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Inefficient Education and High Dropout
Rates of School Children in Indian Slums

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the problems arising in government schools and the education system, which is responsible for high dropout rates among students primarily in the Indian slums. The existing education policies have been reviewed to make relevant recommendations. It has been assumed that a lack of quality education is responsible for the dropouts.

The paper emphasizes the need for the Right to Education (RTE) to safeguard all children under the age of 18 to ensure that no child is denied access from this inalienable right. It underlines the state of execution of the RTE act as well as other related schemes.

The various factors contributing to high dropouts have been explored and relevant solutions have been mentioned. Furthermore, SWOT analysis of the recommendations was carried out to check their effectiveness. They were found to be efficient with the only threat being improper implementation from the concerned authorities end.

The result was that dropouts are due to legal, political and social factors in addition to inadequate quality of education. Also, an appeal has been made to the government to increase the education sector budget allocation to ensure proper infrastructure and technologically advanced learning in the slums.

Keywords:

Education, Right to Education, Implementation, Schemes, Dropout Rates

1.0 Introduction

Education is a major element that plays a vital role in the development of an individual's personality; such an intrinsic component should be ensured to all humans. This construct was taken forward by the Eighty-Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of India by introducing Article 21 A 'Right to Education.' It states that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine." [1] Therefore, the assenting of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 has made the standard process of gaining knowledge in schools a fundamental right of all children between the age group of 6 years to 14 years. However, the

implementation of the same along with other education policies such as SMSA and Mid Day Meal has been found to be shallow and contributing significantly to the dropouts.

Over the years, the importance of education has also been recognized by both the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While MDG 2 - 'Achieve Universal Primary Education' focused on increasing student enrolment, SDG 4 - 'Quality Education' emphasized on improving the quality of education provided in schools. One would believe there to be great progress in the field of education in India with such initiatives in place, however, the current situation rather shows the dismal reality of our country and its slums.

The condition of Indian slums is far from being better. Although the government has initiated various policies, the basic problem in slums and the inhuman living conditions still prevail. One of the most important aspects to improve the state of people in slums is to provide them with a better education. Almost 17% of the Indian population dwells in slums, of which children constitute a major part. [2]

According to the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration in 2016-17, 75.83% of eligible children were enrolled in schools at the elementary and secondary level, leaving 24.17% of children out of schools. The average annual dropout rate at the secondary education level was 19.89% reported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in 2016-2017. [3]

Such levels of dropouts create a long term inefficiency in the whole system and hence a significant threat. Since every social issue and its aligning SDG is related to one or the other, addressing the dropout rates also caters to numerous problems; educating every single person is the best way to overcome many related social evils like gender-based inequality, domestic violence, and crime rates. With people being educated and able to earn a livelihood, the problem of poverty as well as hunger can be tackled.

The current dropout scenario is a major concern for the nation. Taking the ineffective implementation of SDG 4's aim, our hypothesis for the research is that such high dropout rates of school children especially in Indian slums are a result of lack of quality education in government schools. [3] Understanding the importance of education, the intent of this study is to reduce the dropout rates and analyze if our assumed problem for the alarming dropout rates is

correct and to search if there are more factors affecting it. We hope to come up with rational and practical answers and ways to guarantee that the inviolable right to learn is attainable for all kids.

2.0 Methodology

The paper is based upon Qualitative Research and explores the various faults and inefficiencies in the education policies and RTE that contribute significantly in the large dropout rates. Faulty execution of these programmes along with other aspects that resulted in students deviating from education in any way were identified and relevant arguments were constructed and presented to support the same. All the factors contributing to the inadequate implementation of these policies have been mentioned in the findings. Secondary data has been used to support the observations.

The findings and other parameters on which the policies have failed have been analyzed and mentioned in a tabular form. Keeping the problems in mind, relevant recommendations that would ensure an efficient education system have been brought up. These suggestions are practical enough that they can be executed by the government with the help and support of the concerned authorities to reduce the dropouts rates. Further, SWOT Analysis of the recommendations has been done to support their effectiveness considering the various social, political, economic, financial and quality factors.

2.1 Findings: Factors leading to dropout rates:

Through the duration of our research, we observed that there are a number of problems that affect dropout rates.

