

Private Schools Are No Panacea

Result of Providing a Choice of Schools to Parents of Children
in Rural Andhra Pradesh – A Brief Preliminary Report

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SUMMARY

There has been a mushrooming of fee paying private schools in rural areas in the last decade or so. These private schools are generally believed to provide better schooling to children as compared to free government schools. This School Choice study is a longitudinal research over a 5-year period carried out in five districts of Andhra Pradesh with the main aim to rigorously evaluate the impact of providing disadvantaged children in rural areas an opportunity to attend a school of their choice. It is well understood that parental background has a significant impact on learning achievement of children. To be able to truly evaluate the impact of attending private school, this socio-economic and parental background needs to be controlled for. This research attempts to address this. A Randomized Evaluation design was adopted in this research which involved scholarship being provided to children from 180 villages to enroll in private schools of their choice if they wished. The children in private schools as well government schools in these villages were evaluated for their learning achievement using well designed curriculum based common tests. The base line for the study was carried out during March - April 2008 while year-end learning achievement tests were carried out during March - April of 2009 to 2013.

A preliminary analysis of the five year data shows some very interesting patterns.

1. The scholarship children in private schools (children who were interested and voluntarily shifted to private schools) perform no better than their corresponding counterparts in government schools in the two main subjects - Telugu and Mathematics as also in EVS and English. This is observed consistently across the five years. This implies that private schools are not able to add any significant value in terms of learning achievement of these children.
2. The learning achievement in general among non-scholarship children in private schools (who would have been in private schools any way) is significantly better than among children in government schools. However, the private school children's households have a relatively better socio-economic and education profile which may have been a contributory factor.
3. There are clear and significant differences in the profile of the teachers and the school facilities between the private schools and government schools. The teachers in private schools are younger, less experienced, less trained and with lower educational qualifications and are also paid substantially less. On the other hand, the government school teachers need to handle multi-grade teaching situations.
4. Interestingly, interviews with parents of the scholarship children in private schools indicate that they are happy with the private schools. A closer look at the responses shows that the parents are possibly evaluating school outcomes on softer factors like uniforms, discipline, attendance in school (both of children and teachers) and social standing in the community.

It seems clear that, contrary to general perception, private schools are not adding any greater value as compared to government schools to the children in Telugu and Mathematics, the main subjects, as also in EVS and English over five years of primary schooling, after controlling for the background of the households. The reasons for the perception that private schools may be better than government schools may lie in socio-economic, household or other factors. This research has provided rich data on various aspects and there is a need to do further detailed analysis to better understand these complex issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Over the course of the last decade, India has achieved near universal primary school enrollment. According to an all-India representative household survey conducted in 2009, 96 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 were enrolled in school. Despite promising primary school enrollment figures, many students in rural schools cannot demonstrate basic academic proficiency. Ninety-two percent of Class 1 students cannot read at their reading level and 31 percent of Class 1 students cannot even recognize letters accurately (Pratham, 2010). This lackluster performance is even further entrenched by a schooling system plagued by severe accountability problems. At the same time, parents across India (including in rural areas) are enrolling their children in private schools in increasing numbers. private schools now constitute a significant provider of education even for rural children in India. Twenty-two percent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 attend private schools (Pratham, 2010). The growing popularity of private schools has led to concern about furthering economic and social stratification. As a result, there have been calls for expanding access to private schools for all children, regardless of socio-economic background.

1.2 Background

The rapid expansion of private schools throughout rural India has given many households an alternative to sending their children to government schools. Some believe that this expansion may be due to parental dissatisfaction with government schools. A recent study of private and public schools in India, (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008), finds several differences between private and public schools that may explain the expansion of fee-charging schools throughout rural India. They find that private schools in India often pay teachers a fraction of the amount government teachers receive.

The recent “Right to Education” bill passed by the Indian parliament has a provision mandating that private schools reserve up to twenty five percent of the seats in their school for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite the seemingly superior performance of private schools compared to government schools, there is very little rigorous evidence to answer whether private schools actually do a better job of improving educational outcomes of students in India relative to government schools. Students in private school often come from relatively wealthier families with more educated and motivated parents, and children studying in private schools often start schooling a few years before their peers in government school. Thus, a simple comparison of student’s performance in private schools versus government schools would provide a misleading picture of the ability of the different types of schools to add value to student learning. A true evaluation of the impact of private schooling is possible only if the socio-economic background can be controlled. No detailed research of this nature has been carried out in India till now. The Andhra Pradesh School Choice (APSC) project was carried out to address this gap. The main aim of the study was to assess the relative performance of private and government schools in improving education outcomes of students in a manner that allows comparison of students with similar background.

