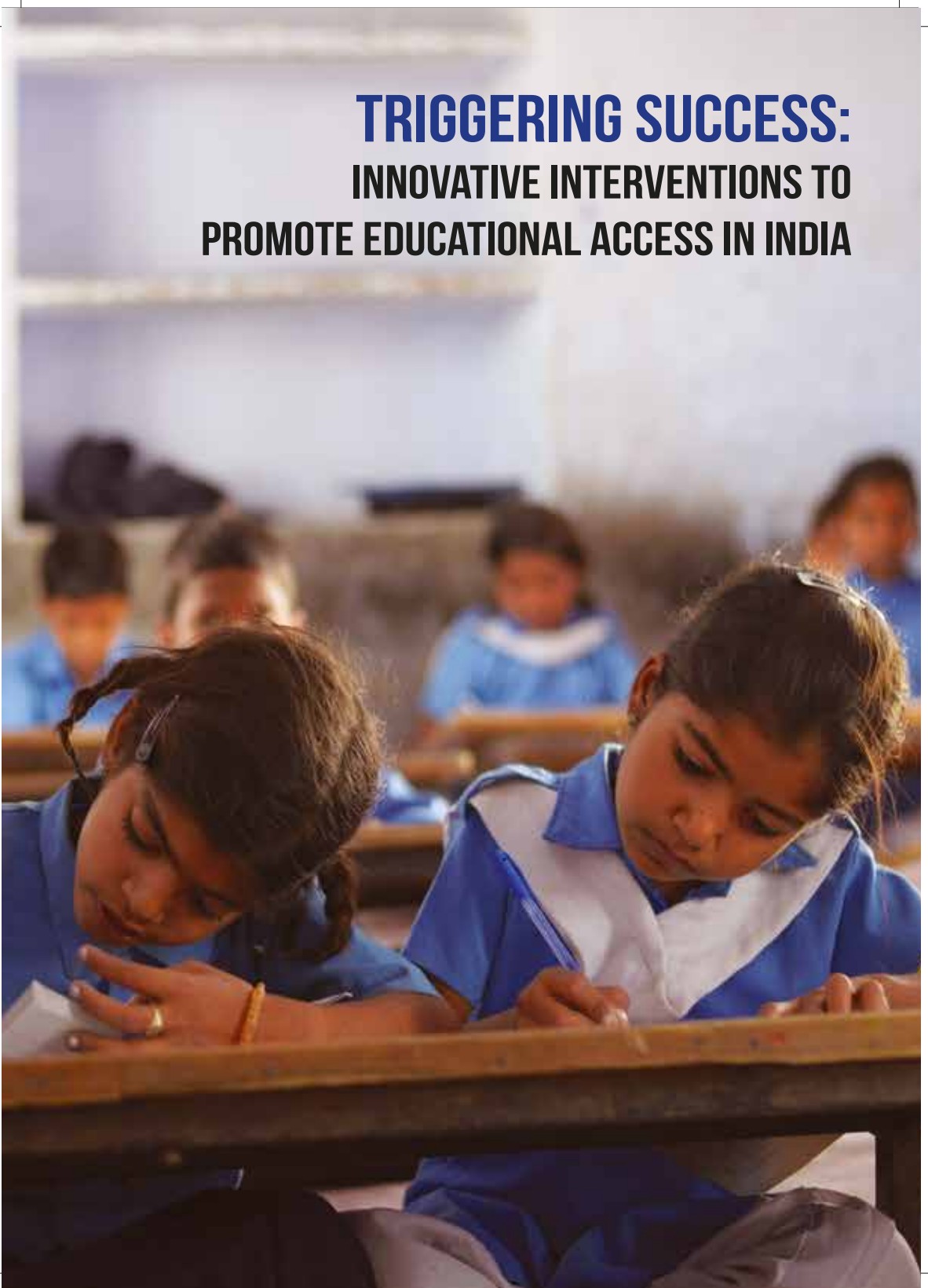


TRIGGERING SUCCESS:
INNOVATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO
PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN INDIA



Cover Picture: Government School Rajasthan 2016
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Triggering Success: Innovative Interventions to Promote Educational Access in India

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This publication is an outcome of a grant from the Tata Trusts to the Harvard University South Asia Institute for a project on 'Livelihood Creation in India through Social Entrepreneurship and Skill Development'. The project explores strategies for strengthening the educational, social and economic empowerment of women.

Authors featured in this publication
reserve all rights to their work

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Preface

Thanks to the generosity and support of the Tata Trusts, the Harvard South Asia Institute, in collaboration with the Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, had the opportunity of convening some of India's most impressive and creative civil society organizations working in the field of girls' education. The convening took the form of a short but intensive workshop outside Mumbai at the end of January 2016. During the course of this meeting, formal presentations on aspects of law, policy and practice concerning education in contemporary India in general and girls' education in particular combined with opportunities for group discussion, networking and case presentation. The result was a rich exchange of views, a learning opportunity for participants, and a decision to highlight for more general dissemination and benefit some of the most original and innovative gender education-related interventions. While some contributions focus on aligning intervention outcomes with development investments to advance a clearly articulated reform agenda, others probe elusive questions about the social factors that impinge on girls' educational success. This publication's modest goal, and hope is that the following pages will provide interesting and instructive reading for a range of audiences. This effort is, part of a broader set of projects distributed nationwide and across public and private sectors aimed at radically improving access to quality education at all stages of the pedagogical process for all India's children and adolescents, an aspiration still a long way in the making.

We welcome feedback from readers and hope to develop further work with our dedicated researcher and practitioner colleagues over the coming months and years.

Jacqueline Bhabha
Professor of the Practice of Human Rights
Harvard University.

Introduction

Education is central to the future development of India's citizenry as active and empowered contributors in building a vibrant and democratic country with social justice and non-discrimination at its core.

Over the past decades, dramatic strides have been witnessed in terms of exponential increase in access to primary education of very large sections of previously excluded populations. However, enduring challenges remain. One relates to ensuring access for the most marginalized and stigmatized groups, including low caste girls, tribal children, children with disabilities and children living in conflict-affected areas. Another challenge relates to improving the quality of learning and the outcomes of the educational system, to ensure access to skill development necessary for productive and well-remunerated employment. Finally, the imperative of reversing pervasive gender-based discrimination continues to generate challenging goals for educational interventions across India.

It is in this context, over an eighteen-month period, that the Harvard South Asia Institute (SAI) explored issues, challenges and solutions connected with the educational empowerment of women in India. The project consisted of field research, capacity strengthening, knowledge dissemination and engagement by Harvard faculty with select organizations across different states. The project reached out to over 45 organizations and worked closely with six of them. Contributions to this volume are primarily based on the work done by four of these organizations. They outline a range of approaches, research studies and policy innovations. Together they paint a rich picture of the toolkit available for future scaling by the central and state governments in India.

The reflections by Alison Bukhari and Safeena Husain from Educate Girls, and Dr. Shantha Sinha, Orla Kelly and Professor Jacqueline Bhabha discussing the Champions Project focus on strategies for incentivizing and scaling success. They explore a range of questions, from the impact of volunteer assistance on increasing the adult to child ratio in schools to multi-factoral drivers of female educational success in challenging contexts. The reflections generate the context for detailed case studies that follow.

The case studies by M V Foundation, White Lotus Trust, Ibtada and Centre for Unlocking Learning Potentials (CULP) focus on innovative strategies introduced

to maximize educational potential, while at the same time exploring the individual narratives that illustrate the broad array of challenges and obstacles that students continue to face. The case studies capture a diverse set of initiatives, from the introduction of targeted means of transport to ensure safety, reliability and affordability in access to education, to the development of alternative forms of educational opportunity that drive significant norm and behavior change in vulnerable communities.

Throughout the different narratives, several themes recur. They include the deep commitment of most parents, particularly mothers, to their children's educational success despite the difficulties they encounter in supporting this practically or financially. They also include the powerful impact of consistent community-based engagement by non-governmental actors as an essential element in building the trust and confidence needed to change traditional gender and child rearing norms. Together these essays and case studies generate useful material for future educational interventions, not only at the primary school level but also at the secondary and tertiary levels, areas that are increasingly vital if entrenched social and economic inequalities are to be challenged.

We wish to acknowledge the efforts of our team that made this publication possible. The guidance from Professor Tarun Khanna, Director, and Meena Hewett, Executive Director, Harvard SAI was valuable. We are very grateful to Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, Faculty Chair of the women's track of the project, for compiling this publication and providing very valuable inputs and insights throughout the course of the project. She was ably assisted by Anisha Gopi who coordinated the field efforts with all grantees, knowledge partners and subject experts. The creative team led by Usha Gawde and Aashika Cunha spared no effort in presenting the content with fine aesthetics. Clare, our copy editor, has done a brilliant job despite tight deadlines. Kundan, Nora, Meghan and Diana from the Harvard SAI Team helped us at every stage of this project. We are obliged to R. Venkataramanan, Executive Trustee, Tata Trusts, and his team for the grant and their consistent cooperation.

