
**BOYS' DROPOUT TRENDS AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN DAULATABAD
GRAM PANCHAYAT OF MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY**

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Abstract

The phenomenon of school dropout remains a pressing concern in India, silently eroding the foundations of equitable education. The present study employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing descriptive survey method and case study design to examine the dropout trend among boys at the secondary level and the factors causing dropout at the Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Dropout related data were collected from three high schools located in the concerned region. To know the socio-economic characteristics and major responsible factors for school dropout among boys, data were collected from purposively selected 40 boys who dropped out at class IX and X during academic session 2018-19 to 2023-24, using socio-economic profile schedule, factors causing boys' dropout - checklist and interview schedule. Data were analyzed through percentage analysis and thematic interpretation. Findings of the study revealed a concerning dropout rate at the secondary level though the dropout rate remains comparatively high in class X than class IX. Major causes of dropout emerged as lack of concentration on studies, lack of infrastructure and employment opportunities; economic hardship, and a disconnect between curriculum and vocational relevance. The study finds dropout as not merely an educational lapse but a manifestation of deeper socio-economic and resource inequities in the study area. It recommends integrated interventions such as psychological support, improved infrastructure, vocational training, parental sensitization, and financial aid. This research calls for policy reforms and community engagement to ensure that every rural boy completes his education with dignity, hope, and opportunity.

Keywords: Boys Dropout, Secondary Level, Socio-economic Characteristics, Retention.

1. Introduction

Education is the foundation for the development of a democratic, equitable and progressive society. Educated manpower is essential for fostering democracy, promoting social justice and driving economic development. Education is a powerful tool to reduce social divides and empower citizens. Over the decades, education has evolved to meet the dynamic and changing needs of the nation, but its fundamental importance in shaping India's future remains unchanged. Right to Education under Article 21A guarantees free and compulsory education for children between the age group of 6 and 14 years. Education is fundamental to national development, with secondary education serving as a crucial bridge between elementary and higher education. India has made significant progress in achieving universalization of elementary education through initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) but universalization of secondary education still remains a challenge. Secondary education in India encompasses students aged 14 to 18 years, a critical period of adolescent development. The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) framework of 2009 envisions making quality education available, accessible and affordable to all students in this age group. The Indian government has implemented various policies and programmes aimed to achieve universalization of secondary education. However, this goal remains elusive, with significant challenges still to be addressed (Mukherjee, 2011). While enrolment rates have improved over time, issues related to student retention and the overall quality of schooling persist (PTI, 2025). The UDISE+ 2021-22 data reveals that one of the most critical concerns in the education system is the high rate of student dropouts, particularly among boys. Many teenagers who begin their education journey but fail to complete it. The Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad District presents a unique context for studying this issue. Regional disparities remain a critical issue in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, where nearly 80% of the population resides in rural areas (Ahmad & Jinnah, 2020). So, as a predominantly rural area, there is a limited access to quality education and it faces challenges typical of rural areas like socioeconomic constraints, infrastructure limitations, and cultural factors that influence educational outcomes (Mandal, Das, & Kar, 2018). Understanding dropout trends among boys in this specific region can provide valuable insights applicable to similar contexts across the country. Recent data indicates that while the transition rate from elementary to secondary education is not very good, retention at the secondary level remains problematic (Patnaik, 2023). The phenomenon of boys' dropout at this stage is particularly concerning as it affects not only individual futures but also has broader implications on social and economic development. This issue becomes more significant considering India's demographic dividend and the need for a skilled workforce. Secondary education covers the age group of 14 to 16 years and these are the years of adolescence and late adolescence. This is the period of transition; indeed, most crucial years of life. There are fast and steady changes in the body structure transforming to adult form and image of life. At this age, the bodily changes take final shape and stabilise. This is also the stage of emotional transformation and maturity that swings between joy and trauma. Secondary education essentially has to be the

education of the adolescence, so the timing of secondary education is crucial in adolescents' lives. And for boys in rural areas, this period often involves increasing pressure to contribute to family income or take up responsibilities that compete with their educational pursuits. This creates a complex dynamic where educational aspirations compete with immediate economic and social pressures. The problem of boys' dropout at the secondary level involves multiple interconnected factors like Socioeconomic conditions forcing boys to seek employment, quality and relevance of education in rural areas, infrastructure and accessibility challenges, cultural and social factors influencing educational decisions, academic performance and examination-related pressures, family expectations and economic necessities etc. The study gains additional relevance in light of the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes reducing dropout rates and ensuring completion of secondary education. Understanding specific challenges faced by boys in rural areas becomes crucial for developing targeted interventions and effective policies that can address this issue comprehensively.

