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P. J. SABU and Deepa ROY — Impact of School and Home Environment on Student Engagement in Learning in Kerala Schools: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

Kuldip PURI, Mamta GARG, Kuldeep KAUR and Satvinderpal KAUR — Phenomenology of Educational Exclusion at Secondary Level

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BOOK REVIEWS

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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Impact of School and Home Environment on Student Engagement in Learning in Kerala Schools: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach 185
P. J. Sabu and *Deepa Roy*

Phenomenology of Educational Exclusion at Secondary Level 207
Kuldip Puri, Mamta Garg, Kuldeep Kaur and *Satvinderpal Kaur*

Challenges Encountered by Rural Women in Pursuing Higher Education: A Study of Andhra Pradesh, India 221
Rayala Prudhvi

Faculty Perspectives on Flexibility and Autonomy: A Generational Analysis of Workplace Preferences in Delhi-NCR Higher Education Institutions 239
Ritu Atheya

BOOK REVIEWS (See overleaf) 259

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BOOK REVIEWS

Growth Trajectory of Gujarat Public Policy Intervention
(Forum Dave, *editor*)

Shrishti Chamola

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Journal of Educational Planning and Administration
Volume XXXIX, No. 3, July 2025, pp. 185-205

Impact of School and Home Environment on Student Engagement in Learning in Kerala Schools: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

P. J. Sabu*
Deepa Roy#

Abstract

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in school education is the highest in Kerala among all the Indian states. However, when it comes to student learning outcomes (SLOs) in school education, the results are poor. For instance, Kerala was ranked 'fourth' in learning outcomes in 2017-18, but by 2021-22, it will only be ranked 'seventeenth.' What are the causes of this deterioration in quality? Previous research has looked at the various causes of this scenario. However, there has been little empirical research on the relationship between the home and school environment and the SLOs in Kerala. Western research held that a conducive environment can lead to higher student engagement in learning (SEL) and consequently better learning outcomes. In this context, the main goal of this research was to investigate the impact of the environment on student engagement in learning in Kerala. This study collected primary data from 506 students from 'private aided' and 'state government' schools in Kerala for the purpose. These primary data were analysed by using statistical methods such as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM). The results revealed that the school environment positively influenced student engagement in learning. Further, the home environment had only a small positive influence on student engagement in learning. Moreover, findings indicated that there would be a positive correlation between the 'mothers' higher education' and the 'students' engagement in learning.' These results suggest that the home environment needs to be significantly improved to increase student's engagement in learning. Based on these findings, this study argues that concerted efforts by parents, school administrators, and the state government are needed to improve the home environment to increase student engagement in learning in Kerala.

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Introduction

Kerala has achieved impressive advancements in selected benchmarks in school education. For instance, the 'gross enrolment ratio' (GER) for Class 10 in Kerala was 90.6 per cent in 2020-21 and rose significantly to 97.9 per cent in 2021-22 (UDISE Plus, 2021; *Kerala Economic Review*, 2023). The 'promotion rate' from Class 9 to 10 increased slightly from 92.9 per cent to 94.5 per cent during the same period. Moreover, there was a 'zero-repetition rate' from Class 1 to 10 standard in both 2020-21 and 2021-22. The 'dropout rate' between Class 9 and 10 was 7.1 per cent, which declined considerably to 5.5 per cent in 2021-22. The quantity attainments are high while the quality of school education has declined in Kerala. The quality of school education has declined in terms of two indicators. These indicators are: (1) The Performance Grading Index (PGI) and (2) National Achievement Survey (NAS).

The performance grading index (PGI) is an important tool for assessing the quality of school education in India. The PGI assesses the relative performance of states/union territories on a uniform scale to promote transformative change in the field of school education. It has key six components. These components are: (1) student learning outcomes (SLOs); (2) access to school education; (3) infrastructure and facilities in schools; (4) equity in school; (5) governance process of schools, and (6) teacher education and training. SLOs have a crucial role in determining the PGI rank of a state in India. It is obvious the drop of rank of Kerala from 'fourth' to 'seventeenth' position in the SLOs rankings over the period from 2017-18 to 2021- 22. Kerala ranked 'second' with a score of 826 out of 1000 in PGI in 2017-18. Since then, its performance has deteriorated, dropping to 'fourth rank' in 2021-22 with 609.70 out of 1000. However, states such as Chandigarh, Punjab, and Delhi have improved significantly, by achieving higher scores in 2021-22 (Ministry of Education, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2022; Kerala Economic Review, 2023).

Apart from PGI, the performance of Kerala is deteriorating in terms of scores in the National Achievement Survey also (see Table 2). The NAS is a comprehensive evaluation technique that aims to gather insights into the academic progress of students in schools throughout India. NAS primarily measures the attainment of student learning outcomes (SLOs). It assesses the learning performance of students in Class 3, 5 and 10 in schools in India. The performance of students in subjects such as Modern Indian Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Science & Social Sciences, and English has been assessed.

Kerala's consistent underperformance in the National Achievement Survey (NAS) in recent times is a cause for urgent attention (National Achievement Survey, 2018; National Achievement Survey, 2021). The present study perceives these disparities as highlighting the pressing need to tackle the problem and boost SLOs. It will help to improve the quality of education in Kerala. Previous research on the quality of school education in Kerala pointed out that poor quality of teaching in state government schools seems to be a major area of concern (Retnakumar & Arokiasamy, 2006; Dilip, 2011; Raj *et al*; 2015; Kundu & Biswas, 2019; Rathore & Das, 2019; Bairagya & Joy, 2022; Singh & Rama, 2024). To elevate the educational standards in Kerala, structural reforms within the education system are imperative. This includes bolstering the resources and atmosphere in schools. Conceptually speaking, the improvement in input and environment are necessary to improve the outcome (I-E-O) are necessary to enhance student engagement in learning (SEL). It will be reflected in student learning outcomes (SLOs) (Vattanaamorn *et al*;2022; Matsumoto *et al*; 2023).

The present study attempted to fill this gap since there is limited research on quality and student engagement in learning.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews the major theoretical approaches and empirical evidence for the interrelationship between student engagement in learning, home environment, school environment, student satisfaction, and the quality of school education. The section following it proposes the main hypotheses of the present study. Then the methodology is presented, followed by a discussion of the results of analysis on the impact of the home environment, and school environment, on the achievement of student engagement. we then conclude with the key findings and policy implications.

Review of Theoretical and Empirical Literature

Approaches to Quality in School Education

Education is a powerful tool for bringing about positive changes in society. However, there is rarely any clear-cut definition when it comes to the quality of education, and different authors interpret it in various ways. Even the indicators used for measuring quality in education lack consensus. According to the I-E-O (Input-Environment-Output) model, improving quality can be achieved by altering three indicators: (1) "inputs" such as financial, human, and material resources, (2) "environment" which include home and school environments and information, and (3) "outcomes" such as student learning outcomes (SLOs) (Heyneman, 2004; Opertti, *et al*, 2014, Jain *et al*; 2018; Vattanaamorn *et al*;2022; Matsumoto *et al*; 2023). Enhancement of student learning outcomes (SLOs) is a unique and crucial route to improving the quality and promotion of social justice. The primary step to improve the SLOs is through improvement in student engagement in learning (SEL) (Osterman, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Heaslip *et al*; 2014).

Student Engagement in Learning and Quality

Student engagement may be defined as the degree of interest, concentration, and eagerness that students exhibit toward their academic work is what constitutes 'student engagement' (Ali & Hassan, 2018; Leonard & Gudino, 2021). It consists of three elements such as 'cognitive engagement,' 'affective engagement' and 'behavioural engagement.' 'Cognitive engagement' refers to the learner's application of indepth learning approaches and self-regulation to understand the subject. 'Affective engagement' pertains to the learner's positive connection and sense of belonging to the learning environment, including interactions with peers and teachers. 'Behavioural engagement' describes the level of participation, persistence, and optimistic behaviour of the learner (Fredricks *et al*; 2016; Payne, 2017).

Empirical research has identified several indicators to measure the element of student engagement in learning. They are: (1) understanding of the concepts; (2) positive conduct; (3) self-regulated learning; (4) enjoyment in learning; (5) high attention in class; (6) interest in academic work and (7) participation in school-related activities. These indicators are distinct and interdependent (Lou & Noels, 2019; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2022). Factors such as family environment, level of peer support, school environment, cultural factors, structural factors, and psychological factors would determine the production and the level of student engagement. It has been found that the school environment and home

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environment play a crucial role in providing the best educational facilities and improving student engagement in learning (Ali & Hassan, 2018, Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Conner, 2021).

Home Environment and Student Engagement in Learning

The home environment directly as well as indirectly impacts the children's education significantly. Factors such as family structure, socio-economic status, relationships, and parental education play a crucial role in constructing a conducive environment. Scholars agree that the support of parents is essential to improve their children's learning. It may be measured through the level of parental involvement, children's autonomy, support, and parenting styles (Lee, 2012; Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012; Tomaszewski *et al*; 2020). Mothers' education and involvement is the single most important factor that can influence children's education substantially. Several authors have enquired about the role of 'mother education' in their research and have found that there was a positive influence on a child's attainments in results, years of completed schooling, and career growth.

This result was mainly linked to the genetic transmission of cognitive abilities and the social transmission of maternal and cultural capital in the home (Kalmijn, 1994; Yamamoto *et al*, 2016; Davis-Kean *et al*; 2021; Gil *et al*; 2021; Reay, 2023). Parental involvement and strategies are critical for a child's educational success. Families can provide direct support, transmission of ideologies, information, and support, or indirect influence through routine behaviour. 'Parental involvement' can take many forms, such as monitoring the education of children, communication, volunteering, learning at home, homework assistance, decision-making, and creating a community-focussed environment. In addition to the home environment, the school environment also plays an essential role in student engagement (Barger *et al*; 2019; Reay, 2023).

School Environment and Student Engagement in Learning

Defining the 'school environment' is a complex task, as it encompasses various factors that contribute to its multi-dimensional nature. The school environment comprises the physical infrastructure in schools, social atmosphere, cultural and academic setting, and overall climate of the school. The impact of these components on student satisfaction is direct and indirect, and can significantly affect student engagement levels and their academic performance. As such, student satisfaction serves as a mediator between the school environment and student achievement (Özgenel, 2020; Grazia, & Molinari, 2021; Lawson & Masyn, 2015; Fredricks *et al*, 2016; Rudasil *et al*, 2017; Konold *et al*; 2018; Wang, 2020). The perception of a school's effectiveness, as seen by its students, is generally referred to as 'student satisfaction.' This perception is influenced by both student expectations and the school's performance.

Student Satisfaction and Student Engagement in Learning

There are a variety of indicators that can be used to assess student satisfaction, such as student perceptions of faculty, approaches to teaching, course administration, interactions with faculty, maintenance of facilities, relevance of curriculum, administrative and support services, instructional delivery, assessment methods, feedback systems, learning resources,

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mechanisms for promoting equity and inclusion, and integration of technology. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of these indicators in understanding and enhancing student satisfaction (Alves and Reposo, 2009; Hosain *et al*, 2019; Atasoy, 2020; Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Min, 2023). Upon a thorough examination of both the theoretical and empirical literature, it may be surmised that a conducive school environment, contented students, and supportive home environments are all crucial factors in promoting student engagement and facilitating effective learning. Based on these presumptions, this study proceeds with the objectives given below.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the impact of the school environment on the attainment of student engagement in learning in Kerala's school education system.
- To analyse the impact of home environment on the attainment of student engagement in learning in Kerala's school education system.
- To evaluate the impact of student satisfaction on the attainment of student engagement in Kerala's school education system.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

To achieve these objectives, the present study has constructed a comprehensive conceptual framework (Figure 1). It is organised into four core sections and is visually depicted in Figure 1. These four core sections are: (1) student engagement in learning (SEL); (2) student perception of the school environment (SPSE); (3) student perception of the school environment (SPSE); and (4) student satisfaction (SSA).

The first construct is 'student engagement in learning (SEL)' and it consists of five items. They are: (1) regular attendance of students in classes (SEL1); (2) positive interaction of students with teachers (SEL 2); (3) enjoyment of students in learning new things (SEL 3); (4) involvement of students in classwork (SEL 4), and self-regulated learning strategies of students (SEL 5) (Vos, 1996; Osterman, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Leonard, 2008; Lawson & Masyn, 2015; Fredricks *et al*, 2016; Quin, 2017; Ali & Hassan, 2018; Jain & Prasad, 2018; Lee, 2018; Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Wang, 2020; Conner, 2021; Leonard, & Gudino, 2021; Theobald, 2021; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2022; Vattanaamorn *et al*; 2022; Matsumoto *et al*; 2023).

The second construct titled 'student perception of the school environment (SPSE)' is divided into the following items: (1) cooperative school management (SPSE 1); (2) systems to monitor teachers (SPSE 2); (3) effective teacher collaboration (SPSE 3); (4) objectivity in the assessment system (SPSE 4); (5) school office system (SPSE 5) and (6) role of students in decision making (SPSE 6) (Thapa *et al*, 2013; Lawson & Masyn, 2015; Fredricks *et al*, 2016; Rudasil *et al*, 2017; Konold *et al,* 2018; Aldridge *et al,* 2020; Bellei *et al,* 2020; Özgenel, 2020; Tyner & Gershenson, 2020; Wang, *et al*, 2020; Grazia & Molinari, 2021; Tamir & Ganon-Shilon, 2021).

The third segment titled 'student perception of home environment (SPHE)' has been divided into the following items: (1) mother's involvement in the homework of their children (SPHE 1); (2) nourishment and diet (SPHE 2); (3) care from family members (SPHE 3); and

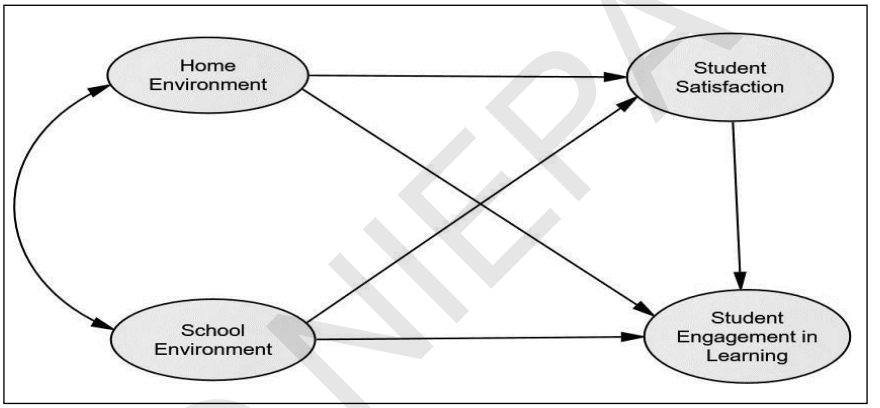
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(4) study room environment (SPHE 4) (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Alves and Reposo, 2009; Epstein, 2010; Lee, 2012; Boonk *et al*, 2018; Barger *et al*, 2019; Tomaszewski *et al*, 2020; Davis-Kean *et al*, 2021; Rani & Ravindranath, 2021; Gibson-Moore *et al*, 2023; Nunez, 2023; Reay, 2023).

With this overview, the rest of the paper is organised as follows. The next section looks into the earlier studies on demand for student loans in a behavioural perspective and highlights the paucity of studies on the access to institutional credit in the rural and urban India. Then the section titled as discussion tries to explore answers to the each of the research questions raised here. The subsequent section explores the underlying structural factors for the differential access to institutional credit across rural and urban students. The last section makes some concluding remarks.

FIGURE 1

Hypothesised Conceptual Model



Source: Compiled by Authors

Finally, the fourth construct, titled as the 'student satisfaction (SSA)' segment, was categorised into the following items. They are: (1) the attention of teachers on each student (SSA 1); quality of teaching (2) (SSA 2); (3) a discipline system for students (SSA 3); (4) a student-centered approach to teaching (SSA 4); (5) support of peers in learning (SSA 5); (6) feedback system from students (SSA 6); (7) identification of learning styles of students (SSA 7) and (8) availability of extracurricular activities (SSA 8). (Alves and Reposo, 2009; Hosain *et al*, 2019; Atasoy, 2020; Ozgenel, 2020; Vermote *et al*, 2020; Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Deeva *et al*, 2021; Lustick, 2021; Seghers, *et al*, 2021; Kimbrough *et al*, 2022; Min, 2023). Based on this conceptual framework, a sampling design and analytical framework have been formulated to collect the primary data.

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Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the conceptual framework, the five hypotheses were formulated. They are as below:

(H1): There is a significantly positive impact of school environment on the attainment of student engagement in learning.

(H2): There is a significantly positive impact of home environment on the attainment of student engagement in learning.

(H3): There is a significantly positive impact of school environment on the attainment of student satisfaction.

(H4): There is a significantly positive impact of student satisfaction has a significantly positive effect on student engagement in learning.

(H5): There is a significantly positive impact of home environment on the attainment of student satisfaction.

Methodology

Quality of School Education in Kerala

In 2020-21, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for Class 10 in school education in Kerala stood at 90.6 per cent. However, in 2021-22, this ratio increased significantly to 97.9 per cent (UDISE Plus, 2021; Kerala Economic Review, 2023). Although this increase is commendable, Kerala still needs to improve its quality indicators, such as the 'Performance Grade Index (PGI)' and National Achievement Survey (NAS) scores, as presented in Tables 1 & 2 (Ministry of Education, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2022; National Achievement Survey, 2018; National Achievement Survey, 2021).

The performance grading index (PGI) is an important tool for assessing the quality of school education in India. The PGI assesses the relative performance of states/union territories on a uniform scale to promote transformative change in the field of school education. It has key six components.

The methodology for calculating the PGI scores for Kerala and its scores are displayed in Table 1, with parts A and part B outlining the respective criteria. Kerala's overall score in the academic year 2017-18 was 862 out of 1000, which decreased to 609.70 out of 1000 in 2021-22. In terms of SLOs, Kerala ranked 4th in 2017-18, but this ranking slid to 17th in 2021-22 (Ministry of Education, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2022; National Achievement Survey, 2018; National Achievement Survey, 2021).

