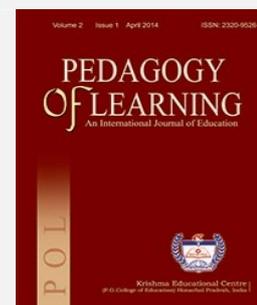


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Exploring the Inter-linkages between Schooling Background of the Students and their Higher Education Participation

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ABSTRACT

Socio-economic background of the students is regarded as a major determinant of their higher education participation. The most common measures of socio-economic status of students include their gender, social category, religion, schooling background, parental education, parental occupation, family income etc. In India, with a stratified school system, vast differences are found between educational institutions that serve upper and lower sections of the society. This paper aims at finding out that how far the students studying in different higher education institutions i.e. general and professional institutions in the Indian state of Punjab differ in their schooling background and how far the schooling background of students studying in different higher education institutions differs with regard to their gender, locale and social category. The information regarding the schooling background of students was collected with the help of a self-prepared semi-structured Socio-Economic Background Questionnaire. The findings indicate that the schooling background of the students is a significant factor in higher education participation of students coming from different locations and belonging to different social categories. Therefore, there is an urgent need to intervene in improving the quality of school education so that an education of equitable quality should be available to all the children irrespective of gender, caste, class, location etc.

Keywords: Socio-economic background, schooling background, higher education participation

INTRODUCTION

Higher education participation is directly or indirectly influenced by a number of factors. Socio-economic background of the students is regarded as a as one of the major deciding factors. Socio-economic background of the student is known to either act as “gateway” or the “barrier” in so far as access to higher education is concerned (Sharma and Chandra, 2009:18). The relationship between socio-economic background and the educational attainment of a student is one of the many dimensions of the relationship between education and environment and perhaps one of the most important dimensions also (Singh, 2007:113). Although intelligence plays an important role in determining which students will be selected for higher education, socio-economic status never ceases to be an important factor in determining who shall be eliminated from the contest for higher education (Sewell and Shah, 1967:22). Jayaram (1976) while analysing the relationship between education and social structure found that even though the admission to higher and professional education was based on merit, in actuality it seemed to be determined by a set of non-academic and socio-cultural factors like the caste, economic background, ability to afford, status of parents, medium of instruction at school stage etc. Similarly, Chinnappan (1987) while examining the functional relationships existing among one’s family background, educational attainment, occupational attainment and income found that the structure of income distributions and patterns of educational distribution were closely associated. A high degree of income inequality was found to be related to a high degree of educational inequality.

Moreover, there are many non-financial barriers in the way to access higher education such as schooling background of the students, medium of instruction of the students, educational background of parents, gender bias etc. Huge disparities in the educational standards at the school level are attributed as a major factor contributing to the strengthening of the entry barrier (Kumar and George, 2009:57). The students coming from well-educated and economically well-off families have access to good schooling. These students also have the requisite cultural capital to be academically successful along with have access to tutoring and test coaching. All these factors significantly contribute in their better academic performance at school level as well in raising their chances to attain higher education. On the other hand, the students coming from economically poor families with poorly educated parents generally suffer in all these respects which results in their poor participation in higher education.

In India, there are different layers of schools such as government-run schools, government-aided schools, private schools etc. This division of educational institutions also reflects social differentiation of the student population. The government schools are generally being opted by the lower sections of the Indian society, whereas the middle and upper sections of the society send their wards to the private schools. This paper is based on the study to explore the schooling background of the students studying in various general and professional colleges in the state of Punjab in isolation and also with respect to their gender, location and social category so as to find out their influence on higher education participation. The factors like gender, location

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and social category are significant as these have their role in determining the school choice as well the higher education participation in the Indian context.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

While studying the role of socio-economic inequality in entry to higher education O'Connell et al. (2006) argued that the inequality prevalent in higher education was an outcome of the cumulative disadvantage rooted in the differential economic, social and cultural capital of the families. This inequality is also reflected in the selection of school and is one of the significant determinants of access, retention and performance in higher education. In this context, Vincent and Menon (2011) articulated that middle class of India had been enthusiasts of differentiated schooling as it equips their children with better credentials, thereby giving them an edge in the employment race. Further, through education middle classes of both maintain and reproduce their cultural capital with the aim of further consolidating the family's social class position.