We hope that researchers, practitioners, civil society leaders, gender activists, educationists and policy makers will draw some valuable insights from this compilation.

- Dr. Shashank Shah

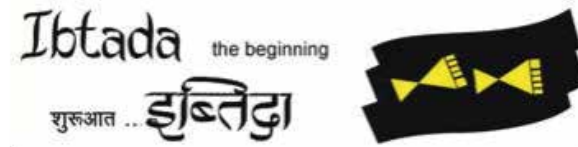
**Project Director, *Livelihood Creation in India*
Harvard University South Asia Institute**



Ibtada

Taleemshala

(An initiative of Ibtada for Girls' Education)



SECTION A

1. Background of the Taleemshala Project

It is difficult to meet the objective of universal primary education without understanding the status of girls' education, especially for those girls from socially, economically and educationally marginalized communities. In the 1990s, most of the girls from these communities had either never enrolled in school or dropped out before completing primary education. The statistics of boys' to girls' enrolment in the year 1995-96 reveals that compared to 2,284,362 boys, only 1,329,375 girls were enrolled in primary classes in Rajasthan - a gap of 42% in enrolment rate between boys and girls.⁷² There are many reasons attributed to this: poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, social customs and taboos. Apart from these, there were systemic failures. The government system neither creates a situation of dialogue with the community, nor could it establish its credibility among the people. The poor status of primary education in the late 1990s was mainly due to irregularity and irresponsibility of teachers, adverse teacher-student ratios, lack of an enabling environment in schools, stereotyped pedagogy and curricula, use of traditional teaching and learning methods, unhealthy relationships between teachers and students and teachers and

⁷² Government of Rajasthan. (1996). Statistical Abstract of Rajasthan, , p. 65.

communities. All of these factors together helped the community to construct its particular viewpoint about education. It is difficult to impart primary education to deprived girls without establishing a dialogue with the parents and community and improving the teaching and learning methods. Against this backdrop, Ibtada started its alternative schools to promote girls' education.

1.1 Ibtada's Understanding of Education

Quality of primary and high school education is a common concern in present-day development forums. Everyone defines it differently. When it comes to reaching the unreached, the question of quality has been left untouched. Ibtada felt that questions of both quantity and quality are worth addressing with a balance. It started its intervention in the field of education in the year 2000 with no prior experience. However, Ibtada had some experience of working with communities through its savings and credit-based women's institutions. As an organization, Ibtada is premised on the assumption that 'Education Empowers'. It is a proven fact that education is the strongest tool to fight exploitation. It liberates and equips us with an understanding of the world, develops sensitivity in our attitude and thinking, makes us skilful in expressing ourselves and enables us to create our own space in the existing society and world. As far as the teaching and learning process is concerned, we believe that it should be relevant to the culture and society. School should be a place of joy for every child, where she can feel safe and secure, and can spend time with pleasure. It is a better learning strategy if we start from our own understanding of the child instead of a given syllabus. Learning by doing is the first basic step of learning abstract concepts. Although Ibtada is in the process of defining the criteria of quality education, it seems clear that standards of education imparted in larger systems are not representative of a quality education.

1.2 The Beginning of the Intervention

Ibtada started as a small initiative of Taleemshalas (girls' learning centers for primary education) in the Umren block of the Alwar district in Mewat region in May 2000 with financial support of Action Aid India. Digantar, a renowned educational institute based at Jaipur, extended technical support. Since its inception, Taleemshala initiatives focused on the most disadvantaged groups of

of society, girls of Meo Muslim⁷³ and other marginalized communities. Providing education for girls in Mewat is considered difficult for sociocultural reasons. In the first instance, it may be said that no community will appreciate innovative education, where children have no textbooks to carry home, where there is no beating or punishment of students, and where children have friendly relations with teachers rather than being afraid of them. It takes a lot of time and energy to educate parents and the entire community about the new ways of teaching and learning. This is particularly true in relation to first-generation learners.

Ibtada's seven Taleemshalas were started in villages where it had its base through women's self-help groups (SHGs). Ibtada had done intensive work with the poor and deprived rural women through these self-help groups. Because of this work, it was easy to discuss the idea of girls' education. A series of interactions were conducted with the women and other community members, and seven centers were started in five villages. Each teacher worked with one group of 25-30 students. Classes were held for four hours and timings were set after consultations with the community. There was no standard or class system, nor was there an examination system. The students were provided with the freedom to learn at their own pace. Although it is widely advocated that every child ought to be given freedom to learn at her own pace, this is truer in the case of marginalized girls who do not have the freedom to attend school regularly. Therefore, each student is at her own stage of learning. Students have to learn 'arambhi kshamtayen' (start-up capabilities), and then keep working on textbooks. Teaching and learning materials (TLM) developed by Digantar were used. The girls had to work on 5th-standard government schoolbooks in order to pass primary school education as per the government system.

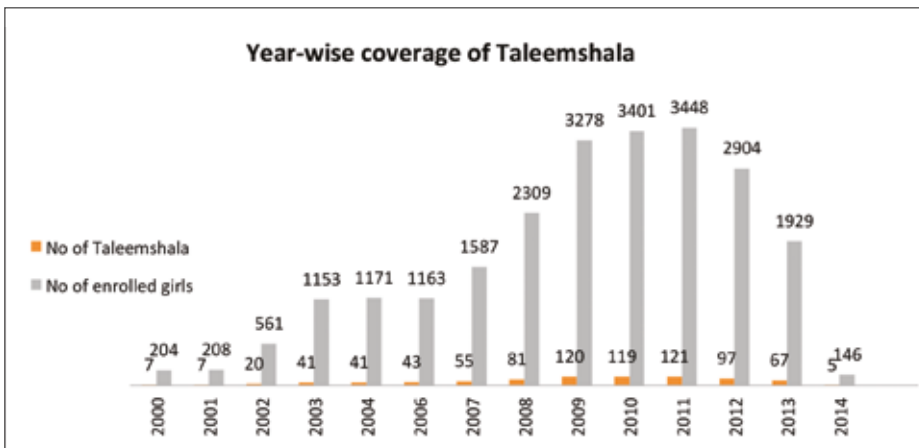
⁷³ The Meo Muslims share a common ancestry with Hindus, and identify closely with them in several social and cultural customs. History suggests that the majority of them embraced Islam during the Tughlaq dynasty and the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.



A typical classroom learning



Donor visiting Taleemshala Chandoli village



In 2002, 13 more Taleemshalas were opened with the support from Aide-et-Action in Ramgarh block. In 2003, IIMPACT supported Ibtada to open 21 more Taleemshalas in Ramgarh and Umren blocks. In 2006-07, Taleemshala made its inroad in Tijara block where 25 Taleemshalas were established. IIMPACT started its second phase with 20 more schools. This time, 20 Taleemshalas were set up in a new block, Kishangarh Bas. The third phase of IIMPACT started in the year 2009, with 30 new Taleemshalas (20 new Taleemshalas were set up in Kishangarh Bas and 10 Taleemshalas in Ramgarh). By the end of 2009, Ibtada was operating 120 Taleemshalas in four blocks of Alwar district.

Average attendance in these centers is more than 75%. Girls who are absent have been kept home for work or have gone to relatives. Teachers of the schools kept in regular contact with the parents and repeatedly reached out to the parents of girls who were frequently absent. These intensive efforts ensured that girls who would never see the classroom are now attending an institution which imparts child-centered, quality education.

Apart from the fact that these girls are getting high-quality education, many more changes are observed in their behavior. These include sensitivity to each other's caste and peer support. Girls are also less hesitant and their expressive ability has improved. They have developed a spirit of cooperation and they help each other to learn. Cleanliness among school-attending girls has improved and there is improvement in their spoken language. Girls have also developed an affinity towards school and education and do not like to miss school, even if

their parents insist that they work at home.

Apart from these impacts, the girls are learning various capabilities. To learn to read and write is one part of Ibtada's program. In addition, these girls are also learning poems, story-making, storytelling, songs, acting, drama and handicrafts. They are getting trained to think logically. These girls are developing the capacity to learn on their own, whereby they can keep learning throughout their life.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act, also known as RTE, was enacted on 4 August 2009 by the Indian Parliament and came into effect from 1 April 2010. After this, Ibtada decided to gradually phase out these Taleemshalas by 2014.

2. Profile of the Area



The main operation area of Ibtada is Alwar district of Rajasthan. The district is spread across 8,380 sq km. It is bound on the north by Rewari district of Haryana, on the east by Bharatpur and Mewat district of Haryana, on the south by Dausa and on the west by Jaipur district. The district is divided into 14 administrative blocks.

Ibtada started its Taleemshalas in 2000 with seven centers in five villages of Umran block. Year after year, it has made additions to the number of Taleemshalas and expanded geographically. By 2007, Ibtada started Taleemshalas in four blocks, namely Umren, Ramgarh, Tijara and Kishangarh Bas. All of these blocks fall under the educationally backward blocks of the Alwar district.

