Enrolling and Retaining Slum Children in Formal Schools

A Field Survey in Eastern Slums of Kolkata

India is yet to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education or 100 per cent enrolment and retention of children with schooling facilities in all habitations. Despite the government's attempt to achieve this goal through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which has a special focus on girl children, students belonging to disadvantaged families still do not attend classes regularly. This paper examines various reasons for poor attendance behaviour of students in formal schools. On the basis of a study in the eastern slums of Kolkata, it finds that retaining the students in a formal school is far more difficult than enrolling them, particularly if the students are from very poor economic backgrounds.

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Since independence, India has made impressive progress in widening the coverage of elementary education. At the time of independence, the gross enrolment rate in the 6-14 age group was just 42.6 per cent. The rate is now as high as 96.3 per cent [Census 2001]. But on the flip side, the reality is that 42 per cent of the children enrolled still drop out before completing primary education and another 19 per cent drop out at class VI-VIII level.[1] There are still at least one lakh habitations in the country having no schooling facility within one kilometre. Coupled with it there are various systemic issues like inadequate school infrastructure, poorly-functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, large number of vacancies in teaching posts and poor quality of teaching. In short, the country is yet to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), which means 100 per cent enrolment and retention of children with schooling facilities in all habitations. With the laudable goal of achieving UEE, the government has launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills for the children. The programme also has a special focus on girl's education and education of children with special needs.

The basic problem with widening the coverage of elementary education in India is that there are a large number of students from challenging backgrounds both in the rural and urban areas. As the private returns from elementary education are low, the guardians of the students belonging to the disadvantaged families do not assign much value to elementary education.[2] Moreover, the opportunity cost of education for the poor families being low, motivating the families to send their children to primary schools and allowing them to continue the studies there until they finish their primary education are rather difficult. A poor induction rate and a poorer retention rate for the students belonging to these disadvantageous communities are largely explained by these socio-economic factors.

The SSA is trying to face this challenge, among other things, by developing awareness among the disadvantaged people about the value of universal primary education. The issue of retaining the students in primary schools is also being met by inviting the involvement of the concerned community in this process. The non-government organisations that have some expertise in running the alternative formal schools in the slums or remote villages have also been invited to participate as facilitators of SSA in many states of India.

In this paper, we address these issues with reference to field level data collected from the slums of eastern Kolkata, with special reference to the attendance behaviour of the school-going children of the locality. We also try to find out the factors that explain the school attendance behaviour of the students from disadvantaged families of urban slums of Kolkata. The idea is to check whether the type of the school, the educational background of the family including that of the mother as also the income level of the family have any influence on the attendance behaviour of the child of the disadvantaged families in formal schools. Retaining the student in formal schools is a much talked about problem with respect to the vulnerable section of the students. In this paper we have also addressed whether the intervention by the NGOs can help SSA in achieving this goal.

The data was collected in a field survey in the slum-dominated part of east Kolkata between November 2003 and July 2005.[3] The survey covered 9,969 children from 104 schools spread over 11 wards of Kolkata. There are predominantly three types of schools, namely, Kolkata Primary School Council (KPSC)-run schools, Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC)-run schools and 'Shikshalayas' (alternative formal schools run by NGOs). Among the schools, 34 KPSC schools, five KMC schools and 65 Shikshalayas were selected for this study. These schools constitute 52.53 per cent of the total number of schools in 11 selected wards. Most of the children in the sample were from the deprived communities. The attendance behaviour of each child was collected from school records by a set of NGO volunteers known as 'Shishumitas'. The household level data had been collected for a subset of 250 students from the locality.[4] While the household level data had been collected by following the principle of random sampling with

the total enrolled students as the population, the selection of the schools was done according to the reach out of the NGO volunteers.

I
Primary School Students in the Slums of East Kolkata

Locality

Census 2001 was the first census in India that collected data on slums[5] in several Indian towns. According to this census, the size of the slum population in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) is 14.91 lakhs which is 32.55 per cent of the total population. Slums were identified by Census 2001 in as many as 107 KMC wards. The contiguous region of eastern slums of the city, the field area for this study, was located in the Ward 56 to Ward 66 of KMC. The demographic profile of the selected slums (as the Census 2001 data indicate) is presented in Table 1.

The percentage of slum population varied widely among the 11 selected wards. In some of the wards, the percentage of slum population was very high (as high as 99.98 per cent in Tangra, Tiljala) whereas in some other wards the percentage was quite low (as low as 12.85 per cent in Park St, Taltola, Shakespeare Sarani). The proportion of slum children to total child population in the ward had been more than 80 per cent in five among the 11 selected wards. However, there existed a wide inter ward variation in this regard, as well. For example, the percentage had been as high as 100 in Tangra, Tiljala (Ward 57) and as low as 16.72 in Park St, Taltola (Ward 62).

