Alternatives to Mainstream Education

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Abstract

Education is a crucial factor which can enable a better standard of living for the children and ensure a better tomorrow for the current generation and the society at large. Most of the prevalent problems that any nation or economy is currently facing can be eliminated by one secret medicine called Education. Hence it becomes very important to understand and strengthen our education system.

India is expected to become the world's youngest country by the year 2020. This explains the indigenous benefit which India has. But somehow the quality of education is being compromised in order to cater the quantity. At present India spends less than 4% of its GDP on the world's second largest population for its education. The education system too is quantitative result oriented. Our research paper is an attempt at understanding the prevailing education systems and to suggest how it could ensure a holistic growth of the student.

There is a need for an alternative to the mainstream education system. This is an attempt to study such alternatives.

Keywords: *Alternative Education, Home-Schooling, Innovation, Right to Education*

Paper Type: *Descriptive, Survey*

Introduction

Overview

Education in India can be categorised into public and private schools, which are administered by the central, state and local level. According to the constitution of India, it is a fundamental right to provide free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. According to an IBEF report, our country has over 250 million school going students. With one of the largest networks of higher education institutions in the world, India has 39,050 colleges and 903 universities. In spite of being a country with rich cultural heritage and numerous revered institutions like the Nalanda University, India has no global acknowledgement. As per the 2019 edition of QS World University Rankings, not even one Indian University makes it to the list of Top 200. Parents and students alike want to move away from the mainstream system of education in our country. A majority of Indians are running in the Rat-Race, be it for education or the corporate. Young individuals have become a product of rote-learning, manufactured by the Indian Education System.

Alternative Education

Alternative form of education refers to imparting education in a method alternative to the existing, mainstream education system. Schools that promote alternative education seek to provide an environment where the child is allowed to express his/ her creativity. Emphasis is laid on introducing and teaching concepts practically and being in touch with nature. This system of education discourages rote- learning and enhances critical thinking amongst the students. Students have no examinations till grade VIII and no ranking system is followed. These schools do not limit themselves to textbooks. The classrooms of such schools are either out in the open or close to nature.

Origin

This system of education dates back to the time of gurukuls, where students would learn religious texts and hymns and as a consideration they helped the guru in his household chores like collecting firewood or working in the fields. Over time, under British India, native Indians started enrolling themselves for the education system set up by the British in India, in order to get a job under the British government. However, a small section of social reformers like Sir Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore to name a few, explored for alternatives.

Journey

Gandhi laid the foundation of Nai Taleem, which focused on child-centric basic and primary education. It focused on the all-round development of the child including agriculture, carpentry etc. He encouraged learning in one's mother tongue and studying English as an optional subject.

Similarly, in the west, Dr. Rudolf Steiner advocated imparting education through child-centric methods for overall development of the child, including emotional intelligence and intellectual development. Two popular alternative education methods of the west are Montessori which focuses on real-life situations and Waldorf which focuses on a child's imagination.

Objectives

- To study the prevailing education systems in India.
- To understand the parents' teachers' and students' point of view on the current education system.
- To analyse any alternative method of teaching.
- To formulate solutions for the flaws in the education system, if any.

Analysis

Secondary data was used to analyse the current scenario of schools in rural India. Primary Data was collected in the form of questionnaire, telephonic and personal interviews to gather the views of parents, students and teachers in the urban areas to understand their opinion of the current education system.

Table 1 : Primary Data Sources		
Methods	Details	No. of respondents
Questionnaire	Teachers	28
	Parents	111
	Students	229
Interviews	Telephonic	2
	Personal	1

Compiled by Researcher

Alternative Education in India

Advantages:

● No pressure on students as there are no formal examinations or a ranking system. The child's pace is given importance.

● Nature trails or treks are an integral part of such schools. Students are not given many instructions and are allowed to explore, where they can see different aspects of nature from their own point of view.

● A conscious effort is made to keep a small Teacher- Student ratio. Students are taught to respect and not fear the authority. Most of the teachers may not have a B.Ed. degree but have expertise in a certain field and believe in the methods of alternative education. These schools are small and focus on the minimum requirements to meet the basic educational facilities.

Disadvantages

● It is often misunderstood that such schools are for the differently abled or children with learning disabilities. Because of their child-centric methods and parent involvement, parents of such students prefer sending their children to such schools.

● Some students find it difficult to face examinations after the VIII grade.

● As a certification, alternative schools have to be affiliated to education boards as they don't have their own curriculum.

● Lack of teachers, who can understand and imbibe the methodologies of such schools. This is also because lack of awareness about such schools as they do not advertise.

● It has been observed that parents enroll their children in such schools just to stand-out or do something off-beat.

Home-schooling in India

Home-schooling or Un-Schooling is a concept which is gaining popularity. Parents who are not happy or satisfied with the available education system in the country, due to curriculum or method of teaching opt for home-schooling. Parents take up the task to research and plan a curriculum. Parents either assume the role of a teacher or appoint a private tutor. The ward is enrolled for sports and extra-curricular

activities to ensure holistic development. Students can choose subjects of their choice and can appear for examinations under National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). But this method of education requires dedication and motivation from both parents and their children.

