastructural provision, teacher education, learner-focused pedagogy, and social-economic provision. Enhancing community involvement, advancing gender equality, and incorporating technology in learning are also critical in enhancing rural education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The educational system is considered one of the strongest vehicles for change, development, and empowerment of the human factor. It illuminates the individual through its growth in Intellectual, moral, emotional and social abilities, which helps them to take an effective role in society. Education plays a vital role in ensuring personal development as well as in the development of a nation by generating skilled human resources and social justice. Hence, education extension and enhancement of all segments of society is among the most important issues in every democratic society (Swain, 2008; Qureshi, 2005). Primary and secondary education serve as the basis for the whole educational system. Elementary education, in particular, has a significant impact on determining the cognitive and social growth of children and their readiness for future schooling and citizenship. The improvement of primary education is a measure of the overall social and economic development of a nation, as said by Naik (1976). Therefore, inclusive growth and sustainable national development demand the development of school education.

India, being a democratic and welfare state, has taken several steps towards universalisation of elementary and secondary education. Constitutional provisions, education commissions, and government programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Right to Education Act (RTE) 2011, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have worked towards increasing access, equity, and quality of education in the country (Government of India, 2011; Government of India, 2020). However, all these attempts have not been able to sort out the educational scenario in the rural areas, especially in states like West Bengal, where socio-economic differences and regional inequality play a significant role in the functioning of the school. The education in the rural areas of West Bengal is full of various structural, pedagogical, administrative and socio-cultural issues. Inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, insufficient teaching-learning materials and lack of technological facilities are the major challenges in many of the rural schools (Abbasi, 2004; ASER Centre, 2023). These gaps in development will hinder successful educational outcomes and have a negative impact on attendance, participation, and school success. Moreover, the continued presence of poverty, child labour, illiteracy among the parents and low SES of rural families can limit children's schooling opportunities (Kingdon & Dreze, 2001). Another key issue of interest is the presence of social and cultural factors that impede education participation, particularly for girls and for marginalised groups. Gender discrimination, early marriage, language and mismatch between the curriculum and the local context often hamper student engagement and lead to dropout rates (Khanna et al., 2003; Thamarasseri, 2008). Moreover, various other issues such as weak educational administration, poor implementation of policies, lack of community involvement and other issues further exacerbate the issues of rural schooling (Hemchand, 2009a). The condition of education in the rural schools has also been a major concern. Enrolment has improved over the years, but learning outcomes are not satisfactory. Many pupils in rural schools are reported to lack the basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic in line with their grade levels (ASER Centre,

2023; World Bank, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic also showed inequities in access to online learning during the pandemic and the inequity in access to technology amongst rural students (UNICEF, 2023).

This makes the critical study of the issues of school education in the rural areas of West Bengal highly relevant in this context. The present study aims to explore the primary structural, pedagogical, socio-economic and cultural problems that are facing rural school education and provide policy-related ideas for enhancing the quality and equity of education. The study adopts a documentary survey method with secondary data sources like academic books, research journals, education policies and government reports. The study aims to add to the knowledge regarding issues in rural education and effective educational interventions in West Bengal through this analysis.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 2.1. To identify the problems of school education in rural areas of West Bengal.
- 2.2. To analyse the structural and pedagogical challenges of school education in rural areas of West Bengal.
- 2.3. To analyse the role of socio-economic and cultural factors of school education in rural areas of West Bengal.
- 2.4. To propose policy-oriented recommendations for improvement of school education in rural areas of West Bengal.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design:** The research design is a descriptive research design, which is suitable for studying and analysing the current conditions, problems and challenges of school education in rural regions. Such a design allows describing and interpreting the current educational situation in a holistic manner without manipulating any variables. It is because it allows the researcher to be critical in analysing structural, pedagogical and socio-economic circumstances that influence rural education.
- **Type of Data:** The research is all secondary. The secondary data will be appropriate in this study because it will enable the researcher to use the information that is already available and is reliable, so that he/she can get an impression of the subject matter and be able to critically analyse the problems that are being addressed.
- **Data Collection:** The secondary data of the study has been sourced from various sources that are effective and authentic, including: - Educational, rural, and policy analysis books. Peer-reviewed educational research journals and empirical studies on educational issues. Government reports and policy documents on school education. Report on Pratichi Trust, which gives important information related to the situation of primary education in West Bengal.
- **Data Analysis Method:** Data collection and analysis have been undertaken using a documentary survey method. This approach entails reviewing, analysing, and interpreting written documents and published sources pertinent to the research topic systematically. The data gathered have been analysed and synthesised critically to come up with the

main themes, patterns and issues surrounding rural school education. The method allows considering the issues in a comprehensive way and making valuable conclusions and policy recommendations.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Problems of School Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal

The issues of school education in rural West Bengal are manifold and rooted in both structural, socio-economic and administrative issues. It is possible to identify the following important issues:

- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** The lack of proper infrastructure is one of the greatest challenges in rural education. Most schools lack enough classrooms, they are in poor building conditions, there is a lack of electricity, drinking water and sanitation facilities. These shortcomings make the learning environment unfavourable and deter students from attending (Abbasi, 2004; Pratiche Trust, 2009; ASER Centre, 2023).
- **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** Rural schools experience an unavailability of trained and qualified teachers. This is because in most instances, one teacher handles a number of classes, and this compromises teaching. Additionally, the teaching-learning process is worsened by the absence of subject-specific teachers and the scarcity of professional training opportunities (Hemchand, 2009a; Khanna et al., 1991; NCERT, 2005).
- **Poor Quality of Education:** Although the enrolment levels have increased, the quality of education is a big concern. Rural school students do not usually succeed in the learning of basic competencies in learning reading, writing and calculations. It means that there is a discrepancy between access and real learning results (Swain, 2010; ASER Centre, 2023; World Bank, 2018).
- **Socio-Economic Constraints:** Poverty is a significant impediment to education in rural environments. A good number of families cannot afford the cost of education, even at the elementary level. Children work at home or do some income-earning jobs, resulting in no regular attendance and low academic results (Qureshi, 2005; Kingdon & Dreze, 2001).
- **High Dropout Rates:** The dropout rates are high in rural areas, especially in the upper primary and secondary levels. Monetary constraints, parental unawareness, early marriages (more so by girls) and insufficient access to secondary schools are some of the factors that lead to this issue (Naik, 1976; Pratiche Trust, 2009; Government of India, 2011).
- **Lack of Parental Awareness and Support:** Parents whose parents are illiterate and who are unaware of the significance of an education negatively influence the

schooling of children. Some other parents fail to actively encourage their children to receive an education, resulting in low motivation and increased likelihood of dropping out (Qureshi, 2005; PROBE Team, 1999).

- **Regional and Social Inequality:** Inequality in education is evident across regions and social classes. Communities that are tribal and marginalized such as rural West Bengal, are more disadvantaged regarding access, participation and success in education (Khanna et al., 1991; Nussbaum, 2000).
- **Issues based on language and curriculum:** Curriculum and medium of instruction are usually not aligned to the socio-cultural background of the rural students, especially students who belong to tribal communities. These poses learning problems and decreases engagement in students (Thamarasseri, 2008; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2015).
- **Weak Educational Administration:** Weaknesses in educational policies, such as poor implementation, lack of accountability and ineffective monitoring, impede the development of rural education. Mismanagement of resources is the result of administrative inefficiencies (Hemchand, 2009a; Government of India, 2020).
- **Limited Use of Technology:** Rural schools do not have access to digital resources and technological teaching resources. The digital divide became more pronounced in scenarios such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where the rural students could not even have an online learning experience (Swain, 2010; UNICEF, 2023).

Overall, these issues raise the concern that the infrastructural insufficiencies, socio-economic barriers, and structural inefficiencies contribute to rural education in West Bengal. To solve these problems, there must be a holistic policy intervention, community involvement and proper implementation strategies to enhance equitable and quality education for all.

4.2. Structural and Pedagogical Challenges:

The structural and pedagogical issues of school education in rural West Bengal are closely interrelated and play a significant role in the quality of education. Critical examination of these issues shows there are systemic gaps that impede the efficient teaching-learning activities and fair education achievement.

