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Inclusion of the economically backward students: Scope and tenet of Indian school libraries

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Abstract

The study aims to find out how far a school library can contribute in the issue of inclusion of the economically backward class students. Meanwhile the author has opined three major issues: *Economical, Psychological* and *Societal* as the reasons behind the school dropouts in India; while theoretical analyses have unveiled that the school library has enough scope and potential to reduce the dropout rate by offering several innovative approaches. Further, the author has investigated the reality and forwarded ten unique approaches (broadly classified into *Library beyond school*, *Increase the reading habit* and *Empowerment of the student*) which could be fruitful to impede the dropout rates in school education and also framed a flowchart to describe the steps of the process. The study shows that the approaches are well construct and self-explanatory and proper implications of those ideas can uplift the literacy rate. Later, two cases are being cited in the study to understand the applicability of those initiatives. The result shows that through the appropriate application of the ideas the dropout rates have decreased in both the cases.

Keywords- School library, Dropout, Inclusion, Education, Economically backward class student, Innovative approaches, Model, India

1.   Setting the scenario

In the third world countries school libraries are theoretically considered as a foremost predictor for the holistic development of a school student (Fuller, 1987) because numerous socio-economic issues which have impeded the empowerment of the students can be eliminated quite easily by the effectiveness of school library. A clear mandate of Government of India (GOI) through constitutional acts has declared that it is the duty of the government to

ensure the education of the countrymen until 14 years of his/her age and school libraries can be used as a vehicle in the path of ensuring optimum literacy. Although, the consideration of school libraries as an indispensable part of the society is still beyond the imagination and the potentiality of school libraries is till now a vague. A large percentage of the people throughout the globe has believed that the preschool years are more effective than school libraries to create a reading habit (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2001; Huysmans, et al. 2013). In India, the statistics of District Information System for Education (DISE) of GOI has also mirrored the dissatisfactory condition of the school libraries; out of 244653 schools 90.17% of them have the library facility and only 16.53% of the schools in India have librarian for functioning the library (Secondary education in India, 2015). The ground reality is even worse as maximum school library rooms are converted as classroom or store room and the librarian are directed by the school authority to take classes in regular basis.

As the primary target of GOI is to inculcate more people in the education system, 69.85% of the schools in India are situated in the rural areas with an endeavour to disseminate education to the remote community. Prior researches have shown a severe correlation between poverty and education (Tilak, 2000) which has directed the Indian policy makers to give emphasis only upon primary education for the development of society (Tilak, 1997; Tilak, 2007). As a result the rate of drop-out has jumped from 19.8% in the end of class five to 36.3% in the end of class eight and 47.4% in the end of class ten (Secondary education in India, 2015). Statistics of DISE also shows that 32 among 100 children have completed their school education. As per Census of India (2011) 99 million children are dropped out from the school due to various reasons. Here lies a huge scope for the school libraries to step forward with its unique approaches to create a reading habit in the students; apart from that the school libraries can emerge as a learning space in the school premises through the extensive engagement with students.

2.   School dropout and behind the scene stories

In 2007, Tilak has ascertained that the elementary education is tangled by several problems like poor quality of education, low levels of student achievements, high student teacher ratio which are also responsible for the elevation of school dropout rate. Another research shows the participation of the student has increase by 10% by the introduction of *Mid-Day Meal* system in the schools (Afridi, 2011), which has a clear inclination towards the poverty; rest of the issues like imparity in sex-ratio, caste prejudices and weak infrastructures too have a

considerable amount of effect on the dropout rate. There are numerous problems which have geared up the possibilities of dropout, thus the author has broadly classified these problems into three major groups: *Economical*, *Psychological* and *Societal*.

2.1.   Economical

The present situation is quite unfavourable to the economically backward people for the purpose of education. According to the report of NSSO in rural area the monthly expenditure of a person on education has raised from Rs.23.24 in 2008 to Rs.49.97 in 2012 meanwhile in urban areas the change is from Rs.96.07 to Rs.181.50 respectively (NSSO, 2008; NSSO, 2014) whereas Rangarajan committee has ascertained a daily wage of Rs.32 as the BPL margin (Rangarajan, 2014); thus the amount of expenditure is hardly affordable for an economically backward family. Hence the drastic growth in the rate of expenditure can be considered as a reason behind the deviation of the students from the school.

