

COMMUNITY SCHOOLING AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN THE KASHMIR VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates community schooling as an innovative educational response to systemic disruptions in the Kashmir Valley. Drawing on a case study methodology, the research examines the emergence, operational dynamics, effectiveness, and sustainability of community schooling initiatives during periods of educational disruption. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis of community schooling initiatives during the 2016 disruption period. The findings reveal that community schools served as crucial educational spaces providing continuity for students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, when formal education systems were inaccessible. Approximately one hundred fifty community schools operated across the valley, providing educational opportunities for thousands of students. However, significant challenges including infrastructure limitations, volunteer shortages, coverage constraints, and sustainability concerns limited their effectiveness. Community schools were primarily stop-gap arrangements rather than sustainable alternatives to formal education. The study recommends developing formal frameworks to support community schooling initiatives while strengthening formal educational systems.

Keywords: Community schooling, educational resilience, alternative education, community engagement, Kashmir Valley, educational disruption.

1. INTRODUCTION

Community schooling represents an innovative educational response to systemic disruptions in formal education systems. The concept, originating from community-based education models in various global contexts, refers to the provision of education by community members in accessible local spaces when formal educational institutions are unable to function effectively. Community schools differ from formal schools in their grassroots origin, volunteer-driven instruction, flexible curriculum, and reliance on community resources and engagement. These characteristics make community schooling particularly relevant in contexts where formal education faces significant operational challenges.

In the Kashmir Valley, community schooling emerged as a creative response to prolonged educational disruptions that have affected the region over several decades. During the 2016 period of educational interruption, approximately one hundred fifty community schools operated across the valley, providing educational continuity for thousands of students who would otherwise have experienced complete educational disruption. These grassroots initiatives typically involved local teachers, educated community members, and volunteers conducting classes in community spaces when formal schools remained closed. The phenomenon represents a significant example of community agency in addressing educational challenges and maintaining educational continuity despite systemic disruptions.

Understanding community schooling initiatives is crucial for several reasons. First, these initiatives represent community agency in educational resilience, demonstrating how communities can mobilize

local resources to address educational challenges when formal systems are unable to function. This community response provides insights into the potential for local innovation and adaptation in educational contexts facing systemic challenges. Second, community schooling provides insights into alternative educational delivery models that may be applicable in other contexts experiencing educational disruption. The operational dynamics, challenges, and effectiveness of community schooling offer lessons for educational planning in challenging environments. Third, examining community schooling contributes to broader discussions about educational equity, community engagement, and social capital in challenging environments, highlighting the role of community resources in supporting educational continuity.

This paper is organized as follows. The literature review examines theoretical frameworks for understanding community-based education, social capital, and educational resilience. The methodology section describes the qualitative case study approach, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies employed in the research. The findings section presents detailed analysis of community schooling emergence, operational dynamics, effectiveness, challenges, and stakeholder perceptions. The discussion section interprets the findings in theoretical context, examines implications for educational policy and practice, and identifies limitations and directions for future research. The conclusion summarizes key findings and offers recommendations for supporting community-based educational initiatives in challenging environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework for Understanding Community-Based Education

Community-based education theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of community engagement in educational processes. Kellogg and Polit (2000) emphasized that communities possess valuable educational resources, including local knowledge, skilled members, and social networks that can support educational activities. Community-based education models are characterized by several key principles that distinguish them from formal educational approaches. Local ownership means that educational initiatives are locally initiated and controlled, ensuring responsiveness to community needs and priorities. Relevance involves curriculum that is connected to local context and needs, making education more meaningful and engaging for students. Participation ensures that community members actively participate in educational governance, resource mobilization, and instructional delivery. Sustainability involves education that is sustained through community resources and commitment, reducing dependence on external support. Flexibility ensures that educational approaches can adapt to local circumstances and changing conditions.

These principles reflect recognition that effective education in challenging environments requires adaptation to local context and engagement with community resources. Community-based approaches have been particularly important in contexts where formal education faces significant challenges, as communities can mobilize local resources to maintain educational continuity when formal systems are unable to function.

Social capital theory provides important insights into how community social networks facilitate educational continuity. Coleman (1988) conceptualized social capital as the social structures and relationships that facilitate collective action and resource mobilization. Communities with high social capital demonstrate several characteristics that support educational initiatives. Trust enables collaborative initiatives by reducing transaction costs and facilitating cooperation among community members. Shared norms and values support collective action and reinforce commitment to education. Social networks facilitate resource mobilization by connecting community members and enabling

information sharing. Reciprocity creates mutual assistance relationships that support educational engagement.

Community schooling requires significant social capital for initiation, operation, and sustainability. The emergence of community schooling reflects the presence of social capital and collective efficacy in communities, as community members must trust each other enough to collaborate on educational initiatives and commit resources to educational activities. The sustainability of community schooling depends on the maintenance of social capital over time, including continued trust, network connections, and collective commitment to education.

