

## ***Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* for Quality Primary Education — An Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) has been one of the foremost objectives of the Government of India ever since Independence. But all children in the country do not get an opportunity to attend primary school due to various reasons. Besides, many drop out even after having been enrolled to a primary school. In order to rectify this situation and achieve the goal of UEE, the Government of West Bengal in the year 1997–98 planned to set up about 1,000 Child Education Centres with the help of Panchayati Raj bodies. The Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, West Bengal, took up the programme as Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi and decided to set up Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs) in areas, where at least 20 children did not have access to a primary school or required some special dispensation, which were not available in formal primary schools. Hence, Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi aimed at mainstreaming out-of-school and other underprivileged children living in the remotest areas of West Bengal. The present study investigates the effectiveness of Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi towards achieving the goal of UEE and various issues faced in implementing the programme at the primary level. The paper discusses various problems related to primary education and barriers like untrained teachers, irregular and inadequate supply of books and uniform, lack of parental involvement in school activities, and lack of infrastructure for Children With Special Needs (CWSN). All these create a hindrance in achieving the goal of UEE. Descriptive survey design was employed to conduct the study. Head teachers, teachers, academic supervisors, parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members were selected as participants through simple random sampling technique.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important factors required for the development of a nation. Ever since Independence, UEE, under which the State aims to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion and place of stay, is one of the foremost objectives of the Government of India. In 1950, the provision of UEE was incorporated in Article 45 of the Constitution, which says: “The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.”

Various commissions were formed and policies were drafted for achieving UEE in India. The Kothari Commission, National Policy on Education (NPE) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for school education 2000, to name a few, emphasised on reducing wastage (dropout) and stagnation (child repeating the same class another year) of children in school. The government also launched the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) on 15 August 1995 to be introduced in all government and government-aided primary schools in order to achieve the goal of UEE. The implementation of MDMS has led to an increase in enrolment, retention and attendance rate of students in primary schools. The Right To Education Act (RTE) 2009, under Article 21A of the Constitution, has made education a

Fundamental Right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years from 1 April 2010. Right To Education was treated as a joint responsibility of both the State and Centre.

Thus, it has been found that the target group of both SSK and RTE Act is the same as both have the same objectives to achieve.

## SHISHU SHIKSHA KARMASUCHI

The aim of the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission (PBRSSM), which works under the West Bengal government’s Panchayat and Rural Development Department, is to implement the *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* and *Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi* in rural areas of the State in order to achieve the goal of UEE. Under the *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi*, launched by the PBRSSM in the year 1997–98, *Shishu Shiksha Kendras* (for Classes I to IV) were opened to meet the basic education needs of children living in backward and remote areas of the State, who are unable to attend primary school due to various reasons. From 2003, under the *Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi*, *Madhyamik Shiksha Kendras* (for Classes V to VIII) were opened for children living in remote and backward areas of the State, who were unable to attend upper primary or secondary school.

In the beginning, both the *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* and *Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi* were launched for mainstream out-of-school and other underprivileged children living

in remote areas of the State. However, with time, both the *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* and *Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi* gained popularity, and they now work towards achieving the goal of UEE in the entire State.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Various studies have been conducted as regards to the implementation of primary and elementary education programmes in the country. While conducting the present study, the researcher found that a programme similar to the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan* (SSA) named *Shishu Shiksha Mission* (SSM), which comes under the *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi*, is being implemented in West Bengal. The objectives of both the programmes are same, i.e., to promote UEE. But it was found that no study on SSM has been conducted so far. Therefore, the researcher has attempted to investigate how the programme is being implemented across West Bengal to achieve quality primary education and how far has it been accessible to children of the State. The researcher has also tried to find out issues that cause a roadblock in the working of SSM to provide quality primary education in the State.

A quality education system must provide people with a comprehensive education programme that enables them to manage daily life activities. In the present study, quality education means the parameters included in the *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* programme of West Bengal.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

All children do not get an opportunity to attend primary school and many drop out in the middle because of various reasons. Therefore, the Government of West Bengal decided to introduce an alternate primary education system, which could reach out to children in the remotest parts of the State. This initiative aims to reach out to maximum number of children and impart primary education to them. The Panchayat and Rural Development Department in the State took up the programme and decided to set up SSKs in all those areas, where there were at least 20 children not having access to primary school or required special dispensation not available in formal primary schools. Initially, the SSKs were run by local untrained teachers. However, later, the teachers teaching in these SSKs were provided with in-service training. Hence, the quality of education provided by SSKs was initially not at par with formal government-run primary schools.