2.2.   Psychological

It has been observed that the preference of instant income for living is always high among the economically backward class people due to their uncertain future. Hence anxiety has worked as a driving force which directs the people under BPL to think about their present and instead of going to the school the parents sent their children to earn. As a result still the number of child labour (5-14 years) as per Census of India 2011 is 10.13 million. The number reaches to 33 million (half of the country's children population) when the range be expanded to 5-18 years which shows a significant correlation with the rising number of school dropouts in tenth standard. Therefore a common mentality has been observed that the poor people prefer security of food over education.

2.3.   Societal

From the ancient times Indian society has been divided into castes and the upper caste people have taken all the privileges by suppressing the lower caste people. A severe impact of these caste prejudices have reflected on Indian education system, as a result a good percentage of people in India are remain disregarded from the education. In 2006, Kabir has opined inequalities have the prime reason behind the social exclusion in context to south Asian countries; further he ascertained that these challenges are affecting the overall development of a society by impeding the MDGs goals. Prior studies have forwarded that the education in

not the primary concern of the lower caste people but it can be applied as a healthy medium for social inclusion in context to India (Nambissan, 1996; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008).

3.   Inclusion into mainstream

Previous researches have thoroughly discussed the reasons and outcomes of school dropouts in India. Here the author has tried to focus on the potentiality of the school libraries to reduce those dropouts, especially among the economically backward students. Apart from that the study has attempted to instrument the approaches which are economic and create a connection between the patron and the library. The approaches forwarded by the author are self-explanatory and tried to cope up with the needs of the economically backward students. Meanwhile, a dedicated effort has also been percolated by the author to re-establish the school library as an integral part of the society.

3.1.   Library beyond school

A school library can motivate more children by enabling their interaction with the community resources like human resources and institutional resources. In 2011, Dike et al. have also manifested that seeking information from these sources will make them imaginative and also increases their interest regarding study. Therefore, is quite impossible for a librarian to prevent school dropouts by seating in the school. Librarian should bring the school library to the economically backward students and make them understand the potentiality of the school library. The prior reason behind the school dropout of the economically backward class students is the economic condition; economy has made the poor students deprived from the additional supports like books, study materials and tutoring. Thus, library should organise cultural activities, awareness programmes, debates, science communication activities to make the students acquainted with the following extensive services of the library:

i)   The primary step which should be adopted by a school librarian is to make the economically backward class people understand about the concept of library. The people belonging from poverty don't even know what is library and how it can uplift their life. Thus the school librarian should reach to those children and tried to communicate with them and their parents regarding the benefits of the library. In African countries the barefoot librarian concept have gain much popularity; the author opined to use this concept in context to school library to allure a large community by maintaining direct communication with each of them.

ii)   The school librarian's duty should not be confined between the official schedules; he/she should give the penetration to the economic side of those people and should try to enchant them with its activities. The school library should organize book distribution programmes in the community to attract more people in learning. As economy creates obstruction hence, after tracing the school dropouts the library should provide study materials and extra books in a free of cost for their education.

iii)   School libraries can become an efficient space for learning; but it is not necessary that the activities of the library should be confined between the four walls. Cultural programmes can be used as a common platform for interaction with the economically backward class student; it is a duty of the librarian to engage those students in the cultural programmes like book exhibitions and educational camps which can motivate them for learning.

iv)   Extra classes, lectures cum talks should be organized by the librarian quite frequently. These programmes have given a healthy impact to those students and motivated them to return in the mainstream.

3.2.   Increase the reading habit

It has been observed that the economically backward class students have lack of interest in studies however these students are also disenchanted by the school too. Prior researches have established a severe connection between the reading habit and school libraries; it has been analysed that the school libraries have enough potential to revive the reading habits of the children through the extensive activities (Busayo, 2011; Ogbonna, 2015). Acknowledging the importance of the students in school library, author of *Storytime action* Jennifer Bromann once stated, *"Readers are leaders"* and propounded to ensure necessary measures to inculcate more students into the library. After building the connection at a primary level through the extensive services it is the duty of the school librarian to robust the bonding through building the reading habit. Therefore, the study has accounted this unique feature of school library and tried to apply it as a corroborator for inclusion of the dropouts.

i)   Arrangement of alternative reading programmes can be a fruitful step towards building the reading habit. During summer vacation library can organize summer reading programmes with the dropout students. The students belonging from

poverty can't afford books or study materials, thus these programmes may build a cohesiveness books and the students.

ii) Many east African countries who are struggling with the poverty and education, have successful implemented *bookmobile, booktalk* programmes to increase the reading habit among the remote community. In India there is a scope for these programmes and only thing which is needed is the initiatives. Studies have conferred mother tongue stories are most suitable agent to become a book lover, thus emphasis should be percolated to those books. A school librarian can introduce story telling class during leisure; direct interaction with those students regarding short stories can built an interest to them.