It is widely believed that the percentage of literate people is low in the slums of east Kolkata. But according to Census 2001, in many of the slums the literacy rate is quite high. In the selected wards the typical scenario was that the literacy rate was more than 70 per cent. (In eight out of 11 wards, the literacy rate was higher than 70 per cent. The literacy rate had been found to be more than 60 per cent in three out of 11 wards of the field area.) In fact, as Table 1 indicates, in most of the selected wards, the literacy rate in non-slum regions had not been much higher than what it was in the slums of the ward.

As the experts observe, literacy among the mothers is crucial for attracting a child to elementary education. More educated the mother is, higher is the value for formal education of children. The conventional wisdom is that slum children remain uneducated because the mothers in the slum region are illiterate. But

Census 2001 indicates that the mothers in the slums of Kolkata are not devoid of education. The female literacy in the slum of Ward 58 (the biggest slum in the city) was as high as 56.03 per cent at the time of our survey. In Karya, Tiljala (Ward 64) the rate was still higher (66.43 per cent). In Ward 60 the female literacy rate had been 67.77 per cent. In fact, with the exception of Tangra, Tiljala, the female literacy rate in the slums of the selected wards had been more than 60 per cent.

The physical facilities and socio-economic endowment of the slumdwellers are, however, quite adverse to healthy living. Usually, the residents here live in tiny rooms without proper ventilation. They use common toilets which often remain unclean, they prepare food in unhygienic conditions and they can never afford to offer a child a quiet atmosphere where the child can prepare her lessons. The sewerage here remains unclean. The factories producing rubber and leather products situated in these areas also pollute the local sewage. As a result, the children suffer from several chronic diseases like stomach disorders, skin problems, common cold, etc. The other reason for high morbidity is chronic malnutrition. The level of family income is very low, children therefore hardly get proper and sufficient food. As a result, they suffer from malnutrition and consequently they become susceptible to diseases. The incidence of absence due to sickness is quite high in the schools in this locality.

Migration is another factor that hampers the schooling of the children of the poor families of this locality. The parents of the children who are engaged in petty jobs in different factories have no job security. Periodic job loss is a common phenomenon here. As the family fails to get an alternative means of livelihood in the locality, they move to some other locality, not necessarily near the school where the child has been enrolled. Moreover, large portions of the population in these slums are immigrants from Bihar who seasonally migrates to Bihar, particularly at the time of harvesting. The casualty is the schooling of the child.

The Schools

The schools in which the survey was conducted account for 52.53 per cent of the total schools in the eleven wards of east Kolkata. The major service provider of the selected schools is the KPSC. It covers 68.52 per cent of the total students for whom the programme of monitoring the school attendance was launched. This is consistent with the distribution of school facilities in the slums of Kolkata. Almost in every slum, there is at least one government-sponsored primary school run by the Primary School

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Slums in Kolkata (Ward 56 to Ward 66)

Ward	Ward Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
56	Beniapukur	83.08	35851	8.86	3714	3175	85.49	70.07	67.23	63.03
57	Beniapukur Tangra, Tiljala	86.29	38756	9.59	4194	3715	88.58	72.25	70.51	68.41
58	Tangra, Tiljala	99.98	86605	10.30	8922	8922	100.00	61.84	61.93	56.03
59	Beniapukur, Tapsia	68.90	45922	11.25	6036	5167	85.60	68.06	66.96	63.36
60	Beniapukur	23.64	10044	8.90	3865	894	23.13	73.54	71.01	67.77
61	Beniapukur, Park St	24.31	8295	9.36	3113	776	24.93	80.08	73.73	68.28
62	Park St, Taltola	17.76	8136	8.87	4318	722	16.72	77.84	77.26	75.32
63	Park St, Taltola, Shakespeare Sarani	12.85	4182	9.49	1807	397	21.97	89.04	80.95	78.15
64	Beniapukur, Karaya	54.21	14572	7.19	1865	1047	56.14	75.57	74.58	70.74
65	Karya, Tiljala	91.97	73810	9.15	7031	6756	96.09	72.39	70.83	66.43
66	Tiljala	72.66	51377	11.96	7968	6143	77.10	73.89	70.08	63.57

Note: (1) Percentage of slum population, (2) Slum population, (3) Percentage of slum child population to total slum population, (4) No of children in the ward, (5) No of children in the slum, (6) Slum children/ward children, (7) Percentage literate in the ward, (8) Percentage literate in slums, (9) Female literacy rate in the slums.

Source: *Census of India 2001*, Tables 14 and 15. Provisional Population Totals, Series 20, Paper 2 of 2001.