The decade of 1990s would be considered as a turning point in the history of Indian education (Aggarwal, 2001). Many initiatives were taken to provide education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years in order to achieve UEE. Aggarwal (2001) conducted a study on progress towards universal access to education and retention of children in schools, ensuring no dropout in primary classes. He pointed out that additional efforts need to be made to improve the quality of education in the country.

Gandhe (2000) says there is a need to raise consciousness among rural people as regards to educating their daughters and eradicating child marriage, which is a stumbling block to girls' education in Rajasthan.

Yadappanavar (2002) examined factors influencing elementary school education. He underlined that poverty; migration of parents; lack of infrastructure like toilets, drinking water facility, playground, classrooms, etc.; parental attitude towards schooling and poor resource planning were responsible for low enrolment rate. He recommended few suggestions to ensure quality education to children.

Kothari (2004) emphasised that the country is far from attaining the goal of UEE due to various factors, such as undernourishment, severe morbidity, physical disability in children, etc. Kothari also opined that school needed to be made more attractive to draw girl students and first generation learners.

Maikhuri (2005) pointed out that all government-run elementary schools in Uttarakhand had no electricity supply and only 40 per cent had toilet facility, which hindered the process of imparting quality education to children in the State.

Acharya and Sarkar (2006) suggested that providing clean drinking water facility in schools and conducting regular health checkups of students were important aspects of school management and parameters for ensuring quality education to children in Odisha.

Mishra (2007) revealed that 92 per cent of primary schools in Angul district of Odisha did not have sufficient furniture.

Jena (2009) pointed out inadequate space for learning, lack of playground and play material, lack of sanitary conditions, inadequate teachers, and irregular and inadequate supply of free textbooks, etc., as some of the barriers in ensuring quality education.

Ram (2011) found that enrolment rate in schools had increased, yet the learning achievement level had declined over the years.

According to Nanda (2013), 92.8 per cent primary schools had drinking water facility, and 74.87 and 6.16 per cent had toilet facility for boys and girls, respectively, in Odisha.

Nayak (2015) found that drinking water facility was available in 99 per cent schools in Odisha.

Behera (2015) conducted an evaluative study, where emphasis was laid on resource mobilisation, partnership with private sector and community organisations, and promoting education through mother tongue to implement different provisions of the RTE Act. The study also discussed and analysed various interventions and strategies to draw the attention of researchers, policy makers, administrators and educationists to address the problems that hindered the process of ensuring quality primary education, and allocating more funds to the area in order to achieve the goal of SSA in Odisha for tribal people.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the effectiveness of *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* towards UEE
- To study the problems faced by school personnel in implementing *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* at the primary level

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the effectiveness of *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* towards achieving the goals of UEE?
- What are the problems faced by school personnel in implementing *Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* at the primary level?

## METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was adopted to conduct the study. The target population comprised all head teachers (*mukhya sahayak* or *mukhya sahayika*), teachers (*sahayak* or *sahayika*), students, parents, SMC members and academic supervisors of 78 SSKs of Sankrail block in Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal.

A sample of 10 SSKs was selected through lottery method (The target population is 78 SSKs and sample for study is 10 SSKs selected through random sampling technique). The block was divided into five regions (eastern, western, northern, southern and central) and the sample was

drawn from each cluster randomly. From each region, the researcher selected two schools randomly. Thus, the total number respondents was 91 (10 *mukhya sahayak* or *mukhya sahayika*; 20 *sahayak* or *sahayika*; 20 students, 20 parents, 20 SMC members and one academic supervisor).

Three type of instruments — researcher made questionnaire, semi-structured interview and information schedule — were used. Descriptive statistics in frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Table 1, all parents and academic supervisors viewed that all SSKs had *pucca* buildings and there was not a single SSK that functioned under a tree. It shows that all SSKs had separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water facility and electricity supply. It is found that 70 per cent SSKs have *pucca* boundary walls. All SSKs have adequate number of classrooms as per the guidelines of the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission. All SSKs have a well-equipped kitchen with drinking water facility. Despite these, some SSKs lack few facilities. For example, only 30 per cent have disabled friendly toilets. It was also found that all SSKs do not have large doors or ramps to allow free movement of disabled children.

