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SCHOOL DROPOUTS: REASONS AND PROSPECTIVE SOLUTIONS- TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Education forms the foundation of every society, and the quality of education imparted in educational institutions should elevate any nation. Education plays a decisive role in shaping the future of a country and meeting its growing demands, thereby creating a healthy and progressive society. It is noticed that every government makes consistent efforts for the promotion of the whole development of its future citizens. However, one of the main obstacles to ensuring that every Indian has access to education is the country's persistently high dropout rates. The current study explores the possible reasons for dropouts and suggests solutions to curb this menace. This study was carried out in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) with a sample size of 80 teachers from three categories of schools, namely, government schools, private schools, and non-profit schools. This study revealed that government schools have higher dropout rates in comparison to other schools.

Keywords: School Dropouts, Kolkata Municipal Corporation, Education, Government Schools, Private Schools
Introduction

Education empowers the younger generation with historical knowledge and contemporary tools to shape the future and is the cornerstone for human advancement towards building a wholesome society. It makes individuals progressive and rational thinkers and helps in the acquisition of knowledge and expertise to escape intergenerational poverty and get a better career. The goal of India's school education vision 2030 is to provide all children in the school-attending age group with a high-quality education. However, dropout is a major issue. Dropout happens when a student leaves a school or a college before completing their academic programme. It is a serious issue that impacts students all over and can have negative repercussions in their lives. India suffers due to this malady, which is cause for considerable concern. The percentage of students who drop out of school has either climbed or stayed the same during the past few years, despite an increase in enrollment rates. The secondary level dropout rate (17%) is still high compared to the primary level (1.8%) and upper primary level (1.5%), according to the UDISE+ 2020 study. The burden of quantitative inclusion is increased for India's vision of setting educational objectives by this percentage of school dropouts. Dropouts waste resources, demonstrating the inefficiency of the educational system, and the children that drop out of high school are generally those that struggle to engage behaviorally and/or academically. To boost primary education and improve attendance rates, the Government of India has adopted numerous strategies such as Mid-Day Meal, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Right to Education, Samagra Shiksha, NISHTHA, and others. The actuality, however, falls far short of expectations.

Background of the Study

After gaining its independence, India made considerable progress in its literacy rate and elementary school enrollment. According to the most recent census, the adult literacy rate increased from 65% in 2001 to 74% in 2011. In 2007, around 95% of primary school-age pupils were literate, and the percentage of children who finish primary school has also increased significantly, going from 72.4% in 2001 to 85.7% in 2006, with little variation between boys and girls. Despite the advancements at various levels, there still seems to be a persistent issue with secondary education. A UNICEF report (2011) states that girls' secondary school attendance rates were 48%, a significant decline from elementary school attendance rates of 84%. For boys, compared to 85.2% at the primary level, their secondary stage attendance rate was 58.5%. Worse yet, in spite of India's supposedly upward growth, the poor attendance rate that causes early high school dropouts has persistently stayed high throughout time. When it comes to West Bengal, the overall literacy rate (among the aged 7 and above) was 75.9% in 2008. The school attendance rate at the primary level is comparable to the national average. In the overall population of West Bengal, according to 2008 data, only 15.3% of boys and 10.1% of girls have educations spanning 11 or more years. So, it is very likely that there is a sizable dropout rate at the high school level. The tables below show the overall dropout rates in India and West Bengal and the dropout rate according to educational levels, including primary level (1–5), secondary level (6–10), and senior secondary level (11–12):

India/ State/ UT	Dropout Rate								
	Primary (1 to 5)			Upper Primary (6-8)			Secondary (9-10)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
India	1.7	1.2	1.5	2.2	3.0	2.6	17.0	15.1	16.1
West Bengal	0.9	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.1	13.6	13.8

Table 1: Dropout Rate by level of Education and Gender, 2019-20 (Source: UDISE+ 2019-20)

