

Thuna's Interventions to Rectify Scholastic

Backwardness: An Analysis

Introduction

Kerala stands tall when it comes to the universalisation of education. Compared to other states, it occupies the prime position, be it elementary education for all, compulsory enrolment of kids above 6 years or the no drop out phenomenon from classes 1 to 10.

Yet, the same cannot be said of the quality of education in the state. Many problems plague the scenario. Even after completing SSLC, there are those who cannot handle the mother tongue faultlessly; their English competency leaves much to be desired and many are not able to solve even the basic practical mathematical problems.

All these factors indirectly contribute to the closing down of govt & aided schools. Scholastic backwardness of children is one the chief factors responsible for and an obstacle in the way of achieving quality education in such schools. It denotes not only the backwardness in scholastic matters but also a host of behavioral factors such as the reluctance to go to school or attend the class or to be engaged in class room activities, the non-ability to respond to teacher's questions, poor performance in exams and assessments and even bad behavior towards teachers and co-students. But this backwardness in studies should never be misconstrued as a mental or intellectual or emotional or physical disability since their weakness lies only in matters related to studies.

However it has been found that such children exhibit certain common characteristics in their behaviour and personality. In any ordinary classroom in a govt or aided school, there will be some children belonging to this category and it is necessary that such backwardness is indentified and rectified at the earliest. This has to be done with the realization that

a learner can never be treated in isolation. The learner's learning ability and educational standard are intertwined with and influenced by his or her family, school, learning-teaching method and media consumption. Only a deliberate and scientific intervention can help in solving the issues of backwardness, thereby uplifting such children to brilliance. Acknowledging the relevance and importance of effective interventions in this matter, SCERT devised a research study named "Thuna" (Help) in 2017-18. The aim was to find out the reasons behind scholastic backwardness and the role to be played by the parents in solving the problem.

The success achieved by "Manasa", an earlier experiment on children with scholastic backwardness, was the inspiration behind "Thuna". "Manasa" had been implemented in 4 selected upper primary schools in Mararikulam Thekku (south) Gramapanchayath in the Alleppey district. The project was for a period of 4 years and it had adopted strategies that yielded good improvement in 55% of the scholastically backward children by the end of the year. SCERT followed the same methods in 'Thuna' as well and the present paper offers an analysis of the same.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the SCERT study were

- i) To develop a comprehensive programme for uplifting and improving scholastically backward children at the UP level
- ii) To find out the practical feasibility of such a programme developed through interventions.

Specific objectives were also devised to achieve the above goals:

- i) The present educational level of the scholastically backward children studying at UP level had to be found out.
- ii) Reasons for the backwardness had to be identified and

iii) appropriate methods to solve this problem had to be devised.

Methodology

Method

Experimental methods, survey, case study and interview were the research tools used for 'Thuna'.

Sample of the study

Children studying at the UP level in the state who exhibited scholastic backwardness and their parents or guardians formed the population for the purpose of the study. 'Thuna' identified 6 schools in the Vithura and Chirayinkil Panchayaths in Thiruvananthapuram District, comprising 1 in urban, 2 each in rural and coastal and 1 in tribal areas. A total of 339 students were brought under the purview of the study and their backwardness was further categorised as mild, moderate and severe.

Tools used for the study

Pre intervention tool

Special activities for mild, moderate and severe students

Portfolio for students

Visitors' dairy for parents

Interview schedule

Techniques used for the study

Percentage analysis

Findings of the Study

1. Educational Standards of Scholastically Backward Children Studying at the UP Level

- i) Assessment done using pre-intervention tool reveals that 23% of children at the UP level are scholastically backward.
- ii) 73% of the children are seen to have achieved academic progress after the interventions. This proves that scholastic backwardness can be rectified by providing personal (individual) attention to such children.
- iii) Scholastically backward children face certain common difficulties. It was found that they constantly commit spelling mistakes and find it difficult to read continuously and rapidly. There is difficulty in reading words due to their inability to comprehend letters. Similarly they have problems in co-ordinating letters and symbols while reading. It was found that they have a tendency to use punctuation marks excessively. Another difficulty they faced was the lack of facility to have a fixed time and place for studying.

2. Reasons for Scholastic Backwardness

a) General

Poor study facilities at home, unsatisfactory learning environment, lack of parental care in academic matters, addiction to TV, domestic discords, single parenting, excessive drinking of the elders (alcoholism) and domestic violence are some of the common reasons behind children's scholastic backwardness.

b) Personal

- i. Lack of self-confidence or self-worth, constant diversion from the task at hand, lack of concentration are some of the individual traits seen in scholastically backward children. 36.63% of the children show attention deficiency while

17.94% are restless. 34.79% find it difficult to concentrate. This study reveals that all these factors contribute to scholastic backwardness.

ii. Lack of parental attention in the academic matters

Majority of the parents are economically backward. The family income is chiefly dependent on the job of the parent. Fathers of 75.09% children are daily-waged labourers and only a mere 0.73% have fathers in govt services. As for mothers, most of them 63.36% are home makers. This naturally affects the financial status of the family which in turn, affects the child. The lack of proper support from one's family leads to scholastic backwardness.

iii. Presence of special needs children in their midst

This is another set back for the scholastically backward. When classes were organized catering to the special needs children separately, inter –relationships could be improved and this led to progress in their studies as well. This could be made possible through activities and games that enhanced communication.

Suggestions/Recommendations

- Specially designed assessment tools should be prepared and used to identify scholastic backwardness. This will improve the quality of general education and also help in differentiating it from other learning disabilities.
- Learning achievement could be made possible through the interventions under 'Thuna'. 73% of the sample showed progress. In view of this, the same programme can be extended

to more schools at different levels and with more learning materials.

- Appropriate learning materials and strategies should be formulated to encompass mild, moderate and severe categories among the scholastically backward children. This will help every child to achieve academic progress.
- The study could identify certain external factors that cause scholastic backwardness. They are mostly related to the home environment. Hence awareness programmes should be organized to educate the parents on proper responsible parenting and parental care.
- Steps should be taken to instill more self-confidence and self-worth in such children. Suitable learning activities and diverse learning strategies promoting concentration should be imbibed by the teachers also.
- Economic backwardness caused by parents' unemployment and low income were found to be major factors behind scholastic backwardness. Hence various methods should be adopted to provide a conducive learning environment and support for learning. Notebooks, pens, paper, pencils and such learning materials may be made available to them at a discounted rate or free of cost.
- Children were found to be prone to unhealthy tendencies such as lack of personal hygiene and drug abuse. Proper awareness has to be provided to them, along with medical help. Awareness programmes and medical camps should be organized to help promote good health among children.