DECLINING SCHOOL ENROLMENT: SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS IN UDHAM SINGH NAGAR DISTRICT IN UTTARAKHAND

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Abstract

In the recent past, the decline of school enrolment has become the foremost concern in different regions of India, even the expansion of educational facilities and welfare schemes across India proved to be insufficient at multitude levels. The existing study explores the social and institutional factors associated with the problem of declining school enrolment in Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttarakhand. The Study is based on primary fieldwork processed among the 100 households covering 168 school going children within semi-urban and in rural area of the given district using household survey method and semi structured interview. The core analysis of the paper shows that though a valid majority of the children are enrolled in schools but a considerable number of children have dropped out or have never enrolled in school due to institutional or social factors within the society. Economic insecurity, vulnerability, migration, paternal education, poverty and social norms were found to influence schooling related decisions at the household level. On the other hand, institutional concerns and issues such as poor learning outcomes, infrastructure shortage, and distance from residence reduces confidence and believe in government institutions. The research argues that declining enrolment cannot be understood by explaining of single factor but slightly by the combined efforts of social vulnerability and institutional limitations.

Key Words*: School Enrolment, Educational exclusion, Udham Singh Nagar, Institutional Factors, Uttarakhand State.*

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1. Introduction

It is universally acknowledged that education is one of the cornerstones of social development. It has great significance for the development of personal identity, the economy, and social mobility (Drèze & Sen, 2013). For some time, the Indian state has laid the foundation for the universal access to education in providing education in the Constitution, the national education system and major policy initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Right to Education Act (2009), and the Samagra Shiksha (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). From the past two decades or so, these programs have resulted in major improvements to school infrastructure, education levels and enrolment in schools across the country (Kingdon,2007). Not with standing these successes, an interesting and troubling observation has started to emerge in many places: falling enrolments, especially at government and aided schools. Such decline is more than administrative or numerical; it constitutes a socio-economic process intertwined with changes in society, the economy, families, and the operation of the educational institutions (Desai et al., 2010). Schools in several areas of India are experiencing declining enrolment numbers despite the availability of schools and teachers and welfare arrangements free textbooks, uniforms, lunch delivery to schools on a mid-day basis and scholarships (ASER Centre, 2022). This brings up very serious issues around the efficacy of educational policies and social acceptance and access to schooling for different population groups.

Being of different geographical and social conditions in Uttarakhand sets an important context for taking a look at decreasing numbers of students. The state has moved forward to expand school facilities and raise literacy although many are still experiencing persistent declines in enrolment (Bandyopadhyay, 2011). Migration, demographic transformation, changes in livelihood, and growing preference on the part of parents for private schooling have profoundly shaped the school attendance rate (Smita, 2008; Kingdon, 1996). The Udham Singh Nagar

district in the Terai region of Uttarakhand is an archetype of this problem. While this aspect of the region advantages hill districts, urbanization and agriculture yield advantages, and industrial activity benefits the cities. But there are also high rates of immigration problems and out-migration, social differences, and a considerable gulf between haves and have-nots (Desai et al., 2010). Several schools in the Udham Singh Nagar district have recently reported declining enrolment, which led them to merge or close down for persistent low student numbers. Taking a sociological view, there is no single reason for poor overall enrolment. Parental education, caste and class background, household income, migration patterns, and attitudes toward formal education are social determinants that may have significant influences on schooling decisions (Smita, 2008). Families who depend on seasonal labour, agriculture, and small-scale informal-work employment may migrate in life and migration is temporary or permanent to better livelihoods leading to interruptions in their children's education. Some children may be removed from school to help with some kind of household work, as well as to care for siblings or find work that will pay them (Desai et al., 2010). In addition, gender norms and concern for safety are factors that may also impact on school participation, especially at higher primary and secondary education levels (ASER Centre, 2022).

Institutional elements are also the key to accounting for the falling enrolment. School infrastructure, teacher availability, motivation, medium of instruction, classroom conditions and administrative functioning are all repeatedly pointed to as major determinant factors of parental trust in government schools (Kremer et al., 2005). Problems like multi-grade teaching, absenteeism of teachers, shortage of subject-specific teachers, adverse learning results that often cause parents to transfer the children to private schools or the kids drop out and drop out of the education as a whole (Muralidharan & Kremer,2008). Moreover, the distance between schools and the community, poor mode of transport and weak surveillance systems also work to prevent enrolment especially in the rural

and semi-urban areas (Govinda & 2011). Sociological perspectives contribute a unique view on how meanings of educational choices, perceptions, and dynamics of power impact those choices (Sen, 1999).