- **Structural Challenges:**

Structural issues are associated mainly with the physical, organisational, and administrative systems of the education system. The insufficiency of the school infrastructure is one of the most significant problems. In most rural schools, the facilities, including well-kept classrooms, libraries, laboratories, clean drinking water, and separate facilities for boys and girls, are lacking. These gaps have a negative impact on the attendance of students, particularly amongst girls, and lower the efficiency of schooling in general

(Abbasi, 2004; Pratiche Trust, 2009; ASER Centre, 2023). The other significant structural problem is the lack of and imbalance of teachers. In rural schools, there is a shortage of qualified and trained teachers, and in most cases, the schools are staffed by a few teachers who are expected to handle several grades. This causes multi-grade teaching, which, though in some cases is needed, more often than not has an effect of poor quality of instructions since they are not planned and supported (Hemchand, 2009a). Also, the poor school management systems, absence of frequent supervision and proper implementation of government schemes contribute to the problem (Khanna et al., 1991; Government of India, 2011).

Another important structural issue is accessibility. Schools in several rural and remote regions are very far away, such that the students find it difficult to attend school on a regular basis. Inefficient transport systems and a lack of security in travelling are factors that lead to absenteeism and dropout, especially among younger children and girls. Also, rural locations have a digital divide that constrains access to modern educational materials, which limits the adoption of technology in education and learning (Swain, 2010; World Bank, 2018).

- **Pedagogical Challenges:**

Pedagogical issues are associated with the teaching and learning techniques, approaches and procedures. The dominance of traditional, teacher-centred approaches to instruction is one of the main problems of rural schools. These approaches tend to prioritise memorisation over understanding concepts, critical thinking and problem solving. This can lead to the eventual performance of poor students in regard to real learning outcomes, even though they are at school (Thamarasseri, 2008; Bruner, 1966). The other significant pedagogical issue is that the curriculum is not contextualised. The recommended curriculum fails to capture the local socio-cultural conditions of the rural students, more so those who are in tribal and marginalised groups. This detachment renders learning meaningless and lessens student engagement and involvement in classroom activities (Qureshi, 2005; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2015). Besides, the lack of teacher training and professional development can slow down the introduction of innovative and inclusive teaching practices. Educators in the rural side are usually not exposed to new methods of teaching, such as child-centric methods, activity-based learning and inclusive learning methods. This impacts their capability to meet the needs of various learners and children with varying abilities (Hemchand, 2009b; NCERT, 2005). Language barriers are also a great pedagogical challenge. Linguistic backgrounds of many students in rural West Bengal are different to those in schools. This brings about problems in comprehension and reduces academic performance, particularly during the early years of schooling (Naik, 1976).

4.3. Role of Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors for School Education in Rural Areas:

The socio-economic and cultural background is relevant in determining the kind of school education, its accessibility, and quality in rural West Bengal. These contribute immensely to enrolment, attendance, retention and learning outcomes of the students and hence the overall efficiency of the education system in rural settings.

- **Socio-Economic Factors:** One of the most impactful factors of educational participation in rural areas is socio-economic conditions. Poverty is also a significant obstacle to education, with most families making ends meet. Even though elementary education is free, the indirect expenses like uniforms, books, transport and private school fees tend to deter poor families from sending their children to school on a regular basis (Kingdon & Dreze, 2001; Qureshi, 2005). Children, in most instances, are put to work in the fields either by performing agricultural labour work or other forms of informal labour, thus their attendance becomes irregular, and the children drop out (Naik, 1976). Awareness and education of parents also have a great influence on the educational attainment of children. Many parents, particularly in marginalised groups, are illiterate in West Bengal, particularly in rural West Bengal. Consequently, they can hardly value education or help their children academically. This unfavourable condition of not being educated at home will most of the time result in poor performance and lack of motivation among the students (Swain, 2010). There is also economic instability, which impacts the availability of educational resources and infrastructure. In economically backward regions, there is a lack of proper facilities, trained teachers and learning resources, which also contribute to poor quality of education (Abbasi, 2004; World Bank, 2018). Therefore, poverty and socio-economic deprivation breed a vicious cycle of lack of education and the inability to move up the ladder.
- **Cultural Factors:** Cultural beliefs, traditions, and social norms are also important in determining the outcome of education. In most rural societies, the traditional views about education, especially girls' education, still influence school attendance. Gender discrimination, preference towards male education and early marriage usually lead to reduced enrolment rates and increased dropout rates among girls (Khanna et al., 1991; UNICEF, 2023). Occupational skills and family duties are often given priority over formal schooling due to cultural practices and the values held by the community. As an illustration, the child of an agricultural or artisan family might be advised to get to know the conventional trade instead of getting a prolonged education. This diminishes the importance of formal education and constrains educational ambitions (Qureshi, 2005). There are also challenges of language and cultural diversity when it comes to rural education. There are several tribal and linguistic groups in West Bengal who have different cultural identities. When the curriculum and