Council of Kolkata. For the parents, the first option is a nearby KPSC school. There are some Kolkata Municipal Corporation-run primary schools in this area. Some of the slum students get enrolled in these schools. Even the NGO-run schools have space in this locality. The population pressure being very high, the schools run by the state government and the Kolkata municipality cannot provide a seat for each child of the locality. The NGO-run schools try to meet this supply gap. The other important factor that creates a space for NGO-run schools is that these schools run on flexible school schedule that suits some of the families. These schools are often "door step" schools and the parents find it safe to send their girl children to these schools. Commonly known as Shikshalayas, these schools are run by trained NGO volunteers.

Average space available per student is found to be better in both the KMC- and KPSC-run schools. This is due to the fact that these two types of schools get regular financial supports from the state government and can, therefore, develop their infrastructure or maintain them regularly (Table 2). On the contrary, most of the Shikshalayas are run in community halls or covered spaces owned by other institutions. It is not possible for them to offer a larger space to each and every student; what they can only do provide a more caring environment (which is reflected by the lowest average student-teacher ratio in Shikshalayas).

With respect to other facilities (such as playground, drinking water, toilets, etc) that should be made available to the children, quite expectedly, the scenario is quite bad. Most of the schools do not have supply of drinking water or water for other usages. Only 13 of these schools provide toilets for girl students (the number of schools in which the girls are admitted is 100). The children get a playground in only nine out of 104 schools in this locality. However, the data indicate that the KPSC schools are somewhat better placed in this regard (Table 3).

The Students

The survey covered 9,969 school children of the selected 104 schools in this locality. Information with respect to 56 children had not been available. The data set, therefore, consists of 9,913 students. It appears that the gender ratio of this cohort had been adverse to the girl students (47.07 per cent). The school-specific distribution of the gender related data, however, indicates that the gender ratio had been most balanced in the Shikshalayas where the percentage of girl students had been 50.32. The percentage of girl students had been higher in Shikshalayas mostly because, as we pointed out earlier, these were "door-step" schools that can be accessed easily by a girl child.

One disquieting feature is that a large number of students in these schools do not study in the age-specific relevant class. This is particularly true if we consider the age distribution of the students at the higher classes. Normally, a child is inducted into school at the age of four in a KG class. While tracking this child over years, it is normal that the child would be located in class I at the age of five and in the subsequent years in class II, class III, class IV and class V respectively. Thus, at the age of 10+ a child should normally leave the school and pursue her studies in junior high or high schools. What happens here is that even if a child gets admitted to a nearby school at the age of four or five in the age-specific relevant class, the study is interrupted for various reasons as the child intends to move to higher classes. Often the child fails to cope with the academic requirements for

pursuing the curriculum at the higher classes. As a result, either the child drops out or she is found in the school not in the age-specific relevant class, but at a lower class. If we consider the age-specific enrolment in the relevant class as the "net enrolment", the net enrolment rate would be found to be abysmally poor in these schools[6] (Table 5).

It is observed the net enrolment is very poor in every school. It appears that only a tiny section of the students study here in the age-specific relevant class. The scenario is not normal, not as normal as one finds in the schools in non-slum areas of the city.

We would assume that the age-specific relevant class for a student of age five is either kindergarten or class I. Similarly, the age-specific class for a child of age six would be either I or II. The overlapping age-specific class is assumed to exist for a child of higher ages as well.

Even after relaxing the condition of being in the relevant class, i e, even after relaxing the definition of net enrolment in a class, we observe that the scenario is not promising, particularly for

Table 2: Space (Sq Ft)- Student and Teacher-Student Ratio in School

School Type	Average Space Per Student	Average Students Per Teacher
KMC	10.67	47
KPSC	8.16	34
Shikshalaya	4.99	31

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 3: Distribution of Schools on the Basis of Availability of Infrastructure

School Type	Number of Schools with				
	Play Ground	Drinking Water	Water Supply	Electricity	Toilet for Girls
KPSC (34)	9	17	20	27	8
KMC (5)	0	4	3	1	2
Shikshalaya (65)	12	6	9	56	3
total (104)	21	27	32	84	13

Note: Figures in parentheses describe the number of schools in the given category; information not available with respect to electricity facility for one KPSC school.
Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 4: Gender-Specific Distribution of the Students in Different Types of Schools

School Type	Gender			
	Female	Male	NA	Total
KMC	310	432	2	744
KPSC	2997	3472	13	6482
Shikshalaya	1349	1332	6	2687
NA	0	0	56	56
Total	4656	5236	77	9969

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 5: Total Number of Students in Age-Appropriate Class by School Type

School Type	Age-Appropriate Class						
	KG	I	II	III	IV	V	Total
KMC	2	1	2	0	0	1	6
KPSC	4	73	46	22	16	1	162
SHIK	11	11	0	1	0	0	23
Total	17	85	48	23	16	2	191

