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Pierre Bourdieu's Capitals and its Impact on Primary Education in Government Schools

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Abstract

The Government of India has been focusing on improving access to education among the lowest socioeconomic groups. Despite the significant investment of the GDP in education and the implementation of various flagship programs, municipal schools still struggle to provide quality education. This analysis is based on empirical data and aims to identify the root causes of poor academic performance and learning outcomes among students attending municipal schools. Our research includes suggestions based on primary data collected from municipal schools and interviews with primary assistant teachers. We found that students lack the social, economic, and cultural capital discussed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which contributes to their underprivileged position. To address these challenges, it is essential to allocate resources effectively, conduct thorough inspections, and learn from successful schools in the same areas as municipal schools to improve competitiveness and efficiency.

Keywords

Primary education, Municipal schools, Assistant teachers, Capitals, Students.

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1. Introduction

The foundation of a person's success is built during their primary education years. In today's knowledge-driven world, access to vast amounts of information is readily available due to mobile technology and affordable data plans. However, the challenge lies in determining what information is relevant and appropriate for students based on their age. This issue is even more critical for young children who are just beginning their formal education journey.

The learning environment and guidance play a crucial role in shaping young minds. If the educational environment fails to provide essential elements of quality education, it can have long-term consequences. Disparities in access to education among children from diverse social and economic backgrounds lead to differential outcomes.

Education serves as a bridge between the family and society. Family influences an individual based on their cultural background and then entrusts them to the school, which prepares them for a more expansive societal role. The impact of the family on an individual lasts a lifetime, gradually diminishing as the individual transitions from their family of origin to their own family. Studies have shown that the early years of life have a lasting impact on an individual's social and psychological development.

Society's cultural capital is perpetuated across generations through education. The realization of inclusive education goals relies on providing quality education to all segments of society. However, achieving this vision requires careful consideration of diverse local needs in curricula, textbooks, teaching methods, and other educational resources.

2. A Brief History of Education in India

The ancient Indian education system was structured to meet the specific and holistic needs of society, focusing on Critical Enquiry

(in areas such as philosophy, ethics, logic, mathematics, literature, and grammar), Technical and Vocational skills (including ayurveda, agriculture, pottery, jewelry making, etc.), and Inner disciplines (encompassing spirituality, moral education, yoga, meditation, etc.). This system was practical and aligned with the societal requirements of that era.

During British rule in India, modern education was introduced, emphasizing rational and scientific subjects, leading to the establishment of numerous village schools, particularly in regions like Bihar and Bengal. These schools primarily focused on moral and character-building education, tailored to the local environment and preserving the societal culture.

In independent India, Mahatma Gandhi introduced Basic Education (Nai Talim) with a vision to make every village self-sufficient. This approach emphasized vocational skills and productive activities like spinning and weaving, and advocated for the use of the mother tongue as the language of initial education.

Subsequent to this, various commissions, such as the Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948, the D S Kothari Commission of 1964-66, the National Education Policy of 1986, and the recent National Education Policy of 2020, have been appointed to recommend reforms in the education system. These initiatives have led to constructive changes, albeit with limitations such as diversity, finances, population, and resources. Despite these challenges, considerable progress has been achieved in the Indian education system.

3. Capitals

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's capital theory consists of three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital refers to material assets and income sources, while cultural capital includes qualifications, skills, and social etiquette. Social capital encompasses connections and networks in society. These three forms of capital collectively influence an individual's education and success, with formal education serving as the foundation for numerous employment opportunities.

Individuals from underprivileged backgrounds often lack one or more forms of capital, perpetuating this disadvantage across generations. Possessing strong economic capital can facilitate the

acquisition of other forms of capital, such as providing access to quality education and enhanced social networking opportunities.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan initiative, conceived by the late former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, aimed to democratize education by providing access to underprivileged communities. This initiative sought to allow children from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue education, free from financial constraints, to integrate into mainstream society, and to pursue their dreams with enhanced opportunities through formal education.

Examining the extent to which the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan initiative has realized its objectives over 75 years, including the role of associated changes in primary and upper primary classes, is the focal point of this study.

4. Rationale of the Study

The study aims to identify the factors contributing to poor educational outcomes in municipal primary and upper primary schools, despite significant government investment in infrastructure, student incentives, and educational programs. While increased spending on education as a share of GDP is crucial, it does not guarantee desired educational outcomes. The quality of primary education forms the basis for subsequent levels of education and plays a vital role in breaking the cycle of poor education, skill development, limited employment opportunities, and poverty.

