

**Research Article**

# Determinants of Student Attendance in Elementary Education in India

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## ABSTRACT

Elementary education is a vital tool for building up a better society and helps in bringing prosperity in a country as a whole. Policymakers have viewed the provision of free and compulsory elementary education for all children as a critical prerequisite for achieving equality and social justice in the society. The Government of India has been executing several initiatives to ensure that schooling is indeed accessible to all children over the years. In view of this, it is observed that the number of children at the elementary level had been increased to almost 60 million, with an annual growth rate of 1.5% from 1991–1992 to 2015–2016 (MHRD) (GOI, 2018). It has been observed that education infrastructure has been developed extensively in recent years to extend access to elementary education for all sections of the society. All responsible governments including central and state governments, and stakeholders (private providers, civil society organisations and communities) have been making significant efforts for establishment of schools and that have resulted in considerable improvement in the availability of schools imparting elementary education across the country. The present study attempts to examine the probability of inclusion of rural and urban students in education process by employing probit models as a statistical tool to investigate the factors that affect their participation in elementary education.

**Keywords:** Student, Attendance, Elementary Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Elementary education is a vital tool for building up a better society and helps in bringing prosperity in a country as a whole. The purpose of elementary education is that every

14-year old child should have foundation skills such as the ability to read, write and numeracy, comprehension, analysis, reasoning and social skills. Elementary education forms the foundation of the education pyramid. Until and unless this foundation is strengthened, it will not be possible to achieve the objective of universal access to quality education for all concerned aged children (Twelfth FYP, 2012–2017) (GOI, 2013). Policymakers have regarded the provision of free and compulsory elementary education for all children as a critical prerequisite for achieving equality and social justice in the society. The Government of India has been executing several initiatives to ensure that schooling is indeed accessible to all children over the years. In view of this, it is observed that the number of children at the elementary level had been increased to almost 60 million, with an annual growth rate of 1.5% from 1991–1992 to 2015–2016 (MHRD) (GOI, 2018). It has been observed that education infrastructure has been developed extensively in recent years to extend access to elementary education for all sections of the society. All responsible governments including central and state governments, and stakeholders (private providers, civil society organisations and communities) have been making significant efforts for establishment of schools and that have resulted in considerable improvement in the availability of schools imparting elementary education across the country. Thus, number of initiatives had been taken in recent years by the Government of India to make elementary education universalised through Constitutional and Fundamental rights with the implantation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

Despite this, the way the education system has grown seems to be contributing to further social divisions in the country. Numerous researches and studies show that social disparities in education still exist and exclusion of specific social groups from education is endemic throughout the country, however, it differs in its degree and nature. Exclusion of children of different groups from formal school system and denial of their right to education needs careful observation. Children who fail to get benefit from formal school education do not constitute a monolithic group. For some of the children, school is genuinely outside their reach in physical terms. Some others fail to join the school, even if it is available in the neighbourhood, due to social and economic reasons. Some enter school, but never physically participate in the education process (Chanana, 1993; Pridmore, 2007; PROBE, 1999). There has been a narrowing trend in the gap in respect to educational achievement between upper-caste Hindus and marginalised groups at higher income levels (Desai and Kulkarni, 2008). In order to reach education at every doorstep of the households of the country and to address the issues of educational inaccessibility across different categories, the government of India has set the agenda of universalising elementary education with a clear focus on access, enrolment and infrastructure in the initial phase and retention, quality and