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TABLE 1

Methodology and Scores in Performance Grade Index of Kerala

Part A			*Part B*				
Domain	*Total Weight*		*Score in Performance Grade Index*				
	2017-18	*2021-22*	*2017-18*	*2018-19*	*2019-20*	*2020-21*	*2021-22*
SLOs	180	240	154 (4)	154 (4)	154 (4)	154 (5)	60.2 (17)
Access	80	80	78 (2)	79 (1)	79 (1)	79 (1)	68.4 (3)
I & F	150	190	123 (4)	123 (8)	130 (13)	135 (13)	94.1 (8)
Equity	230	260	217(3)	210 (8)	216 (17)	218 (11)	218 (23)
GP	360	130	254 (3)	296 (3)	322 (6)	342 (3)	84.8 (2)
TE & T	N.A	100	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	84.3 (3)
Total	1000	1000	826 (2)	862 (3)	901 (4)	928 (1)	609.7 (4)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the relative scores of Kerala as compared to states/UTs in India.
Source: Compiled by authors from Performance Grade Index of MoE, 2017-18 & 2021-22.

Sampling Design and Analytical Framework

The procedure for identifying the study's 'population' is as follows. Based on the results of the National Achievement Survey (NAS), the present study is confined to Kerala. Table 2 presents the NAS results in terms of schools in Kerala (National Achievement Survey, 2018; National Achievement Survey, 2021; Retna Kumar *et al*, 2006; UDISE Plus, 2021; Kerala Economic Review, 2023). Firstly, it was noticed that the learning outcomes (SLOs) of students in 'private aided' and 'state government' schools in Kerala are inferior when compared to students of 'private recognised' and 'central government' schools in 2018 and 2021. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the reasons behind the quality deterioration in 'private aided' and 'state government schools' as it may help contribute to the general quality.

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TABLE 2

Score of Schools in National Achievement Survey in Kerala (Class 10)

	Type of School							
Subject	*State Govt*		*Private Aided*		*Private Unaided*		*Central Govt*	
	2018	*2021*	*2018*	*2021*	*2018*	*2021*	*2018*	*2021*
MIT/ Reading	280 (1)	274 (3)	278 (3)	278 (1)	277 (5)	285 (4)	N.A	276 (15)
Mathematics	248 (10)	202 (19)	251 (11)	203 (24)	257 (14)	230 (12)	N.A	246 (9)
Science	253 (10)	193 (13)	250 (12)	196 (17)	257 (12)	245 (9)	N.A	270 (1)
Social Sciences	258 (5)	224 (10)	255 (10)	227 (11)	255 (14)	277 (6)	N.A	292 (2)
English	252 (7)	276 (9)	266 (6)	290 (10)	287 (12)	348 (6)	N.A	358 (1)
Total	1291	1169	1300	1194	1333	1385	N.A	1442

Notes: 1. Figures in parentheses indicate the relative scores of Kerala compared to other states/UTs in India.

2. MIT; Modern Indian Languages.

3. The row-wise score given in the table is out of 500.

Source: Computed by authors from NAS data, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021.

Secondly, the enrolments of students in state government and private aided schools together constitute a major chunk of the total enrolment in Kerala (Table 3). Based on these two factors, the 'population' of the study was confined to students in Class 10 of 'private aided' and 'state government' schools in Kerala. The present study selected the Class 10 for the following reasons. Firstly, Class 10 students could comprehensively understand and recollect their experiences in school and home environments. Subsequently, the present study identified the 'sample students' through 'stratified random sampling'. For this purpose, the present study developed a benchmark to stratify the districts in Kerala.

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TABLE 3

Enrolment of Students and Types of Schools in Kerala

Enrolment	*Number*	*Enrolment*	*Number*
State Govt	1223554 (33)	SC	369426 (10)
Aided	2181170 (58)	ST	70081 (2)
Private Unaided	341923 (9)	Others	3307140 (88)
Total	37466479 (100)	Total	3746647 (100)
Section of School	*Number*	*Higher Secondary Schools*	*Number*
LP (I-IV)	1308415 (35)	State Govt	819 (39)
UP (V-VII)	1169557 (31)	Aided	846 (41)
HS (VIII-X)	1268675 (34)	Private Unaided	412 (20)
Total	3746647 (100)	Total	2077 (100)

Cont...

Gender	*Number*	*Enrolment in Higher Secondary*	*Number*
Male	1908982 (51)	Male	189199 (49)
Female	1837665 (49)	Female	195357 (51)
Total	3746647 (100)	Total	384556 (100)
Total Schools	*Number*	*Enrolment in Higher Secondary*	*Number*
State Govt	4698 (36)	State Govt	169199 (44)
Aided	7210 (56)	Aided	185447 (48)
Private Unaided	1051 (8)	Private Unaided	29910 (8)
Total	12959 (100)	Total	384556 (100)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage to total.
Source: Compiled by authors from *Kerala Economic Review*, 2023.

This benchmark is based on the performance of Class 10 students in the National Achievement Survey (NAS). Table 4 shows the classification of districts based on this benchmark. Based on this yardstick, this study grouped districts into three categories. They are: (1) relatively advanced; (2) relatively advancing and (3) relatively backward.

TABLE 4

Overall Achievement Score in NAS in Class 10 of Schools in Kerala (2021)

Stratification	*District*	*% of Children at Proficient and Advanced Level*	*% of Children at Basic and Below Basic Level*
Relatively Advanced	Ernakulum	37.5	62.5
	Thiruvananthapuram	31.4	68.6
	Kottayam	29.9	70.1
	Thrissur	27.5	72.5
	Pathanamthitta	27.3	72.7
Relatively Advancing	Alappuzha	25.9	74.1
	Kollam	25.2	74.8
	Kannur	23.9	76.1
	Malappuram	21.9	78.1
	Idukki	19.7	80.3
Relatively Backward	Palakkad	19.2	80.8
	Kozhikode	19.0	81.0
	Kasaragod	16.1	83.9
	Wayanad	13.1	86.9

Source: Compiled by authors from NAS data, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021.

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Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) were then applied (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Barrett, 2007; Hair *et al*, 2010). From each category, one district was randomly chosen for further processes. The districts were then divided into blocks, and two schools were selected from each block, representing both from state government and private-aided strata. Subsequently, the study approached sample schools and collected information from the school register. From the collected information from the school register, the study divided them according to their socio-demographic background. Subsequently, the study selected students from each stratum randomly. The study ensured proportionate sample size was selected from each stratum. The sample was selected through the 'Lahiri method' under probability proportionate size sampling techniques (Skinner, 2016; Hounyo & Lahiri, 2023). As per the appointment of school administration and students, face-to-face interviews were conducted with sample students. For the final survey, 36.17 per cent of the students (183 students) were selected from the Ernakulum district, 26.09 per cent (132 students) from Kollam district, and 37.75 per cent (191 students) from Kozhikode district. Based on the sample size criteria, this study selected a sample of 506 students in the sample schools from Kerala (Table 4).

TABLE 5

Classification of Sample Students from Schools in Kerala

Sample District	*Number of Students*	*Percentage*
Ernakulum	183	36.17
Kollam	132	26.09
Kozhikode	191	37.75
Total	506	100.00
Ownership of School	*Number of Students*	*Percentage*
State-Government	221	43.67
Private-Aided	285	56.32
Total	506	100.00
Gender	*Number of Students*	*Percentage*
Male	228	45.05
Female	278	54.95
Total	506	100.00
Social Group	*Number of Students*	*Percentage*
Forward Caste	163	32.21
Other Backward Castes (OBC)	145	28.66
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	116	22.92
Scheduled Tribes (STs)	82	16.21
Total	506	100.00

Cont…

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Mother's Education	*Number of Students*	*Percentage*
Upto SSLC	98	19.37
SSLC/plus two	316	62.45
Graduation	32	6.32
Post-Graduation and above	8	1.58
Total	506	100.00

Source: Computed by authors from primary data.

For structural equation modelling, it was suggested that the sample size should be more than 200 (Mundfrom *et al*, 2005; Weston & Gore 2006; Kline, 2011; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Based on these benchmarks, the sample size was determined. Once the classification was completed, a 'structured questionnaire' was prepared. The questionnaire had five sections. Each section was divided into constructs and constructs were divided into items. A validated five-point Likert scale and checked boxes were used for the survey. Ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted. Data collected through the pilot study was tested for consistency and validity using Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical tool that allowed for modifications incorporated on the questionnaire (Kennedy, 2022). Subsequently, the final primary survey was conducted through face-to-face mode between December 2023 and August 2024. Each interview with respondents took almost 40 to 45 minutes. The collected data were processed and checked for normality. Cronbach's alpha reliability test was applied to ensure the internal consistency of the primary data. Subsequently, this study applied confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to the primary data. The present study divided the sample students into four categories. They are: (1) district; (2) ownership of school; (3) gender; (4) social group and (5) mother's education (Table 5). Total sample students were 506 in the study. In the analysis group, 285 (56.32 per cent) students were from private-aided schools, whereas 221 (43.67 per cent) students were from state-government schools. The students from the forward caste were 163 (32.21 per cent), and students from the OBC group were 145 (28.66 per cent). Most of the mothers of sample students belong to the SSSL/Plus two categories, and their number is 316 (62.45 per cent).

Results and Discussion

Impact of the Environment on the Attainment of Engagement in Learning

The results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are presented in Table 6. Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.70 and composite reliability ranges from 0.98 to 0.88 which is greater than the recommended value (0.60) (Bagozzi *et al*, 1991; Hair *et al*, 2010). Factor loadings in Table 5 reveal that each of the four dimensions properly comes under four factors and is loaded on their respective constructs. In terms of validity, factor loadings were stretched from 0.68 to 0.96, and it is satisfactory. A higher factor loading pinpoints that the factor could adequately indicate and explain the variance in that variable. Loading for each item on a factor should be greater than or equal to $\pm$ 0.40 (Hair *et al*, 2008).

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TABLE 6

Final Reliability and Validity of CFA Model and Student Engagement in Kerala

Construct	*Code of the Construct*	*Factor Loading*	*Cronbach's Alpha (Final Value)*	*(AVE)*	*Composite Reliability*
Students Engagement in Learning (SEL)	(SEL1)	0.95	0.97	0.9	0.98
	(SEL2)	0.96			
	(SEL3)	0.96			
	(SEL4)	0.98			
	(SEL5)	0.89			
School Environment (SPSE)	(SPSE1)	0.85	0.88	0.57	0.89
	(SPSE2)	0.72			
	(SPSE3)	0.81			
	(SPSE4)	0.75			
	(SPSE5)	0.68			
	(SPSE6)	0.73			
Students' Perception of Home Environment (SPHE)	(SPHE1)	0.78	0.89	0.64	0.88
	(SPHE2)	0.91			
	(SPHE3)	0.77			
	(SPHE4)	0.73			
School Student Satisfaction (SSA)	(SSA1)	0.95	0.96	0.88	0.98
	(SSA2)	0.96			
	(SSA3)	0.94			
	(SSA4)	0.96			
	(SSA5)	0.91			
	(SSA6)	0.92			
	(SSA7)	0.91			
	(SSA8)	0.95			

Source: Computed by authors from primary data.

The composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.9, indicating high internal consistency and reliability for all the constructs. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed the recommended threshold of > 0.5, affirming the high levels of convergence for all constructs. A relationship between the various constructs has been established, and their discriminant validity has been confirmed (Fornell & Larcke, 1981; Yong & Pearce, 2013). The following criteria must be satisfied to ensure convergent validity. CR > 0.7, CR > AVE, and AVE > 0.5 (O'Leary-Kelly & Vokurka, 1998; Hair *et al*, 2010). The AVE of

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the constructs was greater than 0.5. Further in all the cases, the (CR) alpha statistics are significantly greater than their respective AVE statistics. Furthermore, the GFI and AGFI values exceeded 0.9, and the CFI was above 0.9, indicating an excellent fit (Flora *et al*; 2012; O'Boyle & Williams, 2011; Kyriazos, 2018). Table 7 presents the inter-construct latent constructs correlations. The square root of AVE scores (values in brackets) should exceed the correlation values of the inter-construct latent variables. Thus, all the constructs satisfy the prerequisites of convergent validity.

TABLE 7

Model Fit Indices for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Attributes	*CFA Results*	*Recommended Value*
CMIN/DF	3.524	acceptable fit [1-5]
GFI	0.955	greater than 0.9
AGFI	0.99	greater than 0.9
CFI	0.964	greater than 0.9
RMSEA	0.051	less than 0.08

Source: Computed by authors from primary data.

It indicates that the selected measurement constructs have satisfactory reliability, with the outcomes of the fit indices presented in Table 7. The current model's CMIN/DF value of 3.524 was considered optimal. The P-value is 0.057 and it is acceptable for the model. Additionally, the RMSEA score of 0.051 fell below the accepted threshold of 0.08.

TABLE 8

Discriminant Validity among the Environment and Engagement in Learning

Constructs	*SPHE*	*SPSE*	*SEL*	*SSA*
SPHE	0.94			
SPSE	0.71	0.75		
SEL	0.78	0.73	0.80	
SSA	0.64	0.69	0.78	0.93

Source: Computed by authors from primary data.

Table 8 shows that there is rarely any discernible relationship among the constructs, thereby establishing discriminant validity (Kline, 2011). These results indicate that model constructs are within the recommended range, which enables the subsequent analysis of the 'structural equation model.' The outcomes of the structural equation model analyses are presented in Figure 2.

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TABLE 9

Path Analysis on Environment and Engagement in Learning

S.No	*Constructs Path Index*			*Un-Standardised Estimate*	*SE*	*CR*	*P-Value*
1	SEL	←	SPSE	1.263	0.129	9.791	<0.001***
2	SEL	←	SPHE	0.124	0.057	2.175	0.131
3	SSA	←	SPSE	0.284	0.046	6.174	<0.001***
4	SEL	←	SSA	0.601	0.083	7.241	<0.001***
5	SSA	←	SPHE	0.962	0.259	3.714	0.213

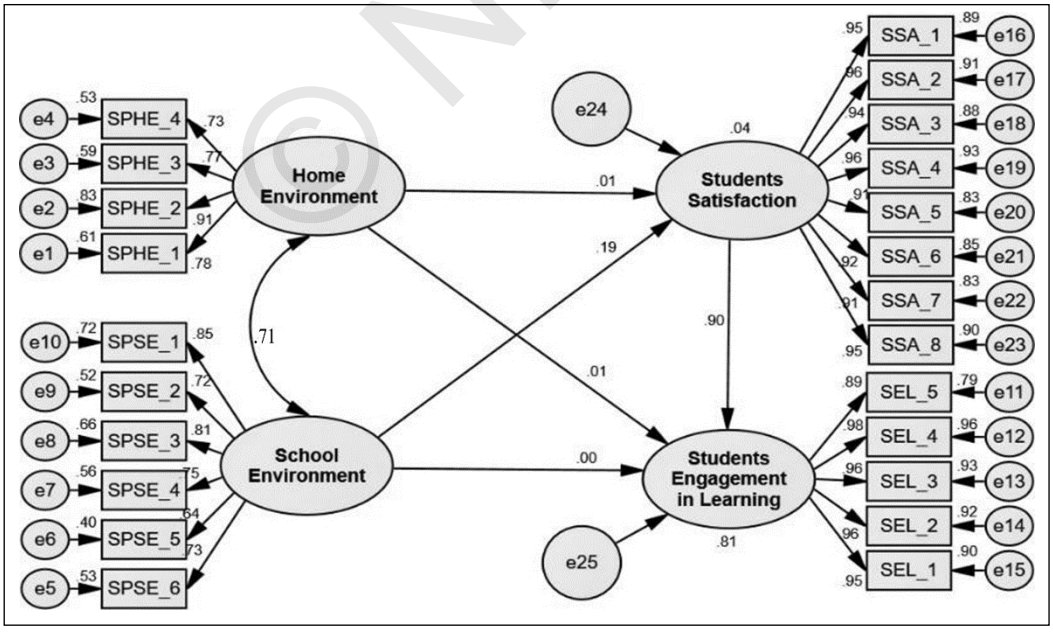
*** Represents significance at .001 per cent level.

Source: Computed by authors from primary data.

Firstly, this study examined the direct impact of the school environment and home environment on the attainment of student engagement in learning (Figure 2). Subsequently, the hypothetical prepositions were tested and the results are presented in Table 9.

FIGURE 2

Tested Structural Equation Model on the Impact of Environment on the Attainment of Student Engagement in Learning



Source: Computed by authors from primary data.

The results revealed that the school environment (SPSE) had a significantly positive impact on student engagement in learning (SEL) and it confirmed the H1 (critical ratio = 9.791, $\beta = 0.129$, $p < 0.001$***). Secondly, home environment (SPHE) did not have a significantly positive impact on student engagement in learning (SEL) (critical ratio = 2.175, $\beta = 2.175$, $p = 0.131$). Apart from the direct impact of school and home environment on student engagement in learning, the present study tested the indirect impact of the environment on SEL through student satisfaction (SSA) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hamid, *et al*, 2017). From the results, it was found that the school environment (SPSE) had a positive impact on the attainment of student satisfaction (SSA) conforming to third hypothesis (critical ratio = 6.174, $\beta = 0.046$, $p < 0.001$***). The fourth hypothesis was accepted then and it confirms that student satisfaction has positively influenced student engagement in learning (critical ratio = 7.241, $\beta = 0.083$, $p < 0.001$***). Analysis results proved that home environment (SPHE) did not have a significantly positive impact on student satisfaction (critical ratio = 3.174, $\beta = 0.259$, $p = 0.213$).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The quality of school education in Kerala has been deteriorating. For instance, its rank in indicators of quality such as the performance grade index (PGI) and student learning outcomes (SLOs) has declined considerably. Previous research seldom inquired about the causes of this trend. Therefore, the present research presumed that inadequate student engagement in learning (SEL) and environments would be the prime causes behind this scenario. The present study tested this presumption by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM).

