CSR Impact Assessment Report

Grant Support to Aseema Charitable Trust towards supporting schools

Prepared For

HDFC CREDiLA
The Education Loan Specialist

HDFC Credila

Prepared By

SoulAce
Path to Sustainability

SOULACE CONSULTING PVT LTD

ISO 27001:2013 Certified

DELHI NCR | MUMBAI | KOLKATA

Website: www.soulace.in; Email: enquiry@soulace.in

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

SoulAce wishes to express its sincere thanks to HDFC Credila for providing its full support and cooperation towards conducting the Impact Assessment Study of its CSR Initiative "Education Promotion Program". The study was undertaken in Public Schools of (MCGM) Mumbai, where HDFC Credila has partnered with Aseema Charitable Trust to provide support to children and enhance their learning experience.

SoulAce also expresses its heartfelt thanks to the CSR team of HDFC Credila for their support in conducting the assessment study.

The Research team is equally grateful to all NGO staff members, teachers, and parents across these schools for their kind cooperation in providing the required data and support for this study. The research team would like to take this opportunity to thank all the students for their engagement during the assessment.

CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pandemic wreaked havoc on the education systems around the globe. While each and every section of society was adversely impacted, children hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds, were affected immensely due to a lack of access to digital tools and literacy, financial and food insecurities as well as socio-emotional issues stemming from illnesses, loss of loved ones, anxiety, fear, and loneliness

In this context, the HDFC Credila supported holistic education program for the marginalized children hailing from the slums of Mumbai, and being implemented by the Aseema Charitable Trust, formulated a rapid response strategy to ensure continued learning for the beneficiary children while supporting their nutritional, health, and socio-emotional needs as well.

SoulAce was commissioned to study the impact of the program for the year 2020-21, and the study used the lens of the pandemic to understand how the program goals were re-calibrated, the program design was remodeled, systems and processes were streamlined, challenges encountered and their subsequent mitigation, and the outcomes generated against the redefined objectives. The major findings of this study are enumerated below.

Major Findings
Curriculum and Planning

- The curriculum was redesigned for remote teaching and an updated teaching manual was provided to teachers.
- The collaborative, multi-step process of curating, reviewing, and transacting the curriculum included mapping the learning outcomes, creating a year plan, preparing templates, creating digital teaching aids, creating practice sheets, and updating the learning tracker.
- The quality of the materials was reviewed by the Curriculum team, the Education Director, and external experts.

Teacher Professional Development

Teachers were provided professional development through an application-oriented approach, focusing on topics such as digital literacy, resource and classroom management in a virtual setting, adapting the curriculum for remote teaching, and finding ways to ensure students' psychological wellbeing.

Digital Literacy

The access issue was addressed by providing digital devices and reloading data packs. Moreover, teachers and students received brief but thorough instruction in digital competency to help them cultivate a range of skills that could be used to facilitate distant education.

Transacting the Remedial and Bridge Courses

- For learning recovery, a bridge course was created with core skills and concepts. Whole class teaching and ability-based grouping were used to teach the bridge course, using a flipped learning model to promote independent learning and individualized guidance during live sessions. For students facing difficulty, special study groups provided the opportunity for teachers to address their specific doubts and misunderstandings.
- Students were divided into ability-based groups for targeted support, using a remediation curriculum focused on literacy and numeracy skills. Different digital platforms and apps were used to create an effective and engaging learning experience.
- Google Classroom was used as a learning management tool, with worksheets provided for practice. Assessments were given via Google Forms and WhatsApp to track progress, and a Learning Outcomes Tracker was used to monitor student performance over time.
- High school students were given personalized attention and study timetables through a mentorship program, with 10 students assigned to one teacher for comprehensive analysis and board exam preparation.

Community Engagement

·The Aseema team used the Community Work Centre (CWC) to reach out to parents, CBOs, and the community. The CWC Head worked with the School Head to raise attendance, provide meals, and attend to health needs.

·The CWC team were wellness coaches and therapists, academic advisors, conflict mediators, and friends. They spread knowledge of COVID-19 and its prevention, gave out supplies, helped students adjust to online and offline learning, and helped families manage the difficulty of the situation.

Key Challenges

- Access to digital devices, internet, and digital literacy posed a challenge in the beginning.
- Attendance and engagement improved once students and teachers were trained to work remotely, although a small number found it difficult to become proficient with digital tools and adapt to a remote learning environment.
- Some students faced issues such as a non-conducive home environment, lack of support, lack of motivation, and socio-emotional issues, while a few teachers had difficulty with content, attendance, activities, and assessment.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

Project Background

Despite the universalization of education in India, the slum-dwelling children of Mumbai continue to face multiple barriers and inequities in accessing and attaining the desired educational outcomes. Most of them do not attend school, drop out midway, or finish schooling without the requisite skills and knowledge to pursue higher education or secure productive employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the fault lines in the public education system in a sharper relief. While children across the globe experienced the loss of learning, the impact was felt disproportionately by children from disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Clearly, a concerted effort is required by businesses, Community-based Organizations, and the government educational machinery to target this group of children and create replicable and scalable models that could address the situation and result in tangible educational outcomes to level the field for higher education as well as employment opportunities for them.

HDFC Credila took cognizance of the dire situation and partnered with Aseema Charitable Trust under its CSR initiative in Education to provide holistic education to these children, that is inclusive of academics, co-curricular activities, excursions, cultural celebrations, and continuous support to those enrolled in the formal system to prevent drop-outs. Training and capacity building of teachers is an integral component of the intervention, as transforming traditional belief systems and approaches to teaching and learning is critical for improving the quality of education.

The program leverages a public-private partnership (PPP) model with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) to operate three government schools in the city that cater to disadvantaged children hailing from the slums of Bandra West and Bandra Reclamation regions.

HDFC Credila commissioned SoulAce to conduct an Impact Assessment study of this education program for the year 2020-21 to evaluate its outcomes and enduring impacts. Since, 2020-21 was the period when COVID-19 hit and schools were largely closed, the study used the lens of the pandemic to understand the response strategy adopted by Aseema to continue the education of these children and to support the community during a highly unpredictable and uncertain period of their lives.

The overarching goal of the study was to measure the impact of the program and its different components on continuing education, promoting health and wellness among children, building teaching capacity for delivering the curriculum using different modalities, and community empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to carry out an Impact Assessment of the Education Promotion Program undertaken by Aseema Charitable Trust as the implementation partner for HDFC Credila's CSR initiative in Education.

The following objectives were formulated for the study:

- Develop an in-depth understanding of the different components of the program and how they interact to promote the holistic development of the children.
- Assess the impact of the program on the primary beneficiaries, that is, the students during the pandemic.
- Assess the impact of the teacher training program on equipping the teachers in efficiently transacting the curriculum during the pandemic.
- Assess the efficacy of the community centres in establishing ties with the community, counseling, and awareness generation, along with overall support during the pandemic.
- Provide suggestions and recommendations for improving efficiency and maximizing the impact of the program.


Students during the class

About the Implementing Organisation

Aseema Charitable Trust is working for children who belong to marginalized communities. They are dedicated to providing them with high-quality, value-based education, enabling the development of their limitless potential. Their main target beneficiaries are the children staying in the slums of Mumbai.

The implementation model followed by Aseema trust is in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) to create centres of excellence within the public education system. They have adopted a few schools of low to medium-income group levels and have created a learning-friendly child-centric environment for holistic development in their academic levels.
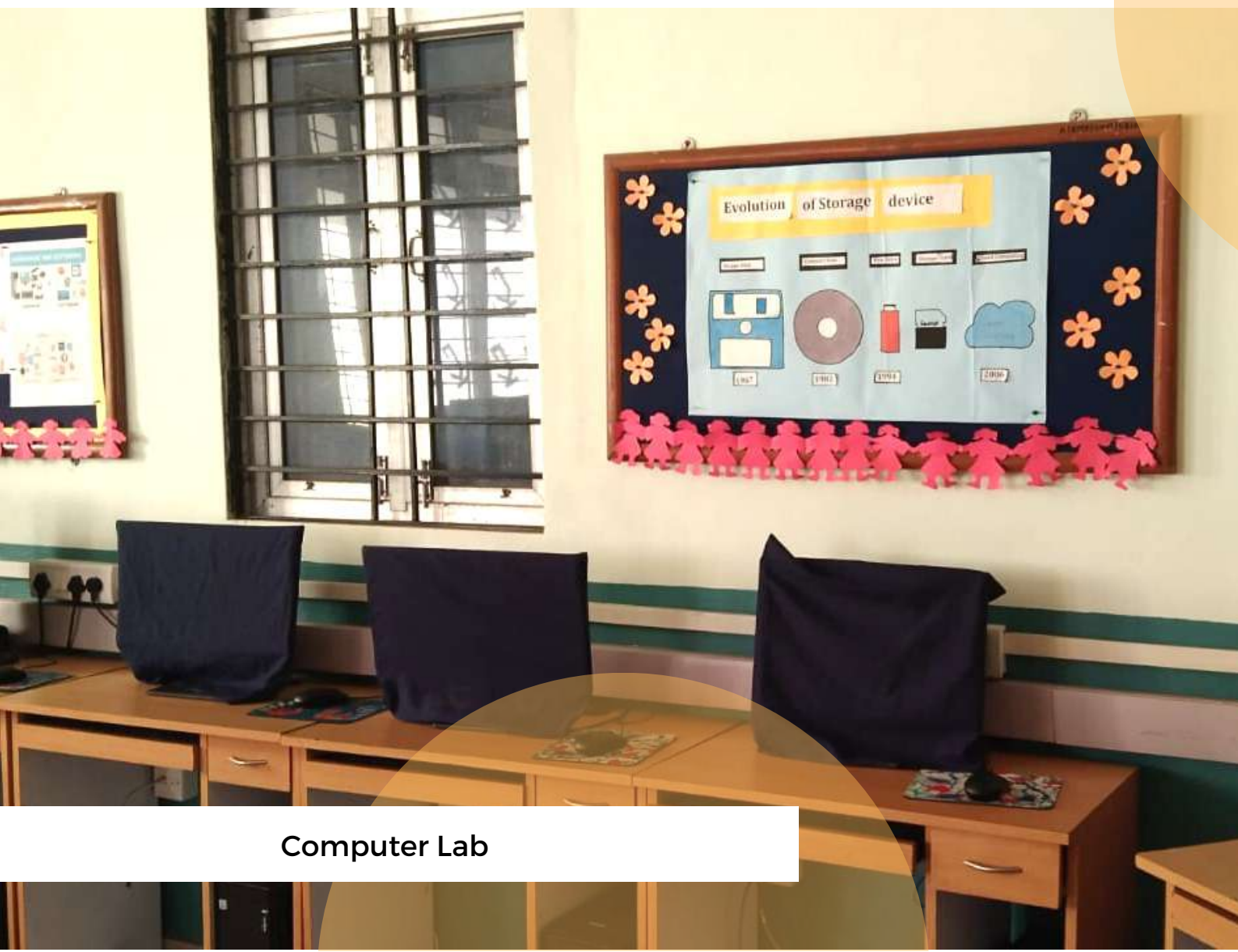
Computer Lab

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research can be stated as a logical and systematic search for new and useful information on a particular subject matter. Social Science Research refers to the systematic activity of gaining new understanding by following scientific principles and methods to minimize bias and subjectivity. It is opposed to writing something based on assumptions or speculations (Handbook on Impact Evaluation, World Bank). The Impact Assessment study was carried out in three project locations in Mumbai utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. The quantitative approach involved one-on-one interaction with the students to understand their perspective, awareness, and future needs if any. For the qualitative data samples of respondents – parents and teachers were considered through Interviews and a Focused Group Discussions approach for an in-depth understanding of the program as well as collecting feedback and suggestions from them.

The first step towards conducting the study was preparing the Impact Assessment study design and tools, which were framed by reviewing the literature shared by HDFC Credila and Aseema Charitable Trust. Inputs were taken from meetings and discussions held with the CSR team and the implementing partner. Assessment questionnaires were formulated, both for the quantitative and qualitative methods.

Further, the assessment required an in-person meeting with the beneficiaries and all the key stakeholders for which support was taken from the Implementing partner, by using the sampling framework agreed upon by HDFC Credila and SoulAce.

Use of Mixed Methodology for Maximum Insights

The research concern here is to understand and assess the impact created by HDFC Credila-supported Aseema Charitable Trust that provides quality value-based education from pre-primary to Grade 10, which is inclusive of academics, co-curricular activities, excursions, and cultural celebrations and provides ongoing support to those enrolled in the formal system so that they do not drop out of school.

The research gives due emphasis to the social and futuristic impact that the project creates in the educational system and in the various stakeholders in the community. Towards this end, to gain maximal insight, both Quantitative and Qualitative techniques are used.

Application of Quantitative Techniques

Quantitative techniques are essential to accurately measure the impact of educational interventions. In the Handbook on Impact Evaluation, published by the World Bank, the authors highlight the advantages of using quantitative techniques to measure the effectiveness of educational interventions, such as increased accuracy and objectivity. These techniques can be used to measure both the short-term and long-term outcomes of interventions, thereby providing a comprehensive and reliable assessment of the effectiveness of a given intervention. Thus, for an objective and evidence-based assessment of the impact of the intervention, the study leveraged structured, close-ended questionnaires to quantify the measurable indicators of impact as proportions or percentages.

Application of Qualitative Techniques

Qualitative techniques such as interviews with the Aseema program team and community members were used to get a deeper understanding of the context in which the intervention took place and to attain deeper insights as well as unanticipated data. The data thus collected helped the researchers to identify the motivations, experiences, and perspectives of individuals involved, that further provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the program. Qualitative data was also used to identify areas in which the program can be improved or modified.

Ensuring Triangulation

Triangulation is needed to increase the credibility and validity of the research findings. It is also a measure taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process. The findings of the quantitative research have been verified with the insights from qualitative research and the reports have also been structured to reflect this point.

Study Design

The overarching research question comprised assessing how the program continued to stay relevant during the uncertainties of the pandemic and managed to achieve its objectives of providing rich curricular and cocurricular inputs to the students and thus, enabling them to continue learning with reasonably good outcomes. The research also used the lens of the pandemic to study the immediate and enduring impacts that the intervention has had on the primary beneficiaries as well as on the community. In this process, the major components of the intervention were identified. The interplay between these components was then analyzed, as well as the implementing mechanisms and processes. This was done within the context of the philosophical and theoretical premises that shape and guide the intervention.

The design of the research was descriptive and semi-structured survey instruments were used to collect qualitative as well as quantifiable data from students and teachers. Further, virtual interviews were conducted with school leads and other stakeholders from Aseema to understand the finer nuances of the challenges faced and their subsequent resolution. The research team also procured and analyzed the documentation provided by Aseema on key components of the intervention to create a more well-rounded picture.

The following key parameters were identified and measurable indicators were created for each parameter:

- Professional Development of Teachers During the Pandemic
- Teaching and Learning Processes Adopted for Distant Mode
- Approach to Curriculum and Planning
- Students' Attendance and Engagement in the Distant Mode of Learning
- Monitoring of Learner Progress in the Distant Mode
- Hard Spots in Implementation
- Key Stakeholder Involvement and Collaboration
- Perceived Strengths and Limitations of the Intervention

Sampling Framework

The study consisted of 3 schools, out of which 2 schools, namely, Kherwadi Municipal School and Pali Chimbai Municipal School, were selected by purposive sampling, as the 3rd school i.e., Santacruz Municipal School was inaccessible owing to the renovation work as was confirmed by Aseema trust. Thus, a total of 95 students from grades 8 and 9 across the two schools were randomly selected for the survey along with 12 teachers and 19 parents. Random sampling was done to ensure that the findings are representative of the entire population and can be generalized. The exhibit below summarizes the sampling framework:

School	Students	Teachers	Parents
Kherwadi Municipal School	50	7	10
Pali Chimbai Municipal School	45	5	9
Total	**95**	**12**	**19**

Research Design

- **Name of the project** : Grant Support to Aseema Charitable Trust towards supporting schools
- **Project Partner** : Aseema Charitable Trust
- **Research Design used** : Descriptive Research Design
- **Sampling Technique** : Random Sampling
- **Sample Size** : 100 students
- **Qualitative Methods used** : Testimonials and case studies

School Building (PCMS)

Study Tools

Tools used during the study

SoulAce has developed a mobile application, a platform for data collection that the field team used to undertake the study. This application has real-time data entry and data upload with GPS location details along with a questionnaire, for interaction with the project beneficiaries, as well as a provision to take pictures of each respondent.

Primary data was collected using two types of questionnaires:

Questionnaire for Primary Beneficiaries:

Structured questionnaires were developed reviewing the project details for each of the focus areas and the indicators were pre-defined before conducting the surveys.

Questionnaire for Secondary Beneficiaries & Stakeholders:

Semi-structured questionnaires were developed for each type of sample of this group. Stakeholders were identified across the focus areas. One-on-one discussions were done with beneficiaries to prepare the case studies.

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders

- Principal
- Teachers
- NGO Staff
- Parents of Students Beneficiaries

Ensuring Commitment to Research Ethics

Anonymity

Anonymity refers to not revealing the identity of the respondents. This research study strictly sticks to not revealing the identity of respondents unless the same is warranted for the illustration of success stories or case studies. After the research was completed, the study did not reveal which individual respondents answered which question in what manner. The results were revealed only as an aggregate, so no one would be able to single out the identity of a particular respondent. This was required to not break the trust of the respondent by not revealing the individual identity.

Confidentiality

Research subjects participate in the process only based on the trust that confidentiality has been maintained. Hence, the research would not reveal any data regarding the respondents for purposes other than the research study.

Non-Maleficence

Research would not lead to any harm to the research subjects. This study ensured that the respondents were not harmed in any way.

