

## Everyday Life of Slum Children: A Case Study from Education Perspective

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### Abstract

*Every year, the city of Pune attracts migrant workers due to urbanization, and these migrants form residential pockets called slums. Today, around 40% of Pune's population lives in urban slums, around 11% of children, who have little or no access to education with the everyday hand-to-mouth struggle for survival. This study explores the lives of slum children and their educational conditions. Three case studies were conducted with three slums from uptown areas of Pune. Focus group discussions, interviews, and visual survey methods were employed, leading to qualitative analysis. Analysis threw light on the everyday challenges faced by slum children in accessing education. The visual studies imply the need for architectural intervention. The findings also suggest policy implications towards the provision of education towards the betterment of the lives of slum children. Working and learning are the two social processes; without breaking the legal structures on child labor, children working within the home as domestic labor or in the household enterprise is a common occurrence in urban centers, particularly among those who are household income is derived from the informal sector and who have lower income levels. Working modes and times differ depending on the situation. Owing to the size of India's informal economy and attempts to reduce child labor trafficking, a strong emphasis has been placed on developing and implementing social policies that address child labor.*

**Key-words:** Slum Children, Education, Learning Center, Case Study, Working and Learning.

### 1. Introduction

Pune is the second-largest city in the state of Maharashtra, after Mumbai. It is a tier 2 city and home for large industrial and educational organizations. 40% of its population lives in the slums. The migrants contribute most of this urban slum population from rural areas of Maharashtra and other neighboring states moving to the city searching for work and better living conditions [2]. The most vulnerable section of these slums is children. These children are deprived of basic living conditions

and education. Surrounded by poverty, illness, and despair, they fight for their survival daily [3]. Most of these children are not enrolled in local schools and have limited access to books and a place to study. The children who are enrolled in the schools still lack basic knowledge due to ignorance of the education system. Several initiatives led by the Government of India like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Right to Education Act [6] are a few of the efforts to provide universal education to children aged 6 to 14. Although many studies conducted into the living conditions and lack of basic infrastructure in slums from an architectural point of view, the condition of education of slum children is less explored. This study was conducted as part of the design research for mobile schools for slum children. The study had three objectives:

1. To study how the slum children are accessing education.
2. To understand the everyday life issues faced by slum children with regards to education.
3. To understand the space utilization pattern for learning activities.

## **2. Background**

A slum household is a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following: inadequate access to safe water, poor structural quality of housing, insecurity, inadequate access to sanitation and infrastructure [1].

A Slum, for Census, has been defined as residential areas where dwellings are unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and design of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of the street, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors, which are detrimental to the safety and health [2].

According to Pune census data, 10.79% of the child population lives in slums, and the literacy rate among these children is 81.73%. Moreover, out of every 100 children, only 32 children finish their age-appropriate school education [4]. Among the major factors affecting the education of slum children are poverty, lack of educational facilities, space constraints in slums, migration of parents, and child labor [10].

## **3. Research Methods and Sampling**

For this research, a Case Study methodology was employed [11]. This research comprised three cases of slums from the uptown areas of Koregaon Park (slum 1), Kalyani Nagar (slum 2), and

Sakore Nagar (slum 3) in Pune city. The data was collected from Focus group discussions, one to group interviews, one-one interviews, and a visual survey of the slums [12].

Focus group discussions were conducted with three groups in each slum with 6, 6, and 5 slum dwellers (age between 19-45 years, median age 32). One to group interviews was conducted with three groups at each slum comprising 15, 10, and 10 children respectively (age between 5-10 years, median age 9). In-depth one to one interview were conducted with 3 (age 5, 9 &12, 2 (age 7 & 10) and 2 (age 8 & 10) children respectively from site1, 2 and 3. Also, in-depth interviews with (key informant (teacher from NGO, age 32) was conducted. Slum Demographics of Children in NGO Learning Center are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 - Slum Demographics of Children in NGO Learning Center

Slum	Age group (Yrs)	Number of children	Age group (yrs)	Number of children	Total
1	2-5	16	6-12	36	52
2	2-5	25	6-12	17	42
3	2-5	05	6-14	26	31

Source: Identity Foundation NGO

#### 4. Data Collection

Primary data was collected at each slum over weekdays and weekends to understand the children's routine. The interviews were informal and open-ended and were conducted in local languages - Marathi and Hindi. The study was conducted in January 2019 over two weeks.