The findings from the study indicate that the 'home environment' was not significant in influencing student engagement in learning in Kerala. It indirectly confirms the poor involvement of mothers in student's work. It was primarily because most of the 'mothers of students' in state-government and private-aided schools have inadequate 'higher education qualification' to assist their children with their homework. It led to their inability to effectively involve assist and guide their children in learning. It would have negatively affected their home environment and consequently the student engagement in learning. More specifically, the study revealed that 'mother's education and assistance and involvement' are necessary to improve student engagement in learning. This finding indirectly confirms the western literature that there is a positive relationship between the educational attainment of students and their mother's education. Inadequate higher education of parents would negatively affect their children's occupational status, household atmosphere, flow of information, income, and family status. Therefore, it will reflect in nourishment and diet to children, care from members of the family, and study room environment. In other words, the satisfaction of students on these items is also sub-optimum and needs to improve considerably. These findings call for some measures to improve the home environment. A survey on the 'qualification of mothers education' would help to diagnosis the intensity of the constraint. Schools also supplement this process. For instance, a 'student engagement survey' may be incorporated into the assessment system in schools. Teachers can visit their students' homes and interact with their mothers and members of the family. Schools can give a training programme to the parents in schools. Furthermore, teachers can give special attention to each student whose mothers lack

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the necessary qualifications to support their children. Providing student-specific remedial classes and learning resources will be fruitful.

Parent level measures such as 'surprise visits' to schools can improve students' understanding of their emotional and academic behaviours. The formation of 'parental communities' for students can also have positive spillover effects through 'collective parenting.' Creating 'peer learning communities' and promoting 'group-wise competition' can also boost student engagement in learning. Awareness camps on the significance of parental involvement and parenting styles can improve parental participation and monitoring of their children's education. Face-to-face interaction with all teachers at regular intervals, along with parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings, can accelerate parental involvement in learning. Identifying the learning styles of each student and providing student-specific teaching is essential for improving the 'school readiness' of each student.

The government should offer effective monetary and non-monetary incentives to the teaching community and schools administration to support parental initiatives and governance systems in schools. Effective monitoring systems should be put in place to improve the functioning of schools. It is important to document the implementation of quality measures in schools. To conclude, the present research argues that structural transformation through innovation in school systems, parental support, and governmental initiatives is necessary to optimise student engagement in learning in Kerala.

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Phenomenology of Educational Exclusion at Secondary Level

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Abstract

Secondary education redefines the academic foundation of the child and serves as a link between the elementary and higher education, which in turns help in developing a reservoir of intellectual human resources. India envisioned having universalisation of secondary education and substantial progress has been made in achieving the goal. Though, at the national level Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at secondary stage is rising and dropout rates are indicating downward trends, yet there is considerable regional disparity in their magnitudes. Many of the children entering the schools are unable to complete education and multiple factors are responsible for their dropping out. It necessitates to a deeper probe into the problem of exclusion of children from secondary education. The present study provides an indepth understanding of the phenomenon of educational exclusion at the secondary school level in Punjab.

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Introduction

Secondary education serves as a link between the elementary and higher education, which in turns help in developing a reservoir of intellectual human resources. A sizeable section of students gets excluded from the secondary school education. All our educational programmes and plans aim at bridging the gender and social gaps in retention, enrolment and learning achievement at the primary stage. At secondary school level, children acquire self- and social consciousness which is an essential ingredient to direct them on the path of development. To develop harmonious social order, egalitarian society and to socio-cultural development, it is imperative to focus on, invest in and strengthen the school education at the secondary level.

The government of India launched a major programme in 2009, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), to improve access, quality and equity in secondary education. The RMSA was the most recent initiative of the government of India to achieve the goal of universalisation of secondary education (USE). The major objectives of RMSA, according to the 12th five-year plan on secondary education, were to:

- Achieve near-universal enrolment in secondary education, with the GER exceeding 90 per cent by 2017.
- Raise the GER at the higher secondary level to 65 per cent.
- Reduce the dropout rate to less than 25 per cent by 2017.
- Raise the minimum level of education to Class 10 and universalise the access to secondary education.
- Ensure good quality secondary education with focus on Science, Mathematics and English.
- Reduce the gender, social and regional gaps in enrolment, dropout and improving retention

Provisioning quality secondary education for all as per the mandate of SDG goal-4 is a humongous task. Although the gross enrolment ratio at secondary stage is rising and dropout rates are indicating downward trends at the national level, yet there is considerable regional disparity in their magnitudes. Many of the children entering the schools are unable to complete education, and multiple factors are responsible for their dropping out of school. Nevertheless, exclusion of children in any form poses formidable challenges on the way to achieve universalisation of education at school level. The challenges appear in the form of ensuring access of schools at relatively comfortable distances from the residences to all the children, increasing gross enrolment ratio, ascertain non-threatening academic environment for children, boosting attendance ratios and reducing the probabilities of children dropping out from the school. Failure in any of these leads to educational exclusion of children.

In the past several years the stress has been laid on enhancing the enrolment figures at the elementary levels of education but little attention has been given to the children who enter at secondary schools. Numerous studies and reports have show that various factors interplay to compel children to exclude from the secondary education. Undoubtedly secondary level of education determines the overall size and quality of the knowledge pool in a country which is essential for the productivity and competitiveness of the economy as a whole. The exclusion of the children at the secondary level means a colossal wastage of human resources. Educational exclusion is the worst form of exclusion because it excludes the person from other

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walks and activities of life. The state of Punjab is among the developed states in terms of per capita income and development index but is unfortunately lagging in human development and also on the gender development index. Intense unemployment and lack of skill push the children in the labour market in early stages of life. The silent exclusion of children from the arena of secondary levels of education leads to inequalities and social segregations. Thus, the pressing challenge before us is to know why the children opt to remain away from school after completing elementary education. It is necessary to find out what really makes them quit the school. What exactly is the way the social dynamics works around such children? What compels the parents to accept the situation as such?

Previous studies have shown that socio-economic status plays an important role in the exclusion of children from secondary school education. There are different categories of children who are out of school due to different background characteristics. Certain people who are marginalised, excluded, and therefore not getting quality education are because of disability, poverty, gender, poor health, caste system, nutrition, ethnicity, conflict and internal displacement, geographical location (rural people), illiteracy after school going age, child labour, orphans and other vulnerable children. Issues such as caste, religion, economic status, place of residence, and knowledge of English have become significant markers in our social and political life (Joseph, 2000; Kinder *et al*, 2000; Greenberg, Weissberg *et al*, 2003; Ainsworth, Beegle and Koda, 2005; Hammond *et al*, 2007; Hill, Samson and Dasgupta, 2011).

Academic atmosphere may also be responsible for the exclusion of children, like distance to school, bad quality of education, insufficient arrangements, overloaded classrooms, unfit languages of instruction, inadequate parenting, high fee structure, irregularity of teachers and security problem of girls in school The absenteeism, corporal punishment as well as poor pedagogical practices are also responsible for poor performance of children. Various studies reveal that there is correlation of dropout rate with poor school attendance, poor academic performance, grade retention, and disengagement from schools (Alexander, Entwisle and Kabbani, 2001; Demmert, 2001; Schneider, 2002; Balgopalan, 2003; Branham, 2005; Shannon, 2005; Balfanz, 2007; Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver, 2007; Hunt, 2008; Stewart, 2008).

Besides these, family factors also play an important role in the exclusion of children from school. A number of factors like low socio-economic status, high family mobility, low education level of parents, large number of siblings, parental death, family disruption, low educational expectations, low contact with school, parental occupation and sibling has dropped out. Parents involve their children in household work instead of allowing them to do school work. It has been documented that the higher the education of the parent or the household head, the greater the chances of increased access, regular attendance and lower dropout rates. (Wimberly, 2002; Ersado, 2005; Etsey, 2005; Lloyd, Mete & Grant, 2009; Govindaraju & Venkatesan, 2010; Ananga, 2011; Chugh, 2011; Gul, Gulshan, & Arshad, 2013; Joy &Srihari, 2014).

A significant mass of research work is available on the exclusionary tendencies at the elementary and secondary levels. A number of studies intended to locate the prominent causes behind the eventual exclusion of children at secondary level. The multiple causes behind the silent exclusion of children at the secondary level came out at the fore are living under inadequate conditions, inadequate housing, lack of security and safety nets, financial crunch, irrelevances of curriculum, lack of employment opportunities after the education etc. among others, UNESCO (2005); Sayed *et al* (2007); Joshi (2010); Kaur (2012); Tilak (2015); Kale (2017); Lahon (2017) and Tamim (2018) have tried to explore the major causes of

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educational exclusion. Nambissan (2009) and Lahon (2017) reported educational exclusion due to class-caste trajectories, income inequalities, cost of education and the oppressive conditions for the socially vulnerable groups in the society. Some studies showed that exclusion from school happens due to factors like distance of school from home, inability in attending the school due to predominating other life demands, when teaching and learning processes prove unable to meet the needs of the learners, the language of instruction, irrelevance of school education with real life, discrimination, prejudice, bullying, violence and neglect inside the school. About the nature of educational exclusion, most of the studies reflected that educational exclusion is a process, which is hidden or sometimes unnoticed and never happens due to immediate single cause.

Though research in India and abroad has made significant contribution to an understanding of the phenomenon of educational exclusion by exploring its causes and consequences, there is a dire need to understand how social structures do and the experiences of schooling interplay to cause the educational exclusion of the children. A phenomenological understanding of the educational exclusion became vital to have deeper insight.

Moreover, the endeavours of inclusion of children in secondary education get more effective and stronger if we understand the factors that promote exclusion. The proposed study will lend clues regarding the different factors which interplay to push the children out of the secondary school system. In order to address exclusion in education effectively, it is necessary to clarify who experiences exclusion. There is a need to identify the factors that obstruct the process of universalisation of secondary education. A better understanding of the social phenomenon of educational exclusion would offer inputs to policy planning for achieving near universal secondary education.

Research Question

What causes the adolescents to dropout from the secondary schools?

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was adopted to carry out this study. It was intended to describe the concept of educational exclusion on the basis of lived experiences of excluded adolescents and their parents. As Giorgi (1989) defined, this approach helps to investigate the relationship between dropouts and their situations, and consequently provides knowledge of the factors responsible for their exclusion. The study focussed on understanding the situations as narrated by the participants that led to their exclusion from secondary education. The study was limited to Punjab state only. The core sample of the study comprised individuals who had dropped out either after elementary school or before completing Class 10. Only those individuals were included who had dropped out from schools within a period of 3 years from the date of data collection. A sample of 72 dropout adolescents (54 boys and 18 girls) and their parents (61) was drawn from the selected areas of Punjab. Purposive sampling technique was applied to select the students from the ones who had dropped out.

The respondents were interviewed to have deeper insights about what they went through during the stage of dropping out and how they felt after that. A semi-structured method of contact was adopted where the respondents were asked to tell about them and their school experiences. As suggested by Creswell (2007), open-ended questions were asked to generate

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data that led to a textural description (what participants experienced) and a structural description (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context) of the experiences.

Bracketing their own assumptions and preconceived notions about the phenomenon of educational exclusion, the researchers approached the participants to make sense of their narratives. The focus has not been on the events but rather the way they experienced it. All the interviews were read several times over to grasp the participant's expression and meaning. Significant statements, sentences, and quotes were highlighted. Out of the 72 participants, only 23 participants discussed anything beyond the structured questions. The data were converted into descriptive codes. Topic coding involved identifying significant statements and grouping them into meaning units, or invariant constituents, and patterns with supporting information. Invariant constituents are the unique qualities of the experience and are created by grouping the significant statements identified during horizontalisation and grouped by meaning. Interpretations of the patterns and groupings were made with analytic memos.

Firstly, some individuals are briefly described in order to provide context and richness for understanding their experiences, later a synthesis of the information is provided for each individual in a paragraph that describes the *essence* of that person's experience. Then themes were developed through horizontalisation and the creation of invariant constituents and described in narratives. Under these themes, textural descriptions have been presented which provide a narrative of what the participant experienced which led to leave the schools.

Findings

Multiple perspectives on lived experiences of the participants about their schools, studies and the conditions abetting their exclusion from educational process were shared by the participants. The multiplicity of narratives helped us in 'finding meanings' or 'making sense' of what the participants perceive about their experiences.

In some cases, hardworking students, belonging to economically less advantaged families finding studies interesting, teachers helpful and the school environment genuinely nice suddenly develop cold resistance from within and leave the studies. The knot in the mind gets complicated and never comes to the fore. In some other narratives the existential questions attain priority over pursuing education. Such children get all the support from home and school but are not able to focus on studies as every single moment of the day they are contemplating work to earn a bit more to sustain the families and ultimately leave to of course regret later in life. Yet another perspective emerges where the occurrence of learning difficulties and absence of some serious remedial intervention causes failure or the fear of failure leading to fading of interest in studies and subsequently exit of the children from the system. The demotivating teachers, taunting peer, not so friendly school environment and diminishing hope for any better future beats many a student to retreat from educational experiences. Girls invariably bear the brunt of collective fear of social insecurity and are withdrawn from educational process when the location of school is at a distance from the native place. Poverty, coupled with the poor health of parents, puts on them the onus of managing household and drags them out of the school. The governmental support in the form of facilities like uniforms, books, stipends, stationery, and nutritious food does help the students but a powerful feeling emerging out of the interaction was that such support is

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minimal and for receiving good education, one needs to invest handsomely which is the privilege out of bound for poor like them.

A large social class of dropout children is busy with different types of works and tries to earn whatever possible for living but feels remorseful of the decision to leave. This group now believes that level and quality of education received by a person is related to decent employment opportunities. Self-reflection on the causes of their educational exclusion indicates their helplessness and more than that, it stands as severe indictment of the unjust economic regime and the prevailing public education system at work in a democracy which defaults on ensuring a dignified, affordable education of equitable quality to all without discrimination.

The views of the parents about the educational exclusion corroborate the perception of dropout students. The parents in general were quite positive about the value of education, though a few sounded dismissive of the quality of education being imparted in schools, but they were constrained to agree to the discontinuation of their children from studies due to financial duress and the demanding household chores. A majority of them visited the schools of their wards when they were studying in schools to attend the parent-teacher meetings, though the frequency of visits varied. Some of them grumbled about the behaviour of teachers which led to deadlocking of any meaningful dialogue about children's betterment. The worrisome observation reveals that they found their children as aliens to the school environment. The alienation quickens the process of exclusion. They wished their children could undergo vocational training and transform the nature of job from unskilled to skilled manpower. But only a few could afford. Given the chance to re-send their children to school, overwhelming majority did not seem enthusiastic to the suggestion.

To summarise, the crucial period of dropping out falls between classes 6 to 9 during which a majority of students are forced to leave the school. Many of them liked to study but faced difficulties in comprehending the nuances of the subjects taught with very few of them getting real help from their teachers to cope up. Ironically, this happened even when the students' perceptions about the behaviour of teachers and other staff in the school towards them was found to be complementary in nature. Financial limitations being faced by the families, pulls experienced from domestic responsibilities, distance of school from home and failure in faring well in studies were the triggers which sowed the seeds of despondency among them. The thoughts of leaving studies often crossed their minds. They shared their feeling mostly with their parents and a majority of the parents could not dissuade them from leaving school, although they never wanted to demotivate their children. The pushed-out children regret their decision and value the connection of good studies with decent job possibilities. They wish if they were saved from abandoning the school which would have ensured a better living for them.

Discussion of the Results

The findings of the present study are in congruence with the previous literature on the issue. A significant mass of research work is available to study the exclusionary tendencies at elementary and secondary level. Number of studies intended to locate the prominent causes behind the eventual exclusion of children at secondary level. The multiple causes behind the silent exclusion of children at the secondary level came out at the fore are living under inadequate conditions, inadequate housing, lack of security and safety nets, financial crunch,

irrelevances of curriculum, lack of employment opportunities after the education etc (UNESCO, 2005; Sayed *et al*, 2007; Joshi, 2010; Tilak, 2015; Kale, 2017; Lahon, 2017; Tamim, 2018).

Financial constraints came out to be a top predictor of dropouts. Parents involved their children in household work instead of allowing them to do their schoolwork. It has been documented that the higher the education of the parent or the household head, the greater the chances of increased access, regular attendance, and lower dropout rates (Wimberly, 2002; Ersado, 2005; Etsey, 2005; Lloyd, Mete & Grant, 2009; Govindaraju & Venkatesan, 2010; Ananga, 2011; Chugh, 2011; Gul, Gulshan & Arshad, 2013; Joy & Srihari, 2014).

In case of girls, household income and distance to school came out be the significant determinants of dropping out (Gondwe, 2016; Dunga & Mafini, 2019). Boy's education is considered an investment compared to educating the girls; parents' negative attitude towards education of girls emerged to be important factor that keep girls away from schools despite their willingness (Gondwe, 2016). The high poverty rates, economic hardships create circumstances for the withdrawal of girls from schools, also less value ascribed to educating a girl emerged an important reason (Kyansimire, 2019). Lack of school fees was the reason for failed participation at school by the girls whereas girls from better socioeconomic conditions sustained in the school (Chikhungu *et al*, 2020). Lu *et al* (2016) called for an unhindered attention to dropout and concluded that age, gender that is girls and older students are more prone to drop out. Most common reason of dropping out of the school was financial constraint and equal desire to rejoin the studies provided conditions became conducive was found by researchers (Desai, Moitra, Chaudhary & Dave, 2017).

Academic atmosphere may also be responsible for exclusion of children. Namrata (2011) emphasised that there is a myriad of factors that are responsible for the disengagement of students that further get translated into dropping out of school. These include the indifferent attitude of teachers that "double marginalise children of disadvantaged groups in classroom setting." Shardreck (2013) also advocated that inadequate teacher student relationship make secondary students drop out.

Besides other factors that have been repeatedly found in various studies conducted in India and other developing countries, psychological issues faced by students were not researched much and thus they got little attention. This we found in case of "Jyotsana" who was a very good student and suddenly she became disinterested in study without herself knowing the reason. There may be many such cases that drop out due to unknown reason (that may be psychological) and need just proper counselling. In Western countries, a lot of emphasis is given on studying psychological issues as a cause of drop out. Quiroga *et al* (2013) found, among other things, that depression in the seventh grade increased the likelihood of school dropout and that experiences of depression at the beginning of secondary school could interfere with school perseverance particularly for students. Esch *et al* (2014) also found that internalising disorders were reported to develop because of school dropout. Brière *et al.* (2017) conclude that the associations between internalising symptoms and school non-completion are modest and that common school-based interventions targeting internalising symptoms are unlikely to have a major impact on school non-completion.