Innovation

In the words of Jean Piaget, "The goal of education is not to increase the amount of knowledge but to create to the possibilities for a child to invent and discover, to create men who are capable of doing new things."

- Sonum Wangchuk, an innovator, and the founding director of Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh. They work to reform the government school system and help educate students in villages. An individual who is even a 10th fail student can be admitted to his institute and he stresses on vocational learning.

- Existing Institutes in India including a few schools are trying to shift to a practical based learning and including interactive boards, project work in their curriculum that would encourage students to go beyond their textbooks, explore about the topic and hone their critical thinking skills.

- Upcoming institutes in India like Jio Institute intend to be game- changers in the field of education where education will be set at a particular standard, to provide resources that the students deserve and offer an innovative and alternative approach to concepts. Eg. Artificial Intelligence based platform.

Right to Education (RTE)

The rules are stringent and quantitative output base. For example at alternative schools locals with expertise in a subject such as gardening are trained as to how to interact with the students and teach; after which are allowed to share the knowledge. But due to specific teachers qualification requirements as mentioned under RTE such individuals with potential knowledge would not be able to deliver their expertise. This is much applicable in the rural areas. Moulding the qualification requirements is not recommended as it could also be a compromise with the quality of education being delivered. In the rural and urban areas the vocational courses such as wooden carving, needle work, cooking, gardening, etc. can be taught by some regional experts after a training. This will aid in employment generation and enabling optimum use of available resources.

The secondary data is derived from various official government websites and published reports

Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2018 (ASER)

ASER is an initiative of an NGO Pratham which collaborates with the Government of India to understand the current education system in rural India by surveying the students of age group 6 to 13 years. The various factors taken into consideration are:

1. Enrollment Status (pre-primary and primary schools)

2. Basic reading skills

3. Arithmetic Abilities

In ASER 2018 report, a total of 546,527 children of age group 3-16 years were surveyed.

Some of the major findings of the report being:

- 57% of 14-18 years old children were unable to do simple math division.

- 40% of 18 year olds cannot read simple English sentences.

- 25% of 14-18 age group students cannot read basic texts in their own language.

- Only 5% of school students are pursuing some kind of vocational education.

- 42% of 14-18 year olds are working regardless of their schooling.

- 76% could count money.

- 58% could not read their state map.

- 14% could not read India map

Graph 1: Percentage of Children in government schools in Std V who can read Std II Text
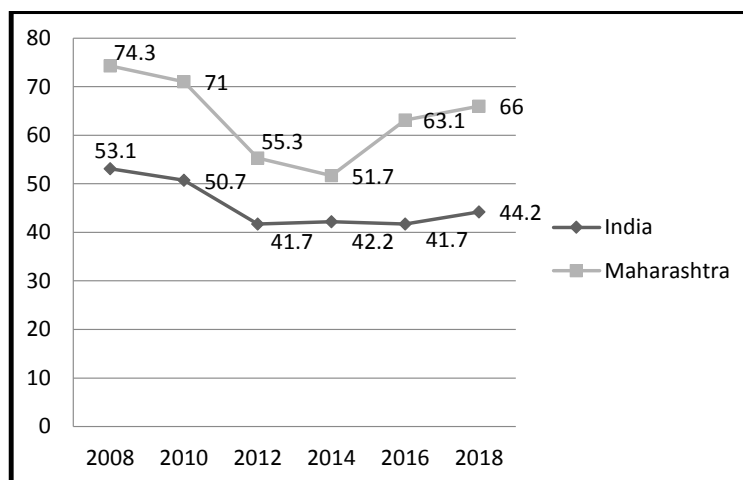
Source: ASER 2018

Table 2: Percentage of children who can read Std II level text, Government vs Private Schools

Std V	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Government	53.1	50.7	41.7	42.2	41.7	44.2
Private	67.9	64.2	61.2	62.6	63.0	65.1

Source: ASER 2018

Table 3: Percentage of children in government schools who can do division, Std V vs Std VIII

India	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Std V	34.4	33.9	20.3	20.7	21.1	22.7
Std VIII	65.2	67.0	44.5	40.0	40.2	40.0

Source: ASER 2018

Table 4: Percentage of children in Private Schools who can do division, Std V vs Std VIII

India	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Std V	47.1	44.2	37.8	39.3	38.0	39.8
Std VIII	71.8	72.0	57.1	54.2	51.2	54.2

Source: ASER 2018

This explains that the whether it is a public or a private school students are facing a problem in understanding and coping up with what is taught or they are not being taught well. The mathematical sums or problems given to the fifth and eighth standard students were the same.