Within this context, the current study seeks to examine the trend in the drop in school enrolment in Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand based on a combination of both social and institutional issues. For instance, the study aims to find reasons for the decreased enrolment in the classroom by looking at each family's socio-economic status, migration patterns and their interpretation by parents and school operation. Analysis from this standpoint also has important policy implications, for addressing the enrolment decline calls for socially sensitive, contextually grounded policy interventions that rebuild trust in schools and make sure the inclusive and useful distribution of educational opportunities to all parts of society (Sen, 2013).

2. Thesis statement of the problem

The research argues that declining student numbers in Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand, isn't merely the result of demographic changes or mismanagement. Instead, it's a function of how social conditions intersect with arrangements of systemic processes deciding whether a child stays in school. Social factors like unstable incomes at home, moves prompted by work, caste and class status, parental learning levels and changing life goals are strong determiners of decisions about schooling. Lots of households primarily those who live off farming, temporary work or insecure jobs are constantly moving and stressed by money, causing steady attendance to be compromised and faith in staying enrolled long term to plummet.

3. Research Objectives

1.   To investigate the social factors related to decreasing school enrolment in Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand.
2.   To analyse institutional factors within schools causing a drop   in   the   enrolment   of   students.   And

3.   To investigate how an interaction between social and institutional factors impacts parents' choices towards children's schooling.

4. Research Methods

The current study is using descriptive and analytical method of research grounded on primary data to explore the social and institutional factors affecting the dropping school enrolment in Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand. Research data was gathered by means of fieldwork in a mixed-methods manner (structured household surveys conducted with the parents of school-age children with 100 households, semi-structured interviews with teachers and school administrators, and focused observations of selected government schools, including those in rural and semi-urban areas of the district). A purposive and stratified sampling approach was employed in order to pick schools and the respondents representing varied socio-economic backgrounds, migration statuses, as well as school types. Quantitative data were subject to simple statistical tools such as percentages and cross-tabulations; meanwhile qualitative data were thematically analysed to obtain perceptions, experiences and institutional practices related to enrolment decline.

5. Findings of the Study

 The findings of this study were based on original data obtained from 100 households (total 168 school age children) from some rural and semi-urban areas in Udham Singh Nagar district, Uttarakhand. Frequency, percentage and simple comparative analysis of school enrolment patterns, and the effects of social and institutional indicators were computed.

 Table: 1 Total Respondents

SL No.	Category	Frequency

1	Total Number of Sample Size (Households)	100
2	Total Number of School Age Children	168

 Source: Research Field work, 2025

5.1 Enrolment Status of School going children

The analysis of enrolment status showed that of 168 school-age children, 104 (61.9%) had the enrolment status in schools at the time of survey. But many children remained out of the formal school system. 39 children (23.2%) had dropped out after enrolment, whereas 25 children (14.9%) had never enrolled. At all, 38.1 per cent of the children not attending school, indicating a considerable amount of educational exclusion.

   Ratio analysis revealed that 5 (out of 10) of enrolled children were either drop out, or never enrolled. At household-level, we had at least one child in 47 households either dropped out or never enrol in analysis. A cross-tabulation across household size and enrolment status indicates that households with three or more children were most likely to experience enrolment discontinuity, indicating the burdens attributed to limited household resources.

 Table & Graph: 2 Enrolment Status of School going children

SL No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Enrolment status	104	61.9%

2	Dropped out after Enrolment	39	23.2%
3	Never Enrolled	25	14.9%
	Total	168	100%

Source: Research Field work, 2025
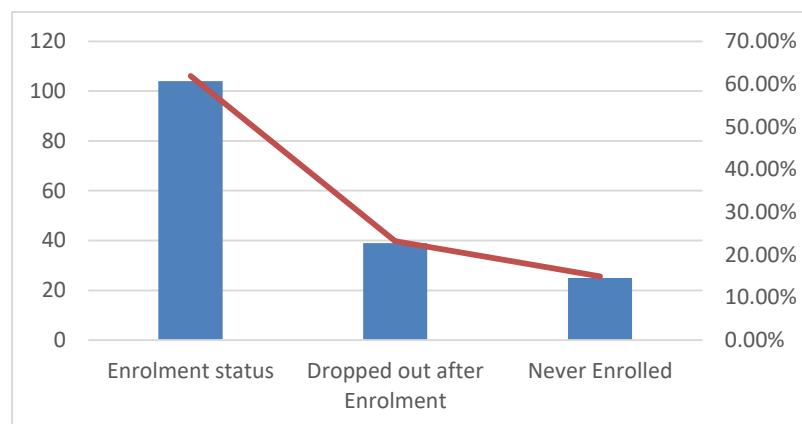

5.2 Social Factors affecting School enrolment

Social determinants were significant factors associated to decreasing school enrolment. Low household income (52 % households, the most influential determinant) was the most strongly associated. Nearly 39 % of these households had at least 1 child attending school who also dropped out or never joined. The relationship between economic hardship and dropout of education is strong.

31 households reported migration (mostly seasonal migration for agricultural and informal work). Statistical comparison showed that children of migrant children were 1.4 times more likely to have interrupted schooling than children whose parents did not migrate. Similarly, parental illiteracy was significantly related to higher drop-out rates – specifically at the upper primary level (29 households). (n=20, p <.0152)

Table & Graph: 3 Social Factors affecting the School Enrolment

SL No.	Social Factors	Percentage
1	Low Household Income	52 %
2	Migration Patterns	31 %
	Gender Norms Influence	27%

Source: Research Field work, 2025
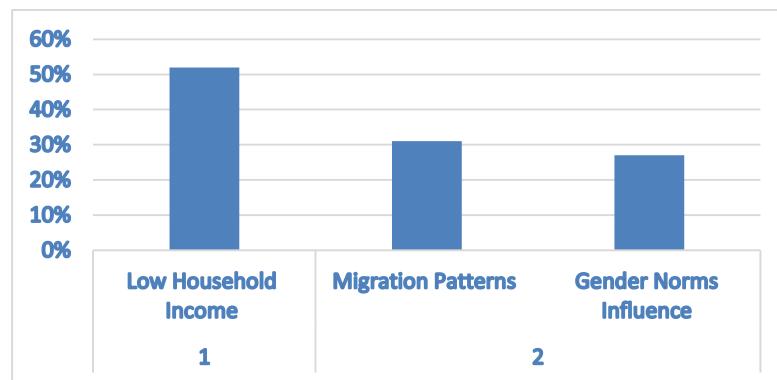
Gender norms influenced the school choice of 27 households despite their young girls still pursuing an education after primary school due to reasons of safety and domestic responsibilities. 24% have child labour and household work; children's participation in economic or domestic activities were related to high odds of irregular attendance and dropout. These results demonstrate that determinants of social vulnerability are a strong driver of enrolment outcomes.

**5.3 Institutional Factors Influencing School Enrolment**

The institutional conditions of the school were found to play a substantial role in both enrolment and retention. 39 households mentioned poor learning outcomes as the most common institutional concern. In these households, the dropout rate was considerably high suggesting a link between the students'

perception of academic quality and dropping out school. The 28 households that had been surveyed reported a teacher shortage and teacher availability that fluctuated, especially at rural schools where multi-grade instruction was widespread. Dropout rates were more common in schools where teachers were short compared to schools that were sufficiently staffed. Disparities in infrastructure, reported by 36% households, such as insufficient classroom capacity, sanitation facilities and materials for learning. Distance to school was mentioned by 32 households as a barrier. Using statistical analysis, study found that children who lived further away from schools were more likely to attend irregular school, much more frequently, especially children under 10 years old (age 10.0% of the sample and younger) and even girls. All these institutional drivers contributed to diminished confidence among parents in government schools and a fall in enrolment.

