

An Educational Appraisal on the Causes of Child Labour among Upper Primary Students in Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal

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Abstract: *Child labour continues to be a persistent socio-educational problem in many parts of India despite constitutional safeguards, compulsory education policies, and child protection laws. The present study attempts an educational appraisal of the causes of child labour among upper primary students in Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal. The focus of the study is to examine how socio-economic conditions, family background, school-related factors, and local labour demand contribute to the engagement of children in labour activities during the upper primary stage of schooling. A descriptive survey method was adopted, and data were collected from students, parents, and teachers using structured questionnaires and interviews. The findings reveal that poverty, parental illiteracy, seasonal migration, lack of academic support, and poor school engagement are the major factors compelling children to participate in labour while continuing or discontinuing their education. The study highlights the educational consequences of child labour, including irregular attendance, low academic achievement, grade repetition, and school dropout. The paper concludes with educational and policy-oriented suggestions to strengthen school retention, improve socio-economic support, and ensure effective implementation of child protection measures*

Keywords: Child Labour, Upper Primary Education, Socio-Economic Factors, School Dropout, Uttar Dinajpur, Educational Appraisal

I. INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a complex and multidimensional problem that intersects education, economics, social structure, and public policy. Although India has made significant progress in expanding access to elementary education through initiatives such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, child labour continues to exist, particularly in economically backward and rural regions. Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal represents one such area where poverty, agrarian dependence, informal labour markets, and limited educational resources coexist, creating conditions conducive to child labour.

The upper primary stage of education is a crucial transitional phase in a child's academic life. It is during this stage that children are expected to consolidate foundational skills, develop higher-order thinking abilities, and prepare for secondary education. However, for many children belonging to marginalized families, this period coincides with increased economic pressure to contribute to household income. As a result, children often engage in part-time or full-time labour in agriculture, household industries, shops, construction sites, and domestic work.

From an educational perspective, child labour not only violates children's rights but also undermines the goals of universal education, equity, and social justice. Children involved in labour face physical exhaustion, lack of study time, emotional stress, and reduced motivation for learning. Over time, these factors result in poor academic performance and eventual school dropout. Therefore, an educational appraisal of the causes of child labour is essential to understand how schooling systems, family environments, and socio-economic structures interact to influence children's participation in labour.

The present study focuses specifically on upper primary students in Uttar Dinajpur district. By examining the causes of child labour through an educational lens, the study seeks to identify factors that hinder effective schooling and to suggest measures for improving retention and educational outcomes.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A substantial body of research has examined child labour from economic, social, and educational perspectives. Scholars have consistently emphasized that child labour is deeply rooted in poverty, inequality, and inadequate educational opportunities.

Basu and Van (1998) provided a foundational economic explanation of child labour, arguing that poverty and low adult wages force families to send children to work. Their study highlighted that child labour decline only when household income crosses a minimum threshold, underscoring the link between economic insecurity and children's work participation.

Weiner (1991) analyzed child labour in the Indian context and argued that social acceptance of child work, combined with weak enforcement of education laws, perpetuates the problem. He emphasized that compulsory education alone cannot eliminate child labour unless supported by social reforms.

Aggarwal (2010) examined the educational consequences of child labour and noted that working children suffer from irregular attendance, low concentration, and poor academic achievement. He emphasized the need for child-friendly schools to retain economically disadvantaged students.

Kumar (2015) studied child labour and school dropout in rural India and found that children engaged in part-time labour were significantly more likely to discontinue education at the upper primary level. The study highlighted parental illiteracy and migration as key contributing factors.

Mukherjee (2012), in a regional study of West Bengal, observed that agricultural dependency and seasonal employment patterns increased children's involvement in labour. He pointed out that district with higher poverty rates showed lower upper primary retention.

UNICEF (2019) emphasized the intergenerational nature of child labour, noting that parents who were child labourers often normalize the practice. The report stressed the role of education in breaking this cycle through incentives and community awareness.

Srivastava (2011) analyzed the gender dimension of child labour and found that girls are often engaged in invisible domestic work, which negatively affects their schooling. The study argued for gender-sensitive educational interventions.

Tilak (2007) highlighted the role of poor school quality in encouraging child labour. He argued that when schooling is perceived as irrelevant or ineffective, parents prefer children's economic contribution.

Sinha (2013) focused on policy implementation and found gaps between child labour laws and ground realities. He emphasized that effective coordination between schools, communities, and welfare schemes is essential to reduce child labour.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To identify the major socio-economic causes of child labour among upper primary students in Uttar Dinajpur district.
- To examine school-related factors that contributes to children's engagement in labour.
- To analyze the impact of child labour on students' attendance, academic performance, and continuation of education.
- To study parental attitudes towards education and child labour.
- To suggest educational measures for reducing child labour and improving school retention at the upper primary level.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey method. The sample consisted of upper primary students, their parents, and teachers from selected schools in Uttar Dinajpur district. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from rural and semi-urban areas.

