

Case Study**PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DROP - OUTS: A CASE STUDY OF BETASING
COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT BLOCK IN WEST - GARO -
HILLS PF MEGHALAYA****Dr Siba Charan Subudhi,**

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NEHU, Tura Campus, Tura, Meghalaya - 794002. sibasubudhi@rediffmail.com**Abstract**

The study investigates the problem of school drop-outs in the Betasing Community and Rural Development Block of West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. Despite India's commitment to achieving Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), dropout rates remain alarmingly high, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Using a normative survey method, data were collected through interviews and observations from 30 drop-out students, parents, and teachers across three villages—Sonabill, Marakapara, and Koch Sonamittee. The findings reveal that poverty, shortage of working hands for agriculture, poor academic performance, lack of parental awareness, large family size, and unattractive school conditions are the major causes of dropouts. Other socio-cultural factors such as illiteracy of parents, unwed mothers, and inadequate school facilities also contribute significantly. The study emphasizes that reducing dropouts requires a holistic approach involving government policies, community participation, teacher commitment, provision of free educational facilities, health care, and social awareness. Practical suggestions include strengthening Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), improving teacher accountability, offering financial and nutritional support, and creating attractive and relevant school programmes. The paper concludes that universal access to elementary education is vital for social justice, democracy, and sustainable development in India.

Keywords: *School dropouts, Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), Rural education, Socio-economic factors, Meghalaya, Poverty and education, Tribal education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Educational equity, Teacher accountability.*

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The question of Universalization of Elementary Education and provision of better educational facilities of the people of India still remains elusive. At present India have very large illiterate population. According to the world bank estimate by 2007 AD India would have the largest concentration of illiterate population (54.8%) in the world. The much debated document on Challenge of education; reiterated the urgency and importance of removal of illiteracy in the country. It emphasized that "if adequate measures are not taken for the spread of education 'the chasm of economic disabilities, regional imbalances and social injustice will widen further resulting in building up of disintegrative tension." The 'Challenge of Education' envisaged the attainment of the universalization of Elementary Education by 2000, which ought to have been achieved in 1960 as per constitutional directive but which has been getting postponed again and again and at the dawn of 2000 we have not achieved and the date has been shifted.

"Universalize education must precede universal in franchisee" goes the saying. An educated and enlightened citizenry is an essential condition for success of Democracy. Development of democratic society can take place only when the masses are educated, so that they can participate, contribute and reap the benefits of the developed process. Realizing this fact they policy makers in most of the developed countries made education as a compulsory up to the secondary stage. But in the developing countries like India, education up to the elementary stage is considered very essential for every citizen. The constitution of India has, therefore, laid down under the Directive principles of state policy with Article - 45 that all children in the age group of 6-14 should have been brought to schools by 1959. But this constitutional commitment made 55 years ago has not been realized till today. The target has not yet been reached and the goal of universalization of elementary education has not yet been reached. The principal reason is being the school dropouts. The 'school drop-outs' are defined as those leaving the school before completing a particular stage of education.

The National Policy on Education (NPE -1986 -92) has expressed strong political will and deep commitment to the universalization of elementary education. The programme of action (POA) for implementing the NPE has rightly observed the NPE suggestion which have given unqualified priority of universalization of elementary education (UEE) with a substantial improvement in the quality of education. the problem of school drop-outs is common to every

region of India. Only it may vary in degree from region to region. This problem is deeply linked to the socio-economic condition and cultural ethos of the society. Realistic diagnosis of the problem therefore is possible only if specific study is carried out for the area in question.

The problem of school drop-outs seems to be a major impediment in the achievement of universalization of Elementary Education. The drop-outs rate at the elementary level continues to be above 64%. This rate is much higher among girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. These may be due to lack of basic amenities in the school. The problem is more alarming in the rural area where there is a low rate of literacy and low socio-economic conditions. A realistic probe into the problems is possible if an area specific study is taken up. In the light of this situation the present study seeks to have an in-depth understanding about the causes, nature and extend of drop-outs and to analyze the problem in the three villages of Betasing Community and Rural Development Block of west Garo Hills of Meghalaya, namely - **Sonabill, Marakapara and Koch Sonamittee**. Here the researcher wants to highlight the crisis of primary Education of this neglected part of rural India. The study has helped to make practical suggestion for solving the problem. Despite taking all care to make the study complete, there may be some shortcomings. I will be grateful, if the same are pointed out to me and some suggestions are given so as to make the work more meaningful.

