

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND CHILD EDUCATION: A STUDY OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN ODISHA

Sabitribala Dash¹ and Mrutyunjay Swain²

Abstract

The problem of school dropouts continues to obstruct the goal of universal education in India, especially among children from socially and economically disadvantaged communities. This study examines the multiple and interconnected reasons for school dropouts in two districts of Odisha—Ganjam and Nabarangpur using both primary and secondary data. The main objectives are to (i) assess the status and the socio-economic factors contributing to dropouts among disadvantaged groups of children, (ii) examine the differences in dropout reasons across educational levels, and (iii) analyse the dropout engagement with a focus on gender differences. The analysis based on descriptive statistics and regression methods, shows, that financial hardship is the main reasons for dropouts, especially at the upper primary and secondary levels. Many children leave school to engage in income-generating activities, which disrupts their regular attendance and eventually pushes them out of school. Low family income and irregular employment patterns make the situation worse. Behavioural factors such as lack of interest in learning, school phobia, and social media addiction also add to the problem. School related issues like poor teacher-student communication, weak infrastructure, and low quality teaching are also major concerns, with communication problems affecting over 30 percent of students in Nabarangpur. The study suggests the need for targeted and localized policies. Key measures include mother tongue-based teaching at the primary level, improved school infrastructure, better teacher training, and greater community participation. Early remedial education and counselling are also important to address learning difficulties and psychological barriers. In conclusion, school dropout is a multifaceted issue influenced by the interplay of poverty, school environment, and child-specific factors. A holistic, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach is essential to ensure equal access to quality education for all children.

Keywords: disadvantaged, economic inequality, gender, school dropout

¹Ms Sabitribala Dash, PhD Scholar, Department of Economics, Berhampur University, Bhanja Bihar, Berhampur-760007, Email-sabitribala1988@gmail.com

²Dr. Mrutyunjay Swain, Professor, Department of Economics, Berhampur University, Bhanja Bihar, Berhampur-760007, Email- mrutyunjay77@gmail.com

Introduction

Education is a key driver of economic growth, social transformation, and individual empowerment. In India, the Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) aims to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to age 14, as mandated by the Right to Education Act under Article 21A of the Constitution. Despite these efforts, achieving 100 percent literacy and universal enrolment remains challenging, largely due to high dropout rates and grade repetition caused by poor-quality education (TNS Report, 2013; Basumatary, 2012). To address these challenges, the Government of India launched initiatives like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001 and introduced tracking systems such as U-DISE, the Child Tracking System (CTS), and Household Surveys (HHS) to monitor enrolment and retention. However, many children are particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to leave school prematurely, highlighting the need for more targeted interventions.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme, launched in 2004, provides residential education facilities for girls from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), minorities, and Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in educationally backward blocks. By reserving 75% of the seats (as per KGBV guideline) for marginalized girls and promoting vocational skills like such as candle-making, sewing, and handicrafts, KGBVs have contributed to girls' self-confidence, skill development, and aspirations for self-employment. Despite these efforts, access to education in states like Odisha remains unequal. Structural factors like gender, caste, class, and religion create significant barriers to school retention. Girls often face early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns, while children from SC, ST, and minority communities struggle with poverty, discrimination, and limited access to quality schooling. These issues reflect deeper systemic inequalities and gaps in policy implementation. This study aims to explore the social barriers to education in Odisha, focusing on how intersecting factors of gender and social disadvantage contribute to school dropout. It also seeks to evaluate the impact of existing schemes and propose inclusive strategies to ensure equitable and sustained access to education for all children.

Review of Literature

School dropout is a critical challenge for India's education system, with 12.6 percent of students discontinuing education, especially at the secondary (19.8%) and upper primary (17.5%) levels, as reported by National Statistical Office (NSO, 2017-18). According to the Unified DISE (U-DISE) report, 2021-

22, India's dropout rates were 1.5 per cent, 3 per cent, and 12.6 per cent at primary, upper primary, and secondary levels, respectively, while in Odisha, the rates were 0 per cent, 7.3 per cent, and 27.3 per cent at the same levels.