2.2 Quality of Education and School Factors

I. Quality of Curriculum

Dropout rates are alarmingly high because the education curriculum does not interest the students. It focuses majorly on the theoretical aspect and relies heavily on textbooks, which are often problematic as they aren't regularly updated. The content at times is also misleading as many depictions and incidents in the prescribed textbooks tend to support racism, sexism, and body shaming.

There is also a lack of laboratories which hinder practical knowledge. Even if these facilities exist, teachers don't conduct the practicals as and when required. Skill training is missing and the traditional concept of focussing on just Science, Maths, and English

education remains dominant. There needs to be a special focus on vocational and entrepreneurial skills along with civic awareness.

Another reason for children dropping out is the lack of 'sex education' in the curriculum. As children hit puberty, changes take place and curiosity about the opposite gender develops. Due to a lack of awareness, they get involved in unhealthy pursuits, which lead to drastic consequences. Such incidents are also a reason why parents are reluctant to send their children to school; students need to be educated on the same.

II. Scarcity of Resources

According to the RTE which states "schools need to maintain an optimum pupil-teacher ratio of 30:1 at primary and 35:1 at the secondary level of schooling, have proper furniture, provide proper infrastructure like school building, other learning equipment, and provide basic necessities", it can be consistently seen that most schools still don't have fit for use furniture and well-lit classrooms. [4]

The infrastructure is a huge problem. Firstly, the number of schools do not suffice with the need and demand. Secondly, the condition of existing school buildings is disgraceful and unsafe. Basic necessities like furniture, hygienic washrooms, safe drinking water, medical rooms and electricity, internet, lab and sports equipment, rainwater drainage system are also missing and lacking.

All these factors have led to the degradation of the quality and experience of education provided in the schools. Even if children are somehow retained in schools, lack of infrastructure would force them to drop out. These conditions are neither suitable for the students nor the teachers.

2.3 Social factors

I. Discrimination

India has itself never been able to remain free of disputes and conflicts happening in the name of class, caste, creed, language, and gender and the situation is the same with the education system. The RTE does protect everyone from these forms of discrimination in its section 8 (a) subclause (c), so the problem should not persist. However, there have been numerous incidents where the RTE has been denied and slum children are still discriminated against, by their peers and teachers following which they choose to drop out.

In a school, 58 Ghasiya children were made to sit in a separate class because they belonged to a marginalized community and the following was reported by one of the students.

“The teacher tells us to sit on the other side. If we sit with others, she scolds us and asks us to sit separately ... The teacher doesn't sit with us because she says we 'are dirty.' The other children also call us dirty everyday so sometimes we get angry and hit them.”[5]

II. Violence and Bullying

Violence and bullying are prevalent all over India and includes personal insults, name-calling, slurs, racial and sexist statements. Low scorers are usually ridiculed for their marks and boys are made fun of for crying or not participating in sports. Constant remarks lead to immense psychological harm to the victim students which may lead to feelings of resentment, loneliness, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. When affected students try to raise their voice against this injustice, they also face physical assault by the bullies. In the age of various anti-bullying laws, we still come across some surveys that show that as many as 42% of students of Class 4 to 8 and 36% of Class 9 to 12 are subjected to harassment by peers on school campuses. [6]

Heart-wrenching cases of sexual abuse and assaults faced by both girls and boys in government schools by other students have also been increasing without much support for the victims. The lack of reliable counselors and unawareness about steps to be taken amongst students leave them with no choice but to succumb to the violence. Such incidents often leave children with trauma which affects their mental, physical, and emotional health, and push them to drop out of school.

Students also face violence at the hands of teachers even though it is strictly prohibited in the RTE. 80% of marginalized children report being punished by teachers, while an average of 43% said they were regularly beaten, up to three times a week, according to a new report by Agrasar, an NGO. In some schools the number of regularly beaten students rose to 88%. [7]

III. Illness

The scheme of school health services is an economical and powerful means of raising the community health and more importantly the health of the future generations.

