

A Multifaceted Analysis of Determinants Behind Student Dropout Rates Among Adivasis Tribal Children in Tinsukia District, Assam.

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the key determinants influencing the decision of students to drop out of school. Employing a descriptive survey method, the research gathered data from a sample of 40 teachers and 289 students who had dropped out from classes 5 to 10 across the district, utilizing a self-constructed 34 and 36-item questionnaire respectively. The findings reveal that dropout rates are highest among male students (58.5%) and are concentrated in classes 8-10 (75%), predominantly from private schools (73%) in semi-urban localities (62.6%). A critical demographic factor is the low level of parental education, with (95%) of dropouts having uneducated parents, primarily employed in low-income occupations such as tea garden work (41.5%), limiting their capacity to provide academic motivation and guidance. Analysis of student perceptions indicates that the decision to drop out is multifaceted, stemming from a combination of push and pull factors. Economic necessity to support their families emerged as the primary reason (21.1%), followed closely by a dislike for school (20.4%) and chronic academic failure (20.1%). Underlying these reasons are profound institutional failures: dissatisfaction with teaching methods (29.1%), a perceived lack of relevance in the curriculum, and a widespread sense of social rejection, with (78.9%) of students feeling ostracized by peers or teachers. Furthermore, behavioural issues and rule violations were prevalent, signalling disengagement.

The study concludes that student dropout is not a result of a single cause but a complex interplay of socio-economic, pedagogical, and psycho-social factors.

Keywords: Dropout, Determinants of dropout, Parental Education, Academic Dissatisfaction, Rejection.

1. Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a critical catalyst for individual empowerment, social mobility, and national development. It is the bedrock upon which equitable and progressive societies are built. The Indian Constitution, through the Directive Principles of State Policy and subsequent landmark legislation like the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, explicitly mandates universal access to education for all children aged 6 to 14 years. This legislative framework represents a national commitment to dismantling historical barriers to education and fostering an inclusive knowledge society.

The state of Assam, located in the northeastern part of India, is a mosaic of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. Its tribal populations, including various Adivasi communities, have a unique socio-cultural fabric. The Tinsukia district, an industrial and agricultural hub in Upper Assam, is home to a significant population of Adivasis, primarily comprising communities like the Tea Tribes. The educational indicators for Adivasi children in Tinsukia are a cause for grave concern. UDISE+ data indicates that Tinsukia district has the highest school dropout rate in the state, with a significant disparity observed within the Adivasi community, as reported by Pratidin Time and North East News (Sept. 3, 2025).

The dropout issue is not merely a statistic; it is a symptom of deep-rooted, interconnected socio-economic, cultural, and systemic failures. For a child from the Adivasi community in Tinsukia, the decision to leave school is seldom a choice but a consequence of a complex web of factors. These may include abject poverty compelling child labour, cultural practices that may not immediately align with formal education, linguistic barriers, geographical isolation, and an educational system that often fails to be inclusive or sensitive to their unique heritage and needs. The persistence of this problem perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage, limiting opportunities for individual growth and constraining the community's overall development.

The Adivasi community in Tinsukia district, despite being a vital component of the region's workforce, continues to experience severe educational marginalization. While initial enrollment rates at the primary level have shown improvement due to government efforts, a substantial number of Adivasi children do not complete their elementary or secondary education. They drop out of the school system prematurely, foreclosing their opportunities for higher education, skilled employment, and socio-economic advancement.

Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the critical gap in understanding the precise, context-driven factors that contribute to the high incidence of school dropout among Adivasi children in Tinsukia district, Assam. It posits that without a deep, qualitative, and community-centred understanding of these factors, policy interventions will remain generic and ineffective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The phenomenon of school dropout among marginalized communities has been extensively studied, providing a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for this research.