learning achievement in the subsequent period. In this context, it needs to study the various determinants of participation of a member of the households in elementary education. In the present study, we are trying to know the factors that promote or impede in attending elementary education among rural and urban students of the country.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nambissan Geetha (1996) analysed the nature of equity that exists within schools and mainly focuses on the experience of the ex-untouchables or scheduled castes in Indian schools. The researcher found that inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of adequate pedagogic supports to acquire linguistic, numerical and cognitive competencies adversely affect the schooling of SC's children in terms low achievement and also mention the factors of outside school which are responsible for the relatively poor outcome of education of scheduled caste children. The author observed that majority of the SC's children belonging to a low-income family and the immiseration of the majority of the SCs population, their denigrated social position, illiterate home backgrounds and apathetic attitudes towards education were seen to be mostly responsible for the poor response to schooling from these communities. The author argued that there is a need to address the issue of equity in education squarely. Kumar and Das (2003) observed that government schemes have played a pivotal role in the development of primary education in West Bengal. However, certain problems still prevail in the state such as poor attendance, perceived class differences, poverty and gender discrimination prevent socially underprivileged groups from accessing education opportunities. On the other side, government successfully provides cost-effective primary education to most underprivileged sections of the society of West Bengal. Marie Lall (2005) argued that enrolment in primary education has been increasing, but still millions of children in the age group of 6–14 years are not going to school. Moreover, disparities are still persistent in gender, regional, as well in caste. Desai and Kulkarni (2008) found the narrowing gap between dalits, adivasis and others with respect to the attainment of primary education during the 1980s and 1990s. Such improvement was not true for Muslims, and they did not benefit from affirmative action. They observed marginal increment in inequality at the college level. Further, they also found that top income class, the so-called creamy layer of dalits and adivasis, disproportionately benefit from the affirmative action programmes at the expense of their lower-income counterparts. Nambissan Geetha B. (2015) in her study analyses the relationship between poverty and elementary education in India and specifically on the advocacy of markets for the schooling of sick children. The researcher pointed out how private sectors are trying to change education policy in India by sketching upon neo-liberal discourses and constructing new narratives, networks and practices around schooling and explained

that such trends have serious implications for social justice in education for the poor. The researcher claimed that in India, children in poverty having multiple deprivations such as poor health, hunger, malnutrition, violence and insecurity as well as neglected school environments. She observed that intersecting disadvantages from structures of deprivation and devalued identities of caste, ethnicity, minority status, gender and regional backwardness are likely to adversely affect children's access to education and participation in schools as well as their sense of self-worth and dignity, which are critical to learning. Wydick and Glewwe (2017) studied the impact of international child sponsorship on adult income and wealth of formerly sponsored children survey on 10,144 individuals in six countries, the study took is for the period 2008–2010. The researcher administered their investigation first-hand to households of previously sponsored children, a random sample of non-participating households in nineteen programme villages, and a random sample of households in thirteen neighbouring non-programme villages. The researcher found that child sponsorship is responsible for increases in a monthly income of about \$13–17 over an unconditional baseline of \$75, or an increase of 17.3–22.9% and also found that sponsored children (males) are more likely as adults to live in better housing.

In view of the above studies, the present study attempts to examine the probability of inclusion of rural and urban students in education process by employing probit models as a statistical tool to investigate the factors that affect their participation in elementary education.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study has following objectives:

1. To analyse the access to elementary education among students of rural and urban areas.
2. To identify the determinants which influence the attendance of students in elementary education in both rural and urban areas.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA**

This study is based on secondary data that have been collected from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India. The unit-level data have been included in this study which has been obtained from the survey of NSS quinquennial rounds 64th round (Education in India: Participation and Expenditure for the year 2007–2008), and 71st round (Social Consumption: Education in India in 2014). The present study examines the participation of students belonging to rural and urban areas in elementary

education by their current attendance (where a student is pursuing his ongoing education is considered). The study tries to know the factors that determine the current attendance of the students for the elementary level of education. Earlier studies found identity and economic status as the main factors explaining participation in education (Basant, 2014; Huisman 2010).

We have taken into consideration variable like identity, occupation, economic condition, types of institutions, incentives, the distance of school/institution and transportation facilities as independent variables for determining attendance of students for the elementary level of education. The dependent variable considered is the attendance of the student at elementary level of education separately for both rural and urban areas. For the present econometric exercise, this has been assumed to be random in nature. For elementary education, current attendance is binary in nature, which can take the value of either 0 or 1. Likewise, its value is 1 if a student is attending elementary education, 0 otherwise. Thus, we have used probit model to regress the independent variables (as mentioned above) on the binary dependent variable. A probit model is

$$\Pr (y_i \neq 0 \mid x_i) = \Phi (x_i a)$$

Where,  $\Phi$  is the standard cumulative normal distribution, and  $x_i a$  is probit index.

