

SCHOOL ADOPTION PROGRAMME AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF GUJARAT : ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY - A CASE-STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Holistic education is the need of the hour for the growth engine of India. Education authorities in India have invested huge amounts and efforts to provide quality education to the people in the country since independence. Despite of these concentrated efforts there have been major lacunae in terms of infrastructure, delivery and other processes. There are many problems like schools being under equipped, underfunded, under staffed and over-crowded (PROBE report, 1998) apart from other general problems of poverty, population and discrimination in India which lead to non-attainment of desired results on implementation of the education programmes. There are many higher education institutions in India which are doing extremely well with good infrastructure, trained teachers and students and a considerable amount of disposable funds. This prompted the president of India and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India to come up with schemes so that these higher education institutions adopt government schools which needed some external support to achieve their objectives.

Adopting a school and thereby extending support to Government's initiatives in providing meaningful education to every child is moving one step forward towards building an inclusive society. University-school collaboration can provide a successful model for this as that would link research with practical experience. There have been many successful initiatives across the country in this regard like that of the IITs and few other universities. Central University of Gujarat, a prominent educational institution in Gujarat, has a huge presence of programmes in Social Science and Humanities whose students' need to understand the needs of the marginalized and act for them. Also for the students of Sciences it is important that they bring innovations that benefit the people at the grass root. Therefore, the University took up this initiative gladly to adopt a municipal school and work towards the betterment of the wards of the school.

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that Government schools in India face several problems like lack of infrastructure in terms of books, class rooms, toilets, computers, play-ground etc., dearth of capable, qualified and devoted teachers, high

drop-out ratio, discrimination among students, lack of interest among the students etc. But the most significant one is a very high drop-out ratio in higher classes especially girls. With the belief that CUG faculty and students could contribute by going and discussing issues with the parents

and their wards and trying to bridge the gaps and retain/return them to school. Thus Central University of Gujarat embarked into the School Adoption Programme by adopting a primary municipal school at sector 29, Gandhinagar.

Also an important aspect of the programme is bringing awareness about Right to Education, Right to Information and other Social Policies that have been made to benefit them.

The following are the objectives of the programme:

1. To integrate theory and practice for the students of the University.
2. To develop the interest of school students in curricular and co-curricular activities of the school and thereby reduce the drop out ratio of the school.
3. To provide vocational skills in order to provide some means of livelihood in the future.
4. To plan and implement a strong outreach activity for the University in an effort towards building a more inclusive society.

Support from the University

The University prepared a committee to oversee the activities with representations from various programmes. The initiatives to be taken

in the school is deliberated well before they are implemented in the school along with the consent and inputs of the principal and the School Management Committee. The administrative office of the University supported the programme in the following manner.

- To get a formal approval from the Administrative Officer of Government Schools, Gandhinagar for initiating the programme.
- Costs associated with various training activities that the University has funded and will continue doing so.
- The University also encourages the students and faculty members to volunteer to contribute their time and skill towards the programme.

The funding requirements initially in the first phase (2 months approximately) was kept minimal. After the first phase the University gradually contributed some funds towards the upkeep of the activities mentioned in the following section. In the third phase (after a year of initiation of the programme) efforts could be made to garner funding from Corporates.

Implementation Plan	:	
Name of the Programme	:	'School Adoption Programme',
School Adopted	:	Government Primary School, No.1 Opposite Central University of Gujarat Campus, Sector 29, Gandhinagar.
Current Principal of the school	:	Ms. Meena Joshi

First Phase

Section I. Those which do not require funding

- 1) Improving language for students and for teachers on requisition (especially spoken English).

- 2) Training them in basic arithmetic skills in order to develop their interest in computations.
- 3) Training them in cultural activities folk dances, folk songs etc.

