



EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES OF SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS (SEDGS) ACROSS THE STATES IN INDIA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250307053>

Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the education of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) to addressing the diversity and promote the inclusive education among them. SEDGs encompass categories based on socio-cultural identities, geographical locations, gender, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions. The study aims to examine the educational issues and challenges for the education of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in India. The open-ended questionnaire was mailed to the DIET and SAMAGRA SHIKSHA across the states namely Kerala, Odisha, Manipur, Uttarakhand, and Goa for collecting the qualitative data. The educational challenges for SEDGs include high dropout rates, gender disparities, lack of access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, language barriers, and limited availability of trained educators. The study highlights state-specific interventions, such as Kerala's focus on Special Education Zones, Odisha's multilingual education programs, Manipur's residential schooling initiatives, Uttarakhand's resources for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), and Goa's scholarship schemes and inclusive policies. This paper underscores the need for comprehensive, localized strategies, interdepartmental coordination, and community engagement to bridge educational gaps for SEDGs. By leveraging government initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha, infrastructure improvements, and skill-based education, the study explores pathways for achieving educational equity and inclusion in India.

Keywords: *Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), Children with Special Needs (CWSN), NEP 2020, Inclusive Education*

Introduction

The Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) are broadly categorized based on socio-cultural identities, socio-economic factors, gender identities, and geographical identities as per the National Education Policy (2020). The policy identifies these groups in several key areas, first, it focuses on gender identities, with particular attention given to females and transgender individuals. Second, it highlights socio-cultural identities, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and various religious and linguistic minorities. Third, it considers geographical identities, specifically individuals from remote areas such as hilly regions, small towns, aspirational districts, and rural villages distant from urban centers. The fourth category addresses disabilities, including both physical and learning disabilities. Lastly, socio-economic conditions such as migrant communities and low-income households are also considered as part of the SEDGs.

These groups, often marginalized and disadvantaged, face considerable barriers in accessing education (Khan, 2018 & Sundar, 2010). To support their inclusion, it is crucial to implement targeted interventions and create an equitable, inclusive education system. NEP 2020 aims to bridge regional disparities by establishing a uniform and reasoned education framework, including the establishment of Special Education Zones (SEZs) across the nation. The study aims to examine the educational issues and challenges for the education of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in India specifically in the states of Kerala, Odisha, Manipur, Uttarakhand, and Goa. The study also focuses on the initiatives and strategies undertaken by the state government to address the challenges of these groups of students.

Methodology

The present study utilized the qualitative method. The open-ended questionnaire was posted to all the DIET and SAMAGRA SHIKSHA across the states namely Kerala, Odisha, Manipur, Uttarakhand, and Goa. The purposive sampling was used to select the state for mailing the open-ended questionnaire and collecting data from the stakeholders of the states.

Findings and Discussions

Educational Issues and Challenges among SEDGs

Kerala, despite being famous for its good literacy rate, is facing many challenges in the matter of education of marginalized communities. Studies and surveys have proved that there is a huge disparity in the literacy rates of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and general population, which has not been eliminated yet. Apart from this, gender disparity is also clearly visible in the literacy rates of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and STs, with the education rate of women being much lower than that of men. The condition of Anganwadi centres in tribal areas is also not good. These centres, which play an important role in the primary phase of education, often face lack of basic facilities, which makes their work ineffective. Due to the lack of proper pre-school facilities, the problem of dropout among tribal children increases further (Joshi, 2010). Apart from this, due to socio-economic, cultural, and institutional problems, the number of tribal students dropping out of school increases, which hinders their education (Singh, 1995).

Lack of awareness towards education among parents of disadvantaged groups is another big problem. The result of this is that parents do not take as much responsibility for the education of their children as they should. Lack of parental support and low socioeconomic status contribute to lower participation and poorer learning outcomes among SEDG children (Dutt, 2010 & Pal, 2020). In tribal areas, the geographical problem of reaching school is also a big challenge, where children have to travel difficult and far-flung paths to go to school. The lack of qualified school teachers in these tribal areas is also a major problem. The lack of regional candidates lowers the eligibility standards for becoming a teacher, which affects the quality of education. Also, the school curriculum is not adjusted to the needs and cultural contexts of marginalized learners, which creates uncertainty toward child education. According to Pal (2020), SEDG children often lack the necessary skills and support to succeed in the education system. These problems can only be resolved if concerted efforts are made to ensure equal opportunity and quality in education, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged groups in Kerala.