medium of instruction are not in line with the local language and culture, the learners will have problems in understanding and participation. This tends to result in low learning results and higher levels of dropouts (Thamarasseri, 2008; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2015).

- **Interplay of Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors:** Socio-economic and cultural aspects are directly connected and influence the educational environment together. An example is poverty coupled with cultural practices like early marriages that can greatly restrict access to education among girls. In the same way, economic poverty and cultural dictates of child labour strengthen one another, resulting in education deprivation. To recap it all, the success or failure of school education in rural West Bengal is solely dependent on socio-economic and cultural factors. To work on these challenges, there must be a holistic approach involved, which incorporates poverty alleviation, awareness programmes, community involvement, gender sensitisation, and culturally responsive teaching practice. It is only with such concerted efforts that equitable and inclusive education can be achieved in the rural areas among all children.

4.4. Policy-Oriented Recommendations:

Enhancing the school education in the rural districts of West Bengal needs a holistic approach that is policy-based and tackles both structural and pedagogical issues. According to the current problems, it is possible to suggest several policy-related recommendations to provide equitable, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities to every learner.

- **Improvement of School Infrastructure:** Government policies are supposed to focus on the development of proper infrastructure in the rural schools, such as proper equipment in the classes, libraries, laboratories, safe drinking water and separate toilets between the boys and girls. Better infrastructure boosts student attendance, student retention and general student learning (Abbasi, 2004; Pratchi Trust, 2009; ASER Centre, 2023).
- **Adequate and Qualified Teachers:** Policies are required to make sure that qualified teachers are recruited, fairly distributed, and retained in the rural areas. The teachers can be encouraged to work in remote areas with incentives like rural allowances, housing facilities and professional growth opportunities. There should also be a continuous in-service training programme so that the pedagogical skills of teachers can be improved (Hemchand, 2009a; Khanna et al., 1991; NCERT, 2005).
- **The Adoption of Learner-Centred Pedagogy:** Educational policies must be used to promote child-centred and activity-based teaching techniques instead of traditional rote learning. In this regard, teachers must be oriented towards the adoption of innovative and inclusive pedagogical methods to meet different learning needs, and

thus enhance the quality of classroom teaching (Thamarasseri, 2008; Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978).

- **Overcoming Socio-Economic Vices:** There should be policies that aim at alleviating the effects of poverty on education by offering financial aid through scholarships, free textbooks, uniforms and mid-day meals. This can be done by introducing conditional cash transfer programmes, awareness programmes to reduce dropout rates and facilitate regular school attendance (Qureshi, 2005; Kingdon & Dreze, 2001; Government of India, 2011).
- **Community Participation:** The active participation of parents, local communities, and school management committees (SMCs) is needed to enhance the functioning of the school. The policies must be designed to raise community awareness about the role of education and get the local community involved in the school administration and school oversight (Naik, 1976; PROBE Team, 1999; Government of India, 2020).
- **The encouragement of Gender Equity and Inclusion:** Special programs are needed to provide equal opportunities in education to girls and marginalised populations, such as the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Separate sanitation facilities and gender sensitive policies, coupled with anti-early marriage campaigns, can go a long way in enhancing the education of girls (Khanna et al., 1991; Nussbaum, 2000).
- **Technology in Education:** It is necessary to bridge the digital divide in rural education through the integration of technology. The policies must foster the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools by providing digital tools, internet facilities and training teachers in digital pedagogy (Swain, 2010; UNICEF, 2023; Government of India, 2020).
- **Contextualising Curriculum and Language:** Curriculum reforms need to be such that the curriculum material is pertinent to the local socio-cultural world of the rural learners. Mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction (particularly at the primary level) can foster better understanding and learning outcomes (Thamarasseri, 2008; NCERT, 2005; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2015).
- **Empowering Monitoring and Governance:** Educational policies need to be implemented effectively, and this should be enabled by effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms. The efficiency of the rural education system can be enhanced through regular inspection, making decisions based on data, and resource allocation transparency (Hemchand, 2009a; World Bank, 2018; Government of India, 2011).