Second Phase

Section II. Those which require funding

- 1) Improving reading skills. This requires funds for purchase of books and creating a school library. Initially we can also start with donated books.
- 2) Training them art activities like drawing, painting, sketching etc. This will require us to provide for sketch books, drawing sheets, colours etc.
- 3) Training them in cultural activities folk dances, folk songs etc. This requires a few musical instruments and a music system.
- 4) Training them in sports activities including fun games which make up a very cherishing learning experience. This will require funds to purchase balls, bats, improving the playground into a good sports ground for outdoor games.
- 5) Gradually there could be a movie club established in which discussions could be carried on with students after showing them movies based on social issues and reformations (to be done by experts only).

Third Phase

Vocational programmes

- 1) Training can be imparted to all the students for developing computer skills. Initially it could be with our own laptops and then gradually a few desktop computers could be purchased for the school.
- 2) Majority of the girl students are from the nearby slum areas which are dominantly from the Muslim community and the principal opines that they are gifted artists. If we could train them in applying henna (mehendi) or in some other handicrafts it could be a good livelihood for them in future. This activity will also require funds and professional trainers in future.

- 3) Gradually in the third phase it is proposed to take up an '**Earn While You Learn**' programme which can be remunerative for the students and the drop out ratio could be kept in a check. Activities like sewing, creating greeting cards, greeting envelopes and other paper works (modelling on the lines of Manav Sadhna, an NGO that functions in the Gandhi Ashram premise, Ahmedabad) which could be non-hazardous for the children and the end products could be sold either through an outlet in the University or at the school itself. This and many other activities could get support from the Corporates under their Corporate Social Responsibility funding.

Expected Programme Outcomes

1. The students of the University understand the issues faced at the grass root of the Indian society and develop social and scientific solutions to solve these issues.
2. The students of the adopted school get benefitted by developing interest in curricular as well as co-curricular activities.
3. The students of the adopted school learn various vocational skills that may help them to create livelihood opportunities for them in future.
4. The drop out ratio of the adopted school falls as a result of the interest of the students being meaningfully captured by our programme.
5. The University linkages develop gradually by associating with various NGOs and Government agencies working in these areas.

The activities were initiated by February, 2015 with the above mentioned plan approved by the University. Volunteers were invited to join the programme through a notice to contribute as per their skills. Many student

volunteers enthusiastically joined in to further the objectives of the programme.

Results of Implementation of first Phase of the Programme

The first phase of school adoption programme started around February, 2015 with a study of basic requirements from the school's end which was understood through various rounds of discussions with the principal and teaching staff of the school. Accordingly, the programme commenced with only two basic objectives:

1. To teach basics of English language to the class III to class V students
2. To throw light on some general knowledge topics and discuss them with class VI to Class VIII students.

The first round of intervention and activities began in March, 2015. The volunteers from the University were mainly students of MA programme in Social Management, Centre for Studies in Social Management. They were trained by Dr. Ishmeet Kaur and her team of Ph.D. students of CUG to teach English to the students of primary school. Dr. Litty Denis gave them some tips on how to interact with such young students while teaching them. These students then went on to teach some topics of general knowledge and English language to students of primary school class III to class VIII. The students were divided into 2 groups; one which taught various topics of general knowledge in Gujarati to different classes and the other to teach English. Each class was about an hour's time, from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The first group taught sentences in English language to class III to V of the primary school. But it was soon realised that the students were not familiar with either words or pronunciation in English. Therefore, the volunteers were instructed by the co-ordinators to make the

students comfortable with the alphabets in English language and their sounds. So for the next few days only Alphabets and some words were taught to them in this class. Another exercise taken up was identification of primary colours and their names in English. Occasionally, at the end of day chocolates were distributed to all the students at the school.

Every day the CUG volunteers took along note books and pencils for the school students and distributed them to class III and IV students so that their work could be monitored properly.

The second group of volunteers discussed general knowledge in Gujarati to class V to VIII. The volunteers prepared a list of general knowledge questions each day and distributed the photocopies to the students in each of their sessions for discussion. The student who answered maximum correctly was rewarded. The students showed great interest & enthusiasm to learn to these topics. Controlling these young students who were full of excitement was quite a herculean task for the young student volunteers of CUG. An additional learning for the volunteers was that they had to do their homework properly so that they were able to answer to all related questions that were asked by the students.

