

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DROPOUT OF SCHEDULED CASTE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered to be the significant tool for the empowerment of scheduled caste communities. Since the pluralistic society always produces inequalities, the Government of India had realized and initiated many policies and programmes to equalize the educational opportunities to all sections of society. In particular, a strategy of preferential treatment was needed for the most vulnerable sections such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to bringing them to the mainstream society. The strategy of preferential treatment has been adopted by the Government of India under Article 46 of the Constitution, which paves the way for enhancing their participation in all levels of education. By this strategy of positive and preferential treatment, to great extent the government had achieved the target only up to the higher secondary level of education. However, though the SC's were improved their GER in higher education, their rate of attainment is less and showed higher dropout rate. It is in this context the study on "educational opportunities and dropout of scheduled caste students in higher education" being taken up. Through this study an attempt was made to find out the reasons for dropout among the respondents. For this purpose, this present study followed the mixed method. Along with structural/cultural, familial reasons and individualistic reasons became important reasons for the increasing trend dropouts.

Keywords: Affirmative Action, Dropout, Scheduled Caste, Higher Education etc.

Introduction

The oppressive nature of caste system led to the segregation of weaker sections especially the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes communities. This imposes prohibitions from the access of various opportunities and denial of many rights. Since centuries, the prevailing practices against them remains as a major constrain for their upliftment to the mainstream society. It is the fact that, the pluralistic society always produces inequalities among its members. But when the constitution was framed, it was realized by the Constitution makers and directed the Government through its different Articles of Constitution. According to article 46 of the constitution the state shall promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker section especially the SC/STs. Since then, the Government of India took many efforts to equalize the educational and employment opportunities of the weaker sections. Thus the strategy of positive preferential treatment namely reservation policy was started to equalize the opportunities to all sections of society. In particular, a strategy of preferential treatment was needed for the most vulnerable sections such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to bringing them to the mainstream society. Affirmative action is a strategy of positive preferential treatment in access to higher education and allotment of jobs. This strategy paved the way to accelerate the integration of SC/STs with the mainstream society. The affirmative action programme is generally known as the Reservation Policy. The policy of reservation has been given in respect to the proportion of the population of each section. "Higher education gives the best opportunity towards social mobility of the disadvantaged sections in a caste ridden hierarchical society" (Gupta Asha, 2008).

The educational opportunities for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes communities has widened in the form of policies and programmes such as, relaxation of marks for getting admission in educational institutions, relaxation of fee, post matric scholarships, scheme for hostels, book bank scheme, scheme for upgradation of their merit, coaching for competitive examinations and various national level merit scholarships etc. Even though these policies and programmes remain as the tool to promote their integration and participation in higher education sector, still there is a large gap between the Scheduled Castes and the non-scheduled communities. "The primary problems of the education of SCs are the prevalence of low literacy and higher dropout rates" (Thorat Sukhadeo, 2009). It is the fact that, the

underrepresentation of reserved categories in higher education sector remains as an unsolved issue even today.

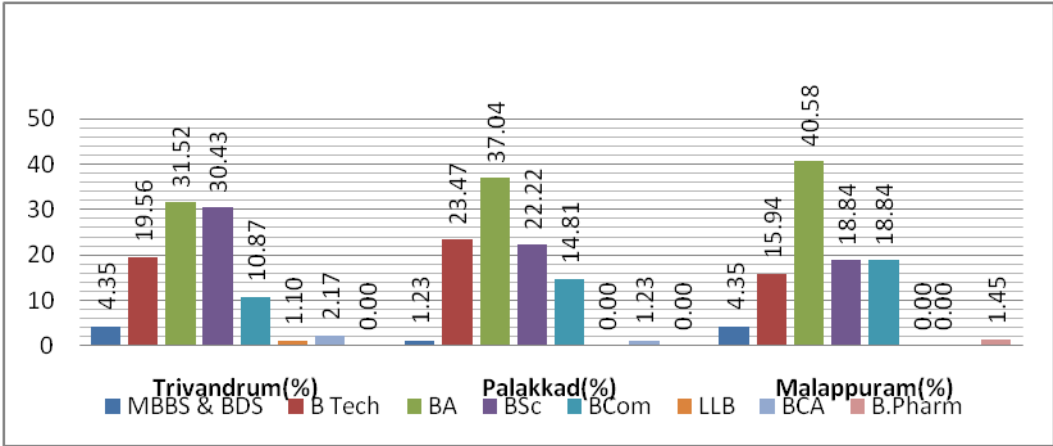
Method of Study

This study followed mixed method. The primary objective of this study was to explore the reasons for dropout among the respondents in higher education. The design of the study was descriptive in nature. In this study, from the students who enrolled in graduation formed the base sample (ie;242 respondents), out of which smaller units such as those who passed, failed and dropouts were found as clusters. In this present study, the cluster consists of dropouts(ie;20 respondents) were selected for an in-depth analysis. Since the whole units of dropouts were taken to study, the sampling procedure used in this study is multistage sampling. For the purpose of the study the primary data was collected by using both an interview schedule as well as interview guide.

