




Accessing Education in India: Challenges Faced by Rural Children

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Rural children in India face challenges like poverty, poor infrastructure, gender inequality, insufficient teacher-student ratios, and a digital divide, affecting their access to quality education.
- Strategies to improve rural education include community involvement, digital inclusion, gender-specific measures, and enhanced teacher training.
- Effective policy implementation and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial for creating a supportive environment for rural education.

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 has proposed three educational objectives which incorporate access to, equity in, and quality of learning. But even after its freedom, the Indian education system is still struggling to provide quality education to a large extent in rural areas. Although the literacy rate has increased there is a significant gender disparity where women are being abandoned from studying as education will not bring any productivity for them. The increasing unemployment rate, lack of awareness among family members, early marriage of girl child, insufficient number of school teachers, and financial crisis are the major road blockers for the rural children from seeking quality education. The rural schools teaching mechanisms are not technology-aided, contributing to other challenges rural children face. The efforts taken by government entities or extension service providers to promote efficient learning have also failed to make a satisfactory impact. The study attempted to explore different hindrances prevailing in the rural educational system and to propose some better approaches to diminish those issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

Even after over 75 years of independence, India is still proclaimed a developing country. There are an ample number of issues preventing our country from developing but among all poor educational system stands the highest. In the majority of the

countries, education has been made compulsory till a certain age. In India, till the age of 14 years, every citizen has to acquire a quality education (Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). Education is considered one of the most powerful instruments worldwide for any development and Sustainable Development Goal 4

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highlights education and aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO). But unfortunately, Indian society especially the rural communities suffer the most in the context of availing quality education. Various factors are negatively influencing the provision of good education in the rural areas. As these rural communities mostly belong to very remote areas the schools, and colleges lack basic infrastructures for water, sanitation, and classrooms coupled with poor information and communication technology (Gupta & Gupta, 2012). World Bank report suggested rural population represents 65% of the total population of India. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the literacy rate in rural India till 2021 was approximately 73.5% which includes 81% male and 65% female literacy which is another triggering factor for low literacy. In many rural parts of our country, the stereotyped beliefs are still prevailing which do not allow a girl child or a woman to get an education. The MoSPI report also suggests that between the years 2003 to 2014, rural literacy increased at a CAGR of approximately 3.42% (IBEF, 2022) and to boost the literacy rate, the Indian Government came up with some initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha, Jahawar Navodaya Vidyalaya, mid-day meal schemes, and digital initiatives but the outcome is not that much satisfactory (Khera, 2019). The Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) through different service providers such as NGOs, private firms, or Government entities failed to create awareness among the rural people. In recent times, it is observed that lack of effective learning results in unemployment, and the number of school or college dropouts is also increasing which indirectly pushes them to migrate to urban areas (Singh, 2019).

2. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Providing quality education in rural areas has become a major challenge in India and the goal should be to overcome this challenge and make the education system stronger. To understand this goal, more attention needs to be given to those aspects influencing the provision of education in rural areas. The study focused on reviewing literature in the context of major constraints faced by rural people in accessing education. The study aims to create awareness about the difficulties rural people encounter in getting a quality education and the study also proposes some way forward to address the challenges.

3. THE FINDINGS OF THE REVIEWS

The related literature was reviewed in the context of investigating and understanding major challenges preventing rural people from seeking

quality education. The collected information was analysed thematically, and the major themes found relate to financial challenges, poor infrastructure, gender inequality, limited access to resources, and many more.

3.1. Challenges of Poverty

The effects of poverty demonstrate many signs from education to health, life outcomes to self-esteem. Poverty integrates poverty of the learners, their families, and the community which inevitably leads to poverty of the school (Du Plessis, 2014). On the other side, educational poverty is defined as the deprivation of basic education and literacy due to a lack of financial support. Rural communities have suffered from this condition for decades. For any rural household, the main source of income is from agriculture and during the non-agricultural season through performing laborers (Roy, 2018). The major concern here is that out of the income, only a few percent of families willingly pay for educational purposes otherwise the majority is consumed on food or fuel. School dropouts are majorly found in rural youths. And according to, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy report, the rural unemployment rate increased to 7.23% from 6.48%. Due to the decrease in unemployment rates with low-income support, the youths are being demotivated and forced to join casual labour jobs.