The district falls within the Mewat region of Rajasthan, which is inhabited by the Meo Muslim community. The Meos are one of the well-known communities of the Mewat region. Mewat is the geographical name given to a region that covers parts of Haryana and Rajasthan with very small pockets in Uttar Pradesh. The community speaks Mewati, which is a Rajasthani dialect influenced by Brij Bhasha (a western Indian Hindi language closely related to Hindustani). Once a warrior tribe, the Meos are now marginal farmers, with nominal landholdings cultivating onions, wheat and mustard.

Meos are believed to have been converted to Islam in the 14th century and trace their ancestry to Rajputs or Yaduvanshis. Even after their conversion, they remained proud of their ancestry and maintained strong links with their Hindu background. Until a few decades ago, they used to be Musalmans in name only and their village deities were the same as those of Hindu cultivators. They also observed several Hindu festivals. The Meo and non-Meo relationship is an excellent example of Hindu-Muslim harmony. However, this has been weakening over the last three to four decades.

The Mewaties were considered a warrior class and were notorious for their turbulence and predatory habits. They were a constant source of trouble to the rulers of Delhi. In the revolt of 1857 against the British, the Mewaties actively supported the last Moghul emperor, and when the revolt failed, the area was severely neglected. Years of social alienation and economic deprivation have had a negative impact on education, leading to an abysmally low literacy rate among Meo Muslims.

A mismatch between traditional cultural and religious beliefs and the 'modern' formal school education system has driven up the non-enrolment rate, especially of girls, among Meo Muslims. According to official estimates, the proportion of Meo Muslim girls in school is less than 1% in the Mewat region.⁷⁴ The influential local clergy or Maulanas advocated deeni taleem, the study of

⁷⁴ Mewat Shiksha Panchayat (It Takes a Village to Educate a Child), p. 7, authored by Ms. Ananthapriya Subramaniam, a Child Rights Good Practices Documentation, is a series prepared and published by Child Rights Focus, a knowledge initiative of ActionAid.

religion, as the only form of education that was permissible for girls. Duniya-ki taleem (modern education) was considered antithetical to Islam. The educational character of formal schools - especially the use of Hindi as the medium of learning, singing and dancing, and the pictorial representation of characters and events - was perceived as un-Islamic or even anti-Islamic. Parents complied with the clergy's diktats. The non-availability or poor availability of schools and teachers, and sheer absence of all-girls' schools and female teachers, further exacerbated the state of educational deprivation among the Meo Muslims.

SECTION B

3. Objectives of the Study

- i. Understand the impact of Taleemshalas on girls' continuity of education and on their lives
- ii. Understand the impact of Taleemshalas to change parents' perspectives and their efforts in furtherance of girls' education
- iii. Document success stories of girls who are first-generation learners

4. Methodology

Between 2010 and 2014, 1,926 girls have passed grade 5 from Taleemshalas. A survey of all of these girls was done to find out their present status of continued education. Ibtada could finally gather data for 1,883 girls.

Ibtada was running 121 Taleemshalas in 91 villages. These Taleemshalas were operational in 45 gram panchayat of four blocks. A sample survey and interview of 325 girls out of 1,883 pass out girls (17.2%) from Taleemshalas was done through stratified random sampling. At least one village (having the maximum number of pass out girls) from each gram panchayat was covered, in which a maximum of six girls from each selected village were surveyed. Similarly, 167 parents were also surveyed and interviewed. The girls and parents were selected randomly from the prepared list.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule was carried out in all the sample villages. In total, 45 FGDs with girls and parents were carried out.

For case studies, 10 girls were selected based on the following criteria:

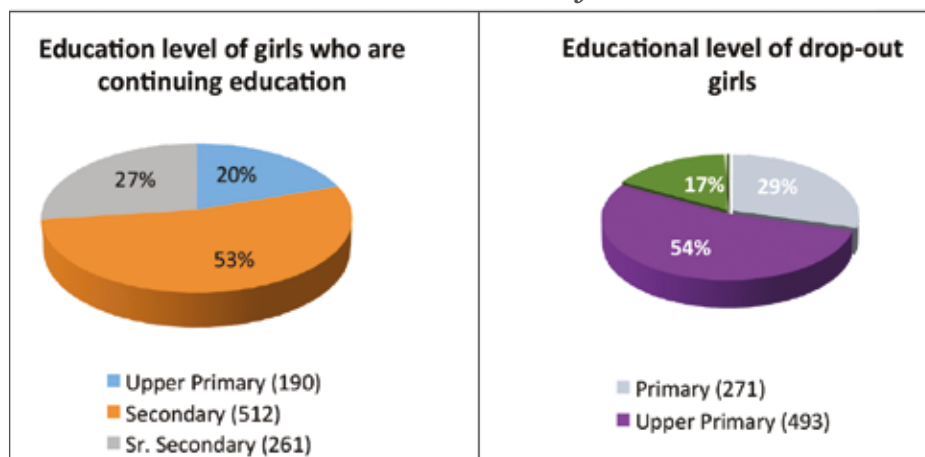
- Girls who have passed out since 2004
- Girls pursuing education above senior secondary level and who have high aspirations
- Girls who have joined a profession such as government or a private job
- Girls who got married after completing education and influenced their in-laws' family about the importance of education

SECTION C

5. Analysis and Findings

5.1 Findings of the Survey of Girls Passed Out in 2010 to 2014

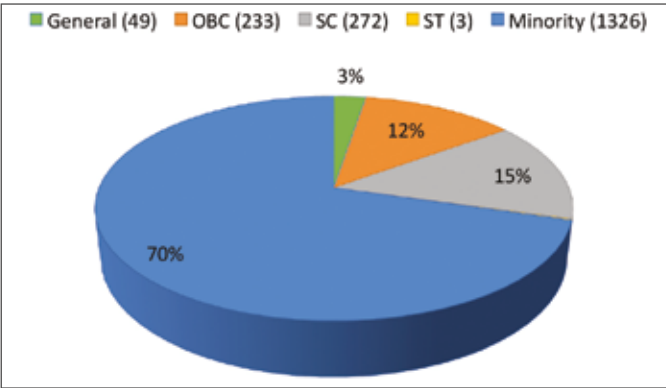
5.1.1 Present Educational Status of Passed Out Girls



The present educational status of girls who have passed out from Taleemshalas reveals that 51% of girls (963 girls out of 1,883 girls surveyed) are continuing education at a different level. The majority of them are pursuing secondary education (53%). Of those who are studying, about 27% are studying at senior secondary level. Out of 1,883 girls surveyed, 14.4% of girls did not continue education after passing out from Taleemshalas. 649 girls discontinued

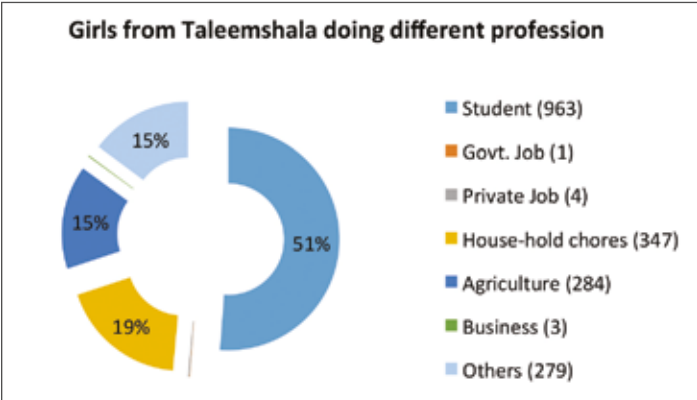
education at various stages. Out of these 649 students, 493 girls (76%) obtained education to upper primary grades. Out of 649, 24% of girls dropped out after completing secondary education.

5.1.2 Caste-wise Reach of Taleemshalas



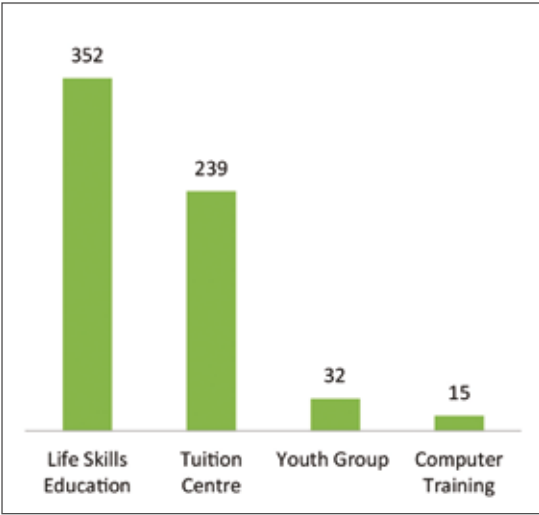
The above graph presents the caste-wise reach of girls in Taleemshala interventions. It is quite evident that more than two-thirds of girls belong to the most educationally marginalized group, i.e. Meo Muslim. Apart from this, 14% of girls belong to a scheduled caste category and 12% of girls represent other backward castes. Overall, 97% of the girls studied are from marginalized sections of society.