Theoretical Frameworks: Numerous theories help explain dropout behaviour. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social reproduction posits that the education system often replicates existing social inequalities by privileging the cultural capital of dominant groups, thereby marginalizing children from communities like the Adivasis whose cultural capital is not recognized. Finn's (1989) Participation-Identification Model suggests that a lack of participation in school activities leads to weak identification with the school, resulting in dropout. This is highly relevant for Adivasi children who may feel alienated in a majoritarian school environment.

Empirical Studies on Tribal Education in India: National-level studies have consistently highlighted the challenges in tribal education. The work of Nambissan (1996, 2009) has been seminal in documenting the systemic discrimination and exclusion faced by tribal children in schools. She argues that the curriculum,

pedagogy, and language of instruction act as instruments of cultural hegemony, devaluing tribal knowledge systems and creating a sense of inadequacy. Sujatha (2002) and Mohanty (2010) have extensively written on the linguistic barriers. Mohanty's work on multilingual education powerfully demonstrates how imposing a dominant language (like Assamese) as the medium of instruction in the early years creates a crippling cognitive gap for tribal children who are native speakers of their own mother tongues (e.g., Sadri, Santali).

Socio-Economic Factors: The link between poverty, child labour, and dropout is well-established. Jha and Jhingran (2005) in their extensive study on elementary education for deprived groups, identified economic hardship as the primary driver for dropout, forcing children into wage labour or domestic chores. This is particularly acute in tea garden communities, where children are often required to supplement family income or assist their parents during peak plucking seasons (Das, 2015).

Studies in the North-Eastern Context: Research specific to Assam and the Northeast adds another layer of understanding. Boruah (2009) discussed how the conflict between the prescribed state curriculum and the lived reality of tribal children creates a disconnect, making education seem irrelevant. A study by Das and Deka (2016) on tea garden workers in Sonitpur district, Assam, found that economic compulsion, lack of parental awareness, and poor school infrastructure were key contributors to low educational attainment. However, a comprehensive study focusing specifically on the multifarious factors—economic, pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural—affecting Adivasi dropout rates in the industrially strategic yet socially complex district of Tinsukia remains conspicuously absent.

This study aims to fill this gap by synthesizing these broader perspectives and applying them to a focused investigation in Tinsukia, thereby generating localized knowledge that can inform targeted action

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To profile the socio-economic and demographic status of dropout students and their parents of Adivasi school dropouts in Tinsukia district.
2. To assess the levels of satisfaction among Adivasi students who have dropped out.
3. To identify the key factors contributing to the decision to drop out and to characterize students who leave mid-academic year.
4. To analyse teachers' perspectives on the multifaceted causes of student attrition.

SAMPLE: School dropouts 289 students and 40 teachers

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND INTERPRETATION

Socio-Economic and Demographic Status of Dropout Students: An analysis of dropout students revealed several key demographic trends. By gender, male students accounted for a larger share of dropout at (58.5%), compared to (41.5%) for female students, indicating a significant gender disparity. The vast majority of these students (75%) were concentrated in classes 8 to 10, of 14-17 year age group. In terms of school type, an overwhelming (73%) of dropouts came from private schools. Geographically, semi-urban localities contributed the most to the dropout figures with (62.6%), followed by rural areas at

(26.3%) and urban areas at (11.1%). Finally, the religious distribution of dropped-out students was predominantly Hindu (65.1%), with Christian students comprising (31.8%), Muslim students (2.1%), and a small portion from other or unspecified religions.

LEVEL OF PARENTS' EDUCATION AND THEIR OCCUPATION

The study shows that (60.90%) of the parents of dropout students have primary education, (37.40%) of the parents have done high school and (1.70%) of the parents did college education. It can be inferred that majority of the parents of the dropout students with just primary education might have failed to give proper motivation and guidance which would have directly impacted towards dropping out of school among students. The study also indicates that (41.5%) of the fathers of dropout students are mostly tea garden workers, (25.6%) are farmers and (16.6%) are masons. The other occupations are drivers, home guard personnel and shopkeeper. The mothers' occupations (50.20%) of them are housewives, (47.10%) are tea garden workers, teachers and farmers make up (7%) each and (1.40%) works as house maids.

