

Educational And Social Outcomes Of Economically And Socially Disadvantaged Students In A Vhp-Managed Free Residential School: A Case Study Of Birsa Vidya Mandir, Jharkhand.

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Abstract

Background: Education plays a significant role in improving the lives of economically and socially disadvantaged children. This study focuses on Birsa Vidya Mandir, a VHP-managed free residential school in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, which provides education, hostel accommodation, food, clothing, and academic supervision to students from low-income families. The problem addressed in this study is the limited understanding of how a free residential schooling model influences educational achievement and social development among economically vulnerable students. The objectives are to examine students' academic progress, social development, institutional support systems, challenges, and aspirations.

Materials and Methods: The study employs a qualitative case study design, based solely on primary data collected from 47 male students in classes III-VIII, aged 7–12 years. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and field observations, and were analysed thematically.

Results: The findings reveal noticeable improvement in academic performance, discipline, communication skills, leadership qualities, and aspirations for social mobility. However, students continue to face subject-specific challenges, particularly in Mathematics, English, and Science, alongside structural constraints such as low teacher salaries.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the residential schooling model contributes positively to academic and social transformation while requiring institutional strengthening for sustained impact.

Keywords: Educational Achievement, Social Development, Residential Schooling, Economically and Socially Disadvantaged Students, Semi-structured interview.

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I. Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a transformative instrument for improving the lives of economically and socially disadvantaged children. In Jharkhand, where many families are engaged in informal and low-income occupations such as farming, daily wage labour, rickshaw pulling, driving, brick-making, and construction work, access to structured and supportive schooling remains critical. Birsa Vidya Mandir, a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)-managed free residential school located in Hazaribagh, provides free education, hostel accommodation, food, clothing, and academic supervision to students from vulnerable backgrounds. In this study, “economically and socially disadvantaged students” refers to children from low-income households with limited parental education, ranging from illiterate to 12th standard. “Educational achievement” denotes academic improvement, examination performance, and subject comprehension, while “social development” includes discipline, communication skills, leadership, teamwork, value formation, and aspirational orientation within a structured residential environment.

Existing literature demonstrates that intergenerational and socio-economic conditions deeply influence educational outcomes. Research on residential schooling highlights long-term intergenerational impacts on educational attainment, including reduced educational outcomes among descendants and the influence of household income and food insecurity (Jones, 2024; Bougie & Sénécal, 2010). Global evidence indicates that socio-economic disparities remain embedded in education systems, affecting achievement and wellbeing (OECD, 2018; Ryan, 2017; Lagravinese et al., 2020). In India, studies reveal continuing barriers in access, inclusion, and higher education for disadvantaged groups despite policy initiatives (Kumar & Singh, 2023–24; Sahoo, 2025). Social-emotional factors, engagement, and institutional support are also found to influence academic performance

and persistence significantly (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Obrovská et al., 2024; Cojocaru & Țabără, 2024). Co-curricular programming and social assistance initiatives contribute to motivation but may not, on their own, ensure long-term human capital development (Karunakar, 2020; Suputra & Eddyono, 2025).

While substantial research exists on socio-economic disadvantage, intergenerational inequality, and policy interventions, limited field-based evidence examines the functioning and lived experiences within VHP-managed free residential schools in Jharkhand. There is insufficient empirical understanding of how institutional support, discipline, infrastructure, and hostel environments influence both academic achievement and social development at the primary and upper-primary levels.

This study aims to examine the educational achievement and social development of students enrolled at Birsa Vidya Mandir; analyse their socio-demographic backgrounds and reasons for admission; assess academic support systems and learning challenges; and understand their aspirations and perceptions of social mobility.

The study is confined to 47 male students in classes III-VIII, aged 7–12 years, residing in the hostel of Birsa Vidya Mandir, Hazaribagh. The findings are strictly based on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations within this institutional context.