Beneficence

Any research study should lead to some benefits for the respondent. This research study also ensures that individuals, groups, and communities benefit and their well-being is enhanced.

Justice

Justice refers to being fair to all. This research study ensures equal treatment of all its research subjects and no biases or prejudices towards any group based on social stereotypes or stigma associated with being a member of a certain group or class.

CHAPTER 3: PROGRAM MODEL AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

The impact and sustainability of an educational program rest heavily on its design. To understand the strengths and weaknesses of the model of education being implemented by Aseema during the pandemic, the research team closely studied the various components of the program and their interplay, along with sharing resources and information between the key stakeholders. The relevant information was obtained from interviews with the program team as well as the documentation provided on different aspects.

Key Components of the Program

The following six broad components of the program model were identified and researched in depth:

- **Remedial Program:**

The majority of the children enrolled in Aseema schools are first-generation learners. Owing to deficiencies in nutrition and cognitive inputs from early childhood that tend to accrue as they move up the grades, several of these children have huge gaps in learning. Thus, remediation is an important component of the educational model that allows them to build their foundational skills and catch up with regular classes. Aseema leverages a compressed learning pedagogy wherein foundational skills in literacy are targeted to speed the process of learning recovery in other domains.

Students are divided into three groups based on their learning levels to provide targeted support using a remediation curriculum. It is designed to meet their specific learning needs.

Group A consists of learners who are struggling with phonetics, basic grammar, and sentence construction. This group was mentored by remedial teachers for 6 days a week, for one hour every day.

Group B consists of learners who have weak vocabulary and comprehension skills. These students are provided remedial support for 2 days a week for an hour.

Group C comprises those students who require additional support to improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills. They too attend remedial classes for an hour, twice a week.

The research team interacted with Ms. Bushranaz Shaikh, Head of PCMS, and Ms. Geeta Subhedar, Head of KMS, through a virtual Zoom call to understand how the remedial program was implemented during the pandemic.

The interaction revealed that the Aseema team broached the challenge of attendance in online lessons held on Google Meet and WhatsApp by holding regular Google Meets and personalized calls with the parents. This was done to ensure that the parents give due importance to the remedial lessons being delivered in the new modality. Furthermore, to capture evidence of their progress, tests were taken twice in October 2021 and April 2022.

PALI CHIMBAI MUNICIPAL SCHOOL
SECOND SEMESTER EXAMINATION 2021-2022

Std: Subject: English Remedial   Roll No.:
Date: (Written)   Duration: 2 hours
Name: Marks: 30

Q1. Fill in the missing letters: (2M)

    1. _____ H _____ J

    2. p ___ r ____ t

Q2. Write 'a/an /the' for the following words: (2M)

    1. _____ eagle

    2. _____ friend

    3. _____ boats

    4. _____ inkpot

Q3. Correct the jumbled sentences: (3M)

    1. are my These pencils

A Snapshot of the English Remedial Test Paper, PCMS

The determined efforts by the team yielded results and the attendee students greatly benefitted from it, as is evident from the fact that several students from Group A transitioned to Group B.

- **Bridge Course:**

The abrupt closure of schools and the eventual shift to digital learning brought a hoard of challenges for the students as well as the teachers. Not only did they lose instructional time while getting habituated to the new modality, but there was also a marked loss of learning vis-à-vis the concepts that were learned previously. To tackle learning recovery, the Aseema team conceived and implemented the Bridge Course. The program leveraged an accelerated learning design by stripping the grade-level curriculum to core skills and concepts in different subject areas. Special emphasis was laid on mathematics and language learning, as these skill-based subjects are empirically known to enhance learning in other domains.

Leveraging Different Digital Platforms: The teaching team in Aseema tapped into the diverse digital platforms and apps to curate an interesting as well as effective learning experience for the learners. Google Classroom was extensively used as a learning management tool to streamline sharing of assignments and other curricular materials, and also to provide instructions and feedback. A variety of learning apps such as the Khan Academy, Diksha, and Pratham's read-aloud books along with YouTube, Google Forms, and personalized videos were used for teaching specific concepts and skills.

Implementing a Flipped Classroom Model: The teaching team adopted a flipped classroom model where students were provided with learning videos from a trusted source or videos that were pre-recorded by the teachers to learn a concept on their own. Live Google Meet sessions were used to clarify doubts and build on their understanding of the concept. The flipped learning model proved to be an efficient pedagogical approach as it promoted independent learning among the students and allowed the teachers to extend individualized guidance during the live sessions.

Supporting Slow Learners: Students who faced greater challenges in achieving the learning outcomes in the bridge course were included in special study groups wherein the teachers resolved their doubts and misconceptions, individually. Further, secondary school students were provided personalized attention and study timetables under a mentorship program. To maximize the impact, 10 students were assigned to one teacher for a comprehensive analysis of their issues and to mentor them for their board examinations.

Tracking Learner Progress: Students were given formative as well as summative assessments via Google Forms and WhatsApp to keep a track of their progress and to fine-tune the instructional design to address gaps.

Student Learning Tracker: The team uses a learning tracker to meticulously record the performance of each student in their formative and summative assessments. This tracker is used to identify proficiency levels and hard spots in learning that in turn informs the approach and instructional design for individual learners as well as learners in the special study groups.

- ## Cocurricular Activities:

The approach to education in Aseema is holistic and it lays an equal emphasis on academics along with co-curricular activities. Thus, co-curricular activities such as music, arts, and sports form an integral component of the curriculum. It aims at providing students with opportunities to discover and develop their intrinsic abilities and talents while enriching them across physical, emotional, cognitive, and social levels. However, conducting these activities proved to be particularly challenging during the pandemic. The Aseema team crafted a focused curriculum for online delivery with the goal to generate awareness about COVID-19 along with helping children to be physically and emotionally fit through regular exercises, craft activities, and meditation exercises. These activities gave an apt outlet for students across the grades to express themselves and channel their anxieties into productive endeavors.

- **Digital Literacy:**

Digital Literacy is acknowledged as a critical 21st-century imperative in Aseema's curriculum. Learners are equipped to use different types of digital devices to explore key digital literacy skills. They are then encouraged to work through a series of three projects that they present in front of the entire class, each more difficult than the last one. Students choose their topics of interest to investigate and independently collate information. The computer teacher facilitates their learning but overall, it is self-directed.

5. Getting Online
Connect to a wired network
Connect to a Wi-Fi network

6. Get Started with Word
Create and save documents in Word
Formatting text
Check spelling and grammar
Find and replace text
Use Word on a mobile device

7. Access Information Online
Methods of connecting to the internet
Connect a device to the internet using Wi-Fi
What is the World Wide Web?
Browse the web with Google Chrome
Understand accessibility options
Safely shop online

8. Participate Safely and Responsibly Online
Methods of communicating online
Protect yourself from phishing and online scams
Communicate safely online
Create strong passwords
Avoid oversharing online
Manage your digital footprint
Responsibly use content you find online
Treat others respectfully online

Snapshot of the Digital Literacy Curriculum

When the pandemic hit and the schools switched to online learning, the biggest crisis faced by the students was access to digital devices and internet connectivity. However, several of the older students had already acquired the basic knowledge to navigate the digital world that they were able to put to use once the initial barrier of access was addressed by the distribution of digital devices. Further, both teachers and students were given short but intensive training in digital literacy to help them build a portfolio of skills that eventually enabled them to continue education in the distant mode.

- **Teacher Training:**

The schools adopted by Aseema are essentially BMC schools with a representative principal appointed by the corporation. However, young teachers are hand-picked by the Aseema team and a considerable amount of time and effort is invested in training them so that they can internalize and align with Aseema's philosophy of education.

Information solicited from **Ms. Hilda Joshua Dsouza**, Head of Curriculum Development and Training, via a written interview form revealed that the overarching goal of the training program is to empower the teachers and to equip them with the necessary skills of teaching and learning within the philosophical and theoretical framework of the Aseema curriculum. Towards the end, a dedicated training team has been deployed in addition to external experts that are recruited for training the teachers on various aspects of the progressive educational philosophy practiced in the schools. After the initial period of onboarding and orientation, the teachers continue participating in the sessions once a week for an hour. The broad areas covered in this training are:

1. Aseema's philosophy and pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.
2. Pedagogical content knowledge (subject-specific) and interdisciplinary linkages.
3. Student-centric, activity-based learning.
4. Strategies for live sessions in order to integrate universal values into the curriculum.
5. Inculcating 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and collaboration.
6. Differentiating instruction by applying theoretical approaches such as Gardner's theory of Multiple-Intelligences and Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.
7. Creating teaching and learning materials along with creative worksheets.

The teachers are also provided with a teaching manual that aids them in translating the philosophy into action on a day-to-day basis. However, during the pandemic, the teaching team had to rapidly switch gears to transact the curriculum using the online modality. There was no playbook to follow and the situation demanded a creative application of hitherto acquired knowledge in uncharted territory.

The program team broached the issue by conducting boot camps for teachers in digital literacy, classroom, and resource management in the distance mode, adapting the curriculum for online delivery, and strategies to be in constant touch with the students in order to ensure their socio-emotional well-being as well as ways of engaging deeply with their families to provide the required support for continuing their education.

- **Community Engagement:**

Robust engagement with the community has empirically known to have yielded sustainable outcomes for developmental interventions. The Aseema educational program has a strong component of establishing deep ties with key stakeholders, CBOs, and the community at large to maximize its outreach and impact. The research team procured information on the structure, goals, and functioning of the centre and how it supported the principal goals of the program during the pandemic, from Ms. Sajida Dhaluj, who heads Aseema's Community Work Centre (CWC).

Organization and Functioning of the CWC: The CWC team, headed by Ms. Dhaluj, consists of trained social workers who are equipped to work with the parents and the communities. Each school is assigned a team of CWC workers based on the strength of the school, who work with the teachers. The CWC Head reports to the School Head, to help them boost student attendance and form a conduit for interaction with parents, visits to communities and homes, providing a nutritious meal for the students and staff, and intervening in case of health issues.

CWC's role during the pandemic has been critical, as the counselors took the mantle of not only being wellness coaches and therapists for the students and their families but also extended their support as academic advisors, conflict mediators, and often, just as friends. They worked relentlessly to raise awareness about COVID-19 and the associated preventive measures, coordinated the distribution of ration and hygiene kits, aided students in toggling between online and offline learning due to shifting mandates from the government, and helped children and their families to cope with the uncertainties of that period.

The different components of the educational program are inextricably linked and the teams worked in tandem to realize the educational goals for the children in extremely challenging times. The first few months were chaotic, but the team managed to quickly formulate a response strategy that included continuous dialogues with the students and their families to ensure their socio-emotional wellbeing, provision of

ration and hygiene kits for health, distribution of digital devices to increase access, intensive training on digital literacy, an adaptation of the curriculum to render remediation in the online mode, the conception of the bridge curriculum for learning recovery, use of a flipped classroom to maximize learning outcomes, and creative implementation of co-curricular activities to centre and motivate students and provide them a platform for expression and sharing.

Nonetheless, the endeavor was fraught with several lingering barriers and challenges that prevented optimal outcomes. These challenges are further detailed in the successive chapters. Against the backdrop of huge learning losses registered among children globally and nationally, evidence for this can be found in several largescale assessments and studies such as The State of Global Learning Poverty (World Bank, 2022), Loss of Learning During the Pandemic (Azim Premji Foundation, 2022), and The Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1, the achievements of these marginalized children hailing from the slums of Mumbai seem remarkable indeed.


Interaction with Students During Assessment

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS FROM STUDENT INTERACTIONS

The pandemic brought about nationwide school closures and a hoard of uncertainties and misgivings in its wake. While everyone was adversely affected, it had huge repercussions on the mental and emotional health of the children and adolescents who were trying to cope with a complex array of challenges such as social isolation, fear, grief, and issues triggered by increased screen time. The stress on children from socio-economically disadvantaged families was even higher as they were additionally grappling with the loss of livelihoods and food insecurities. Huge divides in access to digital technology and digital literacy were also exposed which made continued learning for such children almost impossible.

With this background, the research team interacted extensively with the students of the selected schools to glean information on their backgrounds, access to digital devices and readiness for online learning, quality of content delivery during the lockdown, a continuation of co-curricular activities, educational as well as emotional challenges faced and the kind of support provided by their school during the pandemic.

Socio-Economic Background of the Students
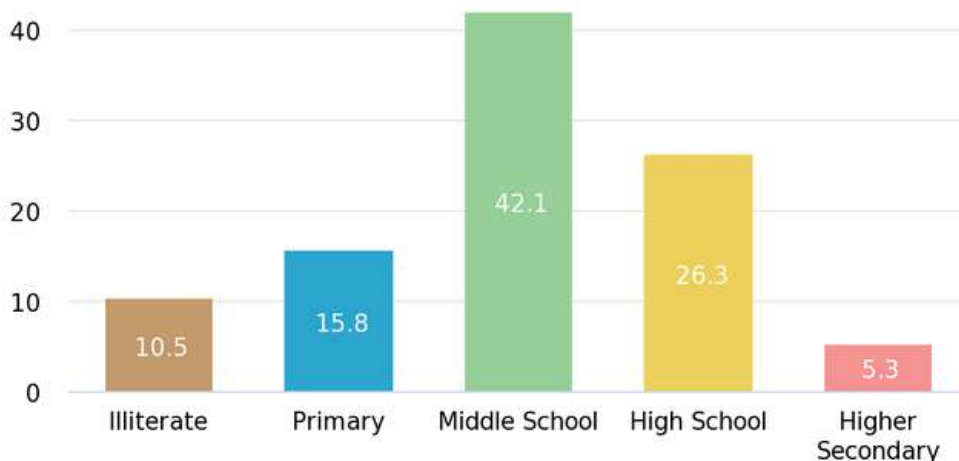
Close to 50% of the parents of these students are either illiterate or have completed middle school. The majority of their fathers are either daily wage laborers, run small shops, or are unemployed and most of their mothers are homemakers. It is evident from the data that a lot of these parents are not equipped to support the learning of their wards at home and have insecure livelihoods that took a further hit during the pandemic.
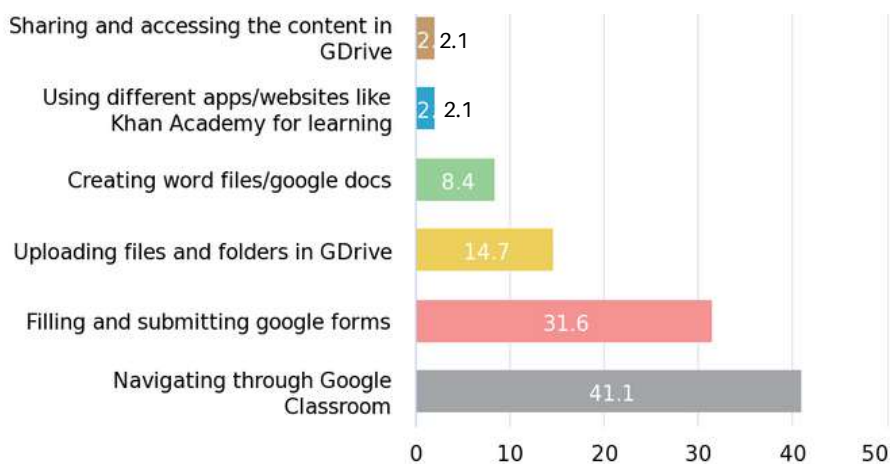
Access to Digital Devices & Readiness for Online Learning

49.0%   51.0%

● No   ● Yes
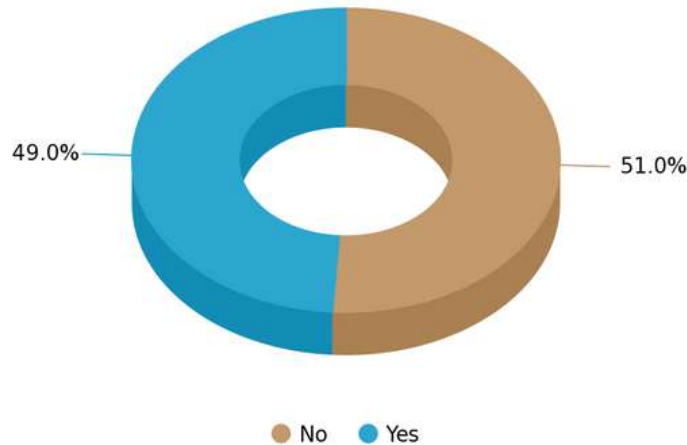
Around 51% of the students reported that they did not own a digital device for online learning. However, a majority of them mentioned that the school provided smartphones for attending their classes. They also mentioned that they were taught to use Zoom and Google Meet for video lessons, and WhatsApp video calls and chat messages were also used.

The exhibit below summarizes the different skills they learned that enabled them to find learning materials, receive assignments and submit them for assessment.

Lessons learned by students like receiving, sending, or finding learning material and assignments

Sharing and accessing the content in GDrive	2.1
Using different apps/websites like Khan Academy for learning	2.1
Creating word files/google docs	8.4
Uploading files and folders in GDrive	14.7
Filling and submitting google forms	31.6
Navigating through Google Classroom	41.1

The graph vividly shows that the majority of the students have learned to navigate through Google classroom (41%) and fill out Google forms (32%) to access learning materials and assignments, also submit classwork and homework. Around 15% of them mentioned that they know how to upload files and folders in Google Drive and 8% said that they know how to work with word files and google docs.

The proportion of students who reported that they have been using different apps and websites for learning was relatively low. Close to 91% of the students said that the training and support provided by the school were extremely helpful for them in continuing learning effectively. A small proportion mentioned that they found it challenging to learn all the skills in such a short time and network inconsistency was an added problem.