Demographic figure of Dropouts in Meghalaya

Meghalaya is called as the above of cloud. It's geographical feature, cultural diversities, religious believes create a separate it identity. This state mainly comprises of three-hills. Each one Which has been divided into three districts i.e East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. These hills lie between 25 degree nine inches and 24 degrees one inch in North latitude and between 89 degrees forty nine inches and 91 degree two inches of East longitude. The greater portions of these is 8,167 Sq.Km. and the total population is 842437 as the 2001 census report, out of that 518,000 population in West Garo Hills. It is on the border area of our country. The greater portion of these districts are consisting of hills Majority parts of these hills are covered with dense forest of these streams, and small rivers are flowing everywhere which create problems for conveyance from one place to another. During rainy season most of the areas are flooded which create

communication problem. In these hills 90% population are living in the rural areas and depend on agriculture as their lively hood i.e jhum cultivation. In these hills more people are illiterate due to different as attitude. Topographical problems, shortage of trained teachers, Mass poverty (i.e 44.21% are under poverty line than 39.9% of Meghalaya), lack of physical facilities and with the other factors the students are withdrawing themselves from the school before completion of education. Especially in west- Garo Hills the literacy rate is 50.7% which is below than the National average. All the above data's are collected from the districts Report Cards 2004, MHRD, Government of India. However, today with the little progress in education people are realizing their social duties as well as social life. But still they are far below than the national figure. These Hills are continuing high rates of dropouts and stagnation at elementary education. According to the Annual report (2000-2001) of the MHRD the dropout rates in classes I to VII was 77.23% in Garo Hills compared to national average 57.59 %. This figure shows us that these hills need more social, economic and human support through different program of actions to reduce the dropout rates. The data of School Drop-outs in general in the Year 2000-2002. Is Obtained from the **DPI** is as follows.

Drop-outs Rate in Meghalaya 2000-2002

Class	percentage	Caste	percentage
I - V	58.5	s.c	86.33
VI - VIII	79.44	S.T.	63.59

This study has conducted in Betasing community and Rural Development Block of West Garo sonamittee practice agriculture. Mainly they plant rice and vegetables and mostly earn their livelihood by selling vegetables. The young women folk of this village also bring home some money by bee weaving for lump sum monthly pay.

Objectives of the study

Objectives of the study are to have an understanding and assessment of the problem of school dropouts within the Betasing community and Rural Development Block of West Garo hills Districts. The finding of the study can be generalized for whole Garo Hills with reasonable assumptions. Findings of the study can be useful to all those who are concerned with the tackling of the problem. The main Objectives of the study are:

- i. To ascertain, the nature and extend of the problem of school dropouts in the study area.
- ii. To make an in-depth study into the village system of education, its cause and effects.
- iii. To find out the specific reasons of dropouts in the study area.
- iv. To study the influence of various socio-economic factors on school - dropouts
- v. To get the opinion of the teachers and villagers on the issue.
- vi. If possible, to suggest measures for tackling the problem of school-drop-outs.
- vii. To make rural inhabitants aware of the importance of education.

vii) To suggest the role of the governmental and non-governmental organization to solve the problem of drop-outs.

Delimitation:

- i. A Sample of 30 students drawn from 3 village of Betasing community and rural development block is taken as representative of the students in the Betasing Block area because higher intensity is beyond the capacity at the individual level.
- ii. Pattern and extent of area has been assumed to be similar to hilly areas. With respect to this the researcher has delimited three villages for the study from Betasing Block i.e sonabill, Marakapara and Koch sonamittee.
- iv. Population is assumed to be homogeneous.
- v. Scope of the study is limited to the question meant for drop-outs, parents and teachers from the selected village and schools.

Methodology and Sampling

The investigation in this study was of the normative survey type and for this the following procedures were adopted to gather data i.e. (I) Interview schedules for teachers, parents and drop- outs.