2. Significance of the Study

This study holds critical significance in unveiling the multifaceted factors contributing to boys' dropout rates at the secondary level in Murshidabad district, with a focused lens on Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district, a region marked by socio-economic hardship, cultural expectations, and infrastructural deficiencies. Understanding why boys discontinue their education is essential for formulating effective, context-specific interventions.

The findings will serve as a foundation for policymakers, educators, school administrators and community leaders to design targeted strategies that enhance retention and re-engage boys with the schooling process. By addressing this deep-rooted challenge, the study aspires to contribute to the broader national goal of achieving inclusive and equitable education, as envisioned by the NEP 2020 and SDG-4. Ultimately, this work aims to break cycles of dropout and lay pathways toward sustained educational and socio-economic upliftment in rural Murshidabad.

3. Review of Literature

Several researches have been conducted in India and its neighbouring countries on school dropouts. Mukherjee (2011) examined the trends in school dropout and the factors that push children out of school, particularly in rural areas of West Bengal. The study identified low income, insufficient educational infrastructure and the availability of labour opportunities for children as primary factors contributing to high dropout rates. Additionally, a lack of parental awareness about the value of education was found to exacerbate the problem. Ghani (2013) conducted a case study exploring the dynamics of student dropout in rural Pakistan, with a focus on gender disparities, contributing factors, and revealed a high dropout rate, particularly in class 9, with a 65% dropout rate overall and 85% among girls substantially exceeding the provincial average of 42%. Major causes included poverty, inadequate facilities, long distances to schools, lack of transport, and societal attitudes toward female education. Pandita (2015) analysed enrollment and dropout rates

among both boys and girls students in India, based on secondary data collected from the Ministry of Human Resource Development from 2001-02 to 2010-11. The study reported that while overall enrollment increased, the growth rate for girls was significantly higher than for boys, indicating a shift in societal attitudes toward female education, but at the secondary level, the dropout rate rose to 81.72% for girls against 78.40% for boys. About one-third of households reported dropouts especially among rural and marginalized families. Dropout rates were notably higher for girls, particularly in wage-labourer households. Key factors included low household income, parental education, large family size, and socio-economic background (Periasamy, 2015). Agrawal and Agrawal (2017) reported that rural boys often perceive education as irrelevant when it does not provide immediate economic benefits or skills that match their local labour market. Several key factors contributing to school dropout, includes economic hardship, parental education, lack of parental interest, inadequate school facilities, students' low academic performance and limited motivation towards education, family disruptions, and parental migration (Chowdhury, 2019; Naz et al. 2019; Mahalanabis & Acharya, 2023). Economic hardships are one of the most significant factors affecting boys' school attendance, especially in agrarian societies. In many rural households, children, particularly boys, are expected to contribute to family income through agricultural labour, leading to early school-leaving (Kumar et al. 2023). Augustine et al. (2020) examined school dropout patterns among the Maram Naga tribe in Manipur, highlighting socio-economic and demographic factors influencing educational discontinuation. The patriarchal structure and economic reliance on agriculture further limited educational opportunities, particularly for girls. Farooqui (2021) explored the causes of school dropouts among Muslim students in Indore, focusing on the impact of economic and social factors and revealed that economic conditions and social factors such as lack of parental support and limited access to educational resources were major contributors to school dropout rates. The dropout rate was highest in classes VIII, IX, and X among boys at the secondary school level in the Indo-Bangladesh border region of West Bengal with a significant correlation between dropout rates and the socio-economic status of students' families (Mollah & Tarafdar 2019). Pasala (2023) explored a high dropout rate of 28.2% among tribal students at the secondary level in northern Andhra Pradesh due to inadequate school facilities and lack of support for students and identified strategies to improve enrollment and retention. Paul and Thapa (2024) highlighted that non-completion of schooling is higher among boys students than girls because they seek employment at an early age due to financial constraints, often working as child labour.

