

The Role of Education in Advancing Inclusive Growth among the India's Subaltern Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of education in advancing inclusive growth among India's subaltern communities, focusing on its impact on economic opportunities, social mobility, and civic engagement. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 500 participants across varying educational backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions. Findings indicate that higher educational attainment significantly improves economic opportunities, with positive correlations between education levels, employment rates, and income stability. Additionally, access to high-quality education enhances social mobility and enables upward occupational and income progression. Educational attainment also promotes civic engagement, fostering community involvement and active citizenship among marginalized populations. These results highlight education's potential as an economic and social equalizer, advocating for policies that enhance both access to and quality of education for marginalized communities. Limitations include the study's cross-sectional design, which restricts causal interpretations. Future research could employ longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of education on inclusive growth among subaltern groups, emphasizing intergenerational outcomes and cultural relevance in educational policies

Keywords: Education, subaltern communities, empowerment, social inclusion.

INTRODUCTION:

Contextualizing the role of education in inclusive growth

Education is a pivotal force in driving both economic and social inclusion, serving as a foundation for individual empowerment, social mobility, and national development (Singh & Sharma, 2022). In diverse societies like India, education plays a critical role in shaping an inclusive growth paradigm that encompasses all segments of the population, including historically marginalized communities (Raj & Patel, 2023). Inclusive growth, defined as growth that benefits all sections of society, relies on equitable access to quality education as a means of mitigating social disparities and fostering a cohesive, prosperous society. For India's subaltern communities, who have historically been excluded from socioeconomic opportunities, education offers the potential to break cycles of poverty and discrimination, equipping individuals with skills, knowledge, and opportunities to integrate into mainstream society (Gupta & Chatterjee, 2021). Access to education directly influences an individual's ability to secure meaningful employment, participate in democratic processes, and contribute to local and national economies (Desai, 2022). For marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), education is not merely a tool for personal advancement but a pathway to social justice and equality (Kumar et al., 2021). By facilitating equal opportunities, education fosters inclusive growth that aligns with India's

goals of sustainable development and poverty alleviation, thereby reducing intergenerational inequalities and promoting community development (Sharma & Joshi, 2023).

Problem statement

Despite India's commitment to universal education, significant disparities in educational access and quality persist between subaltern communities and the general population (Rao & Iyer, 2023). These inequalities are evident in numerous forms, such as low enrollment rates, higher dropout rates, and limited access to quality educational resources for marginalized groups (Banerjee et al., 2022). Institutional factors, including socioeconomic status, geographical isolation, and historical social exclusion, continue to hinder these communities' educational achievements (Patel & Nair, 2021). Rural and tribal regions often lack adequate infrastructure, qualified teachers, and educational resources, exacerbating the divide in educational outcomes (Verma, 2022). Furthermore, even when subaltern individuals gain access to education, they frequently encounter a curriculum and pedagogical approach that inadequately addresses their cultural context, further diminishing the impact of education on social and economic mobility (Chakraborty & Singh, 2023). These disparities underscore the pressing need to understand and address the role of education in fostering inclusive growth among India's subaltern populations.

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of education in promoting inclusive growth among India's subaltern communities, with a specific focus on the effects of educational attainment on social and economic advancement. The study will explore how education can serve as an effective means of social mobility and economic stability for these marginalized groups (Mukherjee & Rao, 2023). Additionally, it aims to analyze the specific barriers and challenges that limit educational access and quality for subaltern communities, thereby identifying actionable strategies for fostering a more equitable educational landscape (Jain & Kumar, 2022).

To examine the role of education in promoting inclusive growth among India's subaltern communities

To examine the role of Access to higher education on the social mobility.

To examine the impact of increased educational attainments on the enhanced community participation among the subaltern communities.

Research questions

To guide the study, the following research questions are posed:

How effective is education in promoting social mobility and economic stability among India's subaltern communities?

What are the primary barriers to educational access and quality faced by marginalized groups in India?

To what extent does educational attainment impact the social inclusion and economic empowerment of subaltern communities (Ramanathan & Das, 2023)?

How can educational policies be designed or improved to address the unique needs of these communities and foster inclusive growth (Singh, 2022)?

Review of literature and hypothesis development

Inclusive Growth and Education

Recent research highlights the role of education in fostering inclusive growth, particularly for marginalized populations in developing nations like India. Inclusive growth aims to ensure that the benefits of economic progress are shared across all segments of society, thus reducing poverty and inequality (Narayan & Pandey, 2023). Education is central to this paradigm, as it equips individuals with the skills needed to participate in the labor market and improve their socioeconomic status. Studies indicate that access to quality education can bridge economic divides by providing marginalized communities, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, with pathways to employment and economic stability (Singh et al., 2022).