LEVEL OF DISSATISFACTION OF STUDENTS WITH THEIR SCHOOLS

Figure-1: Columns represent the Level of Student Dissatisfaction with their schools

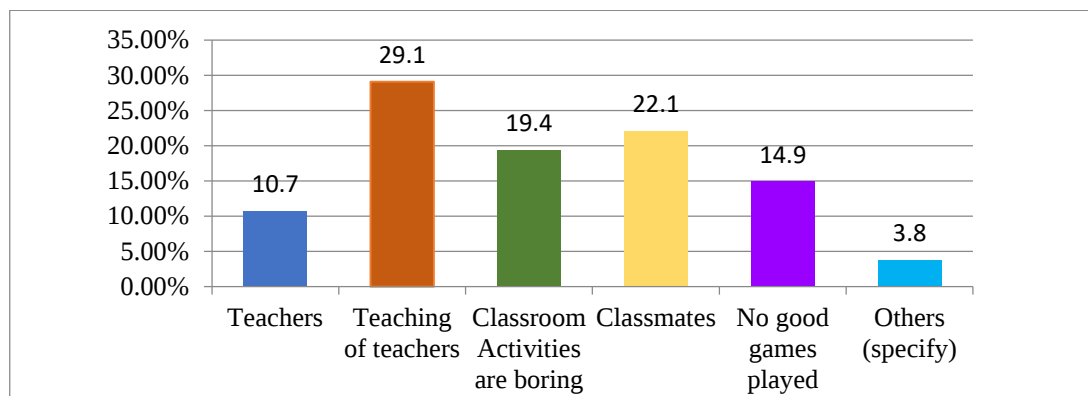


Figure 1 highlights key factors contributing to student dissatisfaction. Specifically, (10.7%) of students reported a dislike of their teachers' personal attributes, while a larger portion, (29.1%), expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching methods themselves. Furthermore, (19.4%) found classroom activities boring, and (22.1%) reported not liking their classmates. Additionally, (14.9%) found school games to be uninteresting, while (3.8%) provided unclear reasons for their dissatisfaction.

LEVEL OF HAPPINESS WITH THEIR SCHOOL RESULTS, PEERS AND SCHOOL IN GENERAL

Figure-2: Columns represent the Level of Happiness of dropout students

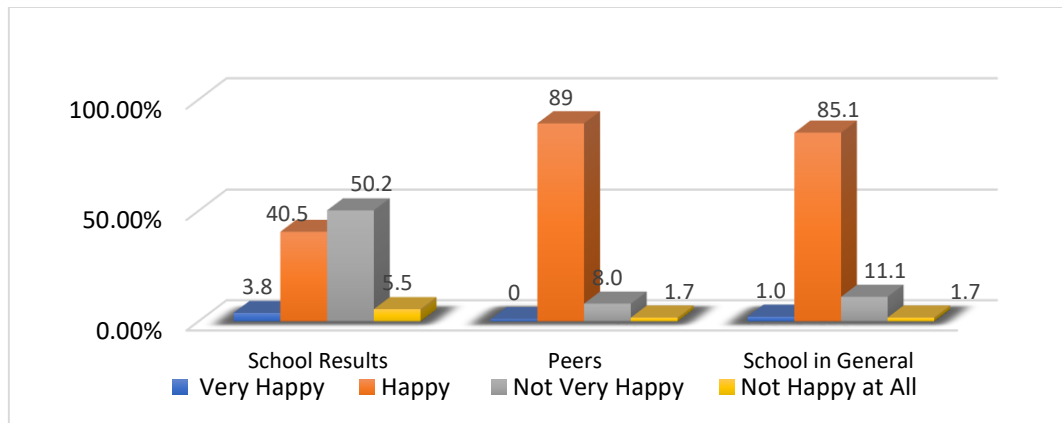


Figure-2 details the dropped students' satisfaction levels regarding their academic results, peers, and schools. A very small minority reported being "very happy" (3.80% with results, (1.00%) with peers, and (2.10%) with school). While a large majority were "happy" with their results (89.30%) and peers (85.10%), fewer (40.50%) were happy with the school itself. Notably, over half (50.20%) were "not very happy" with their results, and (5.50%) were "not happy at all." Dissatisfaction with peers and the school was negligible.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS TOWARDS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