Note: Age 4 – KG, Age 5 – I, Age 6 – II, Age 7 – III, Age 8 – IV and Age 9 – V.
Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.
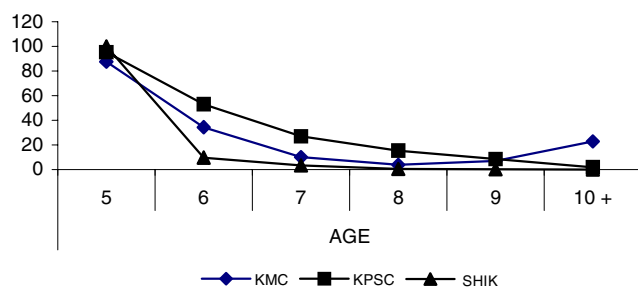
Source: Table 6.

students in 6+ age group. The net enrolment ratio declines sharply after age six even in the KPSC schools. The Shikshalayas most noticeably and the KMC schools to a large extent, have this problem of low net enrolment ratio right from the age 6+. Figure 1 captures this reality. The sharp decline in school-specific difference in net enrolment is revealed in this diagram as we move along the axis describing the age of the student.

Table 7 checks whether there exists any observable variation in the distribution of students in age-specific relevant classes between the boys and the girls in these schools. It seems that no such difference is perceivable in KPSC-, KMC- or Shikshalaya-run schools. The evidence is in favour of the argument that there does not exist any gender-specific variation in net enrolment in these schools. This is a general feature and this does have its impact on both the boys and the girls raised in the slums of east Kolkata.

Since a child in the selected slum areas of Kolkata is not usually admitted in an age-appropriate class, it is not surprising that the class attendance rate[7] of the students in these schools would be rather poor. We discuss this issue on the basis of the relevant field data collected from the select set of 104 schools in the slums of east Kolkata, in the remaining part of this section.

Attendance Behaviour

The information on class attendance had been collected from the attendance records of these schools. The students who were found to attend less than 50 per cent of the total classes in the six months had been grouped together under the nomenclature Follow-Up Priority 1 (FUP 1). The choice of the nomenclature was guided by the fact that any intervention for ensuring retention of the students should address this group first; first priority must be placed on this group which appears to be most vulnerable. The students attending more than 80 per cent of the classes held within this reference period constitute the most regular batch and they were assigned FUP 3. The students, who were found to attend more than 50 per cent but less than 80 per cent of the classes held during the session, belonged to FUP 2.

Out of 9,955 students, 8,598 students had been tracked[8] by the NGO volunteers during November 2003 and April 2004. The percentage of tracked students had been the highest for class IV (98.09); the percentage tracked had been marginally lower for students in class III (96.88). It appears that the percentage of tracked students had been very high for all other classes as well except for the students in KG class.

The attendance behaviour described in Table 8 indicates that only 38.96 per cent of the students were attending more than

80 per cent of the classes held during this period and the percentage of students attending less that 50 per cent of the classes held during this period was 24.53 (Table 8). It is true that the incidence of not attending the school regularly (FUP 1) was lower than that of regular attendance in these schools. But then, the percentage of students in FUP 1 was not at all negligible; the data indicate that about one-fourth of the students in these schools belonged to the vulnerable section that might dropout in subsequent years.

II
Causes of Low Attendance

What causes the poor attendance rate of the students in these selected slums? We have performed an empirical analysis on the basis of the relevant information collected from a select set of households in the locality having their wards enrolled in any of the schools from which the child-specific attendance records were collected. The sample size (of the households) had been 250. The households were visited to collect the information on the level of educational attainment of female guardian of the

**Table 6: Percentage of Students in the Age-Appropriate Class
by School Type**

School Type	Age					
	5	6	7	8	9	10 +
KMC	87.5	34.29	10.14	3.81	6.94	22.76
KPSC	95.35	53.21	27.15	15.37	8.62	1.94
SHIK	100	9.7	3.4	0.47	0.28	0

Note: Age 4 – KG, Age 5 – KG or I, Age 6 – I or II, Age 7 – II or III, Age 8 – III or IV, Age 9 – IV or V and Age 10+ – V.
Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

**Table 7: Percentage of Female and Male Students in the
Age-Appropriate Class**

Age	Gender	KPSC	KMC	Shikshalaya
5	F	88.89	100	100
	M	90.6	100	100
6	F	66.04	17.39	28.9
	M	62.09	34.48	28.39
7	F	21.26	4	9.14
	M	21.56	5.36	5.43
8	F	13.66	1.64	5.75
	M	11.47	10	2.37
9	F	8.61	3.85	0
	M	8.15	2.78	0
10 +	F	1.16	16.16	0
	M	1.94	14.19	0

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

**Table 8: Class-wise Distribution of the Attendance
Performance on the Basis of the Records for Six Months**

Class	1	2	3	Total Tracked	Total Students	PC Tracked
KG	539	374	222	1135	2116	53.64
I	761	1116	865	2742	2910	94.23
II	387	648	901	1936	2016	96.03
III	248	540	735	1523	1572	96.88
IV	158	420	601	1179	1202	98.09
V	16	38	25	79	83	95.18
N A		3	1	4	56	7.14
Total	2109	3139	3350	8598	9955*	86.38

Note: (1) FUP 1, (2) FUP 2 and (3) FUP 3, * excluding 14 students in the preparatory class.
Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

student, highest level of education in the family, number of family members (adult and minor) and the total monthly income of the family, as revealed by the family members. The analysis also utilised the information on the child from the school records as under the type of school (namely, KPSC, KMC and Shikshalayas) in which the ward was studying, gender of the child, his/her religious identity, age of the student, whether the child was studying in an age-appropriate class and the municipal ward to which his/her family belonged.