Based on the above literature, it is noticed that while most of the studies have explored dropout trends in rural areas, no studies specifically addressed the dropout trends in the marginalized rural areas of Murshidabad district, a region marked by socio-economic hardship and infrastructural deficiencies, where socio-economic conditions and educational challenges may vary significantly from other regions. As Murshidabad district belong to backward region, due to economic hardship boys do generally leave school at early age in rural areas to support their family economically.

Therefore, the researchers aimed to conduct a case study on the boys' dropout trends at secondary level in Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district of West Bengal, as it may present different dynamics from those highlighted in other studies. This study will explore the different causes that lead to school dropout among boys and its' trend in the past six years in the context of Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district.

4. Research Questions

- i. What is the dropout trend among the boys students at secondary level in Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district?
- ii. What are the key socio-economic characteristics of the dropout boys students?
- iii. What are the key factors responsible for boys dropout?

5. Objectives of the Study

- i. To find out the dropout trend among boys students at secondary level in Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district.
- ii. To know the key socio-economic characteristics of the dropout boys students.
- iii. To identify the key factors responsible for boys' dropout.

6. Research Method

Research Design

The present study employs a mixed method research design, utilizing the descriptive survey method and case study design to identify the trend and actual factors responsible for boys students' dropout.

Population

The population for the present study comprised of all the boys' dropouts at the secondary level, residing in the Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, researchers have chosen all the three high schools which come under the purview of Daulatabad Gram Panchayat. Following the selection of these schools, a purposive sampling technique was applied to identify and select 40 boys students who had dropped out at the secondary level from those schools during the academic session 2018-19 to 2023-24. Their parents were also interviewed.

Tools used for data collection

Data related to dropouts were collected from school records and data regarding socio-economic characteristics of dropout boys and causes of their dropout were collected by administering the following tools:

- (i) *Socio-Economic Profile Schedule*: Through this schedule, information was obtained regarding key socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. This information was

crucial for contextualizing the dropout phenomenon and understanding the broader socio-cultural and economic factors influencing students' educational trajectories.

(ii) *Factors Causing Boys Dropout – Checklist*: To explore the specific factors that contribute to school dropout among boys at the secondary level, a checklist was developed and used as a diagnostic tool covering different dimensions namely, Academic and Psychological Factors, School Environment, Family Conditions, Attitude of Parents, Peer Group Influence, Job Opportunities, Motivation towards Education, Use of Smartphone and Effects of Covid-19. It was designed to be administered alongside the socio-economic profile schedule, allowing respondents to indicate which factors are prominent to their circumstances. The tool consisted of 35 closed-ended items with "Yes/No" responses under categorized dimensions to ensure clarity and comparability.

(iii) *Interview Schedule*: Two semi-structured interview schedules were developed and administered separately to dropout boys and their parents. The objective of the interviews was to elicit deeper personal insights, explore contextual factors, and to understand the motivations and constraints that influenced the decision to leave school.

Data analysis

Percentage analysis technique and graphical presentation were applied for the data analysis. Qualitative analysis was done for case studies. Information obtained through interviews from dropout students and their parents, were analyzed thematically to uncover patterns, perceptions, and underlying causes contributing to the dropout phenomenon of boys students.

7. Results

Objective 1: To find out the dropout trend among boys students at the secondary level in Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad District.

