MOVING THE NEEDLE OF LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF STUDENTS THROUGH MOTIVATION AND SUPPORT: A CASE STUDY OF A CHAIN OF SCHOOLS FROM BANGALORE, INDIA

S. Bose[1], P. Mathur Velath[2], S. Shastri[2]

[1]*Parikrma Humanity Foundation (INDIA)*
[2]*Jain University (INDIA)*

ABSTRACT

There are 260 million children worldwide that are out of school of which 60 million children come from India alone. This narrative of exclusion from the country's educational services is multidimensional. (Govinda R et al., 2010). It is the outcome of a combination of several factors, and this paper highlights some of the critical issues faced by poor students in India.

"We are in a severe learning crisis because a large percentage of students in elementary schools have not attained foundational literacy. If action is not taken soon, over the next few years, India itself will lose more than 10 million students from the learning system and to illiteracy."(National Education Policy 2019).

Keeping this challenge in mind, the paper focuses on an education experiment in India that tackles this problem of academic progress and learning. The paper identifies the four segments in the student's development that are de-motivating factors: the **physical**; the living conditions and neighborhood of the students, the **biological**; the health and energy condition of the students, the **intellectual**; understanding of world view and critical thinking abilities and **psychological**; levels of self-esteem and wish to break the cycle of poverty.

The authors argue that just enrolling the children into school cannot solve the problem of educating the marginalized and recommend replacing popular terms such as 'drop-out', 'retention' with the term 'survival'. The paper presents the best practices of this foundation that can be replicated in other regions and countries with similar problems.

Keywords: education, motivation, learning, survival, children

1. INTRODUCTION

The scope of this paper addresses the challenges that poor children face completing their schooling, going for higher education and finally acquiring a high valued job. It is set in the context of the Indian subcontinent. The actors of this study are defined as "first-generation learners" (Awashty, G. et al,. 2015). The challenges that this milieu of children face can be categorized in 4 segments: (i) socio-economic and cultural (ii) educational environment at home (iii) academic challenges inside the classroom and (iv) psychological and non-academic challenges outside the school.

The above four challenges are integrated with four segments in the student's development that pose as de-motivating factors: (i) the physical; the living conditions and neighbourhood of the students, (ii) the biological; the health and energy condition of the students, (iii) the intellectual; understanding of world view and critical thinking abilities and (iv) psychological; levels of self-esteem and wish to break the cycle of poverty.

This highly complex problem that children from marginalized homes face, leads us to question the much quoted terms like " drop-out " and "retention" that is used by the government and policymakers to assess the success of any educational policy implemented in the country. The paper recommends the need to replace popular terms 'drop out" and "retention" with "survival". When we use the term 'surviving in the system' as a measure to assess an education policy for the poor, our focus will shift to the real problems and challenges and move away from just numbers and scale that has often diluted the effectiveness of any program at the implementation stage.

2. POVERTY AND EDUCATION – ANALYSIS AND IMPACT

2.1 MYOPIC UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY
None of the education policies of the past have actually addressed the question: Why is it that the children from poor backgrounds either in the villages or in the urban slums find it difficult to *survive* in a school and complete education? Educators, policymakers and implementers still lack an understanding of poverty with all its complexity and diversity. Training programs have failed to train teachers to address the social context of poor children's lives and equip them with the tools and perspectives to address diverse learning needs (Nambissan, G 2000). The policymakers are not sensitive to the intensity of multiple deprivations that poor children face, such as ill-health, hunger, malnutrition, alcoholism and violence and insecurity both at home and school. These poor children find it difficult to *survive* discriminations at all steps of their lives.

Table 1: All India incidence of poverty in Rural and Urban Areas

Year	Percentage of Rural poor	Number of Rural Poor (Million)	Percentage of Urban poor	Number of Urban poor (Million)
1983	45.7	252	40.8	71
1993-94	37.3	244	32.4	76
2004-05	28.3	221	25.7	81
2007-08	14.9	-	14.5	-

Data Sources: India in Figures: Govt of India, 2018

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CULTURAL REASONS
In many rural areas, children have to walk long distances to reach school. And if the children are Dalits or Adivasis they are not allowed to even take the village road to school (Nambissam, G 2000). The urban poor does not have the bus fare to go to school. Young children can only go to school if there are other children from the same slum going to the same school. Their parents are daily wage laborers and cannot adjust their timings with that of the school and so most times the young children have to navigate on their own. Girls are compelled to leave school once they reach puberty because there are no adequate toilet facilities in schools and the parents consider it unsafe to have the girl return home in the evenings.

