



# Barriers and Bridges: A Study on Access and Quality of School Education for Scheduled Caste Children in Rural India (A Case Study of Bukkapatnam Village, Andhrapradesh)

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## Abstract

This study explores the barriers and enabling factors influencing access to and quality of education among Scheduled Caste (SC) children in rural India, focusing on Bukkapatnam village in Andhrapradesh. Based on primary data from 100 SC households, the research examines enrollment, retention, infrastructure, and awareness of government schemes. Findings reveal that poverty, inadequate facilities, and social biases continue to affect educational outcomes despite positive policy initiatives. Parental motivation and scholarships act as critical bridges for improvement. The paper integrates theoretical perspectives from Ambedkar, Bourdieu, and the Human Capital Approach, emphasizing education's transformative role in achieving social justice. The study concludes with evidence-based recommendations aligned with SDG-4 and NEP-2020 for promoting inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

**Keywords: Scheduled Caste, Rural Education, Access, Quality, Infrastructure**

## 1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as the foundation of human development and an essential tool for socio-economic mobility. In India, despite several constitutional and legislative provisions aimed at equality, caste continues to influence access to education, employment, and social dignity. The Scheduled Caste (SC) communities represent one of the most disadvantaged sections of Indian society, often marginalized in terms of literacy, infrastructure, and participation in higher education. According to the Census of India (2011), the literacy rate among Scheduled Castes stood at 66.1% compared to 74% for the general population, showing a persistent gap. The challenge becomes even more pronounced in rural areas where socio-economic backwardness intersects with infrastructural inadequacies. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education, yet India continues to grapple with deep-rooted social disparities that hinder educational progress for SC children.

2. Review of Literature

Research on caste-based educational inequality in India has evolved over time, with increasing focus on structural and institutional determinants. Biradar and Jaysheela (2007) observed that the educational achievements of Scheduled Castes were significantly lower compared to other social groups, even after several decades of policy interventions. Recent studies, such as Bailwal and Paul (2021), reveal that villages with higher SC populations often have fewer public schools, exacerbating exclusion. Panda (2012) highlighted gender disparities within SC communities, noting that SC girls face compounded disadvantages. Kumar and Thomas (2021) emphasized that while enrollment has improved through government programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, quality learning outcomes remain unsatisfactory. The gap in infrastructure and teacher sensitivity continues to hinder inclusive education. Behera (2015) and Patel and Sharma (2023) both stress that expanding access alone is insufficient without addressing issues of quality, discrimination, and aspiration.

3. Objectives

- 1. To analyze the educational status of Scheduled Caste children in Bukkapatnam village.
- 2. To identify barriers to access and retention in education.
- 3. To assess infrastructure and scholarship awareness.
- 4. To suggest strategies for inclusive education.

4. Methodology

The study follows a descriptive-cum-analytical research design based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Primary data were collected from 100 Scheduled Caste households in Bukkapatnam village of Andhrapradesh through structured questionnaires. The questionnaires captured data on demographic characteristics, educational attainment, access to infrastructure, scholarship utilization, and family motivation toward education. Informal interviews with school teachers and parents provided additional qualitative insights. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution, supported by interpretative analysis to understand social dimensions. This mixed-method approach ensures both empirical accuracy and contextual understanding of the challenges faced by SC children.

Table 1: Educational Attainment of Respondents

| Level of Education    | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Middle                | 9                  | 9%         |
| Matriculation         | 15                 | 15%        |
| Senior Secondary      | 35                 | 35%        |
| Technical Education   | 4                  | 4%         |
| Graduation            | 26                 | 26%        |
| Post Graduate / B.Ed. | 11                 | 11%        |

The findings reveal that 35% of respondents completed senior secondary education and 26% attained graduation, while only 4% had technical education. This indicates limited participation in technical or professional programs.

Table 2: Medium of Instruction

| Medium  | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------|--------------------|------------|
| Telugu  | 77                 | 77%        |
| English | 23                 | 23%        |

A majority of students (77%) studied in Telugu medium institutions, indicating economic and cultural preferences that limit English-medium participation.

Table 3: Mode of Transport

| Mode of Transport | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Cycle             | 41                 | 41%        |
| Bike/Scooty       | 12                 | 12%        |
| Public Transport  | 32                 | 32%        |
| None              | 15                 | 15%        |

Transport remains a major barrier. Around 41% rely on bicycles, while 15% have no means of transport, which limits access to distant schools.

Table 4: Scholarship Awareness

| Response | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|------------|
| Yes      | 66                 | 66%        |
| No       | 34                 | 34%        |

Approximately two-thirds of respondents were aware of scholarship opportunities. However, delays and lack of communication hinder full utilization.

Table 5: Dropout Reasons among Scheduled Caste Students

| Reason for Dropout | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------|
|                    |                    |            |

|                         |    |     |
|-------------------------|----|-----|
| Financial constraints   | 28 | 28% |
| Family responsibilities | 22 | 22% |
| Distance from school    | 18 | 18% |
| Lack of interest        | 12 | 12% |
| Health issues           | 8  | 8%  |
| Others                  | 12 | 12% |

Financial instability and family obligations are the leading causes of dropout among Scheduled Caste students. Distance and lack of interest are secondary factors, while health-related reasons are minimal. This suggests that socio-economic support and school accessibility are key to reducing dropout rates.