There are many important education problems in Manipur which create difficulties for both students and teachers. The first problem is that there is a shortage of local teachers who can speak the local dialects. Apart from this, lack of housing facilities or quarters for teachers in the hill areas is also a big problem, due to which teachers face difficulty in performing their duties. Poor infrastructure facilities also delay developmental and progressive work, which affects every educational aspect. Road accessibility is also a major problem in hill areas, making it difficult to reach there (Guha & Lawrniang, 2018). There are 33 identified tribes in Manipur, who speak different dialects, which also creates a language barrier in education. Communal discords are also an issue in special focus areas, which affect education and community development. The pupil-teacher ratio is also very dangerous, which has an impact on the student-teacher interaction. Students' attendance is also very low due to socio-economic conditions, which hampers their regular studies. All these factors result in high drop-out rates. Finally, failure in academic exams and low achievement are also big issue, which force students to leave their studies (Kishore & Sharma, 2012). Right interventions and resources are needed to overcome these problems.

There are many major education-related issues and problems in Odisha that affect children from disadvantaged groups. It is important that children from different disadvantaged groups are properly identified so that their specific needs can be understood. Understanding the learning needs of each child is also a big challenge, which makes it difficult to provide them with better education. Children's home issues and bullying also affect their learning at school, which affects their mental health and academic performance (Pangotra, 1986; Goyal and Dhaliwal, 1995; Khare 1996).

Lack of life skill education is also a big problem, which cannot prepare the children for practical life. Disciplining the students and managing their behaviour also becomes a challenge for the teachers. There is also lack of counselling, which can help the children understand and solve their emotional and psychological issues. The safety and security of children is also a serious concern, especially in remote and rural areas. Confusion of parents and their mental state also hinder the education of children, when parents are not able to take clear decisions for the education of their children. The need for vocational education is also increasing, but there is a lack of proper identification and resources for it. Migration issues also affect the education of children, as they often have to shift between schools. Gender and transgender-related issues, and challenges of adolescence also impact the educational environment, hampering the emotional and academic development of children.

There is a need for flexibility in the examination system so that children can study at their own pace. Lastly, lack of funds for special category children is also becoming a big challenge as they are not able to get proper educational resources and support. To remove all these problems, systematic interventions and government support are needed.

There are many challenges in the education of CWSN (Children with Special Needs) Uttarakhand. Firstly, there is a lack of resource persons and trained teachers and teachers do not know how to teach and engage CWSN students in schools. In hilly areas, there is a lack of professionals like psychiatrists, and audiologists who can issue disability certificates. There is also a lack of awareness among parents and the community and their attitude is also negative. Schools also lack proper infrastructure that is suitable for CWSN students. All these problems are becoming a hindrance in effectively implementing the education system.

There are other education problems for SEDGs in Goa such as low performance of students in the National Achievement Survey, problems in early literacy and numeracy, and taking direct admission to Class 1 without joining pre-primary. Many students could not avail the benefit of online education even during the pandemic as they live in remote and interior areas where there are network issues (Rannaware et al., 2022). The ongoing and proposed strategies and interventions for girls include providing free textbooks, notebooks, uniforms, raincoats, transport facility, and midday meals. Self-defense training, vending machines, and incinerators have also been installed in schools.

Saral Vidya Sahay Scheme, meritorious scholarships, post-matric scholarships, book bank scheme, nursing scholarships, and support for widow/orphan children are being provided for SC students. Prashikshan Yatra and merit-based scholarships are also available. Under tribal welfare, pre-metric and post-metric scholarships, national fellowship, national overseas scholarships, Special Central Assistance to Tribal Scheme, Ashray Adhar Scheme, Self-Employment Scheme, and short-term loan schemes are also being provided. Saral Vidya Sahay Scheme, meritorious scholarships, post-metric scholarships, book bank scheme, nursing scholarships, and support for widow or orphan children are also being provided for OBC students. Prashikshan Yatra and merit-based scholarships are also available for OBC students.

Challenges in Special Educational Zones for SEDGs in Kerala

For Special Education Zones, Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) face several challenges that are hindering their education. The first problem is that the population of marginalized communities is scattered, making it difficult for them to access educational facilities. Poor transportation and communication system prevents them from reaching schools. Besides, these areas are also affected by unhealthy habits like alcohol and tobacco, which not only affect their health but also reduce their interest in education. It has also been observed that people in these areas lack self-respect and the mentality to progress. They do not have any big mental ambitions for themselves, which stops them from taking the next step. Also, in the agro-based economy and estate areas of these regions, the greed to earn daily income during the crop season becomes a big problem for working children. Harvest season often falls during the important time of the academic year, when students leave school and start working to earn money.

Another challenge is that there is a lack of legal guidelines in these matters, which is necessary to resolve these issues. The lack of language-bridging facilities for the children of migrant labourers is also a big problem. These children are often unable to adapt to the new language and cultural environment, which becomes an obstacle to their education (Ajagar, 2024). Also, there is no availability of study materials in the mother tongue of migrant students, which may keep them away from school education. All these problems together pose serious challenges for the education of SEDGs, which require improvement of facilities and social, legal, and education related initiatives to resolve them.

