

Educational Expectations, Aspirations and Structural Constraints

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These papers present findings from Azim Premji Foundation's field engagements in trying to improve the quality and equity of school education in India. Our aim is to disseminate our studies to practitioners, academics and policy makers who wish to understand some of the key issues facing school education as observed by educators in the field. The findings of the paper are those of the Research Group and may not reflect the view of the Azim Premji Foundation including Azim Premji University.

Educational Expectations, Aspirations and Structural Constraints

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Introduction

The last two decades have convincingly dispelled the myth that participation in school education in India has been constrained by low demand for formal schooling among poor parents. This is evident in rising enrolments across all levels of school education, and across social and gender divisions. The increase in demand for education, however, is often interpreted as only an expectation among poorer parents that school education will help their children have some livelihood and jobs; this is so in both prevailing popular opinion as well as in current policy discourses around school education.

In a recent field study, we examined both parental expectations from education and their aspirations for the post-schooling career options of their children. The study was drawn from a larger research¹ on school choice in rural India that covered 121 public and low-fee private schools and 1210 families, in 10 districts across 4 states.² Overall, slightly more than half (51 percent) of the children in the sample went to public schools and the others went to private schools. There was significant difference in the household wealth status of the children going to each type of school - 71 percent of children belonging to the bottom asset quintile in the sample went to public schools, while only 17 percent of children belonging to the top asset quintile went to public schools.

1. Why do parents find education useful?

The study captured parental expectations from education in terms of their opinions on whether education was useful for girls and boys, separately, and the reasons they provided to justify their opinions. Almost universally (greater than 96 percent) of the parents said education was important for both boys and girls. More than 30 percent of the parents provided reasons related to employability when asked about the *main reason* that they thought education was useful for, with this being considered more important for boys than for girls. At the same time, more than 25 percent of the parents, for both boys and girls, responded with reasons that conveyed the usefulness of education for broader social objectives rather than mere employment. These sets of reasons were distinct from their expectation that school education would help their children

1. Research Group. 2018. *School choice in low-information environments: A study of perceptions and realities in four states*. Azim Premji Foundation.

2. Public schools refer to government schools

have better livelihoods or jobs.³ We have labelled these reasons as “social purposes”, which are of three kinds. First, reasons that underscored self-worth (deriving from the ability to do something with one’s life, even if at a very basic level); second, reasons that emphasised respect in society (compared to how the uneducated are neither socially acknowledged nor treated with any respect); and, third, reasons that underlined empowerment (capabilities to lead an independent life).

Table 1 shows the proportion of parents who mentioned the corresponding attribute as one of the top three benefits from school education. Importantly, social purposes of education, such as self-worth, respect in society, and empowerment, unrelated to reasons such as employment or livelihood, were seen to be important to parents, for both girls and boys, and figured prominently among the top three reasons among the largest proportion of parents (84 percent for both girls and boys). Employment, as one of the significant benefits to be derived from school education, was less important for girls as compared to boys (52 versus 71 percent). Similarly, gendered nature of expectations was evident with domestic duties and marriage as a reason among the top three reasons figuring more strongly for girls (53 percent) as compared to boys (13 percent). Aspirational reasons for education, related to social mobility and improving upon one’s present circumstances, was also less important for girls as compared to boys (28 versus 41 percent).⁴

Table 1: Parental opinions (top 3 reasons) on the use of education for boys and girls (%)

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Employment Related	71	52
Social Purposes	84	84
Marriageability and related domestic duties	13	53
Basic Life Skills	35	29
Aspirational Reasons	41	28

3. The aim of the Family Survey Tool that was used for this part of the study was to elicit from the families a nuanced understanding of the issues framing the key research questions. Questions around opinions about usefulness of education and reasons behind them were asked to elicit both a broader set of responses that parents had as well as their primary response.

4. These were some of the responses of parents against the various categories: employment related (will get better jobs; will get more opportunities for earning; will get government jobs; will get better paying work; now any work except as labour people ask how much have you studied); social purposes (educated daughter can look after family independently even if husband is worthless or if no support after marriage; will get respect as compared to uneducated people for whom there is no respect; will be able to differentiate between what is good and what is bad); marriageability and related domestic duties (educated girl has better prospects of marriage as compared to uneducated girl; educated children will be able to teach their own children); basic life skills (can easily look after small shop/business we have; will be able to do basic accounts; will not have to ask others when making applications etc.); aspirational reasons (can do something better in life than what we are doing currently; can go to big cities and find better work).

2. What do parents want their child to become?

Besides expectations from education, parents were also asked about the aspirations they had for the post-schooling career of their children (Table 2). The response to this question showed differences between parents of public school-going children and private school-going children. Surprisingly, the aspirations for government jobs was quite high, 44 percent and 46 percent respectively, irrespective of whether parents send their children to public schools or private schools. As recent reports like the *State of Working India 2018* from the Azim Premji University show, this could be due to the shrinking quality and quantity of jobs in the Indian economy and, therefore, the huge demand for government jobs.⁵ Within government jobs, aspirations for their children becoming teachers was high for both sets of parents.⁶ Aspirations for professional careers such as doctors and engineers was higher for parents with children going to private schools (16 percent) as compared to parents with children going to public schools (10 percent).