5.1.3 Professions of Girls Passed Out of Taleemshalas



At the professional level, it is interesting to note that 51% of girls who have passed out between 2010 and 2014 continue to pursue education at different levels. 15% of girls are involved in agricultural work and 20% are taking responsibility for household chores.

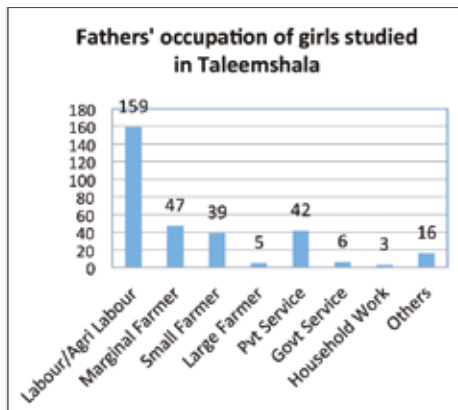
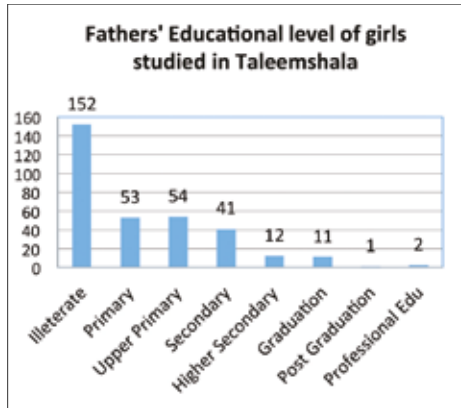
5.1.4 Taleemshala Girls Associated with Other Programs of Ibtada



Ibtada endeavors to provide various opportunities to girls such as life skills education, computer training, and supplementary education through tuition centers and youth groups. These endeavors have significantly helped girls to develop various skills beyond formal education. Out of 1,883 girls who have passed out in the period between 2010 and 2014, 497 (26%) girls were associated with other programs of Ibtada as mentioned above. Out of 497 girls, 352 (71%) girls were associated with Ibtada’s life skills program and 239 (48%) girls were associated with supplementary education programs.

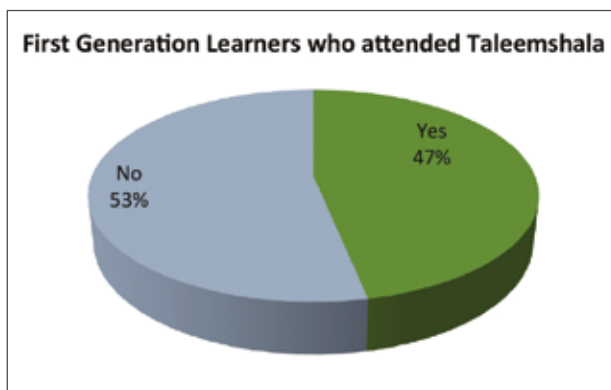
5.2 Findings of Girls' Interviews

5.2.1 Educational and Occupational Background of Family



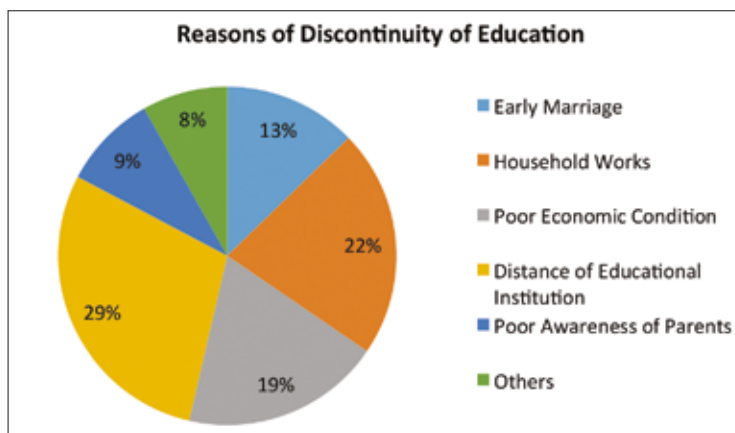
From the above graph, it is quite evident that the social, educational and economic background of the majority of the girls studied in Taleemshalas is poor. The heads of the families of half of the girls interviewed are illiterate and depend on unskilled labor for their livelihoods. The fathers of 26 girls (out of 325 girls interviewed) have an education above secondary level, while the fathers of 47 girls are marginal farmers. The fathers of 39 girls are small farmers and those of 42 girls are dependent on private jobs.

5.2.2 First-generation Learners from Taleemshala



It is interesting to note that 47% of girls (152 out of 325) are first-generation learners. Among these, 22% of the girls are the first member in their family to attend any school. It captures the educational backwardness of the region.

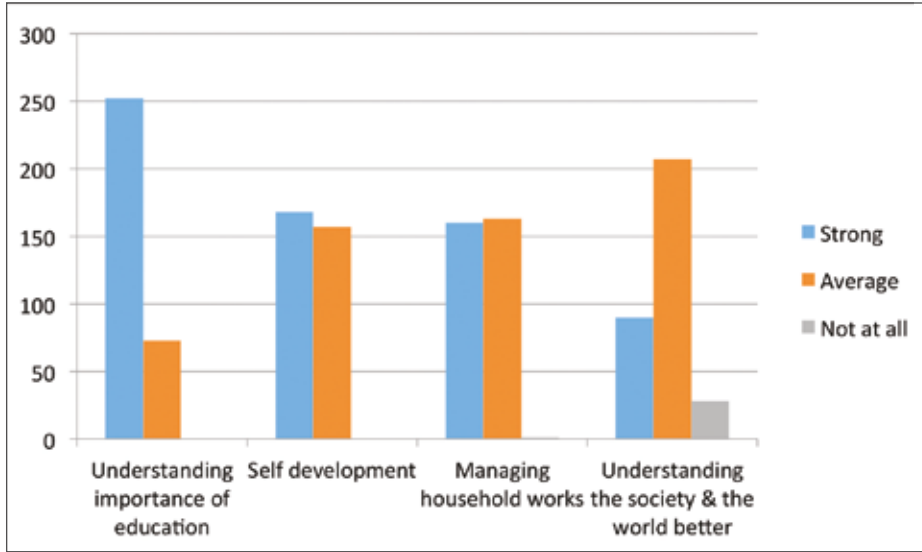
5.2.3 Reasons for Discontinuity of Education



Out of 325 girls interviewed, 110 were found to have discontinued education at various stages. The three most important reasons are the distance of the educational institution (29%), household work which also includes agriculture

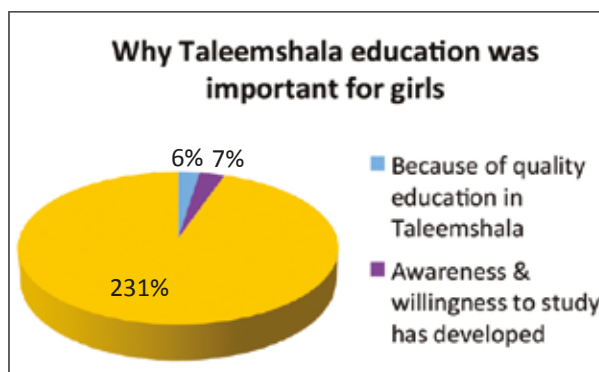
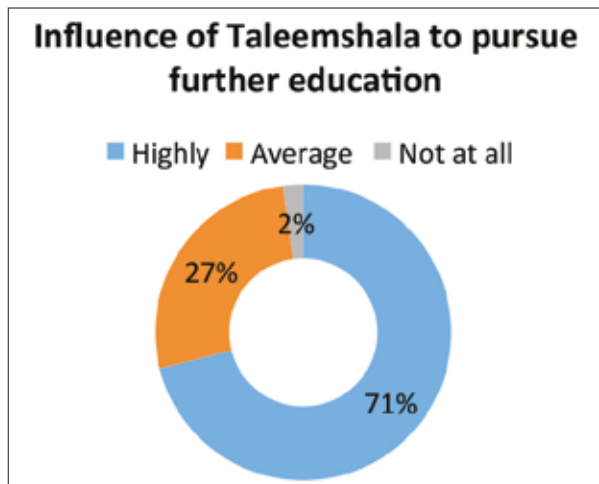
and the poor economic condition of the family (19%). Although access to primary and upper primary schools may not present a problem, distance of secondary schools and beyond definitely poses a challenge, particularly if there is no adequate transportation facility available. At completion of upper primary grades, girls enter adolescence and many parents fear for the safety and security of their child if she has to travel a long distance for higher education. Poor economic status of the family has come out as a strong reason for discontinuation of education. Other reasons are early marriage and poor awareness of the parents of the benefits of continued education.