This report presents summary of some of the findings from the study. It must be noted here that this represents preliminary analysis of all 5 years of data by the Azim Premji Foundation team of some of the critical data pertaining to the main subjects taught in the primary schools - Telugu and Mathematics as also English and EVS (Environmental Science) which is taught in Standard 4 and 5. The study has generated several other elements of data that still need to be analysed in detail to get a more thorough understanding.

The research was designed by Prof. Karthik Muralidharan, Asst. Professor, Department of Economics, University of California, San Diego while all the data collection and management of field work was carried out by Azim Premji Foundation. The funding for the study was provided mainly by Legatum Foundation. The study was carried out under an MOU on education research projects between the Government of Andhra Pradesh and Azim Premji Foundation.

1.3 The Research Objectives

The main objective of the research study can be summarized as follows:

To evaluate the impact of providing school choice to disadvantaged children in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh on the learning outcomes of

- the children who receive the choice and move to private schools
- the children who stay back in government schools
- the children who are in private schools

1.4 Summary of the Research Design

An important part of APSC Project research design is the random allocation of entire villages into control and treatment groups where the treatment villages participate in the scholarship program while the control villages have no students who receive the scholarship. By allocating villages into treatment and control groups, the outcomes of the scholarship recipients (Group 3T) can be compared to students who applied for the scholarships in control villages (Group 2C). This design also permits evaluation of the impact of the scholarship program on students who do not receive the scholarship in Groups 1T, 2T and 4T. (Refer fig 1 below).

Fig -1: Design of the Study

| Treatment Villages (90) | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Group 1T Government School Non- Applicants | Group 2T Applicants from government schools who were offered but not awarded scholarships | Group 3T Applicants from government schools who were offered and received scholarships | Group 4T Non-Scholarship Students in Private Schools |
| Control Villages (90) | | | |
| Group 1C Government School Non- Applicants | Group 2C Applicants from government schools who were offered but not awarded scholarships | Not relevant | Group 4C Non-Scholarship Students in Private Schools |

Andhra Pradesh is divided into 23 districts, each with 3-5 divisions. Each division is composed of 10 to 15 Mandals, the lowest administrative tier of the government. A typical Mandal consists of around 25 villages. A sample of 180 villages across the five districts of Vishakhapatnam, East Godavari, Kadapa, Medak and Nizamabad was constructed through a process of multistage sampling. Approximately equal number of villages in each district were randomly assigned to be in the 'treatment' and 'control' categories.

1.5 School Choice Scholarship Summary

The APSC Project provided a randomly selected sample of government school children with scholarships to enable them to attend private schools. The scholarship was intended for students who were studying in Anganwadis or in Kindergarten (KG) and Standard 1 in the academic year 2007-2008. The scholarship was worth about Rs. 3,000 per year per child. This amount was to be availed of to study in a private recognized school. The amount typically covered all expenses for books, uniforms and school supplies associated with studying in the chosen private school. Parents of scholarship recipients were not expected spend additional amount from personal funds. However, parents would continue to be responsible for transportation and mid-day meals. The participation of private schools was entirely voluntary. Prior to the project's implementation all private schools in the selected villages were provided with details of the scholarship program and asked for their interest in participating in the program, and if they were interested, how many places they could offer under the program.

The scholarship recipients continued to receive the scholarship amount (adjusted for inflation) till they completed Standard 5. Receipt of the scholarship amount was subject to meeting attendance requirements and assessment tests. Field Coordinators from the Azim Premji Foundation regularly monitored attendance among scholarship recipients. If a scholarship student was found to be consistently absent from school, his/her scholarship could be withdrawn. Participating schools agreed to maintain accurate attendance records of scholarship children. Foundation reserved the right to discontinue a school from the project if any falsification of attendance records was noticed.

