Silent Exclusion and Child Schooling: A Case Study of India

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The Asian Conference on Education & International Development 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract
The current educational policy discourse in India has largely focused on the issues of access to basic education. While increasing access is clearly important, the issue of significantly to sustained access is more important in the present context when the fifty per cent of child population in India in the age group of 6-14 years leave the school before completing the elementary education (GoI, 2009). Despite many attempts and improvements have been made by the several states and central governments, a major chunk of our school students in the elementary grades are silently excluded and putting in the category of 'potential dropouts'. The magnitude of the problem is very acute in government schools in rural parts of India. By taking a cluster of 11 villages comprising of 23 government schools were randomly selected in the present study, this paper attempts to provide an in-depth understanding about the magnitude and process of the silent exclusion in the sample schools of Madhya Pradesh in India, and also poses a big challenge to Right to Education (RTE) Act which guarantees the completion of elementary education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years. A survey method was done with the tools of structured questionnaire, informal discussions and school roster data. Major findings point out that silent exclusion was very high in all the existing primary and upper primary government schools irrespective of caste, class and gender. Moreover, children in primary schools and belong to socially backward communities exhibited with low self-esteem were more vulnerable. The implications of the study suggest the introduction of attractive programmes which are more joyful and child-friendly at the institutional level.

Keywords: Silent Exclusion, Right to Education Act, Elementary Grades, Government Schools

Introduction

Along with recent international declarations and conventions on education India has made a significant contribution towards the development of elementary education in our country. In the last few decades, our country has witnessed an unprecedented growth in elementary education both in quantitative and qualitative scales in terms of educational access, enrolment, achievement and quality education. However, survival and completion of a particular cycle of elementary education for children always poses a major challenge for the country, despite this phenomenal increase in school education in India. The comprehensive analysis of recent DISE data from 581 districts revealed that a majority of the children in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab survived up to class V. On the other hand, a majority of the children in Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan dropped out before reaching class V (Mehta 2006; 126-28). However the process of dropping out is more serious concern at the present context when children are silently excluded from the school and are at the risk of dropping out, due to certain contributing factors and the processes making this phenomenon acute one. The problem of survival of these children up to the completion of elementary grades becomes more acute when the factors like poor performance, irregular attendance, grade repetition and overage intermingled with socio-economic factors of these children. Thus keeping in mind, the present study was conducted to comprehensive analysis of the children in the zone of silent exclusion which includes those children who are physically present in the class but going through the schooling experiences of repetition, long absenteeism and poor performance consistently over the period of times and are considered the risk children of dropping out in the government primary, upper primary and middle schools and high schools which having the section of elementary grades in the socio-economic contexts of Madhya Pradesh.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in two clusters of Madhya Pradesh. Based on the developmental characteristics of the districts, both Rewa (developed rural area) and Dindori districts (highly under developed area) have been selected, however, the cluster of 11 villages of Huzur block of Rewa district and cluster of 14 villages of Karanjia and Baijag blocks of Dindori district have been included in the present study. Karanjia and Baijag predominantly inhabited by scheduled tribes and are part of 'Baiga Chak'. Similarly, the majority of population in Huzur block are from OBC and SC category. Out of these blocks, 31 schools of Huzur block and 18 schools from Karanjia and Baijag blocks were selected. For the present study, household and school roster data of 2008 and 2009 of CREATE[1] Project, NUEPA were used.

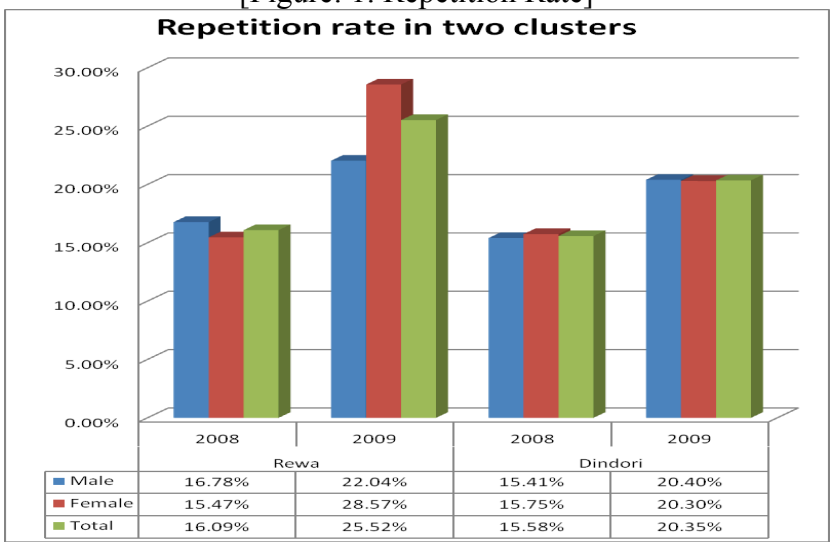
Analysis of Data and Major Findings

Incidence of Repetition in two clusters

It is widely acknowledged that repetition or failure has tremendous negative impact on mind and confidence level of children. This results in developing of disliking for school and that in turn pushing him out of the school as early as possible. With respect to the two areas studied under the present study, it is found that the incidence

of repetition in Rewa and Dindori has changed over the period of times. Fig.1 gives the total picture of repeaters in two clusters in 2008 and 2009.