Literacy in the overall population of the West Bengal (ages 7 and above)		
Literacy Rate (%)	1991	2008
Rural	52.8	72.6
Urban	72.1	84.1
Total	58.5	75.9
Attendance rate among 6 to 10 years old children		
School attendance rate (Primary) (%)	1991	1998
Rural Boys	44.8	91
Rural Girls	37.7	89
Urban Boys	64.7	89
Urban Girls	59.3	89
Total Boys	49.2	91
Total Girls	42.4	89
Distribution of in terms of completed years of schooling		
Years of schooling among population (2008)	Male	Female
Not literate	20.1	35.6
Less than 5 years	42.4	47.5
6 to 8 Years	25.1	26.7
9 to 10 Years	15.9	14.1
11 or more	15.3	10.1

Table 2: Education at a glance in West Bengal (Source: UNICEF, 2010)

Review of Related Literature

The literature analysis highlights several factors that affect the number of school dropouts. The review shows that over the years, several attempts have been made not only in India but also in other nations to address this menace. Lamichhane et al. (2004) reported that most schools lack proper infrastructure, such as separate toilets for boys and girls, a playground, sufficient instructional materials, etc., which in turn facilitate dropout. The Indian Institute of Education (2006) reported that lack of proper transportation facilities, the ill-health of the children, inadequate availability of health services, financial constraints, insufficient support teaching staff, a lack of proper teaching materials in rural schools, and negative perceptions of parents are some of the causes for higher dropout rates. Dinu (2009) pointed out multiple factors responsible for dropout, such as the economic condition, lack of proper infrastructure, migration, lack of teachers, and lack of communication. Research carried out by the Faculty of Education, University of Jos (2009) pointed out that the main causes of students' dropout in secondary schools are due to poor home backgrounds, negative influence by peer groups, poor teacher-student relationships, a lack of motivation, the inability of parents to pay school fees for their children, and a lack of basic facilities in schools. Tabassum (2019) reported that the school dropout rate remains consistently high for boys in comparisons to girls, and this study identified some of the reasons for dropouts, such as lack of interest in studies, domestic contribution of children for household chores, economic reasons, and migration of families. In their investigation into the reasons for the low enrollment of students in government elementary schools, Mohalik, Sethy, and Sangeeta (2021) discovered that factors like the involvement of both parents in the workforce, children's involvement in domestic work, taking care of younger siblings, parents' relocation for employment, children's involvement in farming and harvesting, parents' low aspirations, an abusive home environment, students' lack of interest in academics, their lack of basic skills, and the lack of teachers and regular head teachers among others.

Gil, Antelm-Lanzat, Cacheiro, and Eufrasio Pérez-Navo (2018) examined the causes of school dropout from the viewpoint of secondary school teachers, including both those who teach in the classroom and those who oversee administrative tasks. According to this study, the lack of dedication on the part of students, the teaching staff, and the families of the students are the elements most likely to predict school failure from the viewpoint of the teachers. It was also shown that there is an especially high correlation between school and student commitment and support for students, on the one hand, and between school and student commitment and support for students, on the other. Das and Saha (2014) reported that the northern districts of West Bengal have a much lower dropout rate than the southern districts, with the exception being Bankura and Purulia. Their analysis showed that migration, lack of parental education, large family size, and poverty worsen the dropout problems. Ghosh, Dasgupta, Karmakar, Bandyopadhyay, Sembiah, and Biswas (2018) assessed the degree and causes of school absenteeism and analysed the predictors of absenteeism in a slum community in Kolkata. The data analysis revealed that 43 percent of the children who went to school had been absent for more than two days in the previous month, with the main reasons being illness (18.98%), rainy days (16.45%), and social or family occasions (11.28%). The analysis of literature in general reveals that the increase in dropout rates among students is due to the following factors: economic condition, lack of proper infrastructure, migration, lack of teachers, communication, and the poor health of the students triggered by ignorance of hygiene and insufficient accessibility of health services.

Significance of the Study

Education has been a fundamental human right and has always played a major role in ensuring human growth and economic prosperity. However, the issue of school dropouts is a matter of great concern. The effects of school-going children dropping out are multifaceted because it simultaneously causes harm to both them as well as the societal structure. Ingram (2011) opined that a less educated individual has a lesser chance of performing well in the present economic system. Thornberry (1985) reported that the communities where the rate of school dropout is high have higher rates of crime. Therefore, it is significant to undertake various studies on this issue and suggest appropriate solutions to curb it. The current study seeks to find out the major causes of dropouts from the perspective of teachers. An attempt is made to pinpoint the causes of dropouts and suggest possible solutions to combat them.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the causes for increase in the number of school dropouts
2. To suggest measures that would lessen the number of school dropouts

Research Methodology: Descriptive design was used for the present study. This study is based on literature survey and field investigation using a standard questionnaire.