Table 5: Physical Education and Sports in Schools

% Schools with		Std I – IV / V	Std I – VII / VIII	All Schools
Dedicated time for physical education	Physical education period in the timetable	58.4	69.1	62.9
	No Physical education period but dedicated time allotted	22.4	17.0	20.1
	No Physical education period & no dedicated time allotted	19.2	14.0	17.0
	Total	100	100	100
Physical education teacher	Separate physical education teacher	5.8	30.8	16.5
	Other physical education teacher	63.0	46.6	56.0
	No physical education teacher	31.2	22.6	27.5
	Total	100	100	100
Playground	Playground inside the school premise	65.0	70.3	67.2
	Playground outside the school premise	15.9	15.0	15.5
	No accessible playground	19.1	14.7	17.2
	Total	100	100	100
Availability of any sports equipment		55.8	71.5	62.5
Supervised physical education activity observed on day of visit		23.5	30.3	26.4

Source: ASER 2018

Physical education is an important aspect to ensure a student's holistic growth. The physical activities, sports aid into mental as well as physical development of the student. Almost 37.1% of the schools in reality don't have a physical education period. 27.5% schools don't have a physical education teacher and almost 17.2% don't have a playground to promote games and activities.

Table 6: Percentage of all children in Std III (rural) who:

Reading Level	Cannot recognize letters yet	Can recognize letters but cannot read words	Can read words but cannot read sentences	Can read text at Std I level but not higher	Can read Std II level text	Total
Std III	12.1	22.6	20.8	17.3	27.2	100
Arithmetic Level	Cannot recognize numbers till 9 yet	Can recognize till 9 but not higher	Can recognize numbers till 99 but cannot substract	Can do 2-digit by 2-digit substraction but not division	Can do 3-digit by 1-digit division or higher	Total
Std III	7.6	26.9	37.5	19.6	8.5	100

Source: ASER 2018

If the definition of an 'Educated Indian' is going to be drawn on the same lines as the definition of a 'Literate Indian', the future in endangered. This schooling generation is our future. It is important to understand why they are unable to identify letter, numbers and solve some basic mathematical problems or read some basic text? At the early ages it cannot really be the students disinterest but also a result of deliberate negligence. There have been several cases where the teachers are themselves under qualified and incapable of teaching the students. It is crucial to ensure that the hands in which we lay our children's future are the safe ones.

Primary data was collected through survey method wherein students, teachers, and parents were surveyed by sending questionnaires.

The data collected is as under:

Analysis of Questionnaire

1. Teachers

28 Teachers from various school boards filled the survey form and the results are as follows:

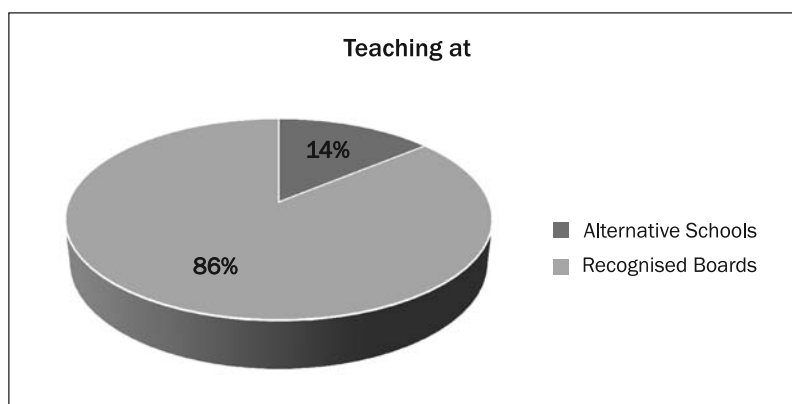*Chart 1: Compiled by Researcher*

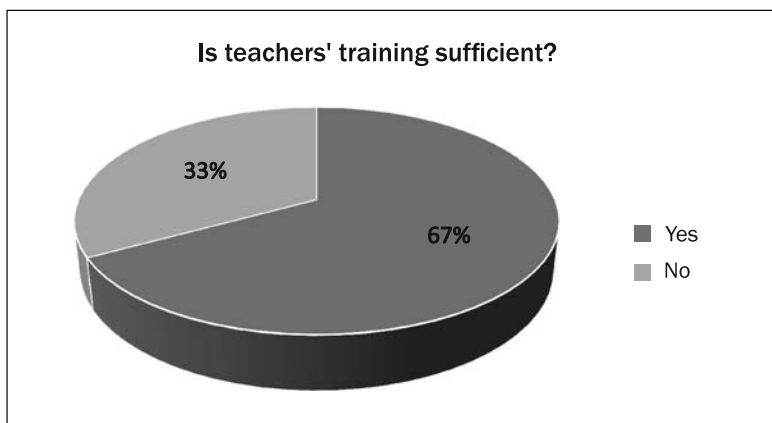● Do you feel that the teachers training provided is sufficient to groom a teacher and address the students need?

Is teachers' training sufficient?

Chart 2: Compiled by Researcher

● Do you feel students are pressurised under the mainstream education?