2.3 EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AT HOME
First-generation learners go back to a home where there is a lack of proper understanding of what is happening in school. (Awasthy G 2015) The parents have never been to school or if they have, they have not *survived* the system. All they want is that the child be burdened with homework which indicates that the child is studying. They cannot help in the homework and cannot afford to send their child for tuitions. They want the child to be beaten to be disciplined because that is the only method of parenting they know. They do not quite understand the necessity to be punctual to school and give priority to attendance.

2.4 ACADEMIC CHALLENGES INSIDE THE CLASSROOM
The learning experience of marginalized children in schools is very depressing. The way these children are treated in school is the extension of the larger context of social marginalization of the backward communities. It is reflected in the curriculum, the language of the educational transaction and the hidden curriculum of the teacher's attitude. "The authority of the teacher is unquestioned and children usually ask no questions even to clarify their doubts. Children listen to the teacher, copy lessons, memorize then and answer questions" (DPEP, 1999). "Some teachers quite openly stated that formal education is not useful for children of the lower castes. Children of these communities who have discontinued schooling and working as agricultural laborers in the same village (Anitha, B. K,. 2000). What the teachers so casually

state as discontinue schooling has a history of discrimination that leads to a damaging feeling of inadequacy, dismal self-worth and very low aspirations.

2.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NON-ACADEMIC CHALLENGES OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL
To be the first generation learner in either a village or an urban slum comes with its unique challenges. (Awasthy, G 2015) The low priority given to education in such environments has a psychological dampening effect on the student and it requires great determination and grit to be able to *survive* in that environment. The severe lack of real role models does not provide any goalposts that would help them cut through illiteracy and limited thinking. The number of suicidal deaths these children witness in their families and communities makes them vulnerable to desperate measures themselves. The insecurity and instability in the homes because of domestic violence, alcoholism, abandonment leaves an indelible impact on the child that leads to disenchantment in moving further in life.

2.6 PHYSICAL DEPRIVATIONS
The living conditions and neighborhood of the students have an impact on the children as they grow up. In this realm, the rural children in some ways are better off than their counterparts in urban slums. The urban poor confront a variety of deprivations such as inadequate availability of affordable housing, basic civic amenities like safe water, drainage, urban waste management, roads, street lighting, health care, education, social security and sustainable livelihood opportunities. The young children in the slums live in 100 square feet homes with the roof made of either plastic or asbestos sheets, both that are insecure and hazardous to health. During monsoons, the sewage drains in front of their houses spillover to their homes and many times their books and uniforms get damaged. There are no attached toilets in their houses and they have to queue in the mornings to go to community toilets or openly defecate in open fields. Girls that attain puberty have the un-dignifying experience of lack of privacy. Children have no open spaces to play and their built-up energy leads to aggression and violence when any conflict arises in play.

2.7 BIOLOGICAL DEPRIVATIONS

The prevalence of underweight children in India is among the highest in the world, Almost 38.9 percent and 29.6 percent of children from backward classes that live in the urban slums suffer from growth retardation and low body weight respectively (Global Hunger Index 2017). This lack of nutrition impacts the health and energy condition of the students. This makes them more susceptible to diseases and because their immunity and resilience level is low they succumb to epidemics like dengue, malaria, typhoid and even viral fever. When they miss classes due to ill health, they find that they are behind the rest of the class which demotivates them and if no remedial action is taken quickly these children are definitely at risk and may not *survive* in the school system for too long. Any ill health in the family severely impacts the child's learning cycle.

2.8 INTELLECTUAL DEPRIVATION
Poverty and its associated hazards of malnutrition, ill-health and financial stress, impact mental capability involving reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, complex idea comprehension, and learning from experience. There have been studies showing that a person born into poverty will already begin with certain cognitive setbacks (Jackson M 2017). These studies have proved that children born to a malnourished mother have poor cognitive ability and that then extends into adulthood. That poverty affects basic cognitive abilities should be an eye-opener for teachers and academics. This stands in contrast to messages from popular psychology that suggest if you work harder, change your attitude and get smarter, then you will be able to beat poverty. These impacts on the intellect affect the child's world-view and aspiration levels and therefore, even self-motivation.