Table 1: Dropout Trend of Class IX Boys (2018-2024)

Year	Total Enrollment (Boys)	Total Dropouts	Dropout Rate (%)
2018-2019	160	14	8.75%
2019-2020	161	18	11.18%
2020-2021	179	18	10.50%
2021-2022	166	21	12.65%
2022-2023	139	14	10.07%
2023-2024	179	23	12.84%

From Table 1, it is revealed that the dropout rate of boys students was 8.75% in the year 2018-19 in class IX and it increased to 11.18% in the next year. In the year 2020-21, total enrollement at class IX was 179, out of which 18 students dropout, resulting in the reduction of dropout rate from the previous years. But in the very consecutive year, the dropout rate took a high growth and increased to 12.65% though it decreased to 10.07% in the next academic year 2022-23. In the year 2023-24, the dropout became highest showing 12.84% rate in class IX. The above data reflects the scenario of dropout rate trend among boys students in class IX in the Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad District which is shown graphically in Figure 1.

Table 2: Dropout Trend of Class X Boys (2018-2024)

Year	Total Enrolment Boys	Total Dropouts	Dropout Rate (%)
2018-2019	111	18	16.21%
2019-2020	160	19	11.87%
2020-2021	116	30	25.86%
2021-2022	128	34	26.56%
2022-2023	126	15	11.90%
2023-2024	128	27	21.09%

From Table 2, it is evident that the dropout rate of class X boys students was 16.21% in the year 2018-19 which decreased to 11.87% in 2019-20. After that the dropout rate increased significantly in the next two consecutive years to 25.86% and 26.56% respectively. Though the dropout rate decreased to 11.90% in the year 2022-23, but again the dropout rate took a sharp increase to 21.09% in the academic year 2023-24. Figure 2 shows the dropout trend among boys students in class X in the Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad District during the academic year 2018-19 to 2023-24.

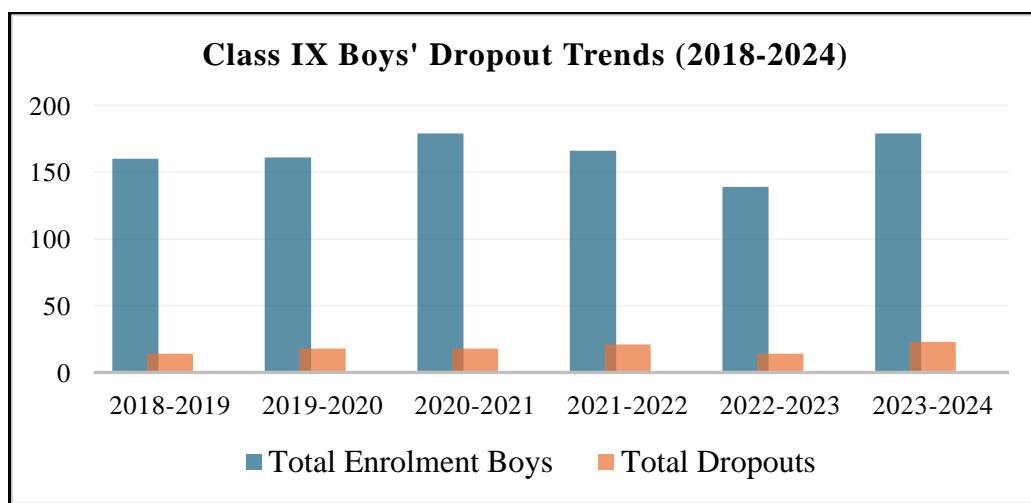


Fig. 1: Dropout Trend of Class IX Boys

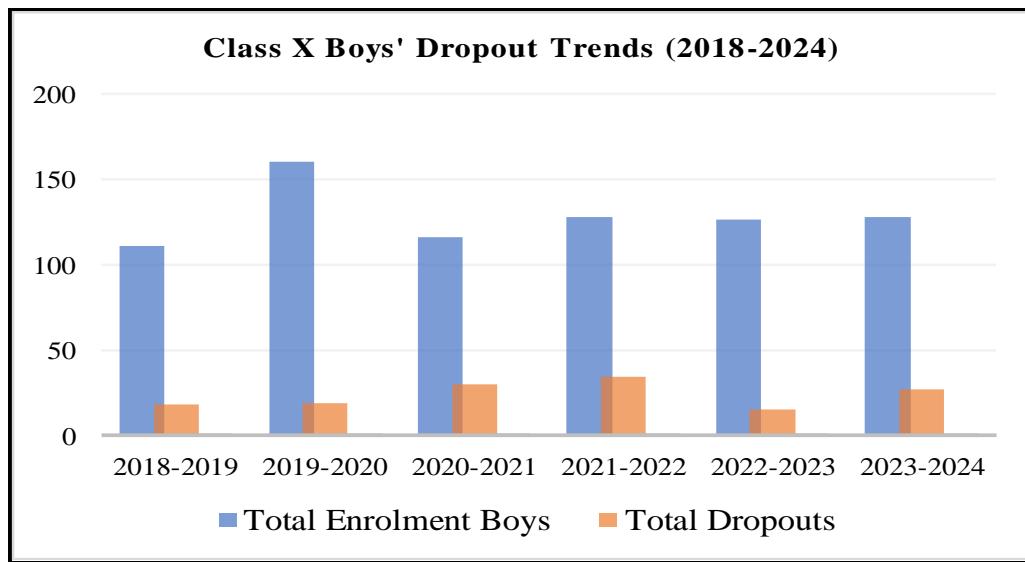


Fig. 2: Dropout Trend of Class X Boys

The above data reflect the scenario of dropout rate trend among boys students in class IX and X in the Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad District. On an average there is a dropout rate of 11% at class IX and almost 19% at class X among the boys which poses a great challenge towards achieving the universalization of secondary education.

Objective 2: What are the socio-economic characteristic features of the boys dropouts?

The socio-economic profile of the boys dropout students was examined across several dimensions, as discussed below in detail.

Educational Level of Dropout Boys' Parents

Table 3: Educational level of Dropout Boys' Parents

Education Level	Father		Mother	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	12	30%	10	25%
Primary	8	20%	11	27%
Upper Primary	10	25%	13	33%
Secondary	10	25%	6	15%
Total	40	100%	40	100%

A significant proportion of parents, particularly mothers, possess limited formal education. Only 15% of mothers and 25% of fathers completed secondary education, while 25% of mothers and 30% of fathers are illiterate. The relatively low educational attainment among parents is a critical factor influencing dropout rates, as it limits both awareness of and support for children's academic pursuits.

Family Type of Boys Dropouts

Table 4: Family Type of Dropout Boys

Type of Family	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear	34	85%
Joint	6	15%
Total	40	100%

The majority of the dropout students (85%) come from nuclear families while remaining 15% belong to joint families. These households, often under financial and time constraints, may lack the extended support necessary for sustained academic supervision for their children, thereby increasing the risk of educational discontinuity.

Occupational Background of Parents of Dropout Boys

Table 5: Occupational Background of Dropout Boys' Parents

Occupation of Parents	Father		Mother	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Farmer	17	42.50%		
Construction	9	22.50%		
Business	7	17.50%		
Brick Field Worker	3	7.50%		
Driver	2	5.00%		
Barber	2	5.00%		
Housewife			39	97%
Teacher			1	3%
Total	40	100%	40	100%

Most fathers are engaged in agriculture and informal-sector occupations such as farming (42.5%), construction work (22.5%), and petty business (17.5%). In contrast, 97% of mothers are housewives, indicating a lack of dual-income households and limited maternal economic empowerment. These occupational patterns describe the financial precarity of these families and reinforce the necessity for male children to enter the labour force prematurely.

Economic Background of the Boys' Dropout Families

Table 6: Economic Background of the Boys' Dropout Families

Monthly Family Income	Frequency	Percentage
5000-10000	3	7%
10001-15001	16	40%
15001-20000	15	37%
20001-25000	5	13%
25000 Above	1	3%
Total	40	100%

From Table 6, it is noticed that a large majority of the dropout boys' families earn between ₹10,001 and ₹20,000 per month, reflecting low and often insufficient household incomes. Financial hardship emerges as a central determinant of school dropout, with many families unable to afford sustained educational expenses or rely on children's labour to supplement family income.

Objective 3: To identify the key factors responsible for boys' dropout.