Several studies highlight key factors influencing dropout. Financial instability, parental illiteracy, and low awareness about education are strongly contribute to school dropout (Khan & Samadder, 2010; Moreira et al., 2018; Prakash et al., 2017; Mishra et al., 2014). Similarly, lack of supervision, weak parental involvement, and poor educational infrastructure further are also worsening the problem of dropout (Mukherjee, 2011; Govindaraju & Venkatesan, 2010). Gender disparities are evident: boys are often pushed into the work, while girls involve in domestic chores and sibling care causing discontinuation in education (Amirtham & Kundupuzhakkal, 2013). Other factors include high educational costs, family conflicts, and lack of parental supervision on children's activities are also played a significant role in creation of dropout problem (Hussain, 2011; Teneva, 2017). Specifically, Singh (2021) observed that poverty, lack of interest, security concerns, long distances to school, household factors and parental death are major reasons for girls' dropping out. However. equal treatment by parents, special care and positive parental attitudes towards girls can reduce dropout rates. Lenka (2020) highlights that financial constraints, children's engagement in work, and psychological issues cause dropout among tribal students before high school completion. Vishishtha & Jain (2022) point out family and individual issues, gender-based discrimination, financial instability, poor curriculum quality, and resource scarcity is act as major causes, while increased education budgets and counselling programmes can mitigate the dropout issue.

Overall, school dropout is a multidimensional issue driven by socio-economic challenges, migration, weak parental engagement, and gender roles with poverty acting as a central factor, influencing nearly all other causes.

Objectives of the Study

The key objectives of the research study are;

- i. To assess the status and socio-economic factors contributing to school dropouts among disadvantaged groups of children.
- ii. To examine the variations in reasons for school dropouts across different levels of education.
- iii. To analyse the post dropout engagement of children with a focus on gender differences.

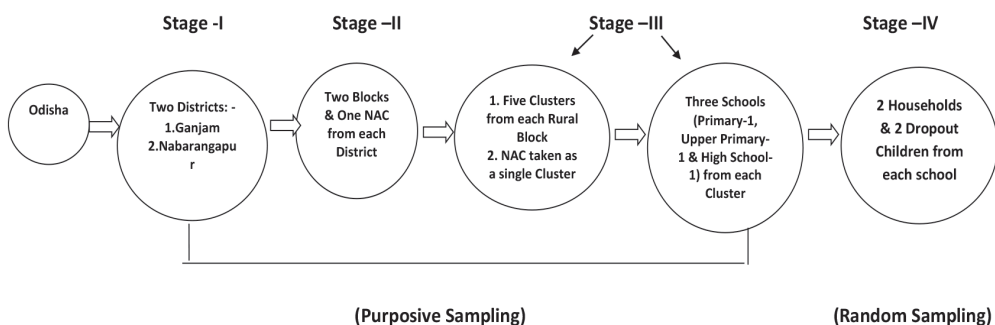
Methodology

The methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem, using a systematic and structured approach. It outlines the research design, including the selection of study areas, sampling techniques, data sources and methods of analysis to obtain the study's outcome.

Selection of Study Area & Sampling Technique

The present study compares two districts of Odisha: Nabarangpur, representing the highest dropout rate (10.01%), and Ganjam, representing a moderate rate (5.08%), selected from rankings of all 30 districts based on dropout rates at primary, upper primary, and secondary levels for three years from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (OSEPA). From each district, two rural blocks and one urban block were selected based on relatively higher dropout rates, totalling four rural blocks and two urban areas. From each rural block, five clusters were chosen, making 20 rural clusters per district, along with two selected urban areas. A total of 66 schools (primary, upper primary, and secondary) were covered, 33 from each district (3 schools from each cluster). From each school, two dropout children and their households were surveyed, resulting in 132 households and 132 dropout students interviewed to explore the actual reasons for school dropouts. The sample distribution is shown in Figure-1.