(ii) Observation - Thirty drop-outs students from three delimited villages of Betasing C.D.Block were taken up as the sample for study by the investigator. The drop-outs were selected randomly from the obtained figure which has collected from the Authority of Sarva Shiksha Aviyana, WestGaro Hills of Meghalaya and given in Table- I. Five teachers and ten parents were also selected randomly for interview.

Methods of gathering Data

The investigator has collected data from the dropouts' students, parents and teachers. The above mentioned categories of persons were questioned from the interview schedule which prepared by their searcher and their reply filled in on the interview schedule by the investigator himself. Since most of the dropouts had lapsed back into illiteracy, they neither could write properly nor could they read English which have observed by the researcher.

Procedure of investigation

Door to survey was carried out in the villages. The investigator visited the selected villages and its primary schools and interacted with the teachers, parents and student drop-outs. The interview schedules were filled while taking the interviews. The data then compiled and analyzed.

Table1.1

Showing Drop-outs of Government Upper Primary School Sonabill

Class	2001	2002	2003	2004
I	2	3	6	2
II	6	-	3	1
III	3	4	2	3
IV	-	2	-	-

Table 1.2

Table showing Dropouts of Government Upper Primary School, Marakpara

Class	2001	2002	2003	2004
I	3	2	2	3
II	2	1	2	-
III	2	-	4	2
IV	1	3	-	3

V	7	5	2	2
VI	2	-	-	-
VII	6	1	5	3

Table 1.3

**Showing Drop-outs of Government Upper primary School, Koch Sonamittee
(Assamese)**

Class	2001	2002	2003	2004
I	6	10	4	4
II	3	2	2	-
III	2	2	1	3
IV	-	3	-	5
V	5	2	4	2
VI	2	1	2	
VII	5	3	1	3

Summary of the thirty persons who dropped out from the schools from the above mentioned 3 schools as per the interview scheduled are presented in the following tables.

Table - 2 Level of Drop-outs

Class	No. of Drop-out
I	4
II	2
III	5
IV	6

V	5
VI	1
VII	7

Table - 3 Age and Drop-outs

Age-grope	No.of Drop-out
6-8	3
8-10	2
10-12	4
12-14	9
14-16	12

Table - 4 Distance of school and Drop-outs

Distance(inKM)	No.of Dron-out
0-2	14
2-4	10
4-6	4
6-8	2

Table -5 Family size and Drop-outs

Family size	No.of Drop-out
Upto4	15
5-6	9

5. Death of parents 1

6. Non interest 4
7. Father's Sickness 1
8. Unwed mothers 2
9. Older than the average in the class 2

Though there are many reasons are there, but all those reasons have been short out within above nine categories by the researcher for the convenience of the study to interpret.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Information compiled through the survey of drop-out students, parents and teachers has to be interpreted in the following manner with the help of descriptive statistics.

Analysis of Table -1; Four years Drop-outs figures of three villages

Table -1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 shows four years data of drop-outs separately from the selected three Villages. The number of drop-outs is quite low but the classes II and classes III and in subsequent higher classes having much high. These facts indicates that after primary classes, going to upper primary classes, parents had to bear more financial expenses on schools going children and since, they could not meet these expenses, children drop-out schools. Also in upper primary schools are no longer part time and hence the reason could be wants for more hands in Jhumming (people who slash and burn the forest and use land for agriculture), agriculture or since the parents are overburdened with work they need an extra hand to help in the household work.

Analysis of table - 3; Age and Drop -outs

As it is seen from Table-3 about 42% of the drop-outs are in the age group of 14-18 years. This clearly interprets that by that age a person is strong enough to plough the field or work full time in the agricultural field or Jhumming. Thus the reason for Drop-outs could be for shortage of working hands in agricultural as well as Jhumming.

Analysis of Table - 4; Distance of school and Drop-outs:

From Table -4 it can be seen that for a maximum number of drop-outs; that is 80% of drop-outs the school is located at a distance of 0-4 KMs, for 13% of drop-outs school is located at a distance of 4-6 KMs, and only for 7% of the drop-outs the school is located at maximum distance of 6-8 KMs. This indicates that distance was not an impediment for majority students.

Although for majority of the students, school was located at a distance of 0-4 KMs. But these small distances is also hilly, forest and streaming which is not convenient for small children.

