Beyond The Bell: Unveiling the Impact of an After-School System In Rural Areas

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Abstract

This research paper explores the importance of after-school learning programs in rural areas. It examines the unique challenges faced by students in rural communities and the potential benefits offered by these programs. The study focuses on the impact of after-school programs on academic performance, personal development, and community engagement. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, data was collected to assess the effectiveness of these programs in addressing educational disparities and promoting positive outcomes. The findings reveal that after-school learning programs in rural areas play a crucial role in bridging the opportunity gap, providing academic support, fostering social-emotional skills, and creating a safe and enriching environment for students. These programs not only enhance educational achievement but also contribute to personal growth, self-confidence, and community involvement. The research highlights the significance of after-school learning programs as a means to empower students in rural areas, improve their educational experiences, and nurture their overall development. A case study of an After School is also included in the paper.

Keywords: After School Learning Program, Education in Rural Areas, Research

INTRODUCTION

An after-school program is a structured and supervised program that takes place after the regular school day. It offers a variety of activities and services to support the educational, social, and recreational needs of children and adolescents. After-school programs can be provided by schools, community organizations, non-profit organizations, or other institutions.

The after-school system plays a crucial role in the development and well-being of children and adolescents. This paper focuses on the importance of After School learning programs specially in rural areas of the country. The data collected from the reports of after school program run in the world by any organization and in India particularly. A case study

also included with the paper to see the impact of after school learning system established by me about 4 years ago.

The study shows why these programs are really significant for the children of growing age specially in the rural areas of the country where the opportunities and amenities are not equally available as urban areas. After-school programs are witnessing a surge in demand, driven by the recognition of their positive impact. Research studies indicate that participants in after-school programs tend to spend less time watching television and engage more in academic activities and enrichment lessons. Consequently, these programs offer significant benefits to children who actively participate in them. Moreover, after-school programs serve as safe havens for numerous children who require adult supervision beyond regular school hours.

Given the pivotal role that after-school programs play in children's development, it becomes crucial for society to strive for the highest level of efficiency in providing such programs. However, many existing after-school programs lack the necessary resources to create exemplary experiences.

METHODS

This research paper adopts a combination of analytical and descriptive methods to investigate the topic at hand. The utilization of these two approaches allowed for a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the research problem.

The analytical method was employed to critically analyze existing literature, theories, and empirical evidence related to the subject matter. A literature review was conducted to identify key concepts, theories, and studies relevant to the research question. These sources were critically evaluated to extract pertinent information and develop a conceptual framework for the study.

In addition to the analytical approach, a descriptive method was adopted to gather primary data and provide a detailed description of the research variables. A sample population (Students of Wings After School Learning Centre, Badi) was selected using a purposive sampling technique, ensuring representation from the target population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What is the After School Learning Program?

Let's get the definition of an After School Program first. After-school programs encompass a broad range of initiatives, each with its own unique definition and set of goals. The specific objectives of these programs can vary widely depending on the desired outcomes they aim to achieve. A representative definition is provided by the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center: After-school programs are defined as safe, structured activities that convene regularly in the hours after school and offer activities to help children learn new skills, and develop into responsible adults. Activities may cover topics such as

technology, reading, math, science and the arts. Programs may also offer new experiences such as community service, internships or tutoring and mentoring opportunities (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, 2001).

Another definition for after school programs which is safe, engaging environment that motivates and inspires learning outside of the regular school day (Safe and Smart, 1998). Safe and Smart also state that, "Both practitioners and researchers have found that effective programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural, and recreational activities to guide learning and engage children and youth in wholesome activities."[1]

Broadly defined, afterschool programs—sometimes called OST or out-of-school time programs—are school- or community-based programs that offer academic and enrichment activities in the hours that follow the school day. These programs serve children of all ages and include academic support, workforce development opportunities, mentoring relationships, and more.[2]

Importance of After School Learning programs

Here are few points highlight the importance and significance of the after school learning system.

- Academic Support: After-school programs provide a valuable opportunity for students to receive additional academic support. They offer homework assistance, tutoring, and educational activities that reinforce and complement what is taught during regular school hours. This extra time and attention can improve students' understanding of subjects, boost their grades, and enhance their overall academic performance.

- Enrichment and Skill Building: After-school programs offer a wide range of activities beyond academics, including art, music, sports, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), leadership development, and more. These activities help children explore their interests, develop new skills, and discover their talents. They provide a well-rounded education that goes beyond the traditional curriculum and fosters creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities.