2.2 Community Schooling in International Contexts

Community schooling has emerged in various global contexts as a response to educational challenges, providing models and lessons for other regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, community schools emerged in response to limited government provision of education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. These schools typically involve community governance, parent participation, and flexible curriculum, making them responsive to local needs and priorities. DeStefano et al. (2007) documented the effectiveness of community schools in expanding educational access, particularly in communities where formal schools were unavailable or inaccessible. Rose (2005) found that community schools in various African contexts successfully reached disadvantaged populations, including girls, rural children, and children from marginalized communities.

In Asian contexts, community schooling has emerged as a response to various educational challenges. In Bangladesh, community-based non-formal education programs have successfully reached disadvantaged populations, providing basic education to children who would otherwise be excluded from formal schooling. Nath et al. (2013) documented the effectiveness of these programs in improving educational outcomes for marginalized children. In Nepal, community schooling was used to maintain education during periods of political transition and disruption, providing educational continuity when formal schools were closed or dysfunctional. Fujikane (2007) examined the role of community schools in maintaining educational access during challenging periods.

In Latin American contexts, community-based education initiatives have demonstrated effectiveness in providing quality education in challenging environments. The Escuela Nueva model in Colombia represents a well-documented example of community-based education that has been replicated in various contexts. McEwan (1998) found that the Escuela Nueva model effectively improved educational outcomes in rural areas through flexible curriculum, community engagement, and student-centered learning approaches.

These international experiences provide important lessons for understanding community schooling in the Kashmir Valley. They demonstrate that community-based education can be effective in expanding educational access and maintaining educational continuity in challenging environments. However, they also highlight the importance of institutional support, resource provision, and quality assurance mechanisms for ensuring community schooling effectiveness and sustainability.

2.3 Educational Disruptions and Alternative Responses in Kashmir

Previous research has documented educational disruptions in the Kashmir Valley and various responses to these challenges. Bhat (2017) found that school closures resulted in significant learning gaps, increased dropout rates, and psychological stress among students. The study documented the extent of educational disruption and its impacts on student learning outcomes and well-being. Hassan (2019) documented the psychological impacts of educational disruption on Kashmiri youth,

highlighting the need for comprehensive support addressing both educational and mental health needs of affected students.

Community schooling in Kashmir is a relatively recent phenomenon, emerging as a grassroots response to educational disruption. While informal religious education through Darsghahs has historically existed in the region, community schooling as a response to educational disruption emerged in the twenty-first century. The 2016 disruption period saw significant growth in community schooling, with approximately one hundred fifty community schools operating across the valley. These initiatives represented a community response to the recognition that formal education was unable to provide educational continuity during extended disruptions.

However, limited research has systematically examined community schooling as an educational response in the Kashmir Valley. Previous literature on education in Kashmir has focused on challenges of educational disruption and their impacts, but less attention has been paid to community responses and alternative educational strategies. This study addresses this gap by providing comprehensive analysis of community schooling initiatives, examining their emergence, operational dynamics, effectiveness, challenges, and sustainability.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this research study are to examine the emergence and growth of community schooling in the Kashmir Valley, including the factors that prompted communities to develop educational alternatives and the process through which community schooling initiatives were established. The study further aims to analyze the operational dynamics of community schools including infrastructure, personnel, curriculum, and instructional approaches, providing detailed understanding of how community schooling functioned in practice. A significant objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness of community schooling in providing educational continuity, examining student learning outcomes, social-emotional benefits, and community cohesion outcomes.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology with multiple methods of data collection to provide comprehensive understanding of community schooling. The case study approach was chosen to provide in-depth understanding of community schooling as a complex social phenomenon in its natural context, enabling detailed examination of how community schooling emerged, operated, and was perceived by stakeholders. Yin (2014) emphasizes that case study methodology is particularly appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, making it suitable for understanding community schooling initiatives.

The case study approach enabled detailed examination of community schooling operational dynamics, stakeholder experiences, and contextual factors influencing effectiveness. Multiple data collection methods including interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to provide comprehensive understanding and enable triangulation of findings. This methodological approach was appropriate for generating rich qualitative data that could illuminate the processes and mechanisms underlying community schooling.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews were the primary data collection method, enabling detailed exploration of stakeholder experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community school coordinators (five participants), volunteer teachers (eight participants), students (fifteen

participants), parents (twenty participants), and education department officials (five participants). Interview protocols explored emergence and motivation for community schooling, operational dynamics, successes and challenges, stakeholder perceptions of effectiveness, and recommendations for improvement. Interviews were conducted in the local language to ensure participant comfort and accurate communication.

