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Gender issues in Indian educational system: Digging beyond the obvious

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Abstract

Gender discrimination refers to the unequal treatment or opportunities of individuals based on their gender. This can take many forms, including discrimination in the workplace, in education, and in other areas of life. It can involve unequal pay, lack of access to education or other resources, or being subjected to violence or harassment because of one's gender. India has failed to provide universalization of education as it remains under the stranglehold of major stratifications leading to discrimination. Early marriage, social discrimination, and lack of education infrastructure have resulted in 60 million girls missing out on primary education and the gender gap remains a problem in the country. The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education for all but still projects one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia as there are almost 300 million rate women in India. Gender inequality persists, as social and legal institutions do not guarantee women's equality in basic human rights. It is a major area of concern at the school level and the literacy questions remain the largest juggernaut in the Indian management of education.

Keywords: Women, discrimination, education, and gender equality

Introduction

The main objective is to have a deeper look at gender discrimination and gender issues in the Indian educational system. The research used qualitative analyses to deliver proposed solutions to gender issues in the Indian higher education system at large.

Gender Disparity in India means health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. Gender disparity is largely the result of the deeply ingrained systems of patriarchy. Discrimination against women begins before birth and is called this systemic subordination. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted problem that affects both men and women. Some argue that gender equality measures place men at a disadvantage. In the current situation, 68% of girls are still educated as their discrimination affects the country and extreme racism deprives women of justice and equality, which only education and enlightenment can secure. Equality and equity in education are directly related to the democratic development of society, where the purpose of education is to produce knowledge makers with the capacity of making the most profitable use of the acquired knowledge. The majority of the nearly six million out-of-school children in India are girls. Between 2006 and 2010, only 26% of girls completed high school, compared to 50% of boys. This gender inequality is most evident in low-income families. Gender disparity is evident in India's childhood literacy rates 82% of boys are literate and only 65% of girls can read and write, according to the 2011 Census of India. Statistics show that about 10% more girls enrolled in Indian high schools by 2019 compared to 2011. While this is a significant increase, much remains to be done to ensure that girls receive the same education as boys.

Understanding Indian Education and Gender Inequality as a Social Problem

Gender Inequality in education is a persistent problem within Indian society, especially for girls, belonging to economically weaker sections of the society. Gender inequalities are important in various dimensions, these include, education, health, employment, and pay (Klasen, & Lamanna, 2008) [6]. During the past several decades, there have been progressions made in the achievement of universal enrolment of students in schools. India's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms

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of Discrimination against Women, and their signing of a Global Fit for Children obligations set a framework for committed action by the government and civil society at large. The Constitutional bill on December 2002 made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years, which led to the Education for All campaign of the Indian government, the national program to achieve universalization of elementary education. There is a huge gap between the policies of India's laws and forward-looking laws and its strong educational practices integrated into structures and institutions. Girls and women are often bound by gender roles and outdated traditions, which make gender inequalities apparent. About twice as many girls as boys are expelled from school or have never been sent to school, especially if they belong to a social and economic group that looks down on them. For many girls who drop out of school at the age of ten or eleven, the future means working in fields or on road construction sites and then earning a living. According to United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), poverty and local cultural practices play a role in gender inequality in education throughout India. Another obstacle to educating girls is the lack of hygiene in schools across the country. In many schools, there are no separate toilet facilities for girls. Separated toilet facilities are important once girls reach puberty. Without privacy and facilities, they need to cope with the menstruation cycle, and many girls choose to leave schooling altogether. 23% of girls in India leave school once they hit puberty. And, the girls who continue education miss as many as 50 school days each year as a result of menstruation. Gender inequality is acknowledged in rural communities more as compared to urban communities. The individuals, belonging to deprived, marginalized, and economically weaker sections of society are overwhelmed by this problem. The girls are deprived of opportunities that would render an important contribution to enhancing their personality traits and promoting the enrichment of their overall living conditions. In rural communities, agriculture and farming practices are regarded as the major occupations of individuals. The individuals are engaged in these jobs only in the productive season. Whereas, during the other time of the year, they are not engaged in these practices. Rural individuals are engaged in the production and manufacturing of various items, like artworks, handicrafts, garments, jewelry, food items, pottery making, weaving, and so forth. The girls are required to assist their parents in the production processes. But they are deprived of getting enrolled in educational institutions and training centers. Therefore, it is understood, there is a prevalence of gender inequality. Furthermore, it is considered a social problem. The health and well-being of individuals is important. It needs to be promoted from the physical and psychological perspectives. Diet and nutrition are regarded as one of the indispensable aspects necessary to promote good health and well-being. The male children within the family are given pucca food to eat. This is the food that is made of butter and ghee. Whereas, girls are in some cases, not given pucca food. They are given kutchra food, i.e., food cooked in water. When male children experience any type of health problem or illness, they are taken to healthcare centers. On the other hand, when girls are ill, they are not paid attention to as compared to their male counterparts. They are in some cases required to carry out the household chores, even when they are not keeping