Population and sample: All teachers of Kolkata Municipal Corporation constituted the population and using non-probability convenient sampling technique 80 teachers were selected as sample from government schools, private schools, and the schools run by non-profit organizations (NPO).

Analysis and Interpretation

1. Profile of Study Participants

- **Types of Schools:** 38 percent of teachers were from private schools, 31 percent were from government schools, and 31 percent were from non-profit organisations, i.e., 30 teachers from private schools, 25 teachers from government schools, and 25 teachers from non-profit organisations.
- **Gender:** The sample consists of a total of 14 male teachers and 66 female teachers, i.e., 83 percent of the sample has female teachers and 17 percent has male teachers. When private schools were taken into consideration, 73 percent were females and 27 percent were males. On the other hand, non-profit organisations had 92 percent female teachers and 8 percent male teachers. When government schools were considered, 84 percent of the teachers were female, and 16 percent were male.
- **Respondents' Teaching Experience:** When the teaching experience of the study participant from a non-profit organisation was taken into consideration, the following facts were obtained: 28 percent of teachers had less than five years of experience, 16 percent had 11 to 16 years, 24 percent had 16 to 21 years, and 32 percent had more than 21 years. When the teaching experience of the study participants from government schools was taken into consideration, the following data was obtained: 8 percent of teachers had 5 to 11 years of experience, 28 percent had 11 to 16 years, 36 percent had 16 to 21 years, and 28 percent had more than 21 years. When the teaching experience of the study participants from government schools was taken into consideration, the following data was obtained: 13 percent of teachers had 5–10 years of experience, 20 percent had 11–16 years, 30 percent had 16–21 years, and 37 percent had more than 21 years.
- **Respondents' Position in School:** When non-profit organisations were considered, 40 percent were assistant teachers and 60 percent were teachers. Government schools had 12 percent administrators, 80 percent assistant teachers, and 8 percent teachers. Private schools had 7 percent administrators, 10 percent counsellors, 60 percent assistant teachers, and 23 percent teachers.

2. Interpretation of the Overall Data

All teachers were presented 20 statements to which they were asked to respond with either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. The items and overall responses are shown in the table below and the percentage of responses are given in figure 2.

Si. No.	Items	Yes	No
1.	The school faces the issue of absenteeism.	57	23
2.	The students come to school without required stationery.	48	32
3.	The students have social skills to adjust with school environment.	56	24
4.	The students have behavioral or emotional issues which interferes with their learning.	58	22
5.	The students often fall sick at home.	16	64
6.	The students are motivated and interested in their studies.	58	22
7.	The school has safe environment	65	15
8.	The parents are actively involved in the school curriculum.	48	32
9.	The parents are not involved in the child’s academic work.	36	44
10.	The students have reported negative experiences at home.	64	16
11.	There is communication between school and parents.	73	7
12.	The parents have a sense of insecurity among themselves about their child being at school.	15	65
13.	The parents have enough expertise to guide their children	24	56
14.	The parents have reported about instances where the child has refused to come to school.	32	48
15.	The school has strong mechanism to increase attendance.	64	16
16.	The school conducts remedial classes for slow learners.	54	26
17.	The school has regular co-curricular activities.	73	7
18.	The school conducts animation for parents.	39	41
19.	The school provides counselling facilities.	40	40
20.	The school has mid-day meal programme.	35	45

