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Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Learning Poverty among Primary School Students in West Bengal

Tilanjali Bhattacharya
PhD Research Scholar, Department of Education, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

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Abstract
Learning poverty has emerged as an important educational concern because school attendance does not necessarily ensure the acquisition of essential foundational learning skills. The present study examined the prevalence of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal and explored its variation across selected socio-economic factors, namely family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. A quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study included 440 primary school students from selected schools in four districts of West Bengal: Kolkata, Howrah, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar. Data were collected using a Learning Poverty Assessment Questionnaire developed for the present study and analysed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square test. The findings showed that 37.0% of students were in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 26.4%, 25.5%, and 11.1% experienced Low, Moderate, and Severe Learning Poverty, respectively. Significant differences were observed according to family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. The findings indicate that learning poverty exists across different socio-economic backgrounds and cannot be understood solely in terms of school participation. The study highlights the need for early identification of learning gaps, regular assessment, targeted remedial instruction, and appropriate educational support to strengthen foundational learning among primary school students in West Bengal.

I. Introduction

Education is one of the most important foundations for the intellectual, social, and overall development of children. In recent years, the understanding of educational success has gradually moved beyond school enrolment and attendance towards the actual learning that students acquire. Although access to schooling has expanded considerably, attending school does not necessarily ensure that children develop the foundational knowledge and skills required for further education. At the primary level, literacy and numeracy are particularly important because they provide the basis for understanding more complex concepts in later stages of learning. When children fail to acquire these basic competencies, they may experience continuing academic difficulties throughout their educational journey. This concern has brought the concept of learning poverty into increasing focus in educational research and policy. The World Bank (2019) introduced the concept of learning poverty to describe children who are unable to read and understand a simple age-appropriate text by approximately the age of ten. The concept draws attention to both schooling and learning and emphasises that being enrolled in school is not sufficient unless children acquire essential foundational skills. Learning poverty is therefore an important indicator of the effectiveness and equity of an education system. Difficulties in foundational learning may affect children's subsequent academic achievement, participation in classroom activities, confidence, and ability to benefit from further educational opportunities. Addressing learning poverty at the primary level is consequently important because learning gaps that remain unidentified may become more difficult to overcome as children progress through school. Children's learning does not occur in isolation. Their educational development is influenced by the social, economic, and educational circumstances of their families. Socio-economic status may determine the availability of learning materials, access to educational resources, opportunities for academic support, and the nature of the home learning environment. Sirin (2005), in a meta-analytic review, found a significant association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Similarly, Davis-Kean (2005) demonstrated that parental education and family income can influence children's achievement through parental expectations, educational practices, and the home environment. These findings suggest that differences in family circumstances may contribute to differences in children's learning opportunities. Parental occupation is another factor that may be

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associated with children's educational experiences. Occupational conditions can influence household income, employment stability, parental availability, and the amount of time and support that parents are able to provide for children's education. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) emphasised the importance of parental involvement, support, and family educational practices in children's academic achievement. From the ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that children's development is influenced by interconnected environmental systems, including the family, school, community, and wider social context. Therefore, children's learning should be understood in relation to the environments in which they live and develop. Evidence from India also indicates the importance of socio-economic inequalities in children's learning. Alcott and Rose (2017), in their study of primary schools in India, found that household wealth and parental schooling contributed substantially to disparities in learning outcomes. Their findings further suggested that learning inequalities could widen as children progressed through the grades. This highlights the importance of identifying learning difficulties during the primary years and providing appropriate support before learning gaps become more persistent. In West Bengal, primary school students come from diverse socio-economic and family backgrounds. Differences in family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification may create variations in children's opportunities for learning and academic support. However, learning poverty may not be confined to a particular socio-economic group, and its distribution may vary according to the specific circumstances of families. Therefore, examining these factors is important for developing a clearer understanding of learning poverty among primary school students in the state. Against this background, the present study focuses on learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal and examines its relationship with three selected socio-economic factors: family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. The study aims to identify the prevalence of learning poverty and determine whether significant differences exist across these family characteristics. Understanding these variations can provide useful evidence for early identification of learning gaps, targeted remedial instruction, regular assessment, and appropriate academic support. Such efforts are important for strengthening foundational learning and promoting more equitable educational opportunities among primary school students.

II. Literature Review

Learning is one of the central purposes of education and provides the foundation for children's intellectual, social and academic development. At the primary level, the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy is particularly important because these foundational skills influence children's ability to participate successfully in later stages of education. However, enrolment and regular school attendance do not necessarily guarantee meaningful learning. The concept of **learning poverty** was introduced to draw attention to children who are unable to acquire essential foundational learning skills despite having access to schooling. The World Bank (2019) defines learning poverty in relation to the inability of children to read and understand a simple text by approximately the age of ten. The concept combines schooling and learning dimensions and highlights the importance of ensuring that children not only attend school but also acquire minimum expected learning outcomes. Socio-economic circumstances are among the important factors associated with differences in children's educational achievement. Sirin (2005), in a meta-analytic review of 74 independent samples involving more than 100,000 students, found a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. The findings indicate that children from different socio-economic backgrounds may experience unequal educational opportunities and learning conditions. Davis-Kean (2005) further demonstrated that parental education and family income can influence children's academic achievement through parental expectations, educational practices and the home environment. These findings suggest that family circumstances may shape learning not only through material resources but also through the nature of educational support available to children at home. Evidence from the Indian context also demonstrates the importance of socio-economic inequalities in learning. Alcott and Rose (2017), examining learning among children in India's primary schools, found that household wealth and parental schooling contributed substantially to disparities in learning outcomes. Their findings also indicated that learning inequalities could become wider as children progressed through school. This highlights the importance of identifying learning difficulties at an early stage rather than allowing disadvantages to accumulate over time. Parental occupation may also influence children's learning experiences because occupational conditions can affect household income, employment stability, parental availability and opportunities for educational support. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) emphasised the importance of parental

