A Study of Residential Bridge Course Centers In Mainstreaming The Out of School Children of Barpeta District of Assam Under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan

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Abstract

A nation is deprived of potential human resources for its all round development if the children are deprived of their proper childhood in the society. There are many factors that lead to deprivation of proper education to the children and they remain out of school. It is important to open new schools in those habitants which do not have required schooling facilities. The study is related to the mainstreaming of out of school children admitted into six residential bridge course centres (RBCC) of Barpeta district of Assam under Sarba Siksha Abhiyan. These RBCCs are situated at Chenga, Barpeta, Alopati, Bhaktardaba, Bhabanipur & Barbhitha. The study covers the academic atmosphere of campuses of RBC schools which include the classroom facilities for teaching learning process, availability of teaching & non teaching staffs, extracurricular activities, health & hygiene, food & accommodation facilities. The study also observes the classroom design, seating arrangement & cleanliness of the campuses.

Key words: Sarba Siksha Abhiyan, residential bridge course centres (RBCC).

Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful instruments in shaping the human race. Education is the only answer to all our socio-economic problems. Several global organizations and nations have been emphasising the need for universalisation of primary education. Alternative school interventions in Assam are targeted both towards the out-of-school children as well as the children in schools at risk of dropping out. With respect to out-of school children, the challenge is mainly in the urban slums and in some remote and tribal pockets where the number of children is too low to open a formal school. The pupil-teacher ratio is approaching a manageable 40:1 in all alternative schools of Assam.
Primary education plays an important role in laying the proper foundation of children’s academic, cultural, emotional, moral, physical, social & spiritual development. We know that primary education is the foundation of the system of secondary & higher education. Human Resource Development deals with all aspects of life. Elementary education should be given the highest priority because this is the stepping-stone of children to pursue higher education. If they are able to undergo their elementary education well, then there is probability that they will be able to continue their education up to high school or even for a higher degree. The Indian constitution has committed to provide free and compulsory education to the children up to the age group of 6—14 years. The Government of India has taken various steps to provide free & compulsory education to the children by introducing various schemes like DPEP, Sarba Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Right to education (RTE) Act & others.

The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (S. S. A.) is a government of India’s flagship programme for the achievement of universalisation of elementary education in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the constitution of India making free and compulsory education to the children of 6-14years age group. The S.S.A. is being implemented in partnership with state government to cover the entire country and address the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations. The SSA covers the entire country with special focus on the educational needs of the girls, schedule caste & schedule tribes & children in different circumstances. Alternative education centres were established as a part of the strategy to provide education facility in small un-served habitations, mainstreaming of children through bridge courses of different durations & education for special groups like child labour, street children, adolescent girls, child belonging to certain backward families, children of migrating families.

The elementary education department of Assam has been implementing the various schemes as mentioned above. It is being observed that there are certain areas in Assam where the number of primary schools are not sufficient to serve the needs of the children. These areas include sparsely populated hilly areas, densely forest areas with difficult geographical terrains, riverine (char) areas. Some densely populated urban areas of Assam also lack schools due to scarcity of land for establishing schools. Children who have dropped out-of-school will have an opportunity to avail of bridge courses, aimed at their mainstreaming.

A majority of out of schools children belong to backward communities such as ST, SC, OBC, Muslim minorities etc. The children from urban slum areas and children from displaced families affected by natural calamities need special attention for proper education. These children require not only the day schooling facilities, but also the lodging and boarding facilities. The residential bridge course centres (RBCC) under SSA scheme are the prime requirements to serve the needs of out of school children. The out of schools children are mainly covered by some special schools known as RSTC (residential special training center) and NRSTC (non residential special training center).Under RSTC, the RBCC and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) are included. The centers under the NRSTC are Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Jyoti Kendra, Sanjogi Siksha Kendra (SSK), Madrasas and Makhtabs, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level.
(NPEGEL), Community coaching programme (CCP), Work Site Siksha Kendra (WSSK) etc. The EGS centres have been presently upgraded to regular primary schools.

**Objectives**
The main objectives of these studies are given below –

1. To investigate the academic atmosphere of RBCC in Barpeta District.
2. To know the status of children in formal schools after finishing the course in RBCCs.
3. To investigate the campus environment of six RBCCs.
4. To investigate the numbers of children & teaching staffs of RBCCs.

**Scope and Geographical Coverage**
Barpeta district is an administrative district in the state of Assam in India. The district headquarter is located at Barpeta town. The Barpeta district occupies an area of 2,679 Sq. Km with a population of 1,693,190 as per census report of 2011. Barpeta district was created in 1983, when it was split from the original undivided Kamrup district. The district has a population density of 632 inhabitants per Sq. Km (1,640 /sq mi). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001–2011 was 21.4 %. The district has a sex ratio of 951 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 65.03 %. The main religious groups are Hindus and Muslim. The study covered 6 (six) numbers of RBCCs of Barpeta District of Assam.

**Observations**
SSA has been enrolling working children in its Residential Bridge Course (RBC) Centre’s since 2005 in Barpeta district. It is evident that a residential facility is sine qua non for a child labour rehabilitation programme. It has been observed that most of the child labour comes from far areas from a large distance from their homes to work somewhere. Hence they need a shelter and free foods and other facilities for their immediate survival and joining in the residential schools under SSA. SSA has successfully conducted child labour release operation in all the districts having RBC centres during July to October. A group was formed to visit the work places and release the children under the leadership of an executive magistrate in each district. Officials from SSA, Education, Labour, Transport and Social welfare department along with the Police and NGO volunteers raided the work places and released the children from work. The children are brought to the Residential Bridge Course Centers. Ashadeep Chenga has been adjudged best RBC amongst such centres in the State. The Ashadeep in Bhaktardaba, a backward minority dominated area was only centre for girls. It is located in the Deshbhakta Rural Development Association (DRDA) buildings. DRDA is an NGO committed for the upliftment of the rural people as well as their habitats who will look after the success of the centre.