The data shows that despite the initial lack of digital knowledge, the learners were able to pick up basic competencies to access curricular material and submit assignments within a relatively short period of time. Aseema schools also prioritized the distribution of digital devices and training for these students who otherwise would not have been able to avail the most effective modality of learning during the pandemic.

Content Delivery & Processes

When queried about the different types of learning materials received from the school, most of the students reported that they received recorded lectures, textbooks, and stationeries. Whereas, around 10% of them said that they received online reading materials. A very small percentage mentioned that they received printed worksheets and audio clips.

Type of learning materials provided by the school as reported by the students:
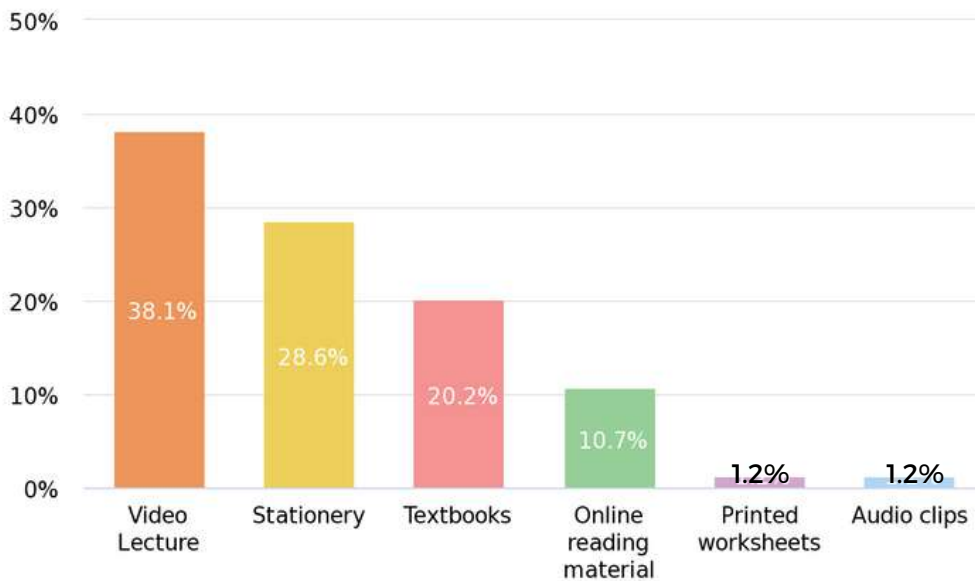
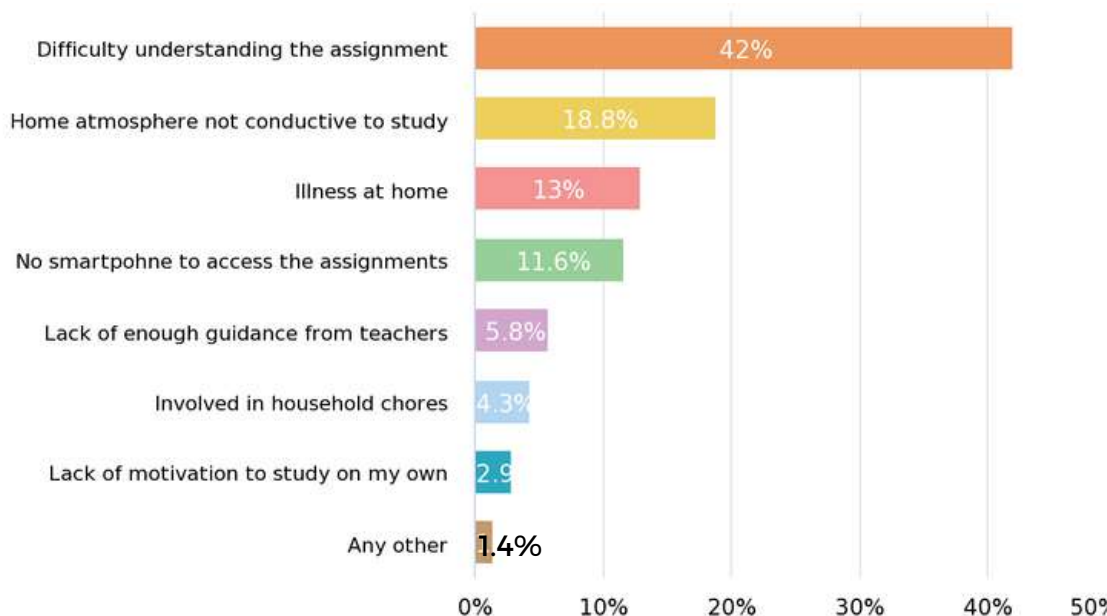The data indicate that Aseema school teachers adopted a flipped classroom instructional methodology wherein they heavily leveraged pre-recorded video lessons that the students could learn on their own and focused on problem-solving and doubt-clearing in the live online lessons. This was corroborated by the interactions with the Aseema program team and teachers.
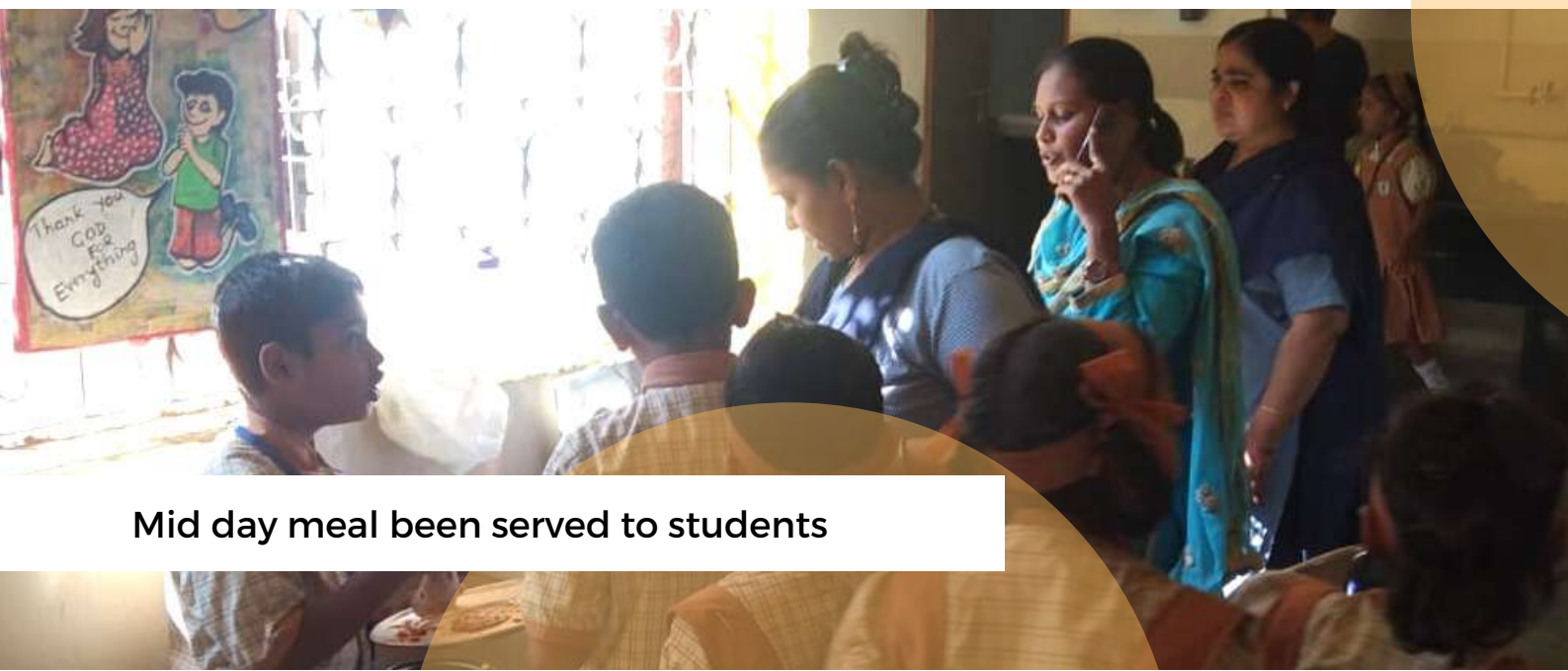
Mid day meal been served to students

Most of the students mentioned that they received daily assignments from the school on the topic that was taught. However, only 27% of them reported that they were able to complete and submit the assignments on time, while 65% of them said that they were able to do so occasionally.

Reasons cited by students for incomplete assignments

| Reason	Percentage
Difficulty understanding the assignment	42%
Home atmosphere not conductive to study	18.8%
Illness at home	13%
No smartpohne to access the assignments	11.6%
Lack of enough guidance from teachers	5.8%
Involved in household chores	4.3%
Lack of motivation to study on my own	2.9
Any other	1.4%

While diving deeper, it was found that those who were unable to submit assignments regularly had either difficulty understanding them (42%), their home environment was not conducive to learning, or a family member was down with COVID. However, 75% of the students also mentioned that Aseema teachers were readily available for clarification of their queries and doubts.

These findings highlight quite a few challenges posited by the pandemic wherein providing individual support to each student in the online modality was not always possible and learning at home was fraught with difficulties due to factors that were beyond the school's control.

Around 77% of the students reported that they attended 4-6 online lessons per week and the duration of these lessons ranged between 60 to 90 minutes. Most of them said that 16-20 students participated in these lessons and the teacher delivered them in English. Around 55% reported that they were able to understand what was happening on the screen and were able to ask questions in the group to clarify their doubts. On being asked about the reasons for not being able to ask questions, the students cited reasons that are summarized in the exhibit below:

Reasons cited by the students for not clarifying doubts
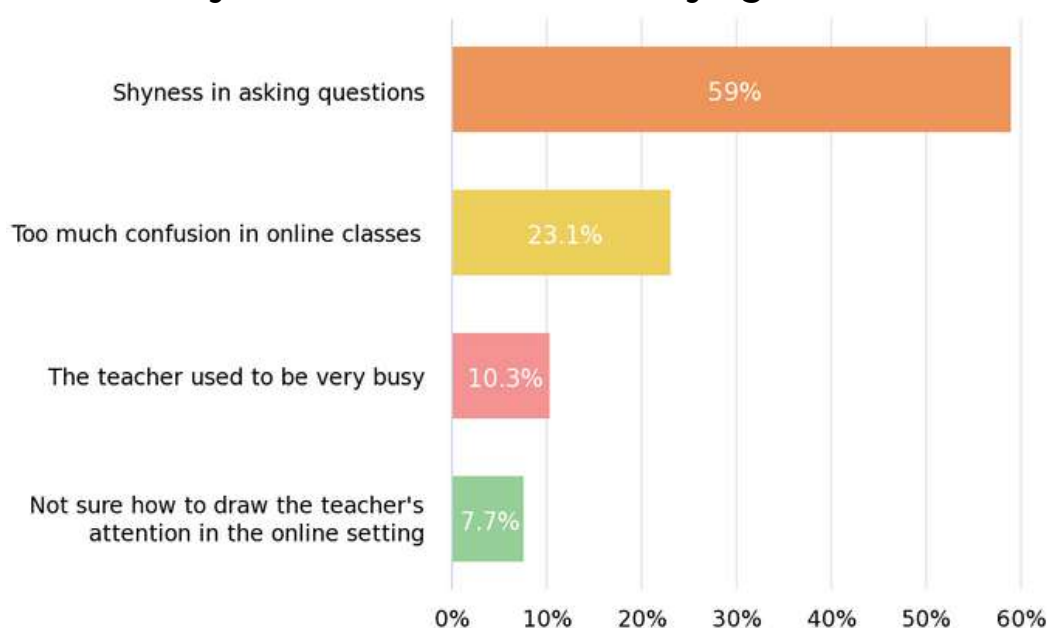
As per the graph, 59% of the students mentioned that they felt shy in posing their questions in class, while 23% of them said that there was too much chaos in the online setting. However, qualitative interviews with the program team and the teachers revealed that the initial chaos as well as students' hesitation went away after a period when both the teachers and the students got the hang of the new modality.

Since the students included in the survey were from Grades 8 and 9, the study focused on eliciting information on subject-specific difficulties faced by them and the kind of support provided by the school for preparing for their board examinations. 25% to 30% of the students reported that they faced the highest difficulty in Science, Mathematics, and Marathi while learning online. The majority of the students reported that they were frequently counseled and guided on exam preparation in groups of 10 or more and were given periodic tests to help them practice answering questions within the stipulated time.

Co-curricular Activities and Sports

A critical component of the educational program being implemented by Aseema is the integral development of the children's faculties that lays an equal thrust on the physical and emotional growth of the children. Towards this end, sports and cocurricular activities such as art and music are important elements of their learning experiences in school to promote good health, collaboration, and creativity. The study tried to elicit the mechanisms and their effectiveness in maintaining this holistic approach in the distant mode and the findings are reported in this section.

Close to 85% of the students reported that they attended online sessions for physical education that included warm-up exercises, judo, and yoga.

Percentage of students by videos received for a type of game
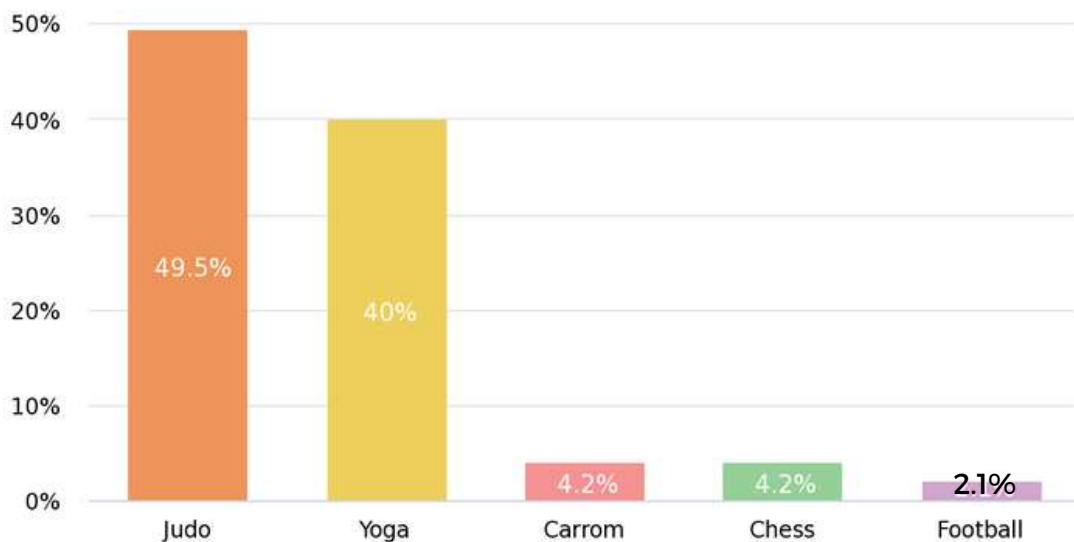
A similar proportion mentioned that their teachers shared a variety of videos on meditation and motivational stories frequently. They also received videos on the history, rules, and techniques of different types of games such as chess, carrom, judo, and yoga along with informative videos on health and nutrition, and national and international games such as the Commonwealth. The students also mentioned that their physical skills and their knowledge of different games were tested routinely. Also, they shared their answers through Google forms.

Close to 70% of the students said that they attended the arts & crafts and music lessons regularly. A majority of them enjoyed arts & crafts the most, followed by music and sports. While triangulating the same with the program team, it was found that the children did appreciate the cocurricular activities as those gave them the space to center themselves and engage with creative activities, thus, taking their minds off the chaos surrounding them.

However, attendance in online sports and art classes was a challenge as parents would not attach importance to these as compared to academics. To broach this issue, the team coordinated closely with the students and counseled the parents on the importance of these lessons to boost attendance.


Provision to sit and have mid-day meal

Technical Barriers to Learning Online

Since the beneficiary children hail from socio-economically disadvantaged families, it is understood that they would not have high access to digital devices, and navigating through an online learning environment would have been challenging for them. The research devoted time to identifying the existing technical barriers that these children faced during school closures and how were these addressed by Aseema. Direct interactions with the students revealed that around 63% of them attended the online lessons on a regular basis while 34% attended them occasionally. When probed further, the students cited several reasons for non-attendance or infrequent attendance that are summarized in the exhibit below.

Reasons for non-attendance in the online lessons
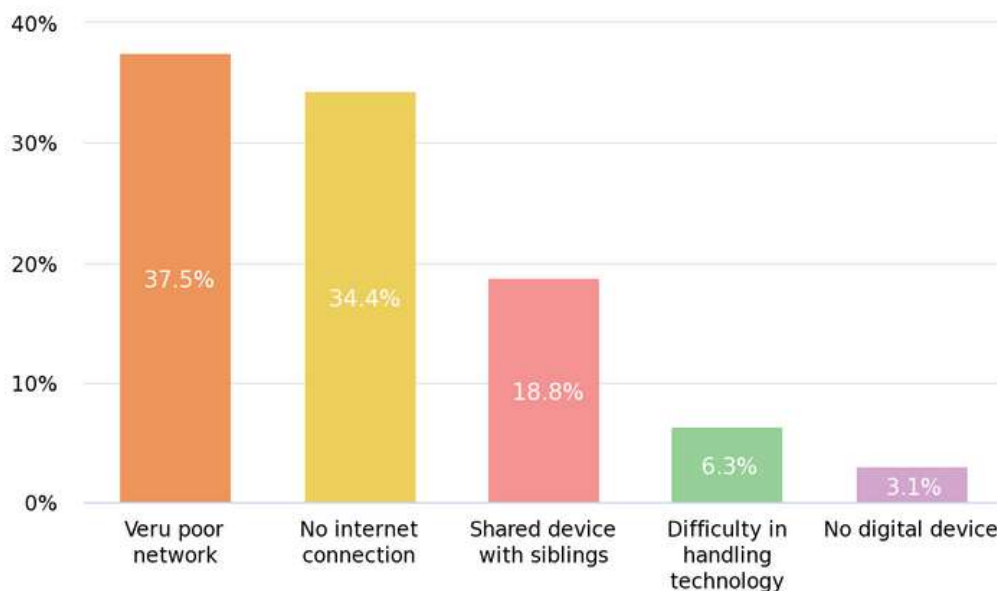
The majority of the students pointed out that the non-availability of a proper internet connection or a low network bandwidth were the prime reasons for their irregular attendance. Further, around 19% of them mentioned that they had to share a device with their siblings and as a result, their classes would often overlap. A small percentage cited the novelty of handling new technology and lack of access to a digital device as the reasons for their infrequent attendance. Around 53% of the students reported that recharging the data pack was sometimes a challenge for them while 21% said that electricity failures occasionally disrupted the lessons. However, a majority of them said that after a few initial glitches, they were able to handle video apps such as Zoom and GMeet and access and submit assignments via Google Classroom. Around 30% of them reported that they faced difficulties in accessing files and folders in GDrive.

