



PERCEPTION OF STAKEHOLDERS REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SSA IN ODISHA

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Abstract : The present article seeks to examine the perceptions of key stakeholders like parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members about the implementation and impact of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Odisha. SSA, launched in 2001-02, has been a cornerstone in India's efforts to universalize elementary education by focusing on access, equity, and quality. The research paper explores stakeholders' views on various aspects of SSA, which includes interventions like the provision of free textbooks, uniforms, and midday meals; improvements in school infrastructure; and the program's role in enhancing enrollment, attendance, retention, and learning achievement. Attempt has also been made to study their perceptions related to inclusive education, support for SC/ST students, and initiatives targeting girls' education. Data were collected through a structured perception scale administered to a sample of 150 respondents from selected districts of Odisha. Findings indicate that stakeholders generally perceive that SSA has been successful in expanding access and participation, especially among marginalized communities. However, challenges persist in areas such as classroom environment, the availability of digital facilities, learning outcomes, effective implementation of inclusive practices, and transparency in scholarship distribution. The study underscores the importance of community feedback in policy evaluation and highlights the need for continued focus on quality and equity in elementary education.

Keywords- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), stakeholder perception, school infrastructure, enrollment, attendance, retention, inclusive education, SC/ST education, girls' education

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001-02, is one of India's most ambitious flagship programs aimed at achieving the universalization of elementary education. Rooted in the principles of equity, access, and quality, SSA seeks to bridge gaps in education by providing essential inputs such as free textbooks, uniforms, and improved infrastructure. In Odisha, the program has played a pivotal role in enhancing school enrollment, promoting regular attendance, and reducing dropout rates, particularly among marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Understanding the perceptions of key stakeholders—especially parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members—is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of SSA's interventions at the grassroots level. Perception studies provide insights into how policies are translated into practice and how beneficiaries experience them, making such feedback vital for evidence-based policymaking and program improvement. As stated in the National Education Policy (2020), "community participation and stakeholder feedback are critical for ensuring accountability and responsiveness in school education." Perceptions reflect the lived realities of the people most affected by educational reforms and offer a nuanced understanding of program outcomes that quantitative indicators alone may not capture. Therefore, this study explores stakeholder perspectives on various components of SSA in Odisha, including its impact on educational access, infrastructure, academic outcomes, equity, and

the challenges that continue to persist. A reality check of the grassroot level can make the planning and implementation of interventions more effective.

2. IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION STUDY

A perception study is essential in the field of education because it captures the lived experiences and attitudes of stakeholders, offering insights that go beyond statistical analysis. In the context of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), understanding how parents, teachers, and community members perceive the program helps assess its real-world effectiveness, accessibility, and equity. For instance, Batra (2009) found that while rural parents expressed enthusiasm about school enrollment, they were disillusioned by poor teaching quality and inadequate facilities—concerns that would remain hidden without perception-based research. Similarly, Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) revealed that teachers in rural areas reported dissatisfaction due to limited professional development opportunities for teachers, which directly affected classroom engagement. These examples demonstrate how stakeholder perceptions can reveal implementation gaps, policy shortfalls, and community-level challenges that official data may overlook. Therefore, **perception** studies play a critical role in bridging the gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes, ensuring that education reforms are grounded in the realities of those they aim to serve (Chand et al., 2013; Mehrotra, 2019). Srivastava and Noronha (2016) emphasized that community perceptions often influence decisions related to enrollment and retention, especially in low-income households. Furthermore, Dreze and Sen (2013) noted that local perceptions are crucial in evaluating the credibility and functionality of government programs, as they reflect both awareness and accountability from the stakeholders' side. By integrating such perspectives, perception studies provide a holistic evaluation of educational programs, guiding better policy formulation and implementation. The evidence generated from perception studies can be helpful in invalidating the official data captured through Government mechanism.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The perceptions of parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members on elementary education in Odisha are shaped by multiple factors including infrastructure, teacher quality, socioeconomic background, policy awareness, and community participation. Mishra (2006) highlighted that rural parents across India often expressed dissatisfaction due to poor infrastructure, lack of toilets, overcrowded classrooms, and untrained teachers. Similar concerns were echoed by Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008), who noted that rural stakeholders were less satisfied compared to their urban counterparts, citing limited access, poor teaching quality, and lack of resources as key issues affecting enrollment and retention.