Baseline assessment tests were administered during the period of March to April 2008 to students in Aanganwadi or kindergarten (KG) and Standard 1 in 2160 schools - 1566 government and 594 private - across an initial sample of 202 villages with recognized private schools. While students in Standard 1 were administered tests in both Math and Telugu, students in Aanganwadi/KG were only administered a general test in Telugu. Household surveys were also carried out in all the villages to gather information on household specific socio-economic and educational factors likely to affect learning levels among children. Further, this survey helped identify households where parents of government school children would be interested in applying for a scholarship that would enable them to exercise the option of school-choice.

Based on the data, 180 villages were identified for the project. A total of 1890 students were offered the scholarship across the sample villages. Of these, 1287 (68%) accepted the offer and got admitted to private schools. The process of Random Assignment was carried out after the baseline measurements.

End of the year learning achievement tests were administered to the same cohort of children for five years during the month of March from 2009 to 2013. All the learning achievement tests in the four subjects (Telugu, Mathematics, EVS and English) were carefully designed paper-pencil tests to assess the common curriculum in the government and in the private schools so as to ensure that there was genuine comparability.

2. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Village Characteristics

In order to scientifically analyze the impact of the scholarship program on the market for education, entire villages were randomly selected to have the scholarship program take place. This table shows differences in observable characteristics of the villages selected for treatment (i.e. the scholarship program) and control (i.e. no scholarship program). On average, treatment and control villages appear similar (no statistically significant differences) based on data collected during the project period.

Table - 1: Village Characteristics by Treatment and Control Villages

| Village Characteristics | Treatment Villages | Control Villages | Difference |
|--|--------------------|------------------|------------|
| | 1 | 2 | (1) - (2) |
| Number of private schools | 3.00 | 3.211 | -0.211 |
| Average Baseline Telugu Score | 0.353 | 0.341 | 0.011 |
| Percentage of students from a scheduled caste or tribe | 37% | 34% | 3 |
| Percentage of students with a father or mother who are literate | 26% | 25% | 1 |
| Percentage of students with a father or mother who completed primary school | 26% | 25% | 1 |
| Average Normalized Household Asset Index Score @ | 3.437 | 3.471 | -0.034 |
| <p>* Significant at 5%, ** Significant at 1%, *** Significant at 1% @ Index worked out based on ownership of 12 household assets - a surrogate for household economic level</p> | | | |

2.2 Household Characteristics

Private school students often come from relatively more privileged and affluent backgrounds. Thirty three percent of government school students come from disadvantaged castes while only thirteen percent of private school students come from these castes. Sixty five percent of private school students have at least one parent who completed primary school while thirty seven percent of government school students have at least one parent who completed primary school.

Table - 2: Household Characteristics of children by type of school

| Household Characteristics | Private schools (1) | Government schools (2) | Difference (1 - 2) |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Students from a scheduled caste or tribe | 13% | 33% | -20*** |
| Students with literate father or mother | 90% | 77% | 13*** |
| Students with father or mother who completed primary school | 65% | 37% | 28*** |
| Average Household Asset Index Score | 3.844 | 3.176 | 0.668*** |
| <i>* Significant at 5%, ** Significant at 1%, *** Significant at 1%.</i> | | | |

2.3 Basic Facilities in Schools and Teacher Characteristics

private schools are commonly believed (particularly in the urban context) to charge high school fees, have exclusive facilities, well trained staff etc. In our context, however, the private schools present a different picture. They hire less-trained teachers and in most cases have only the basic facilities and infrastructure. Table 3 below shows that the private schools generally seem to have better infrastructure than government schools on many observable parameters. While these are, by no means an indication of the schools being high-end, they provide facilities which the government schools should provide under normal circumstances in any case.