5.2.4 Impact of Taleemshalas on Girls’ Lives



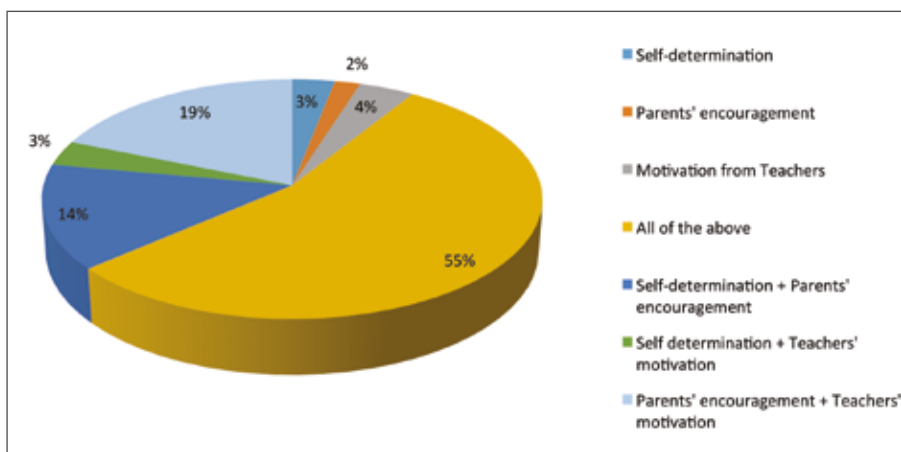
The study has tried to understand the impact of Taleemshala education upon the lives of girls on the basis of four parameters. These are: understanding the importance of education, self-development, managing household work and understanding society and the world better. About 80% of girls perceive that it is because of Taleemshalas that they realize the relevance of education in their lives. Therefore, it is quite clear that Taleemshalas had a high impact in creating awareness of the importance of education in the community. Nearly 50% of girls opined that Taleemshala education has helped in facets of self-development and in better managing household work.

5.2.5 Influence of Taleemshalas on Girls to Pursue Further Education



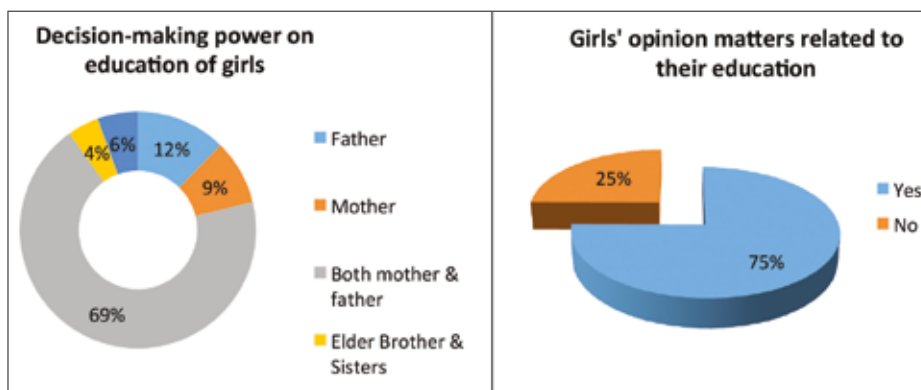
Undoubtedly, Taleemshalas have a very strong influence on girls to continue further education. 71% of girls stated that it had strongly influenced them. 27% of girls felt that it had a minor influence on them. Taleemshalas have been able to strongly influence the girls to continue to pursue further education because of two primary reasons: i) quality of education; and ii) development of an awareness and willingness to study.

5.2.6 Factors Responsible for the Success of Girls



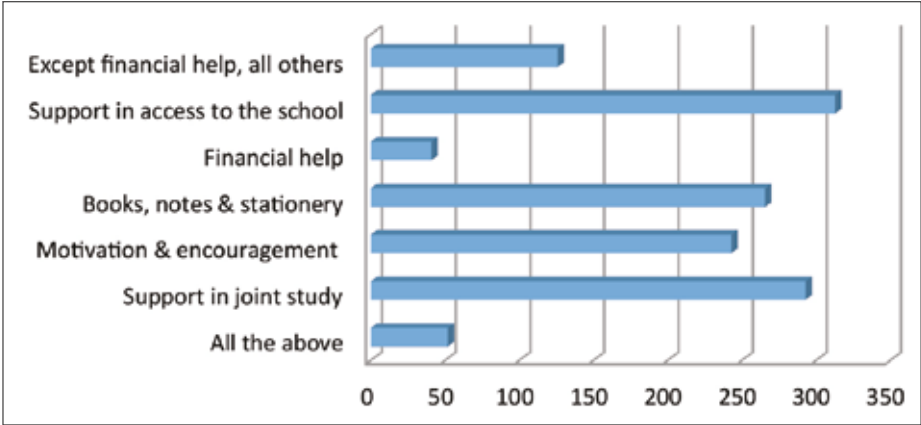
Interviews were conducted in order to understand the success factors for girls. More than half of the girls interviewed revealed that three factors are equally responsible for their success: self-determination, encouragement of parents and motivation of teachers. Apart from this, about 20% of girls are of the opinion that parents' encouragement and teachers' motivation are crucial for their success, and 14% stated that self-determination and parental encouragement are mainly responsible for their success.

5.2.7 Decision-making in Girls' Education



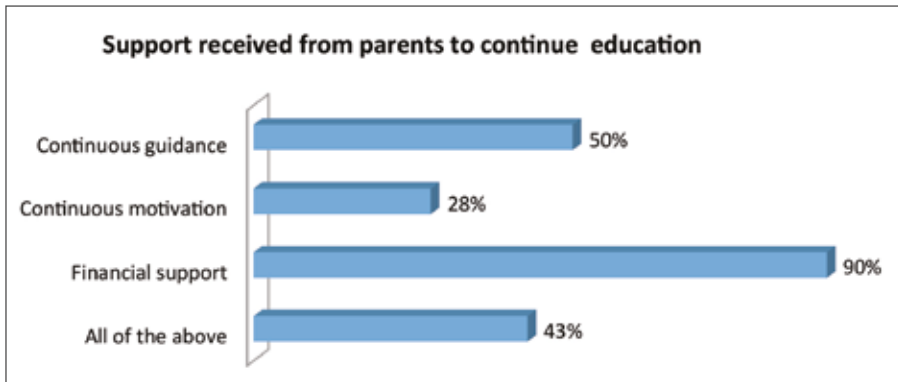
The study reveals that in about 70% of cases, both fathers and mothers jointly decide on matters related to the education of their daughters. This has been made possible due to continuous work within the community, as a result of which mothers' opinions are given high importance in matters of education. Traditionally, in the Meo community, fathers' decisions prevailed over those of mothers. However, this has gradually shifted. Another revelation that has strongly emerged from the study is that the opinions of three out of four girls are taken into account in matters related to their education.

5.2.8 Peer Relations in the Pursuit of Continued Education



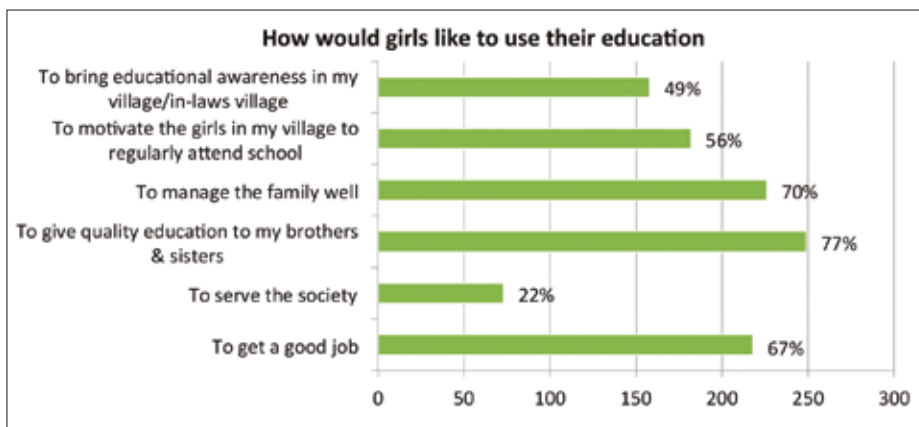
It is well-accepted that peer support is very important in relation to children's learning. The study revealed that 96% of girls received adequate support from their peers in terms of access to school. 90% of girls received peer support in terms of joint study, 82% of girls supported each other in terms of books, notes and other stationery and 75% of girls stated that they motivate and encourage each other. All of these factors are likely to have contributed in the learning process of girls, and the role of Taleemshalas in ensuring peer support in the learning process is key.