3.3.   Empowerment of the student

A general tendency of the poor children is to knowhow a library can offer extra benefits to develop their lifestyle. Thus, it is essential to make them understand that not only the engagement but the empowerment should also be emphasized by the school librarian for the holistic development of them and the process of empowerment not only strengthen their education but also provide non-formal education to develop their working skills too.

i) A librarian should interact with the teachers to get acquainted with the student's activities and their area of interest. These feedbacks will help the librarian to construct further planning regarding the students and their development.

ii) Full utilization of the book bank service is also a prime concern of the school librarian. Meanwhile, the librarian should ensure whether the information needs of the dropout students reflected on the book bank's collection or not; continuous interaction will provide certain information regarding their needs. Thus, the librarian should make aware them about the collection and utility of the book bank for their development.

iii) Schools around India are duelling with the depressed infrastructural quality of the ICT tools. In this context implementation of ICT trainings (computer practices) is quite difficult work for school librarian and it's a mere dream for an economically backward class student to use computer for the study purpose. Thus collaboration of the school libraries with the computer training centres for the upliftment of the poor students can be an effective approach. It will dedicatedly harness the students

with the modern amenities and can be a decent measure for growing interest regarding study.

iv) Vocational training and skill development programmes should be offered by the school libraries as these non-formal education initiatives will allure more poor children to come to the library.

4.   Feasibility of the planning

The study has instrumented several unique approaches for the inclusion of the economically backward class students into the education system but it is necessary to check whether these ideas are feasible or not. Thus the author has re-evaluating these measures to identify the debilitation of them.

a.   The primary impeder of these initiatives is manpower; the number of the school librarian are very less compare to the school libraries, hence it is quite difficult to accumulate the whole initiative with this little manpower. The author has suggested partnership approach will be the best option for this case. The school libraries can collaborate with the public libraries nearest to the schools. It will enable a both way development to the school libraries as well as public libraries; if the condition of the public library is too bad then the school library should harnessed with the college library.

b.   Author has suggested the distribution of study books to the poor students as a fruitful way to bring them back to the school but the present situation is depicting a different issue. The school libraries are reflecting their feeble conditions of the collection of books which is a major drawback in the process of inclusion of economically backward class students. Therefore school authority should mandate the donation of books, reference materials to the library by pass out students and retired teachers which will strengthen the collection and also arrange the provision for books in the 'book distribution programmes'.

c.   The willingness of the authority has a pivotal role to play in the process of implementation of these initiatives. The authority must be flexible and cooperative for the collaboration with the distinguish authorities unless it will be impossible to make the initiative fruitful. The second thing is that the school librarian should decide with whom the library should collaborate; it must be a mean of reciprocal benefit otherwise no one would willingly get attached with the library.