We have also performed a regression analysis with the percentage of classes attended by a student, on an average, during November 2003-April 2004 as the explained variable and the set of explanatory variables are given below:

X_1 = School type; KPSC = 1, 0 otherwise
X_2 = Gender; Male = 1, 0 otherwise
X_3 = Religion; Hindu = 1, 0 otherwise
X_4 = Studying in the proper class; age appropriate class = 1, 0 otherwise
X_5 = Education of female guardian, those who had completed class X = 1, 0, otherwise
X_6 = Highest education level in the family, education level above class X = 1, 0 otherwise
X_7 = Ward number, Ward 57*, 58* and 65* = 0, 1 otherwise (* wards with percentage of slum population 86.29, 99.98 and 91.97, respectively.)
X_8 = Age in complete years
X_9 = Monthly per capita income in current prices
D = Dummy for attendance behaviour
D = 1, if the attendance is more than 85 per cent
= 0, otherwise.

The results of the original logistic regression (OLS) after running the data in SPSS 10.0, reveal that the suggested variables can explain the attendance behaviour of the students at a satisfactory level (R^2 = 0.654, with F = 45.001). There is a clear difference in two subsets, i e, the students who were more regular in schools (attending more than 85 per cent of the classes) and the others, belonging to this set of households.[9]

The regression results indicate that there are three factors which are statistically significant (at least at 10 per cent level of significance). These are "type of school", "the education level of female guardian" and "per capita monthly income of the family". The per capita income is found to be a statistically significant factor, but it works in the reverse direction. Less is the level of per capita income in the family, more regularly the ward attends classes. The result contradicts the conventional wisdom but it seems that the sign of the estimated regression coefficient tries to highlight a truth. The schools here provide food ration for the students. The students coming from very poor families bank on this food ration. One cannot get the ration unless one attends the school. To the poor families, the food ration matters very much which is why the child is regularly sent to school. At the higher income level, the family can exercise the option of not

sending the child regularly to school if the alternative engagement of the child is more rewarding – more than what is compensated by the food ration; the child might give some supportive services for sustaining the family at that level of income. The trade-off in this case would work against going to school regularly – a factor that might have contributed to the negative sign of the estimated coefficient of per capita income as an independent variable of the model.[10]

The other factor, which is found to be statistically significant, is the level of the education of the female guardian of the child. The regression results indicate that the attendance behaviour of the child improves when the female guardian's education level increases more than school leaving level (class X).

Again, a student studying in a KPSC school was found to attend classes more regularly than a student in Shikshalaya does.[11] The attendance was found to increase by more than 9 per cent if the student was from a KPSC school. The result is statistically significant even at 5 per cent level of significance. Our interpretation is that KPSC schools which have relatively better infrastructure might be more attractive to the children. That is why the attendance behaviour is better in the KPSC schools. Better infrastructural facilities thus appear to have a favourable effect on class attendance. The other reason might be that a non-KPSC cohort which consists of students belonging to alternative formal schools (the Shikshalayas) is a difficult cohort. It consists of difficult boys and girls who have the tendency to withdraw from formal schools. It is quite likely that the cohort in the Shikshalayas would be attending classes less regularly. In fact, this is the challenge that the alternative formal schools are supposed to face.

To conclude, the regression results based on the data collected from 250 households indicate that the per capita income, the highest education of the female guardian and the type of school in which the child is pursuing his/her study are the factors that might have some influence on the attendance behaviour of the student.

III
Retention Problem

Retention Rate

Out of 9,969 students registered in these schools in the Session 2003-04, only 7,723 were found to continue in these schools in the next session, i e, only 78.52 per cent students was found to be retained in the next session (Table 10).

At the beginning of the third session (May 2005-July 2005) another 1,602 students were found to be discontinuing (Table 11), i e, only 61.75 per cent of the students of the initial cohort were found to be continuing. The classwise details contained in Tables 11 and 12, however, indicate that the scenario might not be deplorable as the aggregate data indicate. Out of 3,792 students who were missing from the initial cohort of 9,913[12] students, 2,182

Table 9: The Results of OLS Regression

	Intercept	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5	X_6	X_7	X_8	X_9	D
$\hat{\beta}$	0	0.094**	(-) 0.029	0.008	(-) 0.006	0.076***	0.019	0.033	0.003	(-) 0.068***	0.782*
s e	13.955	5.381	3.011	3.885	4.707	14.949	6.551	3.996	1.532	0.008	3.051

R^2 = 0.654, F = 45.001*
Note: * significant at 0 per cent level, ** significant at 5 per cent level and *** significant at 10 per cent level.
Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

had left the school only after class IV or class V, i e, at the end of primary level schooling. Excluding this group, we find that the retention rate in these schools had been 87.51 per cent in the first session and 90.22 per cent in the second session.[13] The rates appeared to be quite promising. In session I, there had been 7,056 students in PREP – class II level. This sub-cohort should be in the school even at the beginning of session III. What we observed was that of the total retainable (7,056) students in the cohort of 9,913, the number of students retained after two successive sessions was 4,463; i e, only 63.25 per cent of the members of this cohort.

The reality, therefore, is that 36.75 per cent of the students in this sub-cohort had been missing from schools only after two successive sessions. If this indicates any trend, the retention rate was expected to go down further in subsequent sessions.

Quality of Retention

Retaining a student in a school indicates that the child has been placed in the proper social milieu; he or she has not dropped out from school, neither has the child been engaged in other activities inappropriate for a person in the lower age group. However, retention of a child in a school does not contribute to his/her learning process, if the retention is not associated with getting promoted to higher classes and ultimately passing out from primary school. We would consider this aspect of the problem now.

Out of 6,121 students retained in all three sessions, 3,250 had been promoted from session I to session II, 2,866 had been detained in the same class. There had been five cases in which demotion took place. Tables 12 contains the summary information. The performance of this batch of 6,121 students at the end of session II has been summarised in Table 13. Comparing the findings of Tables 12 and 13, we observe that the schools could not apply "no detention policy" with respect to 46.82 per cent students in the continuing cohort at the end of session I. The rate was 40.45 per cent in session II.

IV
Role of Intervention

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan aims at 100 per cent enrolment and retention of children in formal schools. As the field data indicate, even if enrolment is ensured, it is very difficult to improve the retention rate in schools that enrol mainly children from disadvantaged families. A sizeable section of the enrolled students do not attend classes regularly. Even when the children are retained in the formal schools, many of them cannot cope with the curriculum of school education and fail to get promoted to higher classes. Such children would gradually drop out from formal schools and join the labour force at a very early age.[14]

What kind of intervention is required to improve the retention rate? Admittedly, the long-run results can only be achieved if, in future, the socio-economic endowments of the disadvantaged families are improved. But can anything be done under the present dispensation? As we argue in this section, a better monitoring of the school-going children might produce some positive results, particularly in improving the quality of retention which, inter alia, would induce the children to attend formal schools even when the general ambiance is not conducive to valuing elementary education.

In east Kolkata slums, such monitoring is being done by one NGO in the locality[15] that provides support to the programme of retaining the disadvantaged children in the formal school by offering support services to the schools in the form of tracking the students and intervening through home visits in case of defaulting students. The students in the continuing cohort, particularly the students of Shikshalayas, had been most exposed to such an intervention programme as because they were continuing the studies in the same set of schools where the intervention programme was in vogue for three consecutive sessions.

Table 11: Distribution of the Students over Class in Session II and Session III

Class	Session III								
Session II	KG	I	II	III	IV	V	Total Continuing	Dis-continued	Total
KG	961	152	15	9	5		1142	174	1316
I	32	785	763	31	9		1620	157	1777
II	18	34	390	1252	7		1701	92	1793
III	11	13	4	267	1169		1464	109	1573
IV	1	1	1		71	118	192	960	1152
V						2	2	110	112
Total	1023	985	1173	1559	1261	120	6121	1602	7723

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 12: Performance of Students in Session I

Class in Session I	Promoted	Demoted	Detained	Total
PREP	2			2
KG	592		1139	1731
I	1263	1	1028	2292
II	1208	3	439	1640
III	183	1	251	435
IV	2		9	11
Total	3250	5	2866	6121

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 10: Distribution of the Students over Class in Session I and Session II

Class	Session II									
Session I	KG	I	II	III	IV	V	Total Continuing	Discontinued	NA	Total
PREP	2						2	12		14
K G	1312	637	4	1			1954	162		2116
I	1	1137	1319	5			2462	448		2910
II	1	3	467	1288			1759	257		2016
III			1	278	1094		1373	199		1572
IV			2	1	58	106	167	1035		1202
V						6	6	77		83
NA							0		56	56
Total	1316	1777	1793	1573	1152	112	7723	2190	56	9969

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

An analysis of the association between the performance (captured through "getting promoted" and "being detained") of the students and the degree of intervention by NGO might help us understand whether the NGO intervention had any positive results.