Are students being pressurised by current education system?
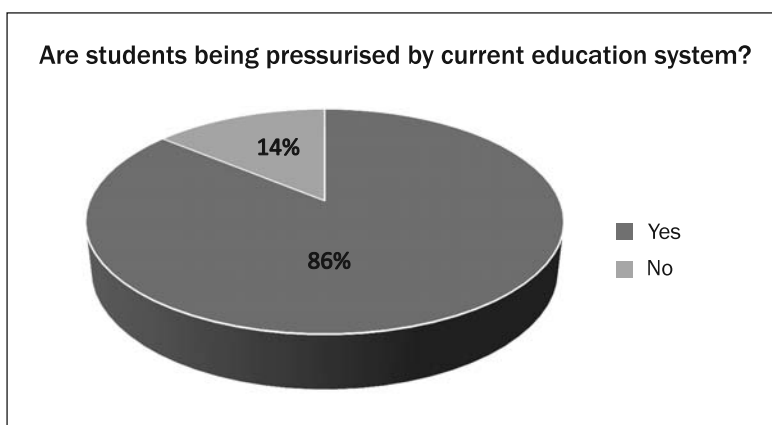
Chart 3: Compiled by Researcher

● Is there a need for the syllabus to be updated?

Syllabus updation required
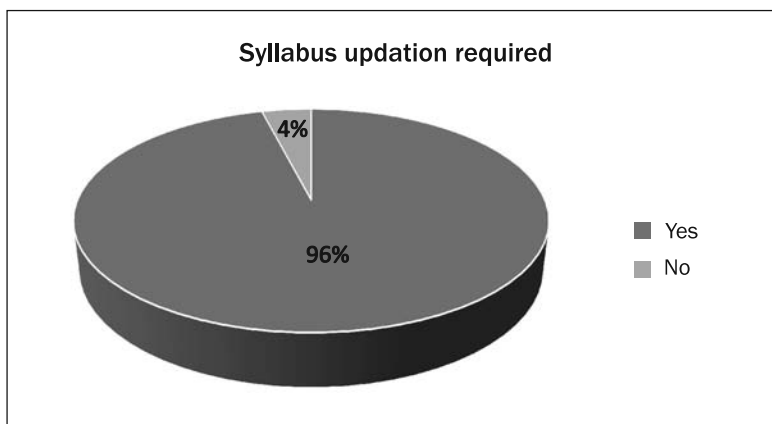
Chart 4: Compiled by Researcher

● Teacher-Student ratio preferred
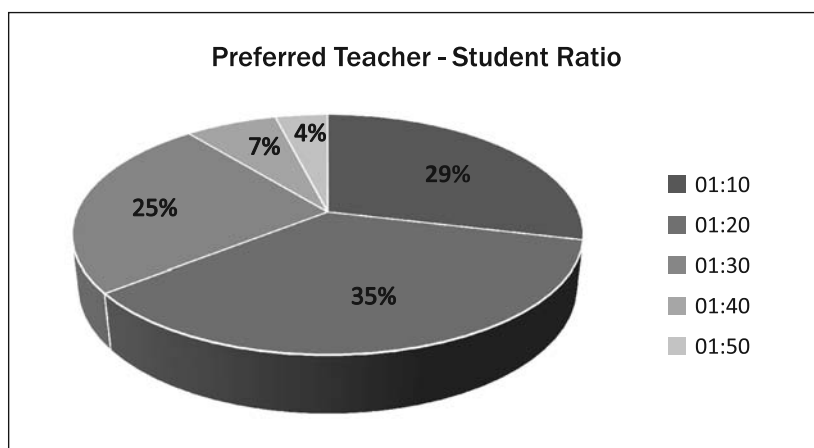
Chart 5: Compiled by Researcher

Suggestions provided by the teachers

● Teacher-Student ratio should be improved.

● Emphasis on developing children friendly curriculum.

● Students should be given the freedom to express themselves and be more creative.

● Individual qualities of teachers and students should be considered to bring out the best in them.

● Creativity, problem solving, negotiation, business management to be included in the syllabus.

● Focus should be on quality of education and not quantity.

2. Parents

111 Parents of students taking education in Mainstream and Alternate education system were surveyed.
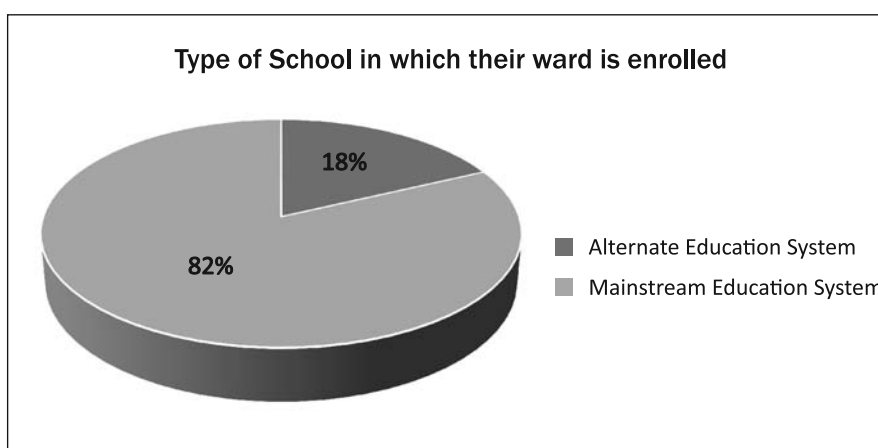
Chart 6: Compiled by Researcher

The results of the survey are as under:

● Are you satisfied with the education that your child is receiving or has received?
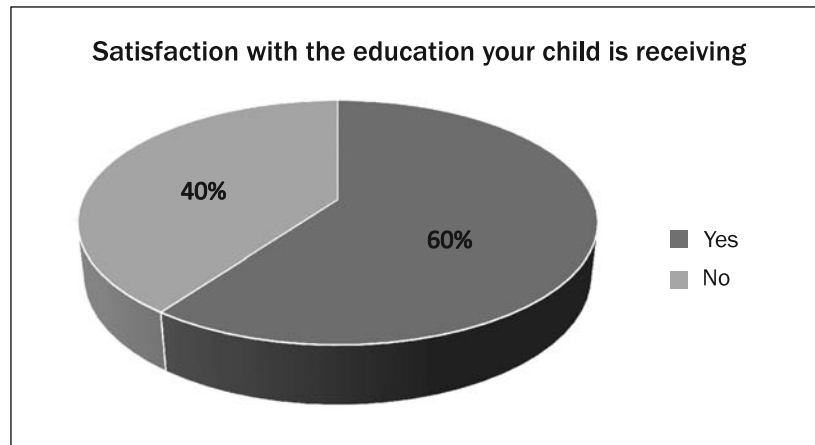
Satisfaction with the education your child is receiving

40%

60%

■ Yes
■ No

Chart 7: Compiled by Researcher

● Do you feel your ward is pressurized?
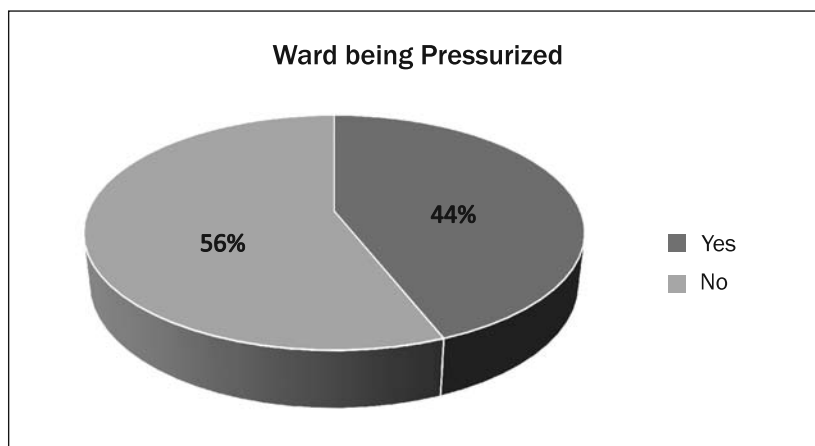
Ward being Pressurized

56%

44%

■ Yes
■ No

Chart 8: Compiled by Researcher

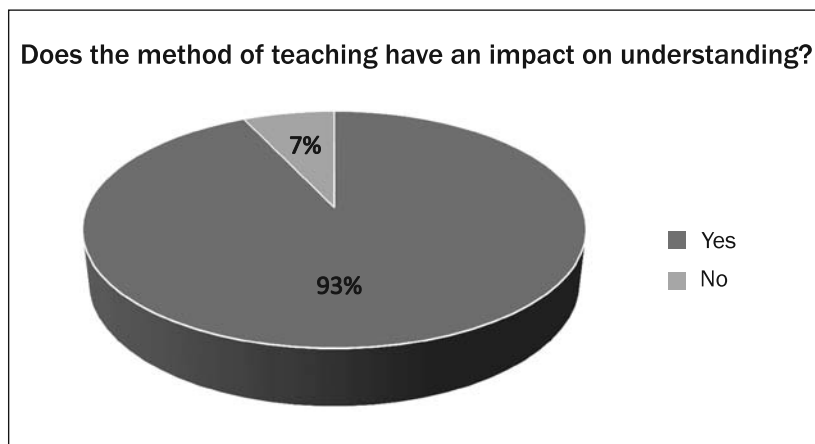● Do you think the method of teaching a particular concept has an effect on the level of understanding?

Does the method of teaching have an impact on understanding?

7%

93%

■ Yes
■ No

Chart 9: Compiled by Researcher

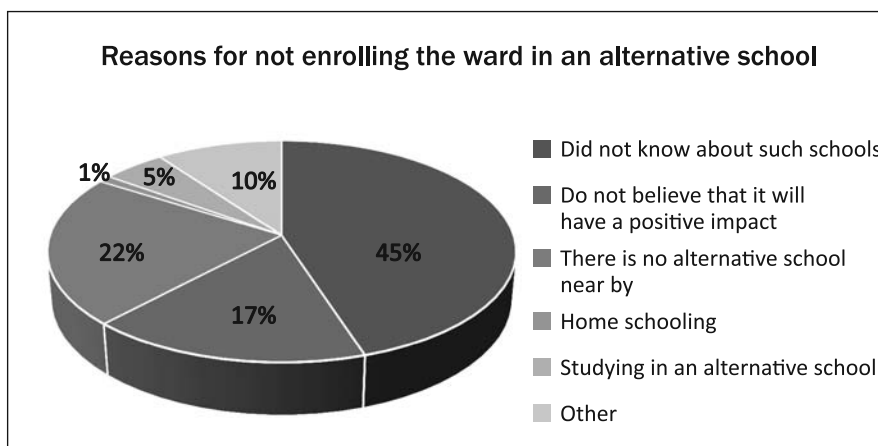- Why have you not enrolled your ward in an Alternative School?