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involvement, support and family educational practices in children's achievement. From the ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that children's development is influenced by interconnected environments, particularly the family and other immediate social contexts. Therefore, family-level socio-economic characteristics can be considered important components of the learning environment. Overall, the existing literature indicates that learning poverty cannot be understood only in terms of children's individual abilities or school access. Family income, parental occupation and parental educational qualification may interact with the home learning environment and shape children's opportunities to acquire foundational skills. However, region-specific evidence remains important because socio-economic conditions and educational contexts vary across geographical areas. Therefore, examining these factors among primary school students in West Bengal is relevant for understanding the distribution of learning poverty and for developing targeted interventions to promote equitable foundational learning.

2.1 Research Objectives

1. To find out the rate of prevalence of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal.
2. To find out the rate of prevalence of learning poverty with respect to family income among primary school students in West Bengal.
3. To find out the rate of prevalence of learning poverty with respect to parental occupation among primary school students in West Bengal.
4. To find out the rate of prevalence of learning poverty with respect to parental educational qualification among primary school students in West Bengal.

2.2 Hypotheses

1. **H_o1**: There is no significant difference in the rate of prevalence of Learning Poverty with respect to family income among primary school students in West Bengal.
2. **H_o3**: There is no significant difference in the rate of prevalence of Learning Poverty with respect to parental occupation among primary school students in West Bengal.
3. **H_o4**: There is no significant difference in the rate of prevalence of Learning Poverty with respect to parental educational qualification among primary school students in West Bengal.

2.3 Delimitations of the Study

The present investigation is limited by the following delimitations:

1. **Sample Size:** The study involved 440 Primary school students from different schools across West Bengal.
2. **Districts and Institutions Covered:** The sample consisted of primary school students from selected schools in four districts of West Bengal i.e. Kolkata, Howrah, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar.
3. **Geographical Scope:** The study was limited to four districts of West Bengal and did not cover participants from other districts of the state or from other parts of India.
4. **Participant Criteria:** The participants were primary school students from West Bengal who were studying in Classes IV and V.
5. **Variables Considered:** The study focuses on learning poverty in relation to selected background characteristics, including family income, parental occupation, and parents' educational qualifications.
6. **Time Frame:** The data for the study were collected during a specific period, reflecting the conditions and circumstances prevailing at the time of data collection.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to address its research objectives. The design enabled the researcher to assess the prevalence of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal and to examine variations in learning poverty across selected demographic and background characteristics.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised primary school students from the selected districts of West Bengal, namely Kolkata, Howrah, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar. A sample of 440 students was drawn from this population using the simple random sampling technique.

Variables

The main variable of interest in the study was learning poverty. The study also examined variations in learning poverty in relation to selected demographic and background characteristics, including family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualifications.

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Data Collection Tools

Standardized measurement scales and structured questionnaires were used to assess learning poverty and collect relevant background information from the participating students.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics and the chi-square test. These techniques were used to identify patterns and examine differences in learning poverty across the selected background characteristics. The analysis provided a systematic understanding of the prevalence and distribution of learning poverty among the students included in the study.

3.2 Instrument for Data Collection

To measure the principal variable of the study, the researcher developed a Learning Poverty Assessment Questionnaire for the present investigation. The questionnaire was intended to determine the level of learning poverty among primary school students by assessing their foundational learning competencies and the educational conditions that may affect their learning. The instrument was developed in accordance with the concept of learning poverty, which refers to a child's inability to attain age-appropriate foundational literacy and numeracy skills despite being enrolled in school. For this purpose, relevant literature on foundational learning, learning outcomes, and factors influencing students' academic achievement was reviewed to identify the important dimensions of the construct and ensure their appropriate representation in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised a range of tasks covering reading comprehension, vocabulary, sentence formation, writing skills, arithmetic operations, numeracy, measurement, geometry, data interpretation, and logical reasoning. These areas were selected to assess different aspects of students' foundational learning abilities and to provide an overall picture of their learning achievement. Prior to the final administration, the questionnaire was subjected to content validation. Experts in education and educational research examined the items with regard to their relevance, clarity, language, and suitability for the intended group of students. Their feedback was taken into consideration, and appropriate changes were made to the questionnaire to improve the wording of the items and ensure adequate coverage of the content.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, which indicates a good level of internal consistency. The result suggests that the items showed satisfactory consistency in measuring the intended construct, supporting the use of the questionnaire for the present study.