Figure-3: Columns represent Psycho-Social and Behavioural Factors

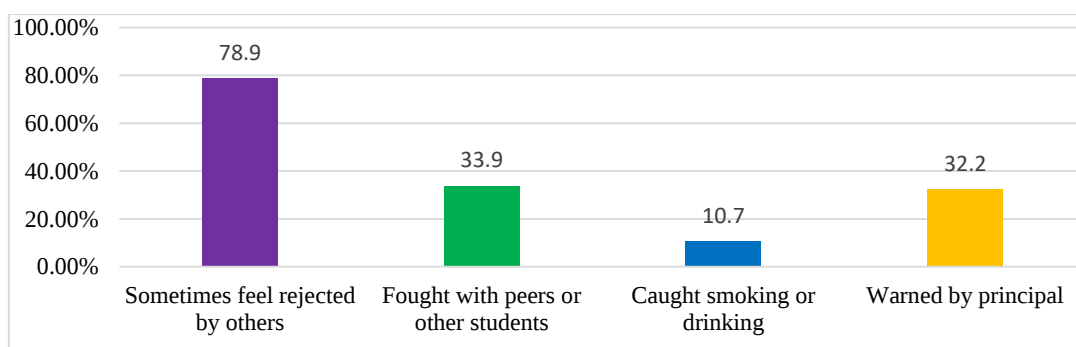
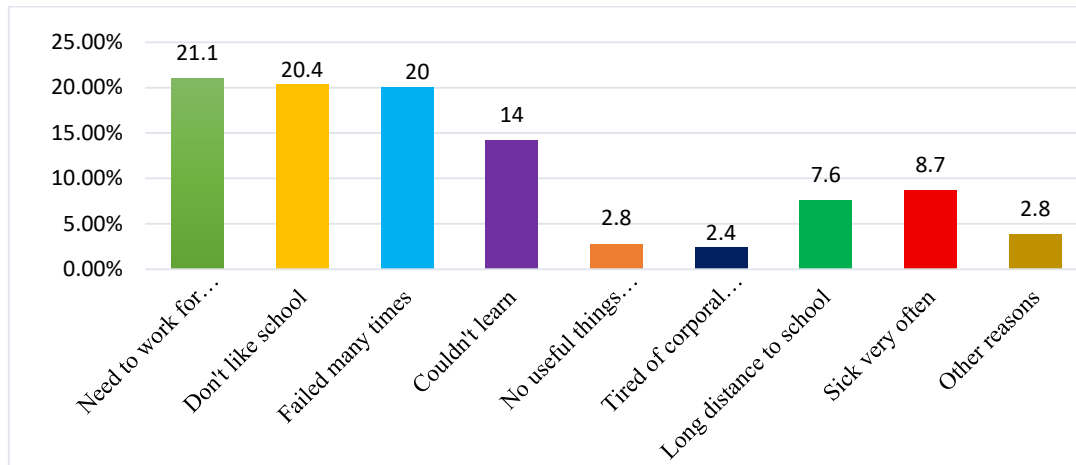


Figure-3 reveals key insights into the perceptions of dropout students, highlighting a complex interplay of dissatisfaction and social alienation. A majority of (78.9%) often felt rejected by their friends or teachers. A significant (33.9%) admitted to fighting with peers, and a segment had engaged in serious misconduct, with (10.70%) caught smoking or drinking and (32.20%) receiving a formal warning from the principal for rule violations. We draw conclusion that the decision to drop out is not attributable to a single cause but is the result of a combination of factors. These include a prevailing sense of social rejection and isolation, academic dissatisfaction despite an interest in the structure provided by discipline, and engagement in behavioural issues.