## DISCUSSION

It has already been mentioned that the government has made several provisions for financial assistance to children belonging to poor and socially disadvantaged children in order to promote inclusive education in the country. These provisions include free education, tuition fee exemption, provision of scholarships, free teaching-learning materials, mid-day meals, etc. Governments worldwide have sought to meet the expenses of education by providing free or highly subsidised education, tuition fee waivers, and scholarships and constitutionally, free education is the prime feature of elementary education in the country through the implementation of RTE Act (2009), because elementary education is considered as one of the basic needs in many countries. Economic factors of households have been generally found to be the most important elements contributing to non-enrolment and in drop-out of children from schools. In this context, the provision of free education becomes particularly important. The 12<sup>th</sup> FYP calls for a substantial increase in funding for achieving a ‘quantum jump in the volume, range and amount of student support in the form of scholarships, stipends, assistantships and loans for disadvantaged students’ (GOI, 2013). Extending the access to education among the socially disadvantages communities viz, STs/SCs, OBCs and Muslims have been major challenge for a long time. In general improvement in access has been observed as well, but the major question remains whether this

enhancement has been inclusive or not. It is computed that GAR in primary education was 101.14%, while in the case of male and female, it was 102.06 and 100.06, respectively, in 2014. In the urban areas, total GAR in the same level of education is 102.20%, male and female are 102.47% and 101.89%, respectively, in the same year. In the case of upper primary education, GAR for person is 89.71% in rural areas, and corresponding male and female are 91.49% and 87.68%, respectively, whereas in urban areas for the same level of education it is marginally higher (90.65%), out of this male and female are 92.55% and 88.47%, respectively, in 2014. (NSSO, 2014).

**Table 1: Result of Maximum Likelihood Probit Model for Participation of Rural Students at Elementary Education as per 64<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> NSS Round Surveys**

All Rural Students Education Level	Coefficients	
	Elementary Education	
Independent Variables	64 <sup>th</sup> Round	71 <sup>st</sup> Round
Female <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.00693*</b>	<b>-0.0207***</b>
STs <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0124*</b>	<b>0.0435***</b>
SCs <sup>#</sup>	-0.00650	-0.0171
OBCs <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0224***</b>	0.0155
Hindu <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0103*</b>	-0.00718
Muslim <sup>#</sup>	0.00900	0.0410
Christian <sup>#</sup>	-0.00151	-0.0390
Sikhs <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0405***</b>	0.0304
Q1 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.129***</b>	<b>0.188***</b>
Q2 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.153***</b>	<b>0.137***</b>
Q3 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0759***</b>	<b>0.124***</b>
Q4 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0370***</b>	<b>0.0866***</b>
Self-Employed in Agriculture <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0325***</b>	0.0160
Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0308***</b>	0.0122
Regular Wage/Salaried Earner <sup>#</sup>	NR	<b>0.0324*</b>
Agricultural Labour <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0186**</b>	NR
Other Labour <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0202**</b>	NR
Casual Labour in Agriculture <sup>#</sup>	NR	-0.00730
Casual Labour in Non-Agriculture <sup>#</sup>	NR	0.0199
Government <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.137***</b>	<b>-0.342***</b>
Local Body <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.189***</b>	NR
Private Aided <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.258***</b>	<b>-0.261***</b>
Free Education <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0752***</b>	<b>0.0839***</b>
Scholarships <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0213***</b>	<b>-0.0582***</b>
Distance < 1 km <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.254***</b>	<b>0.360***</b>

*Table 1 contd...*

All Rural Students Education Level	Coefficients	
	Elementary Education	
Independent Variables	64 <sup>th</sup> Round	71 <sup>st</sup> Round
1 km ≤ D < 2 kms <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.105***</b>	<b>0.206***</b>
2 km ≤ D < 3 kms	<b>0.0829***</b>	<b>0.145***</b>
3 km ≤ D < 5 kms <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0587***</b>	<b>0.0996***</b>
On Foot <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0364***</b>	<b>-0.0584***</b>
School/Institution Bus <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0785***</b>	<b>0.193***</b>
Public Transport <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.257***</b>	<b>-0.247***</b>
Bicycle <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.222***</b>	<b>-0.271***</b>
Mid-Day Meal <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.290***</b>	<b>0.564***</b>
<b>No. of Observations</b>	59,704	52,626

*Source:* Author’s estimations based on NSS 64th Round Survey, 2007–2008 and 71st Round Survey, 2014–2015.

