

ROLE OF INCENTIVES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

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Education has been accepted as the most crucial factor by the civilized society to equip the people with necessary life skills and create in them an awareness of the political, social, cultural and environmental realities. One of the distinctive features of our Indian Constitution since its very inception in 1950, is the recognition of every child as a person entitled to certain fundamental rights. In spite of this, the country took about sixty years to respond to the basic right to education by enacting suitable constitutional amendment to bring education into the folds of fundamental rights of the child. Universal access to quality primary education and gender equity in education have universally been accepted as the most crucial goals in the context of Rights Based Approach (RBA) to development. Various state governments committed themselves at the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000) to achieve these goals along with an array of wider and more suplicated goals.

SSA launched in 2001, covers the entire country in a mission mode with the aim of universal retention and useful relevant education by 2010. It addresses the need of over 19 crore children in 11 lakh habitations, more than 8.5 lakh existing primary and upper primary schools and covers over 33 lakh teachers. The thrust is on bridging the gender and social gaps and bringing all children of school-going age to schools. Within this framework it is expected that the education system will be made relevant so that children and parents find the schooling system useful and absorbing according to their social and natural environment.

Now with the approaching of the target year, it is high time to analyse the role of various incentives being given to meet the educational needs of children in enhancing their enrolment and retention in primary schools. To provide impetus to the achieving of these goals, various incentives in the form of scholarships, mid-day meals, free text-books, free uniforms, free coaching, free lodging etc. are being provided to the poor and the deprived children at the primary level by the state. It is in this perspective that

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this study seeks to assess the impact of incentives (Scholarship, mid-day meals, free text books and free uniform) on the enrolment and retention of children in primary schools.

Besides this the performance level of the children studying in these state run primary schools (Parishadiya Schools) was also studied as it was thought that bringing of all children to schools is not enough. Teaching them the basics of life for bettering their quality of life is the goal of education and in this context the school as well as the community partnership is required.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study had been taken up with the view of achieving the following objectives:-

1. To determine the status of various incentives given in the primary schools.
2. To determine the status of enrolment and retention of children in primary schools.
3. To know the level of reading in children of primary schools.

METHODOLOGY

This Descriptive Field Survey was conducted in Parishadiya Schools of five blocks of Allahabad district selected purposively. To get answers to the objectives spelt out in this study questionnaires and interview schedules were constructed regarding the various government run incentive schemes—mid-day meals(MDM), scholarship, uniform to girls and text-books and administered to the Gram Pradhan, parents, headmaster/teachers and some students. Proforma for School Records for obtaining the enrolment, and retention, etc was constructed. In the end a Reading Ability Test constructed by Pratham NGO was given to class III students to measure their performance.

Informations obtained through interviews and discussion were subjected to simple statistical analysis like percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The significant findings that emerged from the analysis of the views of the Gram Pradhan, headmasters/teachers and parents collected through the above mentioned tools are given in the following table:-

Table -1 showing Responses of headmasters (HM)/ Teachers (Tr) Gram Pradhan (GP) and Parents regarding incentives (in percentage).

S. No.	Items	HM/Tr/GP	Parents
1.	Mid-day Meals (MDM) increase attendance	86	82
2.	MDM diverts attention of teachers and students from studies.	54	19
3.	Quality of food not upto the mark and insufficient	10	56
4.	Scholarship not received timely	38	75
5.	Preference for other teaching material than scholarship (Bag, stationery, etc)	37	52
6.	All the text books not available timely.	56	44
7.	Uniform is attracting girls towards education	48	78
8.	Best incentive is text books	67	89
9.	Boys should also be given uniform	24	33
10.	Medical facilities should be given	28	45
11.	Quality of MDM to be improved	18	80
12.	Provide free coaching to weak students	51	87

On the basis of the findings of this table it can be said that mid-day meal (MDM) is the best incentive followed by text-books and uniform. Regarding MDM the headmaster and teachers (54 percent) said that it diverts their attention as well as that of the students also which disrupts the studies of children. Only 10 percent HM/teachers and 36 percent parents said its quality was not good and the food was also insufficient. About text books they said that they should reach the schools in the beginning of the session so that they can be distributed to the students when they take admission. When they are distributed late children find it difficult to follow in the class and do their homework. In place of scholarship it was suggested that stationery items and school bags should also be given. Besides giving uniform to girls, boys should also be given uniform. Other suggestions that emerged are giving of medical facilities to sick children and providing coaching to weak children.

To study the effect of various incentives on enrolment and retention of children in primary schools the Parishadiya schools were compared with schools where no incentives were given.

Table-2 showing Enrolment and retention of students in primary schools with incentives (WIS) and without incentives (WOIS)

Gender	% of Enrolment		% of Retention in Cl V through Cl. I	
	WIS	WOIS	WIS	WOIS
Boys	54.5	59.8	46.4	75.3
Girls	45.5	40.2	44.1	72.8
Total	61.1	38.9	44.9	73.4

A glance at Table 2 shows that the total enrolment percentage is higher for WIS (61.1) than WOIS (38.9). It also revealed that more boys (59.8%) are enrolled in WOIS than WIS (54.5%) But this is not true in the case of girls. The reason for this may be the attitude of parents who are willing to spend money to provide better education to their sons but not to their daughters for obvious reasons. Higher enrolment in WIS can be attributed to the various incentives in these schools thereby reducing the burden of education on the poor. This finding gets support from the findings of studies conducted by CARE (1977) NIEPA (1979) Sharma (1984), Saxena and Mittal (1985) Bhandari (1998), Malhotra (1998).

On the other hand the retention figures are a cause of concern. Only 44.9 percent students are retained in class V through class I in WIS whereas in the WOIS the retention percentage is quite high (73.4%). Boys of the whole district have a retention percentage of 46.4 and girls of 44.1 per cent in WIS whereas it is higher for both, in WOIS (75.3, 72.8 percent respectively). Thus incentives were found to have no impact in retaining the children in schools. This gets support from the studies conducted by NIEPA (1977) Saxena and Mittal (1985), Shah (1989), Malhotra (1998). Lower percentage of retention of students may be due to the fact that as the children grow older they are considered as an asset as they give a helping hand in the household chores or work outside also thereby contributing to the family income. A higher retention in WOIS may be because the parents as well as the students start realising that education is for their good and may be the teachers here are sincere in doing their duty.

Table-3 showing Results of the Reading Ability Test of Class.III

Reading Ability	% of Children
Children who could not read simple sentences	63
Children who could read simple sentences	37

Administration of the Reading Ability Test found that only 37 percent of class III children could read simple sentences and the rest could not. This showed the dismal state of the learning level of our Parishadiya school children.

Thus it can be concluded that giving of incentives is successful in raising the enrolment of children in primary schools but are not helpful in retaining them in school even upto class V. It is evident that, besides giving incentives only, the teaching aspect is to be improved also in these schools. Perhaps, to retain students and thereby reduce wastage and improve performance of students what is required is a sense of hard work, commitment and above all accountability on the part of teachers. So the approach and methodology at primary level should aim at **'Every child in school and learning well'** to reap the maximum benefits of the various incentives given by the government and meet the objectives of SSA.

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