

Summary of the Ph.D Thesis Report

Topic: A study of student absenteeism in the elementary schools of Eastern UP and its relation with socio-economic and familial factors

By Rasheeda khatoon

Introduction:

At the time of independence, India's primary education was characterized by the historical inequities. Through Article 45 of the Constitution, Directive Principles of the State Policy were committed to ensuring free and compulsory education for all. This did not significantly translate into action and school enrolments and participation remained dismally low for decades after independence. However, the picture of elementary education in rural India began to change rapidly due to the new thrusts given by the government's National Policy of Education (1986) and the Program of Action (1992), which aimed at improving access, reducing dropouts and improving learning achievements for all children between 6-14 years of age. A host of major initiatives by the government, and the mobilization of external resources for primary education, had a deep impact on the status of primary education, in India. Some of the important initiatives have been the Operation Blackboard (1986), Non-formal Education (1986), Shiksha Karmi Project (1987), Mahila Samakya (1989), Lok Jumbish (1992), District Primary Education Program (1994), Mid Day Meal scheme (1995) and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001), which aimed at providing eight years of schooling for all children between 6-14 years by 2010. Elementary Education having been made a fundamental right by the 83rd Constitutional Amendment and the Supreme Court's insistence on states to provide hot cooked meals in schools, are improving enrolments, especially, among girls. As a consequence of these measures, primary education has made remarkable progress, as is evident from the provision of schooling facilities. Indications are that, nearly 83% of habitations (villages) and 94% of the population has a primary school within a distance of one kilometer (Vimala Ramachandran 2002).

It has been widely acknowledged that the socio economic conditions in rural India have constrained the process of primary education and the social inequalities of caste, class and gender have been identified as the major causes of educational deprivation among children in India. To quote Jean Dreze, "Educational disparities, which contribute a great deal to the persistence of massive inequalities in Indian society, also largely derive from more fundamental inequalities such as those of class, caste and gender (Dreze 2003; page 982)". A large proportion of children from the economically poor and socially disadvantaged groups and girls, especially in rural areas, are either denied access or are failing to complete even five years of basic education. The goal of universal elementary education remains a challenge to achieve even after five decades of independence. According to World Bank reports, more than 25% school children remain absent from their classes on each school day. Although primary education had been given due emphasis by the researches in education, yet the area of school absenteeism has remain untouched. However, the investigator could find out a few research studies which are indirectly related to the problem of absenteeism in schools. The review of researches in this area indicates that among other things, the problem of dropouts and absenteeism are seriously hampering the progress in the direction of achievement of the goal of UEE. While a large number of research studies are available on school drop-outs and related problems, studies on the extent of absenteeism among school children and possible causes of it are rarely available.

The issues related to student absenteeism have attracted very limited attention of the researchers. Though a few studies by government and non government organization have been conducted in this field, yet their findings are not conclusive. In certain cases the findings are even conflicting. Moreover, in view of the diverse nature of Indian society it is imperative that more areas specific study should be conducted. While non enrolments and drop-outs hampered the

coverage of the population of the relevant age group, the non participation or absenteeism hampers learning which is the ultimate objective of educative process. The investigator felt that there was a pressing need to carry out in depth study into the problem of student absenteeism especially in the backward areas of UP.

Objective of the Study

The present study was aimed at achieving the following objectives:-

- To assess the extent of student absenteeism at the elementary school stage in selected areas of Eastern UP.
- To study the impact of socioeconomic factors on student absenteeism in these selected areas.
- To study the relationship between student absenteeism and factors related to family environment.
- To study the relationship between the student absenteeism and institutional environment.

Hypotheses

On the basis of study of the related literature and personal experience the investigator formulated the following hypothesis to be tested;

- The student participation in educative process, as measured by the degree of student absenteeism, is significantly less as compared to the total enrolment.
- Socioeconomic factors have a significant bearing on the phenomenon of student absenteeism at elementary stage
- Factors related to family environment have significant bearing on the phenomenon of student absenteeism at elementary stage
- The factors related to institutional environment have significant impact on student absenteeism at the elementary stage

Methodology:

Research is a systematic and objective attempt to provide answer to certain questions. It is *systematic*, because it involves certain steps to be followed in a certain order and *objective*, because the researcher tries to eliminate personal biases and makes every possible effort to ensure objectivity in the methods employed, data collected and conclusion drawn. Methodology includes all the plans, techniques and strategies followed in carrying out the studies. Since the present study was conducted on elementary schools, all the students studying in classes 1 – V111 in the schools of Eastern UP constituted the population of study. The age range of the members of the population was 6-14 years. This study was carried out in elementary schools of 5 districts of Eastern UP i.e. Azamgarh, Mirzapur, Ghazipur, Ballia and Varanasi.

Sample:

In the present study, two-stage cluster sampling technique was used. At the first stage 30 schools were selected randomly from all the five districts – 7 from Mirzapur, 7 from Ghazipur, 7 from Ballia, 2 from Varanasi and 7 from district Azamgarh. Thereafter, samples of students studying in these schools, their teachers and parents were selected. The sizes of these samples were 350 students, 100 teachers and 75 parents.

Research tools used:

The utility of the result of any research work are very much dependent on the appropriateness of the variables studied and the tools used to assess them. The tools used should be valid and reliable as well as must suit the corresponding age and ability levels of the subject involved in the research studies. Since the present study involved the assessment of student absenteeism in the elementary schools of Eastern UP and establishment of its relations with socioeconomic and familial factors, data were gathered separately from students, teachers and parents. Keeping in

view the aims and objectives of the study and the hypotheses to be tested, the investigator developed a School Absenteeism Assessment Questionnaire. (SAAQ) having three different forms as mentioned below:

- School Absenteeism Assessment Questionnaire - Form 1 (for students)
- School Absenteeism Assessment Questionnaire - Form 2 (for teachers)
- School Absenteeism Assessment Questionnaire - Form 3 (for parents)

The SAAQ forms were developed by the investigator herself. In order to obtain information about possible factors or variables associated with school absenteeism, the investigator held discussions with teachers of elementary schools, interviewed some parents and obtained written statements about the possible causes of school absenteeism from a small group of elementary school children.

School Absenteeism Assessment Questionnaire Forms

SAAQ Form	No. of items/statements	Reliability Co-efficients
1 (Students)	40	0.73
2 (Teachers)	25	0.84
3 (Parents)	20	0.77

After completing these procedures, the final forms of SAAQ were printed. These were later on administered to the selected samples of students, teachers and parents respectively.

Collection of Data

Since the tools were constructed by the investigator herself, there was no need of assistants as far as their administration was concerned. So the investigator visited the school herself for data collection. In this context, the investigator studied the attendance registers of various class carefully and identified those students whose regular attendance was less than 50%. It was only to such students that the questionnaire was administered. The main aim was to find out the actual causes of student absenteeism in the elementary schools of rural areas. After collecting data from students the researcher gathered information from teacher's by administering questionnaire. Thereafter, the researcher visited the parents of some absentee's for the same purpose. The investigator visited different elementary schools of eastern UP. To seek co-operation of principals and teachers of these schools the investigator had received an introduction letter from a supervisor and chairman of Department of Education AMU, in which they had requested the concerned principals to co-operate in these tasks.

Scoring:

During administration of the test on students, separate sheet was given along with questionnaire to each student. Then this answer sheet was collected separately. Since the scoring was done manually by the investigator and the questionnaire was multiple-choice type, the investigator represented the responses in form of tally chart in tabular form. The responses in the tally-chart were counted. Later on, these responses of the students were reproduced in the form of frequency and percentage. After the scoring the data analysis was carried out by using Chi-Square test.

Analysis of Data:

In this regard, investigator used relevant statistical technique. The nature of raw data available after scoring of test booklets did not permit the use of any complex statistical techniques for data analysis. Two kinds of statistical techniques were used, one for descriptive purpose and the other for inferential purpose. The frequencies and the percentage were sufficient to describe the data completely. For drawing inferences Chi-Square test was used wherever necessary. Inferences were also drawn by using confidence interval wherever possible and necessary.

To determine the extent of absenteeism, the attendance record of at least 3 months for all students of elementary classes in each school was examined and those students were identified whose attendance was less than 50%. In this way, 43.75% of the students were identified as absentees, who mostly remained absent from school. This leads to the conclusion that the overall extent/degree of absenteeism in Eastern UP is about 44% with a standard error of 1.745. In other words, it may be stated that the total participation rate at the elementary school stage in the area under study may range between 51% and 61%. The 95% confidence interval for the percentage of absentees in the population of elementary school children is given by: $43.75 (+/-) 1.745*1.96$, that is, from 40.312 to 47.188. On the basis of this, it can be stated that the probability is .95 that the true percentage of absentees lies somewhere between 40.312 and 47.188. In the same way, 99% confidence interval was computed as follows:

$$43.75 (+/-) 1.745*2.58,$$

That is to say that probability is .99 that the true percentage of absentees in the population of elementary school children lies between 39.225 and 48.275. The overall situation indicates that incidence of absenteeism at elementary stage is about 44%, showing thereby that out of every 100 children enrolled at elementary school stage in the area under study only 56 participate in the teaching learning process.

Classification of factors:

The factors, which could potentially influence students' participation in education, were placed under three different categories as mentioned below:

- Factors related to Socioeconomic Status
- Factors related to Family Environment
- Factors related to Institutional Environment

Analysis of the student's responses for the above mentioned factors are as follows:

Student-Absenteeism and Socioeconomic Factors (Chi-Square Test)			
Item No.	Factors/Problems	Chi-Square value	Level of significance
2	Means of transportation	505.22	0.01
4	Assistance to parents by students	85.78	0.01
5	Visit to out of station	96.99	0.01
9	Non availability of text books	44.71	0.01
10	Non availability of stationary	28.56	0.01
17	Non provision of sufficient pocket money	108.86	0.01
18	Capability of parents to pay tuition fees	46.15	0.01

Absenteeism and Familial Factors (Chi-Square Test)			
Item No.	Factors/Problems	Chi-Square value	Level of significance
3	Ill health of the student	331.97	0.01
6	To look after the younger	92.29	0.01
7	Place of Study	264.14	0.01
8	Duration of study at	237.79	0.01

	home		
19	Reaction of parents on being absent	162.72	0.01
29	Interest towards story books	240.28	0.01
30	Priority to friends over study	18.28	0.01
31	Interest in visiting different places	18.28	0.01
32	Inclination/Interest towards music	114.28	0.01
33	Reaction of students on being absent	43.12	0.01
34	Inclination of the student toward study on provision of facilities	224	0.01
35	Aim of life	237.79	0.01

Absenteeism and Institutional Factors (Chi-Square Test)			
Item No.	Factors/Problems	Chi-Square value	Level of significance
1	Distance of school from home	46.5	0.01
11	Student's interest in going to school	23.14	0.01
12	Sitting arrangement in classroom	236.73	0.01
13	Participation in cultural programmes in school	4.85	N.S.
14	Behavior of classmates	0.56	N.S.
15	Provision of playground in schools	3.3	N.S.
16	Availability of sufficient sports facilities	43.92	0.01
20	Suitability of teaching work of the teacher	69.74	0.01
21	Punctuality of the teacher	118.85	0.01
22	Behavior of the teacher	150.59	0.01
23	Methodology of the teacher	78.72	0.01
24	Co-operation of the teacher in learning	72.98	0.01
25	Corporal punishment given by the teacher	91.35	0.01
26	Provision of midday meals in school	314.45	0.01
27	Appropriateness of the language of the teacher	75.63	0.01

28	Interests towards their text books	16.5	0.01
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Similarly, the analysis for the teachers' and parents' responses was also done.

Findings

1. Student-related factors

- The distance of school from home of a child and lack of transportation is an important factor related to school absenteeism.
- Bad health of the students
- Assistance to parents by students i.e. parents engage their male children in their occupation and female children in their household work. This compels them to remain absent from school for long duration.
- Due to non-availability of books and stationary, school uniform etc. many students of poor family remain absent from school.
- Unfavorable home environment is also responsible for student absenteeism. Many students don't go to school because they can't complete homework due to lack of proper study room etc.
- Since most of the parents in rural areas are illiterate, they are unable to motivate their children to pursue their studies and attend school regularly.