3.2. The imbalance of the teacher-student ratio

Rural schools mostly in charge of the government find it a challenge to appoint and retain suitable teachers (Shikalepo, 2020). In the very remote areas, the school students are being taught by only 2-3 teachers which is not sufficient enough to provide quality education. Teachers have mostly shown concerns regarding poor accommodation and classroom facilities, sometimes communication gaps, and less access to leisure activities. In this era of digitalization, some parts of rural areas are far behind in technology which is a major concern for teachers as it makes the work process slow. Apart from this, working conditions are characterized as weak because the work culture is not favourable for the teachers to teach effectively (Mooij & Narayan, 2010). The previous studies suggested that working incentives failed to promote effective learning and the incentive process should be revised properly to attract the right teachers. Rural teachers are often found to be overburdened with administrative work which impacts their professional and personal growth (Diwan, 2015). Infrastructural mismanagement includes a lack of basic hygiene in drinking water, cleanliness, and absence of electricity and

management support. Overall, previous research concluded that the absence of qualified teachers in many rural schools is simply because teachers find it difficult to stay in rural areas due to social, professional, and cultural isolation (Janah, 2022).

3.3. Digital Divide

The digital divide suggests the gap between demographics and regions with regular, effective access to digital technology and the internet, and the other parts without access (Correa et al., 2016). Oxfam India reports suggested that internet access through devices such as smartphones, laptops, and computers was found to be more satisfactory in urban India at 44 percent than in rural areas at 17 percent. The schools in the rural areas are less equipped with technologies

and other technical support. There is a huge education gap between the education system of urban areas and the education system of rural areas (Ale et al., 2011). The low financial support and lack of awareness have made the rural youth and children isolated from pursuing quality learning. E-learning is still a new concept for these people. The poor infrastructure in terms of technology is weakening the competency level of rural youth in this fast-paced world (Roy, 2012). During covid 19 when the entire education system was being through online mode the rural school children did not have the minimum support to access any kind of learning materials. According to Daimary (2020), in the Baksha district of Assam, only 20% of schools have conducted classes online and none of the teachers prefer to give online lectures.

Table 1. Major Challenges Faced by Rural Children in Accessing Quality Education

Challenge Category	Description	Source
Financial Challenges	High poverty levels; Limited financial support for education; High dropout rates due to economic pressures	(Roy, 2018)
Poor Infrastructure	Lack of basic facilities (water, sanitation, classrooms); Poor ICT infrastructure	(Gupta & Gupta, 2012)
Gender Inequality	Lower female literacy rates; Traditional beliefs discouraging girls' education; Early marriage and dowry practices	(Radiowala & Molwane, 2021; Khera, 2019)
Teacher-Student Ratio	Insufficient number of teachers; Poor working conditions for teachers; High administrative burden on teachers	(Shikalepo, 2020; Diwan, 2015)
Digital Divide	Limited access to digital technology and internet; Low ICT penetration in rural schools	(Correa et al., 2016; Roy, 2012)
Government Policy Implementation	Inefficient monitoring of educational programs; Lack of transparency and poor administrative guidelines	(Dasari, 2019; Sharma et al., 2018)

3.4. Gender Disparity

"There cannot be educated people without educated women," says Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. But regrettably rural women in India are far behind in acquiring equal opportunities in the context of education (Khera, 2019). Parental illiteracy, weak socio-economic status of a family, non-availability of educational institutions, social barriers, negative attitude of parents towards girls' education, lack of security for the girl child, and cost of education are the major obstacles in their journey (Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). There is a traditional viewpoint that persists in rural families which states that women's education has no bearing on their lifestyle, moreover, it is a waste of time, and it will not support them in

resolving their daily challenges (Jain et al., 2017). Early marriage and the practice of dowry another two significant social factors excluding rural women from seeking education (Kaur, 2016). In some cases, it was found that the non-availability of educational institutions at an approachable distance prevents a girl child from making a better future for herself (Kaiser et al., 2022).