Structure of Learning poverty questionnaire

The distribution of items across dimensions is as follows:

Table 3.1 Dimensions of Learning poverty questionnaire

Dimensions	Items no
Reading Comprehension	1–2
Vocabulary and Language Skills	3–4
Writing Skills	5–6
Mathematics and Numeracy	7–12

Scoring Procedure

Responses are scored as:

Table 3.2 Scoring Procedure

Scoring	
Yes	**5**
Almost	**4**
Sometimes	**3**
Very Rarely	**2**
Never	**1**

The scoring ranges are interpreted as follows:

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Score Interpretation

Table 3.3 Learning Poverty Level

Total Score	Learning Poverty Level
Severe Learning Poverty	0–19
Moderate Learning Poverty	20–29
Low Learning Poverty	30–39
No Learning Poverty / Adequate Learning	40–50

Higher scores indicate stronger foundational literacy and numeracy competencies and therefore reflect a lower level of learning poverty. Conversely, lower scores indicate inadequate mastery of essential learning skills and suggest a higher level of learning poverty.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods were used to examine the prevalence and characteristics of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal. The analysis included selected demographic and socio-educational variables to understand how learning poverty was distributed among the students and to identify patterns and variations across different background characteristics.

Table 4.1 Showing overall Percentage distribution of Learning Poverty among Primary School Students in West Bengal.

			Total
Learning poverty	No learning poverty / Adequate learning	Count	163
		% of Total	37%
	Low learning poverty	Count	116
		% of Total	26.4%
	Moderate learning poverty	Count	112
		% of Total	25.5%
	Severe learning poverty	Count	49
		% of Total	11.1%
Total		Count	440
		% of Total	100.0%

Figure 4.1 Presenting overall Percentage distribution of Learning Poverty among primary School Students in West Bengal.

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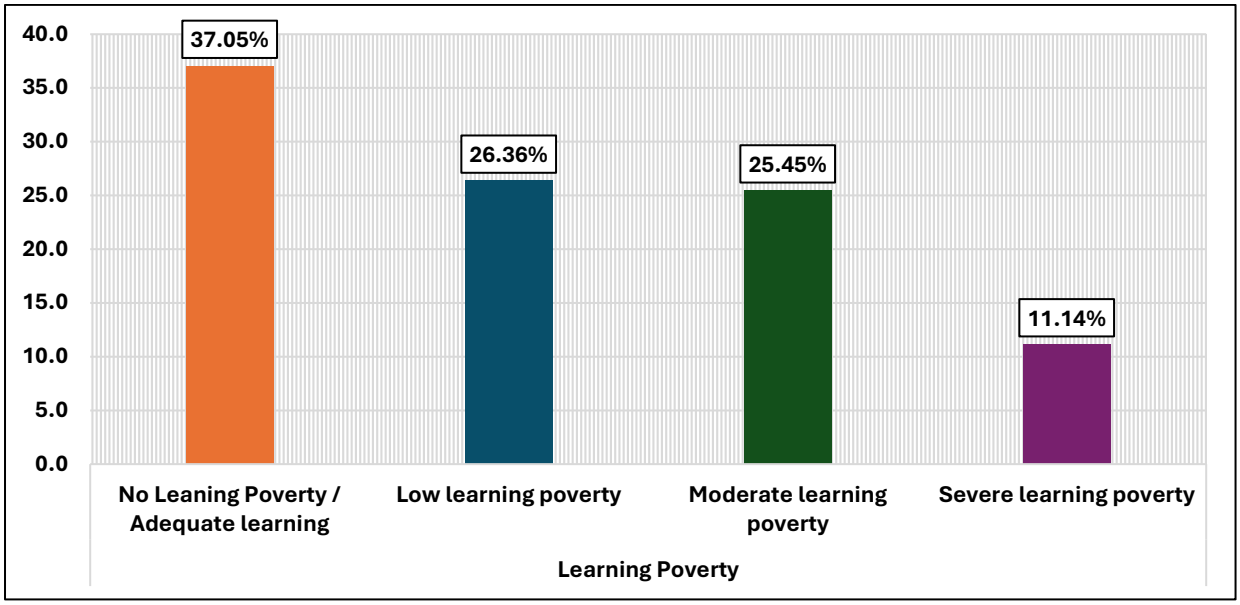

Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 show the overall distribution of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal (N = 440). The results indicate that 163 students (37.0%) fall under the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, which represents the largest group in the sample. This suggests that more than one-third of the students have learning abilities that are broadly appropriate for their educational level. The Low Learning Poverty category includes 116 students (26.4%), indicating that a considerable number of students face some learning difficulties, although these challenges appear to be relatively limited and may be improved through appropriate classroom support and regular academic guidance. A similar pattern is observed for Moderate Learning Poverty, where 112 students (25.5%) are placed in this category. This indicates that about one-fourth of the students experience more noticeable learning difficulties, which may affect their academic progress if they do not receive adequate support. The Severe Learning Poverty category comprises 49 students (11.1%), representing the smallest group. Although this proportion is comparatively lower, these students are likely to require greater attention through focused remedial teaching and additional academic support.

Taken together, the findings present a mixed picture of learning among primary school students in West Bengal. While 163 students (37.0%) are in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, a larger combined group of 277 students (62.9%) falls within the Low, Moderate, or Severe Learning Poverty categories. This indicates that learning difficulties are experienced by a substantial proportion of the students included in the study. The findings therefore point to the importance of identifying learning gaps at an early stage and providing suitable academic support according to the level of difficulty experienced by individual students. Regular assessment, classroom-based remedial activities, and appropriate instructional support may help improve foundational learning and reduce learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal.

Table 4.2 Showing variable-wise Percentage distribution of Learning Poverty among Primary School Students in West Bengal.

