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Digital Pedagogies and Technology-Enhanced Learning: Educational Accessibility among Post-1947 Migrant Marginalized Communities in Nadia District, West Bengal

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Abstract:

This paper examines whether digital learning is opening or closing doors for communities in Nadia district excluded from education after the 1947 Partition. The Partition resulted in long-term educational and economic disadvantage for many groups, including Hindu refugees like the Namasudra community, Matuas and other backward classes. However, these groups are in an era when mobile-based learning has been incorporated into school life under the National Education Policy 2020, and digital tools may expand some people's access while reducing others. This reflexive thematic analysis used sources published from 2020 to 2026 (including peer-reviewed articles, government policies, and international reports). There were four themes emerging from the analysis. First, first-generation learners are at a disadvantage because of their parents' lack of formal education and family situation. Second, the government's primary platforms are in Hindi & English, whereas many people speak Bengali. Third, Bengali-medium teachers are not yet comfortable accessing and using online teaching resources. Fourth, a lack of documentation, institutional apprehension, and low confidence in online systems create a major barrier. In general, learners' ability to benefit from technology depends on several factors, such as using it in Bengali, teachers' guidance, and community assistance with documents.

Keywords: *Digital Pedagogy, Technology-Enhanced Learning, Educational Accessibility, Partition Migrants, Marginalised Communities.*

Introduction

Nadia district of West Bengal has historically been a destination for migrants displaced by the Partition of India in 1947. These migrants did not belong to a single community but represented diverse marginalised social groups, including Namasudra families, members of the Matua community, and other Hindu refugee communities affected by displacement and border-related instability. Situated along the Bangladesh border,

Nadia experienced significant demographic and social transformations resulting from migration, displacement, and the subsequent struggles for rehabilitation and educational access. The educational experiences of these communities were shaped by distinct histories of displacement, caste-based social structures, religious practices, linguistic backgrounds, and unequal access to state welfare services (Chatterjee, 1997; Bandyopadhyay, 2009). Community organisation and collective mobilisation subsequently played an important role in improving educational access and participation among historically disadvantaged groups.

The significance of this historical context has become increasingly evident as digital learning permeates the educational experiences of these communities. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the integration of digital technologies, online learning platforms, and technology-enabled educational resources to expand access and improve educational quality (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, the implementation of digital learning may reproduce or intensify existing inequalities when students lack smartphones, reliable internet connectivity, electricity, appropriate learning environments, or adequate digital literacy. Research on digital infrastructure in Nadia district indicates disparities between urban and rural schools in access to digital resources, teacher preparedness, and institutional technical support (Debnath, 2023). These challenges may disproportionately affect historically marginalised communities whose educational opportunities have already been shaped by displacement, caste-based exclusion, and uneven access to public services.

Consequently, this study investigates whether digital learning provides equitable educational opportunities for these communities or whether its effectiveness depends primarily on access to technological resources and the historical experiences of displacement, marginalisation, and social exclusion.

Literature Review

Previous research indicates that refugee families in post-Partition Bengal experienced prolonged displacement and often struggled to secure rehabilitation independently, particularly among lower-caste refugee communities. Mukherjee (2019), through an ethnographic study of a Namasudra refugee settlement in suburban Calcutta, demonstrates how displacement continued beyond the initial migration period and became embedded in everyday experiences of marginalisation. The study highlights the inadequacy of state rehabilitation measures, the informal conditions of settlement, and the unequal relationship between marginalised refugee communities and the state. Similarly, Bandyopadhyay and Ray Chaudhury (2022) explain that lower-caste refugees from East Bengal frequently experienced inadequate rehabilitation, segregation in refugee camps, and displacement to distant resettlement locations. Their historical analysis demonstrates that caste and class significantly influenced refugee rehabilitation, social mobility, and access to institutional support. Dasgupta (2016) also examines the relationship between the state and marginalised refugee communities in West Bengal, particularly Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe refugees, through historical cases including Cooper's Camp in Nadia district, Dandakaranya, and Marichjhapi. These studies collectively suggest that the consequences of Partition extended beyond immediate displacement and shaped

the subsequent social and economic conditions of refugee communities (Bandyopadhyay & Ray Chaudhury, 2022; Dasgupta, 2016; Mukherjee, 2019).

The historical experiences of displacement are particularly relevant to understanding contemporary educational inequality. The inadequate rehabilitation of marginalised refugee families, combined with persistent caste and class inequalities, may have influenced their access to educational resources, institutional support, and opportunities for social mobility. However, the relationship between historical displacement and present-day educational participation should not be treated as automatically established. Rather, it requires investigation into how displacement-related disadvantages are reproduced through household economic conditions, educational resources, social exclusion, and access to public services. These historical perspectives provide an important foundation for examining the educational experiences of first-generation learners and girls from historically disadvantaged communities.

Another significant dimension of educational inequality concerns the digital divide. Chakrabarti et al. (2024), in their study of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal, examine digital inequality across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Their findings indicate substantial differences in digital access between geographical areas and demonstrate that rural and disadvantaged regions continue to experience barriers to online and blended education. The study highlights how unequal internet access and technological infrastructure contribute to educational and socioeconomic disparities. Similarly, Sarkar et al. (2022) investigated digital learning opportunities among government and private primary-school students in West Bengal during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings revealed substantial differences in access to online education, with private-school students experiencing considerably greater access to smartphones and institutional online learning arrangements than government-school students. The study also identified significant urban–rural differences in educational access during school closures.