Table 3: Number of Responses of Study Participants

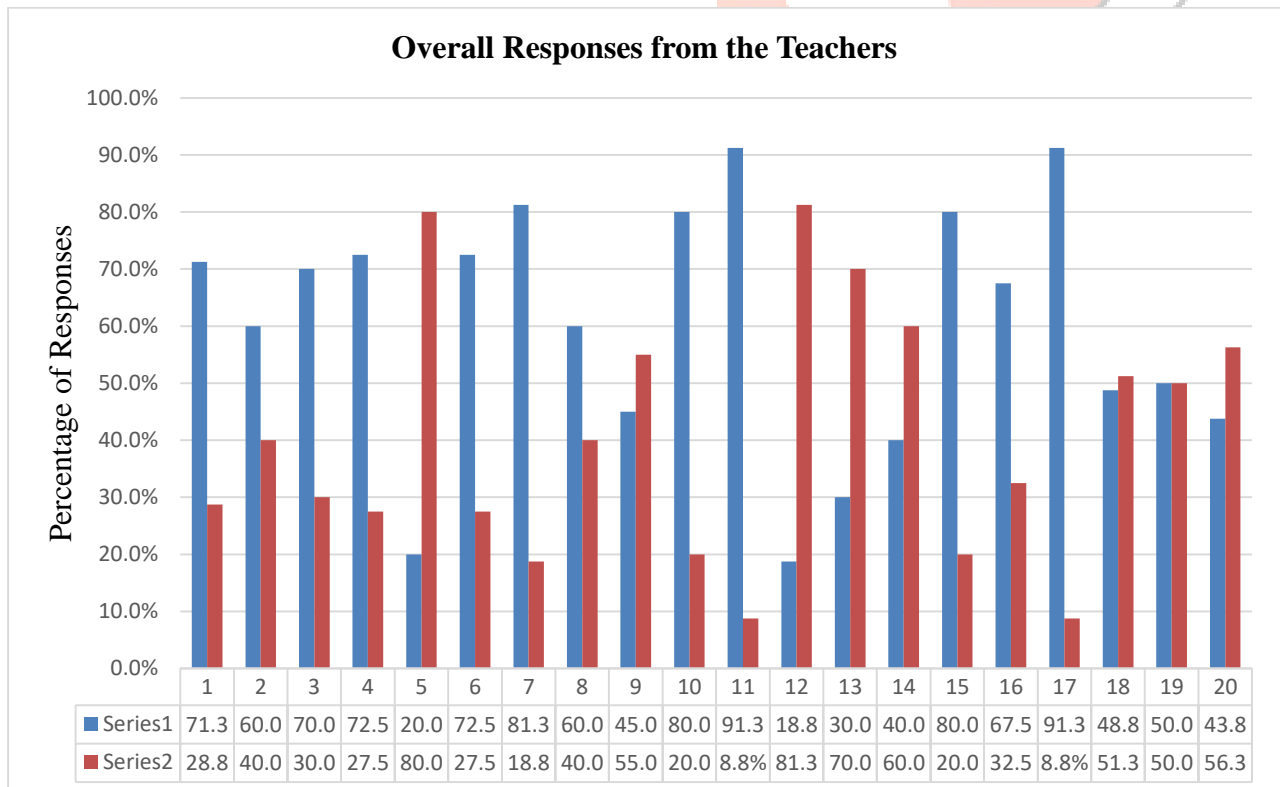


Figure 1: Graphical Representation of Overall Response of Respondents (Series 1: Response ‘yes’; series 2: Response ‘no’)

The percentage of responses that were analysed reveals that there are numerous factors that might influence students to drop out of school at an early age. On the basis of the collected data, it is observed that, on the issue of absenteeism, 71.25 percent of teachers reported in the affirmative. Hence, we can infer that absenteeism is one of the root causes of the increasing number of dropouts. 72.5 percent of teachers agreed with the point that students are observed facing behavioural and emotional problems that have a negative

impact on their learning. This issue is related to the statement that 80 percent of teachers reported that the child has negative experiences at home. These could be due to broken families, drunkenness, financial constraints, or the loss of family members, to name a few causes. About 70 percent of teachers have agreed that the parents do not have enough expertise to help their child excel in academics. One cannot neglect this point because in most rural areas, the children are reported to be forced to drop out of school to reduce the family’s financial burden, and the parents have no idea of the benefit that education provides in terms of economic stability and still consider education to be a waste of time and effort in many areas. This can be considered a failure of the education system and media, as they have failed to propagate the idea that education is an asset and not a liability in interior parts of the country. It is also apparent from the survey that around 60 percent of students are having difficulties meeting the requirements for their studies. Other factors were the lack of counselling facilities in the school for children (50%) and the lack of training programmes for parents (51%).

3. A Comparative Analysis of Private, Government and NPO Schools

It is noticeable from the study a wide variety of responses from the teachers of the various categories of schools: private, government, and non-profit organisations. These responses reveal the contrasting conditions of education prevalent in the various types of schools. The responses of each category of teachers have been graphically represented in the following figures 2, 3, and 4.