good health. The girls are not taken to the health care centres but make use of herbs and medicinal plants to treat health problems and illnesses. Therefore, gender inequality is a social problem, when girls are deprived of opportunities that are necessary in promoting good health.

Rural individuals are overwhelmed by the social problems of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. As a consequence, they experience impediments in achieving desired goals and objectives and sustaining their living conditions in an effective manner. These individuals get compelled to give up their hopes and aspirations. Hence, they are overwhelmed by the psychological problems of anger, stress, anxiety, frustration, and depression. As a consequence, they get engaged in various types of criminal and violent acts. The girls and women within the households are victims of these acts as compared to their male counterparts. They are accused, even when they have not committed any misdemeanors. This signifies that they are discriminated against and are not provided with equal rights and opportunities as compared to their male counterparts. They in some cases are required to experience various types of criminal and violent acts within their homes. Therefore, it can be stated, gender inequality is regarded as a social problem, when girls are discriminated against.

Factors Causing Gender Inequality in Education

There is the existence of multiple and diverse connections between gender equality and fulfillment of the basic right to education. Women and girls are experiencing denial of the human right to education not only in India but in other countries of the world as well (Gender Discrimination in Education, 2012). The factors causing gender inequality in education have been stated as follows:

Conditions of Poverty

When individuals are residing in conditions of poverty, then they experience a number of problems and challenges in making ends meet. In some cases, they even experience problems in meeting their daily nutritional requirements. The individuals and families, who are residing in the conditions of poverty have the primary objective of generating sufficient income to sustain their living conditions satisfactorily. They usually do not possess the financial resources to meet the expenses, involved in the pursuit of education. Even when education is provided free of cost, they still need to meet other expenses, involved in education. These are stationery items, books, bags, uniforms, transportation costs, and so forth. The poverty-stricken individuals experience problems in meeting these expenses.

Poverty-stricken individuals possess this viewpoint that the acquisition of education is of utmost significance in sustaining one's living conditions. Hence, they aspire to get their sons enrolled in schools. They possess this viewpoint that education should be provided to the sons, so they are able to get engaged in good employment opportunities in the future. Whereas, girls are trained in terms of performance of household responsibilities and minor jobs to earn some income to support their families. For instance, when parents are engaged in the production of items, then they encourage their children, both boys and girls to assist them in production and sales. The boys are required to get engaged in this job after school hours. The girls are usually discouraged from acquisition of education, due to limited

financial resources. Their male siblings teach them, what they have learned in school, primarily to enhance their basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and numeracy.

Prevalence of Traditional Viewpoints

The individuals and communities usually possessed traditional viewpoints regarding the education of girls. Particularly, when they possessed limited financial resources, then they believed that these resources should be saved for the marriage of their girls and should not be spent on education. Another viewpoint was that in marital homes, girls would not be able to utilize their educational skills and would primarily have to implement household responsibilities. Taking this aspect into consideration, from the initial stage, they train their girls regarding the implementation of household responsibilities. In the past period, girls and women were merely confined within their homes and not allowed to participate in any social functions or events. They were not allowed to express their viewpoints and perspectives in decision-making matters. They primarily sustained their living conditions on the income earned by men and were meant to obey the decisions and rules formulated by them. Hence, due to the prevalence of traditional viewpoints, they were discriminated against and deprived of certain rights and opportunities.