About the nature of educational exclusion, most of the studies highlighted that educational exclusion is a process, which is hidden or sometimes unnoticed and never happens due to immediate single cause. It calls for a concerted effort to retain these children in schools. As parents are not much aware and face financial problems, teachers have to take

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a proactive role as suggested by Khalkhali, Sharifi and Nikyar (2013), that though teachers cannot control out of school circumstances nevertheless they can provide classroom controls nurture interest and development of internal motivation.

The narrative of teachers and principals about the phenomenon of educational exclusion is more like defending their position. It is significant to note that two thirds of the participating teachers had not noticed any signs of withdrawal among students. The one who could sense the disaster to happen could only do it on the basis of long absenteeism and irregular attendance of the students. Whereas very few could appreciate that non participation of students in classroom activities and anxious disposition were also indicators of potential exclusion. A majority of the teachers seemed to believe that predominant reasons for students to leave was domestic and child-centred as if the pedagogical approaches being adopted, school environment and curriculum related issues were also recognised as possible reasons but contributed minimally to the discomfort of the students. The teachers identified that three fourth of the dropped-out students belonged to poverty ridden families.

The principals identified financial constraints, lack of interest in studies, poor academic performance due to their status of first-generation learners, seasonal migration to other states were the probable factors causing exclusion. Separated families and families in constant conflict affected the mental state of children and turning them into uninspired learners on the verge of going out. Teachers and principals believed that the dropped out students could be brought back to schools by involving school management committees. Once back in schools the students could be provided with guidance and counselling and other remedial courses to cope up. That a majority of the teachers and principals were ignorant of the travails of suffering students is a revelation that should be a major issue to contemplate for the society and educational system.

The negative association of teacher support with intention of students to drop out signifies the importance of teachers' role in preventing drop outs. The teacher student relation climate negatively and significantly associates with drop out problem (Barile *et al*, 2012). Bergeron *et al* (2011) found out "positive relationship with teachers predicted low intention to drop out, while a negative relationship with teachers predicted high intention to drop out."

Implications

Attempts to legally ensure free and compulsory education for all the children till Class 5 were initiated almost a century ago by Gopal Krishan Gokhale who introduced a bill in 1911 in the Imperial Legislative Assembly. The country was then reeling under colonial subjugation. The bill was defeated in the assembly by a majority vote. Provisioning of free and compulsory elementary education to all the children till the age of 14 years, leaving no one behind, was debated intensely in the Constituent Assembly constituted in 1948 to draft the Constitution of free India. It was appreciated by all the members of the Constituent Assembly that making education free and compulsory for all the children in the country was of critical importance for the task national reconstruction after getting independence from the colonial foreign rule. However, there were two kinds of arguments put forth in the debate. One favoured making elementary education free and compulsory as a *Fundamental Right* of the children till they attain 14 years of age. The other view was that the economic constraints must not allow the governments to fulfil their commitment and hence it should not be put in the category of Fundamental Rights and should be included in the Constitution under the Directive Principles

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of State Policy. The second proposal found favour with all the members. Thus, a provision was placed in Article 45 in Part IV of the Constitution which read, *"The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years."* The Constitution was adopted on January 26, 1950. No other article in the Directive Principles of State Policy, except on education, was asserted on a time frame. Fixing a time frame explained the urgency of the task. However, after ten years of commencement of Constitution the aim of education of all the children were not achieved. The states too enacted laws. The goal posts kept on moving forward as the desired results could not be achieved.

The Eighty-Sixth Constitution Amendment, recognising elementary education for all the children in the age group of six to fourteen years as their Fundamental Right under Article 21-A, is a landmark in the history of education in India. It read: *"The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine."* With the enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, children were empowered with a justiciable right after enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE).

Parallel developments in the arena of economic policies influenced education substantially. The liberal opening of education sector for private players deepened the existing socio-economic disparities and led to strengthening of dual types of education. The private funded and run institutions attracted the people having better economic fortunes and the public funded institutions served the rest. The private institutions propagated better physical infrastructure and academic environment. The public funded schools starved and just managed to work with whatever limited resources could be dispensed from the government resources. The schools run by private managements were kept out of it the purview of RTE. However sub-clause (c) of clause (1) of Section 12 of the Act mandated all the unaided schools not receiving any kind of aid or grant to meet their expenses from the appropriate Government or local authority to admit in Class 1, to the extent of at least twenty-five per cent of the strength of that class, children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged group in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion. It would have moderated the inequalities in the society and improved the diversity in private schools and consequently would have made education inclusive in the private sector. Nevertheless, most of the private managements thought otherwise. Ultimately it affected the diversity in government run schools too. Meagre resources of the government run institution and of the parents sending their children to such schools told upon the overall health of the school system.

In this backdrop ten years of implementation of RTE Act assume significance. Attaining near universal access to education, equipping schools with better infrastructure, ascertaining the placement of qualified teachers in schools, and striving for better learning outcomes have been the goals all these years for public funded educational institutions. Continual monitoring and independent evaluations apart from indicating successes on many counts marked out many a gap to be filled. The most crucial of these were the quality of education being provided in schools and challenge of strengthening secondary education after the children complete elementary education. UNESCO's Agenda 2030 too endorsed the constant action in these areas.

The access to education should not be misconstrued as enrolment alone. Neither the right to education should have been understood as merely right to schooling. Ramchandran (2018),

while discussing the issue of access, listed all the important education indicators which should be captured correctly while describing access. These include not only school infrastructure, enrolment also attendance, transition, retention, drop out and out of school children. These together will help in explaining the true landscape of education in terms of access. So, physical access is part of larger continuum where transition, retention and learning outcomes cannot be ignored when goal centres on universalisation of education.

The comprehensive meaning of access and the realisation that school dropout should be regarded as the last stage of a dynamic, cumulative and multidimensional process impelled the researchers to study the phenomenon of education exclusion in its entirety. The data to understand the phenomenon of educational exclusion flow from interaction with the students who were at risk of discontinuing their studies, students who dropped out from schools, their parents, their teachers, and school principals. The findings have been elaborated in previous chapters.

It is imperative to look at the problem from where it arises. The school is the arena where the things are in making. An environment of belongingness in school instils a feeling of confidence among the students that they are owned, and they owe much to school. The in-school experiences of the students offer vital insights about the phenomenon of exclusion. The fundamental responsibility to make the school receptive to the students lies with the teachers and the principals. The teaching learning process thus attains centrality. Students come to schools to learn, and teachers are there to help them in their efforts to learn. Interaction with students, studying in schools but at risk of getting excluded and those who dropped out, reveals that most of them faced difficulties in understanding and learning the subjects of study. The difficulties experienced by them were of varying degrees. Feeble academic support system coming from teachers and absence of any substantial academic help from parents aggravated the trauma of students. Most of the teachers were not aware of any withdrawal signals. It hints towards thin possibility of teachers acting as emotional anchors to shaky students. Lack of empathy alienates the students from school and studies. This partially explains the diminishing interest of students in studies. The difficulty faced by such students in comprehending the nuances of various subjects resulting into poor academic performance implied that the pedagogical strategies adopted by the teachers failed to work effectively. The argument extends to the fallibility of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes.

The general environment of school gets tough and demotivating for students who are academically and socially vulnerable when at times they become the recipients of scolding, insulting comments, labelling and physical punishment from teachers and taunts coming from peer. It saps their self-confidence and the will to sustain in the system. Except few, most of the teachers appeared inclined to ascribe other than academic reasons for the exit of students from schools. They recognised the prevalence of curriculum related discomfort among children but believed these contributed minimally towards their leaving the studies. Precisely this is why the parents found their children as aliens to the school environment. The alienation quickens the process of exclusion.

No matter how much the students valued the significance of education in their lives, wished to regularly attend schools, found the teaching learning process interesting and rewarding, enjoyed the enabling patronisation of their considerate and humane teachers, the economic deprivation of the families dampened the prospects of their continuation in the schools, notwithstanding affectionate and moral support from families. Skeletal financial help

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from the State in the form of uniforms, books, stipends, stationery and nutritious food were not regarded sufficient by academically sensitised students and their parents to get to quality education. They believed that for good education comes after paying handsomely for it which they could not and hence left with no other choice but to leave and work somewhere for mere survival. The domestic responsibilities descending upon young children due to ill health of parents restricted their journey on the path of education. Economic insecurities of the families trigger seasonal migration which has the potential to heighten the possibility of educational exclusion of the children. The children donned the mettle responsible adults and decided to leave their studies by taking their parents into confidence. Although the parents never wanted to demotivate their children but at the same time the grim realities restrained them from dissuading their children from leaving schools. Looking back, the dropped-out students regretted their decision of leaving studies as they valued the correspondence of good studies with decent job possibilities.

The social factors operating outside schools emerged as formidable reasons for educational exclusion. The most sensitive period of going out of the school falls between Classes 6 to 9 during which a majority of students are forced to leave the school. The girls were invariably the sufferers of the collective fear of social insecurity and are withdrawn from educational process when the location of school is at a distance from the native place. They were always at the altar when someone was to be chosen for managing the domestic chores and looking after younger siblings. The irony is that largely they accept their fate and readily agree to sacrifice their own future. Separated families and families in constant conflict affect the mental state of children and turn them into uninspired learners on the verge of going out. Differently abled children too face a constant fear of exclusion. The school system fulfils the enabling requirements mechanically. The children need more of a human touch which is sometimes heard to witness. A cold and lacklustre approach drifts the children away from schools.

Conclusion

Strengthening the public education system, ensuring education of equitable quality to all the children, and alleviating all the irritants that threaten their successful completion of learning courses are the pre-requisites of a thriving democracy. The report reflects upon the grey areas in school system which steepens the disengagement of children resulting in their exit and suggests strategies to overcome the infirmities within. We, the people of India, shall be able to redeem the pledge we made to ourselves while adopting our Constitution on January 26, 1950 of securing "Justice - social, economic and political' to all if we continue working to guarantee that no one shall be left behind and no one will be made to suffer exclusion from the genuine educational process.

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Challenges Encountered by Rural Women in Pursuing Higher Education: A Study of Andhra Pradesh, India

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Abstract

Equitable distribution of higher education among different social groups is crucial for overall development, especially in a country which is as diverse as India. Unfortunately, there is a huge disparity between different social groups in their access to higher education in India. The AISHE report 2021-22 says that the enrolment of women (28.5 per cent) in higher education is higher than the overall GER (28.4 per cent) in India. However, the enrolment of rural women in higher education is much lower compared to urban women. According to the Social Consumption of Education report 2018, the GER among urban women was 33.1 per cent but the corresponding figure among rural women was only 21.1 per cent. These data reveal that there is a significant gap between the enrolment of urban and rural women in higher education. Hence, the present study looks at the challenges faced by rural women students in accessing higher education in India. It involved 40 women respondents at the undergraduate level in two colleges from the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, and all of the respondents in this study were residing in rural areas. The study was conducted by using a sequential explanatory (Quan-Qual) mixed method in which the responses were collected to know the problems faced by the respondents in pursuing higher education. After that, an interview schedule was used for further insights from 10 out of 40 respondents. The study explored the familial, economic, locational and social aspects of the respondents including transportation to their higher education institution located in nearby urban area. The study finds that rural women students face many challenges while pursuing higher education. They suggest that marriage, financial issues and safety concerns are the three major impediments faced by rural women students in pursuing higher education. The respondents also highlighted the importance of the attitude of the parents towards higher education.

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Introduction

Access to higher education (HE) in India is influenced by various factors such as caste, gender, locality, income, etc. According to the latest AISHE report for the year 2021-22, while the overall Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education stood at 28.4 per cent, the corresponding figure among SCs and STs is 25.9 and 22.1 per cent respectively. GER among females is marginally higher than the overall GER standing at 28.5. Similarly, the GER among SC and ST women stands at 26.0 and 20.9 per cent respectively which proves the fact that if an individual is in a disadvantageous position because of more than one factor, then it becomes that much harder to get access to higher education. This is because the more the layers of disadvantage are there, the tougher it becomes to access higher education. This paper deals with one such section of the society, which is women students from rural areas.

In India, the enrolment of rural students in higher education is very low compared to their urban counterparts. According to the Social Consumption of Education report by NSSO (2018), the GER of higher education in India was at 23.2 per cent. GER in post-higher secondary level education in urban areas was 34.0 per cent while the corresponding figure in rural areas was only 18.6 per cent. Thus, the data reveal that there is a huge difference in enrolment at post higher secondary level between urban and rural areas.

Literature suggests that students from rural areas face more impediments in accessing higher education (Agumba, Simpson & Ndofirepi 2023, Chakrabarti 2009, Sowl & Crain 2021). Various factors act as impediments for rural students in accessing higher education. Those factors include rural values and socio-cultural systems that are different from the culture in higher education institutions (HEI), the distance to an HEI, and economic, social, political and familial characteristics. In addition, the education levels of the head of the household, cost of higher education, wealth of the family and access to primary education play a crucial role in determining the higher education prospects of rural youth.

Therefore, using adaptive preference theory, this paper looks at the challenges faced by rural women in accessing higher education in India. The question it seeks to answer is: "What are the challenges faced by rural women in accessing higher education?" It examines the effect of socio-economic, locational and familial factors of rural women students on access to their higher education.

Review of Literature

The literature review for this study is broadly divided into three themes.

Factors Adversely Affecting Rural Students

Data and higher education statistics indicate that rural students face challenges in accessing higher education. The factors responsible for such situation range from differences in socio-cultural systems between urban areas (where the higher education institutions are located) and rural areas, the distance from HEIs, meagre financial resources and broader social, economic, political family and individual characteristics (Agumba, Simpson & Ndofirepi 2023). The study also found that rural students find the new academic environment, concepts, work demands and language foreign to them. Other studies also argue that as a majority of the

HEIs are located in urban areas, it becomes challenging for most of the rural students to get aceess to them (Walker & Mathebula 2019).

Hardy (2021), in her literature review study, states that rural students face disadvantages in accessing higher education because of their intersecting identities and backgrounds and other complexities. She examines the role of community, family and school in influencing the access to higher education in rural areas. The author argues that poor economic conditions of the family, limited career options within rural communities and the education of parents affect the higher education prospects of rural students.

Chakrabarty (2009), in her study, highlights the need for different targeting mechanisms for rural and urban students to increase their enrolment in higher education. She argues that it is crucial to understand the rural identity in order to understand the participation of rural youth in higher education. She also discusses the differences in the disciplinary choices between boys and girls.

Sowl & Crain (2021) argue that the college aspirations of rural students are influenced by factors such as student attachment to family and place, the family's/school's/community's message regarding the values of a college degree, academic efficiency and preparation, socio-economic status, perception of the local labour market, education of the parents and geographical location.

All the literature on this theme deals with how different factors such as socio-economic and cultural factors, limited financial resources, adjustment to the urban areas, identities and backgrounds of the rural women students, etc, adversely affect their chances of pursuing higher education.

Challenges Faced by Rural Women in Pursuing Higher Education

Kumar (2021) looked at the challenges faced by rural women in pursuing education. According to him, rural women face challenges which have two main aspects. They include the family challenges and the social challenges faced by women in accessing education. Family challenges include compulsion in doing household work such as cooking meals, caring siblings, fetching water, agricultural works, cleaning and washing etc. The other aspect is social aspect and it includes gender bias, early marriage, eve teasing, harassment and sexual abuse. All these factors affect the education of rural women in India.

Hasan *et al* (2023) looked at the challenges faced by rural women in accessing higher education. It looked at the socio-economic factors, family size and distance to higher education institution. The findings suggest that financial resources play the most important role in attainment of higher education among rural women. The family size also plays an important role. The larger the size of the family the lesser are the chances of higher education for a rural woman. The distance to higher education institution also shows a significant affect. The nearer the institution, a rural woman has the higher chances of attending it.

Mu (2021), in the review article, talks about rural female access to higher education in China. Social and personal economic factors, male dominated relations, patriarchy, low levels of educational aspirations in rural women, gender bias in the family, gender stereotype, poverty, difficulty in employment, etc, are the main reasons that demotivate rural females from enrolling in higher education.

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Exclusion of Students from Rural Areas

James (2001) looks at the participation disadvantage in Australian HEIs by examining the effect of geographical and residential locations and socioeconomic status on higher education access situation. The article says that lower socio-economic status acts as a powerful barrier to higher education especially when it coincides with the effect of rurality. The author states that rural students are more likely to perceive discouraging inhibitors such as the high cost of living, and losing touch with friends and simultaneously they experience lower levels of encouraging factors such as parental encouragement or a rewarding career. The cost of higher education and leaving home act as major barriers for rural students.

Ontiveros (2020) looks at the discouraging factors for rural students in accessing higher education in the context of the USA. The author's finding is that the admission officers are unlikely to recruit from rural communities and rural students also lack the resources that are required to get admission to a college. In addition, the physical distance to higher education institutions and lack of financial resources act as barriers to higher education among rural students.

Hillman (2016) talks about the geography of college opportunities by using a metaphor called educational desserts. The author argues that geography or spatial consecrations are one of the important factors the students consider for pursuing post-secondary education. He states that the policy makers intentionally do not consider the geographical factors while formulating policies related to higher education. Using secondary data, the author finds out that "areas where a large number of families belonging to the Hispanic community and people belonging to lower economic strata reside, have fewer four-year degree colleges when compared to other areas. This study also shows that near the areas where communities with the lowest educational attainment reside, there are more two-year degree colleges and fewer four-year degree colleges.

The literature in this theme looks less access among rural students from the perspective of exclusion. Intersection between social and geographical disadvantages leads to inequalities in access to higher education. Further, the link between residential location, economic status along with influence of rurality affects rural students. Therefore, this theme also highlights the need for considering geographical factors at the policy level.

Varghese, Sabharwal and Malish (2019) argue that "while access to higher education has improved across all the sections of the population due to progressive policies implemented by the State like affirmative action, the rate of progression has varied resulting in the widening of the regional inequalities in the country." By analysing secondary data on the HEIs in the country, this article argues that there is a concentration of HEIs in urban areas. It is due to this phenomenon that students from rural areas are facing more challenges in accessing higher education compared to their urban counterparts.