Strategies and Interventions Undertaken across the States

In Kerala, the Government Department (LSGD) includes identifying local problems and working on their solutions, organizing Gram Sabha and Ayalkoottam, and ensuring job opportunities through projects like Kudumbasree. The Educational Department focuses on enrolment of children aged 4 to 18 years, work of PPK (Pre-Primary Kerala), remedial learning, individual counselling when needed, and PTA training. Through Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP), work is being done to provide food in tribal colonies, identify health issues, ensure school enrolment, develop basic infrastructure, and work on health protection. The Department of Social Justice ensures the health and welfare of children (0-6 years) and pregnant women, while the work of the Excise Department is to stop the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other substances and to locate and destroy their sources. Women and Child Development Department manage Anganwadi activities and provides nutritious food to pregnant women and children below 6 years of age.

To successfully implement the SDGs for Special Education Zones in Kerala, several organizing teams and committees have been formed that work on different levels. At the state level, an organizing team has been formed that includes the Directorate of General Education (DGE), SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training), and SSK (Sama Samiti Kendra) that coordinate state-wide initiatives. At the district level, an organizing committee has been formed, which includes people from the District Collector, District Panchayath, SSK, District Education Officer (DDE), and DIET (District Institute of Education and Training). This committee oversees the development and implementation of education within the district. There is also an organizing committee at the block level, which manages its tasks through the Block Panchayath, AEO (Assistant Educational Officer), and SSK and keeps local needs in mind. At the grass root level, SSK has a major role. SSK works directly at the community level, where it meets local people and students, understands their issues and works to improve education development. This hierarchical structure creates an integrated and effective approach to SDGs in Kerala, which promotes collaboration and coordination at every level.

In the state Manipur, a number of strategies and interventions are being implemented in Manipur to increase the literacy rate of the tribal communities, and there are also some new proposals. An important programme is being run by Samagra Shiksha to try to provide education to girls and children from SC, ST and minority communities. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and Residential Schools play a very important role in this, which help in educating the children from SC, ST and minority communities. To support out-of-school children, the option of open schooling is also being given so that they can resume their studies. Residential Schools are also being opened under Samagra Shiksha, which provide good education and accommodation facilities to the children. Samagra Shiksha has another important goal – to promote equity through inclusive education, in which

equal opportunities are being given to all children. Vocationalization is being promoted at the secondary level so that students can acquire practical skills for their careers. Also, learning enhancement programs such as “Dalit Shiksha Utkarsha Abhiyaan” are being run, which help improve the academic performance of SC, ST and minority students. All these initiatives are very important for improving education and promoting inclusivity in Manipur.

Under Samagra Shiksha, several initiatives are being taken for disadvantaged groups in Odisha. Migration issues have been addressed through enrolment drives, community mobilization, and seasonal hostels, in which 3,511 students have been accommodated. 1,147 children are living in residential hostels, and 30,275 children have been given admission under the RTE Act. Free textbooks and uniforms are also being given, especially to girls, SC, ST and BPL families. In girls’ education, self-defense training, health counseling, life skills, and safety measures such as CCTV installation have been given priority. 38,750 girls are studying in 302 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), where tailoring and computer skills are also taught. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, scholarships and free education are also being provided for child care institutions and SC/ST children. The MLE program provides primary education in 21 tribal languages for tribal children, which includes 105,446 children. Medical camps and therapy are also provided for CWSN students. Activities such as Math Mela, Science Mela, and personality development camps are conducted for pedagogical improvement.

The Goa government has taken several initiatives for special children such as special medical camps, sports activities, stipends, escort transport allowances, home-based education, corrective surgery aids, braille slates and other facilities. Therapy facilities like speech therapy and physiotherapy are also being provided, and hearing aids and spectacles are also being given to specially-abled children. Stipend, scholarships and financial assistance for self-employment are also being given to disabled students. Financial assistance is being provided to disabled persons through Dayanand Social Security Scheme, Mamata Scheme, Bachpan Scheme and Jeevan Jyoti Scheme, and help is also being provided for running day care centres.

Goa has most of the special schools, which can become part of a long-term inclusive agenda. These schools also offer vocational training, sports, curricular and co-curricular activities along with special education. Steps taken for disadvantaged groups include teacher training programmes, supply of sports materials, development of learning materials such as videos and supplementary study materials, learning through activities, health education, and play-way method of education.

Interventions for EWS and Disadvantaged Groups in Uttarakhand

There are several ongoing and proposed strategies and interventions for education in Uttarakhand. Incentives such as textbooks, uniforms, scholarships are being given. Barkha series has been translated into Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari languages. 40 KGBVs have been established for out-of-school and drop-out girls. Orientation programs have been conducted for VEC members and parental groups, and specific teacher training and awareness programs are also being conducted for CWSN.