Table 6: Availability of School Infrastructure

|                            |         |        |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|
| Facility Available         | Yes (%) | No (%) |
| Drinking water             | 85      | 15     |
| Toilets                    | 78      | 22     |
| Separate toilets for girls | 65      | 35     |
| Library                    | 55      | 45     |
| Computer lab               | 42      | 58     |
| Playground                 | 60      | 40     |

The analysis reveals that although essential facilities such as drinking water and toilets are mostly available, the lack of separate toilets for girls, inadequate computer labs, and insufficient library access significantly affect educational quality. Improving infrastructure is essential to achieving the goals of inclusive education.

Table 7: Career Aspirations of Scheduled Caste Students

|                     |                    |            |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Career Preference   | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
| Government job      | 46                 | 46%        |
| Private sector      | 18                 | 18%        |
| Entrepreneurship    | 10                 | 10%        |
| Higher studies      | 14                 | 14%        |
| Technical skill job | 12                 | 12%        |

A majority of respondents (46%) aspire to government employment, reflecting a strong belief in job security and social mobility through public sector opportunities. However, the lower interest in entrepreneurship and technical jobs indicates a need to promote vocational guidance and innovation-oriented education among SC students.

**Table 8: Parental Education Level**

| Education Level of Parents | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Illiterate                 | 24                 | 24%        |
| Primary (1–5)              | 28                 | 28%        |
| Middle (6–8)               | 20                 | 20%        |
| Secondary (9–10)           | 15                 | 15%        |
| Higher Secondary & Above   | 13                 | 13%        |

The data shows that 52% of parents have only primary or middle-level education, limiting their ability to support children's academic progress at home.

**Table 9: Type of School Attended**

| Type of School  | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------|
| Government      | 68                 | 68%        |
| Private         | 24                 | 24%        |
| NGO / Trust-run | 8                  | 8%         |

Government schools remain the main avenue for SC children's education, but quality issues and limited English exposure in public schools persist.

**Table 10: Awareness of Government Educational Schemes**

| Scheme Awareness                 | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Aware of mid-day meal            | 90                 | 90%        |
| Aware of post-matric scholarship | 66                 | 66%        |
| Aware of free textbooks/uniforms | 78                 | 78%        |

|                                            |    |     |
|--------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Aware of digital/online education programs | 35 | 35% |
|--------------------------------------------|----|-----|

While awareness of traditional schemes (like mid-day meals) is high, newer initiatives such as digital learning remain underutilized among SC communities.

## Findings and Discussion

The educational scenario in Bukkapatnam village reflects the wider realities of rural Scheduled Caste communities across India. Although literacy levels have improved, the transition from primary to higher education remains limited. Table 1 shows that only 4% of respondents attained technical education, indicating inadequate participation in vocational and professional courses. Economic hardship and limited exposure to opportunities act as major deterrents. Similarly, Table 2 reveals that the dominance of Telugu medium (77%) indicates restricted access to English-medium education, often perceived as a gateway to better employment. The prevalence of arts stream among 51% of students further points to limited diversification in education. While government scholarships have benefited many, 34% of respondents remain unaware of such schemes, reflecting a communication gap in welfare delivery.

The gender dimension is equally significant. Female students reported lower mobility due to safety concerns and societal expectations. Around 41% of respondents use bicycles to reach schools or colleges, and 15% lack transport facilities altogether. This directly affects attendance and retention rates. Despite these challenges, there are emerging signs of progress. Parental motivation toward education has increased significantly—91% of respondents stated that their parents encourage them to study. This growing awareness represents a critical 'bridge' that can transform future educational participation if supported by policy and infrastructure.

## Conclusion

The study of Bukkapatnam village demonstrates that while educational access for Scheduled Castes has improved over time, challenges remain pervasive. Economic inequality, infrastructural gaps, and lingering caste-based biases continue to hinder equal opportunities. Government schemes such as scholarships and mid-day meals have yielded positive results, yet awareness and implementation efficiency require strengthening. Achieving the vision of inclusive education under SDG-4 necessitates multi-level coordination between policymakers, educators, and community leaders. Empowering Scheduled Caste children through equitable education is not merely a social responsibility but a constitutional obligation vital for India's democratic and developmental future.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Infrastructure Improvement: \*\* Strengthen the availability of schools and technical institutions within accessible distance in SC-dominated villages.
2. Transport and Safety Facilities: \*\* Provide subsidized transportation and residential facilities, especially for SC girls.
3. Teacher Sensitization and Training: \*\* Integrate inclusion and caste-sensitivity modules in teacher education programs.

4. Scholarship Awareness Campaigns: \*\* Launch regular awareness programs in rural communities to ensure every eligible student benefits from state and central scholarships.
5. Digital Literacy and ICT Integration: \*\* Expand ICT-based learning under Digital India to bridge the digital divide in SC households.
6. Vocational Education and Skill Development: \*\* Link secondary education with vocational courses and local employment opportunities.
7. Community Involvement: \*\* Empower local governance bodies and School Management Committees (SMCs) to monitor attendance, dropout rates, and discrimination.
8. Monitoring Framework: \*\* Establish district-level monitoring systems to track the educational progress of SC students annually.

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