Rao (2010) while studying the higher education participation of marginalised sections of society found that the participation of SC and ST was very low in professional courses such as law, medicine, engineering and technologies, while their enrolment in Arts, Commerce and Science programmes was substantially high. Further, the enrolment of these groups in elite technical institutions such as Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) was very low despite reservations. He opined that the main reason behind the minimal participation of SCs and STs in professional elite courses was their poor and substandard schooling as compared to privileged children of other social categories. Similarly, Hasan and Mehta (2010) highlighted that Scheduled Castes and Muslims were massively underrepresented in college, relative to their shares in population of college going age-group. Further, other backward classes and scheduled tribes were also underrepresented, although to a lesser extent. The basic reason they found behind this underrepresentation was lying at the lower rungs on the educational ladder. They articulated that as most of the children from these marginalised categories were not able to complete the lower levels of education.

Basant and Sen (2013) also strongly linked the participation in higher education to the completion of elementary, secondary and post-secondary education and the educational gap at different levels to the primary reasons behind educational deficits among socially disadvantageous groups at the college level. Moreover, Johl (2008) stated that the poor and disadvantaged sections of the society, particularly in rural areas, suffered cumulatively through generations. In his view, the benefits of the higher education can be achieved only by bringing about substantial improvements in the government schools in the rural areas, where mostly children of the poor and other disadvantaged sections of the rural society are studying.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Schooling of the students is an important factor in determining their educational attainments. In India there are different layers of schools and this division of educational institutions is on the basis of the social differentiation of the student population. Vast differences

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have been found between the educational institutions that serve the upper and lower sections of the society as educational institutions attended predominantly by the upper sections have better human and non-human inputs so that they provide qualitatively better education. Consequently, students from the sections who attend these educational institutions are in position to have better learning experience which leads to their higher educational attainments. Difference in learner's achievement also means difference in the chance for further higher education which leads to difference in occupational placement or social mobility.

Therefore, the present study is conducted by the researcher to find answer to the following research questions:

- I) How far the students studying in different higher education institutions differ in their schooling background?
- II) How far the schooling background of students studying in different higher education institutions differs with regard to their gender, locale and social category?

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the schooling background of students studying in different colleges of Punjab.
2. To study the schooling background of male and female students studying in different colleges of Punjab.
3. To study the schooling background of rural and urban students studying in different colleges of Punjab.
4. To study the schooling background of students belonging to different social categories studying in different colleges of Punjab.

METHODOLOGY

As the basic purpose of the study was to ascertain the schooling background of the students studying in various general and professional colleges of Punjab with regard to their gender, locale and social category, thus, the technique of stratified random sampling was employed to take sample of colleges from amongst the different type of general and professional colleges. Out of the total colleges, 25 general colleges imparting instructions in humanities, commerce and sciences and 25 professional colleges *viz.* engineering, medical, paramedical and management colleges were selected. Further, cluster sampling was employed for studying the schooling background of the students pursuing different courses in general and professional colleges. All the students of the selected colleges enrolled in the first year of the degree course leading to graduation in general or professional education were selected as a part of the sample. On the whole, 6496 students from general higher education colleges and 2429 students from the professional colleges of Punjab constituted the sample of the study.

The information regarding the schooling background of students was collected with the help of a self-prepared semi-structured *Socio-Economic Background Questionnaire* to find out whether the school from where they passed their matriculation i.e. 10th standard was a private or

government institution and whether it was urban or rural in location. The numerical data, thus collected was tabulated and analysed by applying the technique of percentage analysis. Then the data was interpreted to give meanings to the numerical figures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data with respect to schooling background of the students studying in different colleges, revealed that out of total students who were part of the study, 55.75 per cent students did their schooling from the private schools, while 44.25 per cent students studied in the government schools. This means that at higher education level, there is more participation of the students who have done schooling in the private schools. While further analyzing the data, it was found that out of 6496 students studying in general higher education institutions 45.5 per cent students did their schooling from private schools while 54.5 per cent were matriculates from the government schools. On the other hand, from the total students studying in professional colleges (2429), 83.5 per cent students did their schooling from the private schools, while a very small percentage i.e. 16.5 per cent had their schooling from the government schools (Table 1).

Table 1: Schooling Background of Students in Different Colleges

		General Higher Education Colleges	Professional Colleges	All Colleges (8925)
Total Students	Government Schools	3544 (54.5%)	401 (16.5%)	3945 (44.25%)
	Private Schools	2952 (45.5%)	2028 (83.5%)	4980 (55.75%)
Total Students		6496 (100%)	2429 (100%)	8925 (100%)

Thus, it was found that most of the students (83.5%) studying in professional colleges have done their matriculation from private schools. From amongst these students, 63.75 per cent students were matriculates from urban private schools, whereas 19.75 per cent students were matriculates from rural private schools. Among the students studying in professional colleges, only 6.5 per cent were from urban government schools while 10 per cent were those who did their schooling from rural government schools (Table 2). This indicates that the students with private urban schooling background represent the largest share among the students studying in professional colleges of Punjab.