Field observations were conducted at community schooling sites to document infrastructure and physical environment, teaching and learning processes, student engagement, community participation, and operational challenges. Observations were conducted over multiple visits to capture variation in activities and interactions. Observational data provided contextual understanding of community schooling operations and enabled triangulation of interview findings.

Document analysis was conducted to supplement interview and observational data. Documents analyzed included newspaper coverage from Rising Kashmir and Greater Kashmir during 2016, organizational records from Chinara International, education department communications, and online resources and media coverage. Document analysis provided historical context and additional information on community schooling initiatives.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Emergence and Growth of Community Schooling

The findings reveal that community schooling in the Kashmir Valley emerged as a grassroots response to systemic educational disruptions. While informal educational initiatives had occurred in earlier periods, the 2016 disruption marked significant expansion, with approximately one hundred fifty community schools operating across the valley. The emergence of community schooling reflected community agency in addressing educational challenges when formal systems were unable to function. Communities developed educational alternatives drawing on local resources, including educated community members, available spaces, and community solidarity.

The initiation process for community schooling followed several patterns. Individual initiative was common, with an educated individual, often a teacher, initiating classes. The primary case study illustrates this pattern, where a government teacher started a summer school in July 2016 that continued as a community school when the disruption extended beyond the vacation period. This teacher explained that during the disruption, he realized students were losing valuable educational time and decided he could make a difference in his locality. This individual initiative reflects the commitment of some educators to maintaining educational continuity despite significant challenges.

Community consultation was another pattern, with some initiatives involving broader community discussion and decision-making. In Zainakot, a local businessman consulted fourteen educated youth about creating a community school, receiving enthusiastic support from all of them. A parent described how students from well-off families were not that much affected since their parents had managed private tuition, but it was the poor students who had nothing to fall back on, which motivated community members to develop educational alternatives. This pattern reflects community recognition of the differential impact of educational disruption and collective commitment to supporting vulnerable students.

Organizational support was also important, with some community schools established with assistance from nongovernmental organizations. Chinara International established community-based tuition centers in various locations, providing infrastructure, materials, and volunteer support. These organizational partnerships helped expand community schooling reach and enhance quality.

Stakeholder motivations for establishing community schools included maintaining educational continuity, supporting vulnerable students who lacked access to private alternatives, and demonstrating community commitment to education. A volunteer teacher described how the community united for the children, bringing community members together in collective educational effort. These motivations reflect community recognition of the importance of education and collective commitment to maintaining educational engagement despite significant challenges.

5.2 Operational Dynamics of Community Schools

The findings reveal that community schools operated with varying infrastructure, personnel, and instructional approaches. Infrastructure varied significantly across community schools, with operations in private residences, community centers, and formal school buildings. The primary case study operated from a private residence, using two rooms of ten feet by ten feet each, accommodating thirty-six students. The Zainakot community school utilized a community center with three rooms and capacity for fifty students. The Rainawari community school operated from a private residence with one room and capacity for twenty-five students. The Pulwama community school operated in a formal school building with four rooms and capacity for sixty students.

Infrastructure limitations were significant challenges across community schools. Space constraints restricted enrollment and instructional effectiveness. Facility limitations included lack of furniture, teaching materials, and utilities. Resource constraints limited educational materials and technology availability. A volunteer teacher described using rugs for seating and lacking textbooks, whiteboards, and basic teaching supplies. These limitations affected the quality of educational provision and the experience of students and teachers.

Teaching personnel in community schools relied entirely on volunteer teachers. The primary case study involved a single government teacher who taught all subjects to thirty-six students. The Zainakot community school involved fourteen educated youth volunteers. The Rainawari community school involved two retired teachers. The Pulwama community school involved multiple government teachers. Volunteer motivation included commitment to education, concern for student welfare, community solidarity, and professional responsibility. However, volunteers often lacked formal training and received minimal administrative support, affecting instructional quality.

The curriculum in community schools focused on core academic subjects including language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Teaching approaches emphasized student-centered instruction, activity-based learning, individualized support, and flexible pacing. The primary case study teacher reported that learning levels of students actually improved during this phase, with particular improvement in language skills. This finding suggests that community schooling could effectively support educational continuity despite significant limitations.

Student populations in community schools primarily included local students, with a focus on primary grades. Students typically came from disadvantaged backgrounds and lacked access to private education alternatives. Enrollment was voluntary, with no formal registration, and attendance was variable. Students demonstrated high motivation for education, reflecting appreciation for educational opportunities when formal schools were unavailable.

5.3 Effectiveness and Outcomes of Community Schooling

Community schools provided crucial educational continuity during periods of formal school closure. Students received regular instruction that maintained connection with educational material and prevented complete educational interruption. A parent described the community school as a blessing,

noting that children continued learning despite the closure of formal schools. The contact hours provided by community schools, while less than formal schooling, provided important educational engagement that prevented significant learning loss.