MULTIFACETED FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL

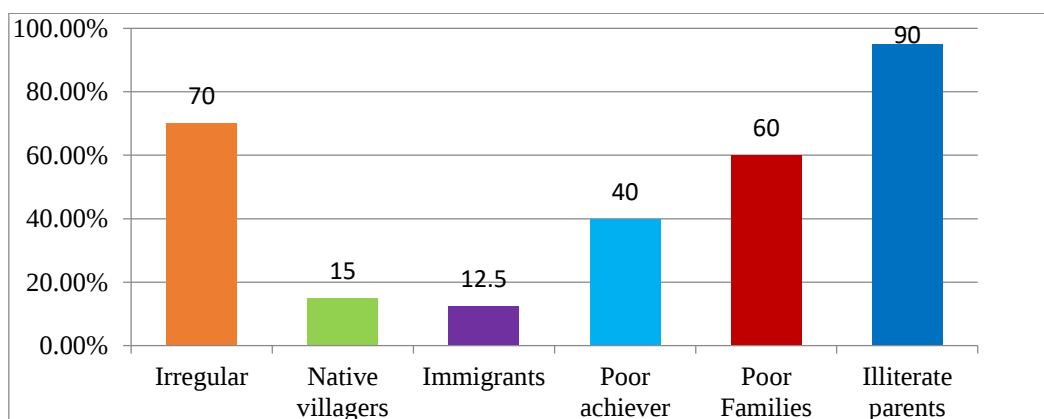
Figure-4: Columns represent the Factors for Dropping out of School



As revealed in Figure-4, the major factors for students to drop out are diverse. Economic necessity is the primary driver (21.10%), forcing students to work and support their families. Dislike of school (20.40%), often stemming from curriculum or disciplinary issues, and repeated academic failure (20.10%) are also significant factors. Furthermore, (14.20%) of students dropped out because they could not understand the lessons. Other contributing reasons include corporal punishment, long commutes, and frequent illness. Ultimately, this indicates a failure to make education feel useful; students do not see how their present learning connects to their daily lives or future prospects.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WHO DROP OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YEAR

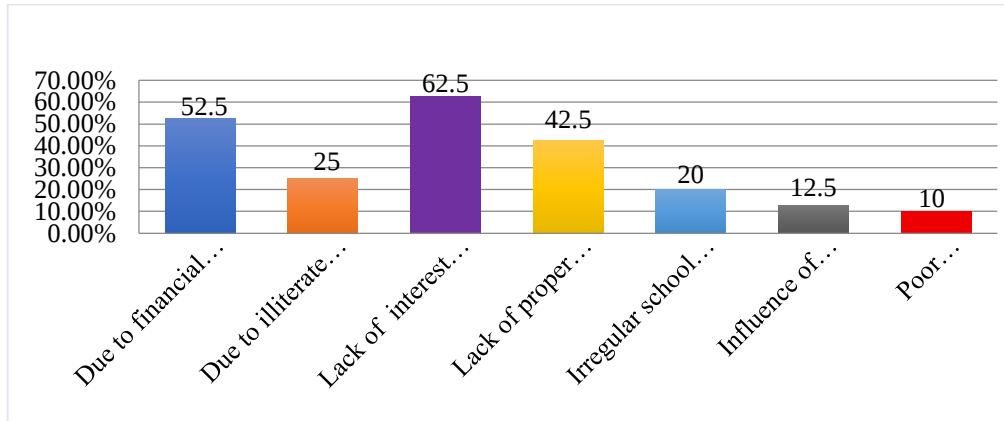
Figure-5: Columns represent the Characteristics of Students who leave school in the middle of the year



In Figure-5, it shows majority of the dropout students (95%) from school in the middle of the year belonged to illiterate parents, (70%) dropouts in the middle the year are the irregular students in attendance at school, (60%) dropout students are from poor families and (40%) of dropout students are those who could not perform well. A few students who dropped out are from the native villagers, immigrants and negligible cases of children from educated parents.