5.2.9 Parental Support in Girls' Education



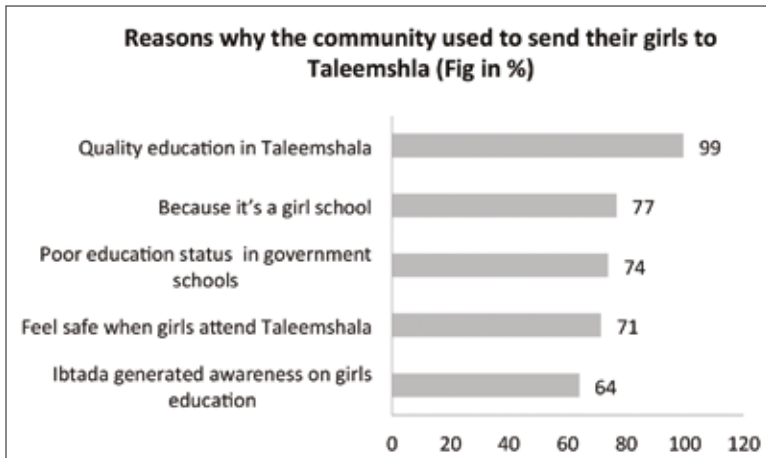
In the Mewat region, generally parents exhibit low levels of participation in their children's education, particularly among parents of girl children. Merely sending a girl child to school is considered a laudable achievement in the Mewat region. The study revealed that 50% of girls received continuous guidance from their parents with respect to education and 90% of girls received financial support for their education. 43% of girls stated that not only were they supported financially for their education; they also received continuous guidance and motivation from their parents.

5.2.10 Perceiving the Benefits of Education



5.3 Analysis and Findings of Parents' Interviews

5.3.1 Parents' Perceptions of Taleemshalas

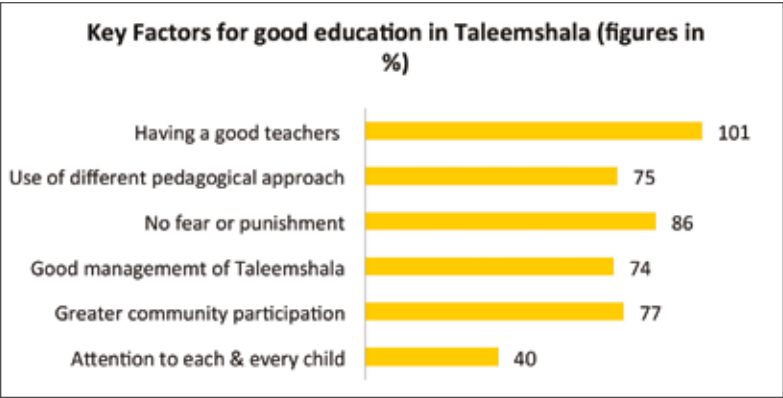


The analysis reveals that quality of education is the most important factor of attraction for the community to send their daughters to Taleemshalas. Apart from quality of education, other factors such as the Taleemshala being a girls' school, the poor status of education in government schools and the perception of their daughters' were motivating factors in sending their children to Taleemshalas. It is interesting to note that awareness generation by Ibtada's staff to promote girls' education has also influenced the community to a great extent.

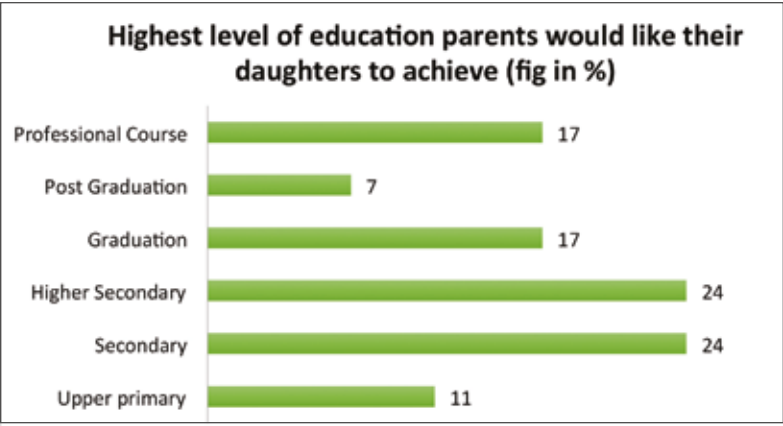
5.3.2 Key Factors Responsible for Good Education in Taleemshalas

All the respondents of the parents' interview shared the opinion that, because of the sincerity and dedication of teachers in Taleemshalas, quality of education was ensured. It is important to mention here that, after selection of teachers through a strict procedure, all teachers have to undergo 40 days of quality training. The second most important factor mentioned was the fact that there

was no fear of corporal punishment. As a result, a better relationship between teachers and pupils was possible. The girls did not hesitate to ask questions if they did not understand anything. Greater community participation, the use of child-centered pedagogies and good management were the other important factors responsible for ensuring quality education in Taleemshalas.

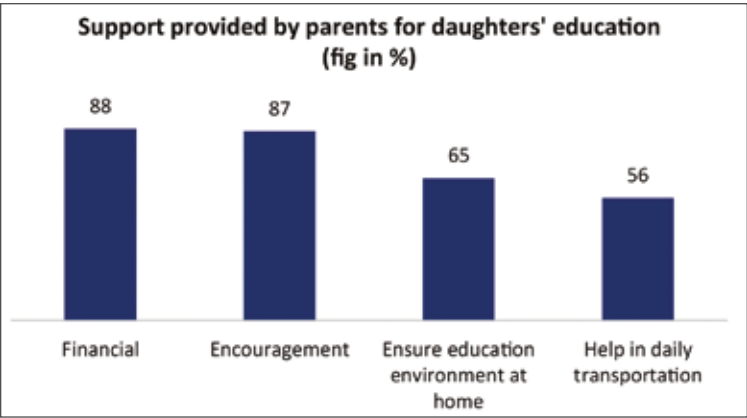


5.3.4 Parents’ Views about their Daughters’ Highest Educational Level



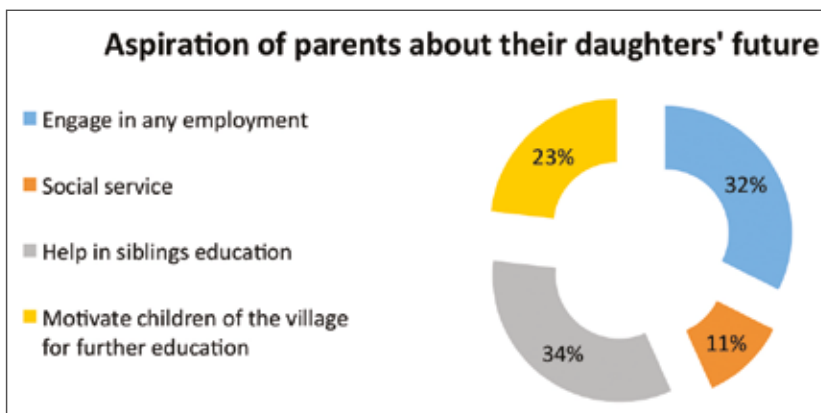
The Taleemshala intervention undoubtedly changed the perception of community members towards the education of girl children. The community has realized the importance and relevance of educating their daughters. As a result of this, 55% of parents are of the view that they are encouraging and providing scope for their daughters to pursue education above higher secondary level. It is interesting to note that 17% of the parents would like their daughters to do some professional courses, and 24% of parents expressed that they will encourage their daughters to do post-graduation-level education. It is indeed a significant trend as more and more parents are showing willingness and making efforts for their daughters' education beyond elementary level.

5.3.5 Support Level of Parents for Girl Child Education



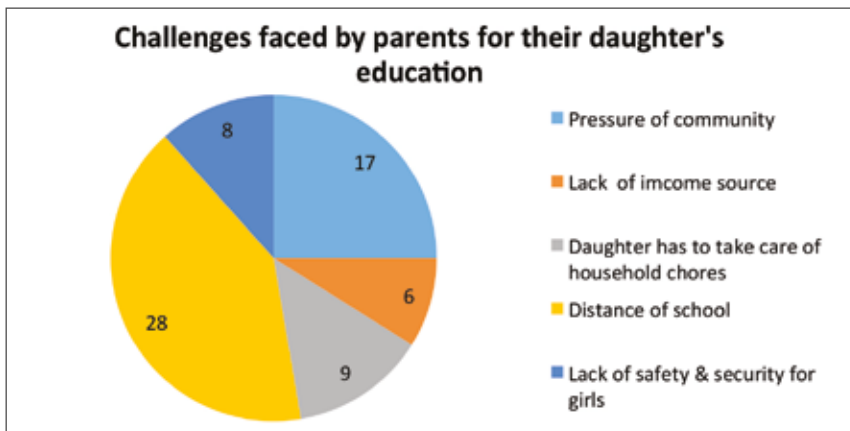
Support for daughters' education is very uncommon in the Mewat region of Alwar district. However, the situation is changing, particularly in the villages where Taleemshalas intervened. 88% of parents expressed that they provide financial support for their daughter's education. 87% of the parents interviewed said that they continuously encourage and motivate their children to continue further education. Two-thirds of the parents have created an enabling environment for education at home so that girls have adequate time to study. In addition, more than half of the parents support their daughters in their daily commute to their educational institution.

