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Educational Scenario of Dropout Students in English Bazar Block, Malda District

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Abstract

School dropout remains one of the most persistent challenges in the educational landscape of rural and semi-urban India. The present study examines the educational scenario of dropout students in the English Bazar Block, with a focus on socio-economic, cultural, and institutional determinants. Using secondary data sources such as District Human Development Reports, Census data, and existing literature, the paper identifies key causes including poverty, gender disparity, migration, and infrastructural inadequacies. The study reveals that dropout rates are significantly higher at the secondary level and disproportionately affect girls. The findings highlight the need for integrated policy interventions, improved educational infrastructure, and community participation to reduce dropout rates and promote inclusive education.

Keywords

Dropout, Rural Education, Gender Inequality, Poverty, Malda District, Secondary Education, Educational Development

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical instrument for socio-economic development. However, the issue of school dropout continues to undermine educational progress, particularly in underdeveloped regions. In India, despite significant improvements in enrollment rates due to policies like the Right to Education Act (2009), retention remains a major concern. The problem is particularly acute in districts such as Malda District, where socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect with educational challenges. Within Malda, English Bazar Block represents a critical area of study due to its mixed rural-urban character and persistent educational disparities.

This paper aims to analyze the educational scenario of dropout students in this block, identify the major causes behind school discontinuation, and suggest measures for improving retention.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

- To examine the educational status of students in English Bazar Block
- To analyze the extent and pattern of school dropout
- To identify socio-economic and institutional causes of dropout
- To assess gender differences in dropout rates
- To suggest policy measures for reducing dropout

3. Methodology

This study is based on secondary data analysis. Data has been collected from:

- Census of India (2011)
- District Human Development Report of Malda
- Government reports and educational statistics
- Research articles and case studies

The methodology involves qualitative and descriptive analysis, focusing on trends, patterns, and causal factors.

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4. Study Area Profile

The present study focuses on English Bazar Block, a significant administrative unit located in the Malda Sadar subdivision of Malda District. The block derives its importance from its mixed rural–urban character and its proximity to English Bazar town, which serves as a major urban center in the district. Geographically, the region lies in the northern part of West Bengal and forms part of the fertile alluvial plains of the Ganga basin, making agriculture the predominant occupation of the population. The presence of riverine systems and periodic flooding also influences the socio-economic conditions of the area, indirectly affecting educational access and continuity. According to Census 2011, the total population of English Bazar Block is approximately 2.7 lakh, with a relatively high population density compared to other rural blocks in the district. The demographic structure is characterized by a substantial proportion of economically weaker sections, including Scheduled Castes and minority communities. The literacy rate of the block stands at around 63.03 percent, which is below the state average, reflecting educational backwardness. A significant gender gap is also evident, with male literacy higher than female literacy, indicating persistent gender inequality in access to education. The economic profile of the block is largely agrarian, with a considerable portion of the population engaged in agriculture, agricultural labor, and informal sector activities. Seasonal unemployment and underemployment are common, leading to migration in search of livelihood opportunities. A large percentage of households fall below the poverty line, which has a direct bearing on educational participation, as children are often required to contribute to family income or household work. These economic constraints play a crucial role in shaping school attendance and dropout patterns. In terms of educational infrastructure, English Bazar Block has witnessed a notable expansion in the number of primary schools over the years, ensuring relatively better access to basic education. However, the availability of middle, secondary, and higher secondary institutions remains comparatively limited, particularly in rural areas. The uneven spatial distribution of schools creates barriers to educational progression, especially for students residing in remote villages. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of transportation facilities, and long distances to secondary schools further discourage continued schooling. The social structure of the block is influenced by traditional norms and practices, which also impact educational outcomes. Early marriage, particularly among girls, remains prevalent in some areas, contributing to higher dropout rates at the secondary level. Additionally, low levels of parental education and awareness often result in limited support for children's schooling. The presence of first-generation learners adds another layer of complexity, as students may lack academic guidance at home. Despite these challenges, the study area has also benefited from various government initiatives aimed at improving educational access and retention. Programs such as the

mid-day meal scheme, free distribution of textbooks, and targeted interventions like the Kanyashree Scheme have had a positive impact on enrollment and attendance, particularly among girls and economically disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these programs varies across different parts of the block, depending on levels of awareness, implementation efficiency, and local socio-economic conditions.