To sum up, enhancing the education of rural schools in West Bengal requires a multi-dimensional policy framework combining the infrastructural, pedagogical, socio-economic,

and community-based interventions. These are the strategies that are necessary to attain inclusive and sustainable educational development.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of school education in rural areas of West Bengal reveals that the challenges confronting the system are deeply rooted in structural inadequacies, pedagogical limitations, and socio-economic as well as cultural constraints. The findings indicate that although access to schooling has expanded over time, the quality, equity, and effectiveness of education remain critical concerns. From the perspective of structural issues, inadequate infrastructure continues to be a fundamental barrier. The absence of basic facilities such as classrooms, sanitation, and electricity creates an unfavourable learning environment and discourages regular attendance (Abbasi, 2004; ASER Centre, 2023). Furthermore, the shortage and uneven distribution of qualified teachers significantly affect instructional quality, leading to practices like multi-grade teaching that are often poorly supported (Hemchand, 2009a; NCERT, 2005). These findings are consistent with broader national and global studies, which emphasise that institutional capacity is a key determinant of learning outcomes (World Bank, 2018).

The pedagogical challenges identified in the study highlight a continued reliance on traditional, teacher-centred approaches that prioritise rote memorisation over conceptual understanding. This limits the development of higher-order thinking skills among students (Bruner, 1966). Additionally, the lack of contextualization in curriculum design reduces its relevance to rural learners, particularly those from tribal and marginalised communities (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2015). Inadequate teacher training and limited exposure to innovative teaching practices further restrict the adoption of inclusive and learner-centred pedagogy (Hemchand, 2009b; Vygotsky, 1978).

The study also demonstrates that socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental illiteracy, and child labour play a decisive role in shaping educational participation and achievement. Financial constraints compel many children to engage in income-generating activities, leading to irregular attendance and higher dropout rates (Kingdon & Dreze, 2001). At the same time, lack of parental awareness reduces educational motivation and support at home (PROBE Team, 1999). These conditions create a cycle of deprivation that limits opportunities for upward social mobility. Equally significant are the cultural factors, including gender bias, early marriage, and preference for traditional occupations, which restrict access to education, particularly for girls (Nussbaum, 2000; UNICEF, 2023). Language barriers and cultural mismatch between school curriculum and local contexts further hinder comprehension and engagement (Thamarasseri, 2008). The interplay of these socio-economic and cultural elements intensifies educational inequality and reinforces systemic disadvantage. The discussion also highlights the digital divide as an emerging concern. Limited access to technology and digital resources in rural areas has widened the gap between rural and urban education, especially during disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic

(UNICEF, 2023). This underscores the need for integrating ICT in education as a critical component of policy reform. The policy-oriented recommendations discussed in the study emphasise the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach. Strengthening infrastructure, ensuring equitable teacher distribution, promoting learner-centred pedagogy, and addressing socio-economic barriers are essential for improving educational outcomes (Government of India, 2020). Community participation and decentralised governance can further enhance accountability and effectiveness in school management (Naik, 1976).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the problems of school education in rural West Bengal are multifaceted and interconnected, requiring a holistic and sustained response. Structural deficiencies, pedagogical gaps, and socio-economic and cultural constraints collectively hinder the realisation of inclusive and quality education. Addressing these challenges demands a multi-dimensional policy framework that integrates infrastructural development, teacher empowerment, curriculum reform, and socio-economic support. Efforts must also focus on promoting gender equity, contextualising education to local needs, and bridging the digital divide. Strong monitoring mechanisms and active community participation are crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of policies. Only through coordinated and context-sensitive interventions can the goal of equitable, inclusive, and quality education be achieved in rural West Bengal, thereby contributing to broader social and economic development.

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