- Social and Emotional Development: After-school programs provide a structured and supervised environment where children can interact with their peers in a positive and inclusive setting. These programs promote social skills, cooperation, and conflict resolution, helping children develop healthy relationships and build self-confidence. Engaging in group activities and teamwork also fosters a sense of belonging and community, reducing the risk of social isolation.

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[1] Davis, Harriet A., "Improving after-school programs : a literature review" (2002). Graduate Research Papers. 358. https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/358
[2] NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures) https://www.ncsl.org/education/supporting-student-success-through-afterschool-programs Retrieved: 05-06-2023.

- Safety and Supervision: After-school programs offer a safe and secure environment for children during the hours when parents or guardians may still be at work. They provide supervision and guidance, reducing the chances of children engaging in risky behaviors or being exposed to unsafe situations. The presence of caring adults and positive role models can contribute to the overall well-being and safety of children.
- Working Parent Support: After-school programs are particularly beneficial for working parents or those with busy schedules. By extending the school day, these programs provide a reliable option for child care and supervision. Parents can have peace of mind knowing that their children are in a structured and productive environment, receiving academic support and engaging in enriching activities.
- Achievement Gap Reduction: After-school programs can help bridge the achievement gap by providing additional resources and support to students who may be at a disadvantage. Children from low-income backgrounds or those facing various challenges may have limited access to educational opportunities outside of regular school hours. After-school programs can offer them the necessary tools, resources, and support to improve their academic performance and future prospects.

After-school Learning programs are essential for promoting the holistic development of children and adolescents. They provide a platform for academic growth, skill building, social interaction, and emotional well-being, while also offering working parents a reliable support system. By investing in after-school programs, communities can enhance the educational outcomes and overall quality of life for children.

History of the After School Programs

After-school programs have a rich history that spans several decades and have evolved in response to changing educational needs and societal demands. While I can provide you with a general overview of the history of after-school programs worldwide, I will also focus on their development in India.

History of After-School Programs Worldwide:

Early Beginnings (Late 19th to Early 20th Century):

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, after-school programs began to emerge as a response to child labor laws and the need for educational and recreational activities for children outside regular school hours. These programs aimed to provide a safe and structured environment for children to learn and grow.

The Rise of Community Centers (1930s - 1950s):

During the Great Depression, community centers and settlement houses became instrumental in offering after-school programs in the United States.[3] These centers offered a range of activities such as arts and crafts, sports, and academic support. [4]

Expansion and Federal Involvement (1960s - 1970s):

In the 1960s and 1970s, after-school programs gained further recognition as an essential component of the War on Poverty initiated by the U.S. government. Programs like Head Start and the Community Action Programs aimed to address the needs of disadvantaged children through comprehensive services, including after-school support and summer programs.[5]

Focus on Educational Enrichment (1980s - 1990s):

During the 1980s and 1990s, after-school programs increasingly emphasized educational enrichment. Various organizations and schools began offering programs focused on academic support, tutoring, and homework assistance. This period also saw the establishment of national after-school networks and advocacy organizations.

21st Century Expansion and Diverse Offerings:

In the 21st century, after-school programs continued to expand worldwide, offering an array of activities to cater to diverse interests and needs. These programs began incorporating STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)[6] education, arts and culture, sports, leadership development, and career exploration.

After-School Programs in India:

Traditional Gurukul System:

India has a rich history of informal after-school programs, dating back to ancient times. The traditional Gurukul system provided residential education for students, where they lived with their teachers and received holistic education beyond regular school hours.[7]

Early Initiatives (20th Century):

In the 20th century, after-school programs in India were often community-driven and offered informal learning opportunities. These programs focused on promoting cultural activities, sports, and vocational skills. The aim was to supplement the regular school curriculum and foster overall development.