In conclusion, English Bazar Block presents a socio-economically diverse and educationally challenged setting, making it an appropriate and significant area for studying the issue of school dropout. The interplay of demographic pressure, economic hardship, infrastructural limitations, and social factors creates a complex environment in which educational attainment is both enabled and constrained. This contextual understanding is essential for analyzing dropout patterns and formulating effective policy responses.

English Bazar Block is located in the Malda Sadar subdivision of West Bengal. It is characterized by a combination of rural and semi-urban settlements.

4.1 Demographic Features

- Population: Approximately 2.7 lakh
- Literacy Rate: Around 63%
 - Male Literacy: ~67%
 - Female Literacy: ~59%

4.2 Economic Profile

- High dependence on agriculture and informal labor
- Significant proportion of households below poverty line
- Seasonal migration is common

4.3 Educational Infrastructure

- Primary schools are relatively well distributed
- Limited access to secondary and higher secondary institutions
- Rural areas face infrastructural deficits

5. Educational Scenario in the Block

The educational scenario in English Bazar Block presents a complex picture marked by both expansion in access to primary education and persistent challenges in retention, quality, and equity. Over the past decades, government initiatives and policy interventions have significantly improved the availability of schooling facilities, particularly at the primary level. As a result, enrollment rates in early stages of education have increased considerably. However, this quantitative expansion has not been matched by qualitative improvements or sustained participation at higher levels of education. According to Census 2011 data, the overall literacy rate in the block stands at approximately 63.03 percent, which is lower than the state average of West Bengal. A notable feature of the literacy profile is the gender disparity, with male literacy at around 66.96 percent and female literacy at about 58.88 percent. This gap reflects underlying socio-cultural inequalities that continue to affect educational access and attainment, particularly for girls. Although enrollment at the primary level has become nearly universal, disparities emerge more clearly as students progress to upper primary

and secondary stages. The distribution of educational institutions further highlights structural imbalances within the block. While there are around 140 primary schools, the number of middle schools is significantly lower, creating a bottleneck in the transition from primary to upper primary education. Although the number of high schools and higher secondary institutions shows some improvement, their spatial distribution remains uneven, with rural areas facing greater disadvantages. While a substantial proportion of children enroll in primary schools, fewer continue to upper primary and even fewer reach secondary and higher secondary levels. Another critical aspect of the educational scenario is the quality of education. Many schools in rural areas face shortages of trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited teaching-learning materials. These deficiencies contribute to poor learning outcomes, which in turn reduce student motivation and increase the likelihood of dropout. Language barriers and first-generation learners further complicate the situation, as students often struggle to cope with the curriculum without adequate support at home or in school. Socio-economic conditions in Malda District also play a decisive role in shaping educational outcomes in English Bazar Block.

Despite these challenges, various government initiatives have contributed to improving the educational landscape. Schemes such as the mid-day meal program, free distribution of textbooks, and conditional cash transfer programs like the Kanyashree Scheme have helped increase enrollment and retention, especially among girls. These interventions have also played a role in altering parental attitudes toward education, gradually emphasizing its importance for future socio-economic mobility.

5.1 Enrollment Trends

Enrollment at the primary level is relatively high due to government initiatives like mid-day meal schemes and free education. However, there is a noticeable decline in enrollment at higher levels.

5.2 Transition Rates

The transition from primary to upper primary and from upper primary to secondary education remains weak. Many students discontinue education after completing primary schooling.

5.3 Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes in rural schools are often below expected standards due to:

- Teacher shortages
- Poor teaching quality
- Lack of learning resources

6. Nature and Pattern of Dropout

6.1 Stage-wise Dropout

Dropout rates increase significantly at:

- Upper primary level (Classes VI–VIII)
- Secondary level (Classes IX–X)

The transition to secondary education is a critical stage where most students drop out.

6.2 Gender-Based Patterns

Girls exhibit higher dropout rates compared to boys. This disparity becomes more pronounced at the secondary level.

6.3 Rural-Urban Differences

- Rural areas have higher dropout rates
- Urban centers show relatively better retention

7. Causes of School Dropout

The causes of dropout in English Bazar Block are multidimensional.

7.1 Economic Factors

Poverty is the most significant determinant of school dropout. Families with low income often prioritize immediate economic survival over education.

- Children engage in agricultural work
- Involvement in informal labor
- Financial inability to afford education-related expenses

7.2 Social and Cultural Factors

Social norms and cultural practices play a crucial role.

