



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE TOWARDS A PROSPEROUS AND INCLUSIVE JHARKHAND VISION AND STRATEGIES

Education in Jharkhand: Structural Trends, District Variations and Emerging Challenges

Kumar Rana

Director, Institute for Human Development
Eastern Regional Centre, Ranchi

Preliminary Draft, Only for Discussion

Organised by

- Institute for Human Development, Ranchi
- Shri Krishna Institute of Public Administration, Ranchi



Education in Jharkhand: Structural Trends, District Variations and Emerging Challenges

Kumar Rana

Since its formation in 2000, the state of Jharkhand has followed an uneven trajectory in the sphere of education. Despite successive policy interventions aimed at improving school education, persistent structural inequalities, regional disparities and differentiated access continue to constrain educational progress. Examination of recent datasets and policy frameworks, including UDISE+ (2023–24), ASER (2024), NFHS-5 and major central/state-level initiatives demonstrates that while enrolment and institutional expansion have advanced gradually, these gains have been neither evenly distributed nor accompanied by commensurate improvements in learning outcomes or effecting transition to higher classes. District-wise patterns reveal contrasts between relatively advantaged urban districts and deprived tribal hinterlands. The study argues that educational inequalities in Jharkhand are reproduced mainly by weak implementation capacity, limited public expenditure and deeply rooted social and spatial hierarchies.

Keywords: *Jharkhand, school education, tribal education, regional disparities, policy implementation, private sector.*

Introduction

The formation of Jharkhand in 2000 carried an explicit developmental promise. The policy document **Vision 2010** articulated a roadmap for transforming the newly created state into a “model for human resource development,” emphasizing education as the principal pathway to social transformation. At that time, more than 50 per cent of the state’s population was illiterate, and schooling infrastructure was terribly inadequate across most districts. Educational disadvantage was intertwined

with wider vulnerabilities of poverty, livelihood insecurity, malnutrition, and poor access to health and welfare services. The Vision 2010 document, therefore, aptly prioritized the educational goal. Yet, after a quarter century of the formation of the state, it is difficult to miss the contrast: while the aspiration of the people for acquiring education by the children is at a peak, the realizability of the aspiration confronts huge barriers, including structural deficits, uneven progress and persistent social inequalities.

While the early years generated optimism, educational gains have remained modest. The literacy rate in 2011 (66 per cent) reflected an increase of only 14 percentage points since 2001. The low literacy rate is further exacerbated by wide gender gap: according to the **National Family Health Survey-5 (2019–21)** only 62 per cent of women as against 81 per cent of men were literate. The gap is particularly pronounced in tribal and rural districts such as **Simdega, Gumla, Khunti, Lohardaga, Latehar, West Singhbhum**, where female literacy frequently falls well below the state average. Progress toward universal schooling has also slowed, and concerns regarding learning outcomes, dropout patterns, and educational quality continue to define the contemporary educational landscape.

Against this background, we present here an overview of school education in Jharkhand, focusing on key structural features, policy interventions, and persistent inequalities. Special emphasis is placed on tribal education, gender equity, and the growing role of private schooling and higher education institutions.

Enrolment Trends and Transition Rates

Government statistics from the **UDISE+ 2023–24** indicate that the state continues to struggle with universal access. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in Jharkhand remains lower than the national average at all levels: 69% in primary, 48% in upper primary, 31% in secondary, and 19% in higher secondary. At every stage of the schooling cycle there is significant attrition, with dropout rates escalating between Class 5 and Class 10.

Approximately **4 percent of children drop out at the primary stage**, and another **10 percent at the secondary level**. Only 83 percent of children enrolled at the primary stage move to middle school, and nearly 38 percent in the middle level fail to make into secondary schooling.

Dropout patterns exhibit clear district-specific trends. Districts such as **Pakur, Sahebganj, Godda, Garhwa and West Singhbhum** show consistently higher dropout

rates, particularly among boys, attributed partly to early entry into the labour market and seasonal migration. Districts like Ranchi and East Singhbhum, by contrast, show relatively better progression rates, shaped by stronger urban infrastructure and higher density of private and English-medium schools.

Education among the Adivasis Schooling: Structural and Linguistic Barriers

Jharkhand's population comprises roughly 26 percent Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes), with a higher concentration in rural and forest districts. Historical disadvantages faced by Adivasi students stem from low availability of schools, linguistic exclusion, and limited state provisioning. Many children encounter a mismatch between mother tongue and school language, as most government schools follow Hindi as the medium of instruction. Evidence suggests that linguistic distance contributes significantly to early dropout among Adivasi children.

The Right to Education Act (2009) mandates neighbourhood schools, inclusive classrooms, and mother-tongue-based multilingual education, yet implementation remains inconsistent. The establishment of Eklavya Model Residential Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan residential hostels has helped improve access, but these remain limited in coverage and are unevenly distributed across districts.

