



An Empirical Analysis of Educational Empowerment among Scheduled Caste Students

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Abstract: The educational empowerment of Scheduled Caste (SC) students is investigated experimentally in this study, which also explores the relationship between socioeconomic restrictions, quality, and access. It examines enrollment trends, dropout patterns, and academic achievement in relation to poverty and caste-based prejudice using survey data, secondary statistics, and literature. Results show that enrollment has significantly improved, but achievement and retention gaps still exist, especially for SC females. Inadequate school resources, economic instability, and institutional prejudices continue to be major obstacles. In order to achieve true educational empowerment for SC communities, the article makes the case for coordinated policy initiatives that combine socioeconomic support with high-quality education.

Keywords: Education, discrimination, poverty, empowerment, Students

Introduction

Education is a powerful catalyst for knowledge creation, personal growth, and social transformation, capable of enhancing human well-being in social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Rooted in the dual concepts of teaching and learning, its history in India spans from the ancient Gurukula system where Siṣyas lived with their gurus in Asramas to learn Sanskrit, philosophy, medicine, warfare, and ethics, fostering holistic mental, cognitive, physical, and moral development similarly the Madrassas serving Muslim communities. However, both systems remained largely exclusive to upper castes and privileged groups. The colonial era was neglected indigenous education during the first six decades of East India Company rule, followed by the Macaulay Minute of 1835, which introduced English-language education and transformed the traditional

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model into a modern but still socially restrictive system. In the Post-independence India, education system has four major categories such as primary education, secondary education, vocational education and Tertiary Education. The Primary education is included lower primary (Standards I to V) and upper primary (Standards VI to VIII). Secondary education begins in IXth standard and upto XIIth standard. The high school level is 9th and 10th standard and 11th and 12th is called higher secondary. In some states this level is called junior college and senior college education. The Schools are running by state government and private through various kinds of boards/syllabus like state board, Matriculation, NCERT, Anglo Indian, and International board. The vocational education system is based on occupation and employment opportunities. It is also known as Career and Technical Education (CTE) or Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This education system has prepared the students for specific trades, crafts and careers at various levels in all spheres of life. Vocational education and its training are provided on a full-time as well as part-time basis in India. Full-time programmes are generally offered through Industrial Training Institutes (I.T.I.s). The nodal agency of NCVT is granting the recognition to them. It is under the Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India. The Part-time training programmes are offered by state technical education boards or universities.

The tertiary education in India, is also called as post-secondary or higher education. India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. Tertiary education includes undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, given by institutions known as colleges or universities. According to AISHE 2021–22, India now hosts 1,113 universities, 43,796 colleges, and 11,296 stand-alone institutions, with 28.4% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in the 18–23 age group up from 27.3% in 2020–21 while GER for Scheduled Castes rose to 27.2% and for Scheduled Tribes to 25.8%. The higher education institutions are managed by state and central government. These are recognized by UGC, and AICTE. Female GER improved to 28.5%, yet disparities persist in access, quality, and retention, especially for marginalized communities. Current policy interventions, including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and RUSA, aim to address these gaps through multi-disciplinary curricula, equitable access, accreditation reform, and infrastructure strengthening, facilitating a shift toward inclusive and holistic education for all sections of society.

Education and Empowerment for Weaker Sections

One of the key important social objectives of education is to provide equal opportunity to all sections of people and individuals to utilize education to enhance their

socio-economic conditions. It is promotion of traditional values of social justice in every society. This is the only guarantee for the building up of democratic to the human society from the exploitation. Indian government has been giving special attention to uplift socio-economic conditions of SC and STs after India's independence. There are number of welfare schemes and programmes have been adopted for their welfare. The policy of reservation for the weaker sections has taken through constitutional measures by the Government. The reservation is being implemented in admission of education institutions, assembly, parliament, local bodies, and employment in government sectors etc. In our constitution, certain provisions under articles 15, 16, 17, 41, 330, 332, 341 and 342 are made, so that the privileges of those backward people are guaranteed. But still a large number of people from SC and ST categories are lagging far behind in politically, socially and educational status than the general people.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the two most disadvantaged sections of Indian society and need for special attention. Together they form about a quarter of the total population of the country (SCs about 16 percent and STs about 8.6 percent). There are large state-wise variations in the proportion of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes population. The scheduled castes (SCs) are concentrated in the states of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Haryana.

Table 1.1: Trends of Literacy Rate of SCs in India, 1961 to 2011

Year	Person	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1961	10.27	16.96	3.29	13.67
1971	14.67	22.36	6.44	15.92
1981	21.38	31.12	10.93	20.19
1991	37.41	49.91	23.76	26.15
2001	54.70	66.60	41.90	24.7
2011	66.10	75.20	56.50	18.7

Source: National Commission for SCs and STs, Fifth Report and Census of India, 2011

Educational condition of SC students in Tamilnadu

Education is a tool for empowerment of the human being. It is even more significant for socially, economically and politically marginalized people. Therefore to provide quality education is one of the major developmental agendas for government. In this platform numbers of individuals and government had been taking many efforts to provide education to the underprivileged section of the society. In this line C. Iyodee

Thass Pandithar (1845-1914) was a dalit intellectual; and he was first person started schools for SC students in British India. He believed that education is the only weapon to empower the dalit community in social, economic and political spares. In this stand Tamilnadu is one of major leading states in educational development. It has many well developed educational institutions from primary to higher studies. Also the government has taking lots of initiatives in the educational sector such as implementation of the article 14, for free and compulsory education to the children under the age of 14 years. The Tamil Nadu government has gradually refocused its educational policy for Tribal and Adi-Dravidar (Scheduled Caste) communities, with an emphasis on empowering girls. In the past, these communities had their own schools set up in their homes. But by 1993–94, this approach was seen as ineffective when the Education Department started giving priority to the opening of schools in underprivileged areas, regardless of caste, which helped to lessen social segregation. The state implemented specific merit-enhancement initiatives after realizing that SC/ST students frequently encounter obstacles in their pursuit of higher education because of financial difficulties and unequal academic preparation. Academic performance has improved dramatically as a result of the Naan Mudhalvan program: the SSLC pass percentage in Adi-Dravidar schools climbed from 78% in 2021 to 92% in 2024, and the +2 pass rate increased from 84% to 96%. Two tribal students notably passed the JEE for the first time in 60 years, indicating a change in their preparedness for competitive exams. Offering financial incentives has long been a strategy to keep students enrolled. Annual awards of ₹500 for Classes III–V, ₹1,000 for Classes VI, and ₹1,500 for Classes VII–VIII have been awarded to SC/ST females since 1994–95. 4.52 lakh recipients received ₹43.5 crore in 2022–2023. Launched in 2022, the Pudhumai Penn plan provides ₹1,000 per month from Class V to graduation, helping around six lakh females each year and filling the gap in their access to higher education. These actions have been supplemented by the building of infrastructure. In recent years, 154 Adi-Dravidar schools received ₹108.5 crore to build 480 new classrooms and 15 scientific labs, while 86 additional schools received ₹125 crore to upgrade their classrooms, labs, and sanitation. The state offers foreign scholarships to broaden exposure worldwide. In 2024–2025, 161 SC/ST students were sponsored with ₹65 crore, and in 2025–2026, funding increased to ₹90 crore for 190 students. This develops leadership potential by providing access to esteemed international colleges. When taken as a whole, these interventions—which include financial aid, academic support, infrastructural development, and international opportunities—are gradually reducing the educational gap and enabling SC/ST females to pursue careers and socioeconomic mobility.

Literature Reviews

In India, the caste system prevented Dalits and other Scheduled Castes (SCs) from receiving an education for centuries, which exacerbated socioeconomic subordination and systemic inequality (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Education was acknowledged as a right and a means of empowerment by post-independence reforms, particularly the constitutional provisions of equality and affirmative action (Government of India, 1950). Since education is seen as a way to overcome discrimination and attain socioeconomic mobility, it has come to represent emancipation for SC people (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Despite the removal of legal obstacles to education, discrimination still exists in subtle but detrimental ways. In Nepal, Bishworna (2017) found that teachers indirectly discriminated against Dalit students by neglecting them, repeatedly condemning them, and designating them as poor performance. Disengagement, erratic attendance, and eventual dropout were the results of this. Similar trends can be seen in India, where caste prejudice restricts participation and causes estrangement from both upper-caste classmates and professors (Vasavi et al., 1997). Such discrimination feeds cycles of underachievement and undercuts the inclusive goal of educational reform.

Inequality in schooling is exacerbated by economic hardship. Children's education is disrupted by the fact that many SC households are still landless and rely on seasonal or migrant labor (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Extended absences, academic difficulties, and dropouts are frequently caused by migratory patterns. UNICEF (2006) goes on to say that low-quality education, which is prevalent in rural regions with little resources, is a major cause of disengagement and reduces the appeal and efficacy of education for SC children. Disparities are still glaring even if access has increased. Dalit boys' enrollment rates rose from 47.7% to 63.25% between 1983 and 2000, while upper-caste boys' enrollment rates increased from 73.22% to 82.92% during the same period (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). While upper-caste girls' enrollment increased from 43.56% to 59.15%, Dalit girls' enrollment increased from 15.72% to 32.61%. Despite their importance, these achievements highlight enduring structural inequalities, particularly for SC girls who must contend with the intersection of gender and caste. For SC students, the change from elementary to secondary school is a particularly vulnerable time. According to Ramachandran (2004, 2018) and Sharma (2009), caste-based prejudice, economic pressures, and a lack of institutional support cause dropout rates to rise precipitously at this time. According to Saravanakumar and Palanisamy (2013), SC dropout rates continue to be disproportionately high in spite of numerous government initiatives, indicating underlying structural disparities that policies have not yet addressed.

Through scholarships, free textbooks, midday meals, and hostels, Tamil Nadu has made large investments in SC education (Thangaraj, 2012). In many places, these initiatives have resulted in higher enrollment and lower dropout rates. However, SCs continue to have lower literacy rates than non-SC/ST groups. According to qualitative data, socioeconomic factors including poverty, taking care of siblings, and family duties continue to be the main causes of absence, even though 98% of students say they love going to school. This emphasizes the necessity of measures that address both the wider economic stability of households and educational access. According to the literature, post-independence measures have significantly increased SC groups' access to education, but they haven't completely removed inequalities in accomplishment, retention, or quality. The transformative power of education is hampered by persistent caste prejudice, unstable economies, and a lack of funding for schools. In order to ensure that SC students are not only admitted but also given the support they need to thrive academically and socially, the current issue is to shift from expansion that is centered on number to inclusion that is centered on quality.

Research Methodology

The study is focused on the Educational Empowerment among Scheduled Caste Students. It is descriptive study by nature. The self prepared questionnaire was used as tool for data collection. The questions are formulated based on the objectives of the study. The data was collected by random sampling method from five Government Adiravidar Welfare Schools in Trichirappalli district. The data was collected from class 10th 11th and 12th standard students. After collection of the data, the statistical method of analyses was carried out to find the result. The following objectives are framed for the study

- To find out the educational empowerment of the ADW schools students
- To study the socio and economic condition of the ADW schools students
- To find out the academic related requirements of the ADW schools students

Statement of the Research Problem

Education is a potent tool for people's socioeconomic growth and empowerment. Most Indian children, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds, nevertheless aspire to have access to high-quality education. Even though the federal and state governments have put in place a number of programs and resources to help these groups like free

textbooks, uniforms, scholarships, and transportation assistance the advancement of education in Adi-Dravidar Welfare (ADW) schools still faces significant obstacles. The sharp drop in the number of welfare schools and student enrollment is a major obstacle. Students from economically poor Scheduled Castes and other marginalized backgrounds are primarily served by these institutions. However, long-standing problems including poor funding, a lack of teachers, and inadequate facilities still make it difficult for them to function. In addition to having an impact on academic performance, these flaws significantly raise dropout rates and cause students to transfer to other institutions. As a result, ADW schools' reputation has suffered, endangering the hopes of many impoverished SC students to pursue further education. Although SSLC pass rates in Adi-Dravidar schools increased from 78% in 2021 to 92% in 2024, recent state-level data show both progress and concern. The State Level Achievement Survey (2025) reveals a decline in proficiency in higher classes, particularly in English, where only 43% of Class VIII students meet grade-level benchmarks. In light of this, the current empirical study investigates the academic standing of ADW schools in the district of Tiruchirappalli. In order to evaluate learning outcomes and the structural elements impacting them, data was gathered from 210 pupils, all enrolled in five Government Adi-Dravidar Welfare schools, who were between the ages of 15 and 18.

Findings of the Study

The findings reveals that along with the physical location and facilities of Adi-Dravidar Welfare Schools, the study looks at the children' personal histories, educational environments, academic performance, difficulties in school, and family situations. Significant differences in housing circumstances are revealed by the main findings. Approximately 35.4% of students reside in single-room houses, while 34.8% occupy homes with two rooms. Just 11.4% of people live in homes with more than three rooms, while a lower percentage (18.6%) has access to three-room homes. There is a direct link between students' academic achievement and the amount of space they have in their homes since cramped living arrangements are frequently linked to poor study spaces and lower learning results.

Students were generally satisfied with the facilities at school, according to 90.5% of them. The majority of Adi-Dravidar Welfare Schools now have basic supplies such smart classrooms, whiteboards, desks and chairs, electricity hookups, drinking water, and restrooms thanks to government funding. These facilities are still insufficient in some schools, though. Specifically, the lighting and ventilation in the classroom are

not up to par, as several students have complained about the fans and lights not being maintained. The availability of clean drinking water became a major issue. Although 55.7% of students said the facilities for drinking water were acceptable, 44.3% said the supply was either poor or irregular. In a similar vein, only 50% of those surveyed thought the state of the electrical infrastructure was adequate. Another significant deficiency was found to be laboratory facilities; according to 70.4% of students, science labs were either completely deficient or inadequately equipped, which limited opportunities for hands-on learning. The study's encouraging conclusion was that a sizable majority of students 82.9% stated that they had solid plans to continue their studies. This implies that pupils continue to have a positive attitude about academic progress in spite of infrastructure deficiencies. The combined effect of focused scholarship programs and awareness campaigns has resulted in a steady increase in Scheduled Caste students' interest in higher education, according to recent state-level data (Tamil Nadu School Education Department, 2023). The study showed that roughly 74.0% of students in the investigated area lacked understanding of important competitive entrance examinations such as NEET, CUET, and JEE, which considerably hinders their possibilities for admission into professional institutions. Regarding parental assistance for education, 68.1% of participants stated that their parents couldn't help them in school, primarily because they weren't very literate.

Educational achievement is further hampered by family-related issues. About 40.5% of students said that their parents' drinking had a detrimental effect on their academic performance, while 33.3% said that having to take care of younger siblings distracted them from their academics. socioeconomic issues also come into play; according to 28.6% of respondents, their education was negatively impacted by prevailing socioeconomic disparities. However, 38.1% said they continued to have good contact with pupils from different communities. An overwhelming 88.6% of parents of students worked in low-wage, informal jobs like construction, farming, agricultural labor, MGNREGA jobs, and factory work, usually for daily earnings. Due to the ensuing financial limitations, parents' low educational attainment, and students' household duties, 43% of students have lost interest in their studies, and 34% find it difficult to understand their classes. Regarding critical school requirements, 87% of students stated that building toilets was urgently needed, citing the appalling state of the facilities. One of the main causes of female students' dropout rates is inadequate sanitation. In order to promote academic and personal growth, 67% of respondents also demanded the installation of well-equipped science labs, 58% asked for the hiring of specialized cleaning personnel, and 56% suggested the formation of guidance

and counseling centers in schools. The majority of Adi-Dravidar Welfare Schools are situated in residential areas that are dominated by Scheduled Castes, which supports its mission to serve mostly SC kids. The limited number of kids from other groups enrolled, however, indicates that these schools continue to be socially segregated, which restricts the potential for diversity and integration in the classroom.

Conclusion

Education is one of the significant developmental tools in the modern society. Therefore to provide quality education is major role for family and government. In India education inequality had been practiced for very long time. It was practiced in the name of caste status. After independence the government of India had providing many facilities through its constitution and policies and schemes for educational empowerment. To provide equal and quality education is not easy task, there were many social reformers like Jothi Rao Pule, Ayothidasa Pandithar, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, EVR Periyar and political parties such as Justice Party, Diravidar Kalagam have struggled lots for achieving this task. Both central and State governments have been implemented many schemes and policies such as compulsory free education upto 14 years, special schools for ST and SC students, reservation in educational opportunities, scholarship schemes, free books, fees waiving, hostel facilities, free note, uniform, bus facilities etc. Important initiatives have been implemented in Tamil Nadu by the state and federal governments, including free and mandatory education till the age of 14, special schools for SC/ST kids, admissions reservations, scholarships, and free textbooks, uniforms, and transportation. Results are now clearly getting better. With the help of focused initiatives like the Naan Mudhalvan program and increased infrastructure (480 classrooms and 15 science labs in 154 schools; upgrades in 86 schools), SSLC pass rates in Adi-Dravidar and Tribal Welfare schools increased from 78% to 92% between 2021 and 2024, and +2 pass rates increased from 84% to 96%. But still some of the setbacks are existed in providing quality education to the welfare school students. There are some outstanding activities are happening in these schools like special attention for the students those who are going to write public examinations and sports and cultural activities. However there were more aspects need to be considered in these schools to reach the educational enhancement of the scheduled caste students. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates ongoing government funding, efficient school management, and proactive family involvement is necessary to maximize the potential of welfare schools and guarantee the academic success of SC/ST pupils.

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