Table - 3: Infrastructure facilities of schools by management in Control Villages

| Characteristics | Private schools(1) | Government schools (2) | Difference (1 - 2) |
|---|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Drinking water available | 0.99 | 0.95 | 0.04*** |
| Functional toilets | 0.89 | 0.73 | 0.16*** |
| Separate functional toilets for girls | 0.83 | 0.45 | 0.38*** |
| Availability of / functional electricity | 0.88 | 0.40 | 0.48*** |
| Functional television | 0.20 | 0.03 | 0.17*** |
| Functional computers | 0.48 | 0.05 | 0.43*** |
| Functional library | 0.85 | 0.97 | -0.12*** |
| Functional radio | 0.15 | 0.73 | -0.58*** |
| Pucca building for school | 0.45 | 0.91 | -0.46*** |
| <i>* Significant at 10%, ** Significant at 5%, *** Significant at 1%.</i> | | | |

Table 4 below shows differences in teacher characteristics, salaries, and teaching activity between private and government school teachers from the project villages. Private school teachers tend to be less experienced, younger, less trained, and receive less pay, but tend to be absent less often and are more likely to be actively teaching.

Table - 4: Teachers Characteristics by Management

| Characteristics | Pvt School Teachers (1) | Govt School Teachers (2) | Difference (1) - (2) |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Male | 0.22 | 0.43 | -0.21*** |
| Age | 27.01 | 39.61 | -12.6*** |
| Years of teaching | 4.76 | 14.53 | -9.77*** |
| Number of Schools taught previously | 0.78 | 2.63 | -1.85*** |
| Completed at least college or masters | 0.61 | 0.89 | -0.28*** |
| Teacher training completed | 0.27 | 0.99 | -0.72*** |
| In-service teacher training program attended in the last 6 months | 0.01 | 0.79 | -0.77*** |
| Come from the same village | 0.46 | 0.14 | 0.32*** |
| Current gross salary per month (average) | 2,003 | 13,843 | -11840*** |
| <i>* Significant at 10%, ** Significant at 5%, *** Significant at 1%.</i> | | | |

The private schools typically charge tuition fees in the region of Rs. 100 to Rs. 200 per month from the students.

On the other hand, the government school teachers are somewhat older, more experienced and more qualified but they have to handle multi-grade teaching - having to handle students of more than one grade at the same time.

3. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

3.1 Learning Levels

Competency based assessments (diagnostic) were prepared based on the state curriculum. The same tools were administered in both private and government schools. The assessments were carried out in all primary schools - government schools and participating private schools - during March - April. All participating schools were informed in advance about the requirement to take end-of-the-year diagnostic tests. Further, after the assessment, all schools were provided with diagnostic reports containing an in-depth feedback on the performance of the children after analysis.

3.2 Baseline Learning Achievement Scores

On the baseline tests, pre-primary school students in private schools scored on average almost thirteen percentage points better than their peers in government schools on Telugu exams. Class 1 students in private schools scored on average twenty percentage points better on Telugu exams and nineteen percentage points better on Math exams. In addition to performing better on standardized exams, private school students were found to be five percentage points less likely to be absent from school. All these differences are statistically significant. Thus, it is clear that private school students performed better than government school students on the base line tests. This table shows differences in test scores and absenteeism between private and government school students.

Table - 5: Baseline Test Score of Government and private schools

| Test Scores | Private schools (1) | Government schools (2) | Difference (1) - (2) |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Average Telugu score (Pre-primary school students) | 68.0% | 55.4% | 12.6*** |
| Average Telugu score (Class 1 students) | 63.9% | 43.5% | 20.4*** |
| Average Mathematics score (Class 1 students) | 51.7% | 32.7% | 19.0*** |
| Percentage of students absent during school visits | 12% | 17% | -5*** |

* Significant at 10%, ** Significant at 5%, *** Significant at 1%.

The learning achievement of children in the private schools was found to significantly higher.

3.3 Year End Achievement Scores - Telugu and Mathematics

As indicated earlier, end of the year learning achievement tests were carried out for five years on the same cohorts of students in the four groups (refer figure 1 earlier). The key findings relating to Telugu and Mathematics are summarized below in Tables 6A and 6B.

