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Four-year data of dropout rates in class 10 shows a steady decrease. HT spoke to experts to understand why students fall out of the education system.



The dropout rate in class 10 stood at 20.6% in 2021-22 — a steady decline over the previous three academic years, the Union ministry of education informed the Parliament last week. It was 25.4 % in 2020-21, 26% in 2019-20

and 28.4% in 2018-19.



The data also highlights that of the nearly 19 million students who appeared for the class 10 examination in 2022, nearly 3 million students failed to progress to class 11. (Representative Image)

Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan submitted four-year data of dropout rates of Class 10 students across the states, according to which Odisha was the worst performer in 2021-22 with 49.9% dropout rate, followed by Bihar (42.1%), Meghalaya (33.5%), Karnataka (28.5%), and Andhra Pradesh and Assam at 28.3%, each.

The data also highlights that of the nearly 19 million students who appeared for the class 10 examination in 2022, nearly 3 million students failed to progress to class 11.

Pradhan cited several reasons behind the dropout including not attending the schools, difficulty in following the instructions in schools, lack of interest in the studies, level of difficulty of question paper, lack of quality teachers, and lack of support from parents, teachers and schools, among others. "Education is in the concurrent list of the Constitution and the majority of the schools are under the domain of respective State and UT Governments," he said.

HT spoke to experts to understand the root causes responsible for such a large number of students falling out of the mainstream education system.

Lack of resources and teachers

According to the government's unified digital Information on school education (UDISE+) data, of the 1.5 million schools in India, 68.6% or more than 1 million are government schools. This means that the majority of the children in India (132.4 million) are enrolled in government schools, where the availability of resources offers a grim picture.

On December 5, the government submitted data in the Parliament highlighting that there are 840,000 teaching vacancies in government schools in India. Of them, 720,000 were at the primary level (classes 1 to 8) and 120,000 were at the secondary level (class 9 to 12).

The data also suggests that only 37.7% of government schools have computer facilities, 24.2% have internet access, and 72.6% have playground facilities.

Shayama Chona, a Delhi-based educationist and a retired school principal of DPS RK Puram, said that children will attend school if schools have basic amenities and foster a correct attitude. "Hundreds of government schools in India don't have sufficient numbers of teachers and even those who are there are not well trained. Many of these schools don't have playgrounds and libraries. The students are supposed to get a free uniform but it does not come on time. The students don't even get free stationery and books at the right time and therefore they stay behind," she said.

Noting that there is a need to bring changes in the system, Chona said, "It is high time that the private schools in India start collaborating with government schools as they do in the US and the UK. Maybe teachers from private schools will be encouraged to teach in nearby government schools and help train the teachers in these schools."

Sanjay Gupta, director of Childhood Enhancement Through Training and Action (Chetna), an NGO that works in the field of children's education, appreciated that the dropout rate has decreased over the years for class 10, but cautioned that there was a need to see how many students were graduating from class 1 to 10.

"Our experience says that the maximum dropout is witnessed in the years up to class 5, due to various reasons including infrastructure like toilets (especially for girls), poverty, distance and imbalanced teacher-student ratio, and proxy teachers. This is where corporations and NGOs can pitch in to assist in improving infrastructure and quality," he said.

Economic backwardness

Education in private schools is free only up to class 8th under the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, but "becomes an extra burden for families," Gupta said, adding that poor families prefer to send their children to work rather than school after Class 8. "The government may look into making education free till class 12 at least in very backward regions in the country," he said.

Economic backwardness is a key factor for students dropping out of school, Chona said. "In the case of large families, the number of people to feed is high and so is the cost of living. Therefore, such families need more hands to earn money. Many students also work while attending schools to help their families, and cannot give full time to their education and fail," she said.

The gender aspect

According to the UDISE+ report, in 2021-22 over 120 million girls are enrolled in primary to higher secondary showing an increase of 819,000 compared to the enrolment of girls in 2020-21. The dropout rate among girls remained lower than boys at the primary and secondary levels. However, at the upper primary level — classes 6-8 — dropout among girls remained higher when compared to that of boys in the country.

Sonal Kapoor, founder-director Protsahan India Foundation, an NGO that works on psychosocial care and rehabilitation for girls facing abuse and gender-based violence, said that adolescent girls often drop out due to various economic and cultural pressures. Factors include early marriages, gendered responsibilities, lack of access to menstrual hygiene facilities, financial constraints, and social norms that prioritize boys' education.

“The consequences are profound; dropping out curtails girls' education, limiting their career options, financial independence, and access to crucial health and life skills like sexual and reproductive health knowledge or digital and financial skills. This limitation can perpetuate never-ending cycles of poverty, abuse and gender inequality,” she said.

Preventing dropouts among girls at an early age needs a “systemic approach”, she said. “Implementing gender transformative policies that address intersectional gender disparities in education, providing safe and inclusive learning environments, offering financial support like scholarships and incentives, ensuring access to healthcare and menstrual hygiene resources, engaging communities using cinema, theatre and arts to change social norms around girls' education, and fostering mentorship programmes can help retaining adolescent girls in schools.”

The National Education Policy 2020 is focused on no child being left behind in terms of educational opportunity because of their background and socio-cultural identities. Educationist Meeta Sengupta said that the real test of the NEP 2020 is its impact on dropout rates.

“New reforms take a while to set in, and nationwide NEP-driven foundational learning and teacher training revival is in progress. The test of it will be whether dropouts are reduced. The old ways with learning gaps, book learning only at school prevails and must give way to on-call, need-based hybrid learning ” she said

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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