Figure 1: Multi Stage Random Sampling Technique



Sources of Data and Analysis

As mentioned earlier, both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Secondary data were obtained from the Odisha School Education Programme Authority (OSEPA), Govt. of Odisha and Ministry of Education, Govt. of India to select sample districts for the primary survey in rural and urban areas. Household survey report of the sample districts was used to select blocks, clusters and schools for the survey. Primary data were collected through field surveys using personal interviews and questionnaires, covering socio-economic characteristics, dropout rates by gender and location, causes of dropout, and consequences of school dropouts.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to examine socio-economic, school and student related factors contributing to dropout and children's engagement after leaving school. Additionally, a regression model was used to study the relationship between socio-economic factors and school dropouts.

Result and Discussion

The objective-wise analysis is carried out to identify the actual reasons for school dropout and the engagement of children after school leaving, which is the major focus of the research paper. Based on this, necessary suggestions have been placed in the conclusion section for policy making, which can help eradicate the issues causing dropout situation.

Status and Socio-Economic Factors Leading to School Dropouts

The study examines the socio-economic factors leading to school dropouts, focusing on gender and disadvantaged social groups such as SC, ST, OBC, general and minority. The key factors are educational standard of mother, annual income of family, family size etc. The detail factor wise relationship with dropout is discussed below for better conceptual clarity of the present research study.

Caste and Religion

Gender differences shows: girls' dropout more due to social norms, safety concerns, sibling care, and household duties, while boys are pushed into wage

labour because of financial constraints. Table 1 shows higher dropout rates among marginalized groups-OBC (48.48%) and SC (39.39%) in Ganjam, and ST (66.66%) and SC (18.18%) in Nabarangpur. In contrast, dropout rates are low among General category children (below 10%) in both districts. Similarly, only 7.57% children among Christians in Ganjam and rest of the dropouts are belonging to Hindu religion in both districts. These trends highlight illiteracy, low parental awareness, and poor educational standards as the main reasons for school dropout among disadvantaged groups.

Mothers' Educational Status

Table 1 shows that 71.21% of mothers in Ganjam and only 34.84% in Nabarangpur have received school education, mostly up to the primary level, with less than 10% completing upper primary or higher education in both districts. Illiteracy is much higher in Nabarangpur (65.15%) than in Ganjam (28.78%). The overall low education of mothers, especially in Nabarangpur, negatively impacts children's schooling, leading to higher dropout rates among tribal children due to parental ignorance, community influence, and lack of awareness.

Annual Income of Family & Income Group

Children's education is closely linked to family income, as all 66 dropouts belong to households earning less than Rs. 1 lakh per year. In Ganjam, 28.78 percent of families are BPL and 34.84 percent are AAY, while in Nabarangpur, 65.15 percent are BPL but none fall under AAY. Ration card holders are nearly the same in both districts (about 35%). The study shows that dropouts are concentrated among economically weaker families, especially in Nabarangpur, due to poverty, low awareness and limited attention to education (Table 1).

Family Size

Table 1 shows that most dropout children come from large families, with over 65 percent of households in both Ganjam and Nabarangpur having more than six members. Medium-sized families (5–6 members) make up about 29 percent in Ganjam and 30 percent in Nabarangpur, while small families are very few. The majority of dropout children belong to joint family's 93.92 percent in Ganjam and 98.46 percent in Nabarangpur showing the strong presence of extended family structures among these households.