Analysis of Table -5; Family size and Drop-outs

As depicted in Table -5, family size is also one of the significant factors for school Drop-outs. As it is most of the parents are poor. Larger family size means less availability of money for educating and feeding children. Hence many drop-out both to work and add to family income or due to inability of the parents to bear the expenses to their education.

Reasons of school Drop-outs

The reasons of school drop-outs found in the survey are shown in Table-6. Poverty as logical is the main important factor responsible for school drop-outs, as it is shown that about 30% of the drop-outs are due to parents' poverty. Then, next in the order of important reasons for drop-outs are shortage of working hands in agriculture and Jhumming and poor performance in studies. Other reasons of school drop-outs are health problems, death of parents, non-interest and older than the average in class. Another important finding of the survey which needs attention for the good of society is that reasons of drop-outs related to unwed mothers. This particular reasons was found especially in village Marakapara. The reason could be be parents, totally illiterate and ignorant. They cannot guide the younger generation properly. The village is situated 6-8 KM to Betasing Block. From the versions given by villagers nearby it was found that young girls are easily lured for small amounts of money or by false promises of marriage by non-resident employees of the Block and in the process they become unwed mothers trained. Some even express that they find no use in sending their children to school as there is no hope of getting employment after education and it will be just the wastage of time and money. Another interesting fact that came to light during the survey was that many poor children in the hope of getting education and better living standards come to town like Tura or elsewhere to stay as menial, but overburdened with work they drop-outs of schools and return back home as they have come.

Analysis of Interview Schedule of the Teacher

Five teachers from in and around the Villages under study were interview. Most of them agreed that unattractive school condition are the main reason behind large scale of school drop-outs. They suggested that, to attract children to come to school, co-curricular activities in the form of games and sports etc. should be provided. They also suggested that other facilities like

teaching aids, free books, and free meals should be provided. Some teachers even put the blame on themselves, as some teachers are irregular it contributes to incompletion of courses and hence results in failure of its. Therefore, they suggested that erring teachers should be punished by explanation calls, pay-held ups etc. Most teachers also agreed that extreme poverty and ignorance on the part of parents as being the main reason for drop-outs. So, poverty should be completely eradicated by generating parents' income. Again, some teachers say that during summer season, the villagers mostly suffer from malaria and hence children are kept away from school. Therefore, Malaria Department should work actively towards eradication of Malaria. Lastly, the teachers were of the opinion that however hard they may try towards educating children, if the children are not interested in studies and if parents do not guide them properly, it remains useless. Therefore, parents should be sensitive towards children's education and children themselves must be serious in their studies.

SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the findings of the study on the problems of dropouts the following suggestion may be made. Since the problem of school drop outs is so acute, large, persistent and related to it cannot be solved only by implementing the policies made by the Government. The co-operation of both the community to whom the children belongs and govt. agencies like the teachers, school authorities etc. is a must. Therefore in order to bring about certain remedial measures or strategies to reduce the grave problem of school drop-outs, the following suggestive measures may be taken.

- (i) ***Minimizing the heterogeneity in the age composition of pupils studying in classes I and II:***

It is desirable that a census of children of school-going age is taken by the teacher at the beginning of each academic session. The parents, whose children have attained the prescribed minimum age of admission, should be informed well in time so that they could spare their children for the enrolment in School.

- (ii) ***Providing medical facilities:***

Medical facilities should be provided to students so during the rainy season, when there are large cases of malaria, typhoid and jaundice, (declared by WHO) the children will not remain absent from school for long.

(iii) ***Introducing upgraded Unit:***

Education commission 1964-66 recommended upgraded unit as one of the remedial measures to cheek wastage and stagnation. This will help individualize instruction by permitting every child to progress according to his own pace. To start with, the experiment of upgraded unit maybe introduced by combining the first two classes of the primary stage.

(iv) ***Financial help to parents from the Government:***

In a poor country like ours mere provision of free from tuition fee in education is not enough and the development of ancillary services becomes highly significant steps should be taken to provide free books, uniform and writing materials to children. To some, uniforms will have to be provided and many will have to be provided with school lunch.