Figure 1 - Location of Slums



Source: Google earth image

The interviews were conducted with the help of Idea foundation and Identity Foundation, NGOs Working in these slums with the children. The children and their parents were briefed about the project in the first week, and consent was obtained from the NGO. In the first week, a visual survey of the slum was conducted, followed by focus group discussions and interviews [14]. Location of Slums, Source: Google Earth Image as indicated in Figure 1. After the interviews, again, one more visual survey was conducted. The obtained data were used for open coding. They were mapped with the visual survey to gain insights into the spatial patterns.

## 5. Results and Discussion

For analysis of interviews, open coding was done. Table 2 shows different information patterns that emerged in the studies in all three slums.

Table 2 - Comparative Analysis

Codes	Slum 1	Slum 2	Slum 3
Access to education	Going to government schools. Use NGO bus to travel to school. Attend classes run by NGOs at the slum.	Enrolled in village schools. Use NGO bus to travel to school. Attend classes run by NGOs at the slum.	Going to government schools. Use NGO bus to travel to school. Only young children attend classes run by NGOs at the slum.
Infrastructure issues	Cannot study at home. No electricity and water.	Can study at home but space constraint.	
Health hazards and safety issues	The canal is flowing next to the slum carrying waste from treated water.	The river flowing along carries garbage. Construction junk lying around can hurt the children.	Children have to pass through garbage dumping ground.
Space constraints	Temporary structure for the learning center.	No structure. Classes are conducted under the tree.	No structure. Classes were conducted inside a small temple in the slum.
Educational aids	Basic furniture, books, pencil& slates, and toys.	No furniture. Children used the materials teacher brought.	
Financial issues	Most parents cannot afford school fees. Children are sent to government schools, so care is taken to provide the noon meal.		
Family issues	No parental guidance in studies. Children are engaged in house chores and tending to younger siblings.		

**Slum 1:** This slum houses migrants from Gulbarga, a town in Karnataka, and most of them work on construction sites. The children living here were enrolled in the nearby government schools. They attended the class at the learning center set by Idea Foundation NGO on slum site in the

morning and then attended the school in the afternoon. The kindergarten children attended the learning center at the slum. The learning center was a kutchha structure with timber frames and tin sheets. There was no electricity in this slum [15].

Figure 2 - Learning Center in Slum 1



The open space in the slum was a small front yard with a temple where sometimes the classes were conducted, with construction machines and materials around, which were used by the people working on construction sites. The learning center was provided with basic teaching materials for children by the NGO [5]. The teacher from the NGO conducted classes for both the age group children. There was no furniture for the children, and the floor is used. Basic furniture like a plastic table and chair was provided for the teacher. The teacher taught different subjects on different days to both the group of children. Learning Center in Slum 1 is indicated in Figure 2. The children were given guidance individually according to the grades they were studying in. So the subjects remained common for the day. The teacher from NGO (key informant) arrived every day at the slum at 7.30 am and went from house to house, calling out children and taking them with her to the center [7]. The classes started at 8.30 am and continued till 10:30 am, after that she attended pre-school children for half an hour. Later, a bus from Identity foundation would drop these kids at the nearby government school at 11.00 am, which continued till 5:00 pm.

**Slum 2:** This slum also had migrants from Gulbarga. Ten children out of 17 from this slum were enrolled in the nearby government school. It is located on the banks of the Mula-Mutha River in Kalyani Nagar. The vast being a declared slum, there was a supply of electricity and water provided by the government [8]. Identity foundation NGO had provided bus service for the children to go to

school. The classes were conducted from 12:30 to 2:30 pm after the children came back from school. The children and the teacher sat under a tree on the plastic mat for learning as there was no structure or furniture [16]. The younger children were enrolled in schools in their villages, which they only visit once a year, which is the slum with the greatest number of young children. They were completely dependent on the NGO-run classes for their education; the older children travelled to the government.

Figure 3 - Learning Center in Slum 2



Completely dependent on the NGO-run classes for their education; the older children traveled to the government school in Lohegaon in the bus provided by the NGOs. Learning Center in Slum 2 is indicated in Figure 3.

**Slum 3:** The people living here belong to Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra, who migrated to Pune looking for work [9]. These people were engaged in different work like domestic help, construction site worker, street vendor, private driver, gardener, taxi driver, sweeper, nanny, rag picker, etc. Part of this slum was a dumping ground for garbage for nearby residences. The teacher also had to go from door to door, asking parents to send their children to the classes. She would sometimes get more children, sometimes less [13]. The classes were conducted from 3.00 to 5.00 pm. This slum has the least number of young children and saw the least strength in the classes in the learning center. The classes were conducted in a temple in the slum as there was no structure provided [17]. Most of the older children were enrolled in a government school. They used a bus provided by Identity Foundation NGO to travel. Learning Center in Slum 3 is indicated in Figure 4.



Figure 4 - Learning Center in Slum 3



### 5.1. Visual Survey

The visual survey was conducted to understand the spatial patterns of the slums and space utilization for educational activities. A graphical representation of spatial patterns is shown in Figures 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 5 - Spatial Representation of Learning Space in Slum 1