Chart 10: Compiled by Researcher

Suggestions provided by the Parents to improvise the mainstream education system

- Syllabus should be updated and shall ensure overall development of the students.

- Request unify the boards and have only ONE BOARD.

- Lack of moral education a request to teach ethics as school

- Yoga should be a compulsory daily activity at schools

- Ranking system should be avoided and make students competent than competitive.

- Education must work on student's skill and prepare them to fit into the work environment in the future.

3.   Students

229 students studying in different boards as well as some who are being home schooled were surveyed and interviewed. The result of the survey is as under:

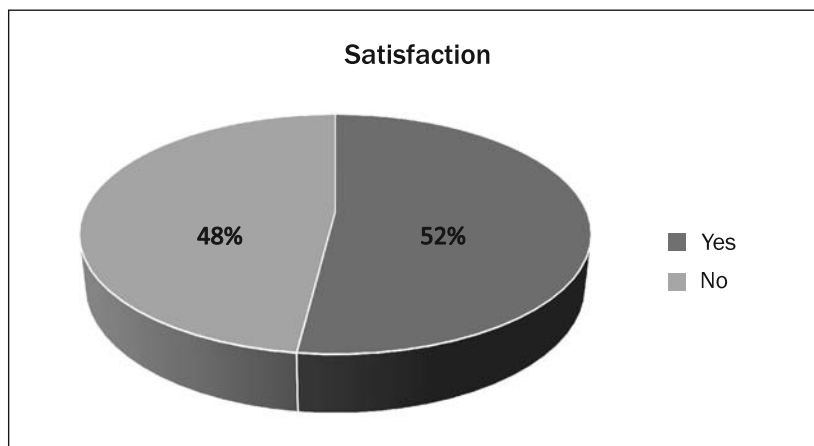- Are you satisfied with the education that you are receiving or have received?

Chart 11: Compiled by Researcher
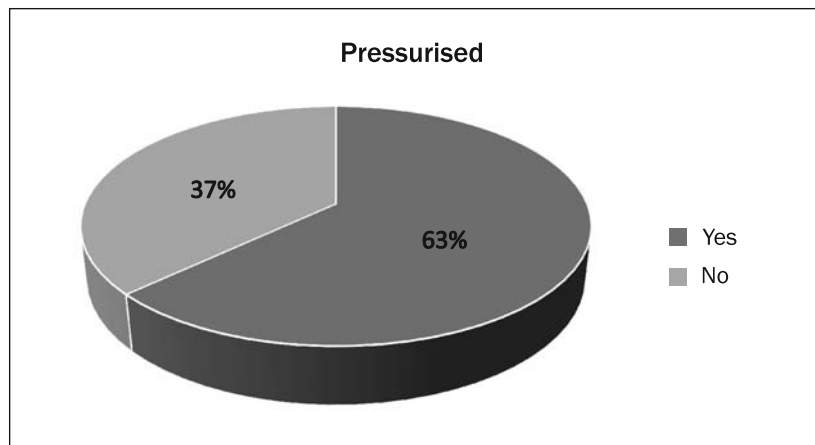
● Do you feel pressurised?

Pressurised

Chart 12: Compiled by Researcher

● Do you get the freedom or opportunity to express your creativity?