Batra (2009) observed that while parents appreciated the increased access to schooling under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), they were critical of the substandard teaching and infrastructure. Teachers advocated for more flexible pedagogy and stronger community engagement. Chand et al. (2013) acknowledged improved enrollment due to SSA initiatives, yet highlighted ongoing concerns regarding quality and the need for better teacher training. According to Kapur, Bordoloi, and Shukla (2018), parents often preferred private schools over government ones due to superior infrastructure and greater teacher accountability, a trend confirmed by Mehrotra (2019), who found that government school students were less satisfied with resources and teaching quality.

Within Odisha, Sahu (2019) found broad support for SMCs among both rural and urban parents, with rural parents showing slightly more positive attitudes, while teachers generally held similar views irrespective of gender. However, Patra and Kumar (2018), along with Kumar and Senapati (2020), pointed out that rural parents often had limited participation in SMCs due to economic hardships, low literacy, and lack of awareness. Naik (2024), in a study of Kalahandi's tribal areas, reported that SMCs contributed positively to academic performance and fund utilization, though a lack of clarity regarding roles hindered effectiveness.

Studies on tribal and rural school management also reflect structural gaps. Rout and Mishra (2021) found that in tribal secondary schools, SMC structures existed but participation was low due to limited education,

household responsibilities, and poor communication. Rout (2014), through a case in Balasore, demonstrated how effective SMCs could improve enrollment and infrastructure through active liaison with authorities.

Parental engagement was also seen to be constrained by socioeconomic realities. Singh and Das (2020) reported that although parents in Ganjam were concerned about their children's education, financial constraints and weak school-parent communication reduced their involvement. Choudhury and Panda (2017) noted that while teachers tried to involve parents through meetings, they often lacked the time and incentives needed for consistent outreach.

Training and capacity building for SMC members remain key challenges. Patel and Mohanty (2018) identified poor understanding of roles and inadequate training as major barriers in Jagatsinghpur, recommending customized programs for rural and tribal areas. Similarly, Rout and Jena (2021) warned that political interference, lack of training, and financial mismanagement often disrupted SMC effectiveness.

Awareness of education policies was another recurring issue. Patra (2020) observed that while SMC members in Nuapada were aware of schemes like Samagra Shiksha, poor implementation and unclear role definitions limited their practical involvement. Socioeconomic and gender barriers also affected participation. Verma and Behera (2019) found that rural, low-income families in Boudh were concerned about infrastructure and teaching, but had limited engagement due to time constraints and resource scarcity. Meher (2021) highlighted how caste hierarchies and gender inequality, especially in Koraput, hindered the active involvement of women and marginalized communities in school governance.

Inclusive education was another area of concern. Sahu (2020) and Das and Sahoo (2022) noted that while SMCs were supportive of inclusion for children with disabilities, the absence of adequate training, resources, and infrastructure limited meaningful implementation at the ground level. Nanda (2024) conducted a research study examining the status of elementary education and teacher education in Odisha post-1986. The report highlighted the generally positive outlook of DEOs and BEOs on the sustainability of child-centered and activity-based pedagogy, contingent upon adequate funding. The findings indicated that the goals of the RCFCE-2009 are considered achievable under proper financial support. Additionally, while inclusive education was seen as feasible, the need for specially appointed teachers was emphasized. However, a critical challenge identified was the lack of community ownership in elementary education. BEOs acknowledged that teachers often lack comprehensive community data and are constrained by time, limiting their engagement with local stakeholders.

Overall, the literature highlights that while parents and SMC members recognize the importance of quality education and are largely supportive of reforms under SSA and Samagra Shiksha, their potential contributions are often found to be underutilized. Inadequate training, limited awareness of roles, weak communication between schools and communities, and structural barriers such as political interference and financial mismanagement have impeded the effective functioning of SMCs. Nonetheless, the positive intent among stakeholders, along with evidence of successful local interventions, indicates a promising foundation. Strengthening capacity-building efforts, clarifying governance structures, and fostering sustained collaboration between schools and communities are essential steps toward enhancing the overall effectiveness and inclusivity of elementary education in Odisha.