(v) ***Appointment of earnest and devoted teachers:***

An earnest and devoted teacher can, to a large extent, overcome all the obstacles through his alertness and through the respect and regard he enjoys among the community. If the teacher takes it seriously upon himself to register and enroll eligible children at the proper time and then is vigilant enough to notice any child becoming irregular in attendance and is prepared to probe into every case of irregularity there is every reason to hope that enrolment will be cent percent.

The Inspector of schools should pay regular inspection to check and regularize the functioning of the schools. The district level supervisors also should pay regular visit to the schools which is not happening regularly. These will serve as a corrective measure that will check absenteeism in teachers.

(vi) ***Continued in-service training of teachers:***

To develop the ever increasing human knowledge, new techniques and skills in educational objectives and curricula, in service education is essential for teachers. This in-service education will improve the professional competence in teachers those who are trained or untrained.

(vii) ***Spreading adult or social education:***

An educated parent, especially an educated mother is the best insurance for the education of her children. If We could make the adults appreciate the value of the education and awaken them to their sense of duty and responsibility to the rising

generation, not only problem of enrolment but those of wastage and stagnation and lapse into illiteracy would be solved.

(viii) ***Adoption of new techniques of evaluation and continuous assessment:***

To check the evil of stagnation, continuous evaluation should be utilized for helping the deficient children to progress, Weak students should be given extra coaching outside school hours or during the vacation. Such evaluation should be utilized to sort out weak, average and above average students.

(ix) ***Provision for pre-school education:***

The real mental development of a child takes place between the ages of 3 and 7 years. If special attention is paid to the pre-school education of all children of this category, they will be less lazy and mentally, they will be better equipped to benefit from primary education and hence there will be less stagnation and wastage.

(x) ***Provision of proper text books:***

Proper text books are subsidized rates should be made available to all schools.

(xi) ***Adjusting school vocations to meet the economic needs of the community:***

To minimize the incidence of wastage and stagnation among grown up children belonging to lower socio-economic strata of society, it is very essential that school hours and vocation are adjusted in such a way that they may assist their parents and also study at school instance, in major crops. Similar suitable patterns may also be taught for other communities.

(xii) ***Enforcing compulsory primary Education Act:***

Although the Compulsory Primary Education Act has been passed (93rd Amendment), yet it has not been properly enforced. Teachers must be made to work vigorously for enforcement of the act. They should enlist co-operation of the elected representative or influential people in the area for the enrolment of the children. Parents who willfully do not send their children to school are fined as provided in the act.

(xiii) ***Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):***

Recently the government of India has launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which is a historic stride towards achieving the long cherished goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) through a time bound integrated approach in partnership with states. SSA, which promises to Change the face of the

elementary education sector of the country, aims to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in 6-14 age groups by 2010. The SAA is an effort to recognize the needs for improving the performance of the school system and to provide community owned quality elementary education in the mission mode. It also envisaged bridging of gender and social gaps but these should be in an extensive way especially in the hilly areas.

(xiv) ***Attractive school education:***

Our primary school programmes are dull and boring with the result that schools do not have any attractive or holding power. The methods of teaching are traditional and uninspiring. Necessary equipment in the form of audio-visual material is lacking. The courses of the study are unrelated to the lives of the students. Work experience and physical education should form an integral part of the education. Education should be suited to the environment and lives of the students so that they do not regard it as a waste of time. Methods of teaching should arouse the curiosity and interest of children.

(xv) ***Morning school with Night schools:***

Morning schools should be opened for students who are not able to come to school during the completed lower primary stage and desire the study further, which have been recommended by different education commissions and committees. If the above mentioned suggested remedial measures are adopted effectively the major leakage in education that is school drop- outs in Garo Hills can be plugged immediately.

CONCLUSION

Social justice and equality are by themselves a strong argument for providing basic education for all. It is an established fact that basic education improves the level of human well- being especially with regard to life expectancy, infant mortality, and nutritional status of children etc. studies have shown that Universal Basic Education significantly contributes to economic growth. Thus, the importance of education in man's life should be made aware to people. The problem of school drop-outs should be completely stopped. Our future citizens can no longer remain uneducated and lead an absolute and discreet life in this fast changing age of science and technological advancements. The domain which is standing on the way should be fought against not only politically and educationally but socially also.

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