1. Enrolment and dropout of SC students in Higher Education

Higher education plays a significant role in the socio-economic mobility of Scheduled Castes. It is the only hope for them to improve their status in the society. To ensure their participation in higher education sector the State as well as central Government has been providing various scholarships and schemes. Though these vulnerable groups were able to improve their participation, still they have witnessed a large gap when compared to non-scheduled communities. It is noted that, the higher dropout rate is also found among these unprivileged sections due to many reasons. Especially the rate of dropouts is higher among the students who got admitted through reserved seats as compared to merit quota. So this is the circumstances under which the study on “Educational opportunities and dropout of Scheduled Caste students in Higher Education” has been taken up. The present study is more relevant since it witnessed a higher dropout rate at a higher level of education. This study observed that among those students who enrolled in graduation (ie: base samples), there are 8.26 percent of the respondents were found to be dropouts from their education.

Figure: 1(1)
Geographical Distribution and Preference of Courses in Enrolment



The above Fig:1(1) shows the geographical distribution of base samples (ie;242 respondents) and their preference of courses at graduate level. The higher rate of enrolment was found in the district Thiruvananthapuram as it having large number of professional and non-professional institutions. From the selected geographical regions, there are 74.80 percent of the respondents were enrolled in the general courses such as BA, B.Sc and B.Com, while only 23 percent were enrolled in the professional courses like Medicine and B.Tech. So this data shows that their preference of courses mainly remains in general degree courses rather than the professional one. Though the government has providing various policies and programmes to ensure their participation in both the professional as well as general degree courses, still these communities believe that they cannot afford the professional education like Medicine and B.Tech as they belong to poor socio-economic background. This study also found that, elites among this reserved category was mainly depends upon professional the courses than the non-elites. So the hierarchical division within this reserved category is more visible in choosing the courses.

Table 1(1)
Distribution of respondents on the basis of their Enrolment and Dropout

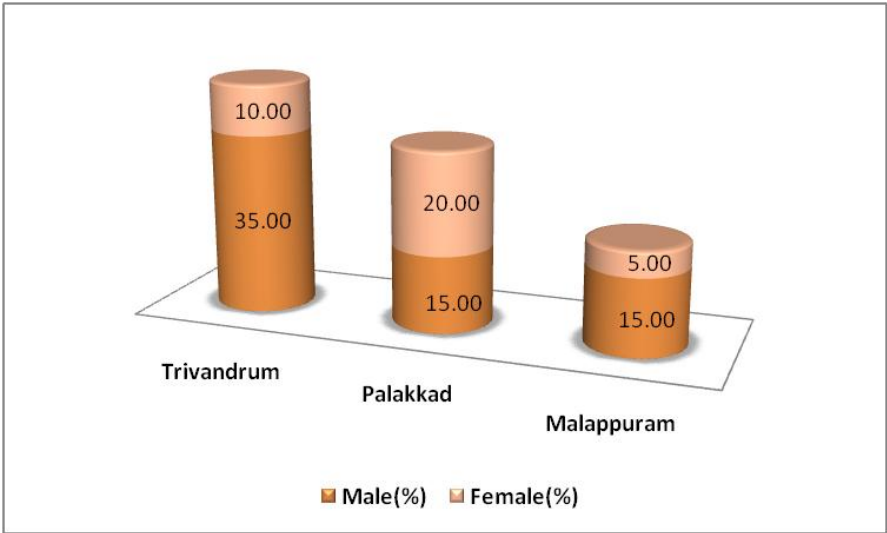
Districts	Enrolment		Dropout	
	f	%	f	%
Thiruvananthapuram	92	38.01	9	45.00
Palakkad	81	33.48	7	35.00
Malappuram	69	28.51	4	20.00
Total	242	100.00	20	100.00

In this present study, out of total samples (ie;242 respondents) there are 8.26 percent of them were found to be drop their education before the completion period. This study also observed that the district Thiruvananthapuram represents the southern region of the state which shows comparatively higher enrolment and recorded 9.78 of the dropouts. While the northern district Malappuram shows only 5.79 percent of dropouts. So it can be inferred that the region with higher rate of enrolment shows the higher dropout rate.