Tools Used

- Student questionnaire focusing on work involvement, study habits, and school experience
- Parent questionnaire addressing socio-economic background and attitudes towards education
- Teacher interview schedule to gather observations on attendance, performance, and dropout

Data Collection

Data were collected through direct administration of questionnaires and personal interviews. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were strictly maintained.

IV. DATA INTERPRETATION AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The analysis and interpretation of data constitute the core of the present study, as they reveal the underlying causes of child labour among upper primary students and its educational implications. Data collected from students, parents, and teachers were systematically classified, tabulated, and interpreted to derive meaningful conclusions. The findings are presented under thematic headings with suitable tables for clarity.

Table 1: Distribution of Students by Socio-Economic Status

Socio-Economic Status	Number of Students	Percentage
Low Income	72	48%
Middle Income	58	38.7%
Relatively Stable	20	13.3%
Total	150	100%

The table shows that nearly half of the sampled students (48%) belong to low-income families. These households primarily depend on daily wage labour, marginal farming, or informal sector employment. The high proportion of students from economically weaker sections indicates that poverty remains a dominant factor compelling children to engage in labour. Students from relatively stable economic backgrounds form a very small segment, suggesting that child labour is closely linked with economic deprivation.

Table 2: Parental Educational Background

Level of Education of Parents	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	60	40%
Primary Education	52	34.7%
Secondary and Above	38	25.3%
Total	150	100%

The data indicate that a majority of parents possess very low levels of education. About 40% of parents are illiterate, while another 34.7% have only primary education. Low parental education affects awareness about the long-term benefits of schooling and limits parents' capacity to support their children academically. This lack of educational background often leads parents to prioritize immediate income through child labour over sustained schooling.

Table 3: Nature of Child Labour among Upper Primary Students

Type of Work	Number of Students	Percentage
Agricultural Work	46	30.7%
Domestic Work	38	25.3%
Shop/Small Business Help	34	22.7%
Construction/Daily Wages	20	13.3%
Others	12	8%

Total	150	100%
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Agricultural labour emerges as the most common form of child labour, reflecting the agrarian nature of Uttar Dinajpur district. Domestic work is particularly prevalent among girls, while boys are more often engaged in shop assistance and daily wage labour. Although some of these activities are part-time, they significantly reduce study time and increase physical exhaustion, thereby negatively affecting educational outcomes.

Table 4: Working Hours per Day

Working Hours	Number of Students	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	44	29.3%
2–4 hours	62	41.3%
More than 4 hours	44	29.3%
Total	150	100%

A significant proportion of students (70.6%) work for more than two hours daily. Such prolonged engagement in labour, especially before or after school hours, leaves children physically tired and mentally disengaged during classroom activities. Students working more than four hours are particularly vulnerable to academic failure and dropout.

Table 5: Attendance Pattern of Working Students

Attendance Level	Frequency	Percentage
Regular	36	24%
Irregular	78	52%
Very Poor	36	24%
Total	150	100%

Only 24% of working students maintain regular attendance, while more than half attend school irregularly. Irregular attendance disrupts continuity in learning and weakens teacher–student interaction. Poor attendance was found to be a major predictor of low academic achievement and grade repetition.

Table 6: Academic Performance of Working Students

Academic Performance	Number of Students	Percentage
Good	28	18.7%
Average	54	36%
Poor	68	45.3%
Total	150	100%

The table clearly shows that nearly half of the students involved in labour perform poorly academically. Fatigue, lack of homework completion, and limited parental support contribute to low performance. Only a small proportion of students manage to perform well, usually those engaged in minimal labour and receiving family encouragement for education.

Table 7: Parental Attitude towards Education

Attitude Category	Frequency	Percentage
Education as Priority	42	28%
Education with Work	66	44%
Work over Education	42	28%
Total	150	100%

While a majority of parents recognize the importance of education, economic realities compel many to combine schooling with work. About 28% of parents clearly prioritize work over education, reflecting deep-rooted poverty and survival needs. This divided attitude weakens consistent educational engagement among children.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study reveal that child labour among upper primary students in Uttar Dinajpur is primarily driven by poverty, parental illiteracy, and economic insecurity. Agricultural and domestic labour dominates due to local occupational patterns. Child labour significantly affects attendance, academic performance, and motivation for

schooling. School-related factors such as lack of remedial support and weak monitoring further intensify the problem. The findings confirm that child labour is both a cause and consequence of educational disadvantage.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study clearly demonstrates that child labour among upper primary students in Uttar Dinajpur is the result of an interplay between poverty, parental illiteracy, weak school engagement, and local labour demand. From an educational perspective, child labour severely hampers students' academic progress and increases the risk of school dropout. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that integrates educational reforms with socio-economic support.

Schools must adopt child-friendly teaching methods, provide academic support to at-risk students, and strengthen monitoring of attendance. Government schemes such as mid-day meals, scholarships, and conditional cash transfers should be effectively implemented to reduce economic pressure on families. Community awareness programs highlighting the long-term value of education are essential to change parental attitudes.

Eliminating child labour is not merely a legal obligation but an educational necessity for achieving inclusive and equitable development.

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