Private Schools have in the last two to three decades have gained mass popularity and are reported to have minimal number of drop outs. The majority of teachers from private schools reported that these schools provide better ambience and learning facilities for the students. Training programmes for parents, counselling facilities for students, and co-curricular activities are some of the key features of private schools. Even though the students from these schools are from a comparatively better background with better financial stability and household conditions, about 67% of teachers reported that even the students of private schools have been reported to be facing negative events at home. Around 50 percent of teachers reported that students face emotional and behavioural issues, and 53 percent reported absenteeism among students. Having better infrastructure and quality of education provides the private schools with an edge over their counterparts in enrolling and maintaining students.

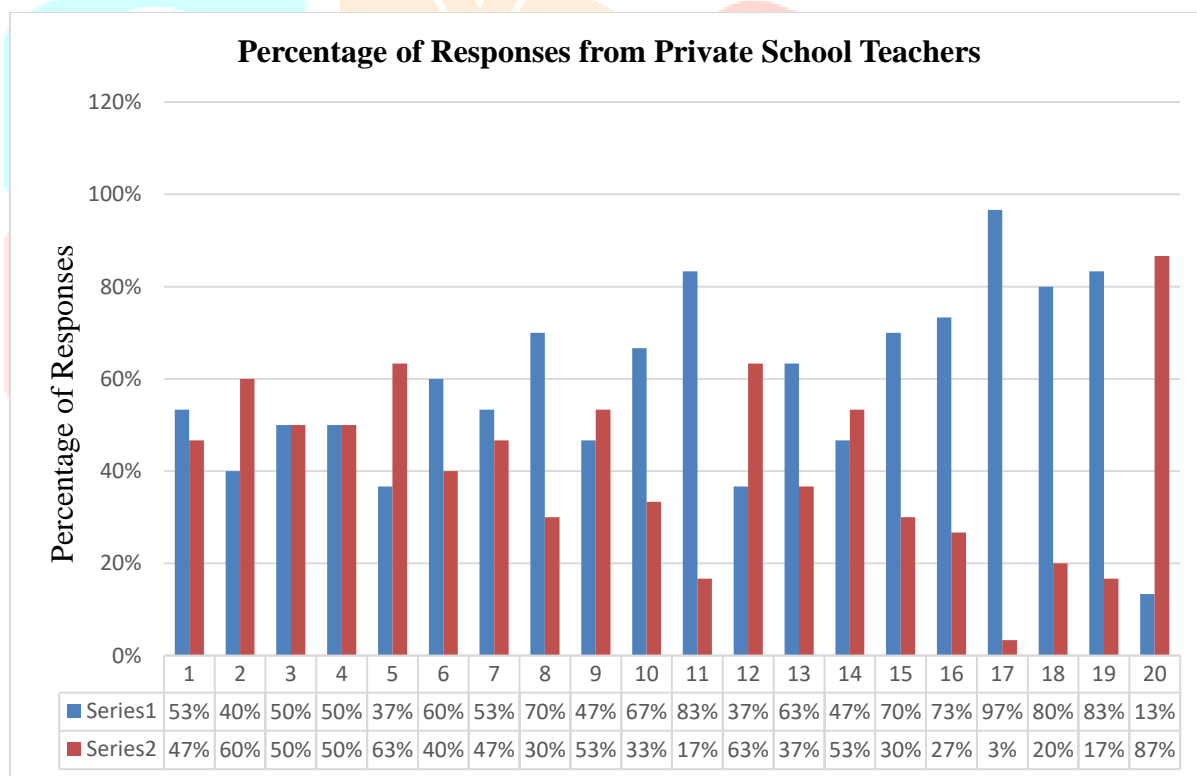


Figure 2: Private school teachers’ responses (percentage)

The government schools are losing their popularity and support among the students. There are many government schools either closed or on the verge of closing due to lack of enrollments. Even in such circumstances, some of these schools are continuing their work of educating a large number of young minds who are deprived of sufficient finances to have their education in elite schools. In the present study, the teachers reported that the schools are taking steps to improve attendance; however, the schools continue to face the problem of absenteeism (67 percent). It was also observed that the students even lack basic stationery items (67 percent). Teachers also agreed with the fact that students face emotional and behavioural problems (60 percent) and have negative events at home (70 percent). These institutions communicate with the parents on a regular basis, but a negligible number of parents have the expertise to help their children out in their academics (30 percent). Co-curricular activities are regularly conducted in these schools. Still, the students are not enthusiastic enough about their curriculum and are not sufficiently motivated in their studies. Government schools strive to uphold their status as a major form of education for the underprivileged, but there are various undesirable factors that influence the children to neglect their academics.

