



Interviewing the Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Rural Students' Educational Journeys

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Abstract. As India's economic engine roars, lifting millions to unprecedented prosperity, a stark shadow falls across its vast rural landscapes: educational inequity. This study delves into the heart of this disparity, venturing beyond the gleaming skylines to the humble villages where socioeconomic status casts a long, often crippling, influence on a child's academic journey. While urban centers boast soaring enrollment rates, the countryside struggles, its classrooms frequently empty, its potential untapped. We contend that unlocking the riddle of rural education is paramount to achieving true educational equity across the nation. The pulse of economic development, or rather its faint beat in these areas, dictates everything: from the trickle of governmental funding to the scarcity of schools, the dwindling numbers of school-aged children, and the silent exodus of teachers. Our findings paint a poignant picture: socioeconomic standing deeply imprints itself on the quality of learning, shaping mindsets, influencing family dynamics around education, and ultimately, charting the long-term academic destinies of these children.

Index Terms- Educational Inequity, Rural Education, Socioeconomic Status, India, Academic Achievement, Access to Education, Education Policy

I. Introduction

As India's economic might continues its dazzling ascent, pushing GDP per capita to unprecedented heights, a stark and unsettling truth comes into sharper focus: the persistent chasm of educational inequity. While the national average sees a hopeful 55% of junior high graduates (for instance, in a developed state like Maharashtra) stepping into the next chapter of ordinary senior high schools, this figure becomes a cruel mirage for their rural counterparts. For students in the quieter, less prosperous corners of, say, rural Bihar, that 55% is a distant dream; the reality often hovers around a mere 25% enrollment rate. Compared with developed areas such as many urban cities in India, the enrollment rate in rural areas is very low. It becomes clear then: the path to true educational equity across India must begin with solving the intricate challenges faced by its rural schools [1].

At the heart of this disparity lies the fundamental issue of economic development. It's the silent, pervasive force that dictates the very breath of rural education. Consider the role of governmental funding: local rural governments, often operating on meager budgets, struggle to channel sufficient financial support into schools. This isn't just about grand infrastructure; it's about the very basics, like essential teaching tools such as projectors or even maintaining adequate security and sanitation within school grounds. The limited number of schools in these areas, a direct consequence of both scarce funding and a dwindling population of school-aged children, further compounds the problem. Local governments often neglect the



development of other education sectors, such as school security, sanitation management, and teaching management, due to limited resources [2].

Beyond infrastructure, the human element faces its challenges. Teacher shortages are rampant, particularly for those with higher qualifications. Why? Because these skilled educators, understandably, seek better living standards and professional opportunities, drawing them away from the less economically vibrant rural settings. Specifically, most teachers with high levels of teaching certificates are more willing to work in areas with good economic conditions to get better living standards.

Adding another layer to this complex tapestry is the profound influence of family socioeconomic status. In a struggle for survival, many rural families prioritize immediate income over long-term education. Children, often at a tender age, are pulled from classrooms and into the workforce to supplement household earnings. This harsh reality fuels high dropout rates in rural areas. Thus, this study aimed to investigate how socioeconomic status impacts education, specifically in rural areas with low socioeconomic status [3, 4].

II. Literature Review

1. The Concept of Poverty

When we talk about poverty, it's easy to picture a lack of money, but its true form is far more complex and insidious. Most researchers agree that a deep, undeniable connection exists between poverty and a person's educational attainment. It's not merely about a family's financial state; poverty casts a much wider, multi-dimensional shadow.

Many scholars in the field of educational equality define poverty not just as material deprivation but as a scarcity of freedom—an inability for individuals to operate effectively and efficiently within society. This broader understanding highlights how poverty strips away opportunities and capabilities, far beyond what a balance sheet can reveal [5]. Generally, the concept of poverty can be understood through both its absolute and relative forms, each contributing to this pervasive barrier to progress [6].

2. Family Background Shapes Educational Destinies

A family's socioeconomic standing casts a long shadow over a child's educational journey. At its core, income level dictates access and opportunity, particularly for those in rural areas grappling with poverty. These families often face an insurmountable hurdle when confronted with the financial and non-financial costs of education, a challenge not unfamiliar even to those striving for better schooling in India's bustling metropolises.

The immediate financial burden is clear: upfront costs like tuition, transportation, school uniforms, and textbooks become impossible barriers for impoverished households [7]. But beyond the tangible, there's a powerful, often overlooked, factor: opportunity cost. For many low-income families, sending a child



to school means foregoing immediate income from their labor, whether it's agricultural work in the fields or domestic duties at home. These families, struggling for daily survival, are often unable to perceive the long-term gains that education promises, gains that can take years to materialize. They prioritize instant benefits, making the decision to keep children out of school a heartbreakingly necessary rather than a choice.

Moreover, the impact of socioeconomic status extends to the home learning environment. Parents under severe financial strain often have less time and fewer resources to engage in family literacy practices with their children. This foundational support, crucial for early learning and sustained academic success, is frequently absent. The cumulative effect of these challenges is stark: a widening achievement gap between students from urban and rural areas, a gap deeply rooted in the socioeconomic realities of their families [8].

3. Quality Education and Its Role in Deepening Educational Inequality

Quality education isn't just a privilege; it's a powerful catalyst for social mobility and a key to shrinking the pervasive achievement gap. Imagine a ripple effect: as the standard of living improves, families across the nation see their average incomes rise. This, in turn, fuels a more robust employment rate, cultivating a more skilled and effective workforce. For families teetering on the edge of financial hardship, the impact of quality education is profound. It opens doors to better career opportunities, providing the income needed to lift them out of poverty. [9]

And the transformation doesn't stop there. Those who have personally experienced the life-altering power of education often become its fiercest advocates. Having broken free from financial struggles, they gain a heightened awareness of education's value, prioritizing their children's schooling to ensure the cycle of poverty doesn't repeat. This intergenerational commitment to learning is crucial.

Furthermore, increasing average incomes has a particularly strong impact on women in underdeveloped areas. When girls and women from financially struggling backgrounds receive a systematic education, they are far more likely to escape poverty, gain agency over their own lives, and contribute significantly to their families and communities. [10] Quality education, therefore, isn't just about individual achievement; it's a cornerstone for building a more equitable and empowered society.

III. Research Approach

1. Setting the Scene: Context and Participants

This study set out to hear directly from those with firsthand teaching experience in rural India—individuals who stepped into these communities driven by motives such as charitable work or involvement in school initiatives. To gather these valuable voices, a convenience sampling method was employed, drawing participants from the researchers' networks. Ultimately, four participants were successfully recruited for semi-structured interviews. A detailed profile of each participant is presented in Table 1.



Table 1 Participant Information

| Participant | Age | Time Taught in Rural Area | Subject(s) taught | Areas Taught | Local level | SES |
|-------------|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|-----|
| Minnie | 17 | 2020.7-8 | English | Hainan China | Extreme poverty | |
| Emma | 17 | 2019.7-8 | English, Chinese | Fujian China | Below the average | |
| Grace | 17 | 2019.11-12 | Spanish Art | Morocco | extreme poverty | |
| Ivory | 18 | 2021.7-8 | English | Guizhou China | Below the average | |

2. Gathering Voices: A Qualitative Dive into Rural Teaching Experiences

To gain authentic insights into the educational landscape of rural areas, participants were invited to share their experiences through semi-structured interviews. These conversations focused on their firsthand observations and reflections while teaching in under-resourced, remote regions. The flexible interview format allowed for open dialogue, while a core set of guiding questions ensured consistency across interviews. The key prompts included:

- Which rural community did you serve as an educator in?
- Can you describe the economic conditions of the area where you conducted your teaching activities?
- How would you characterize the state of education in that region?
- (Consider factors such as the number of schools and teachers, student enrollment, and the quality of school infrastructure.)
- What were your observations of student behavior in rural classrooms?
- (How did these behaviors compare with those of students in urban settings? Were rural students generally attentive, passive, curious, or disengaged?)
- How effectively did rural students grasp the concepts you taught?
- (Were they able to understand lessons and perform well on assessments? How did their academic comprehension differ from urban students? What factors do you believe contributed to these differences?)
- How involved were the parents in their children's education?
- (Did rural parents show concern about academic performance? How did their engagement compare with parents in urban areas? Were they proactive in communicating with teachers or attending school activities?)
- What do you believe are the unique strengths and challenges of attending school in rural areas? Please elaborate.
- In your view, how might the academic outcomes of these students change if they were enrolled in urban schools? Why and how?



These interview responses offered a textured and personal perspective on the inequalities and opportunities embedded within rural education systems, forming the backbone of this study's qualitative analysis.

3. Data Analysis

Following each interview session, audio recordings were promptly transcribed to capture participants' insights in their rawest form. These transcripts were then carefully translated into English, ensuring clarity and consistency for further analysis. A thematic analysis approach was employed, allowing key patterns and recurring themes to emerge organically across the diverse narratives of the participants. This process helped uncover shared experiences and unique perspectives, forming the foundation for meaningful interpretation.

IV. Findings and Discussion

Student Behavior in the Classroom: A Contrast of Worlds

When asked how rural students behave in class, the responses painted a picture rich in both enthusiasm and challenge. Minnie observed that despite the limited resources and teaching quality compared to urban schools, rural students are surprisingly spirited. "They actively engage in lessons, answer questions, and complete assignments diligently," she noted. However, she admitted that students in these regions might struggle with complex topics, lacking exposure to diverse educational experiences and refined instruction.

Emma added another dimension: while rural students show eagerness and curiosity, their attention spans are shorter. "They're easily distracted, and maintaining discipline can take a chunk of class time," she said. Interestingly, she noticed that unlike urban students, who are often hesitant to express thoughts for fear of being wrong, rural children aren't shy about trying—even if their answers miss the mark.