- Early marriage of girls
- Preference for male education
- Low parental literacy and awareness

Girls are often expected to take up household responsibilities, leading to discontinuation of education.

7.3 Migration

Seasonal migration is common in Malda district.

- Families migrate in search of employment
- Children accompany parents
- Disruption leads to permanent dropout

7.4 Institutional Factors

Educational institutions themselves contribute to dropout.

- Poor quality of teaching
- Lack of trained teachers
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Absence of engaging curriculum

Students often lose interest due to an uninspiring learning environment.

7.5 Infrastructure and Accessibility

Physical access to schools is a major concern.

- Long distances to secondary schools
- Lack of transportation facilities
- Poor road connectivity

This particularly affects girls, whose mobility is often restricted.

7.6 Psychological Factors

- Lack of motivation
- Fear of failure
- Academic pressure

Students with weak academic performance are more likely to drop out.

8. Impact of Dropout

8.1 Individual Impact

- Limited employment opportunities
- Low income potential
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation

8.2 Social Impact

- Continuation of poverty cycle
- Gender inequality
- Rise in child labor

8.3 Economic Impact

- Loss of human capital
- Slower regional development

9. Government Initiatives and Interventions

Several government programs aim to reduce dropout rates:

9.1 Mid-Day Meal Scheme

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is one of the most important interventions aimed at improving school participation and reducing dropout rates at the elementary level in India. Launched with the objective of enhancing enrollment, retention, and attendance, the scheme provides free cooked meals to students in government and government-aided schools. In socio-economically vulnerable regions such as English Bazar Block, where poverty remains a significant barrier to education, the scheme has played a crucial role in encouraging children to attend school regularly.

The provision of nutritious meals addresses both educational and health-related concerns. For many children from low-income families, the mid-day meal constitutes an important source of daily nutrition. This reduces classroom hunger and improves students' ability to concentrate and participate in learning activities. As a result, the scheme contributes not only to increased attendance but also to better learning outcomes. In areas like Malda District, where malnutrition and food insecurity are prevalent, the nutritional support provided by the scheme has a direct positive impact on students' physical and cognitive development.

Another significant contribution of the scheme is its role in increasing school enrollment, particularly at the primary level. The assurance of a free meal acts as an incentive for parents to send their children to school, especially in economically disadvantaged households. However, despite its positive impact, the scheme faces certain challenges that affect its overall effectiveness. Issues such as irregular supply of food grains, inadequate kitchen infrastructure, and occasional concerns about food quality can limit its success. In some schools, administrative inefficiencies and lack of proper monitoring also hinder smooth implementation. Nevertheless, these challenges do not diminish the overall significance of the scheme as a tool for improving educational participation.

9.2 Scholarships and Financial Aid

Support economically disadvantaged students.

9.3 Role of Kanyashree Scheme in Decreasing Dropout Rates

The Kanyashree Scheme has emerged as a landmark intervention in addressing the persistent issue of school dropout among adolescent girls in West Bengal. Introduced in 2013, the scheme primarily targets girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, aiming to ensure their retention in the educational system while simultaneously discouraging early marriage. In regions such as English Bazar Block, where poverty, gender inequality, and social customs significantly influence educational participation, the scheme has played a transformative role in reshaping educational trajectories for young girls. The central mechanism of the Kanyashree

Scheme lies in its provision of conditional financial incentives, which directly address the economic constraints faced by families. By offering annual scholarships to adolescent girls who remain enrolled in school and an additional one-time grant upon reaching the age of eighteen—provided they are unmarried and continuing their education—the scheme effectively creates a financial motivation structure that encourages both families and students to prioritize education over early marriage or income-generating activities. In addition to its economic impact, the Kanyashree Scheme has also contributed to a gradual shift in societal attitudes toward girls' education. Education is increasingly perceived not merely as a social obligation but as an asset with tangible benefits. This shift is particularly evident in rural areas of English Bazar Block, where awareness campaigns and institutional support have complemented the financial incentives, fostering a more supportive environment for girls' continued education. As a result, many girls are now more likely to aspire to complete secondary and even higher secondary education.

