

DELHI VOUCHER PROJECT FIRST ASSESSMENT REPORT



CMS social



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1. TERMS USED IN THE REPORT

School Voucher: The Centre for Civil Society awarded school vouchers to 408 poor students in Delhi. The maximum value of each voucher was Rs. 3600 per year per child. The vouchers were made available directly to schools to meet the students' yearly expenses towards school fees, uniforms, books and transportation, as per the school policy.

Study Child: Each child who was interviewed and took the learning achievement test during the study is termed as "Study Child" in this study.

Category of Students: Students sample of the study consisted of three categories: (a) Treatment or Voucher Child (b) Control 1 Child and (c) Control 2 Child

- a. **Treatment Child:** A Study Child who had received a school voucher is termed Treatment or Voucher Child in the study report.
- b. **Control 1:** A Study Child who was in the same class and same school as the Treatment Child at the time of the study, but had not received a school voucher is termed "Control 1 Study Child" in the study report.
- c. **Control 2:** A Study Child who was in the same class as the Treatment Child at the time of the study, but in a different (government) school and had not received a school voucher is called "Control 2 Study Child" in the study report.

Pre-primary Study Child: A student below class 1 (Nursery/Preparatory) who was a beneficiary or non-beneficiary of the school voucher at the time of the study is termed "Pre-Primary Study Child" in the report.

Parents: Either the mother or the father of the Study Child who was interviewed in the study was termed as "Parents" in the report.

House Mapping: 'Not to scale' house mapping was done during the study in order to locate the distance of the Treatment Child's house to his/her present school.

Learning Achievement Test: The test, which was conducted among the sampled Study Children to assess their learning level, is termed as the "Learning Achievement Test" in the study.

2. SUMMARY

2.1. Need for Evaluation

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) launched India's first School Voucher Project, the 'Delhi School Voucher Project', on 28 March 2007 as part of the School Choice Campaign. To understand the effect of School Choice, school vouchers worth up to Rs. 3,600 per year per child were awarded to 408 students from 68 wards in Delhi. While the vouchers will be provided for a minimum of three years, CCS shall continue to support the students further if funds are available.

After the completion of the first year of the Delhi Voucher Project, an independent assessment of the Project was planned. The primary objective was to ascertain whether the parents' attitude towards education had changed and what kind of 'school choice' they exercised after receiving the vouchers. In addition, gain some insight on the academic achievements of voucher students during the first voucher year and how well they performed compared to children studying in private and government schools. Moreover, it was also intended to uncover possible implementation problems of the project. The Centre for Media Studies (CMS), New Delhi was appointed to conduct the study.

2.2. Research Design and Sample Size

During the study, 816 school going students (Class I-VII) and 1107 parents were interviewed in 64 wards from the East, Central, North-East and North-West districts of Delhi. CCS and CMS decided to cover all the voucher students in the study. The CMS team was able to conduct learning achievement tests with 371 voucher students (pre-primary - class VIII), 371 students attending private schools (pre-primary - class VIII) and 371 students from government schools (pre-primary - class VIII). The results were then compared to get an idea of how well the vouchers students were performing as compared to their counterparts in private and government schools. All students were tested separately in Hindi, Mathematics and English to evaluate their learning achievement levels. The parents of all children were also interviewed and 'not to scale' house mapping was done in order to approximate the distance of the Treatment Child's house to his/her present school. A total of eight teams, each consisting of one supervisor and four investigators, collected data in the field from 22 August 2008 to 11 September 2008 (a total of twenty two days).

2.3. The Main Findings

* Overall, the voucher students have performed better than those studying in government schools and on par with the students in private schools in English, Mathematics and Hindi in all grades.