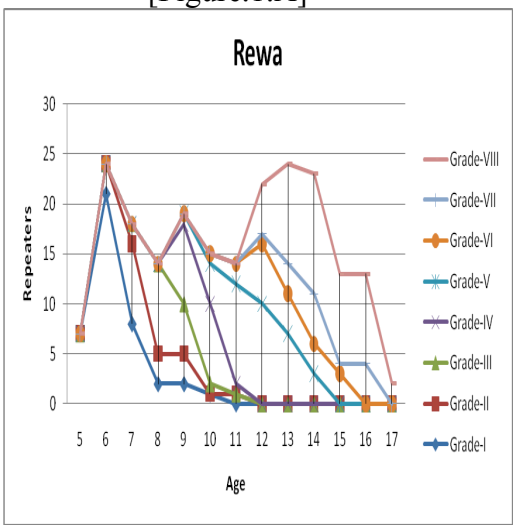
[Figure: 1: Repetition Rate]

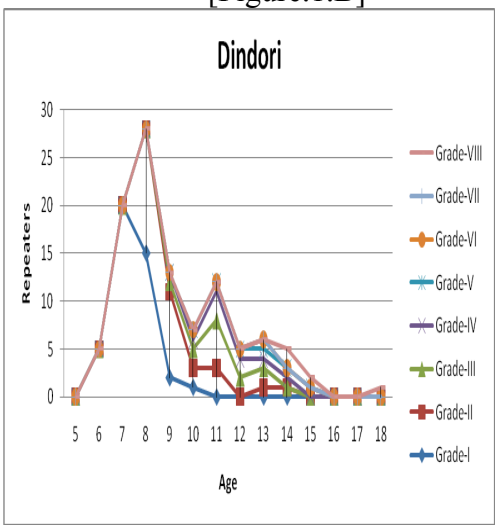


The percentage of female repeaters was higher than the percentage of male repeaters in Rewa, whereas the percentages of males and female repeaters were almost same and equally vulnerable in Dindori in 2009. In Rewa females children are more at the threat of repetition and thus at the risk of dropping out, whereas in Dindori both male and female children are at the risk of dropping out.

The situation of repetition rate in the primary and upper primary schools has changed over a period of times in Rewa in 2009 whereas the situation has remained unchanged in primary schools in Dindori in 2009. The repetition rate was found higher at the middle schools than the primary schools in Rewa cluster in 2009. This clearly indicates that the state of government middle schools is in a very dismal condition and it has a long journey to overcome this situation. Similarly, the primary schools in Dindori cluster are in very worst condition due to the prevalence of high repetition rate within the primary schools. Moreover, the 1st and 8th grades in Rewa and Dindori clusters of Madhya Pradesh are found to be the more risk grades for dropping out. At grade-I, more number of females repeated the grade in Dindori. Similarly females are more in numbers in repeating the grade-VIII in Rewa cluster. The analysis of age-grade combination of repeaters, it was found that the majority of the repeaters were "*substantial overage children*[2]" in the two clusters (See Fig.1.A and 1.B.).

[Figure.1.A] [Figure.1.B]