Table-1: Distribution of school dropouts of sample districts

Particular	Category	Ganjam	Nabarangpur
Caste	SC	26 (39.39%)	12 (18.18%)
	ST	6 (9.09%)	44 (66.66%)
	OBC	32(48.48%)	10 (15.15%)
	General	2 (3.03%)	-
Religion	Hindu	61(92.42%)	66 (100%)
	Christian	5(7.57%)	-
Mothers' Educational Status	Primary grade	40(60.59%)	23(34.84%)
	Upper Primary grade	6 (9.09%)	-
	Above Upper Primary grade	1(1.51%)	-
	No education	19(28.78%)	43(65.15%)
Annual Income of family	Below Rs.1 lakh	65 (98.48%)	66(100%)
	Rs. 1 Lakh -Rs. 2 Lakhs	1(1.51%)	-
Household Size of the family	Up to 4 Members	4(6.06%)	1(1.51%)
	5 to 6 Members	19(28.78%)	20(30.29%)
	More than 6 Members	43(65.14%)	45(68.17%)
Family type	Joint family	62(93.92%)	65(98.46%)
	Nuclear family	4(6.06%)	1(1.51%)

Source: Field survey.

Property Holding Status of Parents

The property status of dropout households highlights economic disparities between Ganjam and Nabarangpur. However, in Nabarangpur, 81.8 percent of families own land worth less Rs. 1 lakh and 84.84 percent live in low-value houses. In contrast, Ganjam shows higher assets, with 86.36 percent owning property above Rs. 2 lakhs and 93.93 percent having cattle or jewellery. Limited assets and weaker financial stability in Nabarangpur reduce family support for children's education, leading to higher dropout rates.

Borrowing Status of Family

Family debt is a major cause of school dropouts, affecting more children in Nabarangpur (45 nos.) than in Ganjam (26 nos.). Fathers often migrate to

repay loans, while in Ganjam, children also contribute to family income. In Nabarangpur, parental absence and lack of interest in studies lead to neglect in education and remain dropouts. Debt burdens limit families' ability to afford education and push children into labour work in various sector for financial support.

Bearing of Educational Expenses by Parents

The survey shows that financial burden is a major reason for dropouts, reported by 60.59 percent of families in Ganjam and 81.8 percent in Nabarangpur. About one-third of families in both districts paid school fees, but Ganjam spent more on tuition 24.24 percent and on books/uniforms (75.75% compared to 46.96% in Nabarangpur). Most families spent up to Rs. 2,000 per child each month, though 30.32 percent in Nabarangpur had no expenses due to government aid. These financial pressures force children from poorer families to leave school before completing their education.

Several socio-economic factors lead children to drop out of school to provide physical and financial support to their families. This study examines the relationship between the class at which a child drops out and other relevant variables, district-wise, using sample data to show the different impacts of these factors. The analysis also justifies the inclusion or exclusion of variables based on their level of correlation. Primary data on these variables have been used for this analysis.

The variables are as follows:

- i. Dependent variable (Y): Child's dropout level.
- ii. Independent variables (Xi): There are 6 independent variables, i.e., education of mother (X_1), annual income of father (X_2), value of asset holding (X_3), family size (X_4), debt amount (X_5), school fees (X_6).

The fitted regression equation is given below.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 (X_1) + \beta_2(X_2) + \beta_3(X_3) + \beta_4(X_4) + \beta_5 (X_5) + \beta_6(X_6) + U_i$$

Table 2 shows that regression analysis identifies X6 as the strongest positive predictor of dropout class ($\beta = 0.646$, $p = 0.000$), followed by X4 ($\beta = 0.223$, $p = 0.018$). X1, X2, and X3 have small but significant negative effects ($p < 0.05$), while X5 is not significant ($p = 0.120$). The constant is significant ($p = 0.017$),

and VIF values near 1 confirm no multicollinearity. Overall, 5 out of 6 variables significantly influence school dropouts among economical poorer families.