2. Socio-economic Background of the Dropouts

Fig: 2(1)

Gender wise distribution of the dropouts



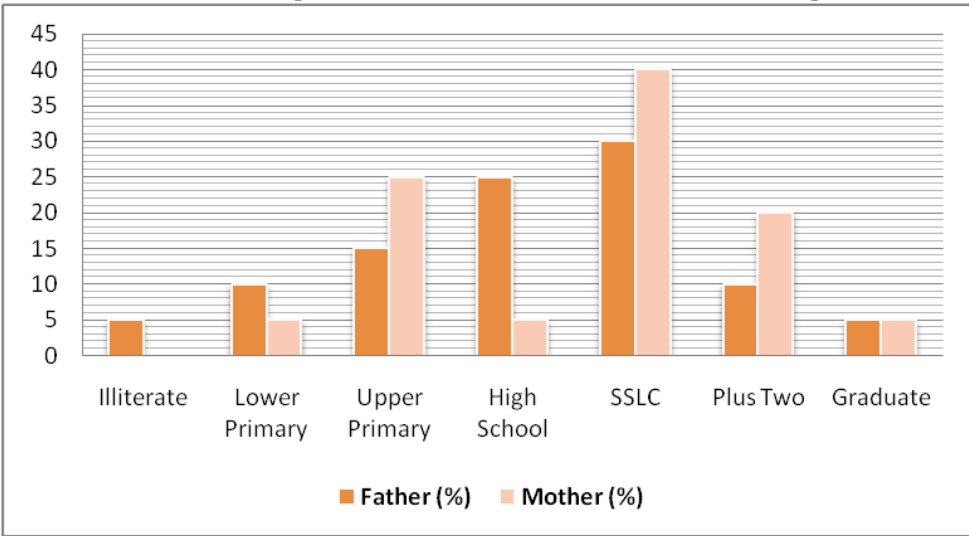
The above Fig: 2(1) represents the distribution of dropouts on the basis of selected districts and gender. From this study, the dropout rate was much higher among the males (65 percent) than the females (35 percent) due to their poor performance and lack of interest to continue their education. While in Palakkad district, the female dropout rate was much higher, which is mainly due to early marriage of girls.

Table: 2(1)
Distribution of respondents on the basis place of residence and courses

Place of Residence		No of Dropouts					Total
		B Tech	BA	BSc	B.Com	BCA	
Rural	f	1	8	2	1	1	13
	%	5.00	40.00	10.00	5.00	5.00	65.00
Urban	f	0	4	1	2	0	7
	%	0.00	20.00	5.00	10.00	0.00	35.00
Total	f	1	12	3	3	1	20
	%	5.00	60.00	15.00	15.00	5.00	100.00

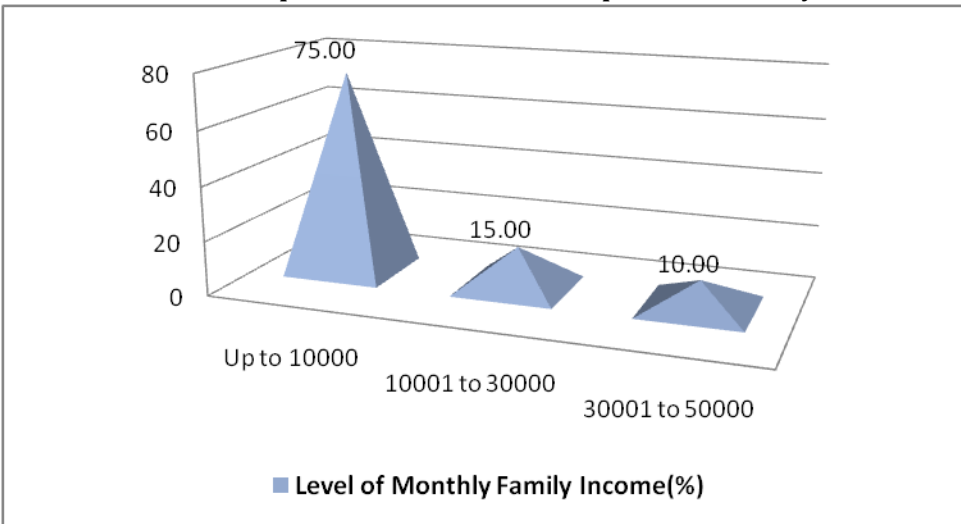
Place of residents is an important social indicator in determining one’s preference of courses and academic progression. Table 2(2), shows the distribution of dropouts on the basis of their place of residents and courses in which dropouts occurred. This study found that, the rural students formed the maximum dropout rate than the urban one. While analyzing the dropout rate on the basis of their course, majority (60 percent) of the dropouts were from BA course. Among the dropouts from BA stream, there are 66.67 percent belong to rural areas while the urban formed 33.33 percent. The stream like B.Sc and B.Com shows 15 percent of dropouts for each. So from the analysis it can be inferred that, the majority of the dropouts from BA background shows less commitment in studies than other courses.