- * The study found that the majority (63.1 percent) of the voucher beneficiaries exercised the freedom of choice after receiving the school voucher and switched over from a government to a private school.
- * More than 90 percent of the parents of the voucher beneficiaries, now attending private schools, were happy with the academic progress of their children, their teachers and the standard of discipline in the schools. A comparatively lesser percentage of the parents of students attending government schools were happy with the learning progress of their children (83.1 percent), the teachers (80.9 percent) and the standard of discipline in the schools (75.5 percent).
- * A majority of the parents of the voucher beneficiaries and the parents of students attending private schools (70.8 and 73 percent respectively) liked the teaching methods employed in their children's schools. A comparatively smaller percentage (52.6 percent) of the parents of students attending government schools liked their teaching methods.
- * Parents of voucher beneficiaries showed significantly greater involvement in the education of their children. A majority of parents of the voucher beneficiaries (91 percent) and the parents of students attending private schools (88 percent) said they met teachers to know about their child's studies. However, only 75 percent parents of students attending government school made the effort to meet teachers. Moreover, 53 percent of the voucher beneficiaries suggested that they are more willing to spend on education and are now spending more on their child's education.
- * Around 15 and 16 percent of the parents of the voucher beneficiaries and the parents of students attending private schools respectively reported inadequate infrastructure in their children's schools. However, 28 percent of the parents of students attending government schools reported inadequate infrastructure in their children's schools.
- * A high majority (94 percent) of the voucher parents mentioned that their children were happy with their present school. 61 percent of the voucher parents felt that their children had also become more regular with school work. More than 50 percent of the voucher parents noticed that their children had become more disciplined and studied more in their new school.
- * A high majority (nearly 90 percent) of the voucher students and those attending private schools perceived that being educated in their present schools would provide them with opportunities for a better life and future. In comparison, a lesser percentage (61 percent) of children attending government schools had the same opinion.
- * More than 50 percent of the voucher parents declared that if the school voucher payments were stopped, their children would have to go back to government schools.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1. About the Centre for Civil Society (CCS)

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) is a non-profit organization working in the field of research, education and advocacy. It is a resource for innovative and market based ideas for critical public policy issues facing India today, particularly in the areas of education, livelihood, governance and environment. By bringing these ideas to current and future leaders, CCS is advancing opportunity and prosperity for all.

Apart from CCS's work in the field of education, 'Improving access to quality education,' the other areas of focus are: (a) Removing barriers to livelihood; (b) Developing new leadership by awakening the youth; (c) Reducing waste, fraud and abuse in public governance.

3.2. Delhi School Voucher Project 2007

CCS focuses on improving quality of education and making it easily accessible, especially for the marginalized. By engaging policy makers, education experts, grassroots- level activists and the general public, the School Choice Campaign, CCS's flag ship programme launched in January 2007, is fighting to remove entry barriers for economically poor parents wishing to send their children to better schools.

CCS launched India's first School Voucher Project, the 'Delhi School Voucher Project', on 28 March 2007 as a part of the School Choice Campaign. To demonstrate the power of school choice, CCS awarded school vouchers worth up to Rs. 3,600 per year per child to 408 students from 68 wards in Delhi. With the vouchers being provided for a minimum of three years, CCS shall continue to support the students further if funds are available.

In the 68 wards, more than 50 School Choice activists reached out to over 12 lakh parents. In excess of 1.2 lakh parents applied for CCS school vouchers.

On 26 July 2007, the Delhi Chief Minister Ms. Sheila Dikshit, Education Minister Mr. Arvinder Singh Lovely, Mr. Gurcharan Das, Ms. Nafisa Ali and Mr. T K Mathew awarded school vouchers to the selected students.

3.3. Selection of School Voucher Beneficiaries

In order to be eligible to apply for a school voucher, an applicant should have studied in class six or below in a government school the previous academic session. Encouraging a fair and transparent method of selecting students, CCS held a public lottery with the local Ward Councillor picking 12 students in each ward - 6 for the first list and 6 for a buffer list. Finally CCS awarded vouchers to 408 beneficiaries.

3.4. Objectives of the Study

- * To understand the project's impact on voucher students and their parents
- * To assess the exercise of freedom of selection of school of their choice by parents
- * To ascertain changes in parents' attitudes and level of engagement with child's education upon receiving the voucher
- * To determine parents' views on the importance of education and their expectations from the education system
- * To understand the families' expenditure on education and the utilization and the breakdown of the voucher amount
- * To ascertain the learning achievements of the voucher students
- * To find shortcomings, if any, of the project and suggest corrective measures

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

4.1. Research Design, Coverage and Sample Size

A quasi-experimental design was applied in the present study to compare the learning achievements of voucher students over the first voucher year with private and government school students who did not receive voucher.