Table - 6 A: Year End Learning Achievement Test Results - Telugu

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Group 1 : Children in govt schools not applied for scholarship | 42.5% | 41.2% | 43.6% | 39.2% | 40.1% |
| Group 2 : Children who applied for but not awarded scholarship | 43.1% | 41.0% | 44.1% | 37.9% | 40.0% |
| Group 3 : Children awarded scholarship and moved to pvt schools | 43.8% | 42.6% | 42.7% | 37.9% | 39.0% |
| Group 4 : Non-scholarship children in pvt schools | 64.2% | 52.4% | 60.5% | 53.2% | 51.6% |

Figure - 2

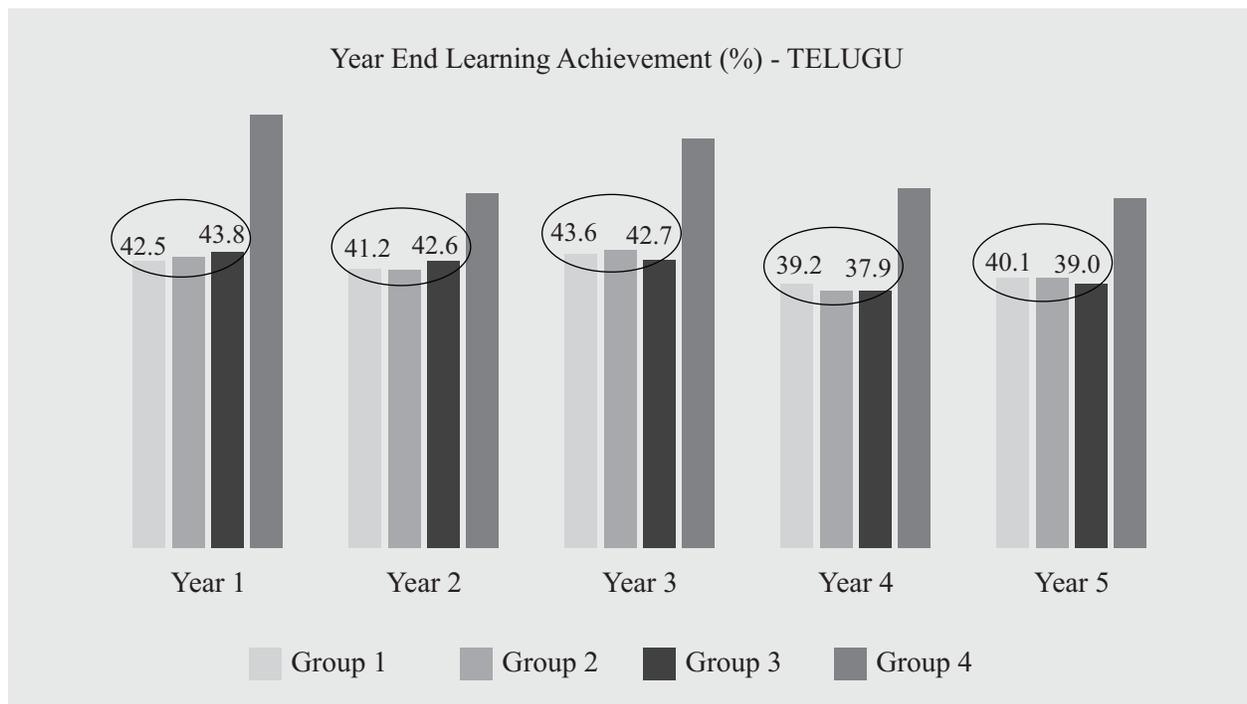
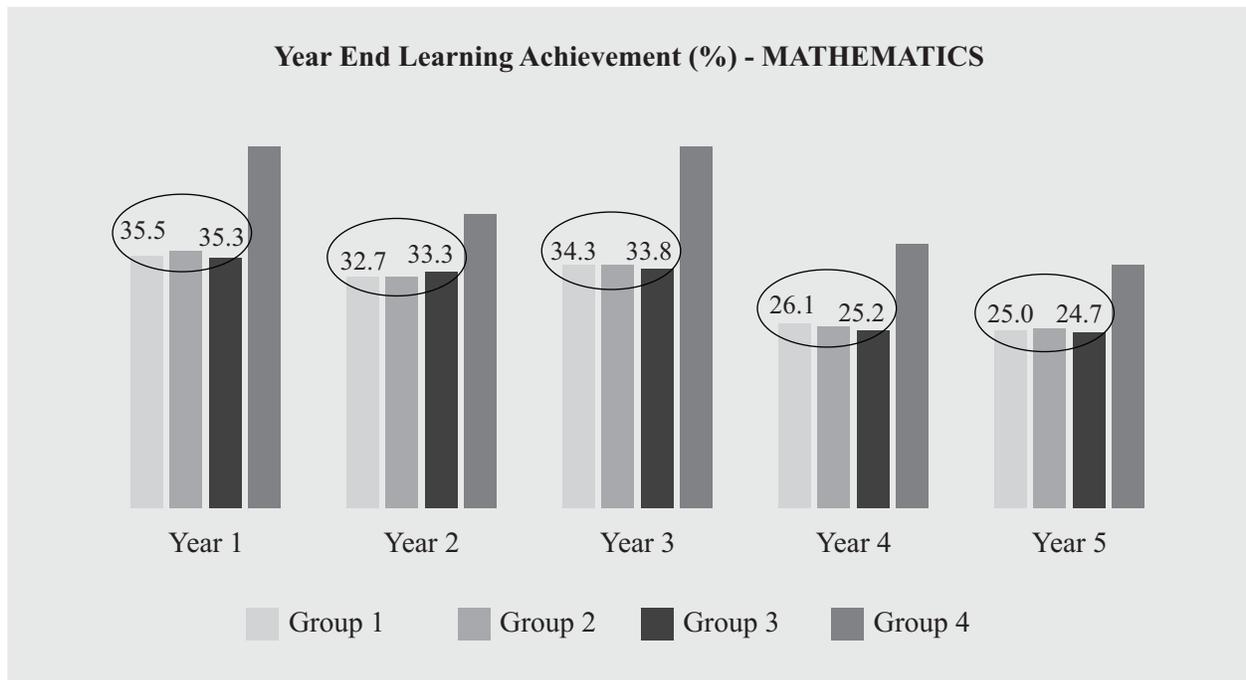


Table - 6 B: Year End Learning Achievement Test Results - Mathematics

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Group 1 : Children in govt schools not applied for scholarship | 35.5% | 32.7% | 34.3% | 26.1% | 25.0% |
| Group 2 : Children who applied for but not awarded scholarship | 36.3% | 32.7% | 34.4% | 25.5% | 25.3% |
| Group 3 : Children awarded scholarship and moved to pvt schools | 35.3% | 33.3% | 33.8% | 25.2% | 24.7% |
| Group 4 : Non-scholarship children in pvt schools | 51.0% | 41.4% | 51.1% | 37.2% | 34.2% |

Figure - 3



As can be seen, the results are stable across the five years. On the one hand, it is clear that the private schools children (Group 4) score better than the government schools children over the years (statistically significant at 99% level). This is not surprising at all. However, the more important findings relate to the performance of the scholarship children who moved from government schools to private schools (Group 3) and the children in government schools who stayed back in private schools (Groups 1 and 2). The Group 3 children have performed no better than children in Group 1 or 2. The differences are not statistically significant. It is thus very clear that the shift to private schools has not resulted in any improvement in learning levels of Telugu or Mathematics.

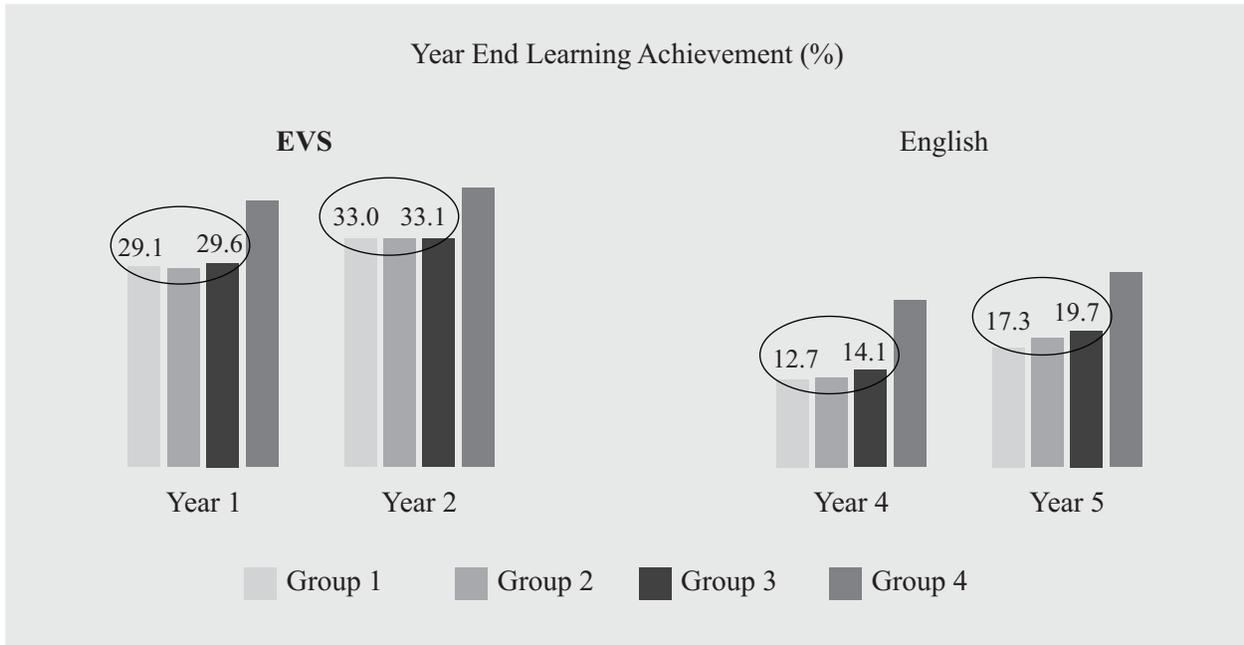
3.4 Year End Achievement Scores - Other Subjects

In addition to Telugu and Mathematics - the main subjects, the children are also taught English and EVS (Environmental Science - a combination of social science and general science) progressively in higher grades. Hence, as an additional measure, year end achievement tests were conducted in these subjects. The findings for these in Standards 4 and 5 are summarized below.

Table - 7: Year End Learning Achievement Test Results EVS and English

| | EVS | | English | |
|---|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
| Group 1 : Children in govt schools not applied for scholarship | 29.1% | 33.0% | 12.7% | 17.3% |
| Group 2 : Children who applied for but not awarded scholarship | 28.6% | 33.2% | 12.8% | 18.7% |
| Group 3 : Children awarded scholarship and moved to pvt schools | 29.6% | 33.1% | 14.1% | 19.7% |
| Group 4 : Non-scholarship children in pvt schools | 38.5% | 40.4% | 24.2% | 28.1% |