Table No.1. Trends in School Infrastructure, Enrollment, and Student Outcomes in Odisha

Indicators		2011-12	2015-16	2019-20	2022-23
SCHOOLS (ALL)	Total School	58134	59555	55059	49822
	Primary	37015	36760	33340	28982
	Upper Primary	21119	22795	21719	20840
TOTAL CHILD POPULATION	6-14 yrs	6435467	6557886	5499530	5800200
	6-11 yrs	4446404	4487254	3305328	3561800
	11-14 yrs	1989063	2070632	2194202	2238400
ENROLLMENT CLASS I - VIII(ALL SCHOOLS)	Total	6506551	6328084	5664883	5590908
	Primary	4438381	4111050	3578819	3519153
	Upper Primary	2068170	2217034	2086064	2071755

SC ENROLLMENT CLASS I - VIII	Total	1242605	1193839	1076344	1043590
	Primary	837811	760291	678354	648062
	Upper Primary	404794	433548	397990	395528
ST ENROLLMENT CLASS I - VIII	Total	1838120	1908715	1666909	1590696
	Primary	1385403	1340620	1072054	997279
	Upper Primary	452717	568095	594855	593417
GIRLS ENROLLMENT CLASS I - VIII	Total	3166185	3058382	2734599	2680627
	Primary	2147441	1986903	1730184	1667966
	Upper Primary	1018744	1071479	1004415	1012661
OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN	6-14 yrs	30591	9368	8168	261
	6-11 yrs	16870	5369	4377	161
	11-14 yrs	13721	3999	3791	100
DROPOUT RATE (PRIMARY)	ALL	0.43	2.82	0.82	0
	SC	2.41	3.3	0.82	0
	ST	3.1	7.07	4.03	1.44
	GIRLS	0.62	2.92	0.82	0.16
DROPOUT RATE (UPPER PRIMARY)	ALL	3.07	3.87	4.49	3.15
	SC	2.74	4.8	3.03	2.67
	ST	4.7	8.82	11.43	6.72
	GIRLS	2.23	3.52	4.09	3.2
DROPOUT RATE (ELEMENTARY)	ALL	1.75	3.34	1.18	1.08
	SC	2.07	4.05	1.92	0.75
	ST	3.9	7.95	7.73	3.38
	GIRLS	1.42	3.15	1.01	1.29
GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO(GRE)	Total	101.31	96.5	102.85	95.59
	Primary	99.69	91.62	108.13	96.98
	Upper Primary	104.93	107.07	94.91	93.36
NET ENROLMENT RATIO(NER)	6-14 yrs	93.27	87.57	88.29	76.49
	6-11 yrs	93.3	90.23	91.99	83.15
	11-14 yrs	93.24	81.79	82.73	65.89
COMPLETION RATE		89.44	88.71	87.82	82.46
TRANSITION RATE(P TO UP)		85.48	90.59	95.83	98.68
REPETITION RATE		3.19	0.08	0.22	0.17
PROMOTION RATE		97.14	96.58	97.2	98.75
PUPIL TEACHER RATIO (GOVT.)	Elementary	27.8	24.29	22.48	26.17
	Primary	29.43	24.97	24.23	31.61
	Upper Primary	24.55	23.04	20.32	20.37

4. RATIONALE

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has been a key initiative in India's drive to universalize elementary education, emphasizing access, equity, and quality (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008). In Odisha, where a large portion of the population resides in rural and tribal areas, SSA has contributed significantly to increased school enrollment, improved infrastructure, and support for marginalized groups (Sahu, 2019; Naik, 2024). However, while official statistics highlight these developments, they often overlook the everyday experiences of those directly affected by the program.

This article underscores the importance of stakeholder perceptions—particularly those of parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members—in assessing the grassroots effectiveness of SSA interventions. As frontline participants in school affairs, their insights reveal the extent to which policy measures such as free textbooks, uniforms, midday meals, and inclusive education are implemented and received. Studies by Batra (2009) and Chand et al. (2013) have shown that while SSA improved enrollment and access, concerns about infrastructure, teacher quality, and limited community engagement persist.

Moreover, researchers like Patra and Kumar (2018) and Patel and Mohanty (2018) have highlighted issues such as poor awareness of SMC roles, lack of training, and structural constraints that limit meaningful stakeholder participation. Singh and Das (2020), and Meher (2021) emphasized that socioeconomic factors and gender inequality further inhibit parental involvement, particularly among marginalized communities.

Despite these challenges, literature also points to positive developments—such as improved academic outcomes and effective fund utