

Achieving Education for All

A Thought

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Abstract

A study of the management control policies and Class X grades of schools affiliated to a state board was conducted. The study revealed that the school fee the only significant variable explaining school performance. Since Colleman's report, socio-economic status (SES) has been found as a significant variable explaining students' performance. The society and the government have taken numerous steps to overcome this barrier to learning. The Right to Education Act 2009 was a milestone to achieve education for all strata of the society. The 25 per cent reservation in private schools for the lower income group has to be especially appreciated as this is a step towards inclusive education. But, this is not sufficient. Over time, we have realised that there is a need to do a little more. Residential schools, with the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model may be a way ahead to overcome the barriers of SES.

INTRODUCTION

This is a thought paper, on developing a model for school education, especially for children from the lower strata in of society. The motivation for this comes from the findings of a study which was conducted to identify the relationship between school policies and school performance.

The results show that school fee as a measure of socio-economic status was the only significant variable. Section two provides details of that study. This again emphasises beyond the school environment, is an important determinant of students' school performance. Various efforts have been made over time to provide

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additional support to the children from needy families. These efforts have been made by individuals and private organisations. Section three enumerates some of them. The government has also achieved a milestone by enacting the RTE Act; however, private residential schools were kept out of it. Section four briefly discusses why they were kept out and how these could have been included. Section five, which is the heart and soul of this paper, gives a new model for school management, based on participation from the society, the government and the corporate sector. The model revives the Gurukul education system which was followed in ancient times in India. The last section provides a conclusion to the study.

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

A study of school management controls (policies), socio-economic status (effective annual tuition fees for Class X students) and the performance of a senior secondary, private unaided school was conducted. The school performance was measured as the three-year average grade scored by students in Class X exams conducted by the state board of examination. Data regarding the school fees were collected from the school management, while grades for each student for the main board examination were collected from the Gujarat Secondary Education Board.

Out of the 57 schools that participated, 36 used Gujarati as the medium of instruction (including one Hindi-medium school), while remaining 21 schools used English as medium of instruction. All of these were private trust schools except one, which was a religious trust. The total students from kindergarten to Class XII varied from a low of 100 to a high of 3,500 with a median of 911.5 students, an average school size of 1,018 students and standard deviation of 706.79. The number of students in Class X varied from a low of 5 to a high of 484, with a median of 54 students and an average school size of 77 students. The school covered started the 10th standard as early as 1987 and as late as in 2013 with the median year being 2004. The effective fees charged to the Class X students varied from a low of ₹1,200 to a maximum of ₹35,000, with an average fee of ₹8,896 per year and standard deviation of ₹7,192.5.

The school fee was used as a proxy for the students' socio-economic status. It very well represented parents' qualification, occupation, and income, kind (quality) of tuition classes that children go to, the number of siblings, parents' aspirations, and child's aspirations at the school level. In private unaided schools, the fee is also a good indicator of the school infrastructure. It was observed during data collection that the quality of infrastructure, such as toilet facility, drinking water facilities, class room furniture, playground, smart board

varied with the amount of fees the school charged from their students. The correlation between the fees and the performance was found to be 0.57 and was significant at 0.01 levels. A regression was also conducted with the fees and management control variables to explain school performance. Management controls were measured as the latent constructs of action control, results control, personnel control, and cultural control for both teachers and students, using multiple items on a five point Likert type scale. Multiple responses were sought from Class X teachers of each school to measure the management control variables. In total, 241 responses were collected from 57 schools. Responses from two schools were dropped on account of missing value and outlier analysis. Reliability and validity analysis of the constructs were conducted and found appropriate. Summated scores were calculated for each school. These scores largely met the tests of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity. The results showed that school fee was the only significant variable explaining school performance.