[8] Health issues have a significant role in the inability of children to attend schools

and dropout rates. Since the slums are not sanitized properly and unhygienic conditions prevail, slum children can be found affected by a plethora of diseases and infections. Anaemia, skin infections, dental caries, visual impairment were major health problems noted in the school dropped out children.[9]

Moreover, in a survey related to personal habits like substance abuse leading to diseases and ailments, it was observed that 8% of the study subjects had a habit of tobacco chewing, 5.9% had a habit of 'gutakha' chewing, 4% indulged in smoking and 1.9% consumed alcohol. 7.9% of the total study subjects had two or more such habits. [9] It is quite surprising to see how underage children are accustomed to such unhealthy practices and there isn't much focus over this point. Creating awareness about the use of such harmful substances is missing in the policies and eventually leads to children falling in the cycle of drug abuse and dropping out.

2.4 Legal and Political Factors

I. Absence of Legal Safeguard in RTE

While the enactment of the Right to Education was a historic step in the field of human development, making education a fundamental right available for free, it still missed out on the holistic growth of an individual by limiting this inalienable right to just 6 to 14 year olds.

The absence of a legal safeguard jeopardizes students from continuing their secondary and senior secondary education as it is neither compulsory nor free of cost and results in a huge amount of dropouts. Children living in slums are the worst hit due to their parent's inability to fund their education because of monetary constraints. The RTE also skips ages below 6 years, not focussing on building the base of education; provisions about their education is included in Article 45 of the Constitution, however, as a part of the Directive Principles of State Policy, it is not justiciable.

What is more distressing is that students of pre-elementary, secondary and senior secondary level of education cannot file complaints about having their right to education seized from them because of any factor, be it their families' financial instability or any social norms. Education for them is not considered a fundamental right and therefore they cannot seek any redressal under the Right to Constitutional Remedies.

II. Ineffective Implementation of Right to Education

Over the years, RTE hasn't been properly executed. A law made to provide free education has been misused numerous times as many cases exist where children have been denied admission by the institution itself on the basis of their religion, gender, or caste. Students also face violence by teachers and authorities which is prohibited according to the act.

A check on the teachers isn't maintained as well. According to section 23 of RTE, they have to be regular and punctual in attending school, paying proper attention to the students, and complete the entire curriculum in the specified time duration. [4] However, it is a common observation that many teachers don't adhere to the above guidelines. Moreover, the current number of teachers is still pretty low in comparison to the required pupil-teacher ratio.

Another major concern is that the number of dropouts increases as the grade increases. This hints that as the level gets harder, children tend to get demotivated and drop out. Many children are not able to keep up with the pace of fellow students and hence start feeling hopeless. There is a need for a system that monitors students' behaviours and the inability to perform like others in a psychological way. There exist provisions by the government to identify and provide special assistance and help such children, but the ineffective implementation of RTE is a major problem in this case.

Moreover, as the child grows, their earning potential increases and thus they might be removed from schools to work and earn to support their families. The responsibility of the authorities to keep a tab on the dropout rates at each grade also has not been regularly maintained.

III. Failed Education Related Schemes and Programmes

1. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

The Union Government proposed to treat school education holistically through the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched in 2018. It subsumes schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which were launched in 2005 and 2009 respectively.

However, the failed implementation of SMSA's base schemes raises questions of concern for the current and future execution and possible success of the programme. SMSA appears to be nothing but the two schemes put together with a new name. If the old schemes couldn't function properly because of a variety of factors, giving it a different identity would nowhere solve the existing problem of dropout rates. The striking similarities and problematic functioning of the 3 schemes have been explained in the table below:

Table 1

S.No	Different Features and Measures	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA)		Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA)		Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan (SMSA)	
		IS	IP	IS	IP	IS	IP
1.	Holistic view of education for all ages	X	-	X	-	✓	X
2.	Focus on providing proper infrastructure, additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water, electricity	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
3.	Focus on increasing quality of education	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
4.	Focus on ICT (Information and Communications Technology)	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X

5.	Focus on equal treatment of girl child and students from weaker sections	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
6.	Focus on vocational skill development	✗	-	✓	✗	✓	✗
7.	Maintenance of pupil - teacher ratio	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
8.	Shared responsibility of money allocation between different authorities	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗

The features introduced in both SSA and RMSA were apt for improving the quality of education. However, due to their faulty implementation, corruption, non-cooperation between involved governments and authorities, and the improper monitoring of usage of funds hampered the impact it aimed to generate.