			Learning Poverty				Total
			No Leaning Poverty / Adequate learning	Low learning poverty	Moderate learning poverty	Severe learning poverty	
		Count	83	49	50	31	213

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FAMILY INCOME	Low	% within FAMILY INCOME	39.0%	23.0%	23.5%	14.6%	100.0 %
	Average	Count	35	48	43	11	137
		% within FAMILY INCOME	25.5%	35.0%	31.4%	8.0%	100.0 %
	High	Count	45	19	19	7	90
		% within FAMILY INCOME	50.0%	21.1%	21.1%	7.8%	100.0 %
PARENTAL OCCUPATION	Agriculture	Count	68	36	46	25	175
		% within PARENTAL OCCUPATION	38.9%	20.6%	26.3%	14.3%	100.0 %
	Business	Count	26	16	27	1	70
		% within PARENTAL OCCUPATION	37.1%	22.9%	38.6%	1.4%	100.0 %
	Private sector	Count	26	22	12	9	69
		% within PARENTAL OCCUPATION	37.7%	31.9%	17.4%	13.0%	100.0 %
	Government sector	Count	24	28	13	9	74
		% within PARENTAL OCCUPATION	32.4%	37.8%	17.6%	12.2%	100.0 %
	Others	Count	19	14	14	5	52
		% within PARENTAL OCCUPATION	36.5%	26.9%	26.9%	9.6%	100.0 %
PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	Illiterate	Count	54	40	26	13	133
		% within PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	40.6%	30.1%	19.5%	9.8%	100.0 %
	Primary	Count	78	51	42	23	194
		% within PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	40.2%	26.3%	21.6%	11.9%	100.0 %
	Madhyamik	Count	22	24	27	6	79
		% within PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	27.8%	30.4%	34.2%	7.6%	100.0 %
	Higher-Education	Count	9	1	17	7	34
		% within PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	26.5%	2.9%	50.0%	20.6%	100.0 %

Figure 4.2 Presenting variable-wise Percentage distribution of Learning Poverty among Primary School Students in West Bengal.

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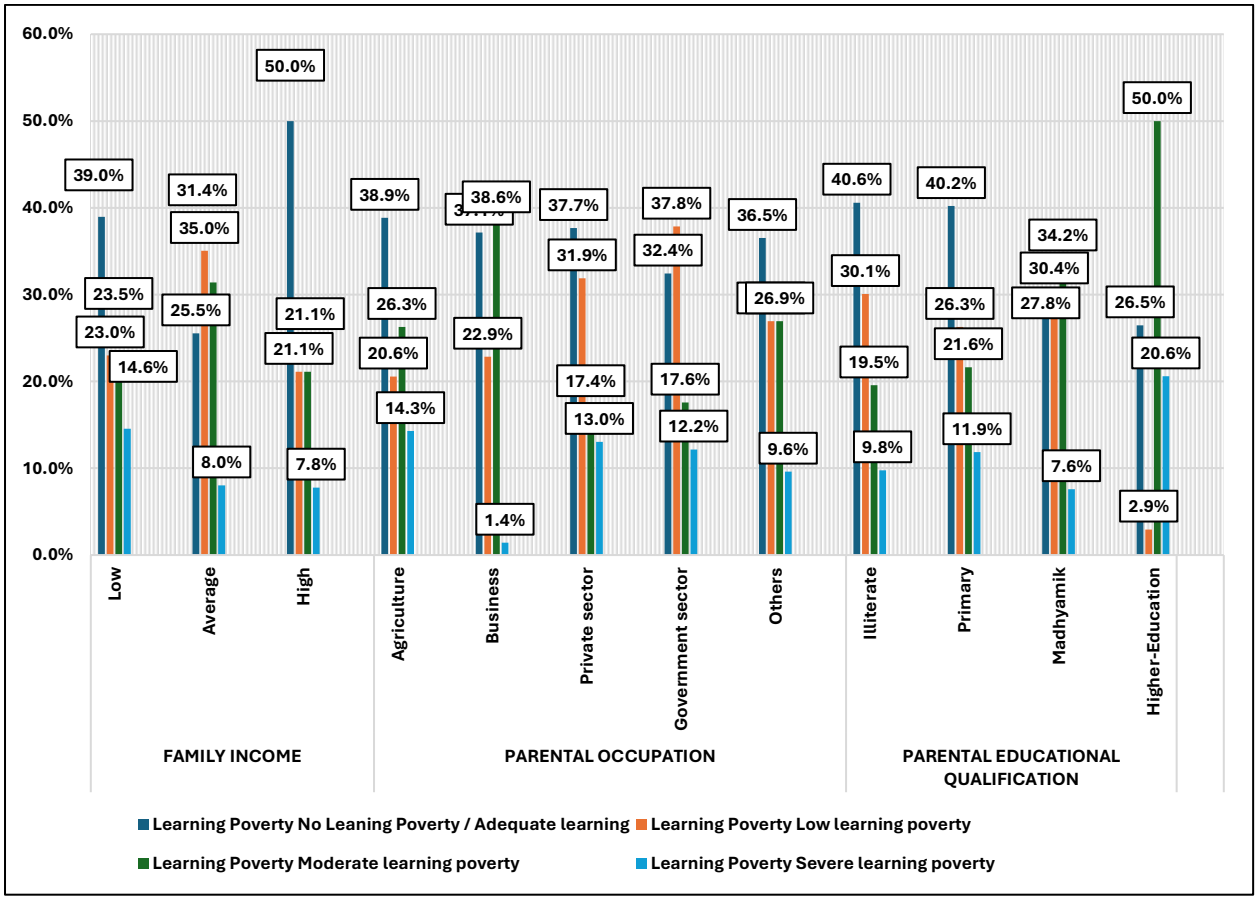