Figure: 2(2)
Distribution of dropouts on the basis of educational status of parents



Educational level of the parents is one of the important factors that decide the educational mobility of their children. From the Fig 2(2), it is evident that majority (80 percent) of the parents possess the education up to SSLC level, while 5 percent of them were illiterates. This study also found that, 15 percent of the parents were having above SSLC level of education. It is noteworthy that, no parents of dropouts were qualified beyond Graduate level. So it can be seen that, the parents with lower educational level, whose children shows less performance in studies and ultimately led to more chances in dropping their education.

Figure: 2(3)
Distribution of dropouts on the basis of their parental monthly income



From the analysis of income and dropouts, it can be seen that, the maximum number of educational dropout were found among the parents with low family income groups. In this study majority (75 percent) of the dropouts were from the income category up to 10000/- per month. While the parental income above 10000/- formed the 25 percent of dropouts.

3. Reasons for educational dropout among Scheduled Caste students in Higher Education

This study has attempted to analyze the various sociological reasons for high dropout rate among the Scheduled Caste students in higher education. They are categorized in to three, namely structural/cultural, familial, and individualistic factors.

(i). Structural/ Cultural Reasons

The structural factors responsible for high dropout rate among the respondents are, caste based discrimination, low self-esteem due to labeling of caste etc. In this study some respondents especially the female students opined that, they have had felt caste based exclusionary behavior from the non-Scheduled groups. Within the class room, due to their residential segregation of scheduled castes, the upper caste students kept a negative attitude in some matters including seating arrangement, inter dining, academic assignments etc. This unfavorable attitude limits their interactions with the non-scheduled communities and it also tends to be inattentive in the academic and non-academic activities. Due to their lower attention in studies they often show very less performance when compared to the non-scheduled communities. Some students pointed out that, the attitude of upper caste teachers also found to be unfavourable towards them. The patronizing attitude towards the dalit children is due to their position in the structural hierarchy. These altogether responsible for generating a feeling of low self-esteem among scheduled caste students and discourages their zeal in education. In this study, majority of the dropouts opined that, the labeling of caste is more responsible for the exclusionary practices.

(ii). Familial Reasons

One's favorable familial environment determines their opportunities and level of aspirations. Familial factors including educational level of parents, insufficient income, absence of reference group, health condition of their parents, parental alcoholism, number of family members etc were more responsible for the dropouts. The educational level of parents always influences the educational status of their children. In this study it can be seen that, the children of less educated parents are formed maximum of dropout rate. As they fail to understand the values and importance of education, the less educated parents do not forced their children to continue education. Since the less educated parents are engaged in a less privileged jobs, they have often suffers due to insufficient income. Due to the insufficient income they were not able to provide the basic requirements in educating their children. In case of the families having more number of children their parents had no interest in sending them to higher education. This study also found a few such respondents who drop their education. It is noteworthy that, no cases were found who drop their education due the family disputes and parental alcoholism. Since majority of the scheduled caste students are first generation learners in higher education sector, the absence of reference group also responsible for higher dropouts among the respondents.

(iii). Individualist Reason

The individual factors such as, less interest in studies, poor academic performance, peer group influence, early marriage etc. were identified as the major reasons for their dropouts in education. The majority of the respondents expressed that, they have less enthusiasm in their studies due to the lack of motivation and absence of reference group. This study also found, majority (95 percent) of the dropouts claims that, they have got admitted via reserved seats while only 5 percent of the respondents opined that who got admission through merit seat. Since merit is a product of the socio-economic background of one's family, these children of the socially excluded group shows poor academic performance. Majority of them becoming very casual and shows carelessness in their studies. As the peers from their neighboring areas are already in an underemployment, the respondents showing less intellectual curiosity and also prompted to go for whatever jobs become available to them. It has also been observed that, few girls who drop their education due to the compulsion of early marriage by their parents. These are the context that reflects in the higher dropout rate at higher level of education.

Conclusion

From the analysis it may be concluded that, since the Constitution of India equalizing the educational opportunities at all levels, the scheduled caste also have the same rights and opportunities as any other sections possess. But the fact is that, the utilization of reservation policies and programmes are not effective among the members of scheduled caste students as they drop their education. In addition to this, the above mentioned structural/ cultural, familial and individual factors are also playing a significant role in their higher dropout rate, low enrolment and shows comparatively less educational attainment. In this way, they often underrepresented in both higher education and higher levels of employment.

Suggestions

- Initiate schemes to enhance their level of aspiration.
- Atrocity cells should be created at college level.
- Initiate special tuition facilities for those who show low performance in studies.

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