Government Initiatives:

In recent years, the Government of India has recognized the importance of after-school programs in complementing formal education. Initiatives like the Rashtriya Madhyamik

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[3] Smith, M. K. (2002). 'Community centres (centers) and associations', The encyclopedia of pedagogy and informal education. [www.infed.org/mobi/community-centers-and-associations. Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[4] Rosemary Moreland & Tom Lovett (1997) Lifelong learning and community development, International Journal of Lifelong Education, 16:3, 201-216, DOI: 10.1080/0260137970160304. Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[5] Head Start History. (June 23-2022) U.S Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-head-start Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[6] Elaine J. Hom, Daisy Dobrijevic. (2022) What is STEM Education?. Live Science https://www.livescience.com/43296-what-is-stem-education.html Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[7] Chandwani, Nikhil. (2019) The importance of the Gurukul system and why Indian education needs it. Desires of a modern Indian, India, The Times of India 08-03-2019. Retrieved: 05-06-2023

Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)[8] and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) have aimed to enhance the quality of education and provide support beyond regular school hours.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

Several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in India have played a crucial role in establishing after-school programs. These organizations focus on providing educational support, vocational training, computer literacy, and extracurricular activities to children from marginalized communities. One of the pioneers in this area is PARD India. This NGO is working since 10 years in the field of After-School programs.[9]

Growing Diversity and Public-Private Partnerships:

In recent years, after-school programs in India have diversified to include various activities such as sports, arts, music, dance, coding, and robotics. Public-private partnerships have also emerged, where corporations collaborate with schools and NGOs to provide after-school opportunities to children.

It's important to note that the development of after-school programs varies across different countries and regions, and the specific history and evolution may differ.

Condition of Education in Rural India

If we talk about the condition of education in rural areas it can vary significantly depending on the specific region, country, and socioeconomic factors. However, there are several common challenges and characteristics that are often associated with education in rural areas.

Infrastructure and facilities are one of the major challenges in rural education. Insufficient classrooms, outdated teaching material and limited access to the modern technology are the primary issues faced by the students in rural areas. Limited resources in terms of insufficient funding, lack of educational resources such as textbooks and learning materials, and shortages of qualified teachers lead to lower the rate of quality education in rural areas.

Particularly in India, the rural population of the country represents 65% of the total population, around 88 crore (880 million). As of 2021, the literacy rate in rural India was around 73.5%. This includes 81% male and 65% female literacy in rural section of India.[10]

According to ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) report, the survey was conducted and covers almost all rural districts; it was found that more than 50% of the children of age 3 to 16 years are not able to read and perform arithmetic abilities in the age group of 5to 16 years.[11] Education in rural areas depends heavily on government-run or aided schools as

[8] Department of School Education and Literacy, India. https://www.education.gov.in/rmsa Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[9] PARD India. https://www.pardindia.org/about-us/history/ Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[10] IBEF (India Brand Equity Foundation). https://www.ibef.org/blogs/rural-education-integral-to-india-s-progress Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[11] Pradhan , Sheshan (2020). Rural Education in India and its Problems. https://pscnotes.in/rural-education-in-india-and-its-problems/ Retrieved: 05-06-2023

well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, rural regions continue to encounter numerous obstacles that directly affect the overall literacy rate of the country. While the National Education Policy 2020 highlights the significance of digital learning as an alternative to traditional classroom-based education, but its successful implementation in rural India is likely to face certain challenges.[12]

The system of rural education in India particularly is faced with numerous problems and challenges, which can be summarized as follows:

Unsatisfactory Teaching-Learning Methods: The teaching-learning methods used in rural schools are in need of improvement. Research has indicated that these methods are often inefficient, failing to effectively enhance students' academic skills. If the class V student cannot read the books of class III, it's absolutely a failure of education system.

Inadequate Infrastructure: The lack of proper infrastructure in rural schools hinders students' ability to acquire academic skills effectively. This includes the absence of essential furniture, machinery, and appropriate heating and cooling equipment to accommodate varying weather conditions. In many rural schools, students are compelled to sit on the floor due to the absence of chairs or desks in the classrooms.

Insufficient Availability of Extra-Curricular Activities: The absence of adequate provision for extra-curricular activities in rural schools limits students' opportunities for holistic development. These activities, such as dance, music, singing, sports, physical activities, role plays, and more, play a crucial role in providing motivation and enthusiasm towards learning. When students actively participate in these activities, they experience a sense of enjoyment and develop a well-rounded educational experience.[13]

Lack of Competitions and Events: Competitions and events hold significant value in the realm of education, offering students opportunities for growth and skill development. These competitions span various areas, including academics, sports, physical activities, dance, music, singing, role plays, and poetry. Participation in such events enhances students' skills and abilities, fostering a positive mindset towards learning. Moreover, students develop effective communication skills and gain confidence through these experiences. Unfortunately, in rural schools, the absence of competitions and events deprives students of these valuable opportunities for growth and self-improvement.