II. Materials And Methods

Intergenerational and Socioeconomic Impacts of Residential Schools and Social Disadvantage on Education

The intergenerational legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada presents a complex and deeply rooted challenge affecting Indigenous educational attainment across multiple generations. Jones (2024) notes that although earlier research suggested that attendance at residential schools increased human capital among the original attendees, this positive effect did not extend to their descendants. Instead, subsequent generations experience significantly lower educational attainment. The underlying causes are multifaceted, with cultural detachment and the disintegration of family relationships emerging as central factors. The forced assimilation policies employed by these schools severed Indigenous children from their cultural heritage. They disrupted traditional family structures, thereby undermining the transmission of educational and social capital from parents to children. This breakdown in intergenerational continuity contributes to a reversal of the typical positive correlation between parental and offspring educational outcomes.

Bougie and Sénécal (2010) reinforce these findings by showing that children whose parents attended residential schools are less likely to succeed academically. Their study highlights that this adverse intergenerational effect is not solely a direct consequence of the residential school experience but is partially mediated by adverse household circumstances. These include lower household income, food insecurity, overcrowding, and poor housing conditions—factors that collectively diminish the resources and stability necessary for educational success. Such socioeconomic disadvantages reflect the broader social and economic marginalisation faced by Indigenous communities, perpetuating cycles of educational inequity.

This intergenerational transmission of disadvantage mirrors global trends where socioeconomic status remains a predominant determinant of educational outcomes. The OECD (2018) report underscores that equity in education is far from achieved worldwide, with socioeconomic disparities deeply embedded in education systems. Ryan (2017) further identifies persistent social disadvantage as encompassing multiple dimensions, including family structure, disability, and parental education levels, all of which negatively influence children's educational trajectories. The work of Lagravinese, Liberati, and Resce (2020) adds a nuanced understanding by employing advanced analytical models to demonstrate that students from disadvantaged economic, social, and cultural backgrounds face disproportionately higher challenges in achieving educational efficiency. Their findings reveal significant heterogeneity both within and between countries, indicating that systemic socioeconomic inequalities, rather than educational systems alone, are major contributors to persistent educational disparities. This evidence strongly advocates for comprehensive public policies that simultaneously address socioeconomic inequalities and educational reforms to promote equitable opportunities and outcomes.

Equity, Access, and Inclusion in Education for Disadvantaged Groups

Equity in education, as defined by the OECD (2018), involves ensuring that all students—regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or other background factors—have access to equal learning opportunities. Importantly, equity does not imply uniform educational outcomes but rather that differences in achievement should not be systematically linked to factors beyond students' control. This principle underpins numerous educational policies aimed at fostering inclusion and reducing disparities.

In India, the Right to Education (RTE) Act mandates the admission of children from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) into private unaided schools, aiming to enhance educational access and inclusion. Kumar and Singh (2023-24) investigate the academic and social experiences of these children, revealing a mixed picture. While many students report positive academic engagement and a generally inclusive

social environment, significant challenges remain. Language barriers, conceptual difficulties in understanding curriculum content, and occasional experiences of social discomfort or discrimination hinder full integration and academic progress. These challenges highlight the critical need for enhanced pedagogical approaches tailored to the diverse needs of disadvantaged students, alongside targeted teacher training that emphasises inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. Structured support mechanisms, including language assistance and psychosocial support, are essential to ensure that inclusion translates into meaningful educational participation and achievement.

Economic barriers to higher education in India remain a significant impediment for marginalised groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, rural populations, and first-generation learners. Sahoo (2025) critically examines these barriers, noting that despite government initiatives like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), and University Grants Commission (UGC) scholarships, systemic issues persist. Merit-based financial aid often excludes the most disadvantaged, bureaucratic inefficiencies delay or prevent aid distribution, and the digital divide further marginalises students lacking access to technology. These intersecting barriers restrict access, retention, and successful completion of higher education programs.