Table 4.2 presents the variable-wise percentage distribution of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal across family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. The analysis highlights variations in the distribution of learning poverty among students belonging to different socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

Family Income Variable – Learning poverty was observed across all family income groups, although noticeable differences were found in the distribution of the learning poverty categories. Among students from low-income families, 14.6% were classified under the Severe Learning Poverty category, while 23.5% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty. A relatively higher proportion of students from this group (39.0%) were placed in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, whereas 23.0% experienced Low Learning Poverty. Among students from average-income families, 8.0% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty and 31.4% under Moderate Learning Poverty. In comparison, 25.5% of the students belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while the highest proportion (35.0%) experienced Low Learning Poverty. Students from high-income families demonstrated the highest proportion in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category (50.0%). Furthermore, 21.1% experienced Low Learning Poverty, another 21.1% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty, and 7.8% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty. These findings indicate that learning poverty was present across all family income groups; however, students from high-income families showed a comparatively higher proportion of adequate learning and a lower proportion of severe learning poverty than students from low- and average-income families.

Parental Occupation Variable – Learning poverty was evident among students irrespective of parental occupation, although variations were observed across the different categories. Among students whose parents were engaged in agriculture, 14.3% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, while 26.3% fell into the Moderate Learning Poverty category. A comparatively higher proportion of these students (38.9%) belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 20.6% experienced Low Learning Poverty. Among students whose parents were engaged in business, 1.4% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, whereas 38.6% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty. The

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proportion of students in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category was 37.1%, while 22.9% experienced Low Learning Poverty. Students whose parents worked in the private sector showed 13.0% in the Severe Learning Poverty category and 17.4% in the Moderate Learning Poverty category. In this group, 37.7% were placed in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category and 31.9% experienced Low Learning Poverty. Among students whose parents were employed in the government sector, 12.2% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, while 17.6% belonged to the Moderate Learning Poverty category. A higher proportion (32.4%) were in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, whereas the largest proportion (37.8%) experienced Low Learning Poverty. Students belonging to the Others category recorded 9.6% under Severe Learning Poverty, 26.9% under Moderate Learning Poverty, 26.9% under Low Learning Poverty, and 36.5% under No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning. These findings indicate that learning poverty was distributed across all parental occupation groups, with students from business families showing the lowest proportion of severe learning poverty, while government-sector families showed a comparatively higher proportion of low learning poverty.

Parental Educational Qualification Variable – Learning poverty was found among students across all levels of parental educational qualification, although the distribution varied considerably between the groups. Among students whose parents were illiterate, 9.8% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, while 19.5% fell into the Moderate Learning Poverty category. A relatively higher proportion (40.6%) belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, and 30.1% experienced Low Learning Poverty. Among students whose parents had primary-level education, 11.9% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, while 21.6% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty. The proportion of students under No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning was 40.2%, whereas 26.3% experienced Low Learning Poverty. Students whose parents had completed Madhyamik education showed a higher proportion of Moderate Learning Poverty (34.2%), followed by Low Learning Poverty (30.4%). In this group, 27.8% were classified under No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning and 7.6% under Severe Learning Poverty. Among students whose parents had higher education, 20.6% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, while the largest proportion (50.0%) fell into the Moderate Learning Poverty category. In contrast, 26.5% belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, and only 2.9% experienced Low Learning Poverty. These findings indicate that learning poverty was present across all parental educational qualification groups, with noticeable differences in the distribution of moderate and severe learning poverty.

Overall, the findings indicate that learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal varies according to family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. Students from average-income families demonstrated the highest proportion of No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning and the lowest proportion of Severe Learning Poverty. Variations were also observed across parental occupation, with the distribution of learning poverty differing between agriculture, business, private-sector, government-sector, and other occupational groups. Similarly, parental educational qualification showed considerable variation, particularly in the distribution of Moderate and Severe Learning Poverty. The presence of learning poverty across different socio-economic and educational backgrounds highlights the need for early identification of learning gaps, targeted remedial instruction, and appropriate educational support to improve foundational learning outcomes among primary school students.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

4.2.1 $H_0$1: Learning Poverty and Family Income

The analysis indicates that the computed chi-square value for family income is x^2 (6, N = 440) = 22.163 with a p-value of 0.001. Since the p-value is less than the 0.01 level of significance ($p < 0.01$), the result is highly statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This suggests that there is a significant difference in learning poverty among students belonging to different family income groups.

4.2.2 $H_0$2: Learning Poverty and Parental Occupation

The computed chi-square value for parental occupation is x^2 (12, N = 440) = 23.924 with a p-value of 0.021. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$), the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This indicates that learning poverty differs significantly among students whose parents are engaged in different occupations.

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Table 4.3 Chi-square Test showing variable wise differences in Learning poverty based on $H_0$1, $H_0$2 and $H_0$3.

Variable	Category	N	df	x^2	Level of Sig.	Remarks
Family income	Low	213	6	22.163	.001	**Sig* (p<.01)**
	Average	137				
	High	90				
Parental occupation	Agriculture	175	12	23.924	.021	**Sig* (p<.05)**
	Business	70				
	Private Sector	69				
	Government Sector	74				
	Others	52				
Parental Educational Qualification	Illiterate	133	9	29.325	.001	**Sig* (p<.01)**
	Primary	194				
	Madhyamik	79				
	Higher-Education	34				

Sig* - Significant, NS - Not Significant

4.2.3 $H_0$3: Learning Poverty and Parental Educational Qualification

The analysis indicates that the computed chi-square value for parental educational qualification is x^2 (9, N = 440) = 29.325 with a p-value of 0.001. Since the p-value is less than the 0.01 level of significance ($p < 0.01$), the result is highly statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This suggests that there is a significant difference in learning poverty among students whose parents have different levels of educational qualification.

4.3 Major Findings

The analysis revealed a highly significant difference in learning poverty among primary school students based on family income. Students from low-income families showed 39.0% in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 23.0% experienced Low Learning Poverty, 23.5% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty, and 14.6% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty. Among students from average-income families, 25.5% belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 35.0% experienced Low Learning Poverty and 31.4% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty. The proportion of Severe Learning Poverty in this group was 8.0%. In comparison, students from high-income families demonstrated the highest proportion of No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning (50.0%) and the lowest proportion of Severe Learning Poverty (7.8%). The significant difference indicates that family income is associated with variations in the distribution of learning poverty among primary school students. These differences may be related to variations in the availability of learning resources, educational support, and the overall learning environment within families.

A statistically significant difference was also observed in learning poverty based on parental occupation. Students whose parents were engaged in agriculture showed 14.3% Severe Learning Poverty, 26.3% Moderate Learning Poverty, 20.6% Low Learning Poverty, and 38.9% No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning. Among students from business families, only 1.4% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, whereas 38.6% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty, 22.9% experienced Low Learning Poverty, and 37.1% belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category. Students whose parents worked in the private sector showed 13.0% Severe Learning Poverty and 17.4% Moderate Learning Poverty, while 31.9% experienced Low Learning Poverty and 37.7% were in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category. Among students whose parents were employed in the government sector, 12.2% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty, 17.6% under Moderate Learning Poverty, 37.8% under Low Learning Poverty, and 32.4% under No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning. Students in the Others category showed 9.6% Severe Learning Poverty, 26.9% Moderate Learning Poverty, 26.9% Low Learning Poverty, and 36.5% No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning. Overall, the findings indicate that learning poverty was distributed across all parental occupation groups, although the proportions varied considerably between categories.

The findings further showed a highly significant difference in learning poverty based on parental educational qualification. Among students whose parents were illiterate, 40.6% belonged to the

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No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 30.1% experienced Low Learning Poverty, 19.5% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty, and 9.8% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty. Students whose parents had primary-level education showed a similar proportion of No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning (40.2%), followed by 26.3% Low Learning Poverty, 21.6% Moderate Learning Poverty, and 11.9% Severe Learning Poverty. Among students whose parents had completed Madhyamik education, 27.8% belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 30.4% experienced Low Learning Poverty, 34.2% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty, and 7.6% experienced Severe Learning Poverty. In the higher-education group, 26.5% of students were in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, 2.9% experienced Low Learning Poverty, 50.0% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty, and 20.6% were classified under Severe Learning Poverty. Thus, learning poverty was present across all parental educational qualification groups, with noticeable differences particularly in the distribution of Moderate and Severe Learning Poverty.

Overall, the findings indicate that learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal varies significantly according to family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. Family income showed a significant association with learning poverty, with high-income families having the highest proportion of students in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category and a comparatively lower proportion in Severe Learning Poverty. Significant variation was also observed across parental occupation groups, while parental educational qualification showed considerable differences, particularly in Moderate and Severe Learning Poverty. The findings highlight that learning poverty is not confined to a single socio-economic or educational background but is distributed across different family circumstances. Therefore, early identification of learning difficulties, targeted remedial instruction, regular assessment, and appropriate academic support may be important for improving foundational learning outcomes and reducing learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal.

V. Discussion

The present study revealed a highly significant difference in learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal based on family income. Students from high-income families demonstrated the highest proportion of No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning (50.0%) and the lowest proportion of Severe Learning Poverty (7.8%). In comparison, students from low-income families showed 39.0% in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, 23.0% in Low Learning Poverty, 23.5% in Moderate Learning Poverty, and 14.6% in Severe Learning Poverty. Students from average-income families showed a comparatively different pattern, with 35.0% experiencing Low Learning Poverty and 31.4% experiencing Moderate Learning Poverty, while 25.5% were in the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category. This finding indicates that family economic conditions are significantly associated with the distribution of learning poverty among primary school students. The finding is consistent with the World Bank (2019), which emphasised that socio-economic conditions play an important role in shaping children's learning opportunities and outcomes. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) highlighted that poverty and socio-economic disadvantage can limit children's access to learning resources, supportive home environments, and other conditions necessary for effective learning. The findings are also broadly supported by the UNICEF (2022) discussion of educational inequality, which noted that children from economically disadvantaged households are more likely to experience barriers affecting learning and educational development. The comparatively higher proportion of adequate learning among students from high-income families in the present study may be related to greater access to educational materials, private academic support, digital resources, and favourable home learning environments. However, the presence of learning poverty even among students from high-income families indicates that economic advantage alone does not guarantee adequate learning. Differences in school quality, instructional practices, parental involvement, individual learning needs, and the quality of educational support may also influence children's learning outcomes. Thus, the present finding reinforces the importance of addressing economic inequalities while also strengthening learning support within schools.