**Table 1: Infrastructure facility**

	<i>Mukhya sahayak/sahayika</i>		<i>Sahayak/sahayika</i>		Parents		SMC members		Academic supervisor	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<i>Pucca</i> building	10	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	10	100
Class under tree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Separate toilets for girls and boys	10	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	10	100
<i>Pucca</i> boundary wall	7	70	14	70	14	70	14	70	7	70
Adequate number of classrooms	10	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	10	100
Electricity supply	10	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	10	100
Separate kitchen	10	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	10	100
Preparation of food in open area	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Drinking water facility	10	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	10	100
Toilets for the disabled	3	30	6	30	6	30	6	30	3	30
Large door for free movement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ramp and support railing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 2: Teaching-learning process**

	<i>Mukhya sahayak or sahayika</i>	<i>Sahayak or sahayika</i>	SMC member	Academic supervisor
Teacher-student ratio as per the guidelines	6	12	12	6
Satisfactory attendance of students	6	12	10	6
Use of child-centric play-way method	4	14	5	4
Sufficient play material	4	7	4	4
Active participation of children	10	20	20	9
Use of teaching-learning material in class by teachers	2	6	4	3

According to Table 2, *mukhya sahayak*, *sahayak* or *sahayika* and SMC members agreed that children were actively involved in all kind of activities related to the teaching-learning process. However, the academic supervisor shared that active participation of students was not found in all SSKs. All respondents (*mukhya sahayak*, *sahayak*, *sahayika*, SMC members and academic supervisor) opined that teacher-student ratio was maintained only in 60 per cent SSKs and that satisfactory attendance was found only in those schools. It was found that 40 per cent schools had a large number of students enrolled in different classes but most of them were irregular.

The *mukhya sahayak* and academic supervisor shared that teachers used child-centric play-way method of teaching and availability of sufficient play material was found only in 40 per cent SSKs. Seventy per cent *sahayak* viewed that they used child-centric play-way method of teaching in classroom transaction but faced problems due to inadequate play material. SMC members also agreed with the *sahayaks* regarding the availability of play material. All respondents agreed that in most SSKs, teachers did not use teaching-learning material in classroom due to unavailability of resources, and inadequate knowledge and training on how to use them.

**Table 3: Other facilities**

	<i>Mukhya sahayak or sahayika</i>	<i>Sahayak or sahayika</i>	Parents	Academic supervisor
Books	10	10	10	10
Uniform	10	10	10	10
Scholarship	10	10	10	10
Midday meal	10	10	10	10
Involvement of parents in school activities	3	3	3	3
Supervision and monitoring	10	10	10	10
Allocation of contingency fund	6	6	—	6
Honorarium for staff	10	10	—	10
Satisfactory quality of food	10	10	10	10
Basic life skill training	4	4	4	4
Participation of SMC members in school activities	2	2	2	2

According to Table 3, the respondents shared that all SSK students received free textbooks, uniform and midday meal. They added that students belonging to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, minority community and those with disabilities also received scholarships. However, the scholarship was not provided on a regular basis. Only 30 per cent respondents said that parents were involved in school activities. Sixty per cent said that contingency fund for school activities was sufficient and timely. All respondents said that SSKs were supervised and monitored by a competent authority on a regular basis.

*Mukhya sahayak*, *sahayak* and academic supervisor shared that they got honorarium on time but the amount was not sufficient. Hence, they had demanded for an increase in the honorarium amount. The respondents opined that only 40 per cent schools provided training in basic life skill education.

The participation of SMC members in school activities was found negligible. Only 20 per cent respondents said that SMC members participated in school activities.

All respondents shared that as per the government order, the head of the institutions and other staff members daily checked the midday meal to be served to the children in the SSKs in terms of basic ingredients and vegetables used, taste and cleanliness maintained while preparing the meal. The academic supervisors shared

that they checked the quality of the food being served to the children during supervision and found it to be satisfactory.