Table-2: Determinants of school dropouts (Ganjam)- Results of the regression model

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta		VIF
(Constant)	8.738	3.556		.017	
X1	-.084	.101	-.080	.010	1.159
X2	-0.00002	.000	-.086	.020	1.072
X3	-0.000002	.000	-.098	.030	1.161
X4	.482	.198	.223	.018	1.038
X5	0.00001	.000	.090	.120	1.084
X6	.001	.000	.646	.000	1.223

- Dependent Variable: Y_1 (Child's dropout class)
- R Square value: 0.72
- F-value of 11.71
- Durbin-Watson statistic- 1.52

The regression model, with Y_1 (child's dropout class) as the dependent variable, shows a strong fit ($R^2 = 0.72$), explaining 72 percent of the variation. The F-value of 11.71 confirms overall significance, and the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.52) shows no serious autocorrelation. Overall, the model is robust and reliable in explaining the factors influencing children's dropout levels.

Table 3 shows that the regression model is statistically sound, with an intercept of 6.939. Among the predictors, X6 has the strongest positive and highly significant effect ($B = 0.001$, $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$), while X4 and X5 also have smaller but significant positive impacts. X1, X2, and X3 show negative effects, with X2 and X3 significant at the 0.05 level, and X1 slightly negative but still significant. All variables have $\text{Sig.} \leq 0.05$ and VIF values below 2, confirming no multicollinearity. Overall, X6 is the most influential factor explaining dropouts from economical poorer families.

The model explains 77 percent of the variation in dropout class ($R^2 = 0.77$), indicating a strong fit. The F-value of 13.71 confirms overall significance, and the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.52) shows no serious autocorrelation. Thus, the model is reliable, statistically valid, and a good fit.

Table-3: Determinants of school dropouts (Nabarangpur)- Results of the regression model

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta		VIF
(Constant)	6.939	.919		.000	
X1	-.030	.235	-.013	.000	1.039
X2	-0.000020	.000	-.215	.040	1.306
X3	-0.000002	.000	-.249	.050	1.559
X4	.234	.108	.225	.030	1.050
X5	0.00002	.000	.131	.000	1.093
X6	.001	.000	.687	.000	1.358

- Dependent Variable: Y_1 (Child's dropout class)
- R-Square value: 0.77
- F-value of 13.71
- Durbin-Watson statistic- 1.52

Variations in Reasons for School Dropouts across Different Levels of Education

The analysis of this objective focuses on student and school related issues that cause children to dropout at different levels before completing formal education. The activity-wise reasons are described below:

Student Related Issues

Lack of Supervision of Children's Activity

Table 4 shows that parental supervision among school dropouts is very low, declining from primary to secondary levels 28.78 percent to 18.19 percent in Ganjam and 15.15 percent to 16.66 percent in Nabarangpur. Most parents spent only 1–2 hours per week with their children and over 20 percent provided no supervision at the different stages of schooling. Supervision was limited to

physical well-being, with no attention to emotional support (0% at all levels). Mothers were the main caregivers, fathers rarely took sole responsibility, and joint caregiving by both parents was reported in only 15–22% of households. Care by others was negligible.

Health Issues

Health issues play only a minor role in school dropouts across both districts. In Ganjam, 9.09 percent of secondary-level students dropped out due to health problems, while in Nabarangpur, no students at this level cited health as a reason. The number of children affected was small, indicating that although health concerns exist, they are not a major cause of dropout (Table 4).

Disinterest of Child

Table 4 shows that disinterest in studies is a major reason for school dropout, and this tendency increases with the level of education. In Ganjam, it rose from 21.21 percent at the primary level to 31.85 percent at the secondary level, while in Nabarangpur, it reached 34.84 percent at secondary level. This reflects growing disengagement with academics as students' progress, possibly due to uninspiring teaching methods or an irrelevant curriculum.

Involvement in Extra-curricular Activities

Table 4 shows that involvement in extra-curricular activities is another significant reason for school dropout, especially at the upper primary and secondary levels. In Ganjam, 27.27 percent of primary-level students and over 30 percent at higher levels left school for this reason. In Nabarangpur, the rate was lower at the primary stage (15.15%) but rose at upper levels. This suggests that for some students, non-academic activities such as sports, arts, or household responsibilities became more attractive or necessary, pulling them away from formal schooling.