2. School-related factors

- Un-attractive school building is an important factor for withdrawal of students from school
- Shortage of classrooms and poor seating arrangement is one of the important causes of student absenteeism.
- Most of them had to sit on floor, or on mat. Thus, classroom was not favorable to motivate the students towards their study.
- In most of the schools only two teachers were available to teach all the students of class 1-V. The teachers could not give proper time to individual students, and that is why, the students did not feel motivated to their studies.
- Shortage of trained teachers is an important factors, responsible for school absenteeism.
- Irresponsible and unfavorable attitude of the teachers towards students also led to school absenteeism.
- Lack of basic amenities i.e. toilet, drinking water facilities and electricity was also responsible for large scale student absenteeism.
- Lack of library facilities is also responsible for student absenteeism.
- School timing did not suit the requirement of the local community. At the daytime most of the children are supposed to help their parents in their daily work.

3. Parents-related factors

- Illiteracy of the parents is an important factor leading to their children school drop-outs and absenteeism.
- Some of the parents who had educated their children had a very bad experience, related to employment. So, from the very beginning they engaged their children in farming. This factor has been mentioned in Form 1 student's related factors.
- Lack of proper and balanced diet, either due to financial problem or illiteracy affects the health of child. That's why they remain absent from school. This factor has been discussed in Form 1.
- Negative and indifferent attitude of parents towards education of girl is a major factor contributing to absenteeism among girls.

Implications

1. Implication for Education

- The State government and the central government have to play significant roles in improving the quality of education by improving physical infrastructure, quality of teachers etc.
- Paucity of fund is an important factor contributing to poor quality and standard of education. While money is necessary condition for improving quality of education, it is not a sufficient one. Most important things are commitment and competence of all those involved in the teaching learning process. There is an urgent need to update curriculum, to include elements, which produce real learning and creativity.
- The State government should pay special attention toward school building and other facilities. Improved school building will not only help increase the enrollment of children but also retain them by creating secure and healthy environment. School should have playgrounds along with the facilities for games and sports.
- Seating arrangement should be improved so that students may feed easy and enjoy learning
- Teacher should realize their responsibilities and develop a friendly atmosphere in the classroom. This will create a sense of security among the students. This will also help dropout rates.
- Parent – teacher meetings should be organized at least quarterly. This will help in solving the problem related to students.
- Similarly, cultural programmes like debates, discussions, bait-baazi etc should be arranged. Guest speakers, doctors, engineers, scientists etc. should be invited to provide elementary knowledge in different fields. Educational tours, excursions, field trips, should be organized in schools
- As majority of the teachers are not trained and well qualified with the method of teaching, orientation programme as well as refresher courses should be organized for shorter as well as longer duration in summer and winter vocation for them.
- According to directive principle each and every children of age-group 6-14 years should be given elementary education fee free of cost. But a few school charged high fees. Instead of charging fees from students they should seek grant-in-aid for their school from appropriate government agencies
- Within the overall school age population, the focus should be on girls, who account for two-third of the target, and among adults the focus should be on women's literacy, which has a beneficial impact on children's literacy as well as other national objectives like population control and family welfare. Exclusive girl schools may help to increase retention and increase in their enrolment.
- A comprehensive package of incentives and support service for girls, SCs, STs and children of the economically weaker sections of the society should be provided. Poverty is the most potential cause which forces the students to leave the school before the completion of a course. Scholarships should be given to students of weaker sections
- Adult education programme should be promoted to create desired sense of curiosity, interest and motivation among weaker sections.

- Teachers should present themselves as a model for the students. Thus teacher training is essential for all elementary schools teacher to equip them with the knowledge of individual differences
- The goal of the universalization of elementary education is still dream before the country despite tremendous increase in schools as well as enrolment. This clearly indicated that our educational system is defective. Govt. should plan such types of institution which can fulfill the needs and demand of students as well as parents of rural area.

2. Implication of Research

- As mentioned in previous chapter, the scope of the present study is limited to elementary levels only due to paucity of time and limited funds. Similar studies can be planned and conducted on secondary and higher level also..
- The areas which have been taken for research purpose is very limited. Although the district taken is educationally, backward still studies should be conducted on other education backward areas like Bihar, Rajasthan, MP etc
- The present research work has been done on rural areas only. The study should be extended to urban areas and comparison study should be done between the achievement of rural and urban area
- The study related to the comparison between boys and girls should be done
- More researches should be done in the tribal, hilly and in accessible areas, as this problem is very much prevalent in those areas also.