Methodology

The study was conducted in West Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, India, and 40 female students from two undergraduate colleges were the participants of this study. The samples were formed by using purposive sampling technique. All of them belonged to rural areas. This study was conducted sequentially using sequential-explanatory (quan-qual) mixed method research. First, responses were taken from participants using a questionnaire to

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understand the challenges faced by them in accessing higher education. Based on the quantitative data, qualitative data was also collected from 10 participants from the same sample who were selected and interviewed using a schedule to gain a deeper understanding of the situation. The data thus obtained provided some insight into understanding the challenges faced by rural students in accessing higher education. The quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and a qualitative content analysis technique was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses adaptive preference theory as its framework to understand the challenges faced by rural women in accessing higher education (Figure 1). The term "adaptive preference" was coined by Jon Elster. He defined adaptive preference as the "adjustment of wants to possibilities not the deliberate adaption but a causal process occurring non-consciously. Behind this adaption there is the drive to reduce the tension or frustration that one feels in having wants that one cannot possibly satisfy" (Elster, 1983).

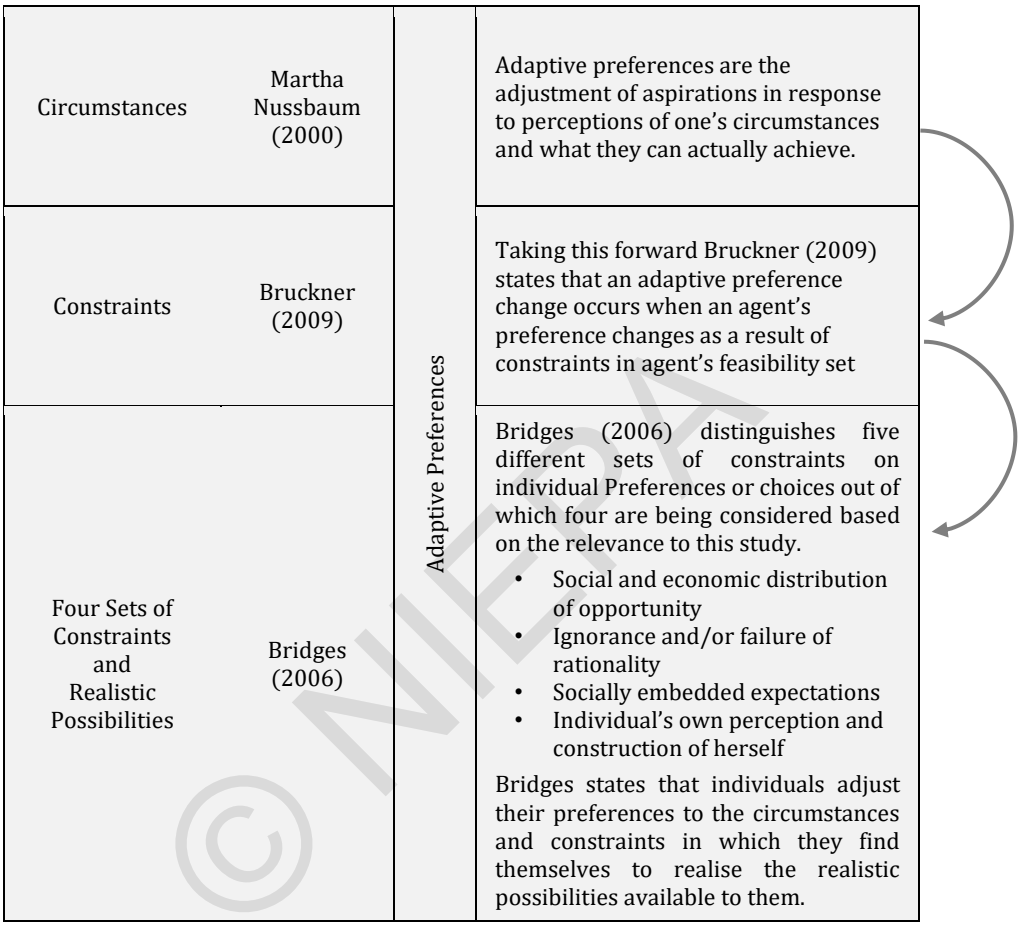
In her work *Women and Human Development*, Martha Nussbaum stated that adaptive preferences are the adjustment of aspirations in response to perceptions of one's circumstances and what they can actually achieve (Nussbaum, 2000). Another core characteristic feature is that "adaptive preferences are formed without one's control or awareness by a causal mechanism that is not of one's choosing." Taking the argument forward, Bruckner (2009) stated that adaptive preference is a preference that is regimented in response to an agent's set of feasible options. A change in adaptive preference occurs if there is a change in the agent's preferences due to a change in the feasible set. The change in feasibility set occurs due to constraints on the preferences of an individual. This study focusses on how the circumstances and constraints of rural women affect their higher education preferences.

Bridges (2006) distinguishes between four different sets of constraints on individual preferences or choices out of which four are being considered based on the relevance to this study. The first constraint on individual preference is of the social and economic distribution of opportunity. This constraint is self-explanatory in the sense that the higher education preferences of an individual are influenced by his/her social status and also by the income and wealth of the family. The second constraint is of ignorance and/or failure of rationality. Ignorance or lack of information or knowledge about higher education opportunities is one of the crucial constraints on the higher education preferences of a rural student and many students especially in rural areas are unaware of the available opportunities (Hughes, 2018; Hillman 2016). The third constraint is of socially embedded expectations. As a part of society and culture, human beings develop certain expectations about how life should be led. As in other aspects of life, parents and society have certain expectations regarding higher education (Sowl & Crain 2021). These socially embedded expectations have a huge influence on the higher education preferences of rural students. The fourth and last constraint is of the individual's own perception and construction of herself. An individual's perception of oneself regarding higher education is built through the above-mentioned aspects such as socioeconomic situation, knowledge about opportunities, socially embedded expectations, and social and cultural capital.

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FIGURE 1

Graphical Representation of Adaptive Preference Theory

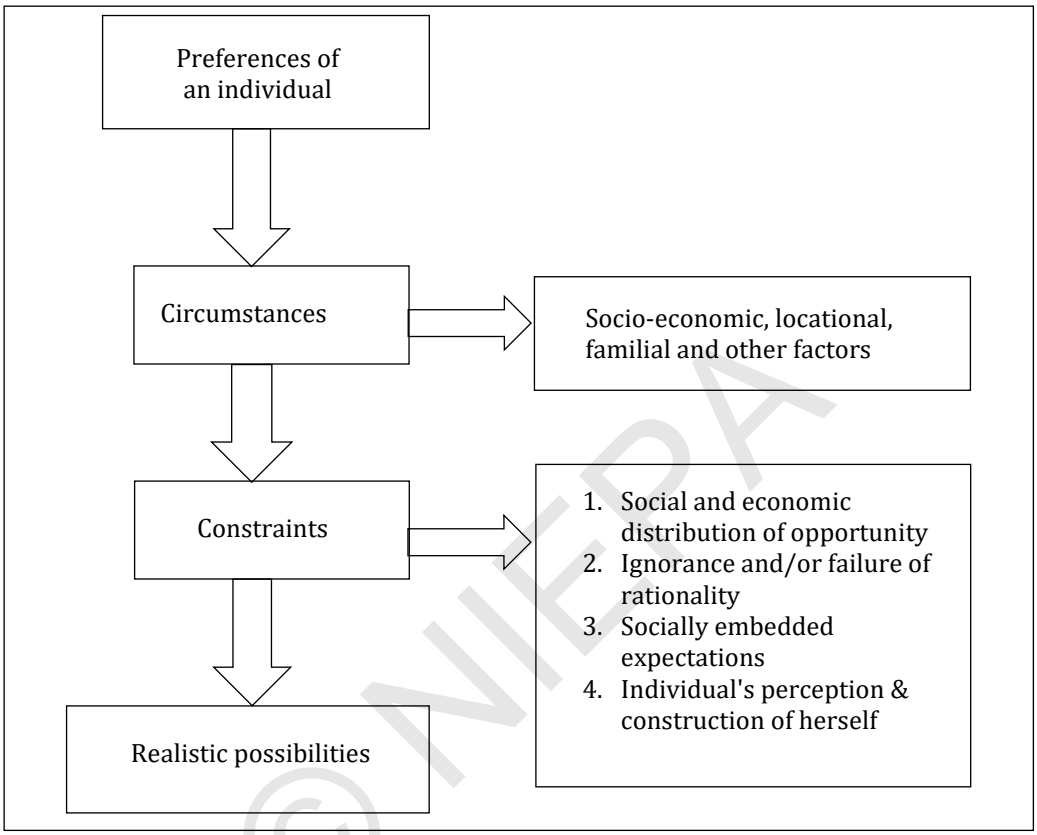


Thus, the preferences of an individual get adjusted to what is feasible as per a consideration of the prevailing circumstances (Figure 2). The circumstances considered for this particular study include socio-economic, locational, and familial factors. Then, the individuals also adjust their preferences considering the four constraints on individual preferences mentioned above. After an individual adjusts his/her preferences or desires considering the prevailing circumstances and constraints in preferences he/she will have realistic possibilities. Realistic possibilities are the actual feasible options that a particular individual has after accounting for the circumstances and constraints. Therefore, using the adaptive preference theory, this study tries to understand the challenges faced by rural women in accessing higher education by considering their circumstances and constraints.

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FIGURE 2

Graphical Representation of the Circumstances in Adaptive Preference Theory



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Findings

Familial Factors: Education of the Parents

Education of the parents plays a crucial role in determining the higher education prospects among rural students (Hardy, 2021). The parents of OBC and SC students are less educated compared to the parents of general-category students. The data suggest that the education levels of parents of rural students are low, especially among the parents of SC respondents. Low levels of educational qualifications among the parents mean that rural students are missing the social, cultural and economic capital and awareness of different opportunities for higher education that educated parents provide their children. One respondent said that "parents need to be provided awareness and should be motivated to send their girls to far places for the sake of higher education, but in my case, they (my parents) were not aware due to lack of education and exposure." Another respondent said, "As parents are

illiterate, they are unwilling to send girls to far places for higher education and because of financial issues too."

For considering the education among the parents, the higher level of educational qualification between the mother and father was considered. 42.5 per cent of the parents had not passed Class 10. Only 15 per cent of the parents had an undergraduate degree. The parents of only 20 per cent of the students pursued education after Class 10. While 36 per cent of the parents of general category students had not passed Class 10, the corresponding figure among the parents of OBC students and SC students was 50 per cent and 75 per cent respectively (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Education of the Parents

Level of Education	*Proportion of Parents*
Below class 10	42.5
Class 10	27.5
Diploma	2.5
Intermediate	2.5
Under Graduation	15

Source: Data collected by the author

Occupation of the Parents

Occupations of parents are directly related to the income and financial stability of the family. Financial stability, in turn, affects the amount of money that can be spent on the higher education of children. The parents of 42.5 per cent of the respondents were involved in agriculture. After agriculture, the greatest number of parents were homemakers, accounting for 20 per cent. Some 10 per cent of the parents worked as a private employee as an accountant in a local school or supervisor in a local factory and other private entities. Another 7.5 per cent of the parents worked as daily wage labour and the same percentage of parents were involved in business. About 5 per cent of the parents worked as masons and another 5 per cent of the parents were involved in shopkeeping and driving. None of the parents of general category students worked as daily wage workers or as masons (Figure 3). The above data show that a majority of the parents are working in low-paying occupations or are involved in ones in which there is no certainty of income. There is a strong correlation between the occupation of the parent and the financial status and stability of the family.

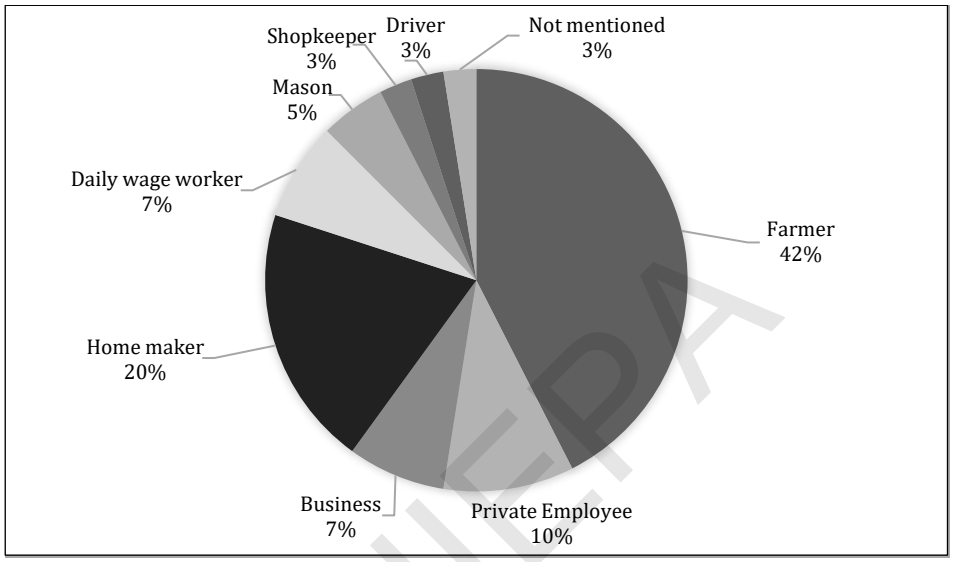
Familial factors such as the education of the parents, occupation of the parents and the size of the family directly affected the higher education prospects of the respondents as those factors had obvious connection with the income of the family. This, in turn, also affects the amount of money that the parents are willing to spend on their child's higher education. The education and occupation of the parents also indirectly affected the higher education of the respondents in the form of awareness of higher education opportunities and also the social and cultural capital shared by them with their children. Due to the lack of required economic, social and cultural capital, the preferences of majority of the respondents were to join in a nearby college for the sake of the degree thereby confirming to the socially embedded

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expectations. Individual perception of herself also plays a major role and all the married respondents of the study never imagined themselves as making their own career.

FIGURE 3

Occupations of the Parents



Source: Data collected by the author

Economic Factors: Annual Income of the Family

The annual income of the family was examined in this study to determine the financial status of the respondents. About 90 per cent of the respondents said that their annual family income is less than 3 lakh per annum while the annual familial income of 5 per cent of respondents was between 5-10 lakh. Some 2.5 per cent of the respondent said their income ranged between 3-5 lakh. No pattern was identified on the lines of the caste but all of the 7.5 per cent of the respondents who had income of more than 3 lakh per annum belonged to the general category (Table 2). As the cost of higher education is increasing at a rapid pace, the financial resources available to rural students, especially for higher education, are limited.

TABLE 2

Annual Income of the Family

Annual Income Range	*Overall*	*General*	*BC*	*SC*
Below 3 lakh	36 (90 per cent)	18	14	4
Between 3-5 lakh	1 (2.5 per cent)	1	0	0
Between 5-10 lakh	2 (5 per cent)	2	0	0
Not answered	1 (2.5 per cent)	1	0	0

Source: Data collected by the author

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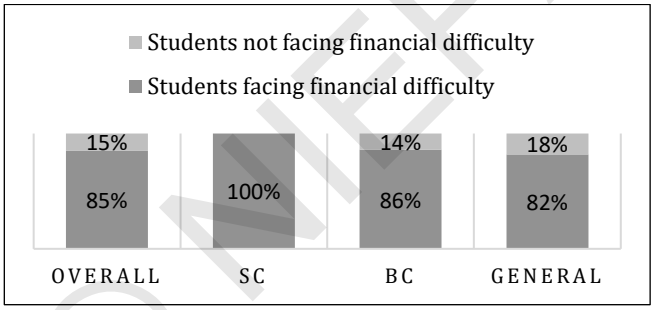
Higher Education and Financial Difficulty

As the income of an overwhelming majority of the respondents is below three lakh per annum, the respondents were asked if they were facing any financial difficulty in pursuing higher education. An overwhelming majority of 85 per cent of the respondents said that they were facing financial difficulty. One of the respondents opined: "I would have liked to go to a better college if financial resources were available but for going to a better college, I have to travel long distances. Because of security reasons, parents never allow us (girls) to study at such places. So, all these factors are there."

All the SC respondents said that they facing financial difficulty while the corresponding percentage among OBCs and general category students stood at 86 per cent and 82 per cent respectively (Figure 4). This situation existed although more than 90 per cent of the respondents were receiving scholarships for pursuing higher education. Such overwhelming responses highlight the fact that financial issues are one of the main hindrances for rural students in accessing higher education.

FIGURE 4

Financial Status of Students in Accessing Higher Education



Source: Data collected by the author

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Financial Resources and College Choice

The respondents were further asked if they would have chosen a better college if financial resources were available. As much as 67.5 per cent of the respondents said they would have chosen a better college if that was the case while 32.5 per cent of the respondents said they would not have chosen a better college anyway. Many of them said that they were not aware of better colleges or opportunities. While 82 per cent of the respondents among general category students said they would have chosen a better college, the corresponding figure among both SC and OBC respondents was only 50 per cent.

This aspect has been included in the study to find out how much lack of financial resources is affecting different sections of rural students. The findings revealed that a significantly higher percentage of general category students were willing to go to better colleges if financial resources were available compared to OBC and SC students. This finding implies that students belonging to the SC and OBC categories face more challenges in accessing higher education, compared to general category students.

When the respondents were asked if they were aware of better higher education opportunities, one respondent said, "Yes, I have heard about such opportunities, but due to financial problems I haven't gone there."

Shortage of financial resources is one of the main challenges if not the main challenge faced by rural students in pursuing higher education. The respondents opined that increased costs of higher education combined with the transport costs are going beyond their affordability. They are not able to afford it due to low paying occupations of their parents. Another respondent said "My family's financial status is not adequate to support my higher education and that is the reason why I am here." The students said they are also not aware of any scholarships or government assistance for their higher education which according to the APT conveys the ignorance of rationality.

This section obviously highlights the fact that social and economic opportunity plays a major role in shaping the preferences of the students. The paucity of it among the respondents affect them by shrinking the spectrum of their realistic possibilities.