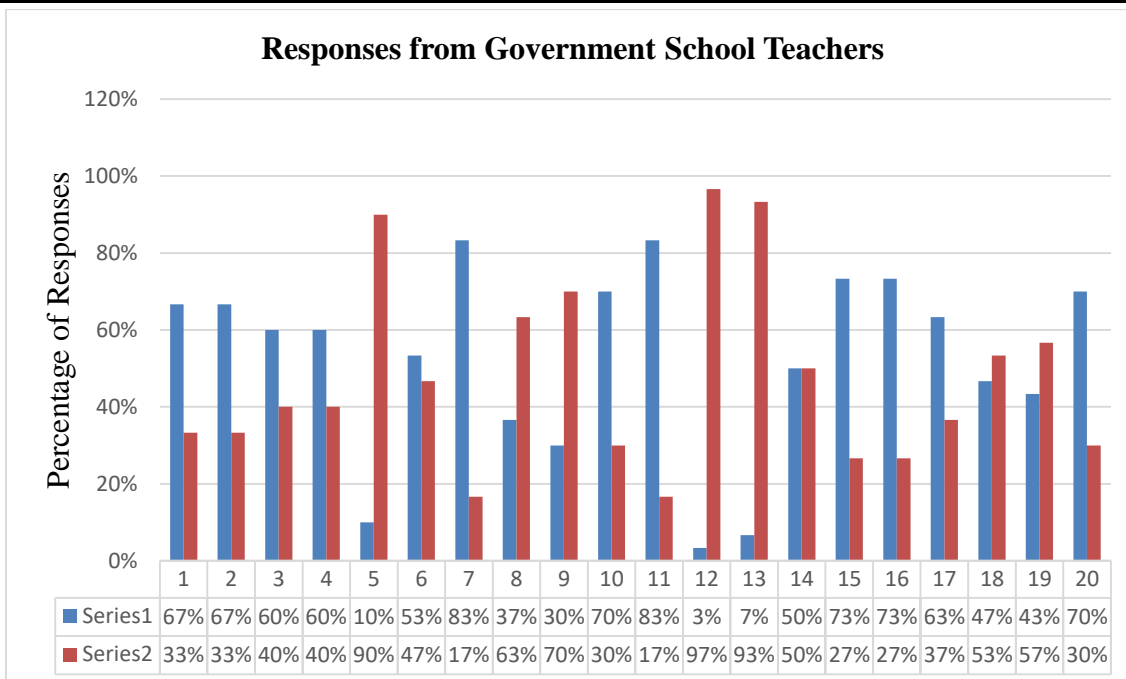


Figure 3: Government school teachers' responses (percentage)

Schools managed by non-profit organisations take up the role of education when their other counterparts are unable to serve a community of people. The NPOs refer to private institutions that educate students who are deprived of basic amenities and train them in basic skills to earn a living. The students of such institutions are mostly from orphanages, slums, and roads. Many of these students even lack parental supervision, and some have never even seen their parents. These institutions play a major role when it comes to serving this community. As for the responses received from the teachers of these schools, they reported that these students have better social and practical skills (92 percent) compared to students of private and governmental institutions. These schools face absenteeism (84 percent), children face emotional and behavioural issues (84 percent), and negative events occur at home (92 percent). These schools provide co-curricular opportunities, and some also provide the students with midday meals and essential stationery. Even though they are fewer in number, these schools continue to successfully serve the goal of educating students and nurturing them in a much better environment, spreading the light of education to members of the underprivileged community.