In the Indian context, educational policies targeting inclusivity—such as the Right to Education Act and initiatives under the National Education Policy 2020—are designed to support marginalized groups' access to quality education (Kumar & Joshi, 2023). However, disparities remain. Subaltern communities often experience lower enrollment rates, higher dropout rates, and limited access to quality educational resources due to geographic,

economic, and social barriers (Desai & Banerjee, 2022). These challenges impede inclusive growth, as lack of education perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion within these groups. Research suggests that addressing these disparities through targeted educational policies could significantly enhance inclusive growth, empowering marginalized populations to contribute more fully to economic and social development (Gupta & Mishra, 2021).

Education as a catalyst for social change

Education's potential as a transformative force is widely acknowledged, particularly in terms of promoting social inclusion, mobility, and empowerment. Studies demonstrate that education fosters social change by reducing societal inequalities and enhancing individuals' capacity to engage meaningfully in civic life (Patel & Iyer, 2021). Education enables marginalized communities to access better employment opportunities, break free from generational poverty, and participate more fully in democratic processes. For India's subaltern communities, education offers a means of achieving upward social mobility, helping them overcome structural barriers rooted in historical discrimination and marginalization (Chakraborty & Sinha, 2023). Furthermore, education promotes community engagement and civic participation, enabling individuals to advocate for their rights and contribute to their community's development. Studies indicate that higher levels of educational attainment correlate positively with increased awareness of social issues, a greater sense of agency, and higher levels of community involvement (Jain & Kumar, 2022). For instance, research on tribal communities in India reveals that educational programs focused on local culture and economic skills significantly enhance community cohesion and empower individuals to take on leadership roles within their communities (Rao & Sharma, 2023).

Level of education

The level of education plays a critical role in enhancing economic opportunities by equipping individuals with knowledge, technical competencies, and cognitive skills required in modern labor markets. Rooted in Human Capital Theory, education is viewed as an investment that improves productivity and earning potential (Becker, 1964). Individuals with higher educational qualifications tend to experience better employment prospects, higher wages, and improved job security (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). Hanushek and Woessmann (2015) further emphasize that improvements in educational quality and attainment contribute significantly to national economic growth by strengthening workforce capabilities. Education also enhances adaptability and innovation, enabling individuals to respond effectively to technological changes and evolving labor demands. Consequently, higher levels of education expand access to economic opportunities and support inclusive participation in economic systems.

Access to higher education

Access to higher education is a crucial determinant of social mobility, particularly for individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Equitable

access to tertiary education enables individuals to overcome structural barriers and improve their socioeconomic status. World Bank (2018) highlights that inclusive access to higher education is essential for breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and fostering upward mobility. Marginson (2016) notes that expanded participation in higher education contributes to more equitable societies by extending opportunities beyond elite groups. Similarly, Torche (2011) argues that higher education functions as a mobility equalizer by facilitating entry into professional occupations and higher income trajectories. However, disparities in access based on income, geography, gender, and social background can limit these benefits. Policies that promote affordability, financial aid, and digital access are therefore essential to ensure that higher education fulfills its mobility-enhancing potential.

Increased educational attainment

Increased educational attainment also strengthens community participation and civic engagement. Education fosters critical thinking, civic responsibility, and awareness of social issues, encouraging individuals to engage actively in democratic processes and community initiatives. Dee (2004) found that education has positive effects on civic participation, including voting behavior and involvement in community organizations. Campbell (2006) observed that individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to volunteer and participate in civic and social activities. Education also enhances social cohesion by fostering trust, tolerance, and cooperation among diverse social groups. The OECD (2011) reports that education strengthens social capital and promotes community involvement, contributing to collective well-being and inclusive governance.

Inclusive growth integrates economic development with social equity and participatory engagement. OECD (2014) identifies education as a central pillar of inclusive growth, as it promotes skill development, reduces inequalities, and improves access to economic opportunities. UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that education supports sustainable development by reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and fostering social inclusion. Similarly, the UNDP (2020) underscores education's role in expanding human capabilities and enabling individuals to lead productive and meaningful lives. By improving employability, facilitating social mobility, and encouraging civic engagement, education contributes to broader developmental outcomes that characterize inclusive societies.