Locational Factors: Rural Location and Options in Higher Education Courses

The respondents were asked if their higher education course options were limited due to their location in rural areas. About 77.5 per cent of the respondents said that they had very limited higher education courses to choose from because the nearby colleges had only a limited variety of courses and the students could not find the course of their interest. They were also not able to go to distant colleges because of various factors like security concerns and financial issues. No less than 91 per cent of the general category students felt that rural location limited their opportunities while the corresponding number among BCs and SCs was 75 per cent respectively (Table 3).

TABLE 3

Rural Location and Options in Higher Education Courses

Response	*Overall*	*General*	*BC*	*SC*
Rural locations limited options for higher education courses	31 (77.5 per cent)	20 (91 per cent)	8 (57 per cent)	3 (75 per cent)
Rural location did not limit options in higher education courses	7 (17.5 per cent)	1 (4.5 per cent)	15 (36 per cent)	1 (25 per cent)
Not answered	2 (5 per cent)	1 (4.5 per cent)	1 (7 per cent)	0

Source: Data collected by the author

More than three-fourths of the respondents felt that rural location feel that their location in rural areas limited their higher education course choices. One of the reasons why more than

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90 per cent of the general category students is because they are more aware of the opportunities and are relatively financially stable than others.

One respondent said: "Yes, our higher education options get limited because many times we think of pursuing a course and that course will not be available in a nearby college. Since we cannot go far due to lack of money and security issues, we join the course available in a nearby college." Similarly, another respondent said: "I did not find the course I want in my place so, I chose something that I am not interested in." The reason why the students are not able to move despite knowing that rural location limited their opportunities is the social and economic distribution of opportunity (because their parents had limited number of resources) and socially embedded expectations (the socially influenced expectations from the family) and also ignorance of rationality (not being aware of the available higher education opportunities).

Urban Location and College Admission

When the respondents were asked if they think that they would have got admission to a better college if they were located in an urban area. Some 87.5 per cent of the respondents thought that they would have got admission to a better college if they were located in an urban area. Among the general category students, an overwhelming majority of 95 per cent said that they would have been admitted to a better college. About 85 per cent of the OBC respondents and also 50 per cent of the SC respondents felt so. One respondent said, "The chances of getting admission in a better college increase as urban areas have more colleges and most importantly, I would have had a higher chance of getting admission in the course that I am interested in."

The responses to this question highlight that the respondents felt disadvantaged to be in rural areas, especially in pursuing higher education. This reiterates the fact that SC and OBC students were in a disadvantageous position compared to general-category students in terms of accessing higher education.

Transportation Difficulties in Reaching College

The next aspect that was looked into in this study was whether the students were facing any difficulty in availing transportation facilities to reach the higher education institution. Roughly, 42.5 per cent of the respondents said that they were facing issues in availing transportation facilities. The reasons they gave included security concerns, the high cost of transport, bad condition of roads, and lack of public transportation facilities among others. One respondent said: "I live in a relatively remote village and the government bus comes once in the morning and has a return shuttle only in the evening. If I miss that bus, I have to take a private mode of transportation such as auto which is very expensive. Moreover, there is a very lower frequency of autos from my village to the town." Similarly, another respondent said: "I am facing difficulty because of the unavailability of public transport."

As a significant percentage of rural students are facing this issue, addressing this will yield tangible results. Another respondent said "Yes, of course, facing difficulties due to high cost of transportation."

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Coaching Institution: Admission in a Better College

Coaching centres play a crucial role in the preparation for entrance into higher education (Salim 2004). Therefore, the respondents were asked if they felt they would have been admitted to a better college if good coaching centres were available nearby their area. About 65 per cent of the respondents said they would have been admitted to a better college if good coaching centres were available in nearby areas. Many students also did not know that they could have attended coaching to improve their chances for admission to graduation. This is due to lack of resources and awareness of the existing opportunities which in turn limited the preferences of the students.

Social Factors: Influence of Caste on Higher Education

Caste plays a major role in influencing the higher education prospects of rural students (Chakrabarti, 2009). Hence, the first aspect that was looked into was how caste influenced higher education. The respondents were asked if their caste influenced higher education. One important point to be noted here is that the respondents considered the positive and negative effects of caste on higher education only through the lens of reservation in higher education. About 62.5 per cent of the respondents said that their caste influenced higher education while the remaining 37.5 per cent of the respondents did not feel so. The responses become more interesting if looked at by caste category. No less than 95 per cent of the general category respondents felt that they were negatively affected by the caste due to lack of reservation in higher education. A respondent said, "Yes because of the reservation system in education, I did not get an engineering seat and that is why I joined this course."

The reason behind that overwhelming response according to them was reservations in higher education. Many of the respondents said that it is due to their caste, that they were not able to avail reservations in higher education. They also felt that people from other castes getting higher education opportunities despite attaining lesser marks than them was an injustice. On being asked if caste influenced their higher education, general category participants responded by saying, "Yes, as a student who is not eligible for reservation, we have to get more marks compared to others." Another respondent said, "Yes, we face problems because of reservation for sections."

Only 21 per cent of the BC respondents felt that their education was positively affected by their caste due to reservations while the rest 79 per cent felt that the caste did not affect their higher education. Among SC respondents, only 25 per cent felt that their caste has positively affected higher education due to reservation policy while 75 per cent said that caste did not affect higher education (Table 4). Another respondent belonging to the Scheduled Caste category said, "Yes, we have support of reservation for what we want to achieve."

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TABLE 4

Effect of Caste on Higher Education (Per cent)

Caste category	*Positive effect*	*Negative effect*	*No effect*
General	--	95 per cent	5 per cent
BC	21 per cent	--	79 per cent
SC	25 per cent	--	75 per cent

Source: Data collected by the author

The respondents immediately thought about reservations and they could not think beyond it to share how the caste had either enabled or hindered their higher education. The limited understanding of caste, especially among the general category students, has the potential to demotivate them from pursuing higher education, especially when the family is not financially stable.

Rural Areas and the Position of Female Students

Female students from rural areas are disadvantaged in accessing higher education (Kumari, 2017). Therefore, the respondents were asked if they thought rural girls were in a disadvantageous position compared to boys in terms of pursuing higher education. As many as 62.5 per cent of the respondents opined that girls were in a disadvantageous position while 30 per cent of the respondents said that was not the case. The respondents were asked in what way they thought rural girls were in a disadvantageous position compared to boys in pursuing higher education. The reasons for such a situation include security concerns, marriage and attitude of parents of girl students. One respondent said, "Yes, girls are in a disadvantageous position because of insecurity and forcing for marriage." Another response was "Some parents do not allow girls to go to other places for higher education." However, the respondents also opined that the education of their parents also affected their higher education. A respondent said, "As parents are illiterate, they are unwilling to send girls to far places for higher education and because of financial issues too."

The key point to note here is that while the percentage of respondents who said girls were in a disadvantageous position among the general category students and BC students was similar at 59 per cent and 57 per cent respectively whereas, all the SC category respondents felt that so.

Social factors such as caste and gender affected the higher education prospects of rural girls. SC respondents in this study were found to be the most disadvantaged group in terms of both in financial and socio-cultural capital. The SC respondents had more hurdles apart from the financial ones. The gender aspect also affected the SC female students adversely compared to respondents from the general category and OBC background. The respondents were also affected by socially embedded prejudices and expectations. The respondents opined that parents were not giving as much importance to their education as they were giving to their marriage. A respondent said, "Parents give more priority to boys' education and girls do not have the freedom to get educated." Such attitude of the parents towards their girl's education

also affects the individual perception of herself. Many of the respondents said that even though they are pursuing graduation, after graduation they will get married as per their parents' wish. When asked about their career aspirations many respondents said that they do not have any aspirations or even plans regarding their career.

This attitude definitely reflects the socially embedded expectations of the society in which parents think that education is more important for boys than girls and it might also be due to the limited social and economic resources. They shape the preferences of parents which in turn limit the preferences of the students.

The higher education preferences of the respondents have been limited and influenced by a number of factors. The most important of all of them is education and occupation of the family. The parents of majority of the respondents were not well educated and as a result they could not ensure the right kind of social and economic opportunities for their children and they also could not question the traditional socially embedded expectations such as "education is more important for boys than girls." Rather they promoted such attitude which was a big challenge for the respondents.

About 85 per cent of the respondents said that they face financial difficulty in pursuing higher education and many students also said there is a paucity of financial resources for further studies. Their rural location also limited the opportunities of both the parents and the children. This situation definitely conveys that there is an inequitable distribution of social and economic opportunity.

The socially embedded expectations from a rural woman also makes her not to even think of education once she gets married. All this leads to the self-perception of herself in congruence with the socially embedded expectations of the society and preferences are also shaped in accordance with those expectations which drastically reduced the spectrum of the realistic possibilities for the rural women.

Economic and social disadvantages act as severe impediments in accessing higher education and when both of these combines with rurality and locational factors the impediments caused to higher education by the combination of these factors has a massive effect, as shown by the findings. All these disadvantages put a rural women student in a severe unfavourable position compared to her counterparts in urban areas because of the difference in the social and economic opportunities available in rural and urban areas.

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Conclusion

The findings suggest that rural women face challenges due to their location in rural areas, because of their gender, socio-economic situation, socially embedded expectations, lack of awareness regarding opportunities, and also individual perception of oneself. The circumstances and constraints on the preferences of respondents meant that their set of feasible options and realistic possibilities were very limited. Respondents belonging to the general category appeared to have lesser constraints and better circumstances compared to the Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Class students. However, all the respondents were adversely affected due to their gender. This was because as a girl from a rural area, the respondents had to overcome the hurdles such as socially embedded expectations like marriage, lack of safe transportation facilities, the unwillingness of the parents to send their girls to far places, especially for higher education, negative attitude towards the education of girls. This paper also found that the understanding of caste among the respondents is very

shallow. They are considering caste as only a ticket to avail reservations in higher education. This limited understanding of caste leads to resentment towards the disadvantaged section which is antithetical to the sole purpose of reservation. In addition, such an understanding of caste also leads to discouragement and disappointment among the general category students because they think no amount of hard work can get them a seat in a better college because of a lack of reservation. Hence it becomes necessary to broaden the understanding of caste among students.

The major concerns expressed by the respondents regarding higher education — such as less number of colleges in rural areas, very few options in higher education courses in colleges in rural areas, lack of proper infrastructure and trained teachers, less amount of scholarships, increasing awareness on the importance of higher education, providing awareness among students and parents regarding government schemes and scholarships regarding higher education, increasing the minimum legal age for a girl's marriage and others similar issues — should be addressed as soon as possible. However, increasing the enrolment of rural students in higher education is not a short-term task as it involves making the students and parents understand the emancipatory nature of higher education. The findings of this paper show the direction towards increasing access to higher education, especially in the context of India.

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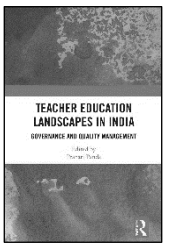
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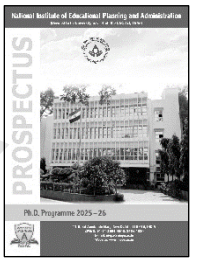
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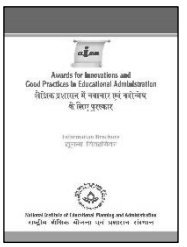
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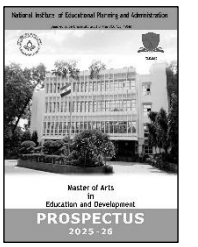


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Faculty Perspectives on Flexibility and Autonomy: A Generational Analysis of Workplace Preferences in Delhi-NCR Higher Education Institutions

Ritu Atheya*

Abstract

In today's fast-changing work environment, organisations are facing the brunt of managing a multi-generational workforce. Every generation has unique expectations, preferences and work styles. These differences stem from the distinct social, cultural and technological experiences brought by them in the generation they grew up. Recognising and embracing these differences may help in creating inclusive strategies, enhance organisational teamwork, reduce conflicts, and boost overall productivity. Effectively understanding and addressing the generational variations is essential for fostering a collaborative and productive work culture. The challenge becomes even more significant in academic institutions, where faculty from different generations and diverse backgrounds work closely in shaping the future of education. In the educational context, generational differences are particularly evident in the varying expectations and approaches to teaching and learning. Focussing on the generational gap between Millennials/Gen Z and older cohorts (Gen X/Baby Boomers), the study aims to investigate faculty opinions on flexibility and autonomy in higher education institutes chosen for the study in Delhi and the National Capital Region. With increasing demands for flexibility and autonomy at the workplace, it is imperative to examine the factors impacting educators' job satisfaction, work-life balance and professional independence. In today's scenario, recognising these changing dynamics is the key to retain talented faculty members and boost morale. The study's sample comprised 200 faculty members from different universities/colleges, The participants were divided into two groups: 100 Gen X/Baby Boomers and 100 Millennials/Gen Z. Faculty opinions were assessed on technological integration, curriculum autonomy, and flexible teaching arrangements. The results may help educational institutions to create policies that meet the demands of various generations while improving faculty well-being and institutional efficacy by offering insightful information on what faculty expect in terms of workplace autonomy and flexibility. The findings may also provide meaningful insights for institutional leaders aiming to promote generational harmony, encourage innovation, and cultivate a balanced and inclusive academic work environment.

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Introduction

The modern workplace is undergoing significant transformation, shaped by changing demographics, increasing diversity and evolving professional expectations (Twenge, 2010). In this fast-paced environment, retention and meeting the expectations of the multi-generational workforce is of paramount importance. With employees ranging from Baby Boomers and Generation X to Millennials and Generation Z, the workplace has become the blend of diverse work styles, varied work habits, expectations and communication approaches. Each generation brings unique perspectives shaped by their social, cultural, economic and technological experiences which they gathered (Schullery, 2013). These differences not only influence employees' approach to work but also their attitudes toward workplace flexibility, communication, collaboration and career development (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008).

The workforce today is the most diverse in terms of age. Employees of four to five generations often work side by side in firms these days. These groups are defined as: Silent Generation (Traditionalists) who was born between 1928-1945, Baby Boomers who was born between 1946-1964, Generation X who was born between 1965-1980, Generation Y (Millennials) who was born between 1981-1996, and Generation Z, born from the mid-1990s to early 2010 (Parry and Urwin, 2011).

A multigenerational workforce strengthens an organisation by combining multiple strengths, as every stage of life offers different experiences. Kupperschmidt (2000) investigated methods for dealing with multigenerational workers in the workplace. Younger workers are more technology -savvy and highly adaptive to rapidly changing environment, while experienced and older workers have more wealth of information, diverse experiences that help them make wise decisions (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010). The symbiotic collaboration of fresh innovation with wisdom from the experience enhances productivity.

The education sector in India, particularly in higher education institutes and colleges are experiencing significant shifts and transformations. Since social, educational, and technical settings are always changing, teaching-learning processes should also be reformed to abreast with the change. It will additionally increase the levels of student involvement (Nita & Guțu, 2023). Higher education institutions in Delhi-NCR employs faculty members with multiple generations covering Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and the Generation Z. Faculty members from different generational cohorts bring diverse perspectives on work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). With the advancement of technology and expansion of remote learning opportunities, students and faculty have greater access to flexible learning and teaching environments. Millennials and Gen Z prioritise flexibility and autonomy in both their education and careers, more than the previous generations.

The older generations often value stability, traditional classroom interactions and hierarchical structures whereas younger faculty members aspire for flexible work arrangements, greater autonomy in curriculum design, and seamless technology-integration in teaching. The differences in their preferences impact faculty job satisfaction, institutional policies, and overall teaching effectiveness (Bennett, Pitt, & Price, 2012). Recognising and understanding these generational preferences is crucial for educational institutions to foster an inclusive and effective academic environment (Swami, 2024).

Interest in flexible work arrangements (FWAs) in higher education was growing even before global pandemic. However, the demand and expectations to have flexibility or work

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remotely have surged significantly (Shepard & McNaughtan, 2024). As the demand for flexibility and autonomy increases across industries, higher education institutes must adapt and align with the evolving needs and expectations. Policies that overlook generational differences negatively impacts faculty's engagement leading to reduced job satisfaction and flag challenges for faculty retention. This study aims to understand faculty perspectives on workplace flexibility and autonomy across generational cohorts in selected higher education institutions available in the Delhi NCR region. By gaining insights from Millennials/Gen Z and Gen X/Baby Boomers faculty, this research seeks to offer valuable insights for policymakers and college administrators to foster a balanced, engaging and productive academic work environment.

Digital technologies have become a transformative force in education. Educational resources, interactive and digital tools aids in improving the classroom atmosphere and make the teaching-learning process more conducive (Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, & Suman, 2022). There is little research on how generational variations affect the demand for flexibility and autonomy in the higher education industry, especially in Delhi-NCR colleges, despite the growing use of digital technologies and flexible learning environments. The findings of this study are crucial for colleges to implement policies that support a positive learning environment and boost faculty output while accommodating the changing preferences of various generational groups.

Literature Review

The literature review on generational differences at the workplace highlights the significant impact these variations have on work dynamics, particularly in the context of higher education. Researches consistently emphasise the increasing need for flexibility, autonomy and work-life balance, especially for Millennials and Gen Z, while older generations prioritise job security and structured roles. Recognising these evolving preferences is crucial for fostering an inclusive work environment as institutions adapt to shifting expectations. The review of literature examines key studies that explore generational differences and their impact on faculty satisfaction and engagement.

Autonomy and Flexibility

Autonomy refers to freedom or liberty for self-governance. It is also defined as freedom given to a person, group, or institution to perform a task on its own without any external control. Autonomy is also referred as academic freedom. It can apply both to institutional settings and to individual faculty members, allowing them the freedom to make independent decisions within their roles. According to CABE (2005), there are three key types of autonomy in higher education. *Academic Autonomy*: Autonomy involves designing academic curriculum, evaluating students, appointing faculty, and forming academic collaborations, establishing new courses. *Administrative Autonomy:* Administrative Autonomy relates to institutional management, including staffing decisions, accountability norms, and grievance redressal systems. *Financial Autonomy* involves managing funding, resource generation, budgeting, and audits. Together, these forms enable institutions to function more independently and efficiently. However, in the context of teachers, academic autonomy or freedom holds even greater significance. Academic Freedom/autonomy assures teachers the

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liberty to express their opinions, have open discussions and explore ideas without fear of punishment or negative consequences (Mitchell, 2019).

