

## Enhancing Scholarship Schemes and RTE Effectiveness through Human Resource Management at Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School

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**How to cite this article:** N. Prabha, B. William Dharma Raja (2022). Enhancing Scholarship Schemes and RTE Effectiveness through Human Resource Management at Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School. *Library Progress International*, 42(2), 715-719

**Abstract:** The private English medium schools in rural areas cater to the needs of the families of children from different socio-economic backgrounds. A private school that does not charge exorbitant fees is the ready choice of parents from economically backward families. Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School in Puthiamputhur has visionary leadership with a deep commitment to educating all the children in the locality, irrespective of caste and economic status. In addition to making English Medium education affordable, this school accommodates parents' struggles through scholarships and concessions. The paper used a qualitative research approach incorporating a direct interview method, focus group interviews and researcher observations. The head of the institution and the seven children studying under the RTE scheme in class 9 were interviewed to bring out this piece of writing.

### *Inception of the School*

In the year 1989, the institution was established. It is almost 35 years old. It has a traditional legacy of providing co-education from Kindergarten to Standard XII, offering education in English medium with the syllabus prescribed by SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training). The school is designed to provide a high-quality education and life skills to students from all the communities in and around their area, producing respectable results in the Matriculation and Higher Secondary Board Examination. The present stature of the school is because of the value-based leadership and innovative schemes to support the parents and reduce their fee burden.

### *Ensuring social justice through education*

Interestingly, the private business owners who faced the labour shortage excommunicated the family of Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School since they believed that the education given to underprivileged communities created new opportunities for the children, resulting in a labour shortage. Thus,

the school stood firm to overcome the caste supremacy that expected children from oppressed communities to remain as illiterate labourers. The school has provided quality education for children from all communities for over three decades.

#### *Fee payment - Challenges faced by parents*

Families with good educational aspirations for their children can only honour the fee commitment if they are in regular full-time jobs with assured monthly salaries. Sometimes, other urgent expenses take priority, and the parents cannot pay the fees on time. Parents rely on the school's compassion. The school management representatives are unable to handle all the requests. They have administration staff to impose the rules to save their faces. At times, the management tends to feel that their compassion is taken for granted because those in a good financial position also don't feel the need to pay the fees on time. The Management representative mentioned that only 10% of the parents pay the fees on time without expectations for fee concession. Almost 60% of the parents seek discounts, concessions and extensions of time to pay the fees. They get money from private money lenders and borrow from family and friends. The School Management does not let the children forego education because of late payment or non-payment of fees. Many students only pay a portion of the fee balance while collecting their School Final Mark sheets and Transfer Certificates. The school management struggles with the expenses; however, it continues to give fee waivers.

#### *Late payment or non-payment of fees-Challenges faced by the School Management*

The School Management needs to generate income to pay the teachers and other staff members on time. In addition to this, they have electricity bills, building and vehicle maintenance, and other administration costs. In this context, the School Management has developed several scholarships and innovative schemes to support the parents and reduce their fee burden. They want to arrive at an amicable solution to effectively run the school without jeopardising the educational aspirations of children.

#### *Scholarship Schemes*

In addition to government scholarships for children from underprivileged communities and outstanding sports players, the management has scholarships for children of single parents, first-generation learners, deserving students, teachers, and other staff members. For students who have studied in Tamil Medium till 10th standard, for their 11th admission, a 50% fee discount is given. The school management understands their background and supports and encourages them. No advertisement is provided to popularise this scheme. Students come to know about this scheme only through word of mouth. The school management feels the number of students seeking admission needs to be more manageable when this scholarship is widely made known. In addition to single-parent children, when both parents are unemployed or have any disability, children receive scholarships. Support is provided for first-, second-, and third-mark students, depending on their financial situation. There is a reduction in fees depending on family background on a case-by-case basis rather than a standard scholarship. These measures ensure the continuation and completion of schooling. Other than the above

provisions, there are instances of sponsorships from alums, well-wishers, and family members that support specific expenses.

#### *Summary of the Right to Education Act provisions*

The Right to Education Act mandated that private English schools provide 25% of the seats for children from economically low-income families. The government took care of the tuition fees for those children. However, there was no plan to support these children beyond class 8. There was a delay in the fund transfer, and the school management had to step in to cover the deficit. More support is needed to popularise the scheme. The distance criteria were limited only to 3kms. When the overall strength declined, it affected the number of children who could be admitted under RTE.