*Note:*

1. Q-Consumption Expenditure Quintile, NR-Not Reported
2. (#) dF/dx is for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.
3. Notation for significance level: \*\*\* significant at 1% level (p<0.01), \*\* significant at 5% level (p<0.05), \* significant at 10% level (p<0.1).
4. Probit Equation: Dependent Variable in the probit model is the probability of students (1) for those that are attending elementary education and (0) otherwise.

We have estimated the determinants of attendance of students for elementary level of education in rural areas during 2007–2008 and 2014–2015. The results reflect that the probability of participation of female students at elementary education is significantly lower than their male counterparts as it has also been confirmed by the study of Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008). When we examined again in 2014–2015, the likelihood of participation of female in elementary education is still less likely to be lower as compared to male students. It has been estimated that the likelihood of enrolment is significantly higher for ST students at elementary in 2007–2008. When we analysed the same groups in 2014–2015, the probability of ST students is significantly higher for the same. It is computed that the probability of attendance for SC students has been not significant at the same level of education in both rounds and however, their corresponding coefficient is positive in the current period. So, the caste background of the SC students does not determine their attendance in rural areas. The coefficient related to OBCs was negatively significant at elementary education in 2007–2008 and shows insignificant in later round. It means that their access to the school level of education is not affected by their social backgrounds later years. The

problem of inequity in coverage and participation has been observed concerning different social groups traditionally identified as underprivileged. Despite special provisions in the constitution to meet the educational need of such groups as SCs and STs, their situation has remained unsatisfactory. When we consider students' religious background with respect to their participation in education in rural areas, it has been estimated that students from Hindu family background significantly participated in elementary education in the 64th round and the same result is not found for the student of Hindu family in later round. Muslim had an insignificant coefficient at elementary education in both periods. The result suggests their probability of access to elementary education is not significantly improved from the previous rounds. It has been argued that Muslim in terms of access to education is the most backward position as compared to other religions as per the Sachar Committee Report (2006). The probability of attendance of Christian students at elementary education was insignificantly lower than reference groups in both survey rounds. The same was significant for Sikhs for concerned stage of education in the 64th round and the probability of Sikhs is estimated again in 2014–2015 and results reflected insignificant coefficients for elementary education. It means that Sikhs religion significantly does not matters for the enrolment of their student in rural areas. The coefficients are positive for all consumption groups at elementary education in both survey periods, meaning that enrolment of children is significantly influenced by economic position of their family in rural areas. Such results are very much consistent with earlier studies (Jha and Parvati, 2014; Tilak, 2015).

The probability of enrolment from all consumption groups has been improved for elementary education over the period. The likelihood of the access to elementary education for the different occupation of rural areas has significantly positive in the 64th round survey, while in 2014, only students belong to regular wage earner family has been significant participation in elementary education across all occupations. The variables related to government, local body and private aided institution/schools were significant negative at all points of time for the concerned level in rural areas. It means that in such institutions students are likely to participate less for acquiring elementary education as compared to the private unaided institution in rural areas over the years. This might be on account of poor quality of schooling, teaching methods and absentia of teachers, lack of infrastructure in a government school in larger part of the country as reported by NEUPA Report (2014). It also noticed that a significant proportion of the rural children received elementary education in private school. The provision of free education has significantly encouraged the enrolment of rural students in elementary education and such provision would encourage the enrolments in elementary education by 1% from the previous period. It was found that probability of attendance of children in elementary education is not significantly determined by the provision of scholarships

in both survey years. The probability of attendance was 29% influenced by the provision of the Mid-day meal scheme in 2007–2008 and this probability is reduced by 1% in 2014–2015 for the attendance in elementary education. Therefore, it may be concluded that free education and a mid-day meal scheme are the main incentives for large scale enrolment in elementary schools in rural areas. It has been analysed that mid-day meal scheme mostly affects the participation of scheduled caste children in the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and allows them to reach higher levels in the education system and lowers the incidence of exclusion, and thus discourage caste discrimination as per findings of Thorat (2005). Our results are very much similar to the findings of Dre’ze and Kingdon (2001) and Kremer and Vermeersch (2004), who find positive impact of school meal programmes on school attendance in India. It has been estimated that nearest schools have significantly recorded higher attendance in elementary education as compared to other variables related to distance of school. This would suggest that the range of school also does matter in access to education for the rural students in both survey periods. It is estimated that among all transport system available, the provision of a school bus has positively determined the participation of students at the elementary level of education in both periods. It means that rural children mostly prefer school bus for attending elementary school and all other means of transport has significantly not encourage participation in elementary education of rural areas.