Further evidence is provided by Maity et al. (2021), who examined digital primary education during the COVID-19 pandemic using data from 720 students in West Bengal. Their findings indicated that school infrastructure, teachers' willingness to conduct online classes, internet accessibility, household economic capacity, and gender were important factors influencing digital learning. Rural government-school students and girls experienced particularly significant disadvantages. These findings suggest that digital educational inequality is not simply a technological problem but is closely connected with socioeconomic conditions, institutional resources, and gender-based disparities.

Taken together, the existing literature reveals two important but insufficiently connected research perspectives. Partition and refugee studies explain the historical origins of displacement, caste-based marginalisation, and unequal rehabilitation, whereas digital-divide studies primarily examine contemporary technological access, internet connectivity, school infrastructure, and online learning participation. Although both bodies of literature contribute significantly to understanding educational inequality, the relationship between historical displacement and contemporary digital educational exclusion remains insufficiently explored, particularly among marginalised refugee-descendant communities in Nadia district. This study

therefore seeks to bridge this gap by examining whether digital learning opportunities are determined primarily by technological access or whether they are also shaped by the historical experiences of displacement, caste-based exclusion, socioeconomic disadvantage, and gender inequality.

Objectives

- To find out what hinders and supports access to education for groups that moved after 1947 and are considered marginal.
- To explore how access is altered with digital learning and technology-enhanced learning.
- To learn more about the role of the teacher, school, family and community groups.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the barriers to education for these groups?

RQ 2: What do they have access to, and how is it affected by digital learning?

RQ 3: What factors determine the success or failure of digital learning?

RQ 4: What are the roles of teachers, schools and communities?

Methodology

The research approach in this study was qualitative (document analysis), which is suitable for the topic. The research literature on Partition history, caste and digital divides is sufficiently detailed to provide answers to the research questions. The sources for the study were selected to be 14 articles published from 2020 to 2026, such as journal articles, policies, and reports. All the sources ranged from issues related to marginalised education, schooling in West Bengal, educational equity, digital learning, and displacement and caste. All sources were read comprehensively and coded for barriers, enablers, and attitudes. Thematic analysis was then undertaken using reflexive analysis, where participants' codes are grouped into themes, rather than other approaches that attempt to find codes from a predetermined list of codes. This suits a study which is based on careful reading and interpretation. All findings are based on secondary sources, and therefore, it is suggested that they be verified only through actual ground visits within Nadia concerned.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis identified four interrelated themes, where the first theme uncovered that disadvantaged status within a family, in turn, impacted online learning. The online learning experiences of children are influenced by aspects of their parents' education, families' income level, where they live and the quality of their networks. Government-school students are more likely to be first-generation learners, meaning their parents have limited ability to affect their child's digital learning. This barrier is less likely to be experienced by children from more privileged, private-school backgrounds. Thus, the family background determines who

can get advantages from online education before the teaching has started.

The second theme is a follow-on from the first since the fact of owning a device does not translate into the ability to use it for learning. According to national data, approximately 90 per cent of young people with smartphones aged 14-16 live in rural areas. Nevertheless, around 36% of boys and 27% of girls have their own phone. In rural areas, cost and/or poor connectivity increase this gap**.**

The third theme is related to access to language and to teachers. There is a gap between the language and syllabus followed in the classrooms by Bengali-medium learners and the materials presented online. In addition, these learners would probably also benefit from lessons in Bengali and having a teacher. This aligns with UNESCO's warning that technology is not a substitute for teachers. For an app, a teacher can explain and encourage what it cannot. The use of language and teacher support are thus included in the nature of access and not extras.

The fourth theme relates to a family's trust, which determines the uptake of online services. This is often due to a family's history of unclear documents, and this could happen in relation to online registration and scholarship systems, although there is a possible rather than a concluded link between the experiences. Noticing that distant government portals are aversive compared to schools and community groups being closer and trusted. Local helpers with a proven track record in guiding families can help them complete online forms. Trust (and not merely technology) ultimately determines whether online systems reach these families.

Implications

These four themes clearly indicate steps for schools and policymakers. Schools should have access to digital tools, rather than requiring students to have them at home, and the content should be available in Bengali and offline or for limited bandwidth. Moreover, there is a need for training teachers in blended teaching in which technology supports them. Similarly, families require direct assistance in document filing, registration and scholarships. International studies also reveal significant dropout rates at the secondary level and indicate that the responsibility for it lies both with the learner and the community in which he or she lives. Although the distribution of devices is more straightforward, it is insufficient to address the needs of disadvantaged learners, as the barriers here are around language, trust and teaching and are not addressed by devices. Therefore, policy should be measured by the learning outcomes of the child, not by the number of devices that have been distributed.

Conclusion

Digital pedagogy can be used to increase access for marginalised migrant communities in Nadia, if it is designed to address their actual situation. Limits remain in the form of weak connectivity, language barriers, unreadable documents and the same system of representationrun by the same group. However, these communities have an appreciation for education and are able to establish groups and organise themselves;

devices cannot provide a foundation for that. Therefore, digital programs need to be created with schools and local entities. Further study may be conducted to test these ideas, where the learner, parent and teachers in Nadia can be interviewed, and household surveys and classroom observations can be conducted with learners.

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