Lack of Education Friendly Environment: Creating an education-friendly environment is crucial for providing effective learning and development among students. Unfortunately, in many rural areas, there is a notable absence of such an environment.

[12] Sardana, Sachin. (2021). Bringing down the barriers. The Hindu – July 14-2021. https://www.thehindu.com/education/what-are-the-challenges-of-education-in-rural-india-and-how-technology-can-help-overcome-them/article35316970.ece Retrieved: 05-06-2023

[13] Kapur, Radhika. (2019). The System of Education in Rural Areas. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331673382_The_System_of_Education_in_Rural_Areas Retrieved: 05-06-2023.

Factors contributing to the lack of an education-friendly environment include inadequate support from the community, limited parental involvement, insufficient availability of electricity and other socio-economic challenges. The absence of a supportive community can lead to a lack of awareness and appreciation for the importance of education, which in turn affects the overall educational climate.

There are few organizations in India already working on the different models of After School Programs. PARD INDIA which is a not-for-profit organization (NPO) is working since 10 years in this field. Maitri School provides afterschool classes to community children studying from class 1st to 10th. Ignite' is an after-school program run by Bhumi for 2800 underprivileged children. This program provides an opportunity for children from low-income families to be up-to-speed with the education standards of their age. India Community Center provides After School Program where kids indulge in art and crafts, science projects, yoga, polish their Hindi speaking skills, learn about music and dance, while also learning how to excel academically.

Importance of After School Program in Rural Areas

There are several problems are mentioned above which are being faced by students in rural areas of the country. A system of After School Program can resolve half of the problems in terms of improving quality in education and proper care to every individual. After School system in rural areas will lower the burden of regular day-schools of the area and provide tremendous growth in the results.

After-school programs in rural areas serve as an essential support system, providing dedicated supervision to children whose parents are engaged in agricultural work or not enough educated to support their children academically. These programs not only enhance children's reading skills and involvement in extracurricular activities, but also foster the completion of high-quality homework with the help of their mentors and enable them to allocate more time to their studies. Additionally, the programs focus on developing proficiency in critical subjects and serving as mentors to inspire children to pursue higher education and fulfill their aspirations. By improving school attendance rates and reducing dropouts at the primary school level. Because "dropping out" is one of the most sensitive issues in rural areas for many reasons. These programs play a crucial role to lower the ratio of dropout students and helps in shaping a brighter future for children in rural communities.

In rural areas, After-school programs employ diverse strategies to enhance parental involvement into children's education. One approach is offering dedicated classes, such as adult literacy programs, designed specifically for parents. Additionally, organizing family nights, holiday parties, fun runs/walks, and events that showcase student work are effective methods to actively engage parents and encourage their participation in the program. These initiatives contribute to fostering a strong bond between the program, parents, and students, creating a collaborative and supportive educational environment in rural regions.

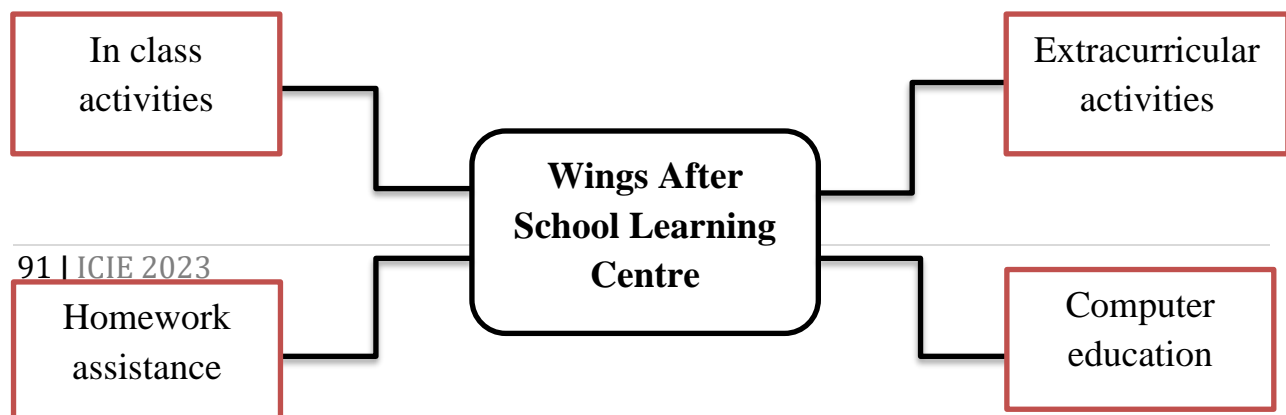**A case study of Wings After School Learning Centre**

This study is based on the practical setup established by the author 5 years ago approximately. After school system can play a crucial role to give upliftment in education and other co-curricular activities in rural areas. It's the ideal system would be adopted for the areas where common access towards sustainable education system is missing.