2.9 PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPRIVATIONS
Studies have shown that when people are constantly poor and struggling to make ends meet, the scarcity effect permeates all decisions (Mullainathan, S 2010). This is also true of children in poverty, who underestimate their own intelligence and capability, which then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A recent Institute of Education study found that teachers also attribute negative characteristics to children in poverty and perceive them to be less able. If children internalise the stereotypes projected on to them while so young, it does nothing to boost their life chances.

2.10 A GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE THAT HAS FAILED TO REACH ITS GOAL

The Right to Education Act (RTE) came into force in 2010 (Article 21A of the Indian Constitution) making the 'right to education' a fundamental right for children between age 6 to 14 years a reality. This landmark law compelled all private schools irrespective of its economic category, to reserve 25% seats in every class for underprivileged children from their neighborhood. This RTE objective was to create a socially equal platform for learning, to design social integration by bringing children "from different backgrounds to share interests and knowledge in a common platform" (RTE Act. 2009). While the spirit of this law is laudable, it has fared very poorly in its implementation because the focus has been to show elevated numbers than providing quality education on ground. There has been no attempt made to understand why poor children find it difficult to *survive* in schools.

Table 2: Comparison of grades of children from Parikrma and RTE (Grade I to III)

	ALL	Grade I			Grade II			Grade III		
		All	Non RTE	RTE	All	Non RTE	RTE	All	Non RTE	RTE
Base: All	2539	537	469	68	685	555	130	691	598	93
(Average Marks)										
COMPUTER SCIENCE	33.34	34.1	34.6	32.75	34.38	34.69	32.8	32.62	33.08	29.75
ENGLISH	27.4	27.98	29.06	23.3	29.12	29.63	27.16	28.63	28.89	26.9
EVS	33.85							37.16	37.37	36.33
HINDI	32.83	39.22	39.88	36.4	31.48	31.39	31.82	32.65	32.82	31.58
KANNADA	31.7	35.86	36.25	34.2	30.27	30.92	27.77	31.81	32.25	28.91
MATHEMATICS	32.95	37.45	38.47	30.8	34.96	35.37	33.38	32.02	32.35	29.83
SCIENCE/EVS	32.32	36.33	37.85	29.11	34	34.24	33.05	33.21	33.52	31.16

3. STUDY OF AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL – A CASE STUDY

Keeping all these challenges in mind, the paper focuses on an educational experiment in India that attempts to tackle this problem of academic progress and learning by moving the focus from the "hardware" of learning such as infrastructure, size of the classroom, number of toilets, playground, computer labs, libraries, virtual classrooms to the "software" of learning such as attitude of teachers, compassionate approach of teachers to encourage the students to learn and counseling children that are struggling, to make them resilient and help them survive. While the government assesses the capability of a teacher by the qualification and degrees that the teacher has acquired, this educational institution pays more attention to the personality of the teacher, how empathetic he/she is, how quickly they bond with the students and their parents, how inspirational he or she is to be able to slowly ignite the fire in the belly in the children to do well and move the needle of learning outcomes.

3.1 PARIKRMA HUMANITY FOUNDATION, BANGALORE, INDIA
Parikrma Foundation has been running 4 schools and a Junior College for 16 years and serves 2000 children from the 100 urban slums and 4 orphanages in Bangalore. The children come from families where the total family income for five members is about $ 45 per month. The Parikrma schools are totally free and have been addressing the needs of children that prevent them from attending schools regularly and doing well in academics. The model looks at a 360-degree intervention program by providing nutrition, total healthcare and family care, apart from a very high-quality education curriculum. The model

also recognizes that students need to be supported and motivated to complete their education and has an "e to e" program (from one end to another end). Scholarships are provided for higher education and mentoring and placements done for jobs. This experiment has been very successful with 97% attendance, less than 1% drop out, 98% students going to college and 100% graduates placed in jobs. At Parikrma, the children are supported and motivated through various channels to *survive* the system.