The programme of intervention involves visiting the homes of the children who have failed to attend a critical minimum number of classes (more than 50 per cent) in a phase (of one week duration) and finding out the reasons behind this incidence of non-attendance. After ascertaining the reasons,[16] the intervener is supposed to take a strategy,[17] mostly in the form of advice, so that the child returns to school and attend the classes regularly in the next phase. Such intervention is usually done by the community volunteers and a section of the motivated teachers. It is claimed to have produced positive results, particularly when a proper strategy is adopted. The present researchers collected the relevant data on the "success" and "failure" with respect to such a programme. The results of the survey might be presented first.

Field visits revealed that sickness was the major reason (32.06 per cent of the cases) behind the irregular attendance of the students. As we mentioned earlier, the children here generally suffer from malnutrition because they do not get adequate and proper food. Consequently, a large number of the children periodically suffer from illness (catching cold, running fever, stomach upset are the common diseases that the children suffer from in the slums of east Kolkata.). The next important reason (19.71 per cent) for long absence is seasonal and non-seasonal migration. This arises out of the fact that a section of the families here cannot settle permanently because of the absence of regular jobs. Frequently they move from one place to another in search of a better job. As a result, a child is uprooted from the school. Sometimes it also happens that the family comes back to the old locality and the child is again sent to school, usually to the same school where the child had been enrolled earlier. Consequently, the child is recorded as being absent for certain period in a year.18 Lack of motivation (18.07 per cent) is found to be the next important factor for being absent. Joining the labour force did not appear to be a major reason of absence (only 0.89 per cent).

The community volunteers known as shishumitas, in consultation with the teachers and the well-meaning community leaders, adopt an "appropriate" strategy. The field data indicate that such a strategy often produces desirable results. It was observed that the shishumitas performed 4,977 visits to the families of the target group of absentee students and out of 4,977 visits, the adopted strategies had been found to be successful for 2,433 times, i e, for 48.88 per cent cases the adopted strategies succeeded in raising the attendance of the child concerned (Table 14).

Did such intervention have any effect on improving the quality of retention? We tried to look into this issue and observed the following:

As the number of home visits increases the child is found to develop seriousness in his/her school prescribed studies and consequently, he/she succeeds in getting promoted in next higher class. Outside intervention therefore, is conducive to improving the quality of retention in these schools. We would elaborate this with the help of the field data.

During two successive sessions, the NGO volunteers and the teachers visited 4,435 houses; the number of times the visits were done had been 9,335. On an average, therefore, the family of a targeted student was visited more than twice during this period. Counselling had been done, and some positive results did emerge. In order to check whether such visits could improve the quality of retention in a school we took a sub group of 4,629 students, 2,683 of whom succeeded in getting promoted to higher classes in consecutive two academic sessions and the remaining 1,946 had to be detained in the same class during the same sessions. The records of home visits indicate that 1,572 students belonging to this group had been exposed to the strategy of intervention through home visit by the NGO volunteers and the teachers. As Table 16 indicates, intervention had a positive effect on the academic performance of the student. Moreover, as the intensity of intervention (captured in repeated visits) increases, the percentage of the students getting promoted in successive sessions increases. A non-parametric (x^2) test on the data with the null hypothesis that there is no association between getting promoted or failed in two successive sessions and the degree of intervention stands rejected at 5 per cent level of significance at every level of intensity of home visit.[19]

The results are quite robust. Had there been no intervention by shishumitas, possibly a larger percentage of students could have been detained in the same class. The social reality is that demotivation increases as a student from the vulnerable section of the society – first generation students in many cases – fail to go through the curriculum-based requirements in the formal schools. Demotivation leads to dropping out from formal schools. Parents often work out an immediate trade-off between retaining

Table 13: Performance of Students in Session II

Class in Session II	Promoted	Demoted	Detained	Total
KG	181	0	961	1142
I	803	32	785	1620
II	1259	52	390	1701
III	1169	28	267	1464
IV	118	3	71	192
V	0	0	2	2
Total	3530	115	2476	6121

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 14: Extent of Effectiveness of the Strategies

Strategy	Failure	Success	Total	Success Rate
1 Advising for medical consultation	198	285	483	59.01
2 Counselling the parents	1809	1818	3627	50.12
3 Motivating the community members	293	197	490	40.20
4 Meeting the employer	5	2	7	28.57
5 Provided other referral services	3	6	9	66.67
6 Seeking help of school teacher	170	84	254	33.07
7 Others	66	41	107	38.32
Total	2544	2433	4977	48.88

Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

Table 15: Intensity of Home Visit and Quality of Retention

No of Home Visit	Total	PC Promoted*
1	922	64.43
2	319	71.79
3	156	78.85
4	65	78.46
5 and above	110	87.27
Total	1572	69.53

Note: *Consecutively in Session I and Session II.
Source: Field Survey, November 2003-July 2005.

the students in the formal schools and getting the boy/girl engaged in some other activities that might help the family in its struggle for existence. If the ward gets success in formal education as reflected in getting promotion to higher classes, the immediate trade-off does not usually work against retaining the child in the system of formal schools. The intervention by shishumita plays a positive role in this context, as the results of statistical tests indicate.