5.3.6 Aspirations of Parents for their Daughters' Future



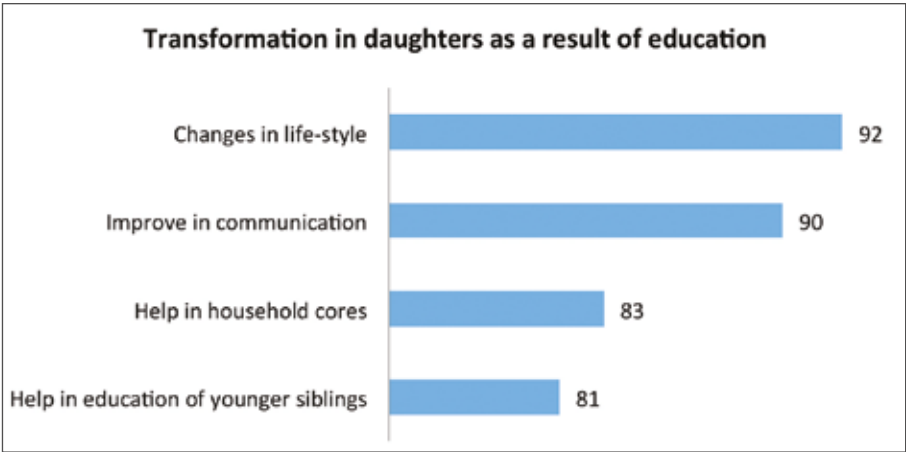
It is interesting to observe the aspirations of parents with respect to the future of their daughters. The data suggest that one-third of parents have aspirations that their daughters will engage in gainful employment after completing education. Another one-third of parents desire that their daughters will help younger siblings to get a quality education. Besides this, the rest of the parents are of the view that their daughters would motivate other girls in the village to pursue further education and do social service in the village and adjoining areas.

5.3.7 Challenges Faced by Parents for Girl Child Education



There were many challenges faced by parents for their daughters' education, the most significant being the distance of the educational institution (28%), especially after the primary level of education. 17% of parents expressed concern that they are being pressured by their own community members not to send their daughters to school or outside of the village for education. Other challenges are the pressure of domestic work, the lack of safety and security for girls, and the lack of an income source.

5.3.8 Transformation in Daughters as a Result of Education



Education is considered an influential factor in changing human life. Many of the parents acknowledged that education has a significant role to play in bringing about positive changes. These positive changes can be seen in the way their daughters conduct themselves. More than 90% of the parents are of the opinion that the lifestyle and communication skills of girls have improved significantly. Besides this, the daughters are also providing a helping hand to their parents in managing household affairs and also significantly contributing to the education of their younger siblings.

5.4 Key Findings of Focus Group Discussions with Girls

FGD Questions	Key Findings
1. Three things you liked most about Taleemshala:	i) studying ii) playing iii) morning assembly
2. Three things that could have been improved in Taleemshala to get better results:	i) availability of toilet facilities ii) infrequent change of teachers iii) availability of drinking water facility iv) permanent place for Taleemshalas
3. How would it have changed your life, had there been no Taleemshala?	i) many of the girls would not have studied at all ii) the progress and awareness level among the girls would not have been possible
4. How important is the role of Taleemshala education for you to pursue further studies?	i) the quality of education and other things that the girls had received in Taleemshalas immensely helped them to pursue further education ii) it has helped the girls to move forward in life iii) the Taleemshala girls have been able to out-perform other girls when they joined government schools beyond class 5
5. Does education (Taleemshala & beyond) help you in getting a good marriage proposal?	i) girls agreed to the point that having a good education will definitely help them get married into a good family ii) girls also agreed that it would be very easy for them to get a good marriage proposal and get married to an educated person
6. Is education important for girls in life? If yes, why? If no, why?	i) keep financial records at home ii) improve lifestyle iii) educate the children iv) be independent v) be able to contribute in the development process of the panchayat
7. What challenges do girls face in seeking to continue their education?	i) distance of school and college ii) financial problems iii) heavy workload at home iv) safety & security of girls v) early marriage vi) social barriers vii) lack of transportation
8. What steps should be taken to overcome those challenges?	i) arrange transportation facility ii) convince parents about continuing education and financial support iii) manage household work after school iv) to avoid safety & security problems, girls should travel in groups v) strongly object to getting married at an early age

5.5 Key Findings of Focus Group Discussions with Parents

FGD Questions	Key Findings
1. Three things you liked most about Taleemshala:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The most important aspect of Taleemshala was that girls were getting good-quality education which was evident in their learning level. ii) The girls educated in Taleemshalas are learning much more than their counterparts in the government schools. ii) There have been sincere efforts by the teachers in ensuring that every girl attends school regularly. iii) In Taleemshalas there was a strong rapport between teachers and girls as well as with community members.
2. Three things that could have been improved in Taleemshala to get better results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) permanent place for Taleemshala premises ii) Taleemshala should be up to grade 8 iii) less dropout or transfer of teachers
3. How would it have changed the lives of your daughters, had there been no Taleemshala?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The girls would not have studied at all. ii) There is a high chance that they would have remained illiterate. iii) The girls and the community would not have understood the importance and relevance of education in their lives.
4. Does education (Taleemshala & beyond) help you in getting good marriage proposals for your daughters?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) In the present scenario, there is a high demand for educated life partners, even in the Mewat region. ii) An educated girl will not only get a marriage proposal from a good family but also there will be less demand for dowry.
5. Is education important for girls? If yes, why? If no, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Education of girls pays rich dividends for the self, family and larger society. ii) Education empowers girls to the extent that they become self-dependent and good decision makers, able to distinguish between right and wrong and good and bad. iii) An educated girl will be able to successfully manage various household affairs and lead a good-quality life. iv) She will be able to give a good education to her children and younger siblings.
6. Has your perception of education changed? If yes, why? If no, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii) We have seen what education can bring in the lives of people. ii) We have realized the importance and relevance of girls' education. iii) If a girl is educated, she will be able to manage the affairs of the home properly. iv) Because of education, we are no longer discriminating between boys and girls.

SECTION E

6. Impact

6.1 Impact Findings of the Study

Continuity & Relevance of Education for Girls

The most important impact of the study is that 85.7% of girls continued studying after passing out from Taleemshalas. As per the state report card 2012-13, there is a gap of 39.2% in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of Rajasthan in primary classes (116.1) and in upper primary classes (76.9).⁷⁵

Taleemshala education greatly impacted the girls in understanding the importance and relevance of education in their lives. This impact will have a lasting impression for the future generation too. The girls have also stated that they will contribute to ensure quality education for their brothers and sisters. Taleemshala education significantly contributed to the overall personality development of the girls. Education has definitely developed self-confidence in girls as a result of which they were able to form their own opinion and express themselves in any platform without any fear and hesitation.



Annual event of Taleemshala program 2011

⁷⁵ Ministry of Human Resource Development, (2012). State Report Card 2011-12, p. 61.

In rural Mewat, especially among the Meo Muslim community, traditionally adolescent girls are not encouraged by their family and the larger community to travel a distance of a few kilometers for their schooling, be it upper primary or secondary level. But that was not the case for girls who passed out from Taleemshalas. Many of them stated that it was because of the influence of Taleemshalas that they pursued further education.

Peer support has a greater role and relevance, especially in early grade education. In the case of Taleemshalas more than 90% of girls have said that they have received immense support from their peers in access to schools and studies.

It is because of the education they have received that girls are feeling confident to face both opportunities and challenges. Many of the girls believe that Taleemshala education will help them not only in getting a good job in the future but also in managing family affairs better. A sense of responsibility towards girls' education has also developed in them as they are eager to help girls of their own village and community to get quality education and also to make sure that no girls should remain uneducated in their village.

Changes in Community Perceptions

Traditionally in the Meo Muslim community, the decision of male members of the family prevails in matters related to girls, be it education or their marriage. The female members and girls have little say in the decision-making process. However, this myth has also been broken as many of the parents strongly stated that matters related to their daughter's education are jointly being taken by the parents and the opinions of the daughter are greatly valued.

It is generally perceived that girls from illiterate, poor and marginalized families do not send their girls to school despite the provision of free and compulsory education, but in Taleemshalas 97% of girls are from marginalized communities and 50% of girls' parents are illiterate and depend on manual labor.

Success Factors of Taleemshalas

The most important aspect of Taleemshala education is the belief that 'education empowers' and the non-stereotypical method it employed in developing girls as self-learners. Girls strongly felt that, had there been no Taleemshalas, they would not have been educated at all.

Relations between students and teachers were informal and cordial. The girls addressed teachers by name. As a result, the girls were studying in an environment with no fear or punishment.