Comparative international experiences offer valuable lessons. Countries such as Germany and the United States have implemented tuition-free education models, centralised and streamlined financial aid systems, and integrated vocational education pathways that better accommodate diverse learner needs. Sahoo (2025) advocates for expanding public investment in higher education, universalising need-based financial aid, strengthening digital infrastructure to bridge access gaps, and promoting community-based open learning initiatives. Such policies are vital to transforming higher education into a genuine engine of social mobility and inclusive national development, aligned with global frameworks like Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) and India's Vision Viksit Bharat @2047.

Social-Emotional and Behavioural Factors Influencing Academic Achievement

Academic achievement among socioeconomically disadvantaged students is deeply intertwined with social-emotional and behavioural factors that operate across multiple ecological levels. Becker and Luthar (2002) propose a comprehensive, interdisciplinary model that identifies four critical components influencing learning outcomes: academic and school attachment, teacher support, peer values, and mental health. These factors can act both as risks and protective buffers. For example, strong teacher support and positive peer influences can mitigate the adverse effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, promoting resilience and academic engagement. Conversely, poor mental health, weak attachment to school, and negative peer dynamics exacerbate learning difficulties and widen achievement gaps.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, Obrovská, Majčík, and Simonová (2024) examine a national project in the Czech Republic aimed at supporting disadvantaged schools. Their findings reveal that interventions predominantly focus on enhancing students' emotional and behavioural engagement through experiential learning activities and dedicated personnel roles. While these measures address important affective and social dimensions, cognitive engagement and direct academic achievement strategies receive comparatively less emphasis. This imbalance raises concerns that student engagement may become a goal in itself, detached from actual learning outcomes. The study advocates for integrated approaches that simultaneously nurture emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement to more effectively close educational achievement gaps.

Complementing these findings, Cojocaru and Țabără (2024) investigate students' well-being in disadvantaged secondary schools in Romania using the Adolescent Wellbeing Scale (EPOCH). Their quantitative analysis reveals generally low levels of well-being, characterised by positive interpersonal relationships but also by indifference toward participation in activities and a propensity to abandon goals prematurely. These patterns underscore the complex relationship between well-being, motivation, and academic persistence. The study emphasises the need for well-being-centred educational strategies to reduce demotivation and school violence, thereby fostering safer, more supportive learning environments conducive to academic success among disadvantaged populations.

Role of Co-Curricular Activities and Social Assistance in Enhancing Educational Outcomes

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities constitute crucial components of holistic education, particularly for marginalised children in residential and disadvantaged settings. Karunakar (2020) documents the efforts of Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions (TSWREIS) to implement a comprehensive framework encompassing curricular, co-curricular, and student-centric programs. These initiatives include diverse activities such as Saturday Clubs, language enrichment, dramatics, community outreach, mock parliaments, and health awareness campaigns. Such programs not only enrich the academic experience but also promote cultural values, personality development, and essential 21st-century skills. The vibrant campus life created through these activities fosters student engagement, empowerment, and improved educational outcomes.

In Jakarta, Suputra and Eddyono (2025) evaluate the Kartu Jakarta Mahasiswa Unggul (KJMU) program, a targeted social assistance initiative designed to enhance access to higher education for marginalised students. Their study, grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour and analysed through Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), reveals that while the program positively influences recipients’ academic motivation and behaviours, it does not directly translate into measurable improvements in human capital quality indicators such as academic achievement, employability, or study efficiency. Academic performance showed the strongest positive association, whereas employability outcomes showed the weakest association. These findings suggest that financial assistance alone is insufficient to realise educational and social mobility goals fully. The authors recommend complementary measures, including career mentoring, soft skills development, and post-graduation support, to enhance the long-term efficacy of social assistance programs. Collectively, these insights highlight that comprehensive support systems—combining financial aid, enriched educational environments, and developmental programming—are essential for empowering disadvantaged students and fostering sustained academic and social success.

Would you like assistance in synthesising these expanded themes into a unified narrative or in developing specific sections for greater clarity and coherence?