Another classification of autonomy is substantive and procedural (Kolke, 2003). In context of higher education, *substantive autonomy* allows teachers the freedom to make key academic decisions, such as designing curricula, setting research directions, and determining assessment methods for quality education and standards. *Procedural autonomy* refers to the freedom educators have in managing their teaching processes, including planning schedules, selecting instructional methods, and organising classroom activities. Both forms are essential for fostering academic excellence and institutional effectiveness.

Flexibility can be defined as 'the capacity to change and to adapt to a challenging environment.' Furthermore, Georgsdottir and Getz (2004) distinguished between adaptive and spontaneous flexibility. *Adaptive flexibility* enables a person to shift his or her perspective on an occurring problem and to use new strategies if the existing methods no longer work. *Spontaneous flexibility* describes a person's tendency to search for various ways to deal with a problem without external pressure. To cope with this external pressure 'to adapt to a challenging environment,' adaptive flexibility may be a useful ability for faculty members. For decades, flexibility has been a focus of attention in the field of education. It is often associated with the terms 'online/hybrid learning,' 'flexible work schedules' and 'self-paced teaching-learning.' Flexibility for teachers in higher education institutions plays a crucial role in enhancing teaching effectiveness, fostering work-life balance, and adapting to diverse student needs and evolving educational demands.

Generational disparities in the dynamics of the workplace

Bennett, Pitt and Price (2012), in their study 'Understanding the Impact of Generational Issues in the Workplace,' examine the impact of generational differences on workplace dynamics. It was mentioned that understanding generational issues at the workplace is critical to foster effective communication and to manage expectations across different age groups. The authors stress the importance of acknowledging diverse work values and preferences to bring organisational change and enhance organisational effectiveness. Specifically, it was pointed out that Millennials and Gen Z value innovation, flexibility and work-life balance in comparison to their older generations who prioritise more structured roles, job security and loyalty to the organisation. Their findings highlight the need to implement tailored strategies for addressing and accommodating generational differences.

Similarly, Deal, Altman and Rogelberg (2010) explored the distinctive characteristics of Millennials and their workplace aspirations. Their study highlighted and talked about the challenges organisations face in meeting Millennials' expectations for flexibility, technology integration, and collaborative work environment. The research also emphasised that millennials prioritise meaningful work, work-life balance, and digital tools for communication and team-work more than previous generations. Their findings suggested that organisations, particularly in education sector, should rethink, reassess workplace policies to attract and retain Millennial employees, emphasising autonomy and flexibility.

On similar lines, Gursoy, Maier and Chi (2008) conducted the study 'Generational Differences: An Examination of Work Values and Generational Gaps in the Hospitality Workforce,' exploring the differences in work values across age groups in the hospitality industry. Their study revealed significant generational gaps in work values, with younger

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employees placing greater emphasis on flexibility, autonomy, and career growth whereas stability and long-term career pathways are more important to older workers. Their study provided valuable insights about generational variations impacting productivity, retention, and work satisfaction. Though research was primarily focussed on the hospitality industry, the findings are also relevant and applicable in education sector too, where generational differences coexist and faculty value flexibility and autonomy.

Impact of Technology and Digital Learning Environment

The digital age has opened up numerous opportunities for educational institutions in offering dynamic, interactive and engaging learning environment for the students. Soly *et al* (2021), in their study 'Technological Perspectives of Education for Generation Z and Generation Alpha,' highlighted the shift from traditional teaching methods to technology-driven approaches for enhancing student engagement. The research also stressed upon the role of digital advancements in making learning more immersive and interactive for Generation Z and Generation Alpha. Additionally, it explored how these generations adapt to technology by analysing their distinct preferences and evolving learning behaviours.

A different study by Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, and Suman (2022) also focussed upon the role of digital technologies in education, particularly in enhancing flexibility and autonomy for faculty members. The study highlighted that while younger faculty members are more tech-savvy, but older faculty may require additional training and support to fully leverage its benefits. The study emphasised the need for institutions to create a supportive culture that ensures seamless technology integration across all generational cohorts.

Oh and Reeves (2013) examined generational disparities in their study, 'Generational differences and the integration of technology in learning, instruction, and performance,' with special emphasis upon the usage of educational technology for training and learning by the Millennial Generation. It was proposed in their study that technology integration should be incorporated and backed by pedagogical effectiveness rather than assumptions about generational traits, considering younger and older learners' specific needs.

In the year 2000, Kupperschmidt, in her study 'Multigeneration Employees: Strategies for Effective Management,' shared strategies for managing multigenerational workforce particularly in healthcare sector. The researcher emphasised the importance of understanding the values and expectations across generational cohorts to promote effective communication and collaboration for bringing meaningful results and productive work environment.

Impact on Job Satisfaction, Professional Freedom and Work-Life Balance

Lyons and Kuron (2014) provided a comprehensive analysis of generational differences in the workplace, emphasising how these differences affect employee behaviour and job satisfaction in their study 'Generational Differences in the Workplace: A Review of the Evidence and Directions for Future Research.' Their research indicated that Millennials and Gen Z demand flexibility, work-life balance and opportunities for personal development. In contrast, older generations tend to prioritise job security and stability.

Likewise, Parry and Urwin (2011) conducted a thorough analysis of the disparities in work values across generations, providing information on variational impact upon

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organisational performance and job satisfaction. Their research highlighted the increasing significance of flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance, particularly for younger generations, with a strong emphasis on Millennials.

The author stresses that organisations, including those in the higher education sector, must adjust to the evolving expectations to keep their workforce motivated and engaged.

Schullery (2013), in her study 'Workplace Engagement and Generational Differences in Values,' investigated the relationship between workplace engagement and generational differences in values. Her study showcased that Millennials and Gen Z value work environments that offer flexibility, autonomy, and opportunities for personal development. These preferences contrast with those of older generations, who tend to value job security and structured roles. Schullery's findings suggest that educational institutions must adapt their workplace policies to accommodate these generational differences to enhance faculty engagement and satisfaction.

In a 2015 report on the future of work, the Pew Research Centre examined how workplace dynamics are influenced by generational shifts. The research noted several important trends, such as the rising need for professional development and advancement, the growing desire for flexible work schedules, and the integration of technology.

Nita and Guțu (2023) also examined the ways in which leadership and digital transformation impacted student engagement in higher education through their study entitled 'The role of leadership and digital transformation in higher education students' work engagement.' The findings suggested that effective leadership, coupled with digital tools usage, can enhance faculty autonomy and work-life balance, ultimately boosting engagement and satisfaction. They highlighted the importance of recognising generational preferences to improve faculty well-being and productivity.

In the article 'Navigating Cultural or Generational Differences in Education', Swami (2024) discussed about the challenges for managing cultural and generational differences in education sector. The researcher emphasised the importance of recognising the diverse needs and expectations of faculty across generations to create more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Preferences for Flexibility and Autonomy in the Education Sector

Twenge (2010), in his study 'The Value of Work Flexibility: Staff Perceptions in Higher Education,' reviewed and presented the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes. The study highlighted that Millennials and Gen Z highly value work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy, whereas older generations tend to prioritise stability and security. Twenge's findings are crucial for understanding the generational shifts in faculty preferences for flexibility and autonomy in higher education.

Another study titled 'Conceptualising Autonomy in Higher Education' by Sandhu (2015) reported that autonomy in higher education institutions leads to higher quality and assist in attainment of better performance goals with regard to teaching and learning.

Shepard and McNaughtan (2024) examined the benefits of flexible work schedules from the viewpoint of higher education staff. Their results showed that, particularly for younger generations, flexibility is a crucial component for their job satisfaction. The difficulties of establishing flexible work schedules were also covered in the study, especially for senior faculty members who might not be as tech-savvy or accustomed to digital teaching techniques.

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Faculty Comfort with Integrating Technology in Teaching and Learning

This section explores the comfort level of faculty with digital tools for teaching and impact of technology on work dynamics and teaching environments, flexibility and autonomy in their roles.

Çelik and Baturay (2024), in their paper 'Technology and Innovation in Shaping the Future of Education,' highlighted the potential of technology and innovation in advancing education. It was reported that in this era of rapid technological advancements and global shifts, traditional paradigms of education are no longer sufficient. Teaching and learning effectively in today's world require continuous change and innovation. Attempt was also made to discuss the importance of fostering a learning environment that prioritises learner-centered approaches and encourages educators to innovate by utilising the power of technology to create meaningful educational experiences.

Another study on 'Faculty Attitudes towards Integrating Technology and Innovation' showed that technology is important for teaching and learning in the 21st century (Marzilli *et al*, 2014). The study found that faculty members perceived that technology would play a bigger role in higher education in the future. However, some faculty expressed concerns that students' increasing dependence on technology might lead to situations where technology use is imposed rather than chosen. Despite these concerns, the study stressed that technology cannot replace the value of knowledgeable, caring faculty or the personal interaction between faculty and students.

Objectives

General Objective: To examine faculty perspectives on flexibility and autonomy across different generations (Millennials, Gen Z and Gen X, Baby Boomers) in higher education institutes of the Delhi NCR region.

Specific Objectives

- To evaluate the significance of flexibility in the academic workplace, identifying the most valued aspects and the level of satisfaction with existing flexibility options.
- To assess faculty perspectives on autonomy, examining its importance, the most valued aspects, and the factors limiting their autonomy in the education sector.
- To explore generational differences in faculty preferences for flexibility and autonomy in their work.
- To identify faculty comfort with using technology in teaching and learning, and its impact on their views on flexibility and autonomy across different generations.

Research Methodology

Study Design: A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used to compare the preferences of faculty for flexibility and autonomy at workplace between Millennials/Gen Z and Gen X/Baby Boomers in higher education institutes.

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Locale of the Study: The study was conducted in Delhi-NCR region, a major educational hub in India with several renowned and prestigious colleges. This locale was selected as it provides an ideal setting to explore generational differences in faculty teaching and learning preferences across institutions. Additionally, its accessibility ensured convenience for the researcher.

Sampling Size and Population

- The sample from educational institutions/colleges were categorised into two groups based on the generational divide — Millennials and Gen Z, and Gen X and Baby Boomers for ensuring adequate representation of both the groups.
- A total of 200 respondents (faculty members) from various colleges located in Delhi NCR region were selected for the study. Out of 200 respondents, 100 respondents from Millennials and Gen Z (aged 18-38) and 100 respondents from Gen X and Baby Boomers (aged 39-65) were taken for the study.
- Further, the sample included 50 faculty members from each generational cohort — Millennials, Gen Z, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. This balanced representation of faculty from each group provides a comprehensive overview analysis of generational preferences and expectations regarding flexibility and autonomy in the educational environment.

Sampling Technique

- Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that both generational groups- Millennials and Gen Z (aged 18-38) and Gen X and Baby Boomers (aged 39-65) are adequately represented in the sample.

Sampling Procedure

- Within each generational stratum, random sampling was used to select faculty members across departments ensuring varied disciplines and subject areas. The study included faculty members from both full-time and part-time or guest positions to provide a holistic perspective on generational differences in teaching preferences, flexibility, and autonomy within the higher education institutes.

Methods of Data Collection

- A structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses on faculty preferences regarding flexibility in teaching and learning, as well as autonomy in course structure and teaching methods.

Data Analysis: The data collected through the questionnaires were analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), and descriptive statistics were used to gather responses from different generational groups.

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Analysis and Discussion

The collected data were analysed and interpreted on the basis of the following key areas:

- *Demographics:* Overview of respondent characteristics.
- *Flexibility Preferences:* Examining the significance of flexibility, the most valued aspects, satisfaction with existing flexibility options and challenges faced by the respondents in achieving flexibility within the educational environment.
- *Autonomy Preferences:* Assessing the importance of autonomy, the most valued aspects, satisfaction with available autonomy and factors limiting autonomy in the educational setting.
- *Generational Perspectives:* Exploring how generational differences influence preferences for flexibility and autonomy in education, respondents' comfort with integrating technology in teaching-learning and perceived generational differences.

Age Group

- The demographic profile provides insights into the diverse composition of faculty members selected for the study across various higher education institutes. Out of 200 participants, each age group is equally represented, i.e. 25 per cent from each category which is 50 respondents from Gen Z (18–25), Millennials (26–38), Gen X (39–50), and Baby Boomers (51–65).
- Efforts were made to ensure equal representation of 100 Millennials/Gen Z and 100 Gen X/Baby Boomers, providing a balanced exploration of generational perspectives on flexibility and autonomy in the education sector.

Employment Type

- Among faculty respondents, 72 per cent were full-time employees, while 28 per cent were part-time or guest faculty, reflecting the staffing pattern in the selected educational institutions as reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Demographic Variables and Employment Status of Faculty Respondents across Generational Cohorts (N-200)

Demographic Variable	*Category*	*Number of Respondents*	*Percentage*
Age	18–25 years (Gen Z)	50	25%
	26–38 years (Millennials)	50	25%
	39–50 years (Gen X)	50	25%
	51–65 years (Baby Boomers)	50	25%
Employment Status	Full-time	144	72%
	Part-Time/Guest	56	28%

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Flexibility

As work environments evolve, flexibility has become a defining factor in faculty satisfaction and engagement. The results are reported in Table 2.

- *Importance of Flexibility:* Flexibility is a key factor in workplace satisfaction, particularly among younger faculty members. When surveyed, 82 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z considered workplace flexibility very important, compared to 64 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers. This indicates that younger generations prioritise flexibility to align with their evolving lifestyles and professional aspirations, while older generations, though valuing structured work environments, still recognise its benefits.
- *Most Valued Flexibility:* Regarding the most valued aspect of flexibility, 40 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z faculty members preferred the ability to choose their own work schedules, followed by 35 per cent favouring online or hybrid teaching models. These preferences reflect their desire for adaptable work structures that support both professional and personal goals. Conversely, 55 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers valued self-paced instruction, emphasising autonomy and control over their schedules rather than external flexibility.
- *Satisfaction with Current Flexibility:* Satisfaction levels also varied by generation. Millennials and Gen Z were more satisfied (56 per cent) with current flexibility options compared to 43 per cent of older faculty members. However, 57 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers expressed dissatisfaction, feeling that institutional policies did not adequately meet their needs.

TABLE 2

Faculty Perceptions of Flexibility across Generational Cohorts (N-200)

Flexibility (Response Categories)	*Millennials & Gen Z (N = 100)*	*Gen X & Baby Boomers (N = 100)*
Importance of Flexibility		
Very Important/Important	82%	64%
Neutral/Not Important	18%	36%
Most Valued Flexibility		
Flexible Schedules	40%	25%
Online/Hybrid Options	35%	20%
Self-paced Learning/Teaching	25%	55%
Satisfaction with Current Flexibility Offered by the Institution		
Very Satisfied/Satisfied	56%	43%
Neutral/Dissatisfied	34%	57%

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Challenges Faced in Achieving Flexibility

Figure 1 highlights the barriers to workplace flexibility across generations which are as follows:

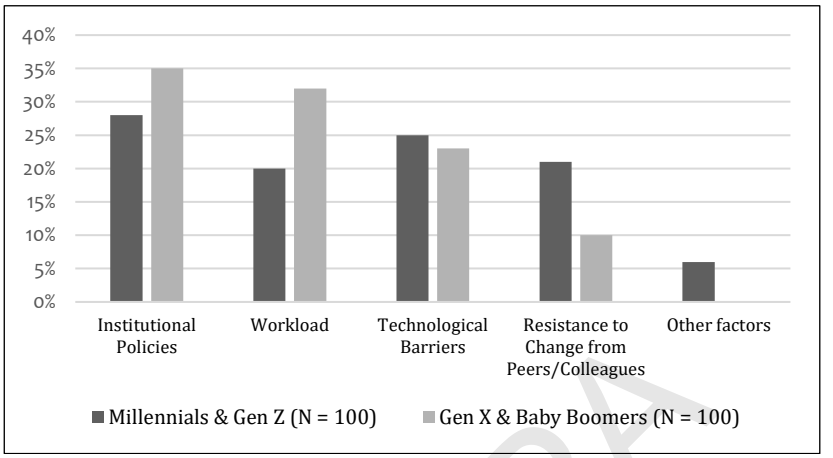
- *Institutional Policies:* Institutional policies are a significant barrier to workplace flexibility, particularly for Gen X and Baby Boomers (35 per cent), compared to Millennials and Gen Z (28 per cent). Older faculty members often face rigid policies that restrict their ability to work flexibly. Furthermore, they may feel constrained by policies that are not aligned with their desire for autonomy and work-life balance.
- *Workload:* Workload is a key challenge for both groups but affects older generations more. While 32 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers cite workload as a major concern, only 20 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z feel the same. Older faculty members typically juggle teaching, administrative, and research responsibilities, making work-life balance more difficult.
- *Technological Barriers:* Despite being more tech-savvy, 25 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z still struggle with technology, often due to inadequate access or insufficient training. In contrast, 23 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers face technological challenges, likely due to lower reliance on digital tools. Older faculty members who do encounter tech issues may find it harder to adapt to new platforms designed to support flexibility.
- *Resistance to Change:* Younger faculty (21 per cent) experience greater resistance from colleagues compared to older faculty (10 per cent). Their preference for flexible hours, remote teaching, and hybrid models often clashes with traditional teaching approaches, leading to pushback.
- *Other Factors:* Some younger faculty reported additional, unspecified challenges, likely related to personal or institutional constraints.

Millennials and Gen Z face technological barriers and peer resistance, while Gen X and Baby Boomers struggle with institutional policies and workload. Tailored flexibility initiatives-such as tech support for younger faculty and policy reforms for older faculty can help create a more inclusive work environment. Addressing these distinct needs can improve flexibility for all generations.

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FIGURE 1

Challenges Faced in Achieving Flexibility in Education Environment



Autonomy

Autonomy is widely valued in academia but different generations perceive and prioritise it in distinct ways. The results are reported in Table 3.

