A Case Study on Reasons of Discontinuation of Formal Schooling: A Socio Economic Perspective

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Abstract- “Socioeconomics” or “Socio-economics” is the study of the relationship between economic activity and social life. It typically analyzes both the social impacts of economic activity and economic impacts of social activity. Naturally, the socio-economic factors determining school attendance depends on the wider aspects of the society. That is, for every society it depends on its sociology, history, economics, psychology, polity etc and without an understanding of these features of the particular society, the understanding might remain incomplete. Therefore, this area is often considered to be multidisciplinary, as it uses theories and methods from the disciplines mentioned above. Naturally, this combination of disciplines poses complexities and challenges to work with.

In the present context, we see that according to the 2001 Census, 65 per cent of Indians were literate. However it is true that almost every child now has access to a school, with around 95 per cent of our rural population having a primary school within one kilometer of their habitation. This is indeed a significant achievement. But, what next? Do people belonging to the margin continue to the next level of education after elementary, if no what are the binding factors? Further, do these factors have some pattern in terms of their priority across regions and across roups? The present attempts to answer such questions from a socio-economic perspective (interdisciplinary) based on a suitably designed sample survey for two backward regions of West Bengal.

Keywords- Education, Socio-economics, Socioeconomics

I. THE KEY ISSUES, "CONVERSATIONS" AND/OR LITERATURE THAT THE PAPER WILL ADDRESS OR DRAW UPON, AS WELL AS DISCIPLINES INVOLVED.

The literature deals with the existing theoretical understanding for the need of human capital in ones life. This section basically deals with the linkage of social capital and human capital. Precisely how the society contributes in the formation of human capital. It further provides some theoretical understanding about how the formation of human capital helps enhance ones capability and thus empowers to lead a quality life. The arguments follow from the work of Schultz, Becker, Sen, Coleman, Bourdeau, Arrow, Solow and many such social scientists who paved the way for further thought on the subject.

The section also briefly demonstrates relevant empirical works done so far (India and abroad). This is to remind us of the research and their outcome on the issue, especially regarding discontinuation of formal schooling of the children’s. Undoubtedly such discontinuation has
ultimately jeopardized the formation of much needed human capital in the society. Perhaps, after a clear understanding of the theories and empirical works so far it becomes easier for a researcher to identify the research problems and thereby move to the field and observe the interactions and draw conclusion from them.

Though there are studies on the proposed agenda, but addressing these issues in a single research work is still scanty. However, it’s not the scantiness that is important over here, but, since socioeconomic factors determining school attendance is a very complex issue and, therefore addressing it from the root, within a single sample space, would be interesting to interpret the situation in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Precisely here lies the prime objective of the present study. Literature review suggests a set of binding constraints for the non-attendance of school, be it the NSS or any other study that has been carried out of the subject. But, a study specific to a certain region and certain social groups is still not very much distinct. The priority of reasons inter change their ranks as the societal, economical and religious affiliation changes . This set of varying structures play a key role in influencing the factors that determine school attendance. More so, as every region has its own history of dealing with a given issue- be it education, health, economy, politics etc. Therefore, the problem is a complex one, and needs a holistic approach to deal with. So far, hardly any such study could be traced where under such micro-macro situations, in these regions, regarding school attendance has been conducted.

II. THE NATURE OF ANY DATA, CASE-STUDY MATERIAL, REVIEWS OF LITERATURE, ETC.

To prove the hypothesis that priorities of problems change across societies and groups, despite the fact that the magnitude of the problem remains the same. That is to say those children discontinue formal schooling in the most formative years, but the reasons vary across families and societies. Therefore, no one policy would suit to address these issues- at least in the Indian context.

For the same a household survey was conducted in two most backward regions of West Bengal (India). One area comprises of the minority populations (Muslims) and the other mainly comprised of the backward sections- scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. All together 243 households were surveyed via a suitably designed questionnaire. Secondary data sources, like that of the National Sample Survey, Performance Audit of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India, UNICEF etc enriched the review and understanding as well.

Especially, when we take up specifically the issue of the girl child, per se. Considering the geographical features of the region selected, it adds a dimension to the study, simply because, the areas are mostly the border areas of countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan etc having a culturally different style of living, as compared to ours in the plain or semi-urban conglomerates. Therefore, the study considered two hamlets – one in the district of Murshidabad which is mostly dominated by the Muslims and another in the district of Jalpaiguri which is mostly dominated by the tribals.

III. WHAT HAS BEEN FOUND FROM ANALYSIS OF DATA, ETC

The study indeed revealed some interesting features and confirm the hypothesis. For a further investigation of the data we also did some econometric analysis. Since the sample chosen here comprises of subjects who has discontinued schooling at some grade between Class V to Class IX so for methodological need we have divided the data into two categories. The first category belongs to the subjects who have discontinued schooling prior to class VIII.
and the other for subjects who followed suit on or after class VIII. Here, households are the land less, mainly engaged in farming, small scale house based industrial works etc. This data set has been chosen so as to give a comprehensive description of the households’ decision variables for subjects who have discontinued in 2007-08.

In addition, a wide variety of variables reflecting the financial position of the individual are also included (as for example, level of income, principal occupation etc). When there is a demand for schooling, a household will choose to continue schooling, depending on their perceived relative probabilities of obtaining better return in future. These perceived probabilities are functions of the demand for schooling in the society or neighborhood, household’s ability to continue schooling, as well as the supply of access to continue schooling available to them. The examination of households’ decision to continue the child’s schooling after a certain benchmark requires logistic regression.

Now the study examines empirical explanations according to the respective questions using logit model with some specifications. The specifications are obtained itself by trial and error method to get the optimal suitable results with acceptable R².

The results obtained from the data analysis and regression shows that apart from income the role of poverty, peer group, society, transport cost and alike factors largely determine the fate of a child – if at all s/he would continue schooling after a certain benchmark. The priority of determinants changes from one area to another and from one society to another. The root causes of discontinuation from formal schooling is much beyond the economic factors.

IV. THE INTENDED/ACTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PAPER TO KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.

Indeed there remains an ample room for the still unmet priorities that were proposed by the government of India in terms of the Millennium development Goals and other covenants. Needless to mention for the successful implementation of the MDGs, India definitely needs to play a significant role. The priorities were thought as a prerequisite for the millennium development goals as well.

The argument for the paper is straightforward- it questions the very fact that despite having an ample size of unmet priorities, is it the right time for the policy makes to design for the ‘Universalisation of Secondary Education’? Overlapping gaps may again lead us to some severe vicious cycle and who knows the entire exercise of universalizing secondary education might stand on quick sand rather then a strong base. Simply allocating higher resources in the budget won’t serve the purpose of making a skilled army of human resource. It also needs to take into account the local factors that hinder the access or continuation of formal schooling. Further, the curriculums should also incorporate some degree of technical education right after one completes elementary level. This would perhaps on one hand train the child from the very beginning and also acts as an incentive for continuation. For the simple reason that such training otherwise might be costly and it has the potential to help him/her earn livihood in the absence of any formal employment.

Perhaps, only robust and authentic interdisciplinary research could help to break the ice and pave the way for a better tomorrow.

¹Views expressed are personal and in no way binding upon the institute