III. Methodology

Study Design & Study Location: This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the educational achievement and social development of economically and socially disadvantaged students enrolled at Birsa Vidya Mandir, a VHP-managed free residential school in Jharkhand.

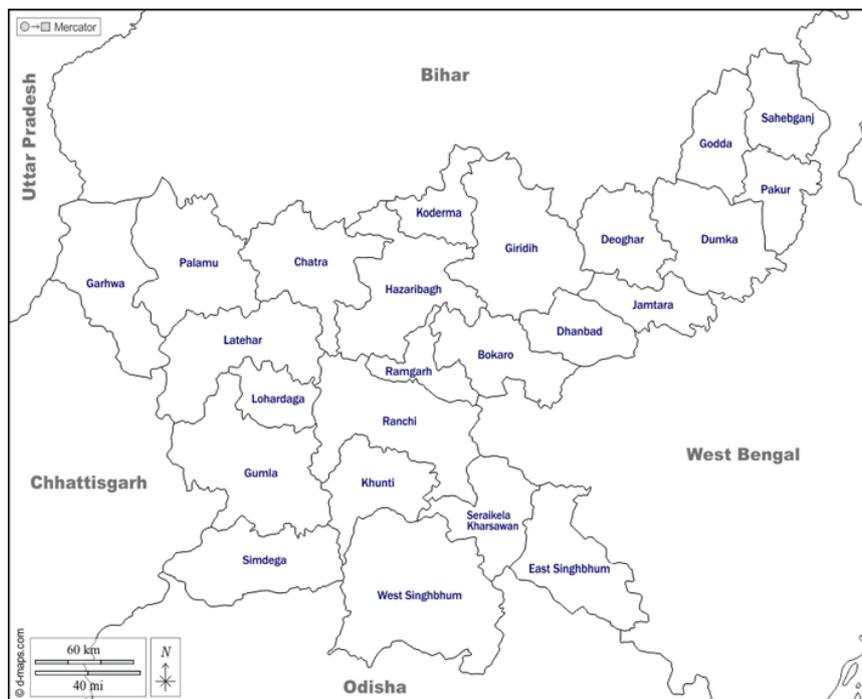


Fig. 1: Map of Jharkhand Published by d-maps.com



Fig. 2: Image of the School taken by a Research Scholar during study

The case study approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of institutional functioning, students' lived experiences, and the contextual realities within a specific educational setting. The research is primarily based on field-collected primary data from students and observations made during the school visit.

Study Duration: This study was conducted between 01 January 2026 to 06 February 2026

Sample size: The study population consists of students in classes III to VIII, aged 7 to 12 years. A total of 47 male students residing in the hostel were selected as respondents.

Subject & selection method: All respondents belong to economically and socially disadvantaged families, with parental occupations concentrated in informal and low-income sectors such as farming, daily wage labour, driving, rickshaw pulling, brick-making, and construction work, while most mothers are housewives. Students belong to different caste categories, including ST, SC, OBC, and General, but share similar socio-economic vulnerability.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview schedule designed to capture both factual information and experiential responses. The interview schedule included sections on family background, educational history, academic performance, institutional support, social development, discipline, aspirations, and perceived transformation after joining the residential school. The semi-structured format enabled flexibility, allowing students to express their experiences in their own words while ensuring consistency across respondents.

In addition to student interviews, observational insights regarding school infrastructure, facilities, staff structure, and hostel arrangements were recorded during the field visit. The data were analysed thematically by organising responses into major themes: background characteristics, educational outcomes, social development, aspirations, institutional support, and structural constraints. The findings presented in this study are based solely on the collected primary data and field observations, without any external data supplementation.