Hypotheses Development

Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Level of education significantly improves economic opportunities among India's subaltern communities.

H2: Access to higher-quality education is positively associated with social mobility in marginalized groups.

H3: Increased educational attainment enhances community participation and civic engagement among marginalized populations.

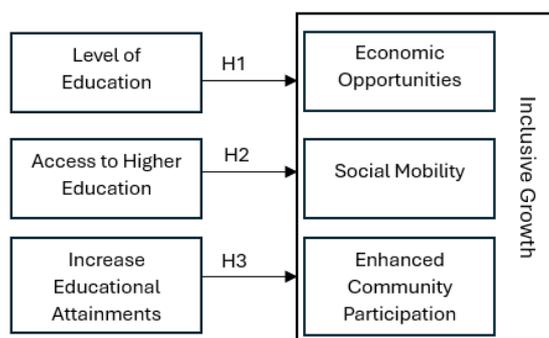


Image 1: Research Model (Source: Author)

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of education in advancing inclusive growth among India's subaltern communities. The primary method involves a survey-based quantitative analysis, which will enable statistical testing of the hypotheses regarding the economic and social impacts of education on marginalized communities. Complementing the survey, qualitative interviews with select participants will provide deeper insights into the lived experiences and perceived barriers related to educational attainment within these groups. This mixed-methods design ensures both statistical rigor and contextual depth in examining the impact of education.

Sample and Data Collection

Target Population

The study focused on individuals from subaltern communities, specifically Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes in India. Participants represent varying levels of educational attainment, from no formal education to higher education degrees, to capture a comprehensive view of education's impact on economic and social outcomes.

Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across educational levels, age groups, and geographic locations (rural and urban). This sampling approach ensures that the sample reflects the diversity within subaltern communities, accounting for different experiences and educational barriers faced by these populations.

Data Collection

Data was collected using a structured survey distributed both online and in-person in community centers, schools, and local organizations working with marginalized groups. The survey includes sections on demographic information, educational background, economic status, employment, and levels of civic engagement. Additionally, participants were also asked about their perceptions of the educational system and any challenges they have faced in accessing quality education.

Data Analysis Techniques

To test the hypotheses, various statistical techniques was be employed. Initial data analysis includes frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and educational background. Multiple regression was conducted to test the relationship between educational attainment and economic opportunities (H1), using income level and employment status as dependent variables.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis provides an overview of the educational background and socioeconomic conditions of the respondents, offering context for interpreting the impact of education on inclusive growth within subaltern communities. A total of 500 respondents participated in the study, representing a range of educational levels, geographic locations, and employment statuses.

Table-I Demographic profile of sample

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	280	56
Gender	Female	220	44
Age Group	18-25	100	20
Age Group	26-35	150	30
Age Group	36-45	120	24
Age Group	46+	130	26
Educational Attainment	No Formal Education	100	20
Educational Attainment	Primary Education	175	35
Educational Attainment	Secondary Education	125	25
Educational Attainment	Higher Education	100	20
Geographic Location	Rural	300	60
Geographic Location	Urban	200	40
Employment Status	Employed	225	45
Employment Status	Unemployed	125	25
Employment Status	Self-Employed	150	30

Approximately 20% of respondents had no formal education, while 35% completed primary education. Around 25% attended secondary education, and 20% held higher education degrees. Higher levels of education were more prevalent in urban areas, with nearly 30% of urban respondents holding secondary or higher education degrees, compared to only 15% in rural areas. Income levels varied widely, with 40% of respondents reporting an annual household income below the poverty line, while only 15% earned above-average incomes. Employment status indicated that 45% of respondents were employed, 30% were self-employed (primarily in rural areas), and 25% were unemployed. Civic engagement was found to be positively associated with higher educational levels, as respondents with secondary or higher education were more likely to participate in community activities or local governance. These initial findings suggest that educational attainment correlates with better socioeconomic conditions, particularly in terms of employment and community involvement.