The acquisition of education for girls is usually affected by traditional practices associated with adolescence. In some rural communities, the prevalence of certain traditional practices proves to be hindrances within the course of the acquisition of education on the part of the girls (Linda, 2014) ^[7]. Due to the prevalence of traditional viewpoints and perspectives, girls are not only deprived of the acquisition of education but also of attaining self-independence. In other words, these are barriers within the course of attainment of empowerment opportunities. Therefore, for bringing about empowerment opportunities among women and girls, it is necessary to bring about transformations in traditional viewpoints and give equal rights and opportunities to women and girls.

Educational Infrastructure and Discriminatory Treatment among Girls

The school infrastructure is regarded as significant in the formation of a suitable and amiable learning environment and in the pursuit of academic goals. With the availability of adequate infrastructural facilities, the members of the educational institutions are able to carry out their job duties in a well-organized manner. Furthermore, the students are also able to feel pleasurable within the school environment and get motivated towards their studies. Research has indicated that due to a lack of appropriate infrastructural facilities, students usually drop out before their educational skills are honed. This applies particularly to the girls. The important infrastructural facilities in schools that are essential to enhance the system of education are furniture, equipment, materials, technologies, restrooms, civic amenities, transportation facilities, playgrounds, classrooms, library facilities, laboratories, and overall school environmental conditions. When these infrastructural facilities will be well-maintained, then the educators, staff members, and students will feel pleasurable and contented within the working environment. It is apparent that to facilitate learning, schools need to make provision for proper teaching-learning materials, library facilities,

laboratories related to science subjects, and computer centers. When educators as well as students will have access to these facilities, then they will be able to carry out the teaching-learning processes in a well-organized manner. In India, in urban areas, normally infrastructural facilities are well-developed. Whereas, in rural communities, these are not well-developed. Therefore, it is vital to formulate measures to bring about improvements in infrastructural facilities in rural schools. The provision of appropriate infrastructural facilities would lead to an increase in the enrolment of students and augment the retention rate.

Research has indicated that among the deprived, marginalized, and socio-economically backward sections of society, girls and women usually experience discriminatory treatment. The discriminatory treatment among girls is depicted in a number of aspects. These are the acquisition of education, attainment of employment opportunities, empowerment opportunities, deprivation in right to property, deprivation from having a say in the decision-making matters, deprivation from expressing their viewpoints and perspectives, discouraged from participation in social, economic, cultural, and political activities, remaining confined within the households, implementing household chores and taking care of the needs and requirements of their family members. Furthermore, they also experience discriminatory treatment regarding health and medical facilities and even food items. Good quality food was provided to the male members and females were given simple food. The prevalence of discriminatory treatment against women regarding these aspects is not only a barrier within the course of their progression but also in the development of the communities and nation. Irrespective of the jobs in which women and girls are engaged, whether they are involved in the management of household responsibilities, are pursuing education or are engaged in employment opportunities, or assisting their parents in the family business. It is vital for them to obtain equal rights and opportunities. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that they provide equal rights and opportunities to their girls. The girls should be given equal rights and opportunities regarding the acquisition of education, health care facilities, medical facilities, diet and nutrition, property, wealth, resources, and so forth. Making provision for equal rights and opportunities for girls would promote their well-being and empowerment opportunities.

Occurrence of Criminal and Violent Acts

In rural as well as urban communities, women and girls have experienced criminal and violent acts to a major extent. These acts are verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, discriminatory treatment, rape, acid attacks, female foeticide and female infanticide, child trafficking, domestic violence, and neglect. The experience of these acts on the part of girls and women has an effect on their physical as well as psychological health. The extent of suffering usually depends upon the extent to which they have experienced these acts. For instance, in schools, when girls experience verbal abuse from fellow students, then they usually do not drop out. But when they experience sexual harassment or other criminal act, then they may drop out of school. Hence, the occurrence of criminal and violent acts is regarded as a major barrier within the course of the acquisition of education.