School Adjustment Failure

Table 4 shows that school adjustment problems were particularly noticeable in Nabarangpur, where about 25–27 percent of students at all levels reported difficulty adapting to the school environment. In Ganjam, the rate was constant at 15.15 percent across levels. These problems may include coping with peer pressure, unfamiliar language of instruction, or teacher attitudes, especially for students from tribal or minority backgrounds.

Poor Academic Performance

Table 4 shows that poor academic performance is the most common and consistent reason for dropout in both districts. Over 30 percent of children at all levels cited academic difficulties as the major cause of leaving school. This highlights gaps in classroom teaching, availability of remedial support, and parents' ability to assist with learning especially for children from disadvantaged groups.

Security Concerns,

Security concerns, while not the main reason, became more prominent at the secondary level, especially in Nabarangpur, where 16.66 percent of dropouts cited safety issues. In Ganjam, the percentage increased moderately from primary to secondary level. These concerns are often greater for girls, including fear of harassment during travel or at school, lack of secure infrastructure, or family restrictions due to perceived safety risks (Table 4).

Substance Abuse

Use of narcotic substances emerged as a serious cause of school dropout among secondary-level students. In Ganjam, 10.61 percent of secondary school dropouts were linked to use, while in Nabarangpur, the figure was higher at 13.63 percent. This highlights a growing social issue affecting adolescents, particularly boys, leading to disengagement from studies and early dropout (Table 4).

Attitude of Children as a Cause of Dropout

Table 4 shows that attitudinal factors such as lack of interest, unwillingness to attend school, or resistance are major causes of dropout in both districts. In Ganjam, this was highest at the upper primary level (33.33%) but declined at secondary (16.66%), while in Nabarangpur it was more evenly distributed, with the highest at primary (31.81%) and secondary (28.78%). This suggests that many rural and tribal children lose motivation or resist formal schooling due to low engagement or understanding.

Involvement in Social-media

Table 4 shows that social media is an emerging cause of dropout, especially among older children. In Ganjam, 13.63 percent of upper primary dropouts were linked to social media, while in Nabarangpur the impact was higher-19.69 percent at upper primary and 18.18 percent at secondary level, with no effect

at primary. These indicates growing digital distractions that reduce academic focus and increase absenteeism.

School Phobia

Table 4 shows that school phobia means anxiety, fear of teachers, exams, or the school environment is a major cause of dropout. In Nabarangpur, it remained consistently high across all levels (33.33%), while in Ganjam it declined from 30.30 percent at upper primary to 13.63 percent at secondary. These patterns suggest that psychological stress and lack of emotional or mental health support significantly contribute to children's disengagement from school.

Table-4: Differences in reasons for school dropouts (in %)

Sl. No.	Particular	Ganjam			Nabarangpur		
		Primary	Upper primary	Secondary	Primary	Upper primary	Secondary
1	Parental supervision	28.78	18.18	18.19	15.15	12.12	16.66
2	Health issue	4.54	1.51	9.09	4.54	4.54	0.00
3	Dislike/disinterest in study	21.21	26.26	31.85	25.75	31.45	34.84
4	Involvement in extra co-curricular activities	27.27	31.81	28.79	15.15	31.81	28.79
5	School adjustment failure	15.15	15.15	15.15	27.27	27.27	25.75
6	Poor academic and comprehension	30.30	33.33	31.81	33.33	33.33	33.33
7	Security problem	4.54	3.03	6.06	3.03	7.57	16.66
8	Using narcotic things/substance	1.51	3.03	10.61	4.54	4.54	13.63
9	Attitude of children	30.30	33.33	16.66	31.81	25.75	28.78
10	Involvement in social media	4.54	13.63	7.57	0.00	19.69	18.18
11	School phobia	25.75	30.30	13.63	33.33	33.33	33.33

Source: Field Survey

School Related Issues

Distance to Schools

Table 5 shows that distance to school is an important factor in dropouts, becoming more significant at higher levels. At the primary stage, it affected 3.03 percent of households in Ganjam and 6.06 percent in Nabarangpur. At upper primary, 9.09 percent in both districts reported schools over 3 km away, while at secondary level, 6.06 percent in Ganjam and 12.12 percent in Nabarangpur had high schools beyond 5 km. These findings highlight that school accessibility is a major barrier, especially in remote areas like Nabarangpur.