The voucher children enrolled in about 180 schools in all four districts were traced and approached with the help of the address list provided by CCS. The Snowball technique was applied to approach target respondents for Control 1 and Control 2 categories. The samples are as follows:

Treatment Category (T) - Students who received school vouchers: 371 children

Control Category 1 (X1) – Students from the same school and grade but did not receive school vouchers: 371 children

Control Category 2 (X2) – Students from the neighbouring government schools (and Aanganwadi Centres in the case of Pre Primary classes) who did not receive school vouchers: 371 children

CCS and CMS decided to cover all the treatment students in the study. Except for a few whose families had migrated or were out of town for a longer period, all voucher students were included in the study and the same number of students of Control 1 and Control 2 categories were also taken into account. The parents of the voucher children were interviewed. In the case of five families, two children from the same family received vouchers. Therefore, the sample size of the voucher children's parents is 366. In the other two categories (Control 1 and Control 2), the parents' sample size was 371 each. The table 4.1 presents district wise details.

As shown in the Table 4.1, 816 school-going students (of Class I-VII) and 1107 parents were interviewed in 64 wards from the East, Central, North-East and North-West districts of Delhi. The CMS team was able to conduct learning achievements tests with 371 voucher students (pre-primary - class VIII), 371 children attending private schools (pre-primary - class VIII) and 371 children attending government schools (pre-primary - class VIII). The learning levels of these three groups were compared to get an idea of how well the vouchers students were doing in their studies compared to private and government school students. All students were tested separately in Hindi, Mathematics and English.

The students in all three categories, except those in pre-primary, were interviewed with the help of a structured schedule to understand their level of satisfaction with the teaching-

Table 4.1.: District and category wise sample covered

District	No. of parents and Study Children interviewed		No. of students tested (learning achievement test)			House Mapping***
	Parents* (of all three categories of students)	Study Children** (all three categories)	Treatment (Voucher beneficiaries)	Control-1	Control-2	
East Delhi	317	252	106	106	106	106
North-East	431	315	114	144	144	144
Central	97	81	33	33	33	33
North-West	262	168	88	88	88	88
Total	1107	816	371	371	371	371

* *Parent respondents = either father or mother, whoever was present at the time of visit of the interviewer*

***All the Study Children except the pre primary children were interviewed. There were 297 (99*3=297) pre primary Study Children.*

*** *House Mapping= To ascertain the distance between the Treatment Children's schools and their houses*

learning facilities available in the school they were currently enrolled in and their attitude towards education. The parents of the sampled students were interviewed with the help of a structured schedule to ascertain their socio-economic background, determine their attitude towards education and the kind of school choice they exercised after receiving the vouchers.

4.2. Data Collection Process

Experienced field investigators conducted the fieldwork (the interviews with parents and students and testing of students). A total of eight teams, each consisting of one supervisor and four investigators, collected data in the field from 22 August 2008 to 11 September 2008 (total of twenty two days). Before commencing, all team members underwent a two-day extensive training on how to conduct fieldwork and every team member carried out mock interview exercises with the other team members. Apart from eight field teams, four persons were engaged with the mapping/plotting (not to scale) of the Treatment Children's homes. CMS field investigators visited the children's homes after school hours (i.e. in the second half of the day) on week days, weekends and holidays to conduct the interviews and learning achievement tests.

4.3. Tools of the Study

Different research tools were used in the present study. They were:

- * A structured schedule for the interviews with the parents
- * A structured schedule for the interviews with the students
- * Separate achievement test question papers for English, Hindi and Mathematics
- * Answer sheets for the English, Hindi and Mathematics tests

The parents' schedule included questions about their children's schooling and related yearly expenditures incurred. The parents schedule tried to collect their overall views on the level of satisfaction with the schools and the quality of education the Study Child was getting; and also the extent of parents' involvement in their children's education.

The learning achievement tests for English, Hindi and Mathematics were designed as rolling tests. Further information on the design of the learning achievement test will be given in chapter 7 of this report (see page 21).

5. FAMILY BACKGROUND, EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AND PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

This chapter presents the social, economic and educational backgrounds, expenditure on education and parents' attitude towards their children's education.