The student and particularly girls have experienced criminal and violent acts in schools as well. Research has indicated that teachers, staff members, and fellow students have been involved in such acts. Therefore, not only leading to the progression of women but also the enhancement of the system of education, it is necessary to formulate measures that would alleviate criminal and violent acts in schools, particularly against women and girls, and promote equal rights and opportunities among them and treat them with respect and courtesy. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that the growth and development of their children, both boys and girls takes place in an effective manner. For carrying out this responsibility, they need to ensure that they treat their girls with kindness and courtesy.

Child Marriage and Educational Background of the Parents

Child marriage is when the marriage of individuals takes place when they are below 18 years of age. Child marriage imposes negative effects upon individuals, particularly girls. When girls are married at a young age, then they are normally deprived of the acquisition of education, getting engaged in employment opportunities, and participation in other childhood activities. They merely are required to remain within their homes, implement household responsibilities and take care of the needs and requirements of other family members. Research has indicated that girls usually depict unwillingness, but they are required to obey their parents. Due to the possession of traditional viewpoints and perspectives, individuals and groups primarily belonging to rural communities get their girls married at an early age. They possess this viewpoint that if girls are educated and get older, then it would be difficult to find suitable grooms for them. For this purpose, they even train their girls in terms of the implementation of household chores from the initial stage. Due to the prevalence of this practice, girls are forbidden from acquisition of education. There has been implementation of programs and schemes that are meant to curb child marriage. In 2006, the Government renewed its efforts and India passed the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. This caused an increase in the penalties for conducting a child marriage ritual and made child marriage voidable by the married party up to two years after reaching the age of adulthood and provided opportunities for the courts to intervene in these cases. The legal age for marriage to take place within the country for boys is 21 years and for girls is 18 years.

Education of the parents is a crucial factor for promoting education among children, inculcating the traits of morality and ethics among them and leading to their well-being. When the parents are well-educated and are engaged in reputed employment opportunities, then it is apparent that they will make provision for good quality education for their children. Educated parents will also be aware of the fact that it is necessary to ensure that equal rights and opportunities should be provided to both boys and girls. Hence, they get their children enrolled in reputed educational institutions and make provision opportunities for them to enhance their career prospects. On the other hand, when the parents are not much educated nor possess the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and numeracy, then in such cases, normally two factors are experienced. First, they recognize the significance of education and promote equal rights and opportunities for both girls and boys towards the acquisition

of education. They form this viewpoint that girls should not be regarded as liabilities and it is necessary to provide them with equal education opportunities. Another aspect is, they discriminate against girls, particularly regarding the acquisition of education, and encourage their boys towards getting enrolled in schools. The major causes are a lack of financial resources and unawareness. With the formulation of programs and schemes, these individuals too have realized that it is vital to make provision for educational opportunities to both girls and boys.

Recent research has indicated that the occupation of the parents is regarded as an important factor in promoting education among girls. The girls are deprived of the acquisition of education due to the lack of wage-earning opportunities for parents. The major objective of all individuals is to get engaged in employment opportunities to sustain their living conditions in an adequate manner. Through getting engaged in employment opportunities, one earns income to sustain their living conditions. In the present existence, finding good employment opportunities is not easy. The individuals are required to struggle to find good employment opportunities or obtain recommendations. The occupations and employment opportunities of the parents are regarded as important factors in facilitating the acquisition of education among children.

When boys and girls get enrolled in schools, then it is apparent that they need to work effectively toward the acquisition of education. They need to pay adequate attention to their studies and inculcate the traits of diligence, resourcefulness, and conscientiousness. Apart from these factors, there are other crucial factors as well. These are admission of the students, retention rate, and academic performance. The occupation of the parents matters to a major extent in influencing these factors. When the parents are engaged in well-paid and reputed occupations, then there is an increase in the admission and retention rate of the students. Furthermore, they are able to achieve good grades as well in their assignments and tests. On the other hand, when parents are engaged in low-paid minority jobs or are unemployed, then there is a decline in the admission and retention rate of the students and they also experience setbacks in their academic performance. Therefore, it is vital for individuals to get engaged in employment opportunities and secure their financial position.