Table 2: Schooling Background of Students in Different Colleges (Location-Wise)

		General Higher Education Colleges	Professional Colleges	All Colleges (8925)
Total Student	Government School (Rural)	2319 (35.75%)	240 (10%)	2559 (28.5%)
	Government School (Urban)	1225 (19%)	161 (6.5%)	1386 (15.5%)

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	Private School (Rural)	1024 (15.75%)	481 (19.75%)	1505 (17%)
	Private School (Urban)	1928 (29.5%)	1547 (63.75%)	3475 (39%)
	Total Students	6496 (100%)	2429 (100%)	8925 (100%)

On the other hand, in general higher education colleges, larger share is of the students (35.75%) who did their schooling from government schools located in rural areas (Table 2). Moreover, 29.5 per cent students of these colleges did their schooling from urban private schools, whereas 19 per cent of students were matriculates from the urban government schools. The share of students pursuing education in general higher education colleges who did their schooling from rural private schools was 15.75 per cent (Table 2).

When data pertaining to schooling background was analysed with respect to gender, it was found that of the total female students studying in professional colleges, 84.5 per cent female students did their schooling from private schools and only 15.5 female students had their schooling from the government schools (Table 3).

Table 3: Schooling Background of Students in Different Colleges (Gender-Wise)

			Government School	Private School
Total Students (8925)	Male Students (4397)	General Higher Education Colleges (2950)	1670 (56.5%)	1280 (43.5%)
		Professional Colleges (1447)	250 (17.25%)	1198 (82.75%)
	Female Students (4528)	General Higher Education Colleges (3546)	1874 (52.75%)	1672 (47.25%)
		Professional Colleges (982)	151 (15.5%)	830 (84.5%)

Nearly same trend was witnessed in case of male students studying in professional colleges as 82.75 per cent of them did their schooling from private schools and 17.25 per cent male students did their schooling from the government schools (Table 3). On the other hand, 56.75 per cent of the male students attending the general higher educational institutions had their schooling from government schools. The corresponding figure for the female students was 52.75 per cent (Table 3).

While looking at the data on schooling background location-wise i.e. in terms of schooling background of students coming from rural and urban areas, it was found that 90.5 per cent of the urban students studying in professional colleges had their schooling from private schools whereas the corresponding figure for the rural students in professional colleges was 66.75 per cent. Similarly, 61 per cent of the urban students and 30.5 per cent of the rural students

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studying in general higher education institutions studied in private schools at matriculation level. Further, 33.25 per cent of the rural students and only 9.5 per cent of the urban students studying in professional colleges had their schooling from government schools. Furthermore, 69.5 per cent of the rural students and 39 per cent of the urban students studying in general higher education institutions did their matriculation from government schools (Table 4).

Table 4: Schooling Background of Students in Different Colleges (Location-Wise)

			Government School	Private School
Total Students	Urban Students (4861)	General Higher Education Colleges (3153)	1225 (39%)	1928 (61%)
		Professional Colleges (1708)	161 (9.5%)	1547 (90.5%)
	Rural Students (4064)	General Higher Education Colleges (3343)	2319 (69.5%)	1024 (30.5%)
		Professional Colleges (721)	240 (33.25%)	481 (66.75%)

The social category-wise analysis of data on schooling background reveals that among the students studying in general higher education colleges 33 per cent of the students belonging to general category and 6.25 per cent each belonging to scheduled castes and backward classes had their schooling from private schools whereas 28.75 per cent of the students belonging to general category, 16 per cent of those belonging to the scheduled castes and 9.75 per cent of those belonging to the backward classes were matriculates from government schools (Table 5).

Table 5: Schooling Background of Students in Different Colleges (Social Category-Wise)

Total Students		Government School	Private School
General Higher Education Colleges (6496)	General	1861 (28.75%)	2143 (33%)
	S.Cs.	1044 (16%)	407 (6.25%)
	B.Cs.	639 (9.75%)	402 (6.25%)
Professional Colleges (2429)	General	168 (7%)	1487 (61.25%)
	S.Cs.	131 (5.5%)	236 (9.75%)
	B.Cs.	102(4.25%)	305(12.5%)

Further, among the students getting professional education, 61.25 per cent of the students belonging to general category, 9.75 per cent students belonging to scheduled castes and 12.5 per cent belonging to backward classes did their schooling from private schools. On the other hand, among students pursuing professional education, only 7 per cent students belonging to general category, 5.5 per cent of those belonging to the scheduled castes and 4.25 per cent of those belonging to backward classes were matriculates from government schools (Table 5).

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While analysing the data pertaining to the schooling background of students studying in different colleges vis-à-vis gender, location and social category, a number of inferences were drawn. Both rural female (10.1%) and male students (9.8%) belonging to the general category who had studied in the government schools along with urban female students (10.42%) belonging to general category with schooling background of private schools constituted the dominant groups among the students studying in the general higher educational institutions (Table 6).

On the other hand, in the professional institutions, the larger group of students was constituted by both male (21.7%) and female students (16.75%) from urban areas belonging to general category and who have had their schooling from private schools. In this way, the professional courses are enrolling more students with private school background. Even a considerable proportion of both male and female students coming from rural areas and belonging to general category who are studying in professional institutions also had their schooling from the private schools (Table 6).

Further, most of the students belonging to Scheduled Castes with government school background are studying in general higher education institutions. Among these students, the most prominent group is constituted by both rural female and male students (Table 6). However, a considerable proportion of both urban and rural female students belonging to the Scheduled Castes with schooling from private schools are pursuing general higher education courses. However, among the students belonging to the Scheduled Castes studying in professional institutions, the group which has the maximum representation is urban male students with their schooling from private schools (Table 6).

**Table 6: Schooling Background of Students in Different Colleges
(Gender, Location and Social Category-Wise)**

Total Students (8925)		General Higher Education Colleges (6496) (100%)		Professional Colleges (2429) (100%)		
		Government School	Private School	Government School	Private School	
Male Students	Rural	General	636 (9.8%)	458 (7%)	73 (3%)	314 (13%)
		S.Cs.	317 (4.88%)	73 (1.13%)	47 (1.93%)	51 (2.1%)
		B.Cs.	240 (3.7%)	107 (1.64%)	41 (1.69%)	111 (4.6%)
	Urban	General	262 (4.05%)	485 (7.5%)	38 (1.56%)	525 (21.7%)
		S.Cs.	125 (1.92%)	74 (1.13%)	22 (0.9%)	86 (3.54%)
		B.Cs.	90 (1.38%)	83 (1.28%)	29 (1.19%)	111 (4.6%)
Female Students	Rural	General	655 (10.1%)	523 (8.05%)	41 (1.69%)	241 (9.7%)
		S.Cs.	407 (6.27%)	109 (1.67%)	50 (2.05%)	44 (1.8%)
		B.Cs.	195 (3%)	95 (1.46%)	24 (1%)	40 (1.65%)
	Urban	General	308 (4.75%)	677 (10.42%)	16 (0.66%)	407 (16.75%)
		S.Cs.	195 (3%)	151 (2.32%)	12 (0.5%)	55 (2.26%)
		B.Cs.	114 (1.75%)	117 (1.8%)	8 (0.33%)	43 (1.77%)

The above results highlight that inequality in access to school education of comparable quality is a significant factor in higher education participation of students coming from different locations and belonging to different social categories. However, equal access to school education is the birth right of every child born in a democratic country, irrespective of caste, creed, place of birth and economic status of the parents. It is not the fault of the child if he/she is born in a village, in a poor family or a disadvantaged household. As a newborn Indian citizen, he/she has a every right to the basic elements that build up his/her capacity to compete on a level playing field for the opportunities society offers in his/her lifetime. It is the primary responsibility of the state to build up the child's ability and capacity according to his/her personality traits. Unfortunately, it is the state and the society that denies elementary facilities to some and provides much to others, depending upon the socio-economic status of the parents, which creates inequities and unequal access to education and gainful employment opportunities (Johl, 2008: 325).

Seeing the inequality perpetuating in the society on the basis of education, Education Commission (1964-66) highlighted the need of common school system of public education. According to commission this system will be open to all the children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic conditions or social status; where access to good education will depend not on wealth or class but on talent.