Opportunity to express creativity

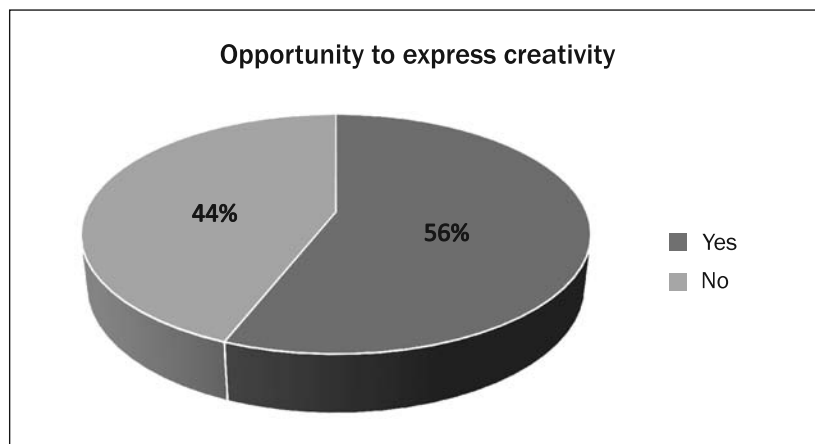*Chart 13: Compiled by Researcher*

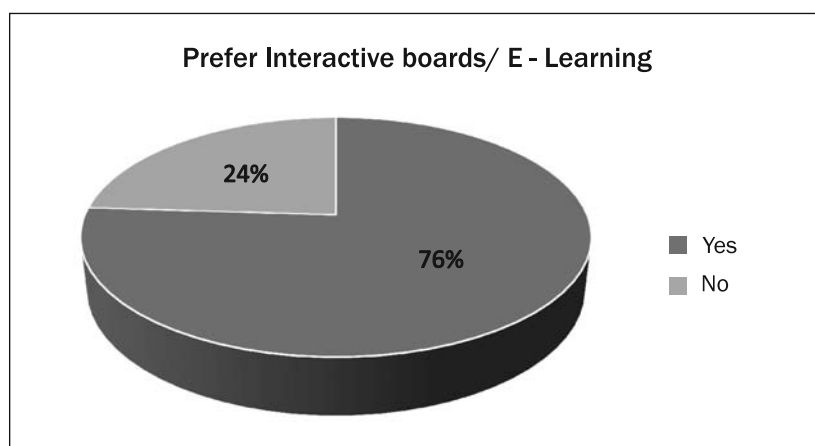● Do you understand concepts better when taught with the help of interactive boards or e-learning?

Prefer Interactive boards/ E - Learning

Chart 14: Compiled by Researcher

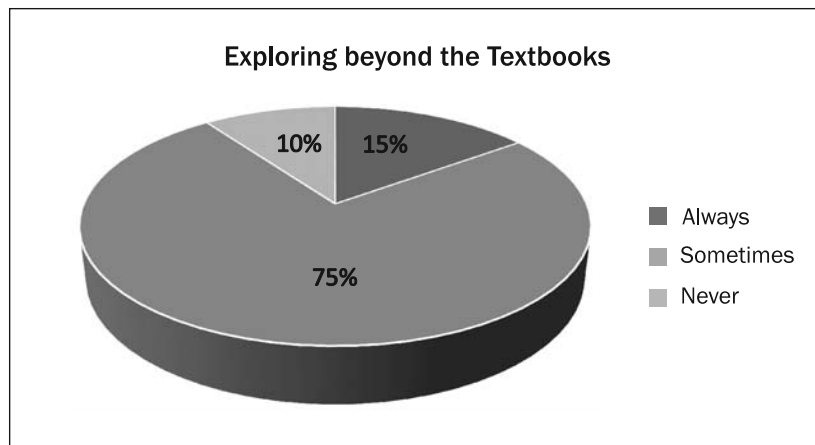● How often do you go beyond your textbooks to understand a concept?

Exploring beyond the Textbooks

10%   15%

75%

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

Chart 15: Compiled by Researcher

● Why is it that you don't explore the concept further?

Reasons

21%   30%   10%   19%   20%

- Textbooks are god enough
- I don't think there is a need to explore more
- I'm not going to get extra marks for it
- I'm too lazy
- I don't have the time for it
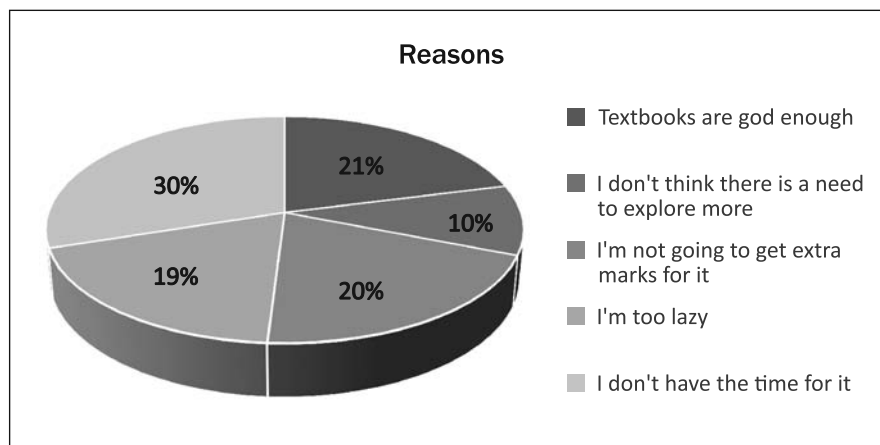
Chart 16: Compiled by Researcher

● Do you think classes (tuitions) are necessary along with schooling?

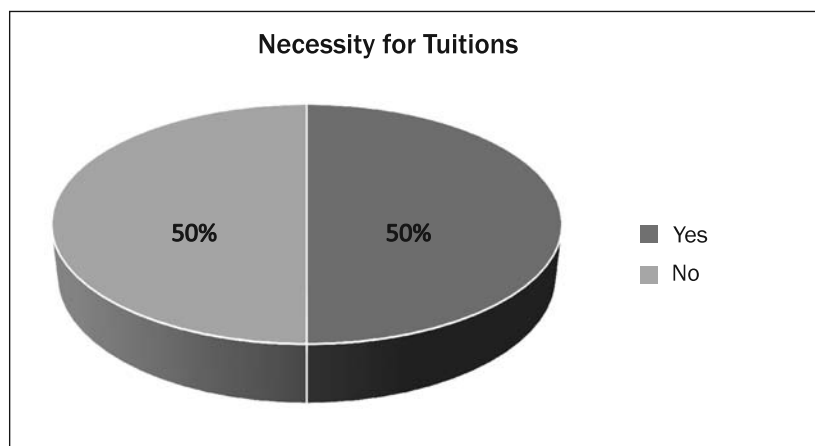**Necessity for Tuitions**

50%   50%

- Yes
- No

Chart 17: Compiled by Researche

● What do you prefer as your classroom? :