Table & Graph: 4 Institutional Factors Influencing School Enrolment

SL.No.	Institutional Factors	Percentage
1	Poor Leaning Outcomes	39 %
2	Teacher Shortage per Student	28 %
3	Insufficient Infrastructure	33 %
4	Distance from Residence	32 %

Source: Research   Field   work,   2025
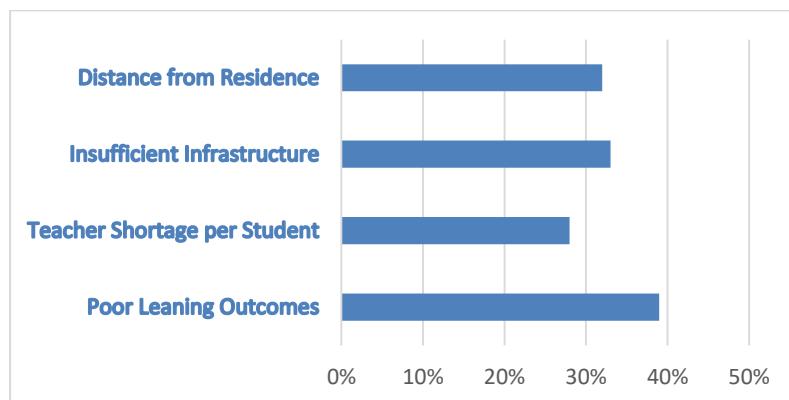
5.4 Parental attitudes and school choices

Parents have a strong influence over school choice. About 56 per cent of parents expressed moderate or little confidence in government schools, describing difficulties within their education and supervision and accountability. Of households that moved their child into private schools, nearly 62 % reported regular instruction and better discipline as main motivators. Most significantly, 52% of low-income households put at least one child in a private school — despite cost. This means perceived quality of education appeared to outweigh economic realities when it comes down to parents' views on a school. Statistical comparison of adverse perceptions of state education and government schooling demonstrated that households with negative views of government schooling were more likely to dropout or transfer to private school.

5.5 Integral Role of Social and Institutional Factors

Joint examination of the social and institutional determinants revealed that economic vulnerability combined with dissatisfaction in the institution led to the highest propensity of both dropouts and non-enrolments in these households. In those households, children were about 1.6 times more likely out of school than children in households with one kind of constraint. The study has also verified that dropping school enrolment

within Udham Singh Nagar district is not simply a consequence of economic hardship but institutional and social disadvantage, more complex than power, and therefore warrants the students to be enrolled into the system. These mixed levels of low-to-moderate poverty, migration and weaknesses at the school level create problems like weak quality educational resources.

6. Discussions

Social vulnerability and institution deficiency are intricately connected to the decline of the school enrolment rate in the Udham Singh Nagar district. Many children who are either out of school or facing disruptions in their education, indicate families' economic constraints. For families, economic uncertainty and the necessity to relocate for jobs are taking priority over continuity of schooling.

The educational background and social values of parents also play a role in how a family treats older learners and girls with regard to their education. Numerous parents express frustrations with the level of education offered in government schools, citing the lack of teachers and inadequate infrastructure, which ultimately diminishes their trust in these institutions. Families are often compelled to withdraw their children from school or seek private education out of necessity. When it comes to social issues that influence the performance of educational institutions, the drop-off in enrolment is particularly telling for families who want to see better results for their children.

7. Conclusions & Recommendations

This research was carried out to study declining school enrolment in Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand based on the primary data from a sample of 100 households and 168 school-age children. Results of the study indicate that children out of schooling are prevalent for multiple interrelated social and institutional reasons despite availability of education. Poverty, migration, and lack of parental education still impede continuous school attendance and enrolment, and weaknesses in state institutions, including poor learning outcomes and teacher

shortages, also act as barriers to enrolment and school retention. The study is concerned that declining enrolment is not just an administration problem but also an institutional problem, an expression of societal inequity and systemic failure in education. Tackling these issues does not occur as if they are standalone interventions that directly address the needs of students at risk while reinforcing schools themselves. It is imperative to provide inclusive education options through the development of better learning environments, the availability of teachers, and public trust in government schools.

The research outlines the approach to tackle declining student numbers, which is to raise public school standards — assigning enough teachers, upgrading facilities, ensuring regular learning checks. For children who grow up in low-income or mobile families, specialized paths to education, nearby resources that would help them get education, and stable access are key. More parents should be involved, the community should be encouraged to participate, but restoring faith in state-run schools is a way to get higher attendance, keep students enrolled and get stronger results over time.

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