

Parental perception and school enrolment among Muslims: Evidence from Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Today access of Muslim children to education is a social issue, especially in India with various reports coming time to time to depict how poorly Muslim children perform on the education front. Educational problem will be solved only if education meets the needs of its recipients. It is important to note what kind of perceptions, attitudes and expectations the parents have with regard to the education of their children and how can this demand be increased by positively impacting their perceptions towards education. Against this backdrop this paper has tried to look into the role of parental perceptions in the demand for schooling for their wards. This study focuses on Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh where primary data of 300 respondents was collected and after analysing the data empirically the results have been presented alongwith suitable policy recommendations.

Key Words: Muslims education, perception, demand for schooling, school enrolment, Aligarh district

Introduction:

Universal primary enrolment has been one of the Millennium Development Goals since many years but, even today, low schooling persists even though market returns to education may appear to be high and direct costs are almost low or negligible. With it, the irony is that primary education is free and yet data shows that about 40% of the children who are entering first grade are the ones who actually complete five years of primary school. About just half move to the secondary school level. With it low learning and lower pass rates persist along with widespread student absenteeism. This also suggests quite low efforts on student's on parent's part as at this primary stage they are the decision makers of school enrolment and learning processes.

And all these concerns are more grave in case of Muslims . They lag behind on all parameters that depicts learning outcomes and enrolment rates . The Sachar Committee Report confirmed that in many parameters Muslims even lag behind SC's and ST's. There may be many reasons behind this but I have tried to find out the role of parental perceptions in schooling decisions for children. Through household survey data, I have examined the impact of family background and structure and parental perceptions on children's educational participation. The results challenge traditional explanations of educational inequality in less industrialized societies and suggest that policies to spark school demand in developing countries may be misguided.

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This research work focuses on the Aligarh district of Western UP which is occupied by more than 7 lakh people with an education rate of about 64%. However, the condition of Muslims with regard to education level is quite pathetic. The Centre for Promotion of Educational and Cultural Advancement of Muslims of India better known by its acronym (CEPECAMI) has done various studies in selected pockets of minority concentrated districts in Uttar Pradesh. Of the three such places, where such surveys were extensively conducted, the study of Aligarh district throws light upon some vital facts of the life of average Muslim in Uttar Pradesh where live almost one-fourth of India's Muslims. The data reveals the fact that economic backwardness stems from low attainment in education or low quality of education. It is clearly reflected in education of Muslims of Aligarh (as per the CEPECAMI). Out of 14,166 persons in the 7 Plus age group, 6,932 are literate which means the literacy level is 48.93 per cent. Of the 6,536 persons who have attained literacy either by having attended modern schools or a combination of madrasa plus modern school, 45.88 per cent have primary level education. The data of this study shows that among these 6,536 persons, only about 24.86 per cent have junior level education, 17.43 per cent have about high school level of education, 7.47 per cent have near about Intermediate level, only 3.03 per cent have graduate level education and just 1.33 per cent have post graduate level education.

Various reports of CEPECAMI from the researches done time to time in Aligarh district also reflect a very high level of dropout at each stage of schooling. Number of dropouts at four levels of school education was found to be 1,764. This is 28.22 per cent of the total population (6,251) of students from 1st standard to class 12th std. Total number of students from 1st to 10th standard is 2,999 out of which 667 (22.24 per cent) were found to drop out before completing primary education.

Such a pathetic and bleak condition attracts a lot of work to be done and grabs attention as to what are the major reasons behind such a grim scenario. It needs major steps to be taken in order to find out what actually constitute demand for schooling, whether it be the perceived returns from schooling or some other non-pecuniary factors or both.

The chosen district that is Aligarh district of Western U.P. shows low levels of schooling and high dropout rates at all levels of education. While there can be several explanations for low schooling such as credit constraints, high discount rates, low school quality and many others, my research work focuses on another possibility that is an information gap between perceived returns to schooling that is what people consider to be the returns and actual returns.

Objectives:

Major objectives include:

1. To examine the factors that determine demand for schooling by Muslim parents for their children in Aligarh district.
2. To understand the expectations, perceptions and apprehensions of Muslim parents of Aligarh district regarding education system and suggest way outs to deal with it.
3. To acknowledge that it is necessary to understand individuals' perception towards enrolment in schools in order to design appropriate and effective policies as a redress for low enrolment rates.

Hypotheses:

The major hypotheses of the study are as follows:

1. Muslims recognize the need and importance of education but, constraints in the form of factors reducing their perceived returns to education prevents the demand for education being translated into effective demand for education.

2. There is a significant impact of examples from within own community that is neighbourhood and peers on demand for schooling among Muslims. And because mostly Muslims live in ghettos so this is downward biased.
3. There is a significant impact of apprehensions of Muslim community regarding discrimination in the labour market because of their religion and their poor financial status on their perception formation towards education system.