Table 3 - Drop-out and Attendance rates

	Government schools		Parikrma	
	Drop-out rate (%)	Attendance (%)	Drop-out rate (%)	Attendance (%)
2013-14	27.6		1%	98
2014-15	26.18		1%	99

Data Sources: Govt School Education in India: Flash Statistics, 2015, Parikrma internal database

Graph 1. Validation of the Parikrma model through academic measures
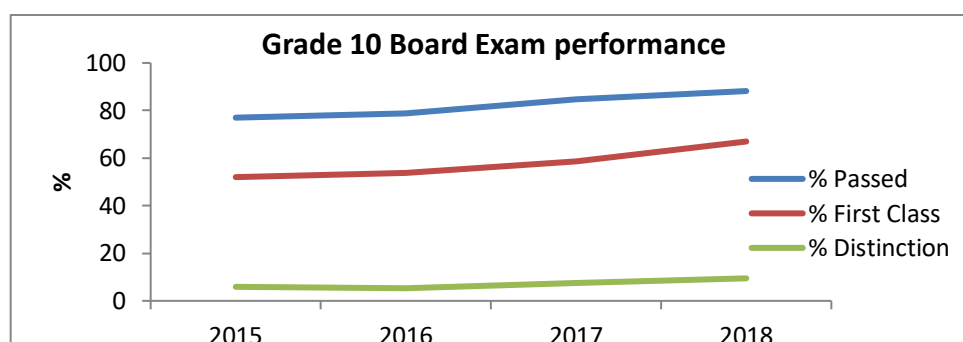
Data source: Parikrma's internal database

3.2 PARIKRMA EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY
The main pillars of the Parikrma Education Philosophy are to encourage children to ENQUIRE, give them EXPOSURE, EXPERIENCE, EMPOWERMENT, skills to EXPRESS and most importantly the sensitivity to EMPATHISE. The overarching implications of these values permeate into their daily practice which they call the PARIKRMA WAY™ of doing things – that also ensures that the entire institution adheres to the intrinsic values of equality, dignity, and quality in all their interventions, either with the children, parents, teachers and external communities. The children are taught to call their teachers Akka (older sister in the local language Kannada) and Anna (older brother). This is to move away from the standard practice of Sir and Madam. The concept of studying and working in a family system is brought in very quickly.

3.3 PARIKRMA MOTTO
The school has a very simple and yet a profound motto; LOVE: EXPLORE and EXCEL The children are encouraged to love each other, their friends, parents, school, the planet, and their own self and life itself. The concept of love then leads to compassion and empathy towards each other. Every day during morning the Assembly each class is encouraged to discuss their projects and activities of Kindness. Teachers too are encouraged to address situations with compassion. While most Indian schools are very focused on their students acquiring high grades to enhance the reputation of the school, Parikrma has made a total departure from the norm. Students here are encouraged to pursue their own interests and dreams and not get into stereotyping. The primary focus is to create a happy and joyful environment where the children feel safe and happy and learn in an environment free of any fear.

3.4 PARIKRMA WORKING MODEL 360 DEGREE INTERVENTIONS

To ensure that all the students of Parikrma from age 5 to 18 are free of hunger, healthy, feel safe and stable, Parikrma has adopted the 360-degree model, which ensures that all children get nearly 90% of the calorie required in the school itself. The children are given breakfast, lunch and a glass of protein mix with snacks before they leave for home. The children also undergo routine health checkups with follow-up treatments as and when necessary.(Choudhury et all 2017) They also have several counseling and intervention programs for the parents. Alcoholic fathers are sent for de-addiction and mentored after they come out from rehab. Mothers are given vocational skills training so that they can increment their income. Single mothers go through series of counseling so that they are able to take care of their family on their own. They are also counseled about savings and assisted to open bank accounts and become financially independent. They are given several sessions on nutrition, menstrual hygiene and gender equality so that they encourage their daughters to go to college and not force them to marry early.