Learning outcomes were reportedly positive, with the primary case study teacher noting that student learning levels improved, particularly in language skills. This improvement likely reflected intensive instructional focus on foundational skills, individualized attention due to small class sizes, and student motivation in the community schooling context. However, systematic assessment of learning outcomes was limited, and findings should be interpreted with caution.

Social and emotional benefits were significant. Community schools provided a sense of normalcy and routine during a period of disruption and uncertainty. A student described how attending community school made him feel normal and gave him something constructive to do. Regular peer interaction maintained social connections and provided social support. A parent noted that her child was happier when he could attend community school, suggesting emotional benefits of educational engagement.

Community cohesion was strengthened through community schooling. Collective action for education brought community members together, strengthening social networks and reinforcing shared commitment to education. A volunteer teacher described how the community united for the children, bringing people together in a common cause. This strengthening of community cohesion may have longer-term benefits for educational engagement and community development.

5.4 Challenges and Limitations of Community Schooling

Infrastructure constraints emerged as a significant challenge across community schools. Space limitations restricted enrollment and instructional effectiveness, with the primary case study limiting enrollment to thirty-six students due to space constraints. Facility limitations included inadequate furniture, teaching materials, and utilities. Resource constraints limited availability of educational materials and technology. A volunteer teacher noted lacking textbooks, whiteboards, and basic teaching supplies. These limitations affected the quality of educational provision and the experience of students and teachers.

Human resource challenges significantly affected community schooling. Teacher shortages were common, with the primary case study having only one teacher for thirty-six students. Volunteer participation varied, and commitment was sometimes inconsistent. A community school coordinator noted that even when several teachers who lived nearby could have volunteered, none did. Skills gaps among volunteers affected instructional quality, as not all volunteers had formal teaching training.

Coverage limitations restricted community schooling reach. Community schools served only a fraction of affected students. Approximately one hundred fifty community schools, while significant, were insufficient to serve all affected communities. Most community schools focused on primary grades, with limited options for secondary and higher secondary students. Geographic coverage was also limited, with rural areas having more community schools than urban areas. A student noted that the program was mainly taken in the countryside and not in urban localities.

5.5 Stakeholder Perceptions and Engagement

Student perceptions of community schooling were generally positive. Students valued educational continuity, social interaction, routine and normalcy, and skill development. However, students also noted limitations including basic facilities, limited curriculum, informal environment, and variable teacher quality. One student commented that community schooling was better than staying at home,

but not as good as formal school, reflecting appreciation for educational opportunities while recognizing limitations.

Parent perspectives were mixed. Supporters appreciated educational continuity, valued community engagement, expressed concern about educational loss, and wanted children to be occupied constructively. A parent described community schooling as a good initiative, noting that at least some people took the initiative for the welfare of poor students. Skeptics expressed security concerns, quality concerns, preference for formal schooling, and fear of reprisal. One parent noted not sending children to community schooling due to security concerns, sending instead to a local teacher's house for free instruction.

Teacher perspectives demonstrated varied opinions. Volunteers expressed commitment to education, concern for students, satisfaction with community service, and frustration with limitations. The primary case study teacher expressed regret that he was the sole volunteer and that even when several teachers lived nearby, none volunteered. Non-participants cited security concerns, personal circumstances, professional obligations, or disagreement with the approach. The primary case study teacher emphasized that if teachers are compassionate towards the issue of educational loss, a lot of problems will be solved.

Education department perspectives were mixed. Supportive officials acknowledged educational need, provided some guidance, allowed flexibility, and recognized community initiative. Cautious officials emphasized formal education priorities, regulatory concerns, quality assurance issues, and coordination challenges. The education department's response included passing instructions to aid community schools in September 2016, providing some flexibility for community schools to operate in private accommodations.

Nongovernmental organizations supported community schooling. Chinari International established community tuition centers across districts, supported students under various programs, provided educational resources and nutrition, and advocated for educational continuity. The organization's support included sixteen tuition centers across districts, supporting four hundred five students under various programs. This organizational support helped expand community schooling reach and enhance quality.

CONCLUSION

This research analyses community schooling as an educational resilience strategy in the Kashmir Valley during the 2016 disruption, when approximately one hundred fifty community schools provided educational continuity for thousands of students. These grassroots initiatives, relying on volunteer teachers and basic infrastructure, served primarily disadvantaged primary-age students. While community schools provided crucial educational continuity and social-emotional support, significant challenges including infrastructure limitations, volunteer shortages, and sustainability concerns limited their effectiveness as stop-gap arrangements rather than sustainable alternatives. The findings highlight the need for formal frameworks, resource support, and strengthened formal education systems to complement community-based initiatives, contributing valuable lessons for educational planning in challenging environments.

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