## PROBLEMS FACED BY SCHOOL PERSONNEL AT THE PRIMARY STAGE

### Lack of awareness

A majority of the respondents said that most SSKs had infrastructure facility as per the guidelines of the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission. They, however, shared that many parents and community members were not aware of the functioning of the SSKs and objectives of the SSM, and hence, needed to be sensitised regarding the same in order to achieve the goal of UEE. Therefore, it is important that they are made aware about the role of SSKs in providing quality education to children at the primary stage.

### Untrained teachers

It was found that all SSKs have adequate number of *sahayak* or *sahayika* (male and female teachers) but all of them were untrained. The minimum qualification for *sahayak* and *sahayika* is higher secondary. Therefore, many join the teaching profession just after qualifying the higher secondary examination without undergoing any professional training.

### Exclusion of children with disabilities

Most students said that children with disabilities were not accepted by peers



and were even treated differently by teachers. Parents shared that disabled children should be taught in special schools as they faced several problems in SSKs, and hence, lagged behind. They said that teachers needed to pay extra attention and time to such students but they, generally, did not have time, and hence, were not patient with them. Many a time, such children made errors in simple calculation or activity. As a result, instead of explaining the problems to them patiently, there were instances of teachers scolding or screaming at them.

### **Incentives**

As per the guidelines of the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Kendra, there is a provision for incentives like uniform, grants, textbooks, scholarship and midday meal for children enrolled in SSKs. All respondents, including head teachers, teachers and parents, opined that the incentives were enough for the children. But few parents and students shared that sometimes textbooks were not available on time.

### **Lack of parental involvement**

Head teachers explained that communication gap between parents and teachers was due to lack of parents' involvement in school activities like parent teacher meetings (PTMs). Teachers and academic supervisor underlined that schools organised PTMs at regular intervals so that teachers could discuss the progress of children with their parents but

most parents did not show interest in such meetings.

### **Supervision and monitoring**

Parents and teachers underlined that it was necessary that supervision and monitoring of SSKs were conducted by a competent authority at regular intervals and steps be taken for improvement in the quality of primary education being imparted by them. Parents said only one academic supervisor was appointed for carrying out supervision and monitoring in 20 schools. But supervision and monitoring were not frequent, which are necessary for improvement in the quality of education. On the other hand, the academic supervisor pointed out that the location of SSKs and lack of transportation facility posed a challenge in the smooth discharge of duties. As a result, she was unable to visit the SSKs on a regular basis, which is mandatory as per the guidelines. Sometimes, she reached an SSK after the morning assembly. Sometimes, she had to skip supervision due to some meeting at the BDO office. She added that the travel allowance (TA) provided to academic supervisors for school visit and supervision was also not satisfactory. The transport expense was approximately double than the amount paid as TA.

### **Midday meal**

It was found that all schools provided midday meal to children. But from the beginning, parents were not happy with the quality of food being provided

to the children. They alleged that the menu and quality of food was not as per the recommended government guidelines. It was also found that many schools did not maintain a midday meal register. Besides, it was found that food was prepared for all students enrolled in a class. But the attendance register showed that many had not been attending school for a long time. Most schools did not provide meal on Saturdays and the attendance on that day was found to be low.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that the SSKs covered in this study have quality and adequate infrastructure. But there are many other challenges that hinder in achieving the goals of SSM. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

- Teachers, as well as, gram panchayat, need to make the local community aware of the importance of education in a child's life, and the objectives and role of SSKs.
- Teachers involved in the teaching-learning process must undergo professional training before they take to teaching.
- CWSN must be included in SSKs along with other students.

- The *mukhya sahayak* and academic supervisor must monitor the quality of food being served as midday meal in SSKs.
- The *mukhya sahayak* and academic supervisor must also regularly monitor classroom teaching activity in SSKs.
- Books and uniform must be provided to the students studying in SSKs on time.
- The honorarium of teachers must be increased timely in order to motivate them (It is, generally, increased in two or five years).

### CONCLUSION

Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs) were set up by the West Bengal government to impart primary education to children living in remote and backward areas of the State, who do not have access to primary schools. The aim of SSKs is to contribute to achieving the goal of UEE. The respondents shared that there were some gaps, which created hindrance in realising the goal UEE. All SSKs lack trained teachers and do not have the required infrastructure for CWSN. Parents' interest, their involvement in school activities, student-teacher ratio and inclusion of CWSN are some areas that affect the quality of education in SSKs.

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