SECTION F

7. Selected Case Studies

Aina: The Girls' Icon



Aina, the change icon

Aina Bano, aged about 22 years, was born and brought up in a Meo Muslim family in Jatoli village of Umren block of Alwar district. Ten kilometers inside the Alwar–Jaipur national highway, the village is surrounded by hills on three sides. With a population of 1,597 (as per the 2011 census), the village is largely dominated by Meos and Scheduled Castes. The village only has a primary school. The educational environment of the village in the early 2000s was pitiable. A random visit to the village during those years revealed girls doing household chores or taking care of younger siblings.

When Aina was only three years old, her father was convicted in a murder case and sentenced to a 14-year jail term. Due to an out-of-court settlement by both the parties, he was released after six years. It was a tough time for the entire family. Aina is the second youngest of six children. Hansina is the eldest daughter and she never went to school. Next is Maman who studied in Taleemshala and passed out in the year 2004. Due to community and family pressure, in the year 2005, the family decided to marry both Hansina and

Maman. At that time, Hansina was just 15 years old and Maman was only 12 years old. Maman was studying in class 7 in the year 2005.

Aina's educational journey started when she joined Taleemshala in the year 2002. She never looked back after that. In the year 2005, she passed out from Taleemshala. It is because of the strong foundation she received in Taleemshala that her father agreed to continue her studies. She had to travel 3-4 kilometers to reach the nearby school in Mohabbatpur. After completing class 8, many of her relatives insisted that she stop going to school. However, she was determined to continue studies and Ibtada staff motivated her parents. Looking at her determination, her parents defied relatives' pressure and supported her admission in the Kalsada Secondary School where she completed matriculation with 54%. Aina used to cycle 18 kilometers daily to attend secondary education. After this, she joined senior secondary school in Malakheda for which she used to cycle 24 kilometers.

She didn't stop there and continued further studies in the district headquarters, i.e. Alwar. She pursued a Bachelor of Arts in G.D. Women's College in history, sociology and economics. During her graduation year, she also joined a basic computer course but could not complete it. She graduated in 2015.

While working towards her graduation in April 2013, she joined a non-government organization named AIMED as a teacher in Udaan (a residential special training center for girls). She continued at AIMED until May 2015. At present, she is working for Ibtada as a teacher in the Udaan project in Nuh, Haryana.

'It is because of Ibtada and Taleemshala that I have reached so far. I have faced lots of challenges to continue education. Because of my achievement, many girls are inspired and going for higher studies. I aspire to be a police officer.' - Aina

Wazida: The Torch Bearer

Mohar Singh Bas is a small hamlet of Neekach village, situated in the foothills of the Aravali mountain range in the Ramgarh block of Alwar. The hamlet of about 60-70 households is divided into three habitations and inhabited mainly by Meos. The primary source of livelihood is agriculture, animal husbandry and unskilled work. A few families migrate seasonally to Punjab and Gujarat.

Wazida is the second child of Fateh Mohammad. She lives with her parents, four sisters and two brothers. She is the eldest daughter of her family. Agriculture is the main economic source for the family. Wazida's father is very active in local politics and her mother does the household and agricultural work.

In the year 2003, the educational environment of the hamlet was quite deplorable. There was no primary school in the hamlet and the distance to the village school was about 2 kilometers. **Not a single girl from Mohar Singh Bas was attending school.** In such a situation, Ibtada decided to set up a Taleemshala there. Initially Fateh Mohammad was suspicious and reluctant, but witnessing the good results of Taleemshala for six months, he decided to enroll his daughter Wazida, when she was only four years old. Recalling her days in Taleemshala, she narrates that the learning environment, teacher-student relations, the helping attitude of each girl, the group work and the English education of Taleemshalas was very good. She says she will never forget the games she played while in Taleemshala. I am still good at English because of my strong foundation laid in Taleemshala. She and all her sisters eventually studied in Taleemshalas. Their interest in education was primarily laid in Taleemshala.

After completing primary education in Taleemshala, she attended a private school in Badi Bas - a village 1 kilometer away from her home where she continued until class 9. However, when she finished class 9, that private school was shut down. In such a scenario, continuing her studies after class 9 became a challenge for her. But she never succumbed and showed a keen determination. She joined class 10 in a government school 6 kilometers away. She secured 52% in class 10. After completion of secondary education, she continued to pursue further education and secured 72% in higher secondary and stood first in her school. It was a proud moment for the entire family. Thanks to her achievement, Wazida was given an award in a district-level function 'Meo Pratibhavan Samman Samaroh - 2015'. On the occasion, her parents said that they were proud of their daughters and that they would continue to support all of their children to get a good education.

After her senior secondary education, Wazida faced additional challenges in order to continue her studies. The nearest college was in Alwar, which is around 60 kilometers away from her village. There is also no direct transportation facility available from her village. However, she took admission in the G.D. College and started attending every day by bus. Her father or elder brother drops her at the nearest bus stop at Mubarikpur, from where she could avail the

bus service to Alwar.

In Mewat region, early marriage of daughters is commonplace. Wazida also became the victim of this phenomenon. Although she could not stop this (and got married in 2015), she strongly put a condition that she would agree to marriage only when her in-laws' family would agree to let her complete her B.Ed. She is currently pursuing graduation and even completed a three-month computer course by Ibtada. She aspires to be a teacher once she has completed her B.Ed. Looking at her determination, her sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, who had already abandoned their education, resumed their studies.

Expressing her gratitude to all her teachers in Taleemshala, she acknowledged that it is because of the strong foundation she received in Taleemshala that she is now able to pursue her dream. The family educational environment has completely turned all of their lives around. Among her siblings, Manisha is studying in class 11, Sumeya in class 9, Sania in class 8 and Rohina in class 4. Her elder brother is in his second year of college.



Wazida



Anjum at Taleemshala

The Story of Anjum

Anjum is from Mahua Khurd village. It is located at Rajgarh Road, 12 kilometers from Alwar. The village has about 500 households where most of the families belong to the Meo community. The educational status of the village

population is very low, despite the existence of a senior secondary school. Little attention has been paid, especially in the case of girl child education.

Anjum belongs to a Meo family. The economic condition of her family is very poor. The agricultural land held by the family has been sold due to financial crises. The family is forced to earn its livelihood by wage labor and animal husbandry. She has two brothers and two sisters.

Ibtada started its Taleemshala in Mahua Khurd in the year 2000. Anjum joined it in 2004. Besides her studies, she learnt several competencies useful in life, like the capability to express her views, and dealing with challenges and problem-solving. After she passed out from Taleemshala in 2007, her parents did not allow her to study as her elder sister was continuing her studies and her parents wanted Anjum to help at home. Ibtada staff convinced her parents and she was enrolled in class 6 in the government school in her village. She passed class 10 with 50% in 2012.

Anjum was forced to discontinue her schooling after class 10. Her parents had already supported the education of her elder sister Samina, an ex-student of Taleemshala. The parents were disappointed that Samina could not find a job after studying until class 12. Both Samina and Anjum were married in 2014. Whereas Samina went to live with her in-laws, Anjum stayed with her parents.

Recently, Anjum met Bhuteri from the adjoining village of Bandipura who had also studied at a Taleemshala and is now a teacher in an NGO-run center. Bhuteri motivated her to continue her studies. Anjum convinced her parents and got enrolled in class 11 in a private school. Then she also got the opportunity to teach in the NGO-run center. Anjum was easily selected as she was a bright student and had experience of studying at a non-formal education center. She joined as a teacher in July 2016 and gets a salary of Rs. 6,000. She and her parents are very happy. She also continues her class 11 studies as a private student.

Anjum quotes that she was deeply motivated by the teachers at the Taleemshala due to their helpful attitude. She says, 'They convinced my parents to continue my studies after passing class 5 from Taleemshala. It was the best support for my life that changed my life completely. My parents initially thought that there was no utility of educating the girls. I have proven that a girl child can too financially support her family after education. My parents are proud of me.'

SECTION G

8. Conclusion

When the girls' education program of Ibtada was initiated in 2000 in the Meo Muslim-dominated Mewat area of Alwar, girls were hardly attending school. Ibtada started setting up Taleemshalas for girls until grade 5. Initially, girls of a higher age group were attending the centers, but with the passage of time, girls between 6-10 years also started attending these centers. Until the year 2010-11, Ibtada was running 121 Taleemshalas in 91 villages. After the advent of the Right to Education Act in 2010, Ibtada started phasing out these Taleemshalas, which was eventually completed in 2015.

This endeavor of Ibtada had a large impact not only upon the lives of girls but also in changing the perspectives of the community. As has been seen in the study, many girls continue to pursue further education and have bold aspirations. They are now considered an asset for their family and contribute to the family and society in many ways.

Over time, Ibtada's interventions in girls' education have deepened. Now Ibtada manages an upper primary school for 100 girls and supports 60 government schools to improve learning outcomes of children in primary grades. In addition, Ibtada provides supplementary education for girls in grades 6 to 8 comprising life skills education, computer education, career facilitation and coaching classes for competitive exams for jobs. Ibtada also seeks to motivate parents to see that more and more girls are educated and continuing their education.



Girls learning to use computers



A glimpse of girls learning at Taleemshala



Teacher - Learner interaction