Communication Problems Among Children

Table 5 shows that communication difficulties such as understanding the language of instruction, self-expression, or interacting with teachers are a major cause of dropout. In Nabarangpur, this issue is consistently high across levels (31.81% at primary, 32.32% at upper primary, 33.33% at secondary), reflecting challenges related to tribal districts and weak early language skills. In Ganjam, it is also significant, peaking at 30.30 percent at upper primary. Overall, language and communication barriers strongly contribute to student disengagement, especially in multilingual or tribal areas.

Non-availability of Infrastructural Facilities

Table 5 shows that lack of basic infrastructure-classrooms, toilets, drinking water, and electricity-is a key factor in school dropout, affecting 18–21 percent of households at primary and upper primary levels, but only 9.09 percent at secondary in both districts. This indicates that poor facilities in early schooling years discourage attendance and retention, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas.

Poor Quality of Teaching

Low teaching standard including untrained or irregular teachers and lack of educational methods are another notable cause of dropout. In Nabarangpur, this was highest at the primary level (25.25%), indicating early disinterest or disengagement among young learners. Ganjam shows a similar pattern, though with slightly lower figures. As students' progress to higher grades, this factor becomes less prominent, suggesting that those who continue may adapt or benefit from better teaching quality (Table 5).

Table-5: School related reasons for school dropouts (in %)

Sl. No.	Activities	Ganjam			Nabarangpur		
		Primary	Upper primary	Secondary	Primary	Upper primary	Secondary
1	Distance of schools	3.03	9.09	6.06	6.06	9.09	12.12
2	Children having communication problem	18.18	30.30	22.72	31.81	32.32	33.33
3	Non availability of infrastructural facilities	19.69	18.18	9.09	21.21	18.18	9.09
4	Poor quality of teaching	21.21	15.15	9.09	25.25	15.15	9.09

Source: Field survey

Engagement of School Dropouts with a Focus on Gender Differences.

Table 6 and Figure 2 highlight that engagement in various activities is a major cause of school dropouts, with 71.2 percent (47 children) in Ganjam and 49.99 percent (33 children) in Nabarangpur left school for this reason. In both districts, girls are more involved in sibling care 16.66 percent in Ganjam and 21.2 percent in Nabarangpur and also take on more household responsibilities, leading 13.63 percent in Ganjam and 7.56 percent in Nabarangpur to dropout due to household work.

Boys are more likely to be engaged in child labour-12.12 percent in Ganjam and 10.6 percent in Nabarangpur with no cases among girls. They also work in shops (15.15% in Ganjam and 18.17% in Nabarangpur) and,

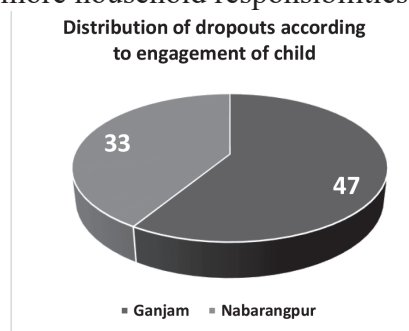


Figure 2 Distribution of dropouts due to engagement of child

in Ganjam, in agriculture, brick kilns, and other tasks. Overall, dropout rates are higher among girls in Nabarangpur district.