Management of Household Responsibilities

According to the latest findings, individuals belonging to deprived, marginalized, and economically weaker sections of society usually discourage their girls from the acquisition of education, mainly because of their participation in the management of household responsibilities. Within the households, there are a number of aspects, which need to be taken care of. These include the preparation of meals, cleaning, washing, gardening, and so forth. In rural households, individuals are required to perform certain additional tasks as well. These include fetching water from the water bodies and taking care of livestock. In urban communities, usually, domestic helpers and cleaners are hired. The hiring of domestic helpers usually enables the members of the household to get engaged in other tasks and activities. But in rural communities, individuals are required to carry out the household responsibilities on their own. Individuals normally encourage their children, especially girls to get engaged in the implementation of household

responsibilities. Due to the management of household responsibilities, they are discouraged from the acquisition of education.

In rural communities, apart from the implementation of household responsibilities, the other tasks and activities that usually girls and women get engaged in are taking care of the needs and requirements of other family members. The individuals are normally engaged in the agricultural sector and farming practices. Therefore, when parents go to work, girls are vested with the responsibility of ensuring that all the household chores are implemented in an appropriate manner and they are able to adequately look after the health care and other needs of elderly family members and younger siblings. From the stage of early childhood, they are trained in terms of the implementation of household responsibilities. Hence, are deprived of getting enrolled in schools and acquisition of education.

Findings and Discussion

The prevalence of gender inequality has been disadvantageous to girls on a comprehensive basis. This is apparently understood that in India, throughout the country, all citizens and communities aim toward progression. In order to achieve the goal of progression, individuals need to take into account various factors, i.e. acquiring good-quality education; augmenting knowledge, skills, and abilities; promoting good health and well-being, physically and psychologically; inculcating the traits of morality and ethics; implementing the traits of diligence, resourcefulness, and conscientiousness; making wise and productive decisions; providing equal rights and opportunities to girls; not discriminating on the basis of any factors; eliminating the social problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and homelessness and promoting women empowerment. Throughout the lives of individuals, they need to be well aware of all these factors. Gender inequality is a social problem, which deprives girls from getting engaged in various tasks and activities that would lead to their progression (Gender Inequality, 2022). The consequences of gender inequality have proven to be disadvantageous to girls to a major extent. Consequences of gender inequality are, introversion and seclusion; psychological problems; decline in motivation levels; problems in forming an effective social circle; illiteracy and unawareness; uninformed in terms of utilization of technologies, and impediments in promoting well-being and goodwill. These are stated as follows:

Psychological Issues of Introversion and Seclusion

Girls and women are deprived of equal rights and opportunities that are necessary to hone communication skills and interactive abilities. As a consequence, they are overwhelmed by introversion and seclusion. These affect their mindsets in such a manner that they do not feel comfortable interacting with distant family and community members. The male members of the family are vested with the authority and responsibility to implement decision-making processes in terms of all factors. The girls and women are required to obey the rules that are formulated by their male counterparts. They are discouraged from expressing their viewpoints and perspectives. The communication processes are not carried out with girls and women in an effective manner. In other words, they are just required to put into operation the household responsibilities and take care of the needs and requirements of family

members. In this manner, they are required to experience gender inequality. Therefore, introversion and seclusion are regarded as one of the indispensable consequences of gender inequality. The health and well-being of individuals is important. It needs to be promoted from the physical and psychological perspectives. When one will be physically and psychologically healthy, only then will be able to contribute effectively towards the implementation of job duties. The girls experience various types of psychological problems as a consequence of gender inequality. These are anger, stress, anxiety, frustration, and depression. When they aspire to achieve something and are deprived of rights and opportunities, these problems are experienced in a major form. These problems are experienced by individuals in a major or minor form. The individuals need to be informed in terms of ways to cope with them in an effective manner. Furthermore, these need to be prevented from assuming a major form. These problems are experienced when girls are deprived of getting engaged in various tasks and activities that would lead to their progression.

The decline in Motivation Levels

As a consequence of experiencing discriminatory treatment, the girls and women are overwhelmed by the feeling of stress. They usually form the viewpoint that what are the reasons, which would enable them to get deprived from participating in various tasks and activities that would lead to their up-gradation. They do not develop motivation in terms of putting into operation household responsibilities and taking care of the needs and requirements of family members. They experience barriers within the course of enhancement of implementation of tasks and activities in a well-organized manner. Due to a decline in motivation levels, girls and women are subject to abuse and mistreatment. When they will not develop motivation toward the implementation of tasks, they will not be able to carry out their jobs in accordance with the expectations of their family members. This renders an important contribution to creating unpleasant environmental conditions within homes. Therefore, the decline in motivation levels is a worthwhile consequence of gender inequality.