5.1. Social, Economic and Educational Backgrounds and School Preferences for boys and girls

Table 5.1.: Social, economic and educational backgrounds and school preferences for boys and girls (in %)

Category		Respondents category					
	Indicators	Treatment (N=366)		Control 1 (N=370)		Control 2 (N=371)	
Social	Caste						
	SC/ST	36.1		34.0		38.0	
	OBC	20.2		20.8		20.8	
	General	27.0		25.7		22.1	
	Others	16.7		19.4		19.2	
Education	Parents' illiteracy level						
		Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
	Illiteracy	15.8	39.3	9.5	32.4	19.7	51.5
Economic	Type of ration card						
	None	25.4		27.8		35.3	
	BPL	23.2		19.5		20.5	
	APL	46.4		48.9		39.4	
	Antodaya	4.9		3.8		4.9	
Gender	Distribution of school going children by school						
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	Government	45.4	62.8	27.2	49.0	90.9	96.5
	Private	54.6	37.2	72.8	51.0	9.1	3.5

Source: Parents interview schedule

The treatment and control 1 categories have better social, economic and educational levels than category 2. In all categories more boys than girls were enrolled in private schools and the majority of girls were enrolled in government schools.

5.2 Yearly Expenditure on Children's Schooling

Table 5.2.: Yearly average expenditure on all school going children (Average amount)

Head of expenses	Treatment* (N=366)	Control 1 (N=370)	Control 2 (N=371)
School Fee	691	1788	286
Transportation	286	259	67
Private Tuition	1324	1166	748
Others	1422	1743	1072
Total	3723	4956	2173

Source: Parents interview schedule

* Expenditure excluding voucher amount

5.3. Reasons for Sending Study Child to School

Table 5.3.: Reason for sending their children to school (in %)

Reason (Multiple response)	Reason (Multiple response)		
	Treatment (N=366)	Control 1 (N=370)	Control 2 (N=371)
Improve their knowledge & skills	93.4	92.2	90.0
Better job prospects	86.3	84.1	81.9
Inculcate good habits & discipline	78.4	74.9	74.1
To make the child learn English	20.5	22.4	11.1
Everyone in the neighborhood sends their children to school	1.6	3.8	5.7
Others (serves as crèche, get mid-day-meal)	1.0	1.6	6.7

Source: Parents interview schedule

5.4. Attention Paid to Child's Studies at Home

The majority of children receive help at home with their homework. The children's answers corresponded with their parents' answers.

Table 5.4.: Showing who helps the Study Child at home in doing homework (in %)

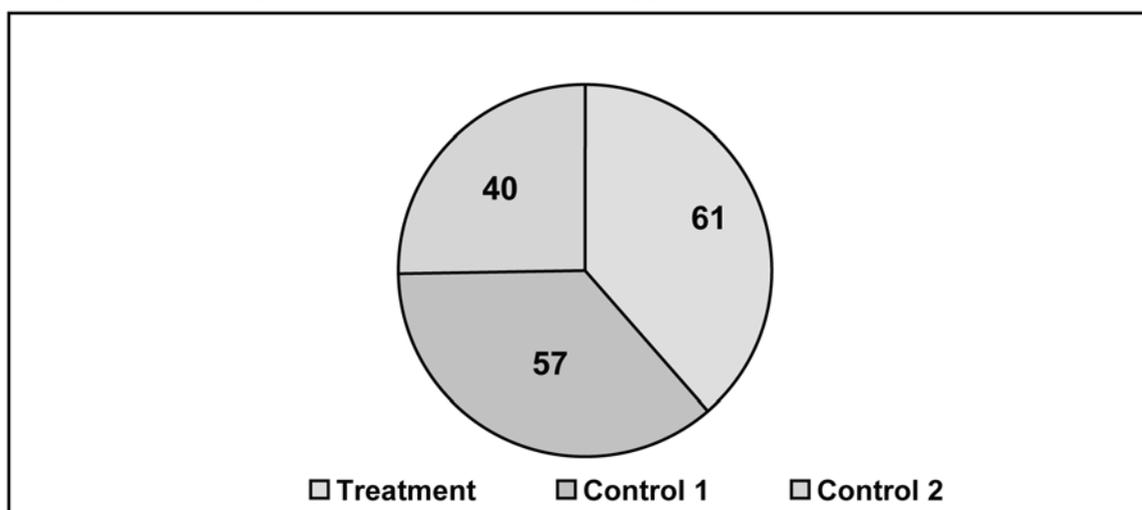
Helps Study Child (Multiple Response)	Respondent Category		
	Treatment (N=366)	Control 1 (N=370)	Control 2 (N=371)
Mother	30.1	31.6	21.8
Older sibling	36.6	19.5	25.9
Father	16.1	22.7	15.6
Other family members	5.5	8.1	4.0
Others (pvt. tutor, friends)	9.0	8.7	7.3
No one helps	15.8	19.2	23.2
Does not get homework	0.3	0.0	4.3
Last time the child was taught or had work checked at home			
	(N= 119)	(N=132)	(N=101)
Today	18.5	14.4	20.8
Yesterday	63.9	66.7	57.4
Day before yesterday	8.4	12.1	15.8
2-7 days ago	9.2	6.8	5.9