- *Importance of Autonomy:* Autonomy is highly valued across generations, with 80 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z faculty considering it very important or important, compared to 70 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers. Younger faculty emphasise autonomy as it grants greater control over their teaching pedagogy, research approaches and overall academic responsibilities, aligning with their preference for flexibility. Older faculty members also value independence, though their perspective is shaped by traditional academic structures. The growing demand for autonomy reflects evolving expectations in the academic landscape.
- *Most Valued Autonomy:* While both generations prioritise autonomy, their preferences differ. Millennials and Gen Z prefer setting their own teaching and learning goals (36 per cent) and using diverse evaluation methods (34 per cent). They value student-centered and innovative teaching approaches, experimenting with flexible learning methods and assessments. Conversely, Gen X and Baby Boomers prioritize autonomy in designing course content, structure, and materials (48 per cent). They emphasise discipline-specific knowledge, academic rigor, and curriculum stability over pedagogical flexibility. This generational divide highlights differing views on workplace freedom and autonomy, older faculty favour subject mastery, while younger faculty seek pedagogical innovation.
- *Satisfaction with Current Autonomy:* Millennials and Gen Z report higher satisfaction (70 per cent) with workplace autonomy compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers (60 per cent). Notably, 40 per cent of older faculty express dissatisfaction, likely due to rigid institutional policies limiting their ability to exercise autonomy.

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Faculty across generations value autonomy differently: Millennials and Gen Z prefer flexible teaching, while older faculty prioritise curriculum control. Institutions should adopt a balanced approach to meet these diverse needs, enhancing faculty engagement and job satisfaction.

TABLE 3

Faculty Perceptions of Autonomy across Generational Cohorts

Autonomy (Response Categories)	*Millennials & Gen Z (N = 100)*	*Gen X & Baby Boomers (N = 100)*
Importance of Autonomy		
Very Important/Important	80%	70%
Neutral/Not Important	20%	30%
Most Valued Autonomy		
Choosing Course Content/Materials	30%	48%
Setting Learning/Teaching Goals	36%	24%
Freedom in Evaluation Methods	34%	28%
Satisfaction with Current Autonomy		
Very Satisfied/Satisfied	70%	60%
Neutral/Dissatisfied	30%	40%

Figure 2 illustrates factors limiting faculty autonomy across generational cohorts:

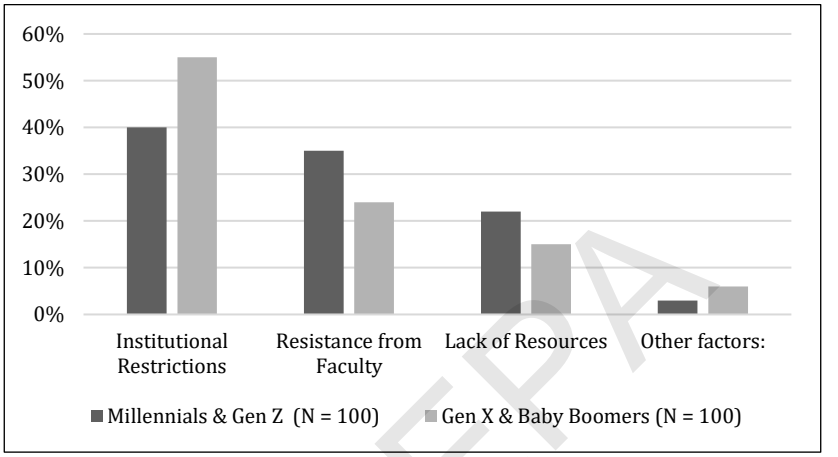
- *Institutional Restrictions:* Institutional restrictions pose significant challenges to faculty autonomy, with 55 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers feeling constrained by rigid policies compared to 40 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z. Older faculty struggle with long-standing traditional systems with fixed structures limiting their flexibility in course design, assessment, and teaching methods, causing stress and frustration while younger faculty find it difficult to implement new ideas due to standardised procedures.
- *Resistance from Faculty:* Resistance from colleagues is another barrier, affecting 35 per cent of Millennials and Gen Z who face pushback when adopting innovative teaching methods. In contrast, 24 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers experience occasional disagreements but encounter less resistance overall. This highlights the need for institutions to foster open discussions and collaborative teaching approaches to bridge generational gaps.
- *Lack of Resources:* Limited resources hinder autonomy, particularly for Millennials and Gen Z, with 22 per cent facing challenges due to insufficient access to modern tools and digital technologies. In contrast, only 15 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers report similar issues, being more accustomed to traditional methods.
- *Other Factors:* Additionally, 3 per cent of younger faculty cite bureaucratic delays and slow administrative processes as barriers, while 6 per cent of older faculty struggle with structural limitations.

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To enhance autonomy, institutions must revise policies, encourage collaboration, and invest in modern resources, fostering an inclusive and adaptive academic environment.

FIGURE 2

Factors Limiting Autonomy in Education Environment across Generational Cohorts



ONLINE

Generational Differences Affect Preferences for Flexibility and Autonomy in Education

As per Table 4, approximately 90 per cent of Millennial and Gen Z faculty believed that age differences significantly influence work preferences, particularly in terms of flexibility and independence. These younger generations often prefer innovative, technology-focussed methods, which differ from the traditional methods favoured by older colleagues. In contrast, about 60 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomer teachers also acknowledge that age differences affect these preferences, indicating that they understand the needs and methods can vary with age. Still, 25 per cent of this group were uncertain, suggesting some ambiguity or hesitation in their full acknowledgement and understanding of how generational differences influence work preferences.

Comfort with Technology for Teaching/Learning

Almost half (45 per cent) of the younger faculty (Millennials & Gen Z) were found 'very comfortable' in adopting technology, and another 30 per cent were 'somewhat comfortable' (Table 4). This high comfort level reflects their reliance on digital tools, online resources and preparedness in using innovative teaching methods. However, only 15 per cent of older faculty (Gen X and Baby Boomers) felt 'very comfortable' with technology, and 35 per cent are 'somewhat comfortable.' A significant portion remains neutral (30 per cent) or uncomfortable (20 per cent), reflecting their slower adaptation to newer technologies and depict an inclination towards traditional teaching methods.

TABLE 4

Generational Differences in Preferences for Flexibility, Autonomy, and Technology Adoption in Education (N=200)

Question	*Response Categories*	*Millennials & Gen Z (N = 100)*	*Gen X & Baby Boomers (N = 100)*
Generational differences affect preferences for flexibility and autonomy in education.	Yes	90%	60%
	No	5%	15%
	Not Sure	5%	25%
Rate your comfort level with adopting technology for teaching/learning.	Very Comfortable	45%	15%
	Somewhat Comfortable	30%	35%
	Neutral	15%	30%
	Somewhat Uncomfortable	5%	10%
	Very Uncomfortable	5%	10%

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Perceived Generational Differences

Table 5 highlights generational differences in faculty perspectives on flexibility and autonomy. Among younger faculty, 80 per cent value flexibility, with 50 per cent strongly agreeing and 30 per cent agreeing, reflecting their preference for innovation and work-life balance. Only 5 per cent disagreed, while 15 per cent remained neutral. In contrast, 60 per cent of older faculty supported flexibility, with 30 per cent neutral and 5 per cent strongly disagreeing, indicating slight resistance. Millennials and Gen Z favour tech-driven teaching, while Gen X and Baby Boomers prefer traditional methods. Institutions should encourage intergenerational collaboration, offer technology-focussed training, and implement flexible policies to create an inclusive academic environment.

TABLE 5

Generational Perspectives on the Need for Flexibility and Autonomy in Education

Question	*Response Categories*	*Millennials & Gen Z (N = 100)*	*Gen X & Baby Boomers*
Perceived need for more flexibility and autonomy among younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) compared to older generations (Gen X and Baby Boomers).	Strongly Agree	50%	25%
	Agree	30%	35%
	Neutral	15%	30%
	Disagree	5%	5%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	5%

Policy Implications

As education evolves, institutions must update policies to address generational needs, ensuring flexibility, technology integration, and an inclusive faculty environment. Some policy implications are as below.

- *Reforming Institutional Policy:* Colleges should update policies to support flexible work, hybrid learning, and professional development, aiding senior faculty in technology adoption while preserving traditional strengths.
- *Technology Integration:* Institutions must invest in digital tools and conduct targeted training for Gen X and Baby Boomers.
- *Support for Faculty Workload Management:* Institutions should automate routine administrative tasks to reduce faculty workload, allowing more focus on teaching, research, and maintaining flexibility.
- *Cross-Generational Collaboration:* Colleges should foster cross-generational collaboration through workshops, mentoring, and discussion platforms, enabling faculty to exchange ideas and blend traditional and modern teaching methods.

Efforts to Embrace Flexibility and Autonomy in Colleges

To stay competitive and relevant in today's evolving educational environment, colleges and universities must adjust to the shifting expectations of faculty members from different generations. Colleges need to adjust to the diverse needs of teachers from different generations by supporting flexibility and autonomy:

- *Adopting Flexible Teaching Methods:* Colleges should incorporate varied teaching styles like online and self-paced learning to align with younger teachers' preferences for modern methods while allowing older teachers greater freedom in course design. At the same time, institutions should respect the expertise of senior faculty by allowing them greater autonomy in designing course content and structuring their teaching approaches.
- *Encouraging Innovation and Autonomy:* Foster an environment where teachers have control over their teaching goals, content, and assessments, which supports personalised approaches and innovation.
- *Flexibility and Autonomy:* Implement clear policies for flexible work schedules and teaching methods, ensuring educational quality remains intact. Regular reviews and feedback help adjust these policies to meet evolving needs of teachers and students. By maintaining this balance, institutions can create an environment where flexibility and academic excellence coexist.
- *Training and Development Programmes:* Colleges should offer targeted training programmes focussed on technology integration and innovative teaching methods for all educators, offering practical experience with modern tools. These programmes should be tailored to the diverse needs of faculty, providing hands-on experience with modern tools and approaches. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous professional development will help keep faculty members updated on evolving

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educational trends, ensuring they remain adaptable and capable of meeting the demands of both traditional and modern classrooms.

- *Fostering a Supportive Culture:* Colleges should prioritise building spaces that emphasise flexibility and autonomy to attract and retain a diverse faculty. This can be achieved by implementing policies, adopting new technologies, and providing growth opportunities that honour various ages and backgrounds, thereby enhancing the educational experience. By fostering openness and adaptability, institutions can address the needs of all staff members.

In summary, colleges should adopt a holistic approach to integrate flexibility and autonomy in teaching, offering diverse methods like online, in-person, and self-paced learning. Encouraging innovation and autonomy empowers faculty to control their goals, content, and assessments while ensuring quality remains high. Clear policies and targeted training programmes foster adaptability and maintain teaching standards. By cultivating a supportive culture that values flexibility and autonomy, colleges can attract and retain a diverse faculty, creating a vibrant academic environment that benefits everyone, regardless of age or background.

Conclusion

The study highlights significant generational differences in regard to flexibility and autonomy in educational settings. Faculty from the Millennial and Gen Z groups emphasised the importance of flexibility, particularly through flexible schedules, online or hybrid learning options, and opportunities for self-paced teaching and learning. These younger generations reported higher satisfaction with the autonomy provided to them but encounter certain challenges such as institutional policies, workload and technological barriers. On the other hand, Gen X and Baby Boomers prefer self-paced learning and content control. The adoption of more traditional methods reflects the valuing of stability and structure over flexibility. People in their 40s appreciate having independence at work but feel less satisfied with their autonomy in educational settings than younger generations. Strict institutional rules and heavy workloads are significant barriers. Moreover, they find technology more challenging compared to Millennials and Gen Z. This generational gap highlights the need for colleges and universities to implement flexible policies that accommodate the diverse needs of their faculty and staff.

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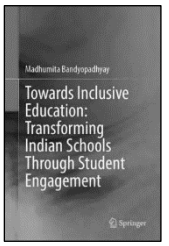
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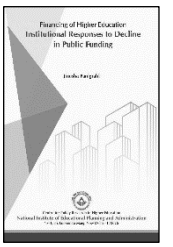


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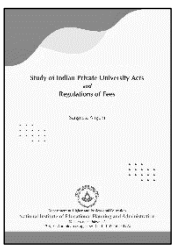
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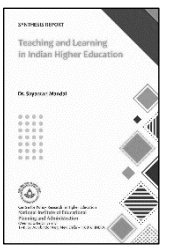
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Book Reviews

Dave Forum (Ed) (2025): ***Growth Trajectory of Gujarat Public Policy Intervention***, Allied Publisher Pvt Ltd, ISBN: 978-93-89934-83-0 (Hard Bound), pp. 358, Price: ₹995

The book gives a comprehensive overview of all the major sectors that drive growth, equity, sustainability and development of any nation. All areas that lie at the heart of the issue of growth for the state of Gujarat are succinctly presented here by engaging with the state policies at the ground level that have impacted the growth and development of the state.

The book is divided into seven sections and has a total of twenty-one chapters, each deliberating on certain key issue of growth in Gujarat. The first section has chapters that dwell on the issues related to agriculture. The first, second and third chapter talk about how the agriculture sector that has witnessed a drop in terms of sectoral contribution to the states GSDP can be overhauled if more stress is laid on the use of high-tech methods like tissue culture, drip irrigation, watershed development and also new commercial farm initiatives like contract farming. These initiatives, however, need to work in tandem with the state government, cooperatives and farmer companies for efficiency to prevail.

The second section comprises Chapters Four, Five and Six, and it deals with economic growth as the main theme. The chapters analyse the sectoral growth trends and the composition of the states GSDP. The contribution that these sectors make to the economic development is also assessed. The state's GSDP shows a rising trend showing the growth in the state. This along with the dominance of industry sector shows the strong growth of Gujarat. The per capita income also shows a rising trend. The disaggregate trends among the sectors gives a nuanced understanding of rise and fall of the sectoral composition in the GSDP; however, the overall decadal analysis shows that there has not been any drastic shift in the sector wise contribution to the GSDP. Therefore, a balanced sectoral growth is one of the key drivers of the state's growth. The last chapter in the section analyses the impact of technological advancement in the growth trajectory of Gujarat by mapping the experiences of consumers in an online food delivery market. Since technology and innovation are drivers of growth it is important to understand the implications of one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy. The chapter highlights the popularity of ordering food online among people of Gujarat along with their cautious nature of while making payments online.

The next section has Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten and Eleven that deal with one of the most important areas of growth and development in a nation, namely, education and health. The chapters under this theme cover a vast expanse from understanding the growth in Gujarat vis-à-vis human capital development. The importance that the policy on seasonal hostels holds in ensuring continuity in education for children of migratory agricultural labour comes out as an interesting and unique initiative of the state. The section also has chapters on maternal and child health programmes of the state as well as the healthcare infrastructure. This section acts

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as a linchpin on which the remaining sections rest. The section highlights the juxtaposition between growth in terms of GSDP and per capita but no improvement in development indicators related to health, education, maternal and child health as well as environment thereby hinting at an uneven growth pattern.

Despite achieving growth in terms of rising GSDP and per capita income, education and health remain a weak spot for the state of Gujarat. The issue of maternal anaemia, stunting among children calls for a strong need to not just focus on the GSDP and monetary indicators but also social indicators like health and education because a healthy and educated population will eventually lead to growth and development in the long run.

The next section has chapters on one of the most pressing issues of current times, that is, environment, and how it impacts the overall growth of Gujarat. Chapters Twelve and Thirteen explain how industrialisation has taken a toll on the environment of the state. The rapid industrialisation has resulted in many chemical and industrial hazards like urban migration, health, hygiene, pollution and overall deterioration in the quality of life of the people of the state. Gujarat faces unique challenges in terms of environment, especially so in case of its water resources. Chapter Thirteen discusses how the rampant pollution of water bodies due to industrialisation and industrial waste being dumped in water bodies is not being effectively tackled by the common effluent treatment plants. This is essentially because of the lack of laws governing CEPTs. The last chapter that is a commentary on the 'industrial development and environmental issues' highlights the other measures that the state has tried to incorporate in order to limit damage to the environment as well as build a sustainable future. Concerns about the environment are also raised in the students' corner section of the book where chapter nineteen highlights how growth of industries has led to contamination of water and coastal areas. It discusses the case of Hazira village that has no fresh water or fishes and the access to sea of the village has been blocked due to oil sludges. Industrial pollution has led to disruption in the marine ecosystem and caused ecological imbalance in the place.

Chapter Fifteen, Sixteen, Seventeen and Eighteen form the next section of the book. The chapters are a deep dive into the financial scenario of Gujarat. These chapters detail the overall financial mood of the state by engaging in issues of fiscal decentralisation, microfinance institutions and self-help groups. The state has been slow in adopting the practices of fiscal decentralisation and having an inactive state finance commission has added to their woes. This has resulted in local government not having enough financial as well as decision making power at the ground level thereby leading to misallocation of resources.

The microfinance institutions have a promising future in the state only if they are able to expand and ensure growth to such an extent that they are able to mitigate losses. These microfinance intuitions form an essential component for meeting requirements of the rural areas. Similar is the case for self-help groups (SHGs), that have been promoted by the government and NGOs in Gujarat. These groups have encouraged an attitude of saving among people and also helped in creating emergency fund as well as investment fund. Self-help groups have also empowered the women of the state by making them self-reliant and adding to their socio-economic progress.

The book covers many themes from policy initiatives in the state that have had a positive impact on social and economic development, the overall livelihood, as well as the excessive industrialisation that has led to lopsided development in Gujarat which requires serious intervention. The state performs brilliantly in terms of the economic parameters like rising

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GSDP and per capita income but falls short in achieving even basic levels of development in the, education and environment sectors, which form the crux of development. Two important contradictions that the book highlights are:

- Rising growth in terms of economic indicators like GSDP and per capita income;
- Deterioration in the social indicators like maternal and child health, education and environment.

The book is a good read for anyone wanting to gain insight about the true growth trajectory of Gujarat. It would be especially beneficial for students of economics, researchers working on state specific policies or someone wanting a capsule course on understanding the economic and social development scenario of Gujarat. It would also be a good read for policy makers that are willing to provide a solution to the skewed growth problem of the state.

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