REASONS FOR DROPOUT ACCORDING TO TEACHERS

Figure-6: Columns represent the Reasons for Dropping out according to Teachers



The most significant barrier, cited by a striking (62.5%) of respondents, is a lack of interest in learning. It is closely followed by financial problems (52.5%), underscoring how poverty remains a fundamental structural obstacle, preventing families from affording direct costs and incurring the opportunity cost of a child not working. This financial strain is compounded by a lack of proper guidance (42.5%), indicating a failure in the support system- both at home, with illiterate parents (25.0%) unable to assist academically, and potentially at school through inadequate counselling. Further analysis reveals a cascade effect where these primary causes lead to observable symptoms. Poor performance (10.0%) and irregular attendance (20.0%) are key indicators that a student is at high risk of dropping out, often resulting from the interplay of financial stress, lack of support, and dwindling motivation. The modern world introduces new challenges, as seen with the influence of social media (12.5%), which acts as a powerful competitor for students' attention and can exacerbate disinterest in formal education.

In conclusion, the data suggests that dropout rates are not the result of a single issue but a vicious cycle. Economic hardship limits a family's capacity to support education, which leads to academic struggles and a lack of guidance. This, in turn, fosters disinterest and poor performance, ultimately culminating in the student leaving school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Dropouts

The analysis identified a distinct demographic profile for students who drop out. The majority were male (58.5%), concentrated in upper secondary classes (75%) in classes 8-10, and hailed primarily from semi-urban localities (62.6%). A striking (73%) of dropouts attended private schools, suggesting issues of affordability and value perception.

A critical finding was the overwhelming influence of parental background. An astounding (95%) of dropouts had parents with little to no formal education, with (60.9%) having only primary education. This was compounded by parental occupation: (41.5%) of fathers were tea garden workers, and (25.6%) were farmers, indicating a predominance of low-income, unstable employment. Similarly, (47.1%) of mothers were also tea garden workers, with (50.2%) being housewives.

Determinants of Student Dissatisfaction

Student dissatisfaction with the school environment was a significant push factor (Figure 1). The largest cohort expressed discontent with how they were taught. A dislike for classmates was a major social factor. A lack of engaging pedagogy was frequently cited. Pointing to a failure in teacher-student relationships.

Primary Reasons for Dropping Out

When asked for the direct reason for leaving school, the leading cause, forcing children into labour to support their families. These two factors were equally prevalent, highlighting a dual crisis of engagement and achievement. This underscores a fundamental pedagogical failure.

Psycho-Social and Behavioral Factors

A deeper look into student perceptions (Figure 3) revealed profound psycho-social challenges. A critical (78.9%) of students reported often feeling rejected by friends or teachers. Despite (72.3%) finding school discipline interesting, (55.7%) were unhappy with their academic results. A significant portion engaged in anti-social behavior, with (33.9%) admitting to fighting with peers, (10.7%) caught smoking/drinking, and (32.2%) receiving official warnings for rule violations. A majority (58.8%) believed they had better alternatives than attending school.

The results paint a vivid picture of student dropout as a syndrome, not a single event, caused by the convergence of multiple vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, the profound sense of rejection felt by (78.9%) of students signals a toxic school climate. A school that fails to be an inclusive, supportive, and socially safe environment actively pushes students out. This social alienation, combined with academic struggle, creates a feeling of perpetual failure, making dropping out an escape from a hostile environment.

Conclusion

This study concludes that mitigating the dropout crisis requires a multi-pronged strategy that moves beyond simplistic explanations. Effective intervention requires a holistic strategy that addresses economic barriers, reforms teaching methodologies to be more engaging and contextually relevant, and fosters an inclusive school environment that supports the social and emotional well-being of students.

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