Socio-emotional Barriers to Learning

The pandemic stirred up a hoard of socio-emotional issues for children across the nation, and the children in Aseema were no exception. Learning in distant mode came with its own sets of technical challenges and issues that revolved around motivation levels, the environment at home, etc. And the emotional support that was extended by the schools had a deep impact on shaping the academic outcomes.

68% of the Aseema students reported that though there were a few initial hiccups due to various reasons, they have been enjoying their classes. The diversity in videos and animations shared by their teachers and the overall learning using technology is loved by most of the students (50%). Around 40% mentioned that they were happy to be able to interact with their teachers and counselors and continue their education during school closures.

Students who reported that they did not enjoy the online lessons or only liked them occasionally, elaborated that the primary reason was due to the difficulty of grasping the taught concepts in the new modality. Quite a few students also mentioned that online lessons were boring and that too many students being on the same call caused disturbances, as the teacher was unable to pay attention to everyone. Some of the students also mentioned that they felt tired looking at the screen constantly and a few said that they felt lonely and sad.
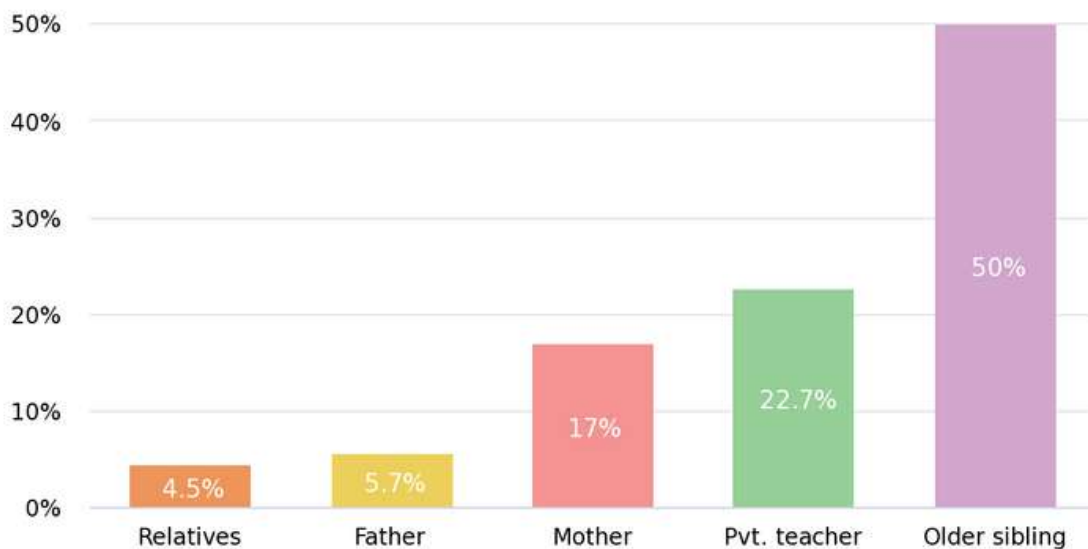
Around 20% of the students mentioned that they were unable to maintain a routine and were often involved in household chores or in taking care of their siblings. 10%of the students shared that they felt lazy and got diverted by social media apps in the absence of a teacher.

Whether anyone at home helped in learning different subjects

- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, frequently
- No, rarely
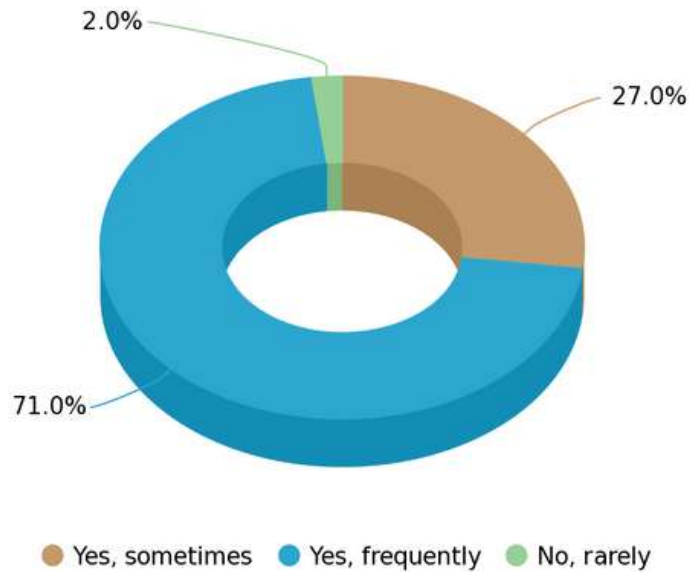
When they were asked about the support they received at home with their studies, 71% of the students mentioned that they frequently got support, while 27% said that they received it occasionally.

Percentage of Students by Source of Help at Home

According to this graph, 50% of the students received support from their older siblings. Around 23% of them reported that either their mother or their father helped them with their studies and 23% of them mentioned that they got help from their private teachers.

Further, 74% of the students shared that the teachers and counselors from the school had spoken to them on a regular basis, while 20% of them said that they spoke to them occasionally. When questioned about the kind of support they received from their teachers and counselors, apart from academics, students enumerated several items that are summarized in the exhibit below.

Type of support received from the teacher/counselor during the lockdown
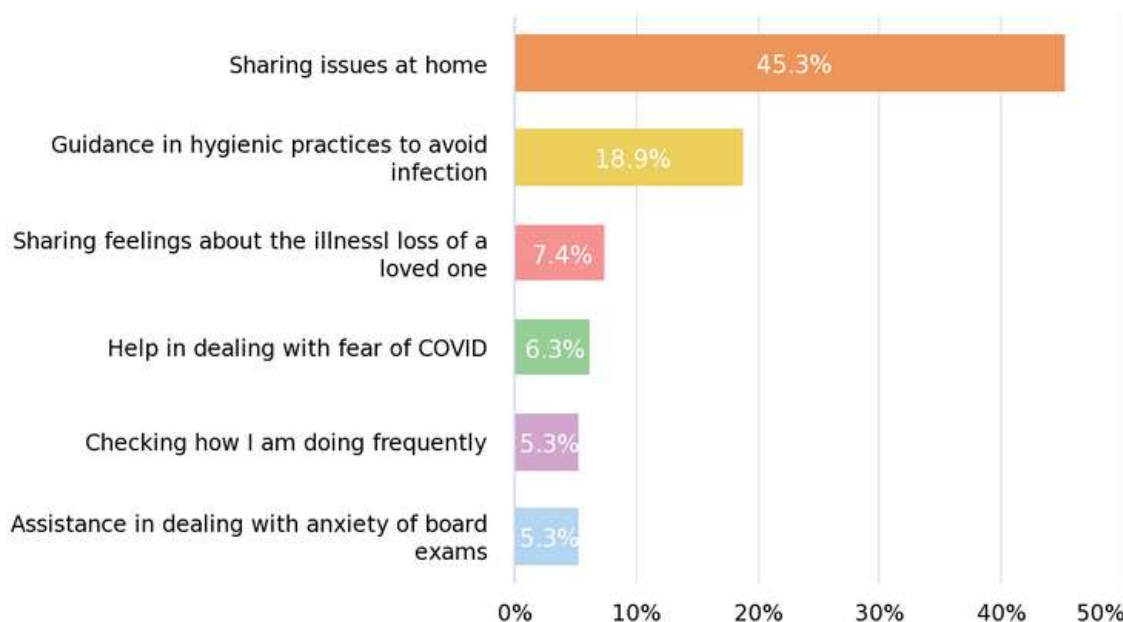
This graph represents that, the majority of the students i.e., 45.3% were facing issues at home and it was the teachers/counselors who helped them cope with those issues. Further, they also received guidance on preventive measures against COVID-19. Some students were also dealing with anxiety and fear which was triggered by the pandemic and quite a few were struggling with various illnesses or the loss of loved ones. The teachers and counselors also helped them deal with the emotional turmoil that these incidents had caused.

It is evident from the data and the information procured from the students that the Aseema team adopted a multipronged strategy to address the challenges faced by the children across academics, co-curricular activities, digital learning, and their socio-emotional well-being. Most of these challenges were cognized and overcome by the team for the majority of the learners. However, the challenges were also multifaceted and complex, and only a small percentage of learners were unable to cope with them despite the concerted efforts made by the team.

Informative Material In Science Laboratory

PCMS Ground

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS FROM TEACHER INTERACTIONS

Quality of teaching, teachers, and teachers' education is central to delivering high-quality education for all. These factors enable education to achieve its transformative potential for individuals, communities, and overall national development. Teachers, through their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices, are key agents who directly contribute to achieving five of the seven targets included in SDG 4. In alignment with SDG 4 and the national thrust on quality of teaching for systemic reform, as reflected in the National Education Policy (2020), the Aseema teacher training program lays a huge emphasis on the continuous training of its teachers to empower them to translate Aseema's philosophy into action by leveraging student-centric, activity-based classroom processes and incorporating interdisciplinary, holistic learning to develop physical, mental, as well as socio-emotional aspects of the learners.

As the pandemic raged a devastating trail across the globe and the country, and school systems floundered to cope with the 'new normal', the Aseema team rethought its teacher training program to build the capacities of the teachers to plan and transact the curriculum online. The research team engaged extensively with these teachers to understand the quality of the continuous professional development during the pandemic, the teaching-learning processes established for distant learning, changes made to the curriculum, student attendance and engagement, and tracking of learner progress. This chapter summarizes the findings from these interactions along with the major challenges faced in the program's implementation.

5.1 Professional Development During the Pandemic

The school closures required the transition to and continuation of teaching and learning processes through online environments. Continuous professional development of teachers became imperative for the successful and sustainable delivery of the curriculum in this modality. This section highlights the nature, quality, and content of the training provided to Aseema teachers during the pandemic for negotiating with and delivering online education.

All the teachers reported that they underwent training for transacting the curriculum through an online environment. Most of them felt that the duration and frequency of training were sufficient to equip them for this purpose. They further shared that the teachers who did not own a digital device were provided with laptops from the schools. Only 8% of the teachers reported that the training was insufficient to equip them for the task. A majority of these teachers felt that their digital devices were not adequate, while the rest opined that the duration of the training program was not adequate to learn all the aspects of adapting the curriculum for online delivery. They further elaborated on the challenges faced that are summarized in the exhibit below:
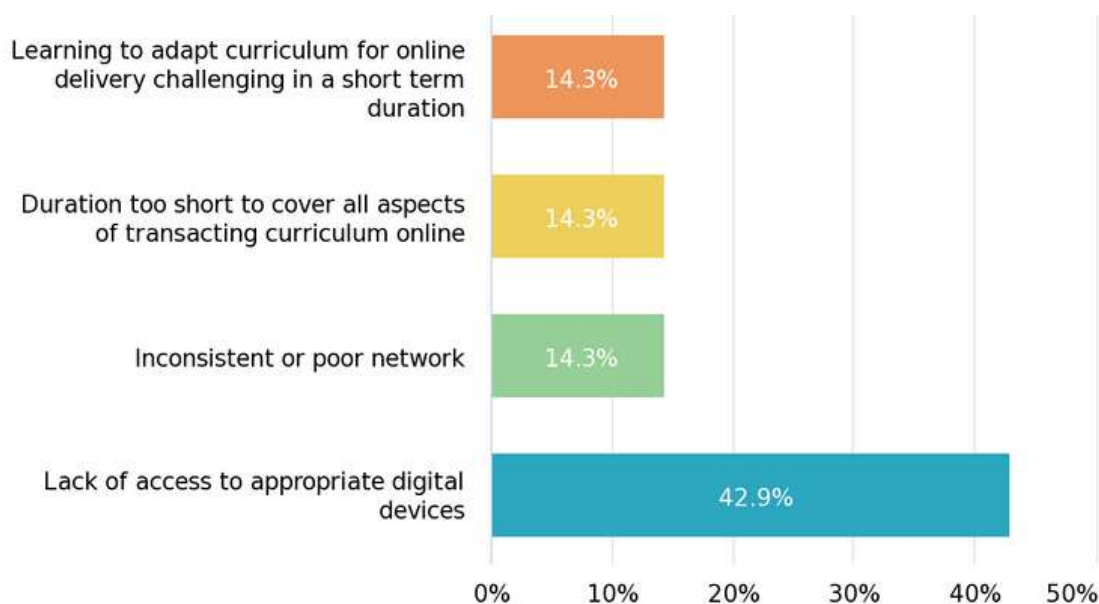
When triangulated with the Curriculum and Training Head, Ms. Hilda Joshua Dsouza, she mentioned that an application-focused approach was employed while implementing professional development for teachers. Towards this end, intensive training was provided for digital readiness and continuous training was imparted every week to adapt the curriculum, leverage online resources, and resource & classroom management. She mentioned that although a majority of the teachers were able to adapt quickly, a few faced challenges that were resolved in one-on-one interactions.

Mrs. Rupali Nakhwa Teacher KMPS

"I've been working with this school for more than 7 years under the program by Aseema Trust and I have also worked for 10 years as a teacher before joining here. I teach Science practicals to students from 5th to 10th standard and Science theory to students of 9th and 10th standard. But during the lockdown, I also taught Science theory to the students of 8th standard. Due to the lockdown, classes were shifted to online mode and it wasn't possible to teach all the science experiments online. So, I taught the basic experiments that they could perform at home easily like the litmus paper test to students till 8th standard. Whereas, for the students of 9th and 10th standard we took their Science practical classes after the lockdown in 2 batches."

Further, she said that Aseema Trust provided her with a laptop during the lockdown which was of much help to her. This helped her in delivering the curriculum online in an effective way. Moreover, during the lockdown, they also had to interact with the parents regularly to ensure that proper precautions are taken.

She said that their students are very brilliant and with proper guidance and support they can achieve great heights.

-Mrs. Rupali Nakhwa Teacher KMPS

The team further focused on eliciting information and perceptions on the content of the training program and how it built the capacities of the teachers to render the curriculum.

Percentage of teachers by content of training program

Content	Percentage
Capturing evidence of learning in online mode	91.7%
Digital literacy training for conducting classes online	91.7%
Developing digital teacher & learning materials	93.3%
Recording progress & periodic reporting	75%
Adapting remediation curriculum for online delivery	75%
Facilitating a student-centred online classroom	66.7%
Understanding digital well-beinng	25%

The exhibit above shows that a majority of the teachers received training on digital literacy to conduct online classes, develop and curate digital teaching and learning material, capture evidence of learning through formative and summative assessments, keep records of student's progress, and report the same, adapting the remediation curriculum for online delivery, and facilitating a student-centric classroom in the new modality. Around 25% of the teachers also mentioned that they were trained in digital well-being.

"I have been working in this school for the past 7 years under the program Aseema Trust. I teach Maths English to grades 5 to 9. The overall model has also developed and evolved over time. During the COVID-19 lockdown phase, we online classes various competitions the students participate actively."

She thanked HDFC C for their support in delivering the program.

-**Ms. Zaira Shaikh Teacher of PCMS**

Teachers also enumerated specific skills that they acquired during the training that aided them in the effective delivery of the content and classroom management. The findings are summarized in the exhibit below:

Percentage of teachers by specific skills learnt during the training
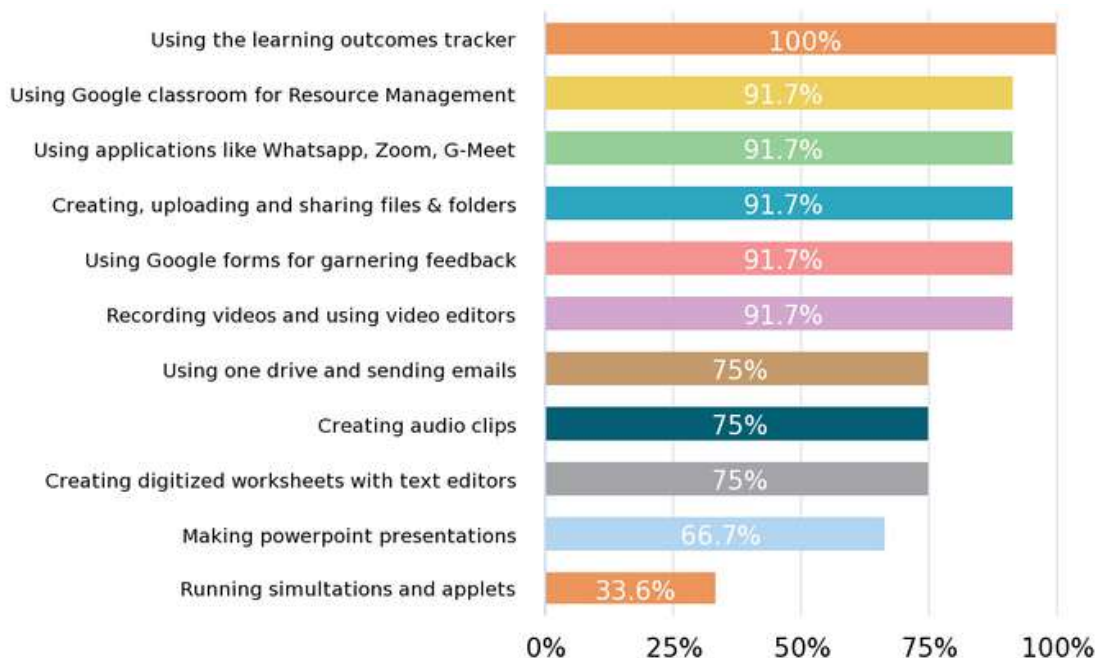
All the teachers mentioned that they learned to use the Learning Outcomes Tracker to effectively record and monitor students' progress. The tracker gave them a bird's eye view of the performance of the whole class as well as that of the individual students. They used it to spot gaps and tailor their instructions accordingly. Around 92% of the teachers shared the skills that helped them in managing resources and the classroom as well as setting interactive communication channels with the learners. They further elaborated that they extensively leveraged Google Classroom for resource management, and created and shared files and folders via Google Drive. They were also able to use Google Forms for soliciting feedback from the students as well as conducting assessments. An important skill that the teachers highlighted was the use of video recorders and editors to create their own content or to adapt video content available on the web to suit the needs of their students.