**Table 2: Result of Maximum Likelihood Probit Model for Participation of Urban Students at Elementary Education during 64<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> NSS Round Surveys**

All Rural Students Education Level	Coefficients	
	Elementary Education	
Independent Variables	64 <sup>th</sup> Round	71 <sup>st</sup> Round
Female <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0230***</b>	<b>-0.0300***</b>
STs <sup>#</sup>	0.0140	-0.00120
SCs <sup>#</sup>	0.00877	-0.00810
OBCs <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0346***</b>	<b>-0.0173*</b>
Hindu <sup>#</sup>	0.0152	-0.0178
Muslim <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0266*</b>	0.0550
Christian <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0442***</b>	-0.0220
Sikhs <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.0749***</b>	-0.0416
Q1 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.298***</b>	<b>0.297***</b>
Q2 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.263***</b>	<b>0.278***</b>
Q3 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.156***</b>	<b>0.185***</b>
Q4 <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.102***</b>	<b>0.139***</b>
Self-Employed <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.204***</b>	<b>0.0684***</b>

*Table 2 contd...*

All Rural Students Education Level	Coefficients	
	Elementary Education	
Independent Variables	64 <sup>th</sup> Round	71 <sup>st</sup> Round
Regular Wage/Salaried <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.190***</b>	<b>0.0826***</b>
Casual Labour <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.168***</b>	<b>0.0479**</b>
Government <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.379***</b>	<b>-0.439***</b>
Local Body <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.293***</b>	NR
Private Aided <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.257***</b>	<b>-0.199***</b>
Free Education <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.0788***</b>	<b>0.0827***</b>
Scholarships <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.148***</b>	<b>-0.168***</b>
Distance < 1 km <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.478***</b>	<b>0.443***</b>
1 km ≤ D < 2 kms <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.287***</b>	<b>0.299***</b>
2 km ≤ D < 3 kms <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.238***</b>	<b>0.225***</b>
3 km ≤ D < 5 kms <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.172***</b>	<b>0.192***</b>
On Foot <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.187***</b>	<b>-0.170***</b>
School/Institution Bus <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.111***</b>	<b>0.164***</b>
Public Transport <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.303***</b>	<b>-0.264***</b>
Bicycle <sup>#</sup>	<b>-0.411***</b>	<b>-0.362***</b>
Mid-Day Meal <sup>#</sup>	<b>0.384***</b>	<b>0.464***</b>
No. of Observations	33,642	39,809

Source: As Table 1.

Note:

1. Q-Consumption Expenditure Quintile, NR-Not Reported
2. (#) dF/dx is for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.
3. Notation for significance level: \*\*\* significant at 1% level ( $p < 0.01$ ), \*\* significant at 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ), \* significant at 10% level ( $p < 0.1$ ).
4. Probit Equation: Dependent Variable in the probit model is the probability of students (1) for those that are attending elementary education and (0) otherwise.

When we employed the probit model for urban areas, it has been estimated that urban female children are less likely to participate in elementary education as compared to their male counterpart. It has been noted that ST students have insignificant result for elementary education in both rounds. It may be due to their dominance in urban areas is insignificant as compared to other social groups. SC students have insignificant result in both rounds. It means that the caste background of scheduled tribes and scheduled caste is not reflected in their participation at elementary education. The probability of participation for OBCs children in elementary education is significantly lower than the general students in both periods, and their likelihood of participation has been improved

for elementary education from the previous round. Religion identity such as Muslim, Christian and Sikhs has a significant negative impact on the probability of participation in elementary education in 2007–2008 and while Hindu identity does not significantly matter for the same. In 2014, religion identity did not matter for the access to education among the religious groups of urban areas. The probit regression estimated that the probability of urban student's attendance from all consumption groups is significantly higher in elementary education in both survey rounds. The coefficients related to the lowest consumption groups has remained the same for elementary education. It has been found that income of the family remained strong determinants in the participation of elementary education and lower consumption group have been relatively more inclusion in the same. The results suggest that urban elementary education also moves towards universal elementary education where a large number of children are enrolled in elementary education across consumption groups.