Additional nutrition and fortified milk are being provided to students through Pradhan Mantri Poshan Yojana and Aanchal Amrit Doodh Yojana. Free textbooks and uniforms are being provided to students of all government schools. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Residential Schools and 7 residential hostels have been established in remote areas. Enrolment drives and Vidya Pravesh (school readiness program) are being conducted through Pravesh Utsav. RST and NRST centers are being established for OoSC and migratory children. Infrastructure facilities like toilets, sanitary pad vending machines and barrier-free access are also being provided in the schools. Identification camps, aids and appliances are being provided for CWSN. Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalayas and residential schools have been established for SC/ST and vulnerable children. Incentives like bicycles and tablets are being provided and teacher training programs are also being organised to address diversity and discrimination. Changes are being made to materials to remove gender stereotypes, and documentaries are being created to create awareness in the community.

The Steps Taken by the State towards Education of Disadvantaged under NEP 2020 in Manipur and Odisha

Under NEP 2020, the state government has taken several important steps to improve education for disadvantaged communities. First of all, special attention is being given to providing access to quality education to SEDGs (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups). For this, states and Union Territories will make their own plans, in which innovative mechanisms, targets and goals will be set, and these plans will be implemented together with the Social Justice and Empowerment, Tribal Affairs, and Women and Child Development departments. These plans will start from 2022-23 and achieve the goal of full inclusion by 2030.

The mapping of SEDGs will be done under the CRC/BRC of each cluster, in which the intensity and level of interventions required for each SEDG will be understood and a database will be prepared. SCERTs (State Council of Educational Research and Training) will also develop special online, offline or blended bridge courses, which will be specific for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other SEDG students, so that their education can be improved. DoSEL (Department of School Education and Literacy) and MSJE (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) will together integrate with existing schemes to provide financial assistance and scholarships to SEDG students. State/UT governments will also open NCC wings in tribal areas so that tribal students can also benefit from this facility. Lastly, retention drives will be started in high drop-out areas, especially in Special Focus Districts (SFD), which will help in keeping children in school and continuing their studies. All these steps will prove to be helpful in expanding and improving the scope of education for disadvantaged communities through NEP 2020.

The Govt. of Odisha, under NEP-2020, many important steps have been taken for disadvantaged communities that address their educational needs. First of all, workbooks and teaching learning materials for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) have been developed which have been designed by experts and these materials are being used for the children. The teachers training

programme on FLN has also been successfully completed so that teachers do not face any problem in its implementation. The State has also developed the FLN module “PRARAMBHA” and the training of teachers has also been completed for this module. Posters and standees have also been made for FLN, which are being used in classrooms.

Special focus has also been given to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The state has developed a play-based joyful learning material called “Vidya Prabesh” for class-1 beginners. Along with this, a handbook has also been prepared for the teachers and these materials have been distributed among the children and teachers so that the implementation can be done in a proper manner. Capacity building of Master Trainers on ECCE module has also been completed so that teachers can be trained and their skill set can be improved.

An assessment cell has also been created within SCERT which will evaluate baseline surveys and activities so that gaps in curricular achievements can be bridged. Lastly, the School & Mass Education Department signed an MOU with Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) South Asia and Women’s Right Organisation Breakthrough. The aim of this MOU is to integrate adolescence issues and gender equality in the school curriculum, which will be implemented for students of classes 6 to 10. All these initiatives are a big step towards improving education for disadvantaged groups.

Conclusion

The study on the educating of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in India shows a number of significant obstacles, including low rates of dropout, gender inequality, a lack of funding, gaps in infrastructure, language hurdles, and a shortage of qualified teachers. Highlighting efforts across five states – Kerala, Odisha, Manipur, Uttarakhand, and Goa – the paper underscores diverse challenges and state-specific interventions. Kerala leverages multilingual education and community involvement; Manipur addresses language and infrastructure gaps; Odisha focuses on FLN (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy) and multilingual education; Uttarakhand prioritizes CWSN (Children with Special Needs); and Goa ensures educational inclusion through scholarships and facilities.

The study highlights the importance of community involvement, interdepartmental collaboration, and focused, localized strategies in addressing SEDG issues. States have started programs for scholarships, vocational training, and inclusivity in an effort to achieve equal access to education by utilizing programs like Samagra Shiksha and the NEP 2020 framework. But ongoing issues including migration, cultural hurdles, and economic limitations call for further attention to infrastructure, teacher preparation, and specialized educational resources.

Acknowledgment: No

Author’s Contribution: *Kanchan Sarkar:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing; *Aswini Ajagar:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing & Prof. Rasmita Das Swain: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing.

Funding: No

Declaration: All the authors have given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

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Publisher's Note

The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

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