Figure - 4



As can be seen, the findings for the four groups of children follow a similar pattern as for Telugu and Mathematics. Performance of Group 3 children even in EVS in Standards 4 and 5 is no different from children in Group 2 or 1 while English shows a small difference in Standards 4.

3.5 Parents Satisfaction and Children’s Perspectives on Private School Education

Three years into the study, feedback was collected from parents of children who moved to private school after accepting the scholarship (Group 3T) on their impressions of the school of their children. The findings are summarized below in Table 8 A. The parents clearly show a high level of satisfaction.

Table - 8 A: Parents satisfaction levels

| | Very satisfied | Somewhat satisfied | Not satisfied | Very unsatisfied |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|
| How satisfied are you with the education of your child in the new school | 59% | 34% | 5% | 2% |
| How does your child feel about the new school | 70% | 25% | 3% | 2% |

The parents were also specifically asked about their perceptions of the changes that they noticed. The findings were interesting.

Table - 8 B: Specific feedback from parents

| What are the major differences you perceive in your child's new school compared to the previous school? | |
|--|-----|
| Teachers assign home work more regularly | 62% |
| Teachers exhibit more teaching activity | 34% |
| Teachers have better knowledge of English | 26% |
| Schools place greater emphasis on discipline | 24% |
| School promotes cleanliness | 13% |
| What positive changes have you observed in your child? | |
| Child attends school more often | 62% |
| Child completes home work more often | 61% |
| Child shows more discipline | 57% |
| Child exhibits more cleanliness | 43% |
| Child's grades have improved | 25% |
| What negative changes have you observed in your child? | |
| Not observed any negative changes | 80% |
| Child struggles more in class | 9% |
| Child is showing health problems | 6% |
| Child has too much homework to complete | 6% |
| Child is less confident | 3% |

Clearly, the satisfaction levels stem from the softer aspects of the schooling. Anecdotal evidence also indicates parents' satisfaction with better uniforms and social standing in the village.