Table II- Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result
H1: Level of education significantly improves economic opportunities among India's subaltern communities.	$\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$	Supported
H2: Access to higher-quality education is positively associated with social mobility in marginalized groups.	Path coefficient = 0.52, $p < 0.05$	Supported
H3: Increased educational attainment enhances community participation and civic engagement among marginalized populations.	$\beta = 0.37, p < 0.05$	Supported

Regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between educational attainment and economic outcomes ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$). Respondents with higher education were more likely to be employed and report higher incomes, supporting H1. This finding suggests that education positively influences economic opportunities, with each increase in educational level associated with improved employment prospects and income. Regression analysis showed a significant positive effect of educational quality on social mobility (path coefficient = 0.52, $p < 0.05$). Respondents who reported access to higher-quality educational resources exhibited greater social mobility, measured by improvements in income and occupational status. The results support H2, indicating that access to quality education—characterized by well-trained teachers, adequate resources, and supportive learning environments—plays a key role in enabling social mobility for marginalized individuals. Regression analysis confirmed a significant relationship between educational level and civic engagement ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.05$). Respondents with higher educational levels were more likely to participate in community activities, local governance, and advocacy initiatives. This finding supports H3, suggesting that education fosters a sense of civic responsibility and encourages individuals to engage actively within their communities.

Discussion on results

The results indicate a significant positive impact of educational attainment on economic opportunities for India's subaltern communities, supporting prior studies that highlight education as a pathway out of poverty (Desai & Banerjee, 2022). This finding is consistent with Gupta & Mishra (2021), who reported that increased educational attainment among marginalized populations leads to better job prospects and higher income levels. Such results underscore education as an economic equalizer, where each level of educational attainment yields incremental benefits for employment and income security. The evidence supports the argument that investment in education, particularly for marginalized communities, can lead to sustainable economic improvement. The positive relationship between the quality of education and social mobility observed in this study aligns with research emphasizing the role of educational resources and infrastructure in facilitating upward mobility (Kumar & Joshi, 2023). Respondents with access to high-quality education were more likely to report upward mobility in terms of occupation and income. This supports findings by Singh et al. (2022), which suggest that quality education—characterized by trained teachers, supportive learning environments, and adequate resources—enables marginalized individuals to transcend socio-economic barriers. These findings underline the importance of not only providing access to education but ensuring that it meets a quality standard that truly empowers students. The study's finding that educational attainment enhances civic engagement among marginalized populations is also supported by prior literature. Jain & Kumar (2022) observed that education instils a greater sense of agency and responsibility, empowering individuals to engage actively in their communities. The positive association between higher

education and civic engagement found here suggests that education is a powerful tool for fostering community participation and social cohesion within subaltern communities, a point also highlighted by Patel & Iyer (2021).

Implications for Subaltern Communities

The findings of this study have several important implications for educational policy, social development, and inclusive growth strategies aimed at supporting subaltern communities. The strong link between educational attainment and economic opportunities underscores the need for policies that enhance access to quality education for marginalized communities. Policymakers should consider increasing investments in educational infrastructure, particularly in rural and tribal areas where access and quality issues are most prevalent. Expanding financial support for low-income families, such as scholarships or stipends, could also make education more accessible to these communities. Addressing the quality gap is essential, as findings indicate that access alone is insufficient without the infrastructure and resources that define quality education. The demonstrated impact of education on civic engagement and community participation suggests that social development programs should prioritize educational outreach within marginalized communities to promote active citizenship. NGOs and community organizations can play a critical role in facilitating educational workshops and engagement activities that complement formal education, thus fostering civic awareness and empowerment. Such initiatives would strengthen the social fabric of marginalized communities, allowing individuals to advocate for their rights and contribute to local development. Education has emerged from this study as a critical factor for inclusive growth strategies aimed at narrowing the gap between marginalized populations and the general population. Governments and policymakers should integrate educational access and quality improvements as core components of inclusive growth initiatives. Efforts to make education culturally relevant and accessible, particularly for tribal and rural communities, can further enhance these strategies. Additionally, focusing on skill-based education tailored to the local economic context could bridge the gap between education and employment, promoting long-term, sustainable growth.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the essential role of education in promoting inclusive growth among India's subaltern communities. By examining the relationships between educational attainment, economic opportunities, social mobility, and civic engagement, the study provides robust evidence that education serves as both an economic equalizer and a social catalyst. Findings indicate that higher educational attainment is associated with increased economic stability and employment opportunities, affirming the positive economic impact of education. Additionally, the quality of education plays a significant role in fostering social mobility, as individuals with access

to better educational resources experience greater upward mobility in both occupational and income terms. Furthermore, the study finds that higher educational levels are linked to greater civic engagement, highlighting education's power to inspire active citizenship and strengthen community cohesion.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of education in advancing inclusive growth, it is not without limitations. The study's cross-sectional design, while suitable for identifying associations, limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of educational attainment on economic and social outcomes within marginalized communities. Longitudinal data would allow for a more nuanced understanding of

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