However, while the scheme has demonstrated considerable success, its effectiveness is not uniform across all areas. Challenges such as lack of awareness, administrative delays in fund disbursement, and infrastructural deficiencies continue to limit its full potential. In several rural pockets, the absence of nearby secondary schools, poor transportation facilities, and inadequate teaching quality remain significant barriers that financial incentives alone cannot overcome. Thus, although the Kanyashree Scheme addresses the economic and social dimensions of dropout, it does not fully resolve institutional and infrastructural issues within the education system.

10. Promotes education among girls and discourages early marriage:

In socio-economically disadvantaged regions such as English Bazar Block, where financial constraints often force families to prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term educational goals, this support helps reduce the economic burden associated with schooling.

At the same time, the scheme is structured in a way that directly addresses the issue of child marriage, which is a major cause of dropout among girls. The eligibility criteria require that beneficiaries remain unmarried until the age of 18 in order to receive the full financial benefit. This conditionality encourages families to delay the marriage of their daughters, thereby allowing them to continue their education for a longer period. As a result, the scheme not only improves school retention rates but also contributes to the social empowerment of girls by extending their educational and developmental opportunities.

Moreover, the scheme has gradually influenced community attitudes by reinforcing the value of girls' education. Parents increasingly perceive education as beneficial, not only for financial incentives but also for enhancing the future prospects of their daughters. This shift in perception has led to higher enrollment and improved attendance

among girls at the secondary level. In this way, the Kanyashree Scheme functions as both an educational and social reform initiative, addressing the interconnected issues of dropout and early marriage in a comprehensive manner.

11. Right to Education Act (2009)

The Right to Education Act (2009), formally known as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, represents a landmark legislative step in ensuring universal access to elementary education in India. The Act mandates that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years have the fundamental right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school. In regions such as English Bazar Block, where socio-economic constraints often limit educational participation, the Act has played a significant role in expanding access to schooling and reducing initial barriers to enrollment. A key feature of the Act is its emphasis on equity and inclusion. The Act also addresses the quality dimension of education by prescribing norms and standards related to infrastructure, teacher qualifications, pupil-teacher ratios, and school facilities. Schools are required to maintain minimum standards to ensure a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, the Act prohibits practices such as physical punishment and mental harassment, and it promotes child-centered and activity-based learning methods. These provisions are particularly important in improving student retention, as poor quality of education is often a contributing factor to dropout.

Another significant aspect of the Right to Education Act (2009) is its focus on retention and completion of elementary education. The “no detention policy,” originally part of the Act, aimed to reduce dropout by allowing students to progress without being held back in early grades. Although this policy has undergone modifications, its initial intent was to create a supportive learning environment and prevent early disengagement from school. However, despite its achievements in increasing access, the Act has limitations in addressing dropout at higher levels of education. Since its scope is restricted to children up to 14 years of age, many students discontinue education after completing elementary schooling. In blocks like English Bazar Block, dropout rates tend to rise sharply at the secondary level, indicating the need for policy support beyond the elementary stage.

12. Awareness Campaigns

Community-based initiatives to encourage school retention.

13. Challenges in Implementation

Despite various initiatives, several challenges persist:

- Lack of effective monitoring
- Corruption and mismanagement
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Limited community participation

14. Discussion

The issue of dropout in English Bazar Block is not merely an educational problem but a socio-economic phenomenon. Poverty, gender norms, and institutional weaknesses

collectively shape educational outcomes. The persistence of dropout despite policy interventions indicates gaps in implementation and the need for localized strategies. A one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective in addressing region-specific challenges.

15. Recommendations

15.1 Strengthening Educational Infrastructure

- Establish more secondary schools in rural areas
- Improve school facilities

15.2 Economic Support

- Provide direct financial assistance to families
- Expand scholarship programs

15.3 Gender-Sensitive Measures

- Promote girls' education through awareness campaigns
- Provide safe transport facilities
- Establish residential schools for girls

15.4 Improving Quality of Education

- Recruit trained teachers
- Use innovative teaching methods
- Integrate digital learning tools

15.5 Community Participation

- Involve parents and local leaders
- Strengthen school management committees

15.6 Addressing Migration

- Provide flexible schooling options
- Introduce seasonal hostels

Conclusion

The educational scenario of dropout students in English Bazar Block reflects deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities. While progress has been made in improving enrollment, retention remains a critical issue. Addressing dropout requires a holistic approach that combines economic support, social reform, and institutional strengthening. Special attention must be given to vulnerable groups, particularly girls and economically disadvantaged families. Only through sustained and coordinated efforts can the goal of universal education be achieved in regions like Malda District.

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