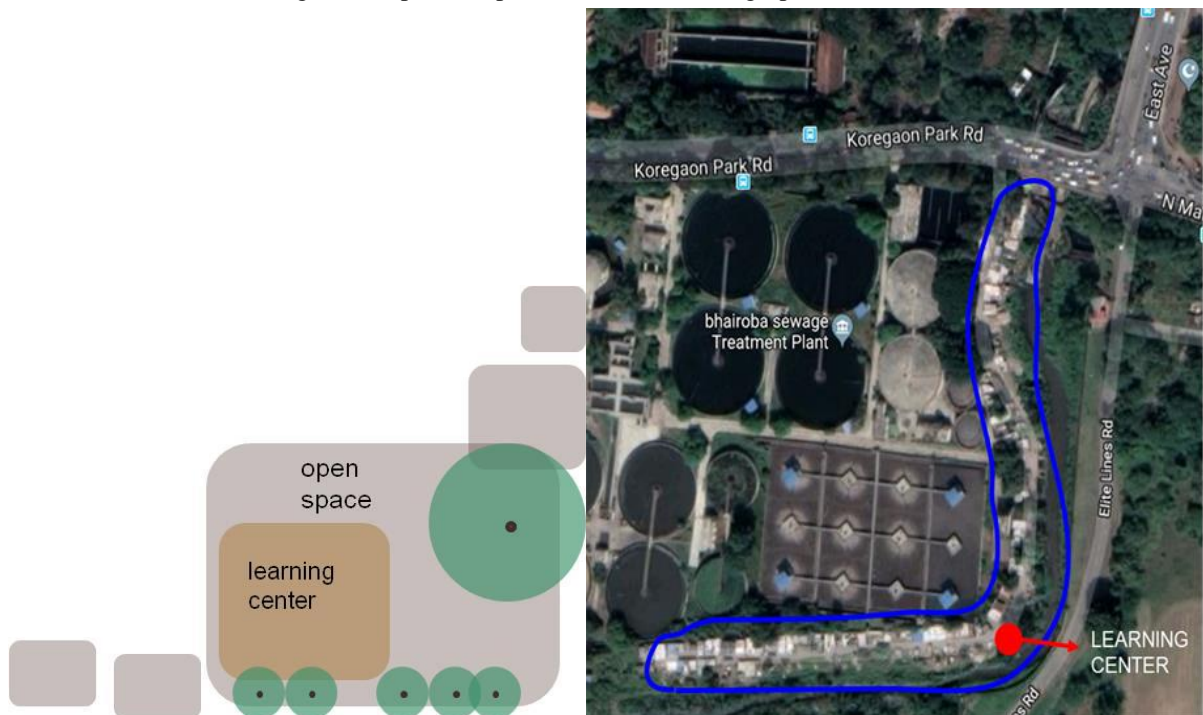
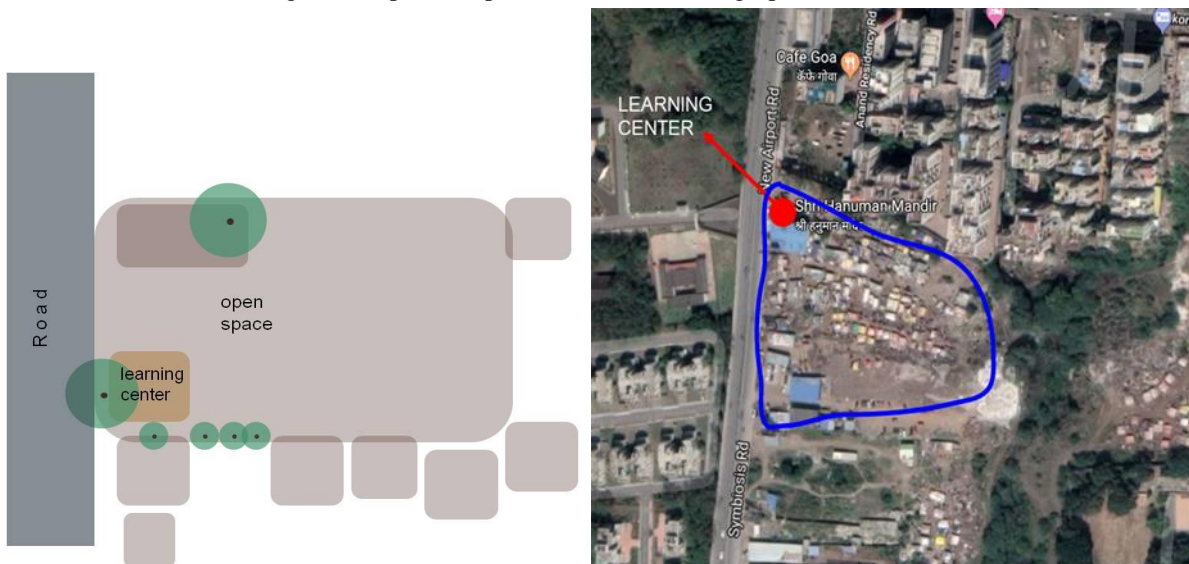


Figure 6 - Spatial Representation of Learning Space in Slum 2



Figure 7 - Spatial Representation of Learning Space in Slum 3



## 5.2. Discussion and Inference

### 5.2.1. Access to Education

Children in slums usually are deprived of education owing to many reasons such as distance, affordability, availability of schools, and supporting infrastructure. In all the three slums studied, access to education for children was made possible by NGOs, be it providing transport to travel to



schools or providing learning centers at the slums in otherwise difficult situations. Some children said, "every day, I look forward to going to school and am happy to hop on the bus in the interviews." The children could not go to private schools as their parents could not afford the fees.

### **5.2.2. Infrastructure Issues**

Many of the slums suffer from a lack of basic infrastructures like water, electricity, and sanitation, because of which the everyday life of these slum children became a struggle for survival. Many children could not study at home owing to a lack of space and electricity. In focus group discussions, one of the parents said, "I got married at a very young age, and life is quite difficult here. I am worried about my daughter's education. I only hope that the (NGO) program would be of help for her future."