3.5. Challenges for implementation of Government policies

To boost the rural education system Indian government has taken many initiatives such as Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Samagra Siksha, Lok Jambish Pariyojana, and Digital Initiatives (Little, 2010). Sarva

Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme of the Government of India, has been functional since 2000–2001 to achieve the target of universalisation of elementary education (Menezes, 2015). The major aim of this program was to improve the previous

educational gap and strengthen the education system, free education for children between the age group 6–14, and also encouraging girls' education (Dasari, 2019).

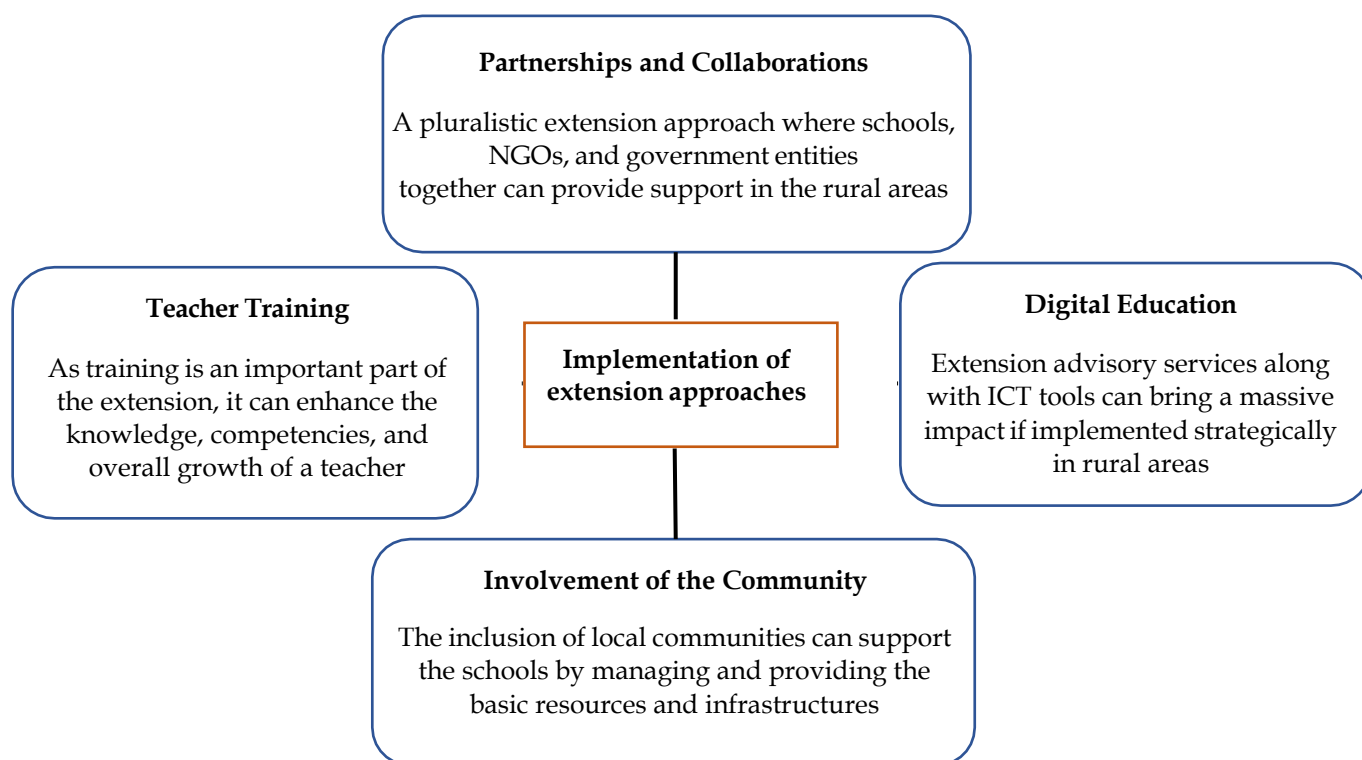


Figure 1. Strategic implementation of extension approaches

Table 2. Proposed Strategies to Improve Rural Education

Strategy Category	Description	Source
Financial Support	Provide scholarships to reduce financial burdens; Generate more employment opportunities for youths	Janah, 2022
Teacher Support	Upgrade service conditions with better incentives; Reduce administrative burden on teachers	Shikalepo, 2020
Digital Inclusion	Equip schools with ICT tools (computers, projectors); Extend broadband connectivity to remote areas	Gond & Gupta, 2017
Community Involvement	Involve local communities in managing school resources and infrastructure	Goel, 2017
Gender-Specific Measures	Promote girls' education through gender-responsive plans; Encourage civil society organizations to change perceptions	Sahoo, 2016

The reports show that 29% of the students in the country drop out before completing five years of primary schooling and 43% drop out before finishing primary school (Dasari, 2019). Other shortcomings of

SSA are misuse of funds and inefficient monitoring. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan is an umbrella scheme that was launched with three flagship schemes by the Ministry of Human Development in 2018 to ensure

quality education, strengthen infrastructure, and promote gender equality (Sharma et al., 2018). Lack of transparency, poor administrative guidelines, and weak monitoring strategies are highlighting the shortcomings of the scheme. Besides, the different public entities along with other private organizations, or NGOs in Extension and Advisory Services have failed to generate awareness regarding the importance of education among the rural youth (Sharma, 2020)

4. WAY FORWARDS

Different challenges and obstacles are preventing rural people from getting a quality education and as a result, India is still labelled as a developing country. Some extension strategies have been illustrated in Figure 1. Educational needs should be primary needs for any individual and to make it a reality, policymakers need to review some major aspects to overcome the previous drawbacks.