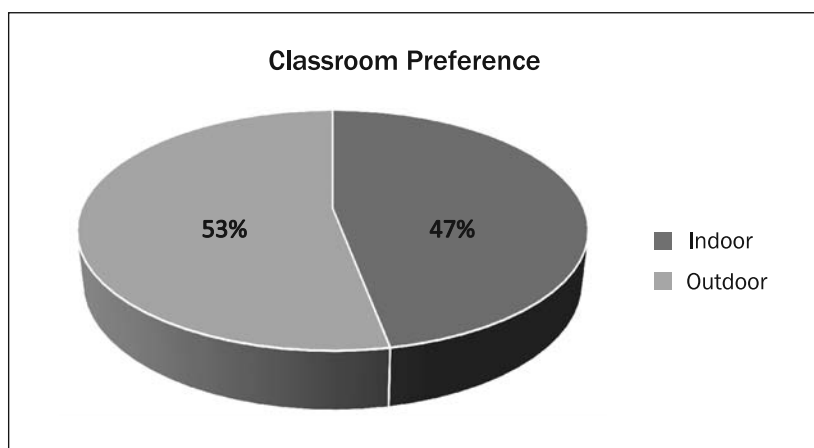**Classroom Preference**

53%   47%

■ Indoor
■ Outdoor

Chart 18: Compiled by Researcher

Suggestions provided by the Students to improvise the mainstream education system

● Make studying practical and avoid rote-learning

● Eliminate the ranking system

● Introduce more of vocational courses

● Ensure student-friendly atmosphere in schools

● Sex-education should be made compulsory at schools

● Parents should consult teachers about their child's performance and progress

● Update the syllabus

● Equal importance to outdoor activities and studies.

● Not restricting education to text books and students would like to explore at a global level

● Allow students to express and reproduce the learnt knowledge in their own words in exams

● "Our education system has got nothing to do with the student's understanding of a subject, it's a pure test of your memory. It's more of practicing the technique of writing exam papers according to the examiner's mood and not of what the student has actually understood. You memorise the technique and there you get tons of marks. That's the key to good marks in our education system. The biggest change our system needs; is that we need to have a system in first place. Syllabus should be in line with the changing time. Age old portions should be scrapped. Evaluation needs to be fair and absolutely transparent.'' – A Student

● There is major need for academic specializations at all levels, more subject choices from earlier standards and compulsory training in sports. Written Projects should be discarded. Presentations, debates, should be promoted as part of teaching.

Suggestions for a better tomorrow

The data collected by secondary and primary research helped and enabled the research team to understand the scenario of current education system and the aspirations of its stakeholders from it.

It has resulted into some suggestions which the research team would like to put forth for a better, value based and qualitative functioning of the education system at large.

- Government and the education institutes should focus more on inputs than on quantitative outputs. How much did a student score? Or how many passed the examination? Should not be the point of focus. Rather how much did the student understand? And how is the knowledge provided will help the student? Requires to be considered.

- Collaborations with foreign universities and indigenous universities for exchange programmes to encourage exchange of knowledge.

- In the Teachers programme (B.Ed., M.Ed.) the teachers training model needs to be enhances with students psychology, student counselling, technology handling skills, creative teaching methods (used across the world) must be taught to the trainees so that they can later adapt to their class's and students' need.

- The teachers training programme must also include a minimum teaching experience in a rural school.

- The strength of the class must be modified. To have a healthy Teacher-Student ratio i.e. 1:20 (as revealed by the primary research). Teachers training along with teachers' enrolment number have to increase.

- Each School needs to have an e - learning facility (minimum requirements being a projector, speakers, laptop/computer and internet facility. This will enable in introducing students to audio-visual and the students can also interact with the students and attend lectures of the collaborate institute.

- Regular yoga and sports sessions need to be incorporated.

- The classroom and school walls can be creatively painted with some general knowledge questions, facts, or student's creative art-work.

- Public-Private partnership shall be encouraged to bridge the curriculum gap.

- A single unified curriculum will ensure students to be at par and enhance the knowledge inputs by incorporating the special features of various boards to form one universal board for India.

- Students must be provided with options to select their subjects of special interest at the age of 13years.

- Regular examinations may that be oral written or of any other form must be conducted to evaluate the student and make him aware of the places wherein he/she has to improve.

- Collaborating with panchayat

Conclusion

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and critically. Intelligence plus Character - that is the goal of true education."

- Martin Luther King Jr

Education is instrumental for a better tomorrow. May it be social, economic or psychological upliftment, education enables an easy way ahead for innovative, development driven and sustainable future generation which can easily adaptable and build a welfare state. It is imperative that the flaws in our education system are addressed. Parents and students must opt for those methods of education where concepts are practically explained and the seeds for critical thinking are sown at an early stage in life. An education system that focuses on holistic development of the student should be the focus. And we must also keep in mind, the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "Do not limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time."

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