5. Objective of the Study

The study's objectives include investigating the reasons for the subpar educational outcomes despite government efforts to provide resources and motivation for students to attend school and receive cost-free education.

6. Hypotheses

An attempt has been made in this study to test the following Hypotheses:

H1: There is a correlation between Economic capital and learning outcomes of students in Municipal schools.

H2: There is a correlation between Cultural capital and learning outcomes of students in Municipal schools.

H3: There is a correlation between Social capital and learning outcomes of students in Municipal schools.

7. Methodology

This research is based on a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was gathered through interviews with 140 government assistant teachers and onsite visits to 48 schools under the basic Shiksha Parishad in Uttar Pradesh, covering classes 1 to 8 in both primary and upper-primary levels in Kanpur Urban. The fieldwork took place between August 2023 and December 2023, and the interview schedule was used as the data collection tool. Each interview lasted 45 to 50 minutes, during which both closed-ended and open-ended questions were employed to ensure comprehensive insight gathering. The secondary data consists of reports from government authorities, relevant published works, as well as reputable magazines, newspapers, and other credible sources. This research forms a part of my doctoral thesis.

8. Data Analysis

8.1 Capitals

Economic Capital : All the schools visited have students coming from underprivileged backgrounds. The Mid-day-meal program was launched in 1995 in Tamil Nadu to increase school enrollment for students from deprived backgrounds. It was later implemented nationally to decrease dropout rates and enhance school enrollment. Additional schemes were introduced to provide more educational benefits to students and their parents, making education completely free of cost. Over the years, the government has increased funds to improve school infrastructure and essential amenities. Today, each school is well-equipped with digital classrooms, advanced books, and other facilities. However, even children from relatively better economic backgrounds did not choose these schools.

Cultural Capital : The parents of these students mostly work in the labor market, as daily wage earners, house helps, or in local shops, primarily in the unorganized sector where earnings only support survival. These children lack cultural capital in terms of academic excellence and training, important for accessing the best opportunities in the market, which affects the next generation.

Social Capital : The role of social capital in the life chances of individuals and children is significant. The importance of networking

in contemporary education has increased. Students in these schools all come from underprivileged backgrounds, and it's not expected for them to have a wider network in society to understand the importance of quality education. Freebies and the Mid-day-meal were the main motivations for them to attend school. Families in the lower strata of society generally have higher fertility rates. They choose these schools to make it easier for parents to work. Once the children learn in school and the parents' financial status improves, they take their children out of municipal schools and enroll them in private schools. The absence of all three capitals in the families of the students attending government schools, specifically municipal schools, significantly affects the learning outcomes.

8.2 Objective Issues with the Schools

There are following objective issues with the schools:

- ▶ In 5 schools, classes from 1 to 5 are held in a building with only one or two separate rooms, causing chaos about which subjects to teach when. As a result, common topics are taught most of the time. The rest of the 43 schools met expectations in terms of infrastructure and basic amenities, including advanced classroom systems.
- ▶ There are no specific subject teachers dedicated exclusively to one subject. One teacher handles all subjects in these smaller classes in all schools visited.
- ▶ The boundary walls of the schools are not sufficient to secure teachers and students. The locality of such schools is hard to find, leading to multiple visits to gather data and inputs from teachers.
- ▶ Serious security concerns were found in 47 out of 48 schools visited. There were no additional services, including security guards at entry gates and cleaners in schools. Some boundary walls were occupied by vendors. Additionally, adult children were found within the campus of one school, and in another school, empty alcohol bottles were discovered. The absence of proper security allows unauthorized individuals to enter the school premises. Citing one statement of the respondent here:
“Ma’am, this is the case now and then, in the absence of proper security, after the school gets over, adult children jump over the wall and enter school and do fishy activities. The next day when

we come to school, we find such things and try to clean them in time. Anybody can enter school anytime in the absence of adequate security.”

8-3 Subjective Issues with Severe Underperformance of School Children

The monthly parent-teacher meetings (PTMs) are an important opportunity for parents to engage with teachers and support their children’s education. However, it’s observed that only a few parents attend these meetings. There’s a need to improve participation and collaboration between parents and teachers for the benefit of the students.