It has been analysed that the probability related to the participation in elementary education for all consumption groups are higher in urban areas than their rural counterparts and as expected it has been observed that children living in households with more economic resources tend to be more in education and more availability of school. This is the case if their parents have more education, if their father works in a higher-level job. Our results have validated the study of Tilak (1979) and Khalid (2012). The educational inequity existed not only in 2007–2008 but it was continuing at all the point of time. So, household income had a more critical role in school attendance in urban areas. It has been computed that students from different urban occupation like self-employed, regular wage salaried earners and casual work have a significantly higher probability of attendance to elementary education in both periods. On the basis of results, we can say that the occupations of student's family also played a critical role in access to elementary education in urban areas. The regression results also reflect that urban children receiving elementary education in government, local body and private aided institution have significantly less as compared to private unaided school in both rounds. In urban areas, the provision of free education has very similar positive effects on the attendance of the student in elementary education as in rural areas in both rounds. In urban areas, the availability of scholarships on the attendance of urban students has the same effect as in rural areas, and it does not affect positively on the participation of elementary education in both periods. Mid-day meal does positively determine the attendance of urban students in elementary education in both rounds. The regression results also confirmed that among urban child mid-day meal programme plays a very critical role to encourage the attendance of students in elementary education. When we compare its impact with rural areas, such meal programme has less influence among urban students. The probability of attendance is

significantly higher in the nearest school for acquiring elementary education in both rounds across related variables. According to the NSS 71st Round (2014), in rural areas, 94% of households and in urban areas, nearly 93% of households reported the availability of primary school within 1 km from the house. Almost 67% of rural households and 83% of urban households reported upper primary schools within 1 km from the home of the students. An analysis of the selection of means of transport in urban areas provided interesting findings and it has been found that the variable related to school bus has positively increased the probability of attendance in elementary education in both survey rounds, and all other means of transport have significantly lower effects for the same level of participation in said rounds.

## CONCLUSION

Various researches and studies show that social disparities in education still exist and exclusion of specific social groups from education is endemic throughout the country, however, it differs in its degree and nature. The empirical aspects of the study are mainly based on the data of NSSO 64th (2007–2008) and 71st round (2014–2015) on elementary education in India. In recent years some positive developments with respect to girls' education have been witnessed, but despite these positive trends, gender differences have also been observed in both rural and urban areas. It is found that differences in access to elementary education across social groups are more or less significantly prevalent in both regions. It is concluded that students from STs are significantly higher attendance than general students in rural areas while students from SCs and OBCs are significantly lower access to the same level of education and despite various affirmative action, they are still lagging behind the general students in rural areas. In urban areas, STs, SCs and OBCs are deprived groups in access to elementary education over the periods. Muslim student has improved their participation in elementary education in both rural and urban areas. Students from economically backward family still has disadvantage to participate in elementary education in both regions. Among all occupations, casual labours are the most disadvantaged to participate in elementary education. Students from self-employed, regular wage/salaried earners and casual work backgrounds have a significantly higher probability of access to elementary education in both regions. School-related variables such as mid-day meals, free education, the availability of school within the radius of students' house and types of schools/institutes are quite significant in access to elementary education in both regions. A significant proportion of rural and urban children receive elementary education in private school. We have observed that elementary education has registered a remarkable success, resulting more than 96% of all children being enrolled in school. However, many studies have shown that India's elementary education system still faces

severe problems and challenges such as children of the disadvantaged groups are still out of school, inequalities in access to education, financial constraints of parents and poor quality of schooling and lack of infrastructure facilities and so on. Therefore, such issues and problems need to be resolved at the earliest. It can be concluded that if inequalities in access to education exist that will lead to socio-economic disparities in the society. We know that inclusive growth may not be achieved without strong and vibrant education systems with public funding, and government at its initial stage of educational development should divert its funds towards addressing and resolving the issues of access and equity that can lead to upliftment of marginalised and socially deprived groups through its various proposed equity interventions in a proactive manner.

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