IV. Result

Table No. 1: This shows the educational and Social Outcomes of economically and Socially Disadvantaged Students

Theme	Core Focus	Key Findings (Based Only on Collected Data)	Evidence from Students' Responses
1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Students	Age, class, gender, family background, income	All 47 students are male, ages 7–12 years, studying in classes 3–8, and living at school for 1–6 years. Fathers are farmers, drivers, labourers, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, brick makers, etc. Mothers are housewives. Parents' education ranges from illiterate to 12th grade. All families belong to a very low income level. Students belong to ST, SC, OBC, and General categories and are economically and socially disadvantaged.	All students have an age between 07 to 12 years." "All students are male." "Father's occupation: farmers, drivers, labourers..." "Income level: very low."
2. Educational Background & Entry Reasons	Previous schooling and reasons for admission	Most students previously attended Government schools; some had no schooling, main reasons for joining: financial constraints, better education, and social development. Academic performance improved after admission (some significantly, others slightly).	All students from the Government School, and some have No Schooling." "Financial constraints, Better education, and social development." "Some improved significantly, others slightly enhanced."
3. Academic Environment & Support System	Academic monitoring and institutional support	All students reported academic improvement. School provides extra classes, mentoring, supervised study hours, regular tests, personal guidance, and parent communication—preparation for board/competitive exams through exceptional coaching and extra practice sessions.	All students say yes." "Extra classes, Mentoring, Supervised study hours." "Regular tests, Personal guidance." "Special coaching and Extra practice sessions."
4. Academic Challenges	Learning difficulties	Students face subject-specific challenges: difficulty with Mathematics, English language complexity, and difficulty understanding Science concepts.	I find Mathematics difficult." "The English language is complex for me." "I struggle to understand Science concepts
5. Social Development & Personal Growth	Behaviour, discipline, communication, values, teamwork	Students reported improved discipline and behaviour through culture, values, and manners. Communication skills improved through interactions with friends, teachers, visiting guests, and organisation members. Students interact comfortably across backgrounds, though	Yes, very much." "By incorporating the right culture, values and manners." "ALL student says Yes." "Very comfortably, but some students feel low confidence."

		some have low confidence. Learned cultural, social, and religious values. Leadership and teamwork are developed through games.	“Developed leadership through the game.”
6. Aspirations & Social Mobility	Future goals and perception of mobility	Students aspire to become doctors, engineers, teachers, etc., to solve family economic problems. All believe the school has increased chances of improving social and economic status. Family perception of education improved for some students; others reported no change due to family issues such as liquor consumption and gambling.	10 students want to be doctors... some engineer, teacher...” “All student says Yes.” “Some say yes, some say no because the family drinks liquor and gambles.”
7. Institutional Facilities, Structural Context & Teacher Suggestions	Infrastructure, nutrition, staff, satisfaction, transformation	Students are delighted with facilities: free nutritional food (two meals + breakfast like halwa, poha, puri, bread; rice, dal, vegetables), daily one glass of milk, vegetarian meals, playground, library, 55-inch TV (gifted), one cow giving 6 litres of milk, free clothing by charity, and entertainment facilities. School has 7 teachers (salary approx. 7000; teachers unhappy due to low salary), one cook, and one unpaid hostel in-charge (ex-government servant). Students report transformation in academic performance, study habits, confidence, communication skills, and increased aspirations.	Highly satisfied.” “Free nutritional food... one glass of milk daily.” “School is totally vegetarian.” “7 teachers receive approx 7000.” “One cow gives 06 litres of milk.” “Improved academic performance and communication skills.”

V. Discussion

The present study examines the educational achievement and social development of economically and socially disadvantaged students enrolled in Birsa Vidya Mandir, a free residential school managed by Vishva Hindu Parishad, located in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand. The institution caters primarily to boys from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds and provides free education, hostel accommodation, food, somewhat clothing, and academic support. The study is based solely on primary data collected from 47 students in classes 3 to 8, aged 7 to 12, along with institutional-level information gathered during fieldwork.