#### *Scholarship for Minority students' challenges*

The school caters to 30% of children from religious minority communities. Now, this scholarship is entirely online. The document must be linked, and Aadhar must be updated once every three months, which is a challenge for children. The total amount received as a scholarship may range from Rs. 6000/- and varies for classes 1-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Five years ago, many children were receiving this scholarship. The count has come down because of the online application. Before 6 years, 10-15 students per class received the scholarships, but now only 2-3 students are receiving the scholarships. Owing to the procedural complications, only a few children receive this scholarship.

#### *Impactful RTE implementation*

Once the first batch of RTE-supported children crossed Class VIII, there were apprehensions in the schools and among parents as to how their children could continue to study in Class IX in the same school since the government's funding support to the children comes to a halt. Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School has admitted all seven children studying under the RTE scheme in class 9 with a reasonable fee of Rs. 10000/—per annum (approximately Rs. 850/—per month). The school fully supports one single-parent child whose mother is an agricultural labourer. Though the school is not in a position to offer fully free education to these children, the continuation of education in the same school for the 7 children confirms the integration success. None of the RTE children have left the school after Class VIII and this is an indicator of the favourable conditions prevalent in the school for children from underprivileged backgrounds.

#### *Awareness and experience about RTE*

Children knew that they were in the school because of RTE. They only knew that RTE meant fewer fees for their education. They should have known the government stopped the fee responsibility beyond class 8. None of the students felt any discrimination in the school because of RTE. They felt respected and valued equally. All the students were happy to study at Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School, mainly because they were continuing in the same school for class IX. Their only suggestion to the government was to continue to support children up to 12th standard.

### *Parents' Occupation and Income*

Out of the seven, 6 students were present for the in-person interaction. The researcher came to know that the total family income was below Rs.10000/- per month for most of the families. Around 4 children were unable to mention their family income. The jobs of the parents were Agriculture Labourer, Housemaid, Tailor, Security, Cutting Master to a Tailor, School Office Worker, Accountant, Balwadi teacher and labourer at Company.

### *School Experience*

Out of the seven, 6 students were present for the in-person interaction. The researcher learned the family income was below Rs.10000/—per month. The parents worked as Agricultural Labourers, Housemaids, Tailors, and Security guards, Cutting Masters to Tailors, School Office Workers, Accountants, Balwadi teachers, and labourers at the Company.

Children have a very positive experience at Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School. They value good education and good teachers. They mentioned that all the teachers interact with them and create the necessary facilities. Good discipline is maintained in the school. Two students noted that the teachers taught them well and made them study well. One student mentioned that teachers corrected their mistakes and made them perfect in all possible ways.

### *Unique schemes and interventions*

The school has devised a brilliant plan of making a "Returnable one-time lumpsum payment". This amount is equivalent to one year's fees in a posh private school in Chennai. It is like 14 years of fee-free education because the money will be returned when children complete school. "Save Daily" - Little drops of water make the mighty ocean. The school has proposed encouraging the children to save daily to ensure panic-free fee payments on time. Though the fees charged by the school are reasonable compared to other private schools, the amount appears significant in rural areas, especially when it is shown as a few thousand in the end. By saving Rs. 30 to 50 each day, children can quickly pay the fees on time and save trouble for the parents and the school. The school wants to meet the parents to give them a small amount of money and encourage students to save. The school also arranges regular meetings to teach children good behaviour, financial literacy and financial wisdom. They are told not to succumb to peer pressure and stay away from liquor and drugs. They are also taught to keep healthy by not getting drawn to different food-related advertisements that show junk food as attractive and tasty.

In contrast, real food is native, organic, and affordable. The market pressure through commercials and serials towards expensive weddings and single-use, heavy-work, skin-unfriendly expensive clothes are conveyed to children. Also, the need to get spiritual simply instead of showing off one's religious beliefs through heavy spending is conveyed. The school management conveys the joy of spending hard-earned money to pursue healthy habits, travel, learning and growing instead of self-destructive behaviour.

### *Conclusion*

There are private schools that set the benchmark higher than the government schools through affordable plans and implementation. The researcher could see the school's struggles and the innovations to overcome them. The gratitude and joy visible in students for the quality educational experiences guaranteed by the school are noteworthy. Through consultations with children and consistent efforts, the school can come up with some path-breaking initiatives that impact their students' education and create models for other grassroot private schools. The researcher recommends systematically documenting success stories of alumni thriving today and overcoming their financial struggles in their youth. The school can develop proactive measures to ensure that no students suffer from non-payment or delayed payment, which is essentially parental responsibility.

### **References**

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