It’s evident that many parents, who are often daily wage workers, struggle to attend PTMs due to work commitments. However, it’s important to address the concerns raised by parents regarding the timely provision of essential school items and government benefits.

Teachers have noted that some students struggle academically due to a lack of cultural and economic capital at home. This highlights the need for additional support within the school system. Furthermore, the decreasing attendance of girls from class 5 onwards is a concern, and it’s important to create an environment that supports their continued education.

It’s crucial to find ways to address these challenges and create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students and their families.

8-4 Hierarchy of Education

The study revealed that not a single teacher expressed interest in enrolling their own children in the schools where they teach. It was observed that for many teachers, the job was an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Twenty-five per cent of the respondents had recently joined and 35 of them were preparing for higher level exams. The remaining 105 were nearing retirement, and for them, the job was primarily a means of achieving financial independence and decision-making power in their families. The teachers seemed to be more concerned with their own status in their families and society than with bringing about positive changes in the lives of underprivileged students.

The study also highlighted the factors that make private schools the preferred choice over government schools, even for families facing financial challenges. Despite the economic difficulties posed by the pandemic, many middle-class families still choose private schools for their children, willing to pay high fees. This preference for private schools is influenced by the competitiveness between schools to achieve academic results and attract admissions, as well as they lack of government funding for public schools. There is a need to elevate the standards of government and municipal schools. Teachers at these schools should be held accountable for their students' performance, and students and parents should also be responsible for ensuring regular attendance and active participation. Additionally, the focus should shift from emphasizing perks and freebies for students and leaves for teachers to highlighting student performance in schools. The aim should be to create a culture where schools are valued based on their performance, rather than just their societal status. Municipal schools need to incorporate successful practices from other schools in the city. Rather than just being centers for freebies and salary distribution, municipal schools should truly become educational hubs for underprivileged students, giving them hope and aspirations.

9. Conclusion and Discussion

The situation of students in government schools, particularly under Basic Shiksha Parishad, presents significant challenges. These students often face stigmatization due to their perceived slow learning abilities and disadvantaged family backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to be highly dedicated and capable of nurturing these young minds without assuming any prior educational foundation.

Accountability in primary education is a critical aspect that requires immediate attention. Despite substantial government spending in this sector, the actual outcome is far from satisfactory. Reports, such as ASER, provide evidence that students beyond class 8 struggle with basic reading and comprehension skills, unable to engage with material from lower grade levels.

It's important to note that a large portion of permanent teachers in primary schools come from families with financial constraints. Furthermore, many students are forced to assist their

parents after school, leaving little time for revising their coursework. Private tuition is not a viable option for these students.

The low attendance of parents in Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) contributes to a lack of oversight regarding the educational outcomes of these students. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of moral responsibility among teachers in facilitating the academic progress of underprivileged students. This is compounded by the fact that parents from similar backgrounds lack the resources to advocate for their children's education, leading to a concerning cycle.

For many parents, schools serve primarily as daycares for their children while they work, and the provision of mid-day meals and educational materials adds to the appeal, particularly in areas with high fertility rates. There are conflicting perspectives on the government's investment in free education for the most underprivileged in society, and its actual impact on the lives of these children.

While government schools often boast extensive outdoor spaces and employ highly qualified teachers, the effectiveness of these resources is questionable. Despite the presence of infrastructure and educators, students in these schools continue to underperform, which ultimately impacts their future opportunities and confidence levels.

I made a critical observation while visiting different schools: the campuses are close to nature with vast green areas, compared to some private schools with closed, concrete environments. Teachers go through a rigorous recruitment process and have the necessary qualifications, but the real question is what they do after starting their positions and how much effort they put into teaching children. Despite having infrastructure, teachers, and students, the combination is resulting in underperformance. As a result, students lack dreams, and when they enter the real world, they find themselves in a highly competitive environment, leading to feelings of inferiority and low confidence.

Through my field visits, I also observed a disheartening trend where parents, upon gaining some economic stability, choose to transfer their children from government schools to private institutions. This highlights a clear stigma associated with attending government schools, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage for these students.

In conclusion, it is evident that there are numerous complex challenges facing government schools, but there are also opportunities for improvement. By addressing accountability, teacher support, parental involvement, and the overall perception of government schools, we can work toward creating a more inclusive and effective educational environment for all students.