Fig 1. Flowchart diagram of the implementation process of the instrumented approaches
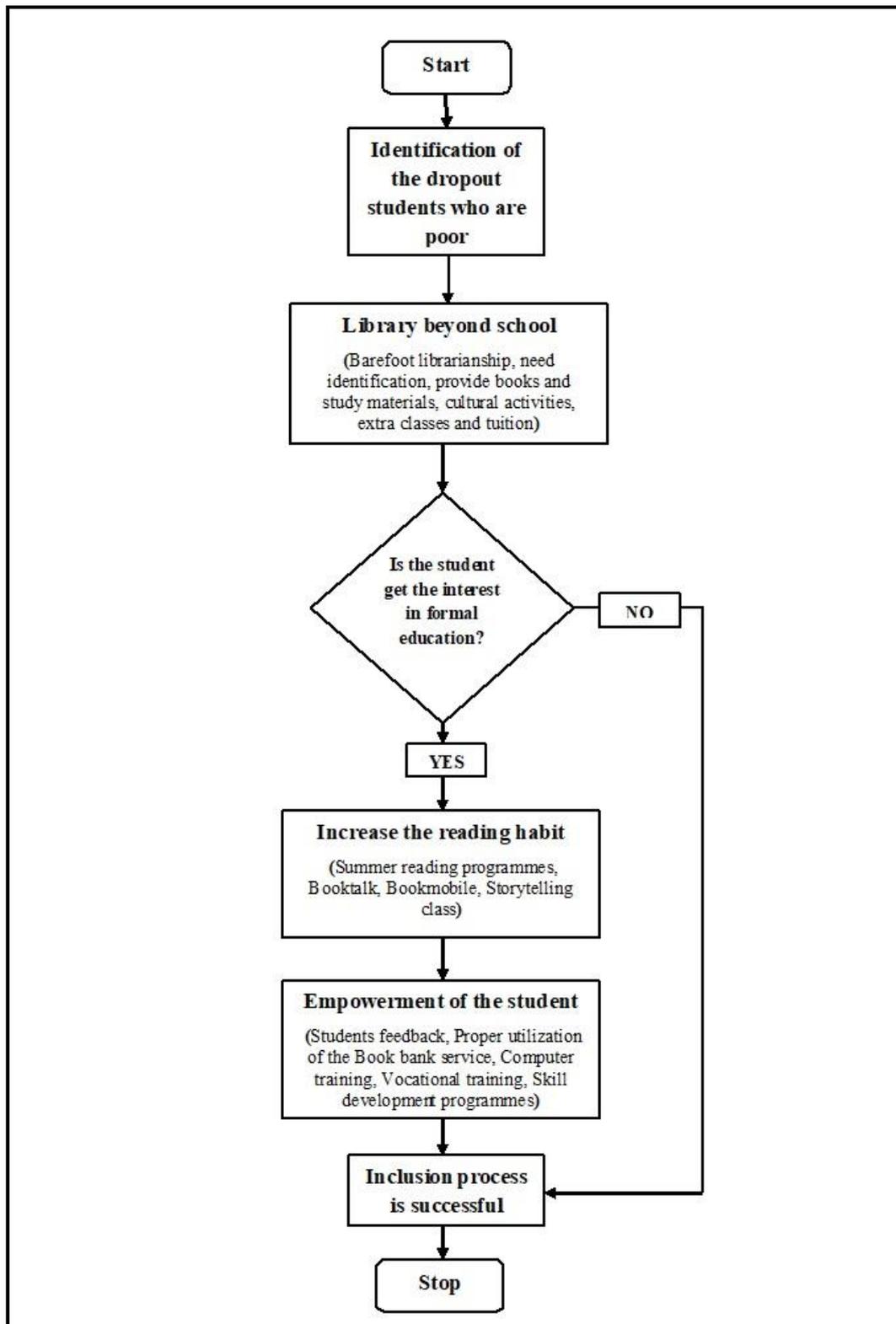
5. **Case studies**

Numerous school libraries around the world are setting the examples by inculcating more and more users through their unique approaches. Namibian Children Books Forum with the collaboration with the school libraries organise *"Readathon"* programme every year. The basic concept of this programme is to create a reading habit; participants are instructed to read something beyond the textbooks. Later, the organizers motivated them to write their own short stories in their native language and named that event as *under the story tree* (Tötemeyer, 2011). By 2011, La Marca et al. have enlighten another unique approach to motivate students for reading; *Reading Opens All Doors* (ROAD) in Genazzano FCJ College, Australia is a 25 years old programme, engage the students by the reading, debates, discussions etc. School libraries in USA have introduced GiggleIT project which attempts to turn their students into global citizens. These initiatives are self-explanatory and successful in their own country as basic needs of those countries are accomplished by them. Meanwhile, the author has also suggested several approaches in context to Indian school libraries but the arguable issues regarding these approaches are:

Q1) Whether these initiatives are feasible in Indian scenario?

Q2) What is the chance for implementation of these ideas?

Therefore the study has accounted two cases where the school libraries have set examples through their innovative ideas.