SMSA was introduced integrating the existing policies when they couldn't function properly. The new scheme currently faces the same fate of its parent schemes due to the improper execution of its objectives. The only major difference it offered was viewing education holistically from pre-elementary to standard 12th while SSA and RMSA focused only on elementary and secondary levels of education respectively. While such an objective is very thoughtful, it is important to realize that no matter how comprehensively the government views education, without an amendment in the RTE, it cannot guarantee education to all school children. Therefore, none of the three schemes have been able to curb the problem of dropout rates of slum children effectively.

IV. Mid Day Meal Scheme

Mid Day Meals Scheme was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August, 1995 with a view of enhancing enrolment, retention, and attendance and

simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children.[10] 25 years down the line, even after several revisions, the scheme poses major challenges with its defective implementation and existing corruption.

Even after fixing a nutritional standard for the meals, instances show how the quantity and quality of food still lacks and doesn't even provide the basic nutrients to the students. Storage of grains, measures and precautions taken while cooking and inspection of the quality of food have always been major issues. The Bihar 2013 midday meal tragedy, in which 23 children died of food poisoning after eating a midday meal is one such example. The cooking oil used for the food had been stored in a container formerly used to store insecticides. [11]

While the scheme and its execution has severe loopholes, one of the biggest drawbacks of the programme is that it doesn't treat students of different ages equally. From its inception till 2006, the scheme only catered to lower-elementary students; only in 2007, it was revised to provide free meals to upper-elementary students i.e. class sixth to eighth. However even today, 13 years after revision, pre-elementary, secondary, and senior secondary students are still not included in this scheme. Its exclusivity gives more the reason to slum students to drop out of school.

2.5 Household Factors

I. Family and Individual Issues

The illiteracy of the parents of slum children results in their general apathy towards education. Parents often believe that going to school is a waste of time and their child should rather earn some money to support the family. Various issues in the family like disputes, alcohol abuse, drug dependency of the parents are also major obstructions in the schooling of youngsters.

Additional reasons for the rising dropout rates relate to the lack of time to study amid numerous household chores, little or no help in studies by the illiteracy of parents, unavailability of space to study for slum students in their overcrowded homes which may lead to low performance of the students and give rise to new insecurities. All these reasons are why students lock themselves out of this opportunity to grow and take up employment even though the country's labour laws prohibit children under the age of 14 to work.

II. Gender-Based Discrimination

The girl children in slums are imprisoned by gender roles and are considered to be inferior to the male gender, who more likely have a say in their education status. Girls are made to drop out of school to support the household, take care of siblings and family members, take up paid jobs, or simply beg. They are also married off early.

According to UNICEF India, the prevalence of girls getting married before age 18 was at 27% in 2015-16. [12]

Another major concern for the parents of slum children is the physical security of girls stepping out for higher education - both in school and while traveling to school. High crime rates against women in India have been increasing at an alarming rate and the safety issue forces young girls to drop out from school and look after the domestic sphere of their lives.

III. Financial Instability

With the absence of a legal safeguard like RTE, the families of rural poor and slum children by no means can finance secondary or higher education and the added expenses of school fees, curriculum and additional course books, stationery, uniform and transport. Schooling becomes an expensive affair and students drop out.

Moreover, although the education provided to children pertaining to 6 -14 years of age is free of cost, from the parents' perspective, the opportunity cost of sending children to schools occurs as the income that could have been generated by sending them to work.

3.0 Possible solutions, recommendations and preventive measures

After exploring the causes of children from slums dropping out of schools, we recommend the following steps to curb the problem at hand.

3.1 Revamping the Curriculum

As discussed earlier, the quality of Education needs to be ameliorated. Textbooks need to be updated with current data and statistics. Conveyance of thoughts by the content that promotes racism, sexism, etc. needs to be addressed at priority. Besides, a practical approach to teaching must be promoted so as to engage the students and make learning a fun process.

Secondly, more vocational and skill training courses such as entrepreneurship, leadership, and more career-oriented knowledge needs to be implemented regularly in the curriculum to hone the children with respective abilities from a young age to acquire good professions and secure a better future.