Gender and Schooling Outcomes

There is a paradoxical pattern in gender participation: girls' enrolment has improved relative to boys' in several districts, yet learning outcomes reveal a different picture. Boys continue to leave school earlier due to labour participation, while girls face gendered responsibilities and early marriage in many tribal districts. In districts such as **Gumla, Khunti, and Simdega**, secondary enrolment for girls has improved significantly due to government stipends, bicycle schemes, and hostel facilities. However, private schooling has also reproduced class-caste hierarchies, as poorer tribal and Dalit families are excluded from these institutions.

Educational Quality and Learning Outcomes

Quantitative expansion has not translated into quality improvements. The **ASER 2024 report** shows that 39 percent of students in Classes 6–8 in rural Jharkhand

are unable to read Class 2-level text, and 57 percent cannot perform simple division. Recent standardised assessments conducted by the Jharkhand Academic Council reported that while 94 percent of students passed Class 8 examinations, only a small proportion achieved an A-grade.

Patterns vary sharply across districts:

- **Urban and mining districts** (Ranchi, Bokaro, Dhanbad) show higher grade performance.
- **Resource-poor tribal districts** (Simdega, Latehar, Pakur) show the lowest learning outcomes.

The persistence of learning poverty is significantly associated with teacher vacancies, inadequate infrastructure, irregular teacher attendance, language barriers and limited school-community engagement.

School Infrastructure and Teacher Provisioning

The UDISE+ 2023–24 data shows that government and government-aided schools account for nearly 80 percent of schools, but enrolment in government schools has declined to 67 percent, reflecting a rising shift toward fee-charging private institutions. The student-teacher ratio in government schools (41:1) is unfavourable despite increased recruitment.

The **Schooling Crisis in Jharkhand Report (2022)** demonstrated significant shortages in RTE-mandated infrastructure such as functional toilets, drinking water, classroom space, playgrounds, and especially school-teacher ratio and student-teacher ratio. Intra-district disparities persist:

- **Ranchi, East Singhbhum, Hazaribagh:** better infrastructural provisioning.
- **Sahebganj, Pakur, Latehar:** continued infrastructural deficits.

The shortfall in teacher availability and professional development is especially visible in remote tribal areas. Moreover, recruitment processes have been slow, contractualisation remains widespread, and teacher-training institutions are unevenly distributed across the state.

Private Schooling and Social Inequality

Jharkhand has witnessed a dramatic rise in private schooling during the last decade. Private schools now constitute nearly 20 percent of schools and account for a growing share of enrolment in urban and peri-urban districts. However, this expansion has deepened stratification:

- private schools are concentrated in Ranchi, Bokaro, East Singhbhum, and Dhanbad;
- rural districts have limited options and high fee barriers;
- English-medium schools generate symbolic and economic hierarchies in access.

Private schooling has attracted middle-class families, while the poor—especially tribal communities—remain dependent on government schools, whose declining quality reinforces structural disadvantage.

Policy Connections: The Right to Education Act- 2009 and the National Educational Policy 2020.

The RTE Act provided a landmark framework for guaranteeing access, equity, and infrastructure norms. Implementation in Jharkhand has been partial, constrained by inadequate public expenditure and limited administrative capacity. Issues like foundational literacy and numeracy, early childhood education, mother-tongue instruction, and curriculum reforms, articulated in the **National Education Policy (2020)** are highly relevant priorities for Jharkhand. While the state has initiated FLN programmes and rationalised curricula to align with NEP recommendations, yet learning gains remain uneven.

Scholarships, Residential Schools and Targeted Schemes

Several schemes have been noteworthy:

- **KGBVs** for girls' secondary education,
- **Post-Matric Scholarships** for SC/ST/OBC,
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools** for tribal students,
- **Bicycle and free-uniform schemes** for girls,
- **Pre-matric scholarships and hostels** for tribal communities.

However, these schemes have limited geographical coverage and are unevenly implemented across districts.

The Mid-day Meal Programme

The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programme has been a central component of Jharkhand's school-level provisioning and social protection since statehood. Implemented in all government and government-aided primary and upper-primary schools, it has functioned as both a nutritional intervention and an incentive for enrolment and retention, particularly in tribal and low-income regions. Studies have shown that the scheme has contributed to improving attendance, reducing classroom hunger and supporting girls' participation in districts with high poverty and migration. At the same time, implementation has been uneven: irregular supply chains, inadequate kitchen infrastructure, caste-based discrimination in serving practices, and dependence on local contractors remain recurrent challenges in several remote districts. Recent reforms—such as decentralised procurement, involvement of women's self-help groups and integration with nutrition-related initiatives—have strengthened delivery in some areas, yet the programme continues to reflect the broader structural disparities that characterise Jharkhand's education system.

Conclusion

Jharkhand's educational system reflects a persistent contradiction between peoples' aspiration and ground-level reality. Despite two decades of targeted interventions, structural deficits in access, learning and governance continue to shape educational outcomes. District-level disparities, inadequate public investment, and uneven policy implementation reinforce inequalities for tribal communities, marginalised groups and rural women.

The most significant future challenge is universalizing literacy, attaching special priority to enhance schooling and bridging the gap between schooling access and educational quality. Strengthening state provisioning, improving teacher capacity, enhancing transition rate and building contextualised, multilingual educational practices are essential steps toward realising the constitutional promise of education for all.