Grace offered a dual perspective through her Spanish and art classes. While most students were disengaged during Spanish, often dozing off or showing disinterest, the moment she switched to drawing, the classroom transformed—students lit up with energy and creativity. This contrast led her to believe that many rural students see academic learning as secondary to their more immediate, expressive needs.

Ivory, who taught English, echoed the same challenges. Language learning proved difficult due to a lack of immersive environments. "I had to repeat simple words three times before students could echo me. And when I asked them to speak in English, they whispered, barely audible, lacking confidence," she recalled. Yet, when spoken to in their native tongue, they responded with surprising boldness.

Together, the participants agreed: rural students show passion, resilience, and a thirst to learn, but their behavior is undeniably shaped by structural limitations—poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and minimal parental guidance—when compared to their urban peers.



Understanding Classroom Content: The Challenge of Bridging Gaps

Despite behavioral differences, most participants affirmed that rural students could grasp classroom concepts reasonably well, often exceeding expectations when they are attentive and encouraged.

Minnie praised their engagement, saying they were usually able to complete assignments and understand lessons. However, she pointed out that they struggled with analytical or abstract topics, attributing this to their lack of exposure to training programs and enrichment opportunities common in urban settings.

Emma admired their eagerness and early arrivals to class but reiterated their challenges with attention and discipline. "They love questions—even tricky ones. But once distracted, it's hard to get them back," she admitted.

Grace found that while students enjoyed repeating Spanish words after her, retention remained an issue. "When tested, many couldn't recall vocabulary, indicating the need for more time and repetition."

Ivory Highlighted a Deeper Struggle: comprehension. Though students could pronounce English words, they often didn't grasp their meanings or how to form coherent sentences. Nevertheless, all participants emphasized that intellectual potential wasn't the issue. Instead, it was the lack of consistent educational reinforcement and structured learning environments that created the gap between rural and urban learners.

Parental Engagement: The Silent Backbone of Education

When it came to parental involvement, the responses painted a sobering picture. Minnie observed that while some rural parents do care and try to communicate with teachers, their ability to support their children academically is hampered by limited education themselves or time constraints due to work. In urban areas, by contrast, parents are more proactive in shaping their children's learning environments from early on.

Emma didn't meet many parents, as most children lived with their grandparents. "The foundational gap starts early, especially when children grow up without educational guidance from their parents," she explained.

Grace, who taught students residing in a disability center, shared a disheartening truth—many of the children she taught rarely saw their parents at all. They simply never came.

Ivory added that many children in her class bore responsibilities far beyond their age—cooking meals for siblings, trekking long distances to school, and helping around the house. "Their parents work in distant cities and only return occasionally. These kids are mature and self-reliant, but their studies suffer," she reflected.



The general consensus among participants was clear: family education and parental presence in rural areas are sorely lacking, leaving children without the academic scaffolding that urban students often take for granted.

Strengths and Limitations of Rural Education

When asked to evaluate the rural schooling experience holistically, the participants highlighted both strengths and weaknesses.

Minnie pointed out that rural students rarely get to engage in extracurricular activities that enhance their learning, like competitions or enrichment classes. Emma mentioned the shortage of qualified teachers, a sentiment echoed by Grace, who noted that low teaching quality and high student-teacher ratios led to diminished academic outcomes.

Ivory, however, highlighted a surprising strength—self-reliance. “Rural students are often more independent. They manage responsibilities that city children might never encounter,” she noted. Yet she agreed that the lack of access to digital tools and educational technology remains a significant barrier.

The collective view was that while rural education builds resilience, it is constrained by outdated infrastructure, lack of qualified educators, and limited access to academic resources.

Future Academic Trajectories: Would Urban Schooling Make a Difference?

Could the academic paths of these students change if they were placed in urban schools? Most participants thought so, but with caveats.

Minnie believed that while rural students have similar foundational potential, urban schooling offers exposure to competitive learning environments, skill development, and broader academic opportunities that could help them break out of cycles of poverty.

Emma raised a cautionary note—urban education could be both a motivator and a source of immense pressure. “Their basic skills might not be on par, and that could cause anxiety. But if given equal opportunities from the start, rural children could match or even surpass their peers.”

Grace supported the idea, noting that certified teachers and multimedia tools in urban schools could significantly enhance learning outcomes. However, Ivory was more skeptical. “Access to better schools doesn’t automatically mean success. If students carry low confidence or language barriers, they might still struggle.”

VIII. Conclusions

This study set out to explore the intricate ways in which socioeconomic status shapes the educational journey of students in rural settings. What emerged from the analysis was a clear and compelling pattern: students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face significant hurdles that affect not just the quality of education they



receive, but also their mindset, behavioral patterns, and the level of educational support available within their families. These factors together weave a complex web that influences their long-term academic path. When compared to their urban counterparts, who often benefit from better infrastructure, exposure, and support systems, rural students find themselves at a considerable disadvantage — not due to a lack of potential, but due to unequal starting points shaped by their socio-economic realities.

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