Based on the analysis of the data presented above, it has been determined that all three hypotheses were thoroughly examined and have been substantiated by the findings.

10. Way Forward toward establishing Educational Equity

NEP 2020 has significantly neglected the socio-cultural aspect, which has greatly affected the learning outcomes of students. The schools under Basic Shiksha Parishad were established to provide education to every child in society. Although the government has implemented various policies successfully to ensure student enrollment, the real concern lies in the quality of education being imparted. Students are progressing from one class to another without acquiring the necessary knowledge for their respective classes.

98 percent of the respondents were first-generation women who obtained government jobs. Many of them view their jobs as the ultimate goal rather than a means to an end. They perceive it as their only opportunity, and if they find a better government job, they are likely to pursue it. There seems to be a lack of innovation among these individuals, and they only adhere to government mandates for their job responsibilities.

The “NIPUN” program is well-designed, but it has created some pressure on teachers to ensure that students qualify and become “NIPUN”. While there are some issues with this approach, it initially aims to enhance the productivity of school education and teachers.

Parent-teacher meetings (PTMs) can be utilized to educate parents monthly on creating a conducive environment at home for their child’s education. This form of parent education, focused on their children’s schooling, can be incorporated into a broader curriculum. Mandatory attendance at PTMs for parents could be enforced, and penalties or benefits may be applied to encourage compliance.

The term “free” often carries the stigma of being associated with “poor people”. In today’s society, where status is often linked

with material possessions and aesthetics, it's important to change this narrative and approach it in a more respectful and dignified manner. The dignity of individuals should be prioritized across various societal aspects such as class, culture, and background.

The study brought attention to the low student-teacher ratio in certain schools, for example, 44 students with 3 permanent teachers in the class 1 to 5 category. The introduction of composite schools (Class 1 to 8) by the government is a commendable initiative, as it will consolidate resources and provide more facilities by having more teachers in one location.

During the school visits, a notable finding was the absence of a "creche" facility in any of the schools, specifically to cater to the needs of children of new mothers employed as teachers. While the option of "Child Care Leave" exists, teachers tend to reserve it for urgent situations, thereby not utilizing it to care for their young children at the school. However, it is crucial for children, especially those newly enrolled in school, to have access to their mothers when needed. To address this issue, a potential solution could involve incorporating a "BALVATIKA" setup within the school premises. This concept envisions the establishment of a comprehensive educational institution, encompassing a playgroup through Class 8, at a single location. By doing so, all government support programs could be integrated at one dedicated site, while simultaneously affording teachers the peace of mind to focus on their professional responsibilities, undistracted by concerns for their children's welfare. It is important to note that these insights are drawn from observations at three reputable private schools in urban Kanpur, and do not encompass findings from government "ANGANWADI CENTRES".

The implications of the findings stress the critical importance of effectively utilizing available resources and maximizing attendance by implementing motivators and penalties. Additionally, the need for thorough inspection and the adoption of competitive elements commonly seen in private schools within government schools is underscored. This integration aims to cultivate a healthy and competitive educational environment, which would benefit both teachers and students while serving as a model for others to follow.

Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that students in these schools are not regarded as "Left-Overs of mainstream society", neither by the educators nor by the government responsible for their

well-being. Education is not just a matter of quantity, but also of quality - it is a fundamental human right. Moral ethics should be upheld in the workplace, particularly when bearing the responsibility for those who are unable to bear it themselves.

When individuals prepare for a government job, the commitment, dedication, and extensive effort required are apparent. However, the recognition and celebration of this achievement should extend beyond the initial days. Regrettably, for a significant portion of individuals, this celebration becomes an ongoing struggle, akin to a lifetime insurance policy. Furthermore, the joy associated with this achievement often remains confined to immediate family members for an extended period.

For example, the ambitious project of the respected figure Shri Ratan Tata Ji, the “NANO” car, aimed to make it accessible to all. However, it failed to take into account the aversion to being labelled as “POOR”, a societal stigma that contributed to the project’s ultimate failure.

In order to facilitate diverse learning experiences among students in a single classroom, it is crucial to acknowledge and nurture the unique combination of skills, knowledge, and experiences that each student brings. By understanding and valuing the diverse forms of capital possessed by each student, we can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment that supports the growth and development of all students.

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