Problems in Forming an Effective Social Circle

When individuals are wholeheartedly committed to doing well in their job duties, achievement of desired goals, and leading to enhancement of their living conditions, they need to form an effective social circle. The social circle needs to be formed with family and community members. The girls and women in some cases experience problems in forming an effective social circle. When they aspire to achieve something and are deprived of rights and opportunities, various types of psychological problems are experienced in a major form. In order to form an effective social circle, individuals need to hone communication skills and interactive abilities. When girls and women experience problems in interacting with others, they are unable to form an effective social circle. When they remain confined within the households, they do get to interact with family members. But they are unable to interact with community members. As a consequence, when they are required to interact with family members, they are overwhelmed by feelings of apprehensiveness and vulnerability. Therefore, problems in forming an effective social circle are a consequence of

gender inequality, which leads to the augmentation of loneliness.

Illiteracy and Unawareness

From the stage of early childhood, girls are trained in terms of household responsibilities. Furthermore, they are required to take care of the needs and requirements of family members. There has been the prevalence of the viewpoint that girls have to eventually get married and in their marital homes, they have to carry out all types of household responsibilities. Education would not be of any use to them. In other words, they would not be able to utilize their educational qualifications in any manner. As a consequence, they are overwhelmed by illiteracy and unawareness. Due to these traits, the girls and women remain unaware in terms of methods and strategies that are necessary for promoting well-being and goodwill. They are only informative in terms of methodologies and procedures that are necessary to carry out all types of household responsibilities. Therefore, illiteracy and unawareness are a consequence of gender inequality, which enables girls to remain uninformed in terms of various factors. In the present existence, with advancements taking place and with the advent of modernization and globalization, it is indispensable for individuals to be informed in terms of the utilization of technologies. The girls are deprived of getting engaged in various tasks and activities that would lead to their progression. As a consequence, they are unable to hone their technical skills. These are the skills that are implemented in the utilization of technologies. Rural individuals are making use of digital technologies for mainly communicating with others and for recreational purposes. The Internet is utilized to a major extent to augment knowledge and understanding in terms of various factors and approaches. Furthermore, individuals are able to obtain answers to their questions. The girls and women in some cases are uninformed in terms of the utilization of technologies. This is a barrier within the course of enhancement of their technical skills.

Conclusion

The prevalence of gender inequality in education is regarded as the major barrier within the course of the progression of the system of education. The major factors that promote gender inequality in education are conditions of poverty, the prevalence of traditional viewpoints, school infrastructure, discriminatory treatment among girls, the occurrence of criminal and violent acts, child marriage, education of the parents, occupation of the parents, management of household responsibilities and lack of interest in studies. When girls and women are experiencing one or more of these factors, then usually it affects them physically as well as psychologically. There has been the formulation of programs and schemes, which have the major objective of generating awareness among individuals, belonging to all categories, backgrounds, and communities to treat girls and women with respect and make provision for equal rights and opportunities to them. When individuals and communities will provide equal rights and opportunities to girls, then it would not only promote their effective growth and development but also the well-being of the communities and the entire nation. The factors that influence the attainment of education are socio-economic factors, accessibility to learning materials and resources, time devoted to formal learning activities, and cultural viewpoints regarding the

education of girls. Furthermore, there has been the initiation of programs and schemes that promote education among women. These are, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). When the girls are encouraged for getting enrolled in schools and acquisition of education, it is vital for them to receive support and encouragement from their family members. In other words, it is necessary for them to be efficiently prepared for pursuing their academic goals. Apart from support and encouragement, it is vital for parents to ensure that they provide their children with educational resources and take care of their well-being to enable them to achieve academic goals. Furthermore, in schools, there should be the formation of a suitable learning environment, with infrastructure, resources, and facilities, which would encourage the enrolment and retention of students.

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