Table 7: Major Five Causes Responsible for Boys Students Dropout

Item/Cause	No of Response	Rank
I found it difficult to concentrate on studies.	36	1
I felt that many of the educated people are unemployed in my area.	35	2
I had to work and support my family financially.	34	3
I didn't see the relevance of my schoolwork to future job opportunities.	31	4
I spent more time with my smartphone than study.	30	5

Table 7 highlights the most commonly cited causes of dropout among the boys at secondary level. The most common reason for school dropout was difficulty in concentrating on studies (36 responses out of 40 respondents). 35 respondents reported that many educated individuals in their area remain unemployed, while 34 respondents expressed that due to economic hardship they had to support their family financially. Another prominent cause (31 responses) was the lack of perceived relevance of schoolwork to future job opportunities, pointing to a disconnect between academic instruction and real-world applicability. Moreover, spending lot of time with smartphone than study (30 responses) emerged as a key factor pushing students towards leaving school at the secondary level in the rural area of Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district.

8. Findings and Discussion

After a detailed data analysis, the researcher found that the dropout rates among boys at the secondary level remained consistently high over the six-year period from 2018-19 to 2023-24. Class X showed a notably higher dropout rate compared to Class IX, with a highest rate of 26.56% in 2021-2022 and 25.86% in 2020-2021, reflecting critical educational disengagement before board examinations. This stage becomes a critical threshold, beyond which many students do not progress. This supports earlier literature (Pasala, 2023) which points to examination pressure, academic under-preparedness, and lack of psychological support as major deterrents to school continuity.

The boys who belong to economically disadvantaged group, whose parents have low education level and work in agricultural or unorganized labour sector, constituted majority of the school dropouts. In line with the previous researches (Mukherjee, 2011; Kumar et al. 2023; Paul & Thapa 2024), this study found that in agrarian society and low-income communities, adolescent boys are often compelled to entry early into the workforce to supplement family income. This confirms the broader narrative that while elementary education may be universalized, retention beyond the middle school level remains a distant goal, especially in rural West Bengal (Mukherjee, 2011). The findings of the study point to a broader issue - the disconnect between academic learning and real-life needs. This supports the arguments of Mollah & Tarafdar (2019) and Periasamy (2015), who advocated for skill-based education.

Moreover, poor school infrastructure and institutional support neither inspires nor sustains students. This finding aligns with earlier study conducted by Paul and Thapa (2024), which also highlighted that infrastructural factors remain a strong deterrent for completion of students' secondary schooling in India.

A critical observation made in this study is the influence of peer groups and mobile phone usage. As found in the interviews, peer dropout often creates a ripple effect, normalizing school leaving among others. As one respondent replied "*education didn't seem essential to me; I didn't enjoy being in the classroom as most of my friends left school gradually.*"

Additionally, overuse of mobile phone leads to poor academic achievement (Joshi et al. 2022), especially among rural adolescent boys and consequently resulted in dropout, as highlighted by a respondent, "*the main reasons I dropped out of school were lack of family guidance, financial hardship and my excessive use of mobile Phone*".

Additionally, addiction to mobile phones especially among young generation in the absence of structured digital literacy programmes drive them far from their study (Tabassum & Jhara, 2024). This reflects a growing challenge of digital distraction in underserved contexts.

Deep-rooted cultural perceptions and parental attitudes towards education is also worth noting. The study reveals that parental literacy and awareness significantly affect students' academic continuity. In families where education is not seen as a path to upward mobility, children especially

boys are often encouraged to pursue labour over learning (Farooqui, 2021; Govindaraju & Venkatesan, 2010).

9. Conclusion

The present study exhibited a concerning dropout trend in the Daulatabad Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district of West Bengal and explored the major key factors responsible for boys' dropout at the secondary level. The dropout problem is not merely a statistical anomaly but a social wound that reflects system neglect, economic desperation, and cultural limitations of that region. Tackling it will require the policymakers and stakeholders to reform policies and support structures for retention of dropout-risk students and to ensure that every rural student completes education with dignity, hope, and opportunity. Government should focus on improving school infrastructures, sensitizing the parents especially the ones who belong to rural area, catering counselling to the vulnerable dropout students, providing adequate well-trained teachers and financial aid to schools, adding vocational training and life skills to the curriculum to make education more useful and interesting as envisioned by NEP 2020 and SDG-4.

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