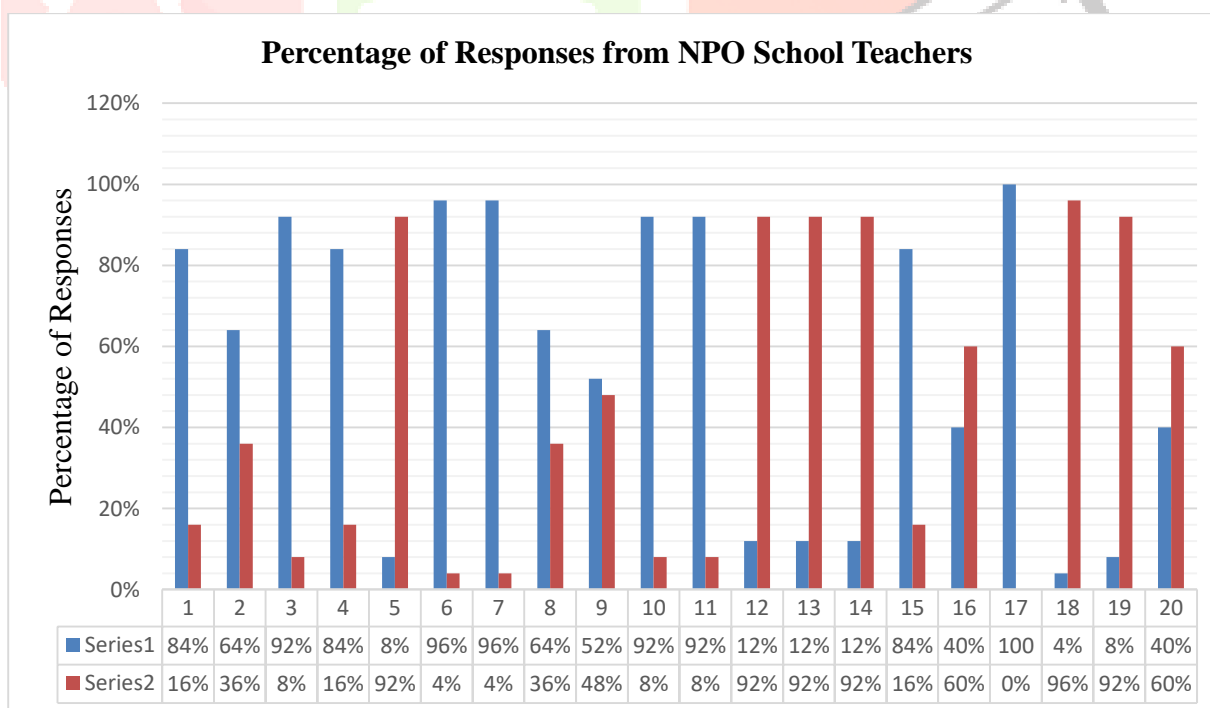


Figure 4: NPO school teachers' responses (percentage)

4. The Causes for the Increase in the Number of Dropouts

The teachers were also provided with four qualitative questions, to which they were asked to respond. On the basis of the responses received, the major possible factors behind drop-outs are as follows:

- **Poverty and financial constraints:** Poverty is a major factor in pupils dropping out of school in India. Many Indian households do not have the financial means to support their children's education. Poverty also causes families to be unable to pay for tuition, books, transportation, and other school-related expenses, forcing children to stay at home to support their families financially. The majority of the girls drop out of school to help with home tasks, whereas the boys drop out to supplement household income. Poor families frequently lack access to health care, making children more susceptible to infections and illnesses that can keep them from attending school.
- **Increasing unemployment Rates:** The rising unemployment rate has altered people's perceptions, particularly of the working class and the impoverished. Even if students finish their studies, they no longer have faith that they can find suitable employment. In addition, the lack of job opportunities can lead to feelings of hopelessness and a lack of motivation to stay in school. Young people who are unemployed may feel that they have no choice but to leave school in order to support themselves and their families. Parents also tend to prefer dropouts for their children so that they can work elsewhere and provide for the family.
- **Lack of interest and motivation:** Many students are not motivated and enthusiastic towards their academics and curriculum. This is the major factor in dropouts, especially in government and non-profit schools. These students prefer to drop out because whatever was taught in class did not attract them or grab their attention.
- **Health-related problems:** Dropout rates among students can be significantly impacted by health problems and impairments. Inadequate health can cause absences, which can cause a student to fall behind and eventually drop out. In addition, health problems and disabilities can cause a lack of confidence and self-esteem, which makes it harder for a kid to continue in school.
- **Emotional and behavioural issues:** Fear of learning, depression, anxiety, and fear of failure significantly contribute to the dropout rate. Negative home environments arising due to brokenness, death, drunkenness, fights in families, death, etc. also adversely affect the students learning.
- **Constant failure:** Some students fail repeatedly, which causes a lack of confidence in them and eventually causes them to drop out of school.
- **Delinquency:** The present study revealed that students who engage in delinquent behaviour are more likely to leave their educational institution than students who do not. Delinquency may result in a student's expulsion or suspension from the school, or in being arrested and having a criminal record. These unpleasant incidents may lead children to lose interest in learning and eventually drop out. Delinquent students might not have equal access to educational resources as other students, which can result in school abandonment.
- **Lack of community support and proper surroundings:** Students might not feel comfortable or supported at school if there is no sense of security and a positive atmosphere. They may eventually become disinterested and leave. When students might not have access to the same resources or educational opportunities as their peers, it can also have an impact on their academic performance. Furthermore, it has been seen that many children live in places where education is not valued and where drugs, gangs, and violence abound. Such conditions result in low enrollment and higher dropout rates.

Prospective Solutions

The Indian government has undoubtedly made great strides in the area of education, but more needs to be done to address school dropouts if we want this work to be even more successful. In India, 96 percent of students currently have access to an elementary education. As it takes a lot of effort to enrol this many children in school, every effort must be made to retain them. The respondents suggested the following measures to reduce dropout rates in our country:

- Awareness Programmes by the Government, NGO's, and Individuals: Awareness programmes should be run in cities and villages in order to spread awareness and knowledge about the ill effects that illiteracy and unemployment can cause.
- The government should launch more programmes to ensure higher enrollment. The quality of midday meals should be improved for better retention.
- Better sanitation facilities. The government and agencies responsible for education need to focus on improving the surroundings of the child, as 'a strong mind cannot survive in a weak body'.
- Good infrastructure should be established in schools so as to draw students closer to education and spark their interest.
- Facilitating stronger communication between the school and the parents
- Incorporating more skill-based education: Many students drop out of school because they feel that a basic education cannot help them secure jobs. To tackle this problem, education should be made more skill-oriented.

Discussions

The present study revealed that private schools have much lower dropout rates than their counterparts, i.e., government and NPO institutions. Private schools have gained mass popularity among students in the last two decades, especially due to their medium of advanced learning, better infrastructure, and much more advanced facilities. These schools provide a much better learning experience than their counterparts and provide their students with co-curricular opportunities. It has been noticed that the number of students enrolled in government is decreasing and that dropouts are on the rise. A good number of students in these schools are found to be least interested in their studies, and absenteeism is a frequent phenomenon. It is noticed that the involvement of the families of these students

is lagging behind. The tendency of students to drop out of school and opt for daily labour was also noticed in government schools. Students from these localities are often reported to leave school and get employed in different types of labour. The NPOs take up the responsibility of educating children living in families below the poverty line. These institutions are private in nature and work like an NGO to impart education to the deprived communities. The form of education includes imparting basic education, which can help them take up higher education. These schools mainly focus on imparting skill-oriented training; they teach the students different skills that could help them earn a living. Dropout rates in these schools are also high, as these students come from backgrounds that do not even consider education necessary. Students from these institutions get employed at an early age and have to drop out.

Conclusion

The problem of dropout is a substantial challenge for many nations around the world and has far-reaching effects on both individuals and societies. Financial obstacles, personal and familial situations, lack of interest, academic difficulties, or a combination of these things can all be causes of dropouts. Many dropouts experience unfavourable outcomes, including fewer career opportunities, lower earning potential, and societal stigma. The root reasons of dropout must be addressed, at-risk students must receive targeted help, and a supportive learning environment must be established in order to effectively address the dropout problem. To guarantee that every student has the opportunity to complete their education and realise their full potential, governments, schools, and communities must collaborate. Reducing dropout rates is an important goal for educators and policymakers, as it can lead to a more educated and skilled workforce, improved economic outcomes, and a more equitable and just society.

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