Graph 2. Comparing Height and Weight: Parikrma vs Government schools
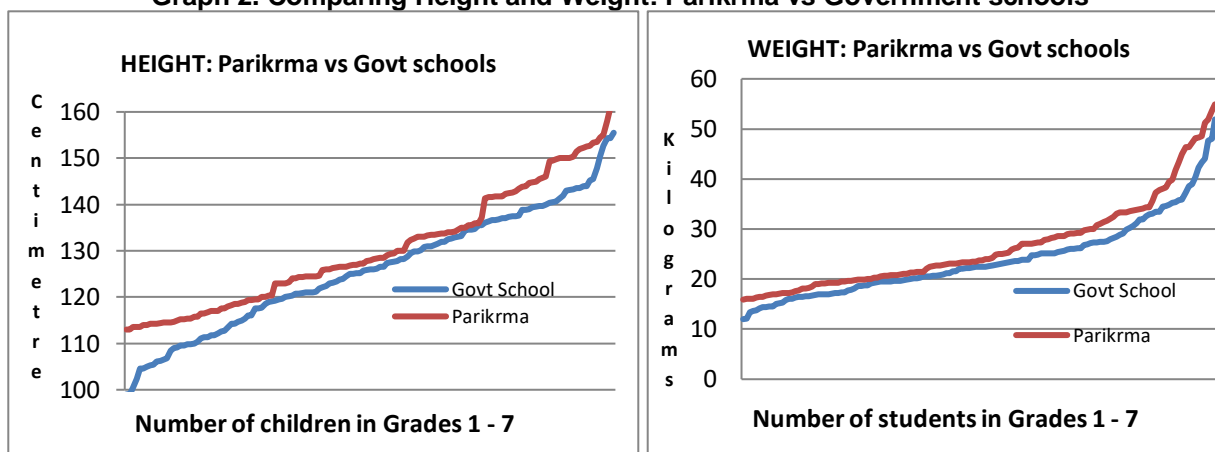
### Graph 3. Impact of the CDS team on families and students of Parikrma
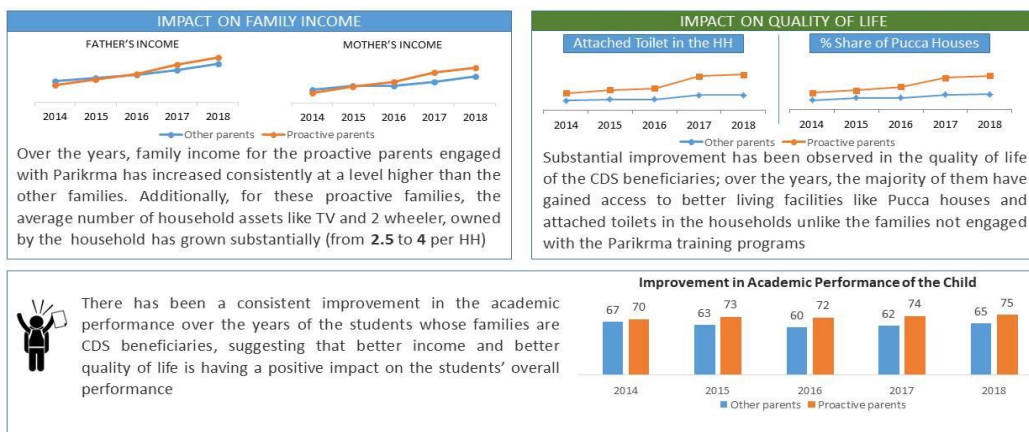
Data source: Parikrma's internal databas

3.5 E-to-E MODEL

Having recognized that while it is necessary to build up aspirations and ambitions, it is important for the school to ensure that there are no roadblocks on the way. Scholarships are therefore provided to students who want to pursue higher studies. While Parikrma pays the fees for university education fully or partially depending on family conditions and the student's interest level and performance, arrangements to facilitate bank loans are also made. Parikrma now has about 300 students who have graduated from college, gone for professional education like engineering, law, paramedical and nursing training,

chartered accountancy and are now placed in high valued jobs. They are now moving out of the slums and leading a better quality life for themselves and their families. Parikrma has about 200 students pursuing higher studies in universities. Apart from the payment of fees, Parikrma gets the students motivated to want to go to college through their robust Mentorship programs. It also offers tuitions to train for competitive exams and hostel facilities so that students can study late in a quiet and stable environment. Table 3