Source: Parents interview schedule

A significant test was carried out across respondent groups to understand the impact on learning achievements of the Study Child as a result of the parents' involvement in their studies. The result of the t-test (at 5 % significance level) suggests that the involvement of the parents of Treatment Children in terms of meeting the teachers of their ward to know about the Study Child's progress is significantly higher than the involvement of Control 2 and on par with Control 1 group. Similarly, the extent of participation of the parents of the voucher children is significantly higher than the extent of participation of the parents of the Control 2 group children and not significantly different from the extent of participation of the parents of the Control 1 group children.

5.5. Attend Private Tuition

Graph 1: Percentage of Study Children attending private tuition (in %)



Source: Parents interview schedule

5.6. Parents Opinion About the Study Child's School

More than 90 percent parents of the Treatment and Control 1 category parents were happy with their child's learning progress. A comparatively smaller percentage (83.1 percent) of the Control-2 category parents was happy with their child's learning progress.

A majority (more than 90 percent) of Treatment and Control 1 category parents were happy with their child's teachers. However, a comparatively smaller percentage (80.9 percent) of the Control 2 parents was happy with their child's teachers.

5.7. Parent-Teacher Meeting and its Regularity

72 percent of the Treatment and Control 1 category parents reported that Parent -Teacher meetings were organized in their child’s school. Whereas, only 37 percent parents of Control 2 mentioned that Parents-Teacher meetings were organized in the school of the Study Child.

5.8. Merits and Demerits of Schools of Study Child

Table 5.5.: Merits and demerits of Study Child’s school in the view of parents (in %)

Merits of the school (Multiple response)	Respondent Category		
	Treatment (N=366)	Control 1 (N=370)	Control 2 (N=371)
Teaching-learning	70.8	73.0	52.6
Discipline	51.9	50.5	32.6
Interaction with the teachers is possible	27.3	28.9	19.9
Child is more motivated	22.1	23.5	19.7
Infrastructure/ Facilities	20.8	19.7	17.3
PTA meetings are held	14.2	11.4	7.0
Do not know	3.3	1.6	7.5
Nominal school fee and Mid day meal	0.5	0.3	5.6
Demerits (Multiple response)			
No demerits	74.5	70.5	45.6
Bad infrastructure/ facilities	14.5	15.7	28.0
No discipline	74.5	70.5	45.6
Bad teaching	3.8	5.4	15.6
Teachers’ absence	2.2	1.1	7.8
No playground	1.6	2.2	-
Others	3.4	3.1	2.2

Source: Parents interview schedule

5.9. Parents' Aspiration for their Children

Table 5.6.: Parents aspiration for their children

Wanted to educate Study Child up to	Respondent Category		
	Treatment (N=366)	Control 1 (N=370)	Control (N=371)
Xth Std.	4.6	4.4	12.5
Higher secondary	37.9	40.8	50.4
Graduate & above	55.7	53.6	36.2
As per the child's wish	1.4	0.3	0.8
Can't say	0.3	1.1	0.3
Wanted to educate all children up to			
Up to Xth Std.	5.5	5.7	13.2
Higher secondary	36.4	39.5	52.0
Graduate & above	57.7	53.8	34.3
Don't know/ Can't say	0.5	1.1	0.5
Wanted the Study Child to become			
Doctor/ engineer	54.2	48.9	42.2
Officer	7.7	10.5	9.8
Teacher	18.6	17.8	17.5
Any Job/service	7.4	5.7	13.7
Advocate/lawyer	2.5	1.4	2.7
Pilot	1.1	2.2	0.8
Others (includes family professio, sport person,etc.)	4.2	6.0	6.5
Don't know/can't say	4.4	7.6	6.7

Source: Parents interview schedule

A majority (more than 80 percent) of the Study Children (Treatment, Control 1 and Control 2) wanted to complete at least higher secondary level or college level education. A majority (nearly 90 percent) of the voucher children and children attending private schools perceived that being educated in their present school would provide them with opportunities for a better life and future. In comparison, a lesser percentage (61 percent) of children attending government schools felt that being educated in their present school would provide them with opportunities for a better life and future.

