

8.0 Academic Resilience in Education: An Inclusive Policy-Based Study for Disadvantaged Students

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Abstract

Education is considered to be the main medium of social change, equal opportunity and inclusive development. But the process of education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in India is associated with many social, economic and psychological challenges. Factors such as poverty, social exclusion, limited resources, school discrimination and mental stress affect the academic continuity and achievement of students. Despite these adversities, some students succeed academically, largely due to academic resilience. Academic resilience is the ability of students to sustain the learning process despite academic setbacks, stressful circumstances, and structural barriers. The paper theoretically reinforces the concept of academic resilience and links it to inclusive educational policies designed for disadvantaged students. It presents an in-depth analysis of the RTE Act 2009, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and National Education Policy 2020 along with a detailed review of the relevant literature. The study establishes the argument that inclusive policies, sensitive teacher behaviors, and supportive social environments can combine to develop academic resilience in disadvantaged students, thereby realizing educational equity and social justice.

Key Words: Academic Resilience, Inclusive Education, Digital Inclusion, Disadvantaged Students, National Education Policy 2020, Educational Equality

Introduction

Education has long been considered a powerful medium for social advancement and individual empowerment. For particularly disadvantaged students, education is the means through which they can transcend socio-economic boundaries. In a society plagued by inequalities like India, caste, class, gender, region, and economic status influence access to education and educational achievement.

Disadvantaged students often face problems such as inadequate school structure, limited academic support, domestic responsibilities, and emotional stress. These circumstances lead to school separation, low academic achievement, and increased likelihood of dropouts. Yet some students maintain their academic continuity in the face of all these obstacles. This fact underscores the importance of academic resilience.

Disadvantaged students and academic challenges

Disadvantaged students face multifaceted challenges in the field of education due to socio-economic deprivation. Lack of resources in schools, language difficulties, digital

divide, and social discrimination affect their educational experience. Additionally, low expectations and a lack of self-esteem can make their approach to learning negative.

Academic resilience in these circumstances acts as a protective factor for disadvantaged students, assisting them to stay connected to education despite the difficulties.

Review of the related literature

It is evident from the international and Indian studies conducted on educational resilience that this concept is not only static but dynamic and context-based. Early research looked at resilience as an individual adaptability, but modern research considers it as a socio-ecological process. According to Ungar's socio-ecological model, resilience develops from the interaction of the individual, family, school, community, and policy-environment. This approach is particularly relevant in the study of disadvantaged pupils, as their educational experiences are deeply intertwined with social inequalities.

Studies based on Bandura (1997) self-efficacy theory have made it clear that students who receive positive feedback and encouragement from the teacher and the school are found to have higher academic self-confidence and resilience. Masten (2014) posited that supportive relationships, clear expectations, and resilience develop as a natural process when opportunities are available. According to Lynch & O'Riordan(1998) The road to higher education for marginalized is laden with many obstacles such as social, cultural, economic and educational barriers are even worse. In the Indian context, Sharma and Sood (2019) and other studies have shown that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more prone to academic stress and school separation. The Right to Education Act was a pathbreaking legislation that made education a fundamental Right for all the children in the age group of 6 to 14 years, the act provided for free and compulsory education and laid down the private schools should reserve a certain percentage of seats for economically disadvantaged students (Sinha & Verma, 2014). After the enactment of RTE 2009, the enrollment rates had raised in the deprived sections of the society but the problems regarding retention and quality of education remain the same. Reports are coming that though enrollments have increased, dropout rates for students from scheduled castes and those from the rural areas continued to be high due to socio-economic pressures, infrastructural problems and lack of support systems (Shah & Stenberg, 2009). However, in schools that have an inclusive culture, counselling services and supportive teacher-student relations, academic resilience is more developed among students.

The literature also indicates that physical resources alone are not enough. Emotional support, positive expectations, and constant guidance play a crucial role in helping disadvantaged students overcome setbacks. Despite all the ambitious objectives of recent policies, there are many serious problems relating to their operational aspects. The problems of inadequate funding and bureaucratic inefficiencies, socio-cultural barriers persist (Chaudhary, 2023). According to the figures, Enrolment of SC and ST children increased from roughly 70% at the beginning of the 2000s to more than 90% over the last few years (Deka, 2015); (Gupta, 2024); (Garg, 2024). However, in terms of retention rates, these groups of the society have still lagged behind the other groups (Assari & Zare, 2024).

Research methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology. The study is primarily based on secondary sources of data from reliable sources, including the National Education Policy 2020, the RTE Act 2009, and the PARAKH Report 2024. The study examines these documents to understand the gap between what the law promises and what students actually experience on the ground.

The concept of academic resilience

Academic resilience is the ability of a student to engage in learning despite setbacks, stresses and obstacles in academic life. This concept recognizes that challenges are an integral part of the education process, but it is the ability to overcome them that helps students to move forward. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, students put in more effort when they are confident in their abilities. Masten defines resilience as a simple yet effective process that develops when appropriate social support is found. In the context of disadvantaged students, this support comes from the school, teacher, family and policy level.