In 2017 I got opportunity to establish an After School Learning Centre in Badi village which is about 50 KMs from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India. This after school was the fulfillment of the dream I saw many years ago to give educational support to the rural students of the country. The mission was to generate positive outcomes for children specially in villages improve their academic performance, classroom behavior and most importantly make them independent enough to face the challenges of the world and become a constructive human being. One of the most prior missions is to stop students dropping out of schools and spoil their career. This program was designed to build children's social skills and enhance their school-day learning. The centre was named "Wings After School Learning Centre". Initially 15 students were enrolled at the centre but very soon this number achieved a triple digit which led to rent a big space and infrastructure to accommodate children easily.

Wings After School Learning Centre has been increasingly recognized as a vital component of comprehensive change in education in Badi village. This case study focuses on a specific after-school program implemented in a rural community with the aim of evaluating its impact on academic performance and personal development. By examining the program's effectiveness, this study contributes to the existing research on after-school programs and provides valuable insights for program improvement and further development.

Wings After School was aimed to provide affordable after school care, safe environment beyond school hours and experiences linking education, enrichment, and exploration and most importantly to prevent children from dropping out. It was functioning on the principles showing below:

In class activities		Extracurricular activities
	Wings After School Learning Centre	
Homework assistance		Computer education

More than 150 students of the same village and nearby got enrolled in the later years of establishment and those students who actively engaged in the after-school program demonstrated improvements in their grades, homework completion, and overall educational outcomes. Moreover, the program provided a supportive and nurturing environment, fostering the development of social and emotional skills such as teamwork, communication, and self-confidence. Many school teachers of the village informed the management of Wings After School that the students who visit centre after their regular school are improving academically and morally on the same time and thanked them for this achievement. The interaction with the students and their parents revealed that students experienced increased motivation, improved self-esteem, and a sense of belonging within the program.

The findings of this case study highlight the significant impact of the Wings After-school program on educational achievement and personal growth in students in the rural community. The program's emphasis on academic support, enrichment activities, and social-emotional learning contributed to the positive outcomes observed. These results support the importance of after-school programs in bridging educational gaps and promoting holistic student development, particularly in rural areas where students may face additional challenges.

Results

The study of After School learning system and this case study of Wings After School particularly demonstrates the positive impact of an after-school program on academic performance and personal development in a rural community. The findings reinforce the value of after-school programs in providing additional educational support, providing social-emotional skills, and creating a nurturing environment for students. The study's insights can help educators to establish and work on the similar programs specially designed for the villages and rural areas keeping their particular issues in mind and promote the well-being of students in rural areas. Further research is recommended to explore long-term effects and sustainability of such programs.

CONCLUSION

Rural areas of the country where the majority of country's population reside cannot be ignored if they are lacking to get equal educational opportunities. After School Learning system is the best supportive method to help those children lacking in their academics and overall school performance. The history of After School programs is not very old. It was

introduced some 150 years ago and in India it was traced a long back in the different shape if we keep this system in consideration. Today we cannot ignore the significance of after school programs specially in the context of rural areas where the infrastructure and educational facilities already lesser as available in cities.

After School System provides academic support, enrichment and skill building, social and emotional development, safety and Supervision and more importantly it gives support to working parent. It can be said in short that After-school Learning programs are essential for promoting the holistic development of children and adolescents.

This paper put lights on the educational condition of the rural areas in India particularly and study shows how this system of learning can improve the quality of education in rural areas of the country. It includes the few organizations who are already working on this system like PARD India etc. A case study of Wings After School is also enclosed which is the practical research sample of the author. This After School is completing its 4 years successfully excluding the Covid era of two years. However this after school system would work nicely in rural areas to get its educational problems resolved and give the equal opportunity to rural children participate in the race.

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