This can be implemented by collaborating with budding NGOs and student body organizations who can train the children with many such skills along with interacting and understanding the problem of the children better especially in the slums. Focusing more on industry specific skill development and indulging the students in small scaled projects can develop their skills as well as give them exposure. Moreover, to pique the interest of the students in studies, collaborations with organizations that have showcased positive results in developing interest among students should be approached.

3.2 Inclusivity and Proper Execution of RTE

One of the biggest ways to curb dropout rates would be to make RTE completely inclusive of all levels of school education. Making it comprehensive by including below 6 years old students and above 14 year olds to 18 years old students would ensure lower dropout rates of students from disadvantaged sections like children living in slums. This amendment would be an extraordinary achievement and the only possible way to devise a legal protection to students to continue their studies; thereby giving them a right to indulge in seeking redressal in case of any violations of their right to get educated through the Right to Constitutional Remedies.

Genuine implementation of the act must take place to reduce the dropout rates of students from slums. We strongly urge the governments and concerned authorities to ensure stronger execution of the act which safeguards students from all types of discrimination, abuse, and violence. Proper action should be taken against the perpetrators of the same, be it either the school authorities and staff, teachers, or even peers of the children. Regular maintenance of the list of children living in a locality, their enrollment, and dropout status too needs to be kept in check to ensure that no child forgoes their right to education.

3.3 Recommendations in Existing Schemes and Programs.

The Mid Day Meals scheme had much potential, however, it failed due to its faulty implementation and corruption. The examination of the transportation of the grains and its quality and quantity, hygiene standards adhered to while storing ingredients, cooking, and serving food and the cleanliness of the utensils used must be strictly done. Also, the scheme should be extended from the elementary level to all school education levels. These possible solutions might help in decreasing the dropout rates of slum children and help in boosting enrollment rates.

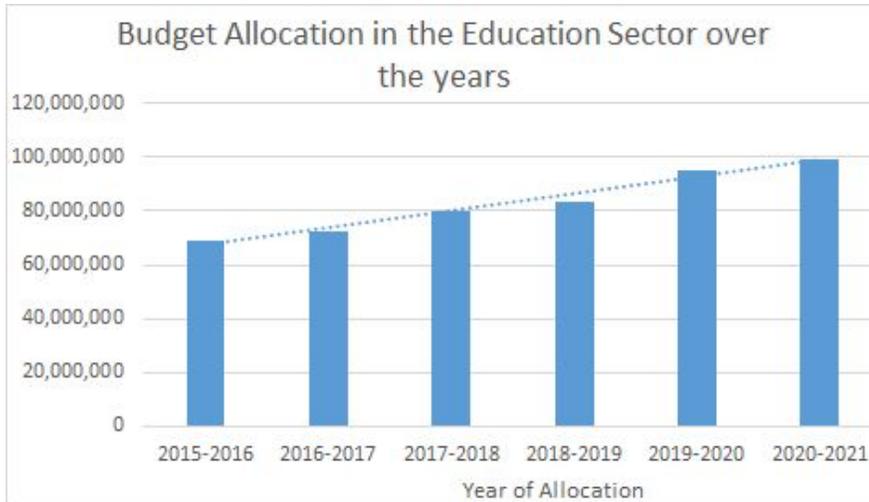
For the SMSA to flourish, it must take initiatives to actually develop a holistic school education system by working towards an addition in the RTE; the only way it can truly guarantee its visioned comprehensive approach. The condition of the necessities and infrastructure like furniture, different equipment, washrooms need to be upgraded and maintained. The governments and authorities involved must work in cooperation and utilize the funds effectively; corruption and the notion of blaming each other won't help the scheme be functional and fruitful.

Besides reaching the accurate pupil-teacher ratio, proper training needs to be given to teachers to conduct online classes given in this age of digitalization and COVID-19. The scheme must introduce steps to make electronic devices and internet available and accessible to students at home during the pandemic to maintain the quality of education it talks about. Moreover, the government should identify regions where dropouts are more prevalent and envision a scheme to incentivize education and provide a basic stipend equivalent to the amount earned by the student on a monthly basis by working.