The study also found a statistically significant difference in learning poverty based on parental occupation. Although learning poverty was present across all occupational groups, the distribution varied considerably. Students whose parents were engaged in agriculture showed 14.3% Severe Learning Poverty and 26.3% Moderate Learning Poverty, whereas students from business families recorded only 1.4% Severe Learning Poverty but a relatively high proportion of Moderate Learning

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Poverty (38.6%). Students whose parents worked in the private sector showed 13.0% Severe Learning Poverty, while those belonging to government-sector families recorded 12.2% Severe Learning Poverty and the highest proportion of Low Learning Poverty (37.8%). The findings indicate that the occupational background of parents is associated with differences in the pattern of learning poverty among primary school students. This finding is broadly consistent with the World Bank (2019), which recognised that household socio-economic circumstances influence children's educational opportunities and learning outcomes. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) noted that employment and economic conditions within households can affect children's access to educational resources and supportive learning environments. The relatively higher proportion of severe learning poverty among students whose parents were engaged in agriculture may reflect differences in household economic stability, availability of educational resources, parents' working conditions, and the amount of time available for academic support at home. At the same time, the comparatively low proportion of severe learning poverty among students from business families suggests that occupational category does not operate in isolation and may be connected with other socio-economic characteristics. The relatively high proportion of Low Learning Poverty among government-sector families also demonstrates that occupational security does not necessarily eliminate learning difficulties. These variations suggest that parental occupation may function as one component of the broader socio-economic environment surrounding children's education. Therefore, educational interventions should consider the different circumstances of families rather than assuming that students belonging to one occupational group experience identical learning conditions. A highly significant difference was further observed in learning poverty based on parental educational qualification. The distribution showed considerable variation across the different educational groups. Among students whose parents were illiterate, 40.6% belonged to the No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning category, while 30.1% experienced Low Learning Poverty and 19.5% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty. Students whose parents had primary-level education showed a similar proportion of adequate learning (40.2%), whereas students whose parents had completed Madhyamik education showed a comparatively higher proportion of Moderate Learning Poverty (34.2%). The most distinctive pattern was observed among students whose parents had higher education, where 50.0% experienced Moderate Learning Poverty and 20.6% experienced Severe Learning Poverty, while only 26.5% were classified under No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning. This finding indicates that learning poverty differs significantly across parental educational qualification groups, but the pattern does not show a simple linear relationship in which higher parental education is always associated with lower learning poverty. The broader association between parental education and children's educational outcomes is supported by UNESCO (2020) and UNICEF (2022), which have emphasised the importance of family educational background and the home learning environment in children's educational development. Research on parental involvement and home learning environments has also generally suggested that parents' educational experiences can influence the nature and extent of academic support available to children. However, the specific pattern found in the present study, particularly the comparatively high proportion of Moderate and Severe Learning Poverty among students whose parents had higher education, differs from what might ordinarily be expected from a straightforward socio-economic interpretation. This difference may be influenced by other factors that were not examined in the present analysis, such as parental work demands, expectations regarding children's achievement, school environment, children's individual learning difficulties, or differences in the distribution of the sample across educational groups. It is therefore important not to interpret parental educational qualification as an independent causal factor based solely on the present finding. Instead, the result suggests that the relationship between parental education and learning poverty may be more complex and may operate through several interacting family and educational conditions. The overall findings demonstrate that learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal is significantly associated with family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. The results indicate that learning poverty is not restricted to students belonging to one particular socio-economic group; rather, it occurs across different family circumstances, although its distribution varies considerably. Family income showed a clear association with learning poverty, particularly in relation to the proportion of students achieving No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning and the proportion experiencing Severe Learning Poverty. Parental occupation also produced significant differences, suggesting that variations in household employment conditions may be linked with students' learning experiences. Similarly, parental educational

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qualification showed substantial differences, particularly in the distribution of Moderate and Severe Learning Poverty. These findings support the broader view that children's learning is shaped by the interaction of family, economic, and educational conditions rather than by school attendance alone. In this respect, the findings are consistent with the learning-poverty framework of the World Bank (2019), which emphasises the importance of improving actual learning outcomes and addressing the conditions that prevent children from acquiring foundational skills. The findings also reflect the broader ecological understanding of child development associated with Bronfenbrenner (1979), where children's development is influenced by interconnected environments including family, school, and wider socio-economic conditions. Therefore, reducing learning poverty among primary school students requires more than classroom-based measures alone. Early identification of learning gaps, regular assessment of foundational skills, targeted remedial teaching, parental awareness programmes, and additional academic support for students from vulnerable family circumstances may help address the observed disparities. Such interventions should be sensitive to the diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds of families and should focus primarily on improving children's actual learning opportunities and outcomes.