AFTER-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT—THE KEY TO STUDENT SUCCESS

I neither negate nor undermine the role of schools in pupils' learning and development. I have a different point of argument here. Today, a parallel support system has developed to overcome the barriers of socio-

economic status which has an important bearing on the students and school performance. For example, one aided school associated with a church organises evening classes for children from poor families. Another aided school which has a hostel facility provides additional academic support to students that come from rural areas. IIMA students' club *Prayaas* also engages in providing additional teaching and learning support to the disadvantaged children in the vicinity. Visamo Kids in Ahmedabad gets children from rural areas and provides them with food, stay and additional academic support. These kids go to the best schools of Ahmedabad city and have performed remarkably well. All these services are being provided on a voluntary basis without any additional charges to parents. The residential schools run in Gujarat by devotees of Swami Narayan sect are also a similar case. This provides an environment of support to the children and helps them to overcome the limitations faced by the families.

All evidence points that beyond-school-support is very essential. An informal correspondence with the officials at the Right to Education Resource Centre, IIMA, showcased new information in support of seeking admission in private schools under section 12(1)(C) of the RTE Act 2009. They are also planning a tracking system through a network of volunteers to help students that require additional support to cope

up with school studies, so that they do not drop out at year-end. The efforts of Government of India in opening Eklavya Model Residential Schools for tribal children, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and Navodaya Vidyalaya also strengthens the argument for creating an environment beyond school as a necessary condition for children to perform well in schools.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND THE RTE ACT

Including private residential schools would have led to inclusive education in the true sense. The logic which I could see is a resource crunch on the part of the government to finance these children's food and stay. To me, food does not seem to be a big problem. These children are entitled to the Mid Day Meal Scheme and also subsidised food, for which the government is giving (Direct Benefit Transfer) D.B.T. to their families. This money can be provided to schools for the food of these children. Hostel facilities have to be provided for these children. If the government provides loans for constructing or renovating schools and hostel facilities (maybe under priority sector lending) at subsidised rates, then this will encourage private players to build residential facilities. Priority sector lending will not increase the government's burden as it is a reallocation of the existing funds available. The amount of subsidy has to be written off over the life of the hostel building (say

30 to 40 years) by spending money over the stay of the disadvantaged children. The money not spent will have to be returned with interest to the government. Transfer for fees, food and writing off of subsidy has to be linked to the learning levels of students which are in line with the priority set under the twelfth Five-Year Plan.

NEW MODEL OF SCHOOLING FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

Since the New Education Policy 1992, private participation in education has increased and calculations put forth by Jain and Dholakia (2009) has made it clear beyond debate that the low fee private schools will play an important role in achieving universal literacy. Definitely, the low fee private schools including models like Gyan Shala, Ahmedabad has shown high levels of students' achievement at very low cost. Gyan Shala currently incurs approximately ₹3,500 per annum, per child at the primary level which goes up to ₹5,000 at secondary level. However, the criticism of Jain and Saxena (2010), Sarangpani (2009) and others cannot be overlooked. So, there is a need for a modified model for schooling in India, especially with respect to the disadvantaged section. This model which I am proposing is not new, but somewhere, it has been missed out in the discussion on the current schooling system in India. I feel that residential schools with government, private, and community partnership are a way

out of this problem. These schools, apart from cognitive learning, will provide children with a place to play sports, learn music and dance, and involve in various extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. This will overcome the drawbacks of the Gyan Shala model and meet the objectives of the *National Curriculum Framework -2005* as given by the NCERT.

These schools will be located outside the city areas, where land is easily available or existing municipal schools, which need extensive renovation. The government has to provide these lands on a long term lease of 40–50 years at a token amount to the private players interested in building and managing schools. Preference has to be given to the corporates which take this venture as part of their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activity, or social entrepreneurs whose main objective is to contribute to the society and do not take this as a business venture for profit making. The money for construction of school and hostel can be provided through the CSR funds available with both public and private sector organisation and other donations. All donations to this category of schools should also be made 100 per cent tax free. The residential status will be compulsory for the students admitted in these schools. Today, state governments are reimbursing up to ₹ 17,000 per annum, per child on account of fees, books, etc., to the private schools (*The Times of India* 2015). Now, if the

cost of education for these schools is around ₹ 3,500–5,000 per child, per annum, then an additional amount of ₹ 10,000 per child will be sufficient to meet the cost of stay per child once infrastructure and money transfer for food subsidy is provided by the government. In this case also, transfer for fees and food has to be linked to the learning levels of students. The expenditure incurred by residential schools run by government is around ₹ 45,000 per child, per year for KGBV. Other government-run residential schools also have a similar cost structure. We expect that this model will be able to provide much better results in terms of school performance at a lower cost.