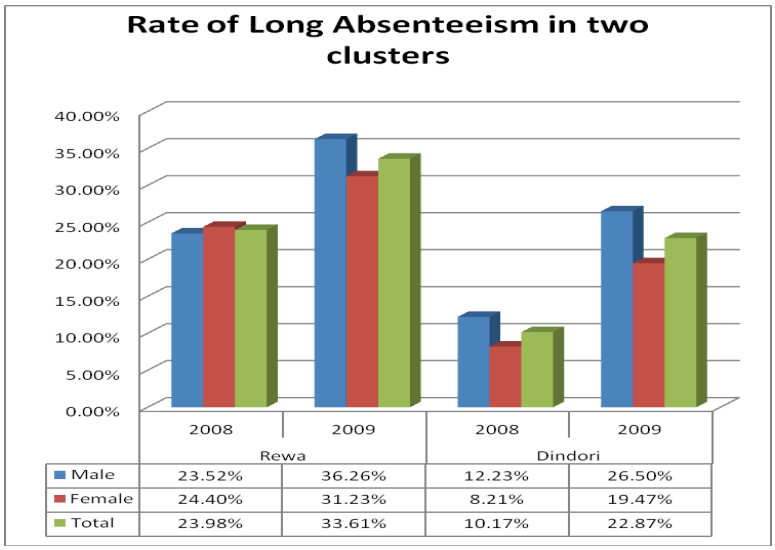


The grade-I considered to be the most critical stage with substantial number of overage children in Dindori. The village-wise[3] analysis indicates that the villages like Amiliki (35%) and Raura (27%) in Rewa; and Tantar (26%), and Dadartola (16%) in Dindori have the highest numbers of repeaters. Further the results reveal that the high rated risk schools of repetition, it was found that majority of schools have had adequate physical facilities but did not have adequate academic facilities in the selected areas of Rewa and Dindori districts.

Incidence of Long absenteeism

The tendency of absenteeism among the children is one of the factors strongly associated with of early dropout from the schools. Long absenteeism is considered a major predictor of dropping out in many instances. The figure-2 indicates the incidence of long absenteeism > 7 days in the previous month of data collection in both the years in both the clusters.

[Figure: 2: Long Absenteeism Rate]



The results of the figure-2 indicates that the incidence of long absenteeism (>7 days) in the present study has increased in Rewa as well as Dindori over a period of one year. The highest percentages of absentees were females (24.40. percent) in 2008 and males i.e. 36.26 pecent in 2009 in Rewa cluster, whereas in Dindori cluster the highest percentages of absentees were males (12.23 percent) in 2008 and were females (22.87 percent) in 2009. In school-wise, the overall rate of long absenteeism in the middle or upper primary schools of Rewa cluster increased over a period of time (within one year) but the rate was still higher in middle schools than the primary schools in the year of 2009. The rate of long absenteeism has found consistently higher in all the middle schools than the primary schools in Rewa cluster. However, in Dindori-cluster the rate of long absenteeism was found higher in the primary schools than middle schools in 2009. This clearly indicates that the state of government middle schools are in a very pitiable condition in facing the incidence of long absenteeism in Rewa and whereas the primary schools in Dindori are very dismal conditions in checking the high rate of long absenteeism. Moreover, in Rewa cluster, grade-I and grade-VI are considered to be risk grades for the male children and female children respectively who were remained long absent in the month of their schools registers in both years. In Dindori cluster, the highest percentages of long absenteeism occurred at grade III in primary level and VI grade in upper primary level in 2009. In both the grades male children account to highest proportion of absentees.

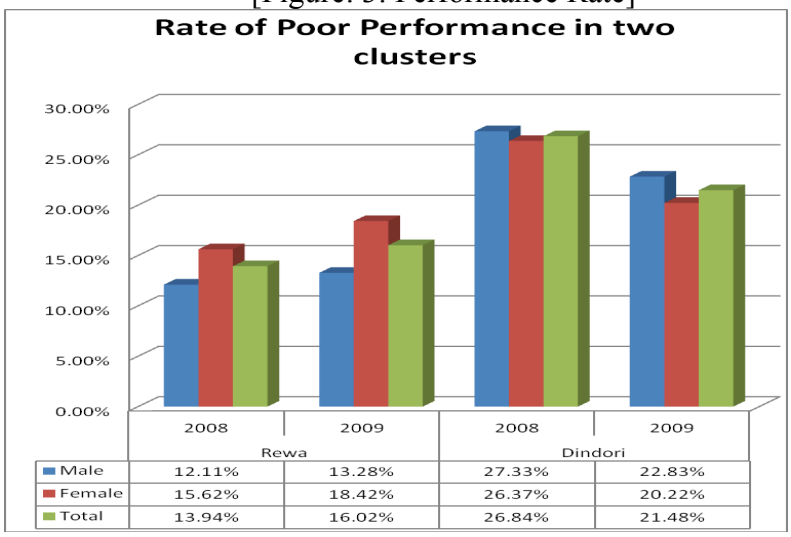
Incidence of Poor Performance

There is plenty of research evidences show that children with poor performance or low achievement more likely to drop out than those with higher achievement (Boyle et al, 2002; Hunter and May, 2003). In one of the study, it is found that one third of high school dropouts cite their poor grades as a reason for dropping out. (McDill et al., 1985). Thus poor academic achievement in turn, predicts dropping out of school (Eckstrom et al. 1986).

The findings of the present study reveals that situation of poor performance is strongly persisted in the two clusters and putting a major proportion of school going children at the risk of dropping out from the selected government schools in the above two clusters.

The figure-3 indicates the total picture of poor performance (below average and very poor) according to teachers' perception in both the years in both clusters.