6. EXERCISING SCHOOL CHOICE AFTER RECEIVING THE SCHOOL VOUCHER

The present chapter is based on the responses of the parents of the Treatment Child (Voucher Child). 366 parents were interviewed.

6.1. Opted for New School

The study showed that nearly two thirds of parents exercised school choice after getting the voucher by shifting the Treatment Child to another institution of their choice. Those who did not change schools after getting a school voucher did so for various reasons. 14 percent of them did not switch schools because the parents were satisfied with the school where the Treatment Child was studying. One fourth cited that private schools were too expensive for them even after getting the voucher.

6.2. Reason for Getting the Study Child Enrolled in a Particular School

Table 6.1.: Reasons for enrolling the Treatment Child in a particular school (in %)

Reason (N=231)	Multiple response
Heard that it is a good school	63.6
Quality of teaching is better	62.3
Present school is closer than other schools	46.8
Child's siblings/ cousins are attending the same school	9.1
Neighbour's children attend the same school	16.5
Inculcates good habits & discipline	31.6
Will learn more in the new school	6.5
The new school is better than the alternative school	10.4
English medium education	5.2
Recognized status	5.2
Regularity of teachers	1.7

Source: Parents interview schedule

6.3. Schools Response at Admission

Nine out of ten parents did not face any problems during the admission process at the schools their children were enrolled.

6.4. Voucher Child Enrolled in the Lower Class in the New School

From among those who switched schools after getting the school voucher, 30 percent were enrolled in a lower grade at their new school. Citing poor performance in the pre-admission tests as the main reason, the head of the school advised parents to get the Voucher Child enrolled in a lower class. However, more than 80 percent parents of the Voucher Children who were enrolled in lower grades took it positively and see no wrong on the school's part.

6.5. Children's Feeling about the New School

94 percent of the parents of the children who switched to private schools opined that their children were happy and enjoying themselves in the new school.

Table 6.2.: Feelings about the school and positive changes (in %)

Voucher Child in new school (N=231)	
Very happy	47.2
Happy	46.8
Neutral	4.8
Unhappy	1.3
Positive changes in the child in new school (Multiple response)	
Regular attendance	61.0
Disciplined	53.2
Cleanliness	29.0
Doing more studies	52.4
More self-study	18.6
Improvement in grades	8.7
Doing more homework	22.9
No change	4.3
Speaks clearly	0.9

Source: Parents interview schedule

6.6. Differences in Previous and Present School of Voucher Students

The parents of voucher students mentioned a number of positive things about the present schools as compared to their earlier schools.

Table 6.3: Major differences in the present and previous school of Treatment Child (in %)

Differences in previous and present school (N=231)	Multiple response
More teaching activity	58.4
Regular homework	41.6
Knowledge/usage of English	34.7
More disciplined	27.3
Higher teacher attendance	26.4
Ensuring attendance of child	6.9
Schools are positive to your concerns	7.4
More cleanliness	4.8
No change	3.5

Source: Parents interview schedule

6.7. Expenditure of Voucher Amount (Rs. 3,600/-)

The maximum voucher amount is Rs. 3,600 per year per child. However, each individual beneficiary was given the voucher amount according to his/her actual expenditure on education, not exceeding the voucher amount of Rs. 3600 per child per year. Parents were required to provide expenditure details including transportation, uniforms and books, particularly where the yearly school fees was less than Rs. 3,600.

Table 6.4: Head wise average yearly expenditure of the voucher amount (in Rs.)