The socio-economic profile of respondents reveals that all students belong to economically disadvantaged households. Fathers are engaged in informal and low-income occupations such as farming, daily wage labour, rickshaw pulling, driving, construction works, and brick-making, while most mothers are housewives. Parental education ranges from illiterate to 12th standard, with a majority having limited formal schooling. Students belong to diverse caste categories, including Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backwards Classes (OBC), and the General category, yet economic vulnerability is common across these categories. The duration of stay at the residential school varies from 1 to 6 years.

Prior to admission, most students attended government schools, while some had irregular schooling backgrounds. The principal reasons for joining the residential school include severe financial constraints, lack of educational support at home, and the aspiration for better educational opportunities. Students reported noticeable improvement in academic performance after joining the institution. While some described the improvement as significant, others noted gradual progress, especially in study habits and examination performance.

The residential environment plays a central role in shaping academic outcomes. Students unanimously reported that structured routines, supervised study hours, extra classes, regular tests, mentoring support, and continuous teacher monitoring have positively influenced their academic achievement. The school provides examination-oriented preparation, including additional practice sessions for board and competitive examinations. However, despite overall academic improvement, students continue to experience subject-specific challenges, particularly in Mathematics, English, and Science. These difficulties are attributed to weak foundational learning from earlier schooling and language barriers.

In terms of social development, students reported substantial transformation in behaviour, discipline, and interpersonal conduct. The structured residential setting, daily routines, collective activities, and moral instruction have contributed to increased punctuality, respect for elders, and self-regulation. Communication skills have improved through interaction with peers, teachers, visitors, and organisational members. Most students expressed comfort interacting with classmates from different social and economic backgrounds, although a few reported initial hesitations due to low confidence.

The institution also imparts cultural, social, and moral values as part of daily practice. Participation in games, group activities, and collective responsibilities has helped students develop leadership qualities and teamwork skills. Many students reported enhanced self-confidence and greater clarity about their future goals. Career aspirations include becoming doctors, engineers, teachers, and government officers. Students frequently linked their aspirations to the desire to improve their family’s financial condition and social status.

All respondents expressed that the school has increased their chances of upward social mobility by providing structured education, discipline, and exposure beyond their village environment. However, family perceptions of education vary. Some students reported increased parental awareness and support after admission, while others indicated persistent family challenges such as alcoholism and gambling that continue to affect the home environment.

Institutional facilities are perceived positively by students. The school provides free vegetarian meals, including breakfast items such as halwa, poha, puri, and bread, as well as rice, dal, and vegetables for main meals. Each student receives one glass of milk daily, partially funded by a donated cow that produces approximately 6 litres per day. The institution also provides free clothing through charitable support, access to a playground, library, and entertainment facilities, including a donated 55-inch television.

At the structural level, the school employs 7 teachers, who reportedly receive a monthly salary of approximately ₹7,000 each. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with low remuneration, but continued due to limited alternative employment opportunities. The hostel is managed by an ex-government servant who receives no pay, and one cook is employed for food preparation. Despite financial constraints, students reported high levels of satisfaction with hostel discipline, academic supervision, and overall living conditions.

The findings demonstrate that the residential schooling model in this context contributes to measurable improvements in academic performance, discipline, communication skills, and aspirational orientation among economically and socially disadvantaged students. At the same time, persistent academic challenges in core subjects and structural limitations, such as low teacher salaries, indicate areas requiring institutional strengthening. The study, grounded strictly in empirical data, highlights both transformative outcomes and structural constraints within the functioning of this VHP-managed free residential school.

VI. Conclusion

The findings confirm that the residential schooling model at Birsa Vidya Mandir substantially enhances both educational achievement and social development among economically and socially disadvantaged students. Structured academic supervision, mentoring, disciplined routines, and supportive hostel environments have led to improved academic performance, communication skills, leadership qualities, and an aspirational orientation toward social mobility and despite these positive transformations, continued subject-specific learning difficulties in Mathematics, English, and Science, along with structural limitations such as low teacher remuneration, highlight areas requiring institutional strengthening. Overall, the study demonstrates that free residential education can serve as an effective mechanism for academic and social transformation when systematically supported.

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