VI. Educational Implications

The findings of the present study have several important educational implications for policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders involved in primary education. The significant association of learning poverty with family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification indicates that children's learning outcomes are influenced not only by what happens inside the classroom but also by the wider family and socio-economic conditions in which learning takes place. Therefore, efforts to reduce learning poverty among primary school students should focus on improving foundational learning while also responding to the diverse circumstances of families. First, the considerable proportion of students experiencing Low, Moderate, and Severe Learning Poverty highlights the need for the early identification of learning difficulties. Primary schools should conduct regular diagnostic and formative assessments to identify students who have not acquired the expected foundational literacy and numeracy competencies. Early identification would allow teachers to provide timely academic support before learning gaps become more difficult to address in later stages of schooling. Second, the significant association between family income and learning poverty suggests the need for additional educational support for students from economically vulnerable families. Schools and educational authorities should ensure that disadvantaged students have adequate access to textbooks, learning materials, digital resources, and other essential educational facilities. Where necessary, targeted academic support, learning materials, scholarships, and other forms of educational assistance may be provided to reduce the effect of economic disadvantage on children's learning opportunities. Third, the findings related to parental occupation indicate that children's learning conditions may vary according to the circumstances of their families. Schools should therefore avoid adopting a uniform approach when providing academic support. Particular attention may be given to students whose parents have demanding or unstable occupational conditions, where limited time or resources may restrict opportunities for academic assistance at home. Flexible school-based support and additional learning opportunities can help compensate for differences in home learning conditions. Fourth, the significant relationship between parental educational qualification and learning poverty highlights the importance of strengthening the home learning environment. Schools should organise simple parent-awareness and orientation programmes to help parents understand how they can support children's learning, irrespective of their own educational background. Parents may be encouraged to establish regular study routines, communicate with teachers, monitor children's learning progress, and provide a supportive environment for reading, practice, and completion of learning activities at home. Fifth, the findings indicate the importance of strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy at the primary level. Since difficulties in foundational competencies can accumulate over time, schools should provide structured remedial programmes, bridge activities, reading support, numeracy exercises, and competency-based learning opportunities for students who are performing below the expected level. Such programmes should be integrated into regular school activities rather than being treated only as additional or occasional interventions. Sixth, teachers have a central role in addressing learning poverty. Continuous professional development should therefore equip primary school teachers with appropriate strategies for differentiated instruction, formative assessment, identification of learning gaps, remedial teaching, and classroom-level intervention. Teachers should be encouraged to recognise

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differences in students' learning abilities and provide additional support to learners who require greater academic assistance. Seventh, the findings emphasise the importance of strengthening collaboration between schools and families. Regular communication between teachers and parents can help schools understand children's learning circumstances outside the classroom and enable parents to remain informed about their children's progress. Such collaboration may be particularly valuable for students experiencing learning difficulties or coming from families with limited educational resources. Eighth, educational planning should be increasingly informed by evidence on actual learning outcomes. Schools and educational authorities should make systematic use of assessment information to identify groups of students requiring additional support and to evaluate whether existing interventions are producing meaningful improvements. Data-based planning can help ensure that educational resources are directed towards students and schools where learning needs are greatest. Ninth, schools should promote learner-centred and activity-based approaches to teaching. Interactive classroom activities, reading practices, problem-solving exercises, collaborative learning, and appropriate use of educational technology may help students develop a stronger understanding of basic concepts. Such approaches can be particularly useful for students who experience persistent learning difficulties and may not respond adequately to traditional teacher-centred instruction. Finally, the findings point to the need for coordinated educational interventions involving government authorities, schools, teachers, parents, and local communities. The relationship between learning poverty and family circumstances demonstrates that reducing learning poverty cannot be achieved through school-based interventions alone. Educational programmes should therefore be aligned with the broader objectives of NEP 2020 and SDG 4, particularly with regard to equitable access to quality education, foundational learning, inclusion, and reduction of educational inequalities.

VII. Conclusion

The present study examined the prevalence of learning poverty among primary school students in West Bengal and explored its association with selected family and socio-economic factors, namely family income, parental occupation, and parental educational qualification. The findings demonstrate that learning poverty remains an important educational concern at the primary level, as a considerable proportion of students were found to experience Low, Moderate, and Severe Learning Poverty. This indicates that school participation alone does not necessarily ensure that children acquire the foundational competencies required for successful and continued learning. The study revealed a statistically significant association between family income and learning poverty. Students from high-income families showed a comparatively greater proportion of No Learning Poverty/Adequate Learning and a lower proportion of Severe Learning Poverty, whereas students from lower-income groups experienced greater levels of learning difficulty. This finding highlights the importance of children's socio-economic circumstances in shaping their learning opportunities. At the same time, the presence of learning poverty among students from relatively advantaged families indicates that economic conditions alone cannot explain differences in learning outcomes. Parental occupation was also found to be significantly associated with learning poverty. Although learning poverty was observed across all occupational groups, its severity and distribution differed considerably. This suggests that the occupational circumstances of parents may form part of the wider environment influencing children's educational experiences. However, the variations across occupational groups also indicate that parental occupation should not be considered in isolation, as other family, school, and individual factors may contribute to children's learning outcomes. Similarly, parental educational qualification showed a significant association with learning poverty. However, the pattern was not linear, as students whose parents had higher educational qualifications did not consistently demonstrate lower levels of learning poverty. The comparatively high proportion of Moderate and Severe Learning Poverty within the higher-education parental group suggests that children's learning is influenced by a complex combination of factors rather than by parental education alone. Therefore, the findings should be understood in relation to the wider family and educational environment rather than as evidence of a direct causal relationship. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that learning poverty among primary school students is associated with multiple dimensions of children's family circumstances. Learning difficulties are not restricted to a single socio-economic group; rather, they occur across different family backgrounds, although their distribution varies significantly. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of moving beyond a narrow focus on educational access and placing greater emphasis on actual learning outcomes, particularly the acquisition of foundational literacy

and numeracy skills. The study also highlights the importance of early intervention. Identifying learning gaps at the primary level, providing appropriate remedial instruction, strengthening foundational learning, improving classroom practices, and ensuring regular communication between schools and families can help prevent learning difficulties from becoming more persistent. Particular attention should be given to students whose family circumstances may limit their access to educational resources or academic support at home.

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