

CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is a fundamental right and a critical determinant of socio-economic development. However, in India, dropout rates—especially among marginalized communities—remain a significant challenge. Bhopal, a city with both urban and rural populations, reflects the broader national challenges of educational retention.

School dropout, defined as leaving the formal education system before completing the prescribed course of study, remains a critical challenge worldwide. Globally, UNESCO estimates hundreds of millions of children are out of school due to a complex interplay of social, economic, and institutional factors. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which targets free, equitable primary and secondary education for all, requires addressing dropout at its roots. In India, despite near-universal primary enrollment, dropout rates rise sharply at higher levels. National surveys indicate that about 12.6% of children leave school without completing secondary education. In Madhya Pradesh (MP), the dropout problem is acute: UNICEF reports an upper-primary dropout rate of 7.6% (higher than the national average of 5.6%) and an estimated 450,952 children out of school (2016–17 data). The state government data and news reports likewise highlight worrying trends, especially among girls – for example, one study found the number of adolescent girls dropping out in MP more than doubled between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

School dropout is a critical issue affecting educational outcomes worldwide. Even as enrollment has expanded, a large number of children remain out of school. All around the world, about 251 million children and young people aren't going to school. That's a huge number—and it means that in many low-income countries, around one in every three school-age kids is missing out on an education. For these children, dropping out of school isn't just about missing classes—it's about losing the chance to grow, build a better future, and break the cycle of poverty. Education isn't just important—it's a lifeline for both individuals and the future of their communities and countries.

India, dropout remains a serious concern. Recent statistics indicate that about 12.6% of enrolled students eventually drop out of school. The problem intensifies at higher grade levels: nearly 19.8% of students leave during secondary school and about 17.5% drop out at the upper primary level. These figures show that a significant fraction of children are failing to complete basic schooling. Factors such as poverty-induced child labor and cultural practices (e.g. early marriage) contribute heavily to school discontinuation. For instance, a recent study reports that child labor and early marriage remain among the major reasons why children, especially girls, leave school.

Madhya Pradesh (MP), the state in which Bhopal is located, exhibits pronounced dropout patterns. In many rural parts of Madhya Pradesh, students are leaving school not because they want to, but because they have no choice. Poor infrastructure and the lack of basic facilities make it difficult for them to continue their education. According to the 2025 ASER report, the situation becomes even more concerning during adolescence—around 14.3% of children aged 15 to 16 are out of school. Girls are especially affected, with 15% dropping out compared to 11% of boys. These numbers reflect more than statistics—they highlight the real struggles faced by children and families in accessing quality education. Bhopal, as the state capital, both mirrors and moderates these issues. Understanding dropout in Bhopal’s urban context can shed light on localized causes and help tailor interventions.

This study focuses on Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, as a case study to understand why schoolchildren leave school prematurely. Bhopal, with its mix of city and surrounding rural communities, rich social diversity, and new educational efforts, offers a unique snapshot of the broader challenges in education. Despite receiving considerable government funding, many children in Madhya Pradesh — including in Bhopal — are still dropping out of school. According to media reports, this is often due to poor infrastructure, not enough teachers, and a lack of basic necessities like clean drinking water and proper sanitation facilities. Rural schools in MP often lack furniture and clean toilets, driving especially female students to drop out. At the same time, the economic vulnerability and social norms in the region (including early marriage and gender bias) also impact attendance and retention

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the implementation of numerous government schemes aimed at universal education, school dropout rates in Bhopal remain troubling. This study seeks to identify the socio-economic, familial, and educational factors that contribute to this issue.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the demographic profile of school dropouts in Bhopal.
2. To explore reasons for school dropout.
3. To examine post-dropout activities.
4. To examine the characteristics of, reasons for, determinants of and regional variation of school dropout at India level.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the main socio-economic and educational causes behind school dropout in Bhopal?
2. What are the current occupations and aspirations of school dropouts?

3. What intervention can help reduce dropout rates and improve retention?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study sheds light on why students are dropping out of school in Bhopal. The insights gathered here can help policymakers, schools, NGOs, and government bodies make better decisions and take meaningful action to ensure every child gets access to education.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

This study used a relatively small, non-random sample, so findings should be interpreted with caution. Some categories (e.g., “Other” occupation) are broad. Self-reported reasons for dropout might be biased by stigma or recall. Additionally, the data provide a snapshot and cannot capture trends over time. Future research could use larger samples and statistical modeling to confirm these patterns. Due to lack of time factor the study was not carried out to show trends in school dropout.