3.4 Increase in Budget Allocated to Education

An amount of Rs. 99,300 crores has been announced by Hon'ble Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union budget speech for 2020-21 to be allocated to the education sector, which is an increase of nearly 5% from the previous year's budget of Rs. 94,800 crore. Also, Rs. 3000 crore has been allocated for skill training.[13]

Fig.1



The above graph depicts the allocation of budget in the past 6 years. As can be seen the budget allocation hasn't seen much progress over the years. Source [14][15][16][17]

Fig.2



The nominal growth in the allocation has suffered greatly in 2020-21 as it can be seen from the above graph (<5%). The growth each year tends to first drop and then more amount is allocated showcasing a big rise. However if a nominal growth of preferably higher than 11% (2019-20) is maintained, the budget can increase over the years and cater the needs.

Since slum areas don't even have proper buildings for schools, furniture, laboratory equipment and toilets, funds should be allocated especially for the schools near slums and

directly to the local authority to cater to their needs better. However, proper monitoring and checks need to be kept on the financial statements to ensure the money is being utilised for educational purposes.

To enforce and universalize RTE and provide free and compulsory education and mid day meals without compromising on quality for all children under 18 years of age, the allocated budget needs to be increased significantly to provide a quality education experience.

3.4 Awareness Programs

As discussed, the huge dropout rates of slum children are also a result of the parents' disinterest in education. The Central and State Governments in collaboration with several NGOs and student bodies must conduct sensitization drives regarding the importance and benefits of education in both government schools and slums.

Awareness programmes conducted for both children and their parents would make them conscious about the value of knowledge in having a stable career and leading a life of dignity and respect. All people at slums need to be made aware about the rights of all children, including the girl child who must be treated equally as boys, their right to free and compulsory education and various schemes and upcoming policies for the smooth functioning of their rights. These drives should also focus on disseminating information about various opportunities that are provided to the weaker sections like different reservations, scholarships and financial aid. Career counselling in schools would also help in strengthening students' trust in education, their potential bright future and in reducing dropout rates.

4.0 Analysis

To check the effectiveness of our recommendations, we conducted a SWOT Analysis of the possible solutions:

Table 2

Strengths (+) 12	Weaknesses (-) 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce dropout rate ● Better enrolment rate ● Education will become a fundamental right for all students ● Redressal mechanism would be functional for all students ● Students will gain good industry specific skills along with practical knowledge and experience ● Reduced child labour ● Learn to treat racism, sexism, body shaming and discrimination as real issues ● Gender Equality ● Improvement in Health Quotient ● Proper and better infrastructure ● Monetary benefit would act as incentive to parents ● Interesting and relevant curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of funds and excessive government spending ● Long time span required for the amendments to be made and steps to be implemented ● Education might be seen as a monetary benefit rather than a need by parents and students
Opportunities (+) 7	Threats (-) 2

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Better higher education, scholarships and career opportunities in the future● Equality amongst individuals● Sensitivity towards environmental issues● Reduced rate of poverty, violence, crimes and substance abuse● Promote women empowerment● Technologically advanced and updated individuals● Healthy individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Improper and faulty implementation of the recommendations● Corruption of funds
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The exceeding number of the strengths and opportunities of our recommendations makes them strong enough to be implemented to bring a change in the system of education and prevent any further dropouts.

5.0 Conclusion

By the end of our research, we realised that the alarming rates of dropouts, especially of slum children from schools was because of a variety of reasons; our hypothesis was only partially true. Understanding that along with the quality of schooling provided and the structure of curriculum taught at the academic institutions in India; legal and political factors like the faulty implementation exclusivity of the RTE and several other schemes; social factors like discrimination, violence, abuse and illness; household factors like family issues, gender discrimination and financial instability; all contribute towards the dropping rate of students studying at schools.

In the hope to change the same, we suggested some recommendations which must be taken up by governments, different authorities as well like minded people for further research. Our belief of educating one person creating a ripple effect and leading to an impact from a micro to macro

level can only be accomplished once opportunities and proper conditions are given to slum children. Education is always a profitable investment for the country; after analysing our appeals and solutions, we aspire to influence a change in the current education and dropout scenario, and in the lives of children living in slums.

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