Graph 4. Moving onto College
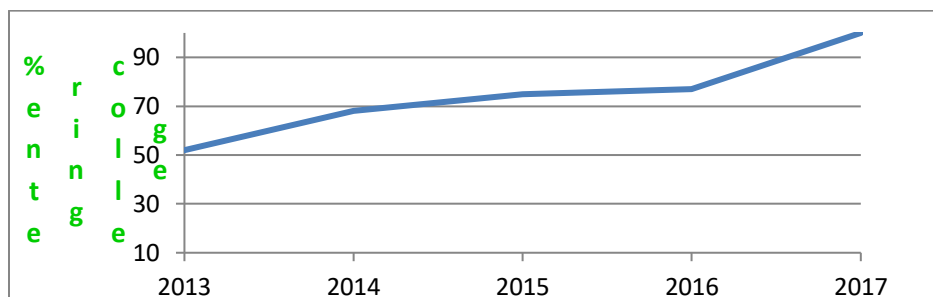
3.6 PARIKRMA WAY™ OF MOTIVATION THROUGH TEACHER ORIENTATION
Motivating students' sense of well-being and engagement in learning begin in Parikrma even when the new admissions come in at age 5. They are first generation learners who are starting school at a disadvantage because they have never been to pre-schools like privileged children. The teachers of the junior, middle and senior school are trained to deal with such children with a lot of love and care. This process begins with the hiring of teachers who want to teach to serve and therefore understand the responsibility of keeping the children in school. To support them Parikrma has a team of social workers who work with the parents and become the bridge between the school and the community. All teachers and staff, both old and new, go through an intense two weeks Immersion in Parikrma Culture program where they understand their purpose of teaching such children. They visit the homes of their students to understand their reality and be more empathetic. They attend Personal Growth and Sensitivity Labs right through the year to become more compassionate and nurturing. Parikrma believes that once the students begin to trust their teachers they listen to them and create an environment of positive energy, enthusiasm for learning well. Parikrma has been working for many years on creating self-directed discipline without the element of fear.

3.7 PARIKRMA WAY™ OF MOTIVATION THROUGH DIFFERENTIATION AND REMEDIATION
Students at Parikrma come from varied degrees of dysfunctionality, violence, abuse and deprivation at home and the neighborhood. When a child falls behind the rest of the class he/she gets de-motivated and refuses to participate in class and slowly falls out of the school system because he/she cannot *survive* in the class system anymore. Parikrma recognizes this and follows a Differentiation Program where teachers are trained to deal with different learning levels and interest and prepare resource material to suit all levels. If the child persists to fall behind class he/she is sent for a Remedial Program where the child is tutored one to one. This is run parallel to sessions with the school psychologist that counsels the child, teacher and even the parents – keeping with the philosophy, that no child slips through the fingers and instead learns to *survive* and thrive in a robust manner. Table 1

Table 4. The Impact of the Remediation classes

| Years	Junior School		Middle School		High School	
	No. who started year needing Remedial	*No.(%) caught up/ sent back to regular class*	*No. who started year needing Remedial*	*No.(%) caught up/ sent back to regular class*	*No. who started year needing Remedial*	*No.(%) caught up/ sent back to regular class*
2015	41	11 (27)	60	19 (32)	52	15 (29)

2016	69	18 (26)	52	28 (54)	40	12 (30)
2017	77	21 (27)	45	18 (40)	38	11 (29)

Data source: Parikrma's internal database

3.8 PARIKRMA WAY OF MOTIVATION THROUGH SETTING DIFFERENT BENCHMARKS

The students do not have any respectable role models in their families and communities so special effort is made to give the students exposure by taking them to well known organizations, reputed academic institutions, so that they are inspired to push their benchmarks of aspirations. In order to establish their self-esteem, sense of dignity and equality, the students are made to participate in interschool competitions where they do well. Some students have even participated in Global Youth Leadership Summit in USA. This motivates their juniors to aim to be selected for this. The best motivation for the students to see their seniors doing well in valued jobs. They realize that their challenges are possible to overcome.