Case: 1

Deepalaya a NGO of India has taken necessary steps to reduce the school dropout and include more economically backward students into education (Deepalaya, 2016). In 1999, the organization has chosen the Okhla Industrial Area in Delhi where most of the residents are slum dwellers and cant effort a single meal. Education was a tertiary need of those people. Thus the NGO has built a school at there to provide decent education and make the children aware of health and hygiene. Later Deepalaya introduced *Deepalaya Community Library and Reading Project* is an initiative of Deepalaya School to increase the reading habit in the teens. Since 2008 this initiative has commenced by the Deepalaya organization where the volunteers have been dedicated to their work to attach more teens with the library. The project has started with 15-20 students of that school but as the time passes the number has crossed to more than 500. In the beginning the library has been run by the teachers of that school; later students of American Embassy School has also volunteered to gear up the

initiative. During the library hours the volunteers have read out the stories to the teens and tried to elevate their interest regarding the books. Continuation of this effort has given a significant result to the organization. For encouraging the youth and to elevated their eagerness Deepalaya has initiated *Honour Roll Readers* concept, where they have listed the best book borrower's name. Through these initiatives Deepalaya has reduced 18% drop-out ratein that community, apart from that girls and boys student ratio have developed to 40:60; to allure the larger community *Deepalaya Community Library and Reading Project* has served non formal education and vocational training programmes for the rest of the children who are not associated with school.

Case: 2

Mukti a NGO mainly worked for economically needy people has initiated Book Bank service to the rural schools of Canning subdivision (Mainly Sundarban), Westbengal, India (Project book Bank, 2016). The objective of this programme is to provide all the text books to the students from class 5 to 12 as they can't buy any book due to their poor economic condition. Another factor worrying the villagers is the communication system; the transport facility is too bad that it would take couple of hours to reach to the nearby school. Making the collaboration with the school libraries Mukti has identified the need of the students of those areas and served books for them. Till now 22 schools in the Sundarban area have been benefited by this NGO.

Table 1. Distribution of benefited student by school

Name of the School	Location	Boys	Girls
Shibnagar Mokshoda sundari vidyamandir	Shibnagar, PrathorPratima	125	113
Ambikanagar High School	AmbikaNagar, Kultali	114	90
Dakshin Kashinagar High School	Kuyemuri, Raidighi	79	72
Gadamathura Adarsha Binoy Higher Secondary School	Gadamathura. PathorPratima	85	68
Bhagabati Milan Siksha Kendra	Narendrapur, Raidighi	75	70
Madhya Purba Gurguriya High School	Gurguriya, Kultali	124	101
Bhubaneshwari Joykrishna High School	Maipith, Kultali	105	110
DebnagarMokshodaDinda Higher	Debnagar, Namkhana	121	74

Secondary School			
Kedarpur Higher Secondary School	Kedarpur, PathorPratima	97	110
Gathiharania High School	Kultali	102	93
Krishna Chandrapur Higher Secondary School	KrishnaChandrapur, Mathurapur	95	57
Khagendranath Smriti Vidyamandir	Basanti	85	60
AAL Ameen High Madrasa	Joynagar	95	70
Nagendrapur Hemanta Kumari High School	Nagendrapur, Raidighi	215	205
Jota Nagendrapur Higher Secondary School	Nagendrapur, Raidighi	172	153
Santoshghorai Balika Vidyamandir	Kankandighi	0	175
Babujan Shephai Higher Secondary School	Kankandighi	125	110
Damkal J. H School	Damkal, Ridighi	65	86
Gilarchat High School	Raidighi	95	91
Raidighi Shrifaltala Chandrakanta Higher Secondary School	Raidighi	109	96
Jota Jogendrapur Higher Secondary School	Jogendrapur,Raidighi	125	110
Baikunthapur High School	Maipith, Kultali	97	118
Graduation Students	Raidighi	41	19
Total Student		**2346**	**2251**

Source: Report on Book Bank Project 2015-16, MUKTI

The school library librarian with the Headmaster of that school jointly supervised this work; Mukti has also assigned a coordinator for this purpose. By analysing the student need the librarian distributed those books properly to them. It merely helps 4,597 students who have faced fatal problem regarding the education. This initiative provides an educational support to them, which is automatically reflected on their annual scorecards. The Book bank service is gaining its popularity day by day, as a result a 3% growth in the number of students has been observed during 2015-2016.

6. Conclusion

The study have tried to deliver some approaches to bring back more economically backward class students in to the mainstream of education and cited two individual case studies which

have described the success of the school libraries in the mentioned process by following the instrumented approaches. A huge socio-economic diversity has been observed in India, thus it is impossible to apply all the methods in a single place. Thus a school librarian should show pro-activeness in working and analyse the situation before applying the methods. Lastly, comparison with international scenario is a vague concept regarding these matters as the issue is very sensitive and varying from community to community. Therefore, efficiency should be reflected in the process of working of the librarian. Apart from that the biggest challenge in this process is the mentality of the librarian; without the willingness of the librarian school library can't secure the success.

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