While these activities went on, the co-ordinators along with the principal conducted a check for those students who could drop out after their class VIII exam. Shockingly some of the brightest female students were planning to drop out. When asked for the reason they said there were social reasons. Some of them added that in case the same school offered class IX and X then they could continue while some of the male students wanted to drop out but had no concrete reasons. Taking into account this situation it was decided to call for a parents' meeting of all students of class VIII so that a

counselling session could be held for them. But as apprehended by the principal, none of the parents came over to meet. Hence, it was important to plan to go to the slum areas where these students reside and create some awareness regarding continuing education. Also there was a felt need of commencing some 'Earn While You Learn' programme along with the school. Fortunately later it was told by the principal that few female students who were to drop out have changed their minds and would take admission in some high school nearby.

Since the final exams were nearing the teachers requested to get a revision conducted for each class at least for the course on English. This request was also gladly taken up by the volunteers. The programme of the first phase continued till 1st of April as they had their final exams after that and then the school broke for summer vacation till June.

The school required some computers as they do not have enough in the school for the students to learn the quintessential computer skills and hence requested the University if they could do so. This was immediately agreed upon by the Vice Chancellor of the University and after some assessment donation of 12 computers was approved for the programme. This pumped in more enthusiasm among the co-ordinators of the programme. Not limited to this the much needed motivation came by appointing a dedicated office staff for the assisting the programme for all its extension and outreach activities. In addition, an office was created to manage the programme with the necessary infrastructure to support like the laptop, printer, cupboard and other requirements of conducting the programme was instantly taken care of by the University.

Talks were held for awareness on various issues like career options, health and sanitation,

role of leaders in democracy, environment among others. This activity is aimed to create aspirations among children and also to give them exposure about various issues. Eminent people from various sectors were invited like the personnel from Crime Branch of Central Investigation Department (CID) excited the students the most as they relate them with a very popular television series.

After the summer break of the school the programme again resumed with renewed enthusiasm of volunteers and co-ordinators of the programme. This time every one was much more confident of what needed to be done in the programme and the learning curve for delivering the programme was already visible.

Additionally, sports activities were started and the sports in-charge of the University herself trained the school students with a team of dedicated volunteers in athletics, kho-kho and other games like volleyball. The available play ground in the school is being converted in to a sports ground and it will be possible to train students in cricket, football and other games after that.

Few discussions are going on with an NGO who is also associated with the school to develop an 'Earn While You Learn' programme in the interest of the school students.

Considering the experiences from the first phase of implementation, the following activities are proposed to be taken up in the next academic session:

1. Continuing the English Language teaching with a more need-based approach.
2. Installing computers donated by the University and delivering the requisite basic computer skills.
3. Developing and sponsoring an 'Earn While You Learn' programme.

Critical inputs for the future sustainability of the programme**Support from Management**

A very critical input of such extension activities is an enthusiastic support of the Management of both school and the University. Until this is found it is difficult to further the objectives of the programme and such programmes will die early as the co-ordinators lose interest. But in this case the management of both stake holders have been forthcoming and a lot of support financially and otherwise along with autonomy helps to make a programme successful.

Maintaining the right balance between Curricular and Co-curricular Activities

Such programmes have to maintain a balance between curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular activities of the students.

Compulsory credit for students

Though student volunteers did come and contribute but there was still a need of many more numbers to improve the efficiency. It is proposed that the activities of the School Adoption Programme it is suggested that students may be asked to opt for compulsory credits from such extension activities so that more students contribute regularly for the sustainability of the programme in line with the vision of the University by involving volunteers from across the University.

Conclusion

Though it may be a little premature to conclude that it is an extremely successful programme but it is significant such initiatives are documented and modelled. It is pertinent that many institutions initiate such programmes in small and big scales depending on the constraints under which it functions.