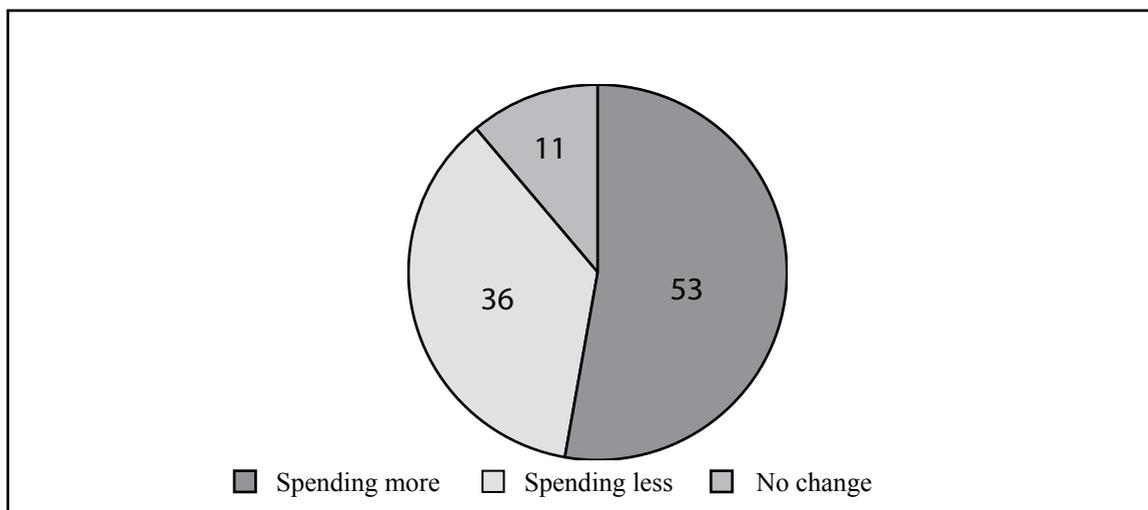
Heads (N=366)	
School Fees	2394
Uniform	270
Books	447
Travel	96
Others (includes annual charges, examination fee etc.)	429
Per child average expenditure in a year	3351

Source: Parents interview schedule

6.8. Change in Expenditure Pattern on Education of the Voucher Child after getting Voucher

A majority (52 percent) of the parents of the Voucher Child mentioned that the expenditure on education of the Voucher Child had comparatively increased after getting the school voucher. The parents might have started spending more on Voucher Child's education considering it as a good investment for his/her career.

Graph 2: Change in expenditure pattern on voucher child after getting voucher (in %)



Source: Parents interview schedule

6.9. Will the Voucher Child Continue in the Same School if the Voucher Payment is Stopped?

A majority (53 percent) of the parents said that they would send the Voucher Child to a government school if the voucher payment stopped. Similarly, a majority (60 percent) of the school voucher beneficiaries' parents said that their children would be studying in government schools had they not received the voucher.

7. ACHIEVEMENT TEST: METHODOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE

7.1. Design and Administration of the Learning Achievement Test

For the students studying in grade I to grade VIII, three separate tests were conducted: one each for Hindi, English and Mathematics. The tests were carried out one after the other. Single rolling test papers were prepared for each of the three subjects for students of Class 1 to VIII. This means that only one test for each subject was designed for all the students. For each test, the questions were arranged in increasing order of difficulty. On an average, there were about 3-4 questions for each class. For each test, the questions were printed on a flip chart with one question on each sheet. Questions were printed in bold letters and in a large font size so that the students could read the questions without any difficulty. While preparing the test papers, the CCS-CMS team referred to the syllabus of schools in Delhi and it was ensured that the level of questions was in keeping with the syllabus of each class. The learning level of the child was judged by the number of questions he/she could answer correctly. A separate question paper was developed for children in pre-primary schools. A single test paper for pre-primary was administered, which tested the students on their ability to identify the Hindi and English alphabets and numbers and match them with corresponding pictures.

To ensure that the process was fair and unbiased for each student, the CMS test administering team members were properly instructed on the manner in which the tests were to be conducted. These were:

- * All students were required to be tested on all the three subjects. The order of the tests was Hindi, Mathematics and English.
- * The test paper was in the form of flip chart with one question on each sheet. This was done to ensure that the student proceed in a sequence while attempting the test paper for each subject.
- * For students of the pre-primary stage up to class II, the questions were read out. The students of higher classes had to read the questions themselves. This was done as it was felt that the students of lower classes might find it difficult to read the instructions.
- * Each student was required to answer the questions starting at question number 1 and proceed to the last question sequentially for each subject, with a condition that if any student either answered incorrectly or skipped two consecutive questions, the invigilator would stop the test for that subject and move to the next subject.
- * Each student was given up to 30 minutes to complete a test.