Conclusion

To conclude, India is yet to achieve the targeted goal of UEE. The government has launched the SSA, which is trying to face this challenge by developing awareness among the disadvantaged parents. The non-government organisations have also been invited to participate as facilitators of the SSA in many states of India.

The ground reality, however, is that the students belonging to the disadvantaged families still do not attend classes regularly. Even if they are induced to get enrolled in formal schools, thanks to SSA retaining them in the school till they complete the primary education is still a big problem. On the basis of the field data collected from the eastern slums of Kolkata, we, in this paper, tried to find out the factors that explain the poor attendance behaviour of the students in the formal school.

Retaining the students in formal school is far more difficult than enrolling them, particularly if the students are from very poor economic background. The scenario is not expected to change radically unless the basic socio-economic issues related to the disadvantaged families are addressed properly. The field survey, however, indicates that the intervention by the NGOs might have a positive contribution in meeting this challenge. For such cases where absenteeism can be checked by counselling of the parents as also by developing community consciousness, the NGOs with their flexibility in approach can contribute positively in this endeavour. The NGO intervention may also help the child in improving her school performance (thus getting mental incentive in continuing education), as the field data indicate. 🄴🄿🅆

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Notes

1 Around 50 per cent dropout at primary level as recorded in the NSSO 55th round survey and according to Census 2001, 43.5 per cent of children in 5-9 age group are not continuing in school.
2 The private return from elementary education is low also for the students from more affluent families. The trade- off- there is calculated on the basis of the future private return on human capital from higher education for which elementary education is essential.
3 The period included the second half of the academic session 2003-04, full academic session of the next year (2004-05) and first three months of the third session.
4 The survey was conducted by CINI ASHA (Ref: *Tracing School Children in Kolkata Slums,* A CINI ASHA Project on Slum Children of Kolkata).
5 The Census 2001, Government of India, identified slums of a city as follows:
   (i) All areas notified as 'slum' by the state/local government or union territory administration under any act;
   (ii) All areas recognised as slum by state/local government or union territory which have not been formally notified as slum under any act;
   (iii) A compact area of at least 300 populations or above 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, having unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities.
   (Census of India, Circular No 9, 2001)
6 Sometimes it is found that a child of age four or five is admitted even in higher classes. This is largely due to ignorance of the guardians and lack of proper scrutiny on behalf of the school authority.
7 Number of days present as percentage of total number of working days in a school.
8 i e, their attendance behaviour has been tracked by collecting information on class attendance from school records.
9 The standardised Beta coefficient of D is 0.782 which is statistically significant at 0 per cent.
10 We should mention that the average per capita income of these families is quite low (Rs 270 per month). The relatively better off families have usually a supplementary source of income (running a small tea shop, bidi binding, preparing packages from newspaper) or both the parents in such families perform outside job. In both the cases, the child is used for supportive service, such as sibling care, assisting in family shop, etc.
11 Non-KPSC group consists of students studying in shikshalayas or in KMC schools. However, in the cohort of 250 students on which the information has been collected for regression analysis, there did not exist any student from KMC schools (the percentage of students in KMC schools had been only 7.46 in the population of 9,969 students).
12 Excluding 56 for which no information was available.
13 Retention Rates in Session I and Session II

	Students in the Cohort			Continuing			Discontinued			Retention Rate
	A	B	Total	C	D	Total	E	F	Total	
Session I	8628	1285	9913	7550	173	7723	1078	1112	2190	87.51
Session II	6459	1264	7723	5927	194	6121	532	1070	1602	91.76

`A=Class PREP – III , B=Class IV-V, C and E refer to A and D and F refers to B.
14 The legal embargo imposed recently by the Supreme Court on child labour may not thwart the process because the child might not be formally found to do such prohibited jobs.
15 CINI ASHA that runs most of the shikshalayas in this area.
16 The major reasons are illness of the child, seasonal and non-seasonal migration of the parent, joining the labour force, lack of motivation of the child and also his/her parents, sibling care, poor performance in the school, early marriage of the girls, insufficient coaching, ill health of the parents, distance of the school etc.
17 They advised several strategies such as consultation with doctors for the proper treatment of the sick children; they sometimes tried to solve the problems by talking to the parents, community members and employers (for those who had joined the labour force); they had also talked to the school teachers to overcome the problems the students face in the school and they also provided some other referral services.
18 The intervener can hardly do anything except bringing the child back to school, if and when the family returns to the same or to a nearby slum.
19 Thus, the estimated $\chi2$ at 1 degree of freedom had been 20.52, which is higher than the theoretical value (3.84) at 5 per cent level of significance for the set of data when the intensity of home visit had been "5 and above".

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