[Figure: 3: Performance Rate]



It was found that females accounted for higher proportion to poor performers in both the years in Rewa cluster. Therefore the conditions of the females were relatively at the most risk in Rewa cluster. In Dindori males were at the most risk because in both the years their proportions were higher in the category of poor performance. The school-wise analysis indicates that the rate of poor performance is found higher in all the primary schools in Dindori cluster in 2009. Nevertheless, the rate of poor performance is found higher in all the middle schools of Rewa cluster in the same year. Moreover, the highest percentage of poor performance occurred at grade I, and VIII in Rewa and grade I, II and VI grade in Dindori cluster. Similarly, in respect to the analysis of school academic and physical facilities in the high rated poor performance schools , it was found that majority of schools have had inadequate physical as well as academic facilities in the selected areas of Rewa and Dindori districts.

Analysis of Net Effects of Risk Factors on Vulnerability of Dropping Out

For the purpose of our analysis I have selected some risk indicators (repetition, poor performance and long absenteeism) and in order to examine their net effects or impact on vulnerability of dropping out from the elementary schools in the above three clusters, the statistically appropriate method of logistic regression is employed in the study. Moreover, there are three logistic models like model-1, model-2, and model-3 are employed in order to examine the effects of risk factors on three different dependent variables in the study. Along with the basic frameworks of the three logistic models, the net effects of the risk factors on the vulnerability of dropping out are analyzed in the following order:

The results of regression analysis of Model-1, indicates that there a positive and significant relationship exists between repetition and poor performers in both the clusters. The children who are poor performers are more than twenty five times in Rewa and more than eight times in Dindori are likely to repeat in the same grades as compared to the other children who are not poor performers. The significant relationship is also found between repetition and long absenteeism in both the clusters. This clearly indicates that children who are having long absenteeism in the schools are more likely to repeat the grades than the children who are not having long

absenteeism both in Rewa and Dindori clusters. Moreover, repetition rate is also directly related to the sex particularly with the female sex in Rewa and not in Dindori.

And the results of Model-2, implies that poor performance rate is directly related to long absenteeism in both the clusters. The children who remain long absent in the schools more than three times in Rewa and more than eight times in Dindori are likely to perform poor as compared to children who don't remain long absent. It is also found the significant relationship between sex of the child and poor performance in Rewa cluster. Thus, the results indicate that after controlling absenteeism, female children are more likely to perform poor than the male children in Rewa only.

The Model-3 of the regression analysis results demonstrated that there is a positive and significant relationship exists between long absenteeism and poor performance in the two clusters. The children who are poor performers are nearly two times in Rewa and more than seven times in Dindori are likely to remain long absent as compared to other children who are not poor performers after controlling other factors remain constant. Similarly, the positive and significant relationship is found between repetition and long absenteeism. The children who repeated the grades are more likely to remain long absent in schools than the children who not repeated any grades both in Rewa and Dindori clusters. Moreover the positive and significant relationship is also found between sex of the child particularly the female sex and long absenteeism in these two clusters. After controlling repetition female children are more likely to remain long absent than the male children both in Rewa and Dindori.

Conclusion

The aim and purpose of the present study was to analyze the situation of the phenomenon of silent exclusion in the government schools in respect to two clusters in Rewa and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh. While selecting the two areas it was kept in mind the socio-demographic factor as well as the developmental characteristics of the areas as one district was developed area and another district was underdeveloped area of the state. Similarly, also the two clusters of this study were selected by applying the same criteria. The general perception gives the hints that comparatively the schooling of the children in government schools in developed areas must be in a better situations due to the availability of many developmental characteristics of the area than the children schooling in underdeveloped areas of the state. However the findings of the present study demystify this general perception by showing the truth that the children schooling in both clusters are not good. As in both clusters of Rewa (developed) and Dindori (underdeveloped) the phenomenon of silent exclusion in the government schools is very acute. The situations of the repetition, long absenteeism and poor performance are rampant in both middle and primary government schools in two districts of Madhya Pradesh. A good chunk of child population at the elementary levels is struggling every day to get the basic rights to get education and to complete the specific cycle of elementary education. It is the high time for the state government to take alternative strategies to counter the phenomenon of silent exclusion in the existing government schools of the state. The state should play the active role by improving physical as well as the academic infrastructure of the government schools for providing a conducive school atmosphere to all the children to get complete the basic cycle of elementary education.

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End Notes:

[1] Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transions and Equity. For details see the website- www.create-rpc.org.

[2] Substantially overage children are those children who have despite of giving the relaxation of one or two years than the actual age of theirs and if they detained/repeated in the respective grades, then these children are called substantial overage. This substantial overage children indicate that either they entered the school in late of their age or they were detained/repeated the grades more than one times in their schooling career, thus they are at the risk zone of silent exclusion.

[3] While analyzing the village-wise data repetition in primary & middle schools both were taken into account.