This section compares the opinions of parents whose children were offered the scholarship in treatment villages (Group 3T) to the opinions of parents whose children applied for the scholarship in control villages (Group 2C). These results are presented in Table 8 C below. Column (1) & (2) presents the differences between the opinions of typical parents of private school children and government school children.

Table - 8 C: Parent’s aspirations about their children

| Differences between Parental Satisfaction, Aspiration and Activity | Children in private schools (1) | Children in Government Schools (2) | Difference (2) |
|---|--|---|-----------------------|
| Satisfied with quality of child's education | 0.906 | 0.779 | 0.127*** |
| | (251) | (941) | |
| Like to see child go to college | 0.200 | 0.169 | 0.031 |
| | (253) | (949) | |
| Aspire to have a child get a formal sector job | 0.716 | 0.594 | 0.122** |
| | (253) | (950) | |

(Figures in parentheses represent the sample size)

The scholarship program seems to have had some positive impact on parental perceptions about their child’s education and aspirations for their children going to college and attaining a formal sector job. Interestingly, the parents of scholarship students have positive feedback even though the learning achievement scores are poorer than their government school counterparts. It is possible that some rationalization of their decision to send their child to private school may be taking place with the parents.

At the same time, it must be noted that at the end of year 4, of the 1287 students 472 (37%) withdrew from private schools. The reasons indicated for this include migration of family; problems in transportation; child not interested; parents cannot spend time to help the student with studies at home and teacher does to treat child well.

Thus, while the data clearly indicate no improvement in the children’s learning levels as a result of shifting to private schools from government schools, the satisfaction levels are high. Clearly, there seems to be a mismatch between the parents’ perceptions and actual learning achievement data. At this preliminary stage, there seem to be two possible explanations for these perceptions. One is that the parents are more swayed by the softer aspects of private schools. The second could be that the parents are trying to rationalize their decision.

The reasons for private schools apparently showing better performance may have to be found in factors such as the socio-economic and parental education profile realities rather than the inputs given by the schools. Further detailed analysis of the data needs to be carried out but the fact remains that the children shifting to private schools perform no better than their equivalent peers in government schools in the main subjects.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Key Issues Emerging from the Study

The preliminary analysis of five year data of the APSC study suggests that contrary to popular perceptions, private schools are not adding value as compared to government schools to the children in the main subjects. Learning achievement tests at the end of the academic year (March - April) in each of the five years from 2008-09 to 2012-13 in Telugu and Mathematics and even in EVS and English are very consistent and stable.

The learning achievement scores for children in Group 4 (children from private schools) are significantly higher (at 99% level) than the other three groups in all the four subjects - Telugu, Mathematics, EVS and English. This however is no surprise at all. The critical set of children whose performance determines the impact of private schooling is Group 3 - the children who shifted to private schools after accepting the scholarship. The comparison of their performance with performance of children in Group 1 (in government schools not offered scholarship) and Group 2 (in government schools who did not accept scholarship) shows:

1. the learning achievement of the children in Groups 1, 2 and 3 are very similar and there is no statistically significant difference in their scores.
2. performance of Group 3 children is no better than performance of Group 1 or 2. This is a very clear indication that shifting to private schools has not helped these children in any way in terms of learning achievement in any of the five years. The consistency over five years of the data suggests that in the main subjects, the private schools do not add better value than government schools.
3. the performance of the children who stayed back is similar to the group that shifted. Clearly, the perception that the shifting of some children to private schools will change the dynamics of functioning of the government schools also does not seem justified.

Interestingly, parents of children in Group 3 seemed quite satisfied with the shift to private schools. The reasons for this perception may lie in socio-economic, household or other factors. It is possible that some extent of 'rationalisation' of their decision to shift may be at work here. Qualitative data collected over the project period seems to indicate that softer aspects like 'smarter uniforms', longer school hours, more homework given at school, greater discipline and cleanliness have weighed in with the parents. While there is no denying that these are not unimportant aspects of schooling, the key parameter of learning achievement improvement (or the lack of it) in private schools cannot be glossed over.

It is also important to note here that about thirty seven percent of the children in Group 3 dropped out and went back to government schools. There is a need to do further detailed analysis of the data to better understand these complex issues.

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