Table 2: Aspirations of parents for their children's post-schooling career options by school type (%)

	Public	Private
Government jobs		
<i>Teacher</i>	16	15
<i>Army / Police</i>	11	10
<i>Other government jobs</i>	17	21
Nurse	2	2
Professional careers	10	16
Own business	2	2
Family craft	0	1
Unsure / Undecided	40	31
Any other	1	2

*Figures have been rounded to the nearest integer

5. Basole et al. 2018. *State of Working India 2018*. Bengaluru: Azim Premji University.

6. Though aspirations for teachers could include private school teachers, the qualitative part of the larger study showed that such aspirations in the rural sites of our study were mainly for government school teachers.

In terms of parental aspirations for specific career options, there were visible gender-based differences (Table 3). For example, while parental aspirations for girls becoming teachers was 20 percent, for boys it was only 11 percent. Conversely, parental aspirations for careers in the army or police was higher for boys at 15 percent compared to only 6 percent for girls. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between boys and girls for professional career options.

Table 3: Aspirations of parents for their children’s post-schooling career options by gender (%)

	Girls	Boys
Government jobs		
<i>Teacher</i>	20	11
<i>Army / Police</i>	6	15
<i>Other government jobs</i>	18	20
Nurse	3	1
Professional careers	12	14
Own business	2	3
Family craft	0	0
Unsure / Undecided	37	34
Any other	2	2

The relationship between economic status of families and parental aspirations for professional careers was apparent for parents sending their children to public schools as well as parents sending their children to private schools (Table 4). In both cases, parents in higher wealth quintiles are seen to have a higher preference for professional careers. While aspirations for government jobs was quite high and consistent across different wealth quintiles for parents sending their children to public schools, this was seen to be decreasing with higher economic status among parents sending their children to private schools.

Table 4: Aspirations of parents for government and professional jobs across poorest and richest wealth quintiles (%)

		Poorest 20%	Richest 20%
Public Schools	<i>Government jobs</i>	43	51
	<i>Professional careers</i>	8	15
Private Schools	<i>Government jobs</i>	50	41
	<i>Professional careers</i>	12	24

Another observation was that the higher the level of the mother’s education, the higher the aspirations for professional careers for their children, more so for children who go to private schools (Table 5). The aspiration for government jobs is highest among the families with least educated mothers, for children going to both public and private schools.

Table 5: Aspirations of parents for government and professional jobs across mother’s educational status (%)

	Public Schools		Private Schools	
	<i>Government jobs</i>	<i>Professional careers</i>	<i>Government jobs</i>	<i>Professional careers</i>
Illiterate or Below Primary	49	8	57	10
Completed Primary (5)	47	10	44	15
Completed Upper Primary (8)	46	12	44	17
Completed 10th or 12th Grade	36	19	40	19
Completed Diploma or Higher	25	9	29	30

In Conclusion

The findings from this study underline two important issues. First, parents value the social purpose of education and do not regard education only as a means of employment. The reasons offered by them—self-worth, respect in society, and empowerment—align to a substantive idea of a democratic society and are also seen as key aims of education at a policy level.⁷ Second, higher aspirations for professional careers were seen to be related to higher economic and higher educational status of parents. These findings suggest it is likely that social and economic conditions play an important role in providing different aspirational horizons for parents from different backgrounds. Structural constraints probably limit these horizons for the poorer parents sending their children to public schools as compared to their private school counterparts.

Increasingly, popular understanding and policy discourses around school education in India have veered towards only a narrow instrumental view of education that regards education being relevant primarily for basic employment. As our study shows, parents do value purposes of education, other than employability, that directly resonate with more fundamental aims of education enshrined in the Constitution of India. Moreover, the study also shows that differences in aspirations among parents for their children's post-school career options map on to differences in socio-economic backgrounds (and corresponding differences in types of schools—public or private) as well as parental educational levels. In a way, aspirations are seen to be strongly shaped by structural constraints. In such a scenario, policies in education that focus on streaming children or only on basic education and skills for certain sections of the child population would arguably result in reproduction of structural constraints, that is, the continuation of a stratified education system that offers differential possibilities of learning and career paths for children from different backgrounds. What is required, instead, are education policies that move the school education system towards a more equitable system for all.

7. See, NCERT. (2005). *National Curriculum Framework 2005*. New Delhi: National Council for Education Research and Training.

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 $प = 4 \times \text{भुजा}$ $का का क्षेत्रफल = \frac{1}{2} \times \text{भुजा} \times \text{भुजा}$

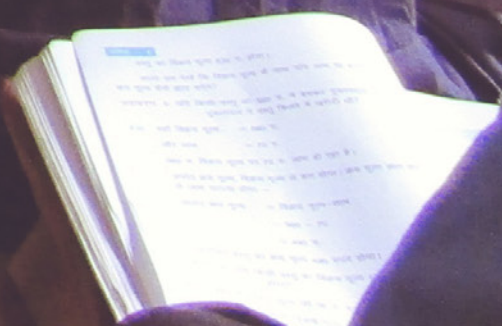




अभ्यास
 ① कितना लाभ / कितनी हानि
 ② क्रय मूल्य 136, विक्रय मूल्य 143 लाभ 7 रु.



लब्ध - क्रय मूल्य, क्रय मूल्य = विक्रय - लाभ, क्रय मूल्य = विक्रय + हानि / हानि = विक्रय - क्रय मूल्य



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