- * To motivate students to appear for the tests, a token gift was given after each test paper, irrespective of the number of questions attempted by them.
- * One of the limitations of conducting the tests at a household level, which was anticipated prior to commencing the fieldwork by the CMS team, was the interference (prompting) by family members and neighbours. It was also observed that due to low socio-economic conditions, many did not have sufficient space to carry out the tests in isolation. However, the CMS field investigators with repeated requests convinced parents and neighbours not to interfere.
- * Each question carried equal marks. Right answers were given one mark each while wrong answers were given no marks.

7.2. Children's Performance

7.2.1. Children Studying in Grades I-VIII

After analyzing the results of the learning achievement tests, the following observations were made:

- * The performance of students from the Treatment group was on par with the performance of the students from the Control 1 group.

The significance test (t-test at 5% significance level) carried out to see whether the mean marks secured by the Study Child of the three categories differed significantly from each other, shows that the students of the treatment group have performed better than Control 2 (government) group students in all the three subjects (Hindi, English and Mathematics). Further, comparing the marks obtained by the Study Child of Treatment and Control 1 groups, it was observed that there was no significant difference in the mean marks secured by the students of the two categories. Overall, this indicates that the Treatment Child group performed better than the Control 2 (government) group and at par with the Control 1 group.

- * Control 2 group students' performance particularly in English and Mathematics was inferior compared to the performance of the students in the Treatment and Control 1 groups.
- * Another observation is that a majority of the students of higher classes could not correctly answer the questions of their level, more so in the case of English followed by Mathematics.

7.2.2. Children Studying in Pre-primary Classes

- * At the pre-primary level, a combined score of the single test i.e. on picture matching, alphabet (English and Hindi) matching with words and number matching, has been taken to grade the students.
- * The results show that students of Treatment and Control 1 categories performed better than Control 2 category.
- * It was further observed that in the picture matching section where the students were required to match the picture on a left column with the same pictures on the right side placed in a different order, the students performed better.
- * In the remaining three sections, the scoring pattern within each respondent category was observed to be similar.

8.CONCLUSION

The primary objective of the study was to ascertain whether the parents' attitude towards education had changed and what kind of 'school choice' they exercised after receiving the vouchers. In addition, School Choice Campaign (SCC) wanted to gain some insight into the academic achievements of voucher students during the first voucher year and how well they performed compared to children studying in private and government schools. This study has given answers to these questions. Since the school, with its infrastructure, pedagogy, quality of teachers and philosophy, is reflected in a child's academic performance, the changes in the performance levels of the voucher students reflect the effect of 'choice' their parents exercised after receiving the vouchers.

The study has found that a huge majority (63.1 percent) of the voucher beneficiaries exercised the freedom of choice after receiving the school voucher and switched over from a government to a private school. More than 90 percent of the parents of the voucher beneficiaries, now attending private schools, were happy with the academic progress of their children, their teachers and the standard of discipline in the schools. A comparatively lesser percentage of the parents of students attending government schools were happy with the learning progress of their children (83.1 percent), the teachers (80.9 percent) and the standard of discipline in the schools (75.5 percent). A high majority (94 percent) of the voucher parents mentioned that their children were happy with their present school. 61 percent of the voucher parents felt that their children had also become more regular with school work. More than 50 percent of the voucher parents noticed that their children had become more disciplined and studied more in their new school.

Availability of 'choice' has had a big impact on the children too. A high majority (nearly 90 percent) of the voucher students and those attending private schools perceived that being educated in their present schools would provide them with opportunities for a better life and future. In comparison, a lesser percentage (61 percent) of children attending government schools had the same opinion. Overall, the voucher students have performed better than those studying in government schools and on par with the students in private schools in English, Mathematics and Hindi in all grades.

Over the years, India has tried varied approaches to improve enrolments and the quality of school education. As the latest Pratham survey shows, there is a huge gap between our aspirations and actual achievements. The Delhi Voucher Project is an experiment which is testing how school choice can help poor children attending government schools to improve their learning levels. This study has provided evidence that 'choice' when exercised can assist students from weaker economic backgrounds to learn better.



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