But in a highly stratified society of India due to the lack of the commitment of political leaders and pressure from civil society this common school system which was visualised by Education Commission could not be realized. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 totally disregarded the framework of common school system as it itself legitimized the different types of schools having varied infrastructural and academic facilities and imparting education of varied quality. In section 2 (n) of the Act while defining school it remarked: School means any recognized school imparting elementary education and include, a school established, owned or controlled by the appropriate government or local authority; an aided school receiving aid or grants to from government or local authority (privately managed but government aided schools); a school belonging to specified category (such as central schools, Navodaya schools, Sainik schools etc.) and unaided schools. So, the Act legalized whole range of schools i.e. those that barely fulfill the infrastructural norms to those who are well endowed to those who are over endowed having air-conditioned classrooms, internet coverage etc. In this way RTE Act (2009) totally disregarded common school system and legitimized multilayered system of schooling. Although a provision has been made in the act to reserve 25% seats for children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged sections from the neighborhood even in the unaided schools and reimbursement of expenditure incurred on them by government, but this is not in consonance with the spirit of common school system.

In this process of multilayered schooling, quality education at school level became the exclusive preserve of a limited number of privately funded and managed schools located in the urban areas, which catered to the educational needs of economically sound, educated and articulate sections of the society. The government funded and operated schools, gradually but ultimately, became the preserve of the lower strata of the society. The cumulative impact of

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many factors, particularly resource crunch, loss of interest by vocal sections and utter neglect by the state authorities made government operated schools completely dysfunctional. In between the quality private schools and sick government schools, a third layer made up of large number of substandard private schools strengthened its foothold (Brar, 2008: 336). In the process, the poor and disadvantaged sections of the society, particularly in rural areas, suffer cumulatively through generations and the better-off sections move on higher and higher up the growth path of prosperity (Johl, 2008: 326).

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Education especially the higher education is generally viewed as a powerful tool of social change in a society where majority of the population is socially and economically disadvantaged. This is because of the fact that higher education is not only a means of seeking better economic opportunity but also an effective instrument for upward social mobility. Hence in the democratic societies there emerges a need for massification of higher education. In this context, the following educational implications are being outlined:

1. The benefits of the higher education can be achieved only when school level education is improved in the government schools, where children of the poor and disadvantaged sections of the society are generally studying. Therefore, the government should strive to take appropriate policy steps to ensure school education of comparable quality to all socio-economic strata of the society.
2. Professional education is found to be heavily biased against the rural population and the socially marginalized sections of the society. Besides, opportunities for professional education are mostly limited to the students with particular type of social, cultural and economic capital. Steps should be undertaken by the government to dilute the disadvantages of the deprived sections of the society by providing them quality schooling and free pre-entrance coaching.
3. All the entrance tests for admission to higher professional courses are held in English language. But, there are not many government schools in rural areas which teach science streams and further science and mathematics subjects are taught to the students in local languages, which later on do not help in competition for seats in institutions of professional education. Thus, an option should be made to teach these subjects to all the deserving and aspiring students in English language in all government schools rather than opening 'meritorious schools' for the blessed few.
4. The Scheduled Castes constitute a deprived group at all the levels, be it cultural, social, economic or educational. The females of this marginalised section of the society are facing deprivation within deprivation. Therefore, in the higher education institutions particularly in the professional education, out of the total number of reserved seats for SC category some proportion of seats should only be reserved for the female students of these categories which will lead to their upward social and later on economic mobility.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of this study, a number of significant conclusions have been drawn. Firstly, the urban students with private schooling background represent the largest share among the students studying in professional colleges of Punjab. However, in general higher education institutions, the students with government school background outnumber the students who did their schooling from private schools.

Among the male and female students, the proportion of female students with private school background is slightly higher than that of male students in professional colleges. However, in the general higher education institutions, the proportion of male students with schooling background of government schools is slightly higher than that of female students.

The social category-wise analysis of data on schooling background reveals that among the students getting professional education, there is a predominance of students belonging to general category who did their schooling from private schools. Further, nearly one-tenth of the students belonging to the Scheduled Castes and studying in professional colleges had their matriculation from private schools.

Further, among the students studying in general higher education colleges, the proportion of students belonging to general category and having studied in private schools slightly outnumber the general category students who did their schooling from the government schools. However, a reverse trend is apparent in case of students belonging to both Scheduled Castes and Backward classes as among these students the students having a government school background are more in number.

The analysis of data of schooling background of students studying in different colleges vis-à-vis gender, location and social category highlights that both rural female and male students belonging to the general category who had studied in the government schools constituted the dominant groups among the students studying in the general higher educational institutions. In the professional institutions, both male and female students from urban areas belonging to general category and who have had their schooling from private schools constitute the larger group of students.

Thus the schooling background of the students is a significant factor in higher education participation of students coming from different locations and belonging to different social categories. Therefore, there is an urgent need to intervene in improving the quality of school education so that an education of equitable quality should be available to all the children irrespective of gender, caste, class, location etc.

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