Inclusive policies for disadvantaged students

The inclusive policies implemented for the academic development of disadvantaged students in India are based on the concept of equal opportunity and social justice. The Right to Education Act, 2009, provides every child with the legal right to free and compulsory education. The Act not only ensures access to school but also promotes a non-discriminatory, child-centered, and inclusive educational environment. The system of reservation for students from economically weaker sections in private schools helps in social inclusion and development of self-respect.

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan is a comprehensive policy initiative in the field of school education that aims at improving enrolment, retention and educational quality. The scheme undertakes measures such as remedial teaching, specialized training, student counselling and teacher capacity building. All these provisions help in strengthening self-confidence, continuity of learning and academic resilience among disadvantaged students.

The National Education Policy 2020 has provided a comprehensive and holistic approach to inclusive education. The policy considers social-emotional learning, life skills and mental health as integral parts of education. The policy calls for identifying socially and economically disadvantaged groups and developing specific strategies for them. Provisions such as flexible curriculum, multilingual education and assessment reforms help students develop a positive attitude towards learning by reducing academic pressure.

Digital inclusion initiatives, such as PM e-Vidya, DIKSHA and SWAYAM platform, provide underprivileged students with access to quality educational resources. Although the digital divide is still a challenge, these initiatives have created new learning opportunities for students from rural and backward areas. Additionally, various scholarship schemes and nutrition programs help students stay connected to the education system by reducing financial barriers.

Taken as a whole, these inclusive policies are not limited to academic access, but they also serve to develop self-confidence, hope and academic resilience among disadvantaged

students. When these policies are combined with sensitive implementation and school support, they are effective in reducing educational inequalities and realizing inclusive growth.

Challenge of inclusion and limited access of schemes to the disadvantaged

In recent years, several initiatives have been taken by the Government of India to promote digital inclusion in the education sector such as PM e-Vidya, DIKSHA, Swayam, and online educational platforms. The objective of these schemes is to make quality educational material accessible to all students. However, at the practical level, it has been observed that the benefits of these digital schemes are not reaching the underprivileged equitably. Many students from disadvantaged backgrounds lack smartphones, tablets, internet connectivity or digital literacy. Network problems in rural and remote areas, family economic limitations, and lack of shared digital devices hinder digital learning. As a result, schemes that were designed to establish educational equality are often confined to the already privileged section. This situation also hinders the development of academic resilience, as students who are disadvantaged by lack of access to digital resources feel further isolated from the education system. Therefore, it is imperative that digital inclusion is not limited to planning but also takes into account structural inequalities in its implementation.

Role of government

The real success of digital schemes depends on how effectively they reach the last mile student. The role of the government here should not be limited to providing digital platforms only, but should extend to expansion and continuous monitoring of infrastructure. Setting up of Community Digital Centres in schools, provision of shared equipment, availability of offline content and development of content in local languages are essential to ensure digital access. Additionally, special digital assistance programmes should be run for socially and economically disadvantaged groups so that digital education becomes a medium of opportunity for them, not a new barrier.

The National Education Policy 2020 calls for special interventions while identifying SEDGs (Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups). The impact of these interventions will be visible only when digital plans are aligned with ground realities and the gap between policy and implementation is bridged.

Role of teachers and implementation of sedg provisions of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 has identified teachers as key agents of change, especially in the context of disadvantaged students. The actual implementation of the suggested policies for the SEDG depends on the sensitivity and active role of the teacher at the classroom level. Teachers can adopt resilience in teaching strategies by recognizing the academic and digital needs of disadvantaged students. When using digital resources, it is essential that teachers do not limit themselves to just online content, but also value alternative offline means, collaborative learning, and personalized guidance. Additionally, teachers can play a crucial role in developing digital confidence in students. Technical guidance in simple language, peer support groups, and continuous encouragement can help

disadvantaged students connect to digital education. Thus, teachers not only communicate the textbook but also act as a bridge between policy and practice.

The development of academic resilience requires that teachers do not see the failures of pupils as their incompetence, but rather as the result of structural constraints. Such a vision puts into practice the spirit of inclusive and equitable education enshrined in the National Education Policy 2020.

Conclusion

Academic resilience is an important key for disadvantaged pupils to stay in education and succeed. Inclusive policies, supportive school environments, and social support empower students to overcome adversity. It is not possible to develop academic resilience for disadvantaged students without coordination between digital schemes, government policies and the role of the teacher. Academic resilience develops when the government provides structural support, teachers adopt sensitive teaching practices, and schools create an inclusive environment. Thus, education can be a powerful tool for social justice, equal opportunity and inclusive growth rather than just a means of acquiring knowledge. Only then does the actual implementation of SEDG-centric education as envisaged in the National Education Policy 2020 become possible.

Thus, inclusion should not be seen as a mere technological initiative but as a social and academic responsibility so that disadvantaged students can confidently integrate into the mainstream of education. Academic resilience is a powerful tool not only for personal growth but also towards social justice and educational equity.

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