### **5.2.3. Health Hazards and Safety Issues**

In two slums, a water body was running along with the unclean and posing danger of an epidemic. In one slum, a part of it was used as a garbage dump yard, which was extremely unhygienic for the children who had to pass through it every day. Lack of clean water and sanitation aggravates this issue. One of the parents, who also looks after children besides hers, said, "I look after the kids here when their parents are out for work. It is risky to leave the kids alone near a sewage plant. However, to meet the needs (of the family), people have to leave them. The (NGO) classroom program is of great help to keep children safe." One of the slums was right outside of a sewage treatment plant area. The untreated dirty water flowed at speed next to the slum, which poses a danger both for the safety and health of the children. In another slum, many construction junks like machinery and building materials dumped around, which posed a danger to health and safety. The teacher would teach slum children about methods of personal and public hygiene. Many children miss their school and classes in the NGO learning center because they often fall sick.

### **5.2.4. Space Constraints and Educational Aids**

The visual survey revealed most of the space utilization patterns in slums. The tiny houses in the slums offered little or no space for the children to study inside homes. In all of the slums, the public spaces were used for the NGO learning center. In one of the slums, before the center was built, the teacher used to teach in the temple two hundred meters away. Due to religious issues, they shifted

the center under the peepal tree. This center was provided with a plastic table and chair for the teacher, but children were seated on mats on the floor. Toys and teaching material such as books, pencil & slate, etc., was provided by NGO. The other two slums did not have any structure and any educational aids for the learning center. In the interview, the teacher said, "I am happy to teach them even though many things are missing. The NGOs are doing much more than what authorities could do for them (children). I hope that these children receive a good education and secure their futures." One of these slums had elongated open space, which the NGO would use as classroom space. This classroom could not happen during heavy rains and very hot summers. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> slum, though, it seemed to allow the temple to be used as a classroom (for spatial patterns, refer to Figures 5, Figure 6 and Figure7).

### **5.2.5. Financial Issues**

The biggest hindrance for slum children for education was their parents' financial conditions. As they struggled to provide for the family's necessities, they hardly could afford education for their children. As one of the parents in the focus group discussion said, "I am a simple man. We have a hand-to-mouth struggle every single day. One of my four sons got married recently. Others are studying in government schools. I want to support their education. I do not want them to end up doing what I do (for a living)." The NGOs were also helping them financially with free classes and educational material.

### **5.2.6. Family Issues**

The slum families had mostly both parents working. They would leave early in the morning and come back late in the evening. Most of the older children had to tend to their younger siblings and perform house chores. Also, the parents being illiterate could not help their children with their studies. However, some of them were engaged in community activities like sewing and basket weaving in the learning centers during the evenings. One of the older children said in the interview, "I study in 7<sup>th</sup> standard in Lohegaon government school. I work at home after school hours and take care of my younger brother. I also help him with his studies. I want to complete my education before I get married. I want to become a working woman in the future." Another problem with the slum families was that the migrants' number was more than the number of out-migrants, which created issues for space, infrastructure, and health.

## 6. Conclusions

As the city of Pune is growing, rapid urbanization and developmental activities will bring more and more migrants to slums. As they constantly move from one slum to another seeking work, their families, especially the children, would need access to education. The slums in the cases attract many rural migrants to these areas because of the Metro project and construction activities. In the cases studied, educational facilities were provided by NGOs, but not every slum would get this kind of aid. The findings throw light on the everyday struggle of slum children and their unshakable will to get an education, as they deem it to be the only savior out of their misery. The space utilization study suggests the need for architectural intervention. The different issues from the inferences suggest the strong need for policymakers and authorities to implement reformation policies for slum children's education, including financial aids. Social innovation is not the responsibility of NGOs alone. However, it has to be a collective effort by every agency involved in urban slum renewal programs.

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