- The studies highlighted poverty issues are the major factor for any rural household. Different strategies should be included to bridge the immense gap during the distribution of monetary resources among different levels of society. The provision of scholarship facilities should be made strong to reduce the financial burdens. The government should generate more employment opportunities for youths to control school dropout children (Janah, 2022).
- To support and promote retention of qualified and competent teachers in the rural schools the service condition should be upgraded with better incentives. Teachers should not be overburdened with other administrative work and the government should look after it by granting better policies (Shikalepo, 2020).
- Digital inclusion in rural areas is another important aspect to make the rural children competent and potent enough to face real-world situations schools should be well- functioned with ICT tools such as computers, and projectors (Gond & Gupta, 2017). The broadband connection needs to be reached in very remote areas too so that rural school children can also avail of online education if a situation like COVID occurs in the future.
- Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services may play an important role in creating awareness among people. Educational training and campaigns make a positive impact and through ICT-enabled and skill-based training programs, extension service providers can provide more technology-aided information (Goel, 2017).

- Rural Girls' education must be promoted with some specific plans including gender- responsive measures at various levels to ensure their rights, opportunities, participation, and leadership in developmental processes (Sahoo, 2016). Different civil society organizations may come forward to motivate family members and change their perceptions and stereotypes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The review provided certain insights into the obstacles being faced by rural children while seeking effective learning. The education curriculum set for rural schools has to be revised immediately and should be incorporated with effective plans and strategies. The government alone cannot solve all the problems related to education but can delegate the responsibilities to other civil society organizations that are in direct contact with the rural communities. Our country is massively progressing in terms of technology, but the imprint of this advancement needs to be made more visible in rural areas. The concern should be to educate every man and woman from any part of the country as everyone deserves to be enlightened with real facts which can be only obtained through education.

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