These schools will provide education for Classes I–VIII as provided under the RTE Act. It will function full day, working six days a week and the medium of instruction will be the mother tongue (regional language). This will make possible the additional support required by students to be provided in school only. The proposed model is better suited for schools working in two shifts. Though such schools make efficient use of resources, but at the cost of students' learning the disadvantaged students who need additional support but do not have the environment at home lose interest in studies resulting in increased absenteeism and eventually higher dropouts.

Based on the principles of school-based management, school

management committee will have full authority and be responsible for managing the school affairs. There will be no interference from government bodies with respect to the school functioning, as long as the students admitted are from the lowest strata of the society and the students' results meet pre-defined learning targets. There will be a separate school for boys and girls. Each school will have 16 classrooms (two each for Classes I–VII), one lab, one staffroom, one library room and one for the principal room. Class rooms, lab and library rooms should be with a sitting capacity of 40 students. This school structure will be built on the ground and first floors. The second floor will house the kitchen, dining area and indoor playing room. The kitchen will be managed by an outside contractor. The third to sixth floors will be used as a hostel with 10 rooms on each floor, accommodating 16 beds in each room. The seventh floor will have four flats for the teaching staff who will also be mentors for students on each hostel floor. In the first two years, admission will be given to students in all classes for one section, provided they possess class-specific learning levels. However, year three onwards admission will be given in Class I only. This is based on the presumption that the school will be able to attract 120–140 students in Class I from the third year onwards.

Schools will also have an open ground, and the infrastructure will meet the minimum requirements of

the RTE Act 2009. Initially, schools may have to start without chairs, tables and beds for children. These resources will have to be arranged by the school management committee by garnering funds from the society through donations and sponsorship. *Prayaas* at IIMA, *Visamo Kids* and others generate lot of funds through these measures. Even family members and relatives of the children will be encouraged to donate in the donation box kept in the schools.

Teachers' salary and working conditions in these schools will be better compared to low cost private schools. Teachers will have free accommodation and food for them. They will also have free schooling for their children. This will restrict them to shift jobs for small increase in salary (Tooley and Dixon 2007). Further, teachers will be incentivised for children securing above the minimum learning levels. This has been recommended by many studies. (Muralidharan 2013). Learning levels will be tested by an independent body. This will keep them motivated to work hard. Also, the selection process and training will focus more on building a culture of service for humanity and not on monetary gains.

This model is based on the traditional Indian gurukul system. Here, the society is largely responsible for running the school. This system is part of the Indian culture since ancient times. Parents will be more inclined to send their children to

these schools. They find it difficult to meet additional expenses which they have to incur when the child goes to high fee charging schools. Children, after Class VIII may join the labour market, opt for vocational education or go for secondary and higher education. This model will not meet the objective of inclusive education. In any case, 100 per cent inclusive education was never an agenda of the Act, as residential schools were kept out. An example of a close model is Shri Sant Nilobaray Vidyalaya run by social activist Anna Hazare.

CONCLUSION

Numerous studies have found a strong positive association between the socio-economic background and students' performance. While we cannot change the realities of a child's birth environment, but we can definitely provide them with an environment where they are given an equal opportunity to learn and take decisions in their best interests. This model is meant particularly for those who are at the bottom of our social

strata. Even children of people like construction labourers and others who keep on moving from one place to another for their jobs will be able to admit their kids here. Here, admission of students will be granted even if parents do not agree, provided this is in the interest of children and somebody (maybe a person or an organisation such as Kailash Satyarthi's Bachpan Bachao Andolan or the NGO by Harsh Mander for street children) becomes a guardian to the students. This will go a long way in reducing child labour also. Harsh Mander has also advocated building residential schools to solve the increasing problem of street children in big cities. Rainbow houses built in few cities of India provide for shelter and education of girl child living on the streets. The initial outcomes seem positive. So, we advocate that the government should make a provision for such residential schools where all stakeholders of the society join hands and come forward to provide basic education to the most neglected section of the society.

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