The special training centre for adolescent children at residential and non-residential level is an important strategy of the government. The school dropout
children would be woven into mainstream by bridging education at the centres. Initiatives are also being taken for the bridging of class 5 to 7 students deprived of education. At the proposal of district collectors, residential and non-residential bridge course and human development centres have been sanctioned under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan in 2011-12. Special training is being imparted to the children above the age of seven at the request of parents.

Since the objective of the present study in mainstreaming the out of school children of Barpeta District of Assam under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Assam with respect to quality improvement at elementary education by the centers of RSTC the investigator is worth mentioning that the purpose of the study. On the other hand, the aim of the study is to observe whether the students of selected class have been able to achieve minimum levels of education in those centers.

Table I shows the mainstreamed children of RBCC of Barpeta district since the establishment of residential bridge course centers at Barpeta which is an educationally backward block of Assam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of RBCC</th>
<th>2005-2008</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>Total Mainstreamed Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chenga RBCC</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alopati RBCC</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhaktardaba Girls RBCC</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbhitha RBCC</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta RBCC</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhawanipur RBCC</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>516</strong></td>
<td><strong>149</strong></td>
<td><strong>330</strong></td>
<td><strong>484</strong></td>
<td><strong>471</strong></td>
<td><strong>1950</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collected from EVs from Chenga RBCC.

In order to provide better and quality education, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has established Residential Special Technical Centre (RSTC) for children between the age group of 6-14 years who are not admitted in the schools, irregular and left the schools due to certain reasons. The main thrust of these centres is to make ensure that they get proper class as per their capability.

- We have observed that the effort has been made to provide the required physical infrastructure for quality teaching & learning process.
- The teacher pupil ratio is as per norms i.e. 1:40.
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- The teacher appointed by the authority is based on merit.
- SSA provided with study and stationary materials like Uniform, bag, Foot wear, note books, pencil, geometry box etc. as per breakup of expenditure is provided.
- The students are provided quality food & suitable accommodation, text books, copies, dress materials, learning tools, health checkup and coaching facilities etc. are at free of cost.
- Daily routine of students include time for prayer, meditation, sports & other extracurricular activities in addition to normal class time table from 10 AM-12 Noon & 1 PM-3PM, with launch break of one hour.
- All the RBCC are well maintained for creating a good academic and residential environment.
- Curriculum in RBCCs is quite enriched.
- Finances and other management issues are controlled by the Government of Assam under Sarba Siksha Abhiyan.
- The teachers are familiar with techniques of modern teaching.
- Most of the teachers are young & energetic.
- The SSA makes an expenditure plan for each item and communicates this to RBCCs.
- Every centre has one caretaker-cum-remedial teacher who takes care of educational, health and hygiene issues.
- A daily routine from 5.30 in the morning to 8.30 at night has stabilized.
- At the RBCCs the children get to participate in co-curricular activities.
- Each RBCC also has one cook-cum helper.
- The daily menu is put on display for everyone to see, so that monitoring is possible in a transparent manner.
- Six-month Residential Bridge Courses have been organized for those who have never been enrolled and for those children who were unable to cope with school.
- The children enrolled in the targeted schools are listed in a child profile where the children are assigned a unique ID.
- The salary of each Education Volunteer should be paid Rs.5000/- per month for a centre having minimum 50 children. Rs.2000/-, Rs.1500/- and Rs.1500/- should be paid for the cook, helper and Watchman respectively.
- Periodical Medical checkup is mandatory. Health card shall be maintained.
- After coaching for a period 10 – 12 months, the achievement level of these children will be evaluated through the BRC personnel and mainstreamed /inducted in the formal school already enrolled.

SSA Barpeta has been providing free education with free food and lodging to poor and needy children. The Ashadeep established in Bhaktardaba would be reserved specially for girls. The girls of six to fourteen years of age mainly school dropouts or engaged as laborers deprived from the light of education would be prepared for formal education during the coming eleven months and after that they would be admitted in the formal education system. Already many children of Ashadeep Chenga admitted in the mainstream of education have passed the HSLC examination.
Gradually they will become a part of the mainstream and be admitted along with regular students.

It is worth mentioning here that a number of children in Assam have been working as labourers due to one or the other reasons. The numbers of such deprived child are increasing day by day due to the ignorance of their parents. But in most cases the economic condition is vital – the child has to work on compulsion of supporting the family or the family has not been able to support him in adequate manner so as to continue his study.

**Conclusion**

This work is carried out to investigate the academic atmosphere of six RBCCs situated in Barpeta District of Assam. It is reported that RBC scheme under Sarba Siksha Abhiyan of Assam is becoming successful as most of the student have been joining the mainstreamed school. It is also found that the academic & residential requirements of RBC are being fulfilled as per norms. The enrolment at the primary and upper primary levels of education over time improved significantly but still more girls are out-of-school than their boys counterpart. The enrolment ratio at the upper primary level is much lower than at the primary level.

**Acknowledgment**

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**References**

[1] Sarba Siksha Abhiyan: Ministry of Human Resource Development