Table 5. Where the Alumni stand vs their Peers
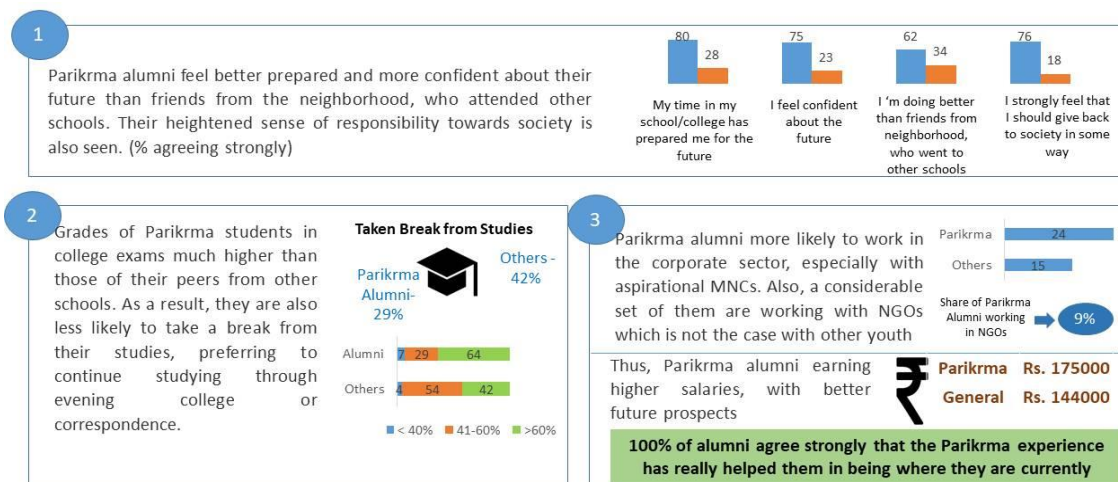
Data source: Telephone and Face to face surveys done by Hansa Research among 110 Parikrma alumni & 120 of their peers from the same neighbourhoods, educated at Government schools,2018

3.8 PARIKRMA WAY© CHALLENGES FACED

While the vision and mission of Parikrma has never been questioned by anyone and neither have some of the methods of Parikrma Way©, it has not been so simple to implement the non-traditional systems of pedagogy, child management the last 16 years. The emotional and compassionate quotient in the school is high and it takes a toll on the teachers who experience burn out and fatigue very quickly. The organization has to find innovative ways to sustain grit and energy amongst the teachers over the years. In today's heated political environment of nationalism and strong religious beliefs, Parikrma is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain its secular, liberal and balanced approach that is very much a part of the Parikrma ethos. And raising funds to sustain itself year after year so as not to compromise its quality, has put pressure on the Parikrma leadership with no end in sight.

4.1 CONCLUSION

This paper examined the real challenge that the poor children in India face to go to school and complete the education cycle. Using the term poverty without understanding the variables, not to find why poor children do not excel in studies, is shortchanging the real truth. This leads to the gap between the theoretical version of exclusion from education and the real world in practice. The authors of this paper also argued that whatever the physical, biological, intellectual and psychological challenges may be for poor children to attain quality education and survive in the school system, it is not impossible to do so. The case study of Parikrma Humanity Foundation was cited as an alternative model that has seen challenges converted into success through simple methods of motivation that has become a part of their daily practice called Parikrma Way©. Some of the best practices have been shared so that it can be replicated and scaled.

REFERENCES

[1]   Awasthy G & Khimani, "Academic Challenges faced by First Generation Learners in an NGO School Vis a Vis Government school in Nainital", in *Azim Premji University*, 2015.

[2]   Banerji R, "Poverty and Primary Schooling: Field Studies from Mumbai and Delhi", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2000.

[3]   Choudhury R A & Bose S, "Overcoming Barriers to Learning – the Parikrma Way", in *EDULEARN18 Proceedings*, pp. 821-831, 2018.

[4]   Desai S & Kulkarni V, "Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the context of Affirmative Action", in *Demography*, pp. 245–270, 2008.

[5]   Jackson, Margot, "Effects of poverty and health on children's cognitive development", in *Focus*, 2017.

[6]   Nambissan, G, "Dealing with deprivation", 2000. Retrieved from https://www.india-seminar.com/2000/493/493%20geetha%20b.%20nambissan.htm