75% of the teachers mentioned that they learned how to create digitized worksheets using text editors, create audio clips, and use One Drive for sending group emails.

It is evident from the data that a majority of the teachers were appreciative of the training received and managed to acquire applicable skills for tapping and creating digital content as well as managing learning resources and interactions with the students.

The research team further delved into how the training program specifically equipped the teachers to conduct remedial lessons and the bridge course, which are the key components of Aseema's educational program.

75% of the teachers mentioned that they were trained to implement activity-based lessons with small groups of students. They also said that remediation also requires differentiation of curriculum to address each student's individual needs. And the training program aided them in preparing and delivering a differentiated remedial curriculum in the online mode.

Around 55% of the teachers mentioned that the training helped them to document and track student's progress and plan further remediation to target specific competencies for an identified learning deficiency. 33% of the teachers reported that the training enabled them to plan and conduct time-bound engaging activities with the students. However, a majority of them reported that engagement was a challenge in online classes.

As far as the bridge course is concerned, 67% of the teachers reported that the training equipped them to prepare and deliver the core curriculum in the online mode. They were able to create and share e-videos with students for teaching new concepts as well as for revising previously learned concepts. 58% of the teachers said that the training enabled them to sustain students' interest through a variety of digital tools and to efficiently assign classwork, practice work along with providing feedback.

However, teachers mentioned that giving demos to the whole class effectively was often a challenge owing to the size of the group, differential abilities, and technological issues.

Two recurring themes in the teachers' professional development program have emerged from the findings. The primary one is that a majority of teachers were adequately equipped to manage digital tools and resources in a relatively short duration of time. Further, they were trained reasonably well to adapt the remedial and bridge curricula for online delivery with rigor, while keeping the core tenets of Aseema's educational philosophy intact.

5.2 Curriculum & Teaching-Learning Processes Adopted in the Distant Mode

5.2.1 Curriculum and Planning

Aseema's educational philosophy drives student-centric, activity-based teaching-learning processes in the classroom. The research team delved into how the curriculum was modified, the process followed for quality control, and how teaching-learning processes were reshaped for the remedial and bridge courses, to suit the new learning modality, and for continued effectiveness.

75% of the teachers reported that they had an updated manual for transacting the curriculum for different subjects in an online environment. The exhibit below summarizes the content of the teaching manual as reported by the teachers:

Content of the teaching manual
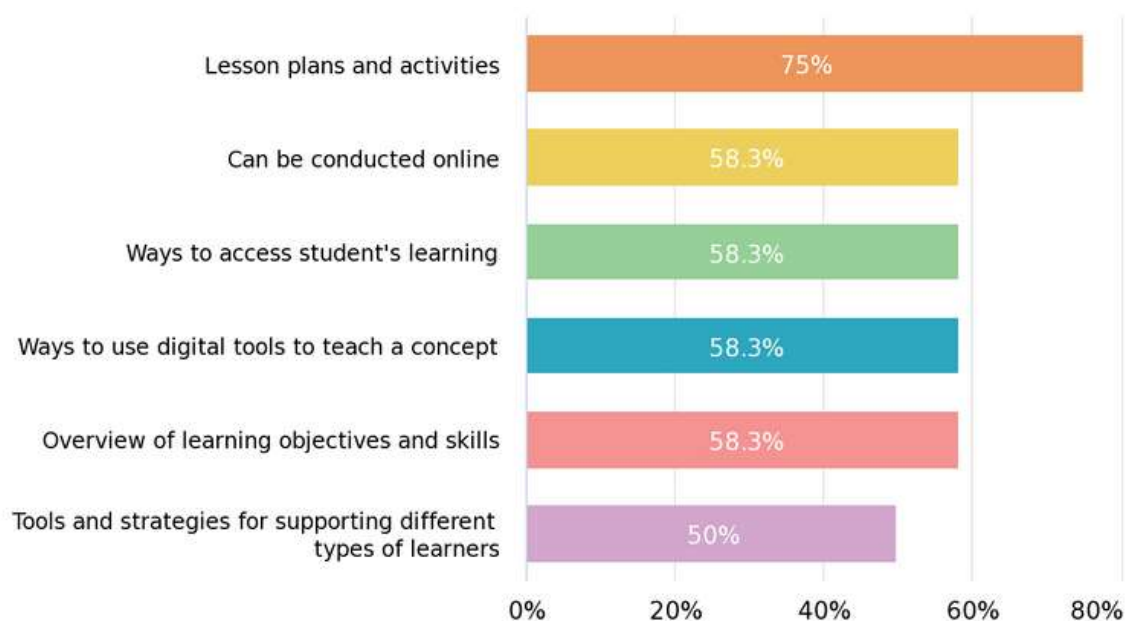
The exhibit shows that the majority of the teachers had access to lesson plans and activities that they were able to use in their classrooms. 58% of them reported that the manual included guidance on leveraging digital tools to teach a concept, an overview of the learning objectives and skills, different types of remediation and enrichment activities that can be conducted online, and strategies for assessing students' learning. 50% of the teachers mentioned that the manual included guidance on supporting different types of learners through differentiation of content. All the teachers said that the modified curriculum had clear benchmarks and milestones to indicate the level of any given student in the curriculum.

Also, all the teachers mentioned that they created lesson plans well ahead of the class in fixed formats provided to them in the manuals. However, they had the flexibility to consult with their peers and their seniors to adapt the lesson suited to the content and the students. Ms. Dsouza enumerated the steps in the entire process which are described below:

System of Review and Quality Control

- **Creating the Learning Outcomes:** This is an extensive document of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that individual students should possess and can demonstrate upon completion of a learning experience.
- Preparing Templates: These are the formats and patterns required for the process of creating such as year plans, worksheets, activity sheets, and other resources that are part of the curriculum.
- Creating the Year Plan This is the annual planning of the syllabus or the portion to be covered over a period of an academic year. This document also has the month-wise bifurcation required for more specific and precise planning.
- Preparing the Day Plan: This is an extensive plan that includes activities and methodologies to be implemented in the online class by the teacher, in one teaching period, to enhance the teaching-learning process. This includes a detailed description of the general and specific objectives, prerequisites, teaching aids, set induction, and the content of the lesson.
- Creating Teaching Aids: This includes creating and curating videos, PPTs, audio clips, web-based interactive models, and simulations.
- Preparing Creative Worksheets These are digitized practice sheets that are provided to the students to gauge students' previous knowledge, develop skills, practice concepts, engage students in the teaching-learning process, assess their understanding
- Updating the Learning Tracker: This is an effective tool to keep track of progress, identify areas of deficiency, and inform instruction.

Ms. Dsouza further elaborated that the program team ensures that all curricular materials are thoroughly reviewed for quality check by the curriculum team, the Education Director, as well as external experts. Further, department heads and senior teachers assess individual lesson plans and provide feedback to the teachers to ensure that the plans are aligned with larger curricular goals and pedagogy.

5.2.2 Remedial Course

The remedial course was designed to address the learning deficiencies and gaps in a large proportion of the students that had accrued from early childhood due to poor language and cognitive inputs. 92% of the teachers reported that the Student-Teacher Ratio (STR) was kept between 1:5 to 1:10 by design, as it enabled the teachers to provide targeted and individualized remediation to each student. Further, the nature of the grouping was ability-based, so it was easier for the teacher to tailor the instructional design for differentiation. Remedial lessons were mostly delivered in 45-60 minute long sessions 3-6 times a week, depending on the requirement of the students. 92% of the teachers opined that the duration and frequency of remediation were adequate to address the learning gaps.

The majority of the teachers mentioned that the approach to teaching and learning for remediation in the distant mode was focused on teaching foundational skills and concepts through online lectures and pre-recorded videos. It was followed up by the rigorous practice of the learned skills and concepts through digitized worksheets. Occasionally, the teachers also used simulations, applets, and learning applications for greater engagement and retention of concepts.

5.2.3 Bridge Course

The bridge course was conceived during the pandemic to address the issue of loss of learning and to reinforce core concepts and skills in languages and mathematics. 75% of the teachers reported that they adopted a whole class teaching strategy for a majority of the online lessons and the STR was 1:20 or higher in such classes. Occasionally, they would create ability-wise groups of 4-5 students to address specific learning needs. The whole class lessons were mostly delivered in 45-minute long sessions thrice a week. Individual and group lessons were more frequent and the duration was also higher. 92% of the teachers felt that the frequency and duration were sufficient for meaningful learning.

Most teachers mentioned that a flipped learning model was adopted for transacting the bridge course. Teachers would prepare or curate videos and e-lectures that the students could watch in their own time. Live Google Meet sessions were then used to clarify doubts and for the rigorous practice of the learnt concepts. Students were also assigned to smaller groups to play with simulations and applets for boosting their interest and deeper assimilation of learning.

5.3 Student Attendance and Engagement

In the traditional mode of teaching and learning, student engagement is frequently operationalized using attendance as one of the key indicators. However, it is always supported by other indicators of engagement such as participation in activities, submission of assignments, and social interactions. In an online learning environment, tracking participation in activities and social interactions is challenging and attendance in itself proves to be a poor qualifier for engagement. Thus, the Aseema team adopted a more strategic approach to ensure the continuation of learning wherein they routinely captured data on student access and engagement.

5.3.1 Student Access

Actual attendance in online lessons is a matter of access to digital devices and a stable network. Access was tracked from June 2020 onwards and the lack of it was addressed by distributing devices and recharging data packs.

5.3.2 Student Engagement

The Aseema team adopted more stringent criteria for defining engagement. Two tangible dimensions were identified: participation and submission of assignments. If the students participated in the online lesson that was recorded and if the student submitted that day's assignment, it was recorded separately.

The tables below provide an overview of the participation rates (P) and assignment-submission rates (A) from August 2020 to March 2021 for Pali Chimbai Municipal School (PCMS) and Kherwadi Municipal School (KMS).

Student Engagement Trend in Pali Chimbai Municipal School (PCMS)

	Aug		Sept		Oct		Nov		Dec		Jan		Feb		March	
	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A
Prithvi B	59%	28%	63%	35%	57%	34%	60%	35%	40%	24%	76%	33%	74%	39%	83%	40%
Jal A	52%	34%	55%	36%	79%	40%	63%	38%	68%	33%	69%	39%	83%	39%	99%	45%
Jal B	61%	45%	70%	50%	77%	49%	61%	49%	55%	40%	78%	51%	91%	45%	99%	44%

Student Engagement Trend in Kherwadi Municipal School (KMS)

	Aug		Sept		Oct		Nov		Dec		Jan		Feb		March	
	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A
Jal A	67%	51%	81%	56%	74%	57%	88%	44%	88%	72%	88%	81%	79%	77%	81%	75%
Tej A	72%	60%	79%	60%	75%	59%	79%	54%	82%	77%	86%	77%	79%	72%	74%	71%
Tej B	72%	58%	80%	67%	77%	64%	83%	60%	86%	75%	77%	83%	87%	86%	74%	89%
VII B	83%	64%	73%	69%	63%	55%	78%	72%	88%	73%	80%	70%	90%	85%	88%	85%
VII C	82%	67%	87%	69%	84%	61%	82%	75%	82%	73%	89%	66%	79%	75%	89%	78%
VIII B	74%	55%	74%	51%	87%	57%	90%	44%	82%	49%	85%	52%	92%	66%	92%	81%
IX B	87%	61%	89%	68%	92%	82%	92%	72%	90%	91%	80%	80%	80%	84%	82%	84%
X B	89%	64%	89%	71%	96%	79%	96%	79%	100%	67%	100%	79%	100%	84%	100%	93%

Notably, both the participation rates and the assignment-submission rates show an increasing trend over time. The gap between the participation rate and assignment-submission rate also decreases greatly from August 2020 to March 2021. These trends can be explained by the fact that the teachers, along with the counselors and the social workers from the CWC, worked in tandem to distribute devices and to reach out to the parents and students to identify barriers with the aim of resolving them.

The research team further engaged with the teachers to triangulate this information received from the school heads. A majority of them reported that they struggled with student absenteeism in the initial months. They enumerated multiple reasons that triggered absenteeism which is summarized in the exhibit below:

Percentage of teachers by reason for Student Absenteeism

| Reason	Percentage
Poor network connectivity	100%
Lack of access to digital devices	100%
Migration	91.7%
Difficulty in adapting to an online learning environment	66.7%
Low student interest	58.3%
Parents indifferent to regular attendance	33.3%
Illness in the family or students' ill health	33.3%
Socio-economic Disturbances	33.3%
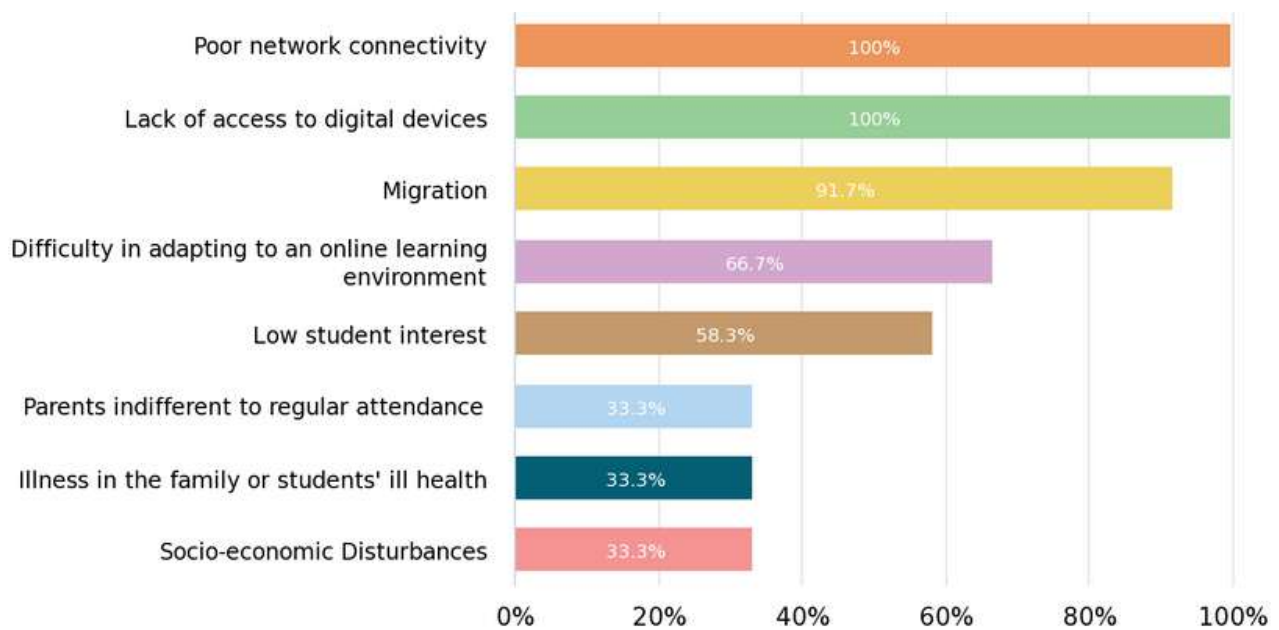
Access to digital devices and poor networks emerged as the biggest factors that prevented students from attending their lessons. Teachers also mentioned that once the problem was addressed, it was still challenging for them to keep the students interested in the classes as the modality was new for both teachers and students. However, as everyone learned the nitty-gritty of online learning over time, they were able to design interesting and engaging lessons. Other factors that caused absenteeism were socio-emotional disturbances precipitated by illnesses in the family or the overall mayhem prevalent during the pandemic. Teachers also mentioned that several families migrated or were indifferent to their wards' learning as they were battling with issues of livelihood loss and food security.

However, the situation gradually shifted because of the measures taken by the Aseema team as shown in the exhibit below.