Methodology and Datasource:

The methodology of research was a survey based research, that is, primarily based on primary data but secondary data sources were also consulted to get a thorough glimpse of the condition of schooling and overall status of education in the study area that is Aligarh district. Initially, pilot survey was done in the Muslim dominated areas of Aligarh district that is in Jeevangarh and Jamalpur area. This was followed by the comprehensive primary data collection through intensive field surveys, interviews of Muslim parents and focus group discussions from four selected sampled villages. Secondary data collection was done mainly through district statistical offices, reports, books, internet etc. Sample size was of 300 Muslim parents from two blocks and four villages of Aligarh district. The type of sampling used was purposive, multi-stage as well as random. Purposive because the selection of blocks was done on the basis of level of economic development and selection of two villages from each block was also done on the basis of literacy rate. Multi-stage sampling as the data collected trickled down from the block level then at the village level and then to single unit from all four villages. Purposive random sampling as only Muslim families were selected on random basis. Different statistical tools were used for the analysis of the collected data. The major tools used were factor analysis, chi-square test, Spearman's correlation test and Monte-Carlo parallel analysis.

The sequence in which the factor extraction were completed and final hypothesis testing was done is, first exploratory factor analysis after the normality and factorability check. Having extracted the factors and checking their reliability through Cronbach's alpha value, the next step was the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on AMOS (Analysis of Moment structure) software. The factors extracted from EFA were used to conduct CFA. Path diagrams were drawn that displayed the cause and effect relationship between the latent and observed variables.

AMOS generates model fit statistics to assess the overall fit. Having tested the model fit, the composite reliability, average variance extracted and discriminant validity were calculated to find out if the model exhibits validity and reliability or not.

Further, structural equations modeling was conducted and the best part about it is that the final hypothesis testing was done through it by using t-values or critical ratios and standardized regression weights. These are the major tools that were used in the analysis of the collected data. Few other tools were also used like chi-square test and Spearman's correlation test.

Softwares to be used in the whole analysis were SPSS, AMOS, Excel and Monte Carlo software for parallel analysis.

Major findings:

Against the goals that were set, the main findings were :

1. Neighborhood and peers remain important component behind formation of perception regarding education as well as job market expectations.
2. Fear among Muslims and their apprehensions about their minority status and discrimination in job market plays a significant role in affecting Muslim parents perception and then their demand for schooling.

3. From the survey and focus group discussions, it was found that separatism gives Muslim parents lack of choices, so they live in concentrated ghettos which leads to another problem of dissemination of imperfect information about various government schemes and returns to education. This also poses issues of access to schools as there are very few state sponsored schools in these ghettos.
4. Ghettoisation among Muslims takes a toll on girls access to education as, security issues emerged out to be the most important concern among parents , which further contributes to inequalities.
5. It was observed that deficits in participation in higher schooling is higher when parental education is lower and also when parents know fewer people both inside and outside their locality who have attained success through education.
6. Parents perceive a wide gap between what a male and female child can earn. The results showed clear bias in parents perceptions.
7. Mid-day meal, government scholarships, incentives, good facilities, proper infrastructure and good sincere teachers were the most emphasized points raised by the respondents and most of the respondents did not have access to any of these.

Policy recommendations:

Thus, it can be said that Muslims perceptions interact with supply side constraints and conditions, various opportunities, attitudes and endowments to give rise to a whole new and different pattern of participation in education. As the situation is pretty complex, so, actions have to be so strong that they strike at the perceived notions of Muslim parents directly and changes their trajectory of perception towards education and against biases in general. The educational infrastructure of many schools is in an abysmal state and needs urgent attention School within a reasonable distance of Muslim dominated habitations and by removing gender, socio-economic and disability barriers to education. Special focus on micro planning and preference in opening schools in areas with concentrations of Muslims esp. in urban and rural ghettos. Undertaking a special enrolment drive for the weaker sections, providing more female teachers in schools and separate toilet blocks for girls are some of the significant strategies. Extension of mid-day meals and other incentives; accountability and teacher absenteeism check through ICT; conveyance and security issues to be targeted. There is need for a national body to monitor the quality of both government and private schools, to ensure that minimum standards are met in terms of learning outcomes

Special strategies are required to ensure greater access to schools in backward regions, remote locations and difficult terrains

There is a need for durable changes. Firstly, are cognition that deprivation amongst the minorities exists due to systemic causes which can be set right only through broad based public policy initiatives, not entirely through special purpose vehicles such as the minority/Muslim/Christian oriented programs

By assisting Muslims to strive to access their share within the mainstream such as the regular ministries, departments and programs of government of India and many major states.. As a matter of fact, Muslims have to reconcile themselves to the fact that there would exist some degree of discrimination against them despite the constitutional professions of equality of opportunity. They themselves had took some independent steps to ameliorate the situation, with opening of community schools being be one such step (Ahmad1981, 1457- 1465).

Concluding Views

Thus, in conclusion, It was found that Muslims realize the importance of education but there are so many constraints in front of them them being a minority group, that directly attacks the perception they have towards the whole education system. This research work presents as to how perception of parents actually determine the demand for schooling among Muslims in Aligarh district. This work is a positive step in understanding the expectations, perceptions and apprehensions of Muslim parents of Aligarh district regarding education and also suggests way-outs to deal with it. This work ascertains that it is crucial to understand Muslims perception in

order to design effective policies as a redress for low enrolment rates among this group. This work presents all the determinants of perception formation and perceived returns among Muslims regarding education and also tries to know as to how much these perceives returns deviate form estimated returns and also tries to know the reason behind such deviations. . However, there is a whole ambit of work that still needs to be done and this is just a step in this direction with the hope that many new researches will come up in future so that the question raised through this work may be successfully answered. And this can happen only if the projected problem is redressed.

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