Table-6: Engagement of school dropouts in different sector

Sl. No.	Particular	Ganjam				Nabarangpur			
		Boy (26)		Girls (21)		Boy (14)		Girls (19)	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Sibling care	0	0	11	16.66	0	0	14	21.2
2	Home work	1	1.51	9	13.63	0	0	5	7.56
3	Child labour	8	12.12	0	0	5	10.6	0	0
4	Work in shop	10	15.15	0	0	9	18.17	0	0
5	Agricultural work	1	1.51	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	Brick kiln	3	4.53	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	Any Other	3	4.54	1	1.51	0	0	0	0

Source: Field survey

Table 7 shows that financial constraints are a major cause of school dropouts, especially at the upper primary and secondary levels. In Ganjam, 21.21 percent of secondary-level students and in Nabarangpur 18.18 percent left school due to economic hardship, often engaging in income-generating activities to support their families. About 18.18 percent of secondary level dropouts in Ganjam and 11.11 percent in Nabarangpur were involved in wage labour and agriculture, with no participation in skilled or service sectors.

Table-7: Role of financial constraint in school dropouts (in %)

Sl. No.	Particular	Category	Ganjam			Nabarangpur		
			Pri- mary	Upper prima- ry	Sec- ond- ary	Prima- ry	Upper primary	Second- ary
1	Financial constraint a cause of dropout		6.06	19.69	21.21	6.06	15.15	18.18
2	Engaged in various sector for financial support to the family	Primary	0	3.03	3.03	6.06	3.03	7.07
		Secondary	6.06	16.66	18.18	0	12.12	11.11
		Tertiary	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Nature of employment	Temporary	6.06	19.69	21.21	6.06	15.15	18.18
		Permanent	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	Annual Income	Upto Rs.5000	0	4.54	3.03	6.06	3.03	7.07
		Rs.5000-10000	6.06	15.15	11.11	0	12.12	11.11
		More than Rs.10000	0	0	7.07	0	0	0

Source: Field survey

All working children were in temporary, informal jobs, indicating a lack of job security. Most children were earned below Rs.10,000 per month, with 15.15 percent of upper primary and 11.11 percent of secondary dropouts in Ganjam, and about 11.11 percent in Nabarangpur, earning in the Rs.5,000-10,000 income range. Very few children were earned above Rs.10,000 income. This shows that low household income strongly correlates with higher dropout rates, forcing children into low-paid, unstable work and perpetuating cycles of poverty. However, scholarships, income support, and community-based interventions are essential to help retain disadvantaged students in school (Table 7).

Conclusion

The study highlights that school-related issues particularly communication challenges, poor infrastructure, and ineffective teaching significantly contribute to dropout rates, especially among children from disadvantaged groups. These problems are more severe in tribal-dominated and rural areas like Nabarangpur. Targeted, inclusive, and localized policy interventions are therefore essential to ensure all children remain in school and receive quality education.

To address communication barriers, local language-specific textbooks should be provided up to the primary level and teachers proficient in tribal languages should be engaged. Odia should be promoted for higher-level studies. Improving teaching quality and making classrooms more engaging can help reduce academic disengagement among students. Residential and seasonal hostels should be expanded, especially for children from migrant or financially constrained families. Scholarships such as NMMS, NRTS, PSMTS, and SMSHKY, along with free educational materials, fee exemptions, and supplementary learning resources, can ensure continuity in education.

Strict enforcement of child labour laws and the ban on early marriage, supported by village-level awareness programmes is essential. Employment opportunities through schemes like MGNREGS, PMRY, ABRY, and PMRPY should be provided for poor families to reduce economic pressures that push children out of school. Parental involvement can be strengthened through monthly parent-teacher meetings, counselling, and awareness drives. Female literacy should be promoted through initiatives like NILP. Motivational programmes highlighting the benefits of education, along with hostels, transport, or escort facilities for children in remote areas and improved road connectivity, can further reduce dropout rates particularly in inaccessible areas.

Collectively, these measures addressing language barriers, teaching quality, residential and financial support, child protection, livelihood support, and community engagement can significantly reduce dropout rates and ensure sustained education for economically and socially disadvantaged groups of children.

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