Percentage of teachers by reason for increase in Attendance
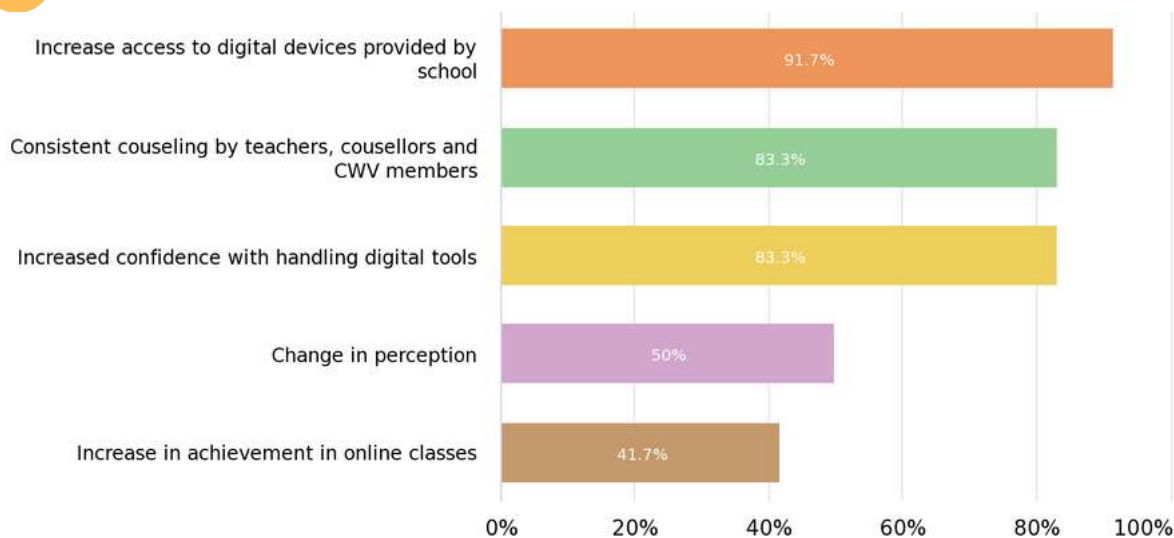
The first and foremost reason for the gradual increase in attendance was access to digital devices. Students also built their fluency and confidence in handling digital tools because of the training provided by the school. The concerted efforts made by teachers, counselors, and social workers to reach out to the students and their families and counsel them also yielded results. This also influenced the parents' perception of online lessons and they supported the team's effort to bring children back to learning. Students also felt more motivated as there was a gradual increase in their achievement.

5.4 Hard Spots in Implementation and Nature of Support Provided

The pandemic has been a uniquely adaptive and transformative challenge for teachers as no playbook could guide their response to the havoc wreaked on the school ecosystem. As they grappled with alternative learning modalities and continued to equip themselves to teach remotely, they were parallelly dealing with health and socio-emotional issues on the personal front. The Aseema team worked to create a professional learning community to support the teachers by imparting technical training, and regular meetings with peers, school heads, and the education director. This ensured that the morale of the teachers was kept high and adequate support was extended wherever required. The strategy helped in the continuous remodeling of the remote learning program to meet the shifting needs of the students and their families along with collaborative mitigation of the barriers that came up at different stages of the implementation.

The research team interacted with the teachers to create a more granular understanding of the roadblocks that they encountered in this tumultuous journey and the quality of support that was extended to them.

A majority of the teachers responded that they faced multiple challenges in the initial months of the school closure. Fear, doubts, and uncertainty assailed them as the world was paralyzed by the onslaught of the virus and a response from the education system was slow to come. They mentioned that the Aseema program team extended full support to them during this crisis and consistently worked towards equipping them to transact the curriculum remotely.

When asked about the specific challenges they faced in delivering the curriculum, teachers reported several challenges that are summarized in the exhibit below:

Challenges faced in Transacting the Online Curriculum
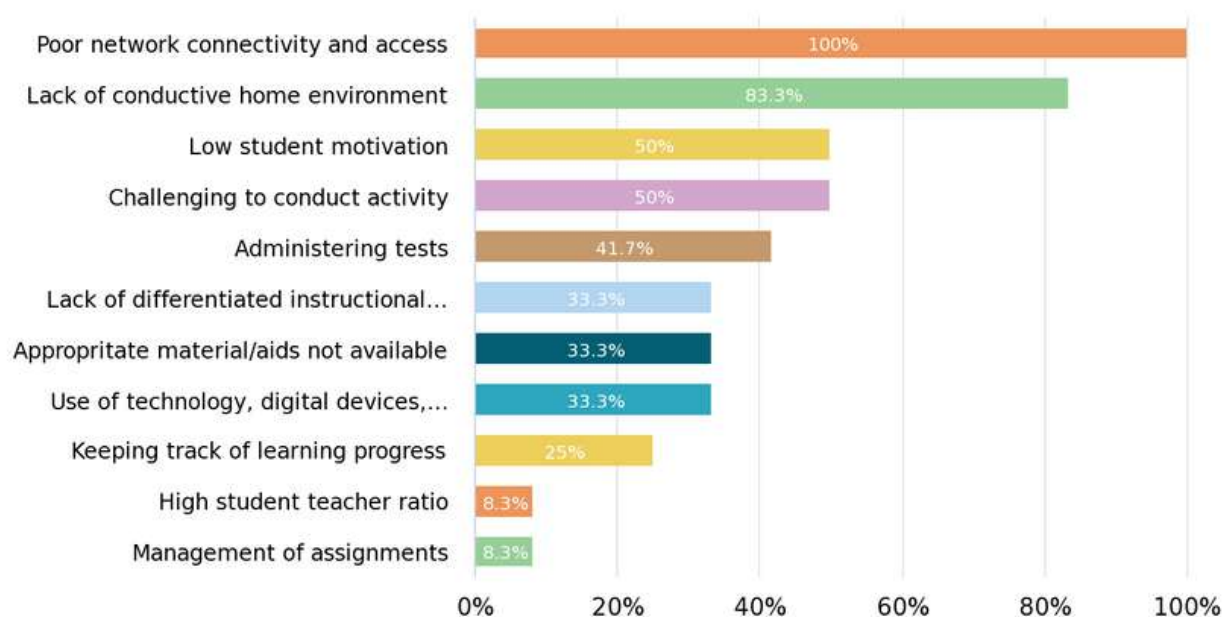
Several of the key challenges came up repeatedly in the course of the study. New challenges that were reported in these interactions were conducting activity-based lessons, administering tests, and assessing students' progress, lack of differentiation in content for teaching a mixed-ability classroom, and a dearth of adequate resources for online teaching.

However, the majority of the teachers mentioned that they communicated with their seniors and supervisors almost on a daily basis and they proactively helped them to brainstorm solutions. Troubleshooting was focused on planning and classroom management, helping slow learners, hardware and network issues, and dealing with malfunctioning apps.

Teachers also shared the different ways in which the pandemic managed to take a toll on the students' learning despite all the efforts. 75% reported that several students forgot previously learned concepts and skills, 17% mentioned that those who managed to retain the past concepts and skills were able to make very slow progress, and 8% said that a few students were not majorly impacted by the pandemic.

The findings from the teacher interactions make it evident that the repercussions of the pandemic were felt not only by the students but also by the teachers in the socio-emotional and professional spheres of their lives. The Aseema team took due cognizance of these challenges and created a professional learning community to collaboratively develop, implement and share skills, practices, knowledge, and values that would serve the interest of the students and aid them in continuing their education remotely. Several challenges were mitigated in the process and a few were not, owing to uncontrollable variables such as individual capacities and motivational levels, acceptance of and fluency with digital technologies, differential persistence levels and adaptivity, and the overall immensity and complexity of the challenges encountered.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS FROM PARENTS' INTERACTIONS

Extensive community involvement has been found to be beneficial for developmental initiatives, as research has shown. The Aseema educational program prioritizes building strong relationships with stakeholders and community-based organizations to make its outreach more effective. During the pandemic, the program used Community Work Centres (CWCs) to engage with local communities and ensure that its positive impact continued. CWC counselors played multiple roles such as academic advisors, conflict mediators, and support providers to help children and families deal with the uncertainties of the challenging time.

To assess the effectiveness of Aseema's community engagement and educational program, researchers interacted with parents from selected schools. They collected information about the parents' socioeconomic backgrounds, awareness of Aseema's support, academic support provided by Aseema, community engagement during the pandemic, and parental perception of the program's relevance and effectiveness. The study's results provide valuable insights into the impact of Aseema's community engagement initiatives and educational program on the communities they serve.

# 6.1 Socio-economic and Educational Profile of the Parents

Percentage distribution of parents by Educational qualification
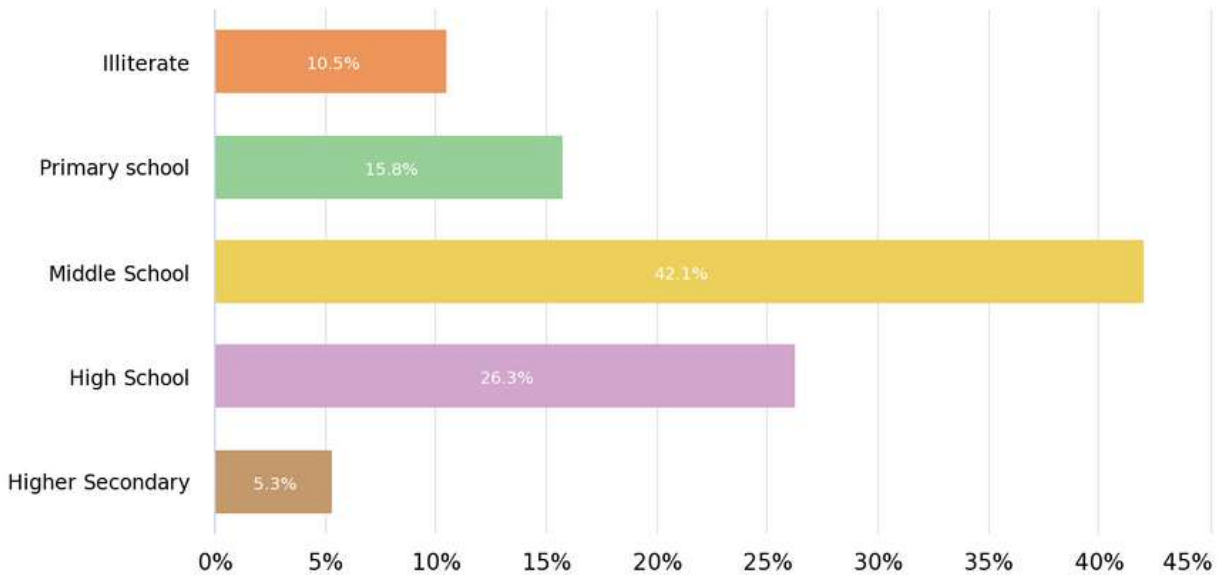
Data was collected to determine the socio-economic profile of the parents, including their age, educational qualification, occupation, and average monthly income. The study revealed that the majority of parents, 42.1%, were in the age group of 30-35 years. Most of them, also 42.1%, had completed only middle school, while 15.8% had only studied up to primary school. Additionally, 10.5% of the parents were illiterate, and only 5.3% had completed up to higher secondary schooling. Notably, none of the parents had graduated from college.

In terms of occupation, 57.8% of the parents are housewives, while others work as domestic workers, industrial workers, tuition teachers, tailors, or run shops and businesses. Notably, none of them work in government or service sector jobs.

Percentage distribution of parents by their Average Monthly Income
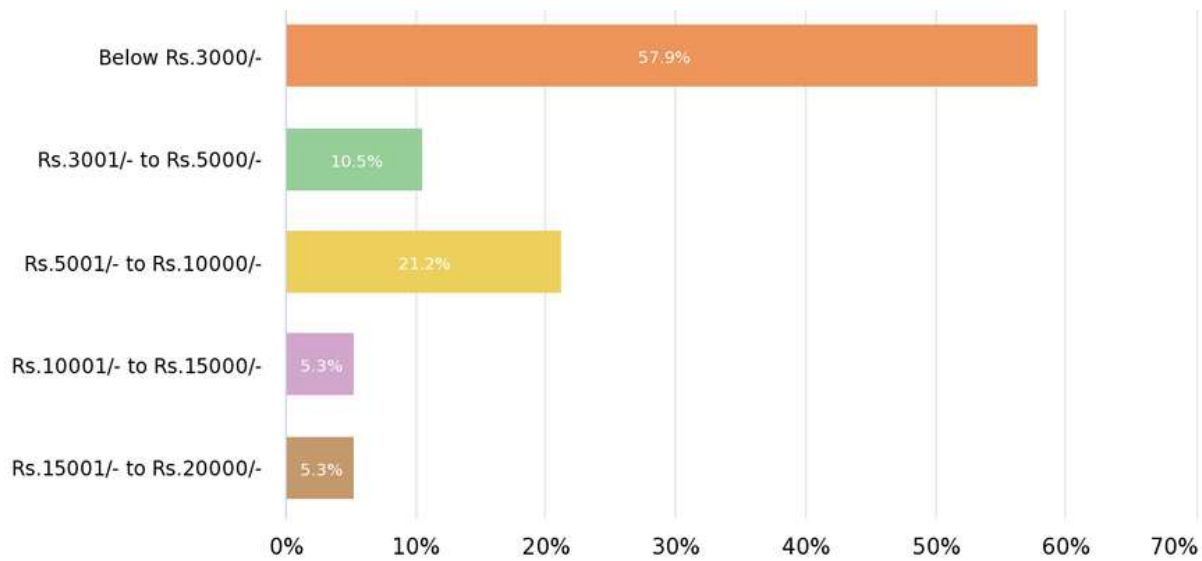
The exhibit shows that more than half of the participants i.e., 57.9% have a monthly income of less than Rs. 3000/-, and only 5.3% of the respondents have an income between Rs. 15001/- and Rs. 20000/-. This shows that the respondents of the study are economically and socially from the disadvantaged section of society.

My experience with Aseema was really great. Our children have so many facilities and quality education here which is not available in other municipal schools."
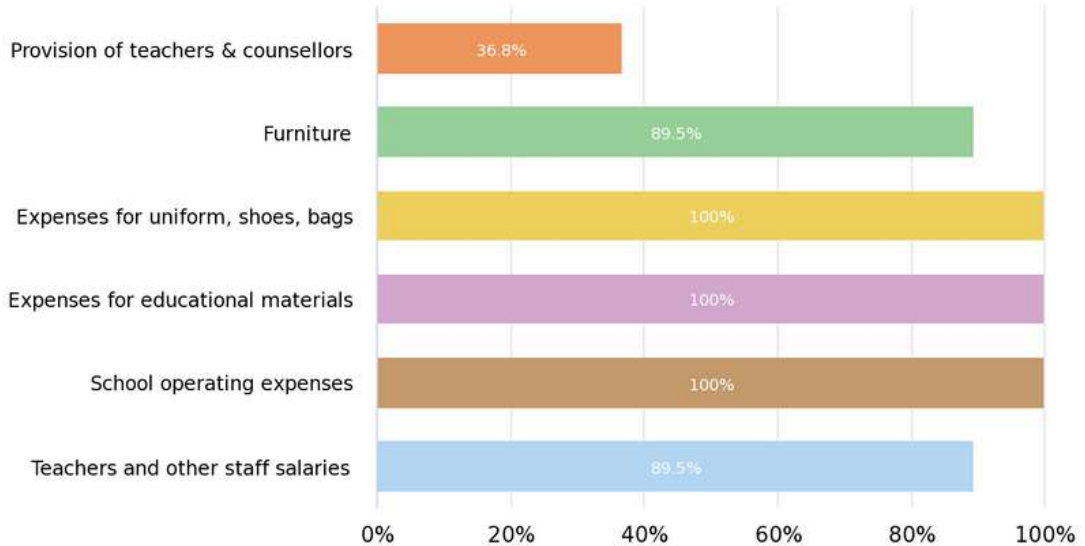
The data procured from the parents shows that the Aseema team adopted a range of strategies not only to support the children in studies during the pandemic but also to support the community in dealing with the risks of the pandemic through engaging the community.

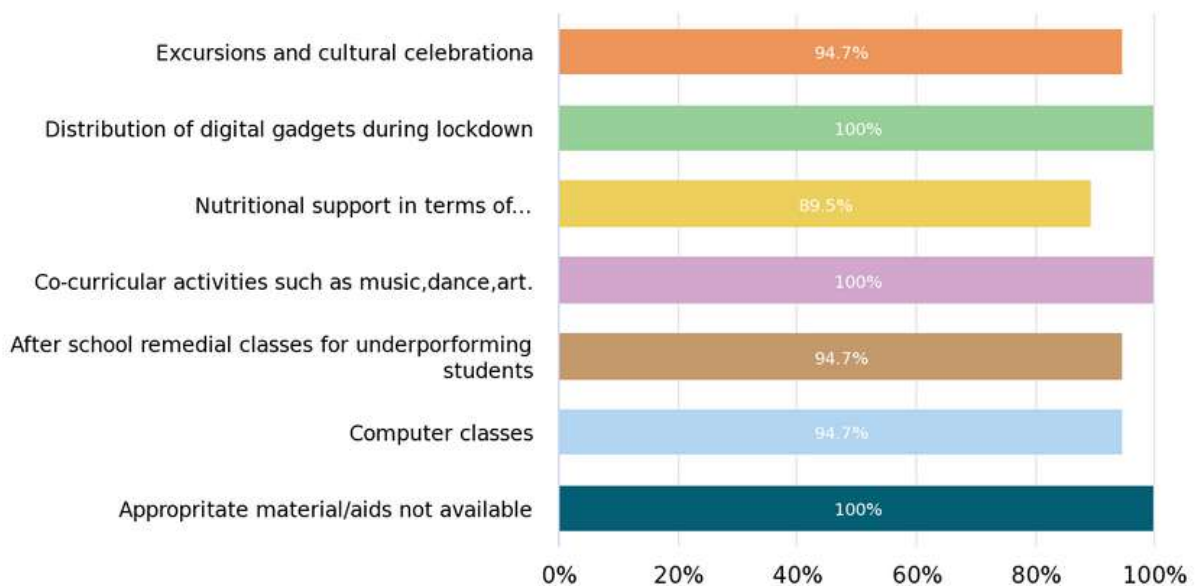**-Ms. Sangeeta Gupta, Parents of Mr. Aman Gupta.**

6.2 Awareness of the Support Provided by Aseema

**Percentage of parents reported about types of support is provided to the school and to the students directly**

Provision of teachers & counsellors	36.8%
Furniture	89.5%
Expenses for uniform, shoes, bags	100%
Expenses for educational materials	100%
School operating expenses	100%
Teachers and other staff salaries	89.5%

Percentage of parents reported about the types of support provided to the students directly

Excursions and cultural celebrationa	94.7%
Distribution of digital gadgets during lockdown	100%
Nutritional support in terms of...	89.5%
Co-curricular activities such as music,dance,art.	100%
After school remedial classes for underperforming students	94.7%
Computer classes	94.7%
Appropritate material/aids not available	100%

The data collected on parents' awareness of the support provided by Aseema indicates that, overall, parents are aware and hold a high opinion of the organization's activities in the community. All parents who participated in the study are well-informed of the support that Aseema provides for school operating expenses, such as educational materials, uniforms, shoes, and bags. Moreover, 89.5% of them are aware of the support Aseema provides for furniture, teachers' salaries, and other staff salaries. Additionally, 36.8% of the parents are aware of Aseema's contribution to the provision of teachers and counselors.

6.3 Academic Support Provided by Aseema during the Pandemic

Percentage of parents reported about types of learning material provided in school
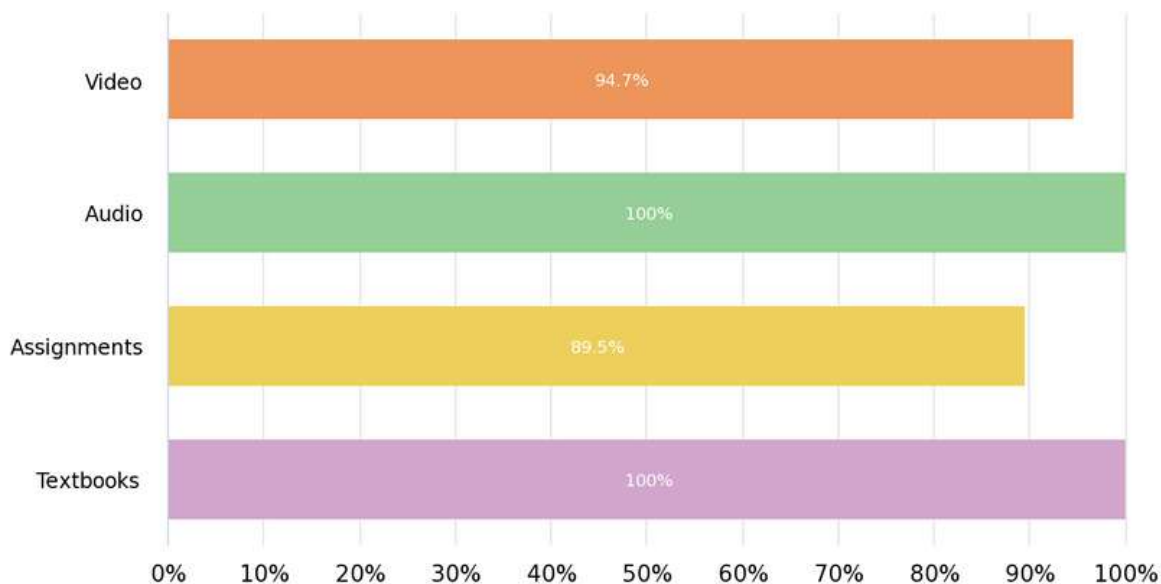
In terms of the academic support provided by Aseema during the pandemic, it was observed that all parents (100%) reported that Aseema supported their children to continue their studies during the lockdown. Similarly, all parents (100%) said that Aseema provided textbooks for their children in school. Additionally, 94.7% of the parents were aware that the learning materials provided by Aseema included videos, audio, and assignments.

> Regarding community engagement during the pandemic, Mrs. Mamta Saroj (Mother of Piyush Saroj, Class 9th KMPS) recollects the role of Aseema and HDFC Credila's support,
>
> She mentioned that they are a family of 4 members. She is a housewife and her husband is the sole bread earner in the family. Naturally, it is very difficult for him to manage all the household expenses like house rent, ration, health, and education of children. But with the education program of Aseema Trust, supported by HDFC Credila, their children are getting a quality education that too free of cost along with all other facilities like uniforms, books, bags, etc. And their family was also provided with ration kits during the lockdown by Aseema Trust. She also informed the team that she is an SMC member and is involved in regular meetings and interactions with the teachers. Further, she said that this is a great initiative taken up by HDFC Credila, and it would be really helpful for them if such programs could be extended to higher education as well.
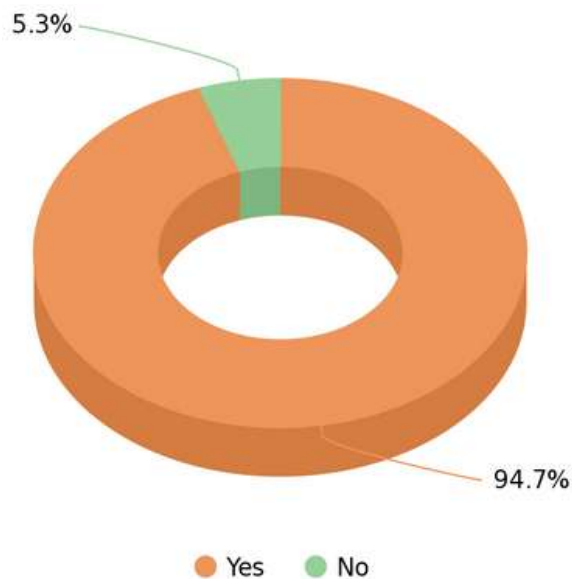>
> **Mrs. Mamta Saroj (Mother of Piyush Saroj, Class 9th KMPS)**

## Whether a smartphone or any other digital gadget was provided to their child to attend online lessons.

10.5%

89.5%

● Yes ● No
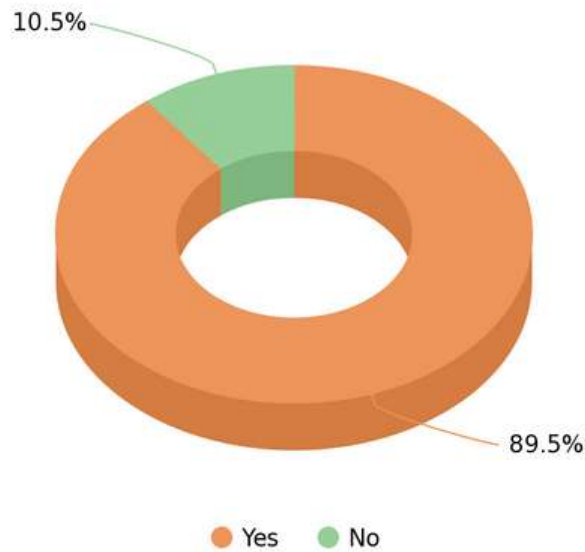
Percentage of parents reported whether their child got support to recharge the data packs

5.3%

94.7%

● Yes ● No

Furthermore, it was noted that 89.5% of parents reported that their children were provided with a smartphone or digital gadget to attend online lessons. This was an important aspect of ensuring continued learning and decreasing the digital divide, especially during the pandemic. Moreover, it was observed that children not only received digital gadgets but also received support with the recharge of their data packs. 94.7% of parents agreed that this support was provided

Whether the parents and their child were trained on using WhatsApp/Google Meet/any other platform for attending online lessons

100.0%

● Yes
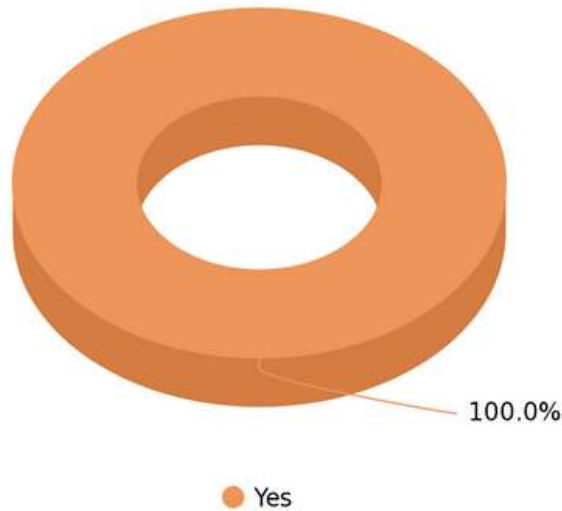
The study further shows that 100% of the parents agreed to the fact that their children got trained to use WhatsApp/ Google Meet/ any other platform for attending online lessons. They agreed that during the pandemic, their children got daily assignments from the school and they were also able to submit the assignments on time.

Difficulties faced during learning

Percentage of parents reported whether their ward faced any difficulties in learning

31.6%

68.4%

● Yes ● No
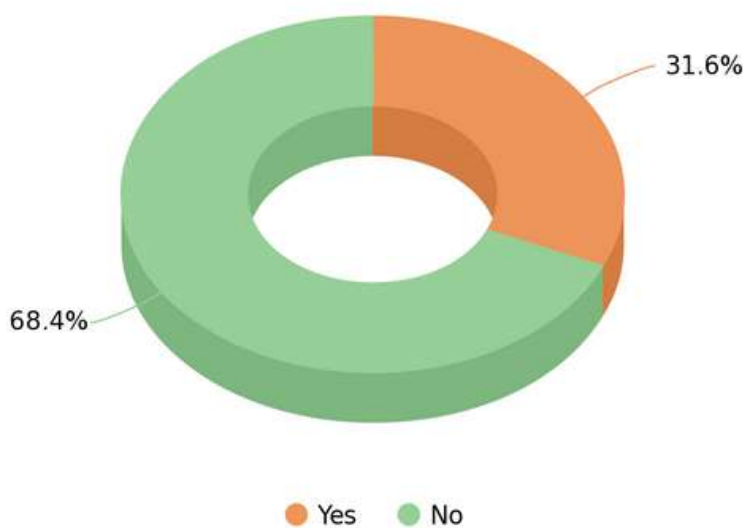
The following graph shows that 68.4% of the parents reported that their children did not face any difficulties with learning during COVID. However, 31.6% of the parents do agree that their children faced difficulties with their learning.

Guidance from the teachers to prepare the students for board exams

Percentage of parents reported whether their ward received guidance from the teacher to prepare for their board exams

52.6% No
47.4% Yes

● Yes   ● No
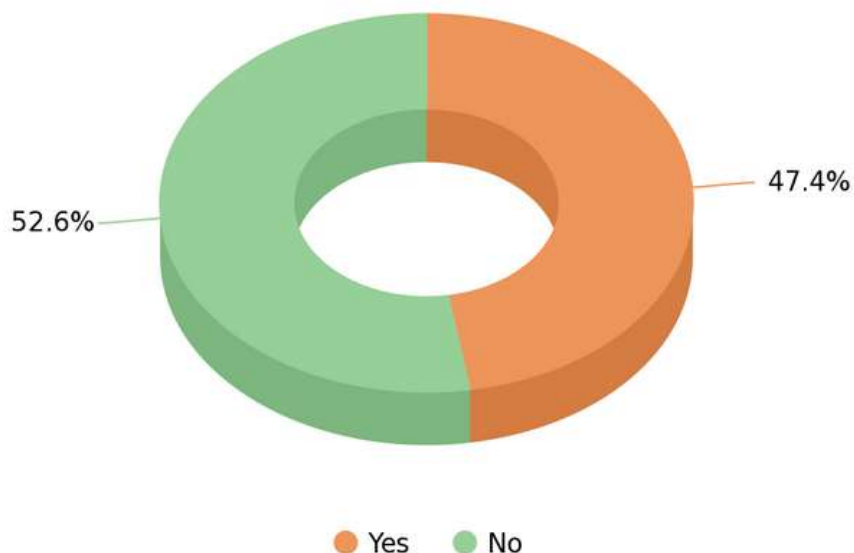
52.6% of the parents reported that their children had received guidance from the teachers to prepare for board exams during the pandemic. However, 47.4% of them said, their children didn't receive any form of guidance from the teachers.

6.4 Community Engagement during the Pandemic

The CWC team, led by Ms. Dhakuj, is a group of trained social workers that support schools by working with parents and communities to improve student attendance and provide various services such as nutritious meals, health interventions, and visits to homes and communities. During the pandemic, they acted as counselors, academic advisors, and friends, supporting students and families by raising awareness about COVID-19, distributing ration and hygiene kits, and providing digital devices and training for online learning. The team worked together with other educational program components, such as the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and learning recovery, to achieve their goals in a challenging period.
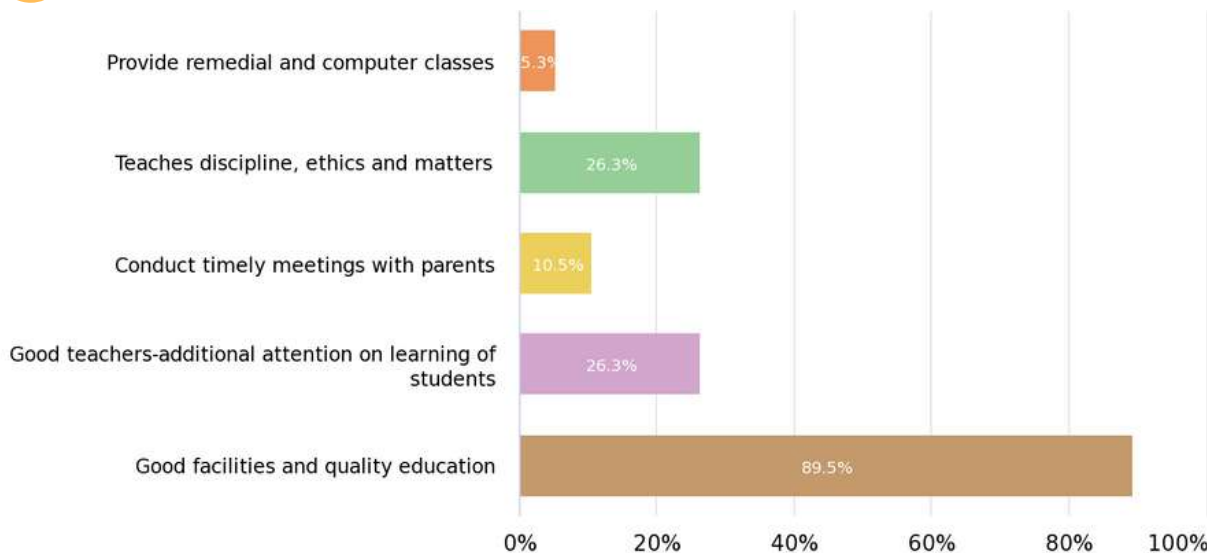
6.5 Perception towards Relevance and Effectiveness of the Program

Opinion of parents on the functioning of Aseema

5.3%

94.7%

● Highly effective ● Somewhat effective
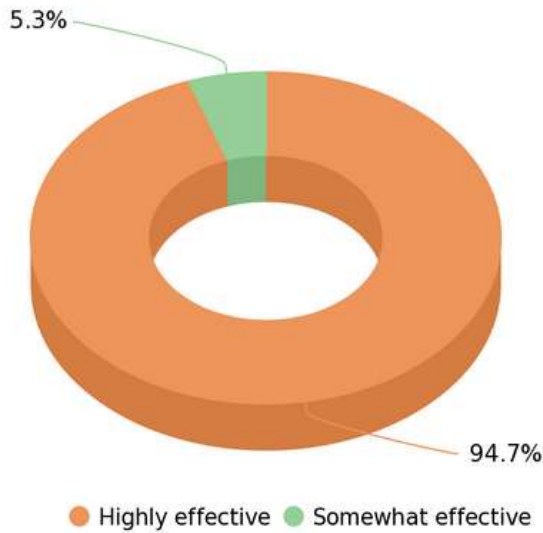
When asked about the relevance and effectiveness of the program, 94.7% of the parents think that the program is highly effective, and 5.3% of the parents think that the program is somewhat effective.

Percentage of parents reported about their good experiences with Aseema

Provide remedial and computer classes — 5.3%

Teaches discipline, ethics and matters — 26.3%

Conduct timely meetings with parents — 10.5%

Good teachers-additional attention on learning of students — 26.3%

Good facilities and quality education — 89.5%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

When it comes to the good experiences of the parents with Aseema, 89.5% of the parents reported the good facilities and quality education Aseema provided, and 26.3% of the parents consider the good teachers and additional attention that is given to the learning of the students. Other 26.3% of the parents think that Aseema teaches discipline, ethics, and manners, and the other 10.5% of the parents are impressed with the timely meetings that are conducted with the parents. Further, 5.3% of the parents also pointed out the remedial classes and computer classes provided by Aseema.

Regarding the effectiveness of the program, Mr. Wasim Qureshi (Father of Misbah Qureshi, Class 9th PCMS) responded as follows,

He mentioned that they are a family of 5 people. He works as an auto driver and his wife works as a domestic help. Hence, both of their jobs demand them to be out of their home for the whole day. Due to this, they are unable to give much time to their children. They find the education program conducted by Aseema Trust to be very helpful. He further says that it would have been difficult for them to afford private tuition for Misbah, but it is already taken care of as the school provides sufficient guidance in clearing doubts. Wasim said, "My son shares everything that he learns at the school and we can make out from his way of talking that he quite enjoys learning at school. He never complains about anything. We trust the teaching process and my son has also scored good grades in his exams."

When Mr. Qureshi was questioned, if he is aware of the organisation that is supporting Aseema Trust for this program, he said, "Yes, I know it is HDFC Credila."

-Mr. Wasim Qureshi
(Father of Misbah Qureshi, Class 9th PCMS)

" When asked about the program during the discussion with SoulAce's research team, Ms. Sanjeevni Santosh Mandavkar (Mother of Laksh Mandavkar, Class 8th PCMS) said that she has enrolled both of her children in the PCMS school. One in 8th grade and the other in the 3rd grade. She shared that she has seen positive growth in them over the years like improvement in their marks in exams, confidence level, and fluency in speaking English.

-Sanjeevni Santosh Mandavkar
(Mother of Laksh Mandavkar, Class 8th PCMS)

CHAPTER 7: MAJOR FINDINGS AND IMPACT OF THE STUDY

The research study set out to assess the immediate and long-term impacts of the holistic educational program supported by HDFC Credila and implemented by Aseema Charitable Trust, which serves the needs of the marginalized children living in the slums of Mumbai. Since the year of assessment was 2020-21, the study used the lens of the pandemic to understand how the program goals were recalibrated, the program design was remodeled, systems and processes were streamlined, challenges encountered and their subsequent mitigation, and the outcomes generated against the redefined objectives.

This chapter summarizes the major findings of the study and uses an internationally accepted, standardized framework for evaluating the impact of the intervention along the dimensions of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

7.1 Major Findings

Curriculum and Planning:

- The curriculum was redesigned to be transacted remotely and an updated teaching manual was provided to the teachers
- The curriculum manual contained an overview of the learning objectives and skills, lesson plans and activities, remediation and enrichment materials, and strategies for assessing students' learning
- The team adopted a collaborative, multi-step process of curating, reviewing, and transacting the curriculum as listed below:
  - Mapping the Learning Outcomes consisted of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that individual students would demonstrate upon completion of a learning experience.
  - Creating the Year plan with the month-wise bifurcation of the syllabus to be covered over a period of an academic year.
  - Preparing Templates for year plans, lesson plans, worksheets, activity sheets, and other resources that are part of the curriculum.
  - Preparing the Day Plan of activities and methodologies to be implemented in the online class by the teacher, in one teaching period.

- Creating digital teaching aids such as curating videos, PPTs, audio clips, web-based interactive models, and simulations.
- Creating digitized practice sheets to gauge students' previous knowledge, develop skills, practice concepts, engage students in the teaching-learning process, and assess their understanding.
- Updating the Learning Tracker to keep track of progress, identify areas of deficiency, and inform instruction.
- All curricular materials were thoroughly reviewed for quality by the Curriculum team, the Education Director, as well as external experts.

Teacher Professional Development:

The pandemic significantly impacted the education sector, forcing institutions to re-evaluate their teaching methods and strategies. In response, the Aseema team designed a comprehensive plan to reshape its teacher education to realize its goals and objectives.

- Teachers were provided with a revised curriculum handbook for online delivery
- Teachers were trained on creating and using digitized worksheets and assignments, and managing the classroom and resources using Google Classroom
- Teachers also learnt to conduct formative assessment of student learning through Google Forms and tests. To track student progress, the intervention created a Learning Outcome tracker.
- The Aseema team established a support system for its teachers, consisting of a professional learning community and peer groups. This system provided a platform for teachers to collaborate, exchange ideas, and share best practices.
- In order to ensure the success of the program, a team of dedicated coordinators, counselors, and trainers worked together to implement the various strategies, along with an intensive monitoring and evaluation system for tracking progress.
- The professional development program aimed to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to the changing educational landscape, ensuring that students continued to receive quality education during the pandemic.

Digital Literacy:

The initial barrier of access was addressed by the distribution of digital devices and the recharging of data packs. Both teachers and students were given short but intensive training in digital literacy to help them build a portfolio of skills that eventually enabled them to continue education in the distant mode.

Transacting the Remedial and Bridge Courses:

- The bridge course was designed for learning recovery by stripping the grade-level curriculum to core skills and concepts.
- Whole class teaching and ability-based grouping were both employed to teach the bridge course.
- A flipped learning model was adopted for the bridge course which proved to be an efficient pedagogical approach as it promoted independent learning among the students and allowed the teachers to extend individualized guidance during the live sessions.
- Students who faced greater challenges in achieving the learning outcomes in the bridge course were included in special study groups wherein the teachers resolved their doubts and misconceptions, individually.
- Students were divided into ability-based groups to provide targeted support using a compressed remediation curriculum that addressed foundational literacy and numeracy skills.
- Diverse digital platforms and apps were used to curate an interesting as well as effective learning experience for the learners in both courses.
- Google Classroom was extensively used as a learning management tool to streamline sharing of assignments and other curricular materials, and also to provide instructions and feedback.
- Digitized and printed worksheets were given to students for intensive practice of learned concepts and skills.
- Students were given formative as well as summative assessments via Google Forms and WhatsApp to keep a track of their progress and to fine-tune the instructional design to address gaps.
- A dedicated **Learning Outcomes Tracker** was used to meticulously record the performance of each student and track it over time.
- High school students were provided personalized attention and study timetables under a mentorship program. To maximize the impact, 10 students were assigned to one teacher for a comprehensive analysis of their issues and to mentor them for their board examinations.

Cocurricular Education:

The team crafted a focused curriculum for online delivery with the goal to generate awareness about COVID-19 along with helping children to be physically and emotionally fit through regular exercises, craft activities, meditation exercises, and motivational videos.

Socio-emotional Wellbeing:

Teachers, counselors, and social workers worked in tandem to reach out to each and every child and their families to motivate them to continue learning, provide assistance with nutrition and health issues, deal with illnesses and loss, help them cope with fear, anxiety, and loneliness, resolve conflicts at home, and provide children a platform to share and vent out their feelings.

Community Engagement:

The Aseema team operated through its Community Work Centre (CWC) to engage extensively with the parents, CBOs, and the community at large:

- The CWC team comprises trained social workers and counselors.
- Each school is assigned a team of CWC workers based on the strength of the school, who work with the teachers.
- The CWC Head reports to the School Head, to help them boost student attendance and form a conduit for interaction with parents, visits to communities and homes, providing a nutritious meal for the students and staff, and intervening in case of health issues.
- The CWC team took on the mantle of not only being wellness coaches and therapists for the students and their families but also extending their support as academic advisors, conflict mediators, and often, just as friends.
- The CWC team worked relentlessly to raise awareness about COVID-19 and the associated preventive measures, coordinated the distribution of ration and hygiene kits, aided students in toggling between online and offline learning due to shifting mandates from the government, and helped children and their families to cope with the uncertainties of that period.
- Students, teachers, as well as parents are deeply appreciative of the continuous support provided by Aseema, especially during the pandemic.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Access to digital devices, the internet, and digital literacy in the initial months proved to be a major stumbling block.

- Students' attendance and engagement (measured by the submission of assignments daily) were a challenge in the initial months.

- Once devices were distributed and both students and teachers were trained to work remotely, most of them were able to be productive and both attendance and engagement improved.

- Individual capacity to cope with and transform to the tumult of the situation varied, hence a few teachers and students found it difficult to attain fluency with digital tools and adapt to a remote learning environment. However, the proportion of these students and teachers was relatively small.

- A proportion of students struggled with learning remotely owing to factors such as a non-conducive home environment, lack of parental interest or support, engagement with sibling care and households chores, lack of motivation in the absence of a regular classroom set-up, socio-emotional issues stemming from anxiety, fear, loneliness, illnesses and loss, financial crisis, and food insecurity.

- A few teachers struggled with finding and curating differentiated content, attendance, and engagement of students, conducting activity-based lessons, and assessing student learning.

OECD FRAMEWORK

RELEVANCE

RATING ● ● ● ● ○

The program addressed a real and deep educational, economic, health, and socio-emotional crisis faced by the children and their families in the identified regions of Mumbai during the pandemic. It is highly relevant because it endeavored to provide continued education to the children with measurable learning outcomes and to support the entire community by generating COVID-19-related awareness and extensive outreach and counseling through its Community Work Centre.

COHERENCE

RATING ● ● ● ● ○
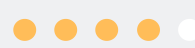
The program aligns well with the following Sustainable Development Goals and national agendas:

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and the national thrust on quality of teaching for systemic reform as reflected in the NEP 2020.

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all age groups and the national agenda for promoting school-based preventive healthcare programs. Thus, it is high on coherence

EFFECTIVENESS

RATING ● ● ● ● ○

The effectiveness of the program was assessed along the following dimensions:

- **Transaction of the Holistic Curriculum Remotely:** The primary objectives of learning continuity and learning recovery were met reasonably well as indicated by the quantitative and qualitative findings. All aspects of students' development, namely, physical fitness, creative growth, and socio-emotional wellness, were prioritized and the curriculum was modified to create a balance between these aspects. Teachers, counselors, and social workers also worked meticulously to reach out to each child and their parents to counsel and resolve multiple crises faced by them.

Index : 5 Points - Very High ; 4 Points - High ; 3 Points - Moderate ; 2 Points - Low ; 1 Point - Very Low

- **Teacher Professional Development & Support:** The program was able to equip their teachers in terms of digital literacy and online delivery of the remedial classes, bridge course, and cocurricular activities in a relatively short period of time as reflected by the qualitative findings that indicate a positive perception and application of learning by the teachers.

- **Community Engagement:** The program was able to engage extensively with the community through its Community Work Centre at a time when people across the nation were physically isolated. In this way, it was able to meet its objectives of generating awareness, providing food security, and addressing socio-emotional issues at home.

Thus, the program is high on effectiveness.

EFFICIENCY   RATING ● ● ● ○

The overall planning, execution, and management of the program and utilization of material and human resources were reasonably good given the tumult caused by the lockdown, but the evolving context of the pandemic laid its own demands and impacted efficiency to some extent. Thus, the program is medium-high on efficiency.

IMPACT   RATING ● ● ● ○

The program has had a significant impact in terms of enabling students to continue learning. However, the more enduring impacts are reflected in the acceptance of and fluency gained with a novel and alternative method of learning, and the resilience inculcated among all stakeholders to creatively respond to an unprecedented crisis through close collaboration.

SUSTAINABILITY   RATING ● ● ● ○

The program has adopted three municipal schools to impart holistic educational opportunities to children hailing from the nearby slums. It leveraged a public institution to establish proof points of the efficacy of the model and to inform influential players in the system. Further, it has established deep ties with the community to instill a sense of ownership. Both factors contribute greatly to its sustainability. However, the program has reached a stage where the design needs to be further refined with the intent to replicate and scale. This would mean bringing a larger number of municipal schools into its ambit, testing and fine-tuning the model, and working towards a large-scale adoption by the public education system.

Index : 5 Points - Very High ; 4 Points - High ; 3 Points - Moderate ; 2 Points - Low ; 1 Point - Very Low

CONCLUSION

Despite the numerous challenges thrown by the pandemic, the holistic educational program being implemented by Aseema Charitable Trust has managed to stay relevant and impactful. This was made possible by an efficient and rapid response strategy that involved recalibration of the program goals, remodeling of the implementation design, effective adoption of the curriculum for remote learning, capacity-building of teachers, and establishment of a professional learning community to transact the curriculum in an alternative mode while adhering to the core tenets of Aseema's educational philosophy, a comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluation for quality control and troubleshooting, and extensive engagement with the community to address the multiple challenges faced by them in those trying times.

The program has reached a stage where it has a stable and effective design that has stood the tough test of the pandemic. The time is ripe now to extend its outreach and impact by taking it to scale.

THE WAY FORWARD AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to further enhance the impact of the Aseema Charitable Trust's holistic educational program, the following recommendations are proposed:

Integrate Learning with Digital Tools

Digital tools are powerful in teaching and learning because they provide numerous benefits that go beyond the pandemic. First, they can facilitate personalized learning, where teachers can customize instruction based on individual student needs, preferences, and learning styles. This can lead to better student engagement and achievement. Second, digital tools can enhance collaboration and communication among students and teachers, allowing for the seamless sharing of ideas, feedback, and resources. Third, digital tools can promote critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills through interactive simulations, games, and multimedia resources. Fourth, digital tools can provide anytime, anywhere access to learning materials and resources, which is particularly useful for students who may miss school due to illness, travel, or other reasons.

In addition, digital tools can help teachers save time and effort by automating routine tasks, such as grading and assessment, and allowing them to focus on more meaningful and impactful teaching activities. They can also enable teachers to track student progress more effectively and provide timely feedback and support. Furthermore, digital tools can provide access to vast amounts of data and analytics, which can help teachers identify learning gaps, assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, and make data-driven decisions to improve student outcomes. Overall, digital tools have the potential to transform teaching and learning in many positive ways, even in a post-pandemic world.

- Provide regular training sessions for teachers on new digital tools, applications, and teaching strategies that can help them integrate technology effectively in their classrooms.
- Encourage teachers to create and share online resources such as digital worksheets, videos, and assessments that can enhance students' learning experience and engagement.

- Educate students on digital safety, privacy, and responsible online behavior, including the appropriate use of social media and online communication tools.
- Provide students with access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity to support their learning, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Use technology to facilitate communication and collaboration among teachers, students, and parents, such as through the use of online learning platforms or social media groups.
- Encourage students to use digital tools and resources to enhance their research skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.
- Regularly assess students' digital literacy skills and provide targeted support to those who need it.

Build a Robust Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Building a professional learning community (PLC) for teachers can enhance the quality of teaching and provide opportunities for professional growth. Here are some recommendations for creating a successful PLC:

- Provide time and space for collaboration: Teachers need time to collaborate and engage in professional discussions to build a sense of community. This can be achieved through regular meetings, workshops, and professional development sessions.
- Establish shared goals and expectations: All members of the PLC should work towards achieving shared goals and expectations. This can include developing a common language for teaching, creating common assessments, and agreeing on instructional practices.
- Encourage peer observation and feedback: Peer observation and feedback can provide valuable insights into teaching practices and help teachers to identify areas for improvement. PLCs can facilitate this process by providing opportunities for teachers to observe and provide feedback to their peers.
- Foster a culture of continuous learning: PLCs should encourage ongoing learning and professional growth. This can include opportunities for professional development, access to research and best practices, and support for innovative teaching approaches.
- Build a resource pool: A resource pool can be created through collaboration between teachers and can include resources such as lesson plans, assessments, and teaching materials. This can save time and effort for teachers while promoting consistent teaching practices across the PLC.

- Utilize technology: Technology can be used to facilitate collaboration, communication, and sharing of resources within the PLC. Online platforms, social media, and learning management systems can provide opportunities for teachers to connect and collaborate outside of regular meetings.

Expand Outreach

While the program has been successful in reaching a significant number of slum children, there are still many more who could benefit from it. Expanding the program's outreach to more slum communities is important at this stage so that more children have access to quality education, regardless of their background. Scaling up the program's impact across multiple slum communities can have a significant positive impact on better job prospects, health outcomes, and overall quality of life for these disadvantaged communities. Replicability and scalability are essential for the long-term sustainability of the program. By replicating the program in other slum communities and scaling it up, it is possible to create a sustainable model that could influence policy-making and continue to impact the lives of slum children and communities for years to come.

- Develop a comprehensive training program for teachers and staff to ensure consistency in implementation across all locations. This should include training on the program's philosophy, goals, and teaching methods, as well as specific training on remote teaching and digital tools.
- Develop partnerships with NGOs, and other stakeholders to increase the program's reach and impact. These partnerships can help with resource mobilization, outreach, and community engagement.
- Identify areas of synergy with government education and health programs at the local, state, and national levels and engage with the government to implement joint initiatives, leveraging the government's resources to enhance the program's impact, or participating in government-led training or capacity-building programs.
- Develop a sustainability plan to ensure the program's long-term viability. This can include exploring different funding models, such as public-private partnerships, grant funding, or corporate sponsorships, and developing a plan for revenue generation.

- Develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to track the program's progress and impact. This can include setting up a data management system, developing performance indicators, and conducting regular assessments.
- Develop a communication strategy to raise awareness about the program and its impact. This can include developing a website, social media presence, and other outreach materials to promote the program and attract potential partners, funders, and volunteers.

Foster Innovation

The pandemic has shown that the program can adapt and innovate in the face of challenges. The program should continue to foster innovation and experimentation in its design and implementation to stay relevant and impactful. Fostering innovation is important because it helps to keep programs, initiatives, and organizations relevant and effective over time. In the context of Aseema's educational program, innovation can lead to the development of new teaching and learning approaches, tools, and technologies that better meet the needs of students and teachers. By fostering innovation, the program can stay ahead of the curve, anticipate future challenges, and respond quickly to changing circumstances.

Innovation also promotes continuous improvement by encouraging experimentation, evaluation, and refinement of program strategies and activities. This can help to identify and address weaknesses and areas for improvement, leading to better outcomes for students and teachers. Additionally, innovation can inspire creativity, collaboration, and engagement among program stakeholders, helping to build a strong culture of learning and improvement.

Overall, fostering innovation is crucial for staying relevant and effective in the ever-changing landscape of education, and for ensuring that the program continues to meet the evolving needs of students, teachers, and communities.

- Create a culture of innovation: Encourage teachers and staff to think outside the box and come up with new and creative ideas to improve the program. Establish regular brainstorming sessions or workshops to facilitate the exchange of ideas and encourage experimentation.

- Build partnerships with technology companies: Partnering with technology companies can help the program stay at the forefront of technological innovations in education. Such partnerships can provide access to new and emerging technologies, as well as the expertise of the technology companies.

- Encourage teacher-led innovation: Provide opportunities for teachers to develop and pilot new ideas within their classrooms. This can be done through small-scale projects or action research, where teachers can test out new approaches and assess their impact on student learning.

- Create a feedback loop: Encourage regular feedback from students, parents, and staff to identify areas for improvement and generate new ideas for innovation. Use this feedback to refine and adapt the program as needed to better meet the needs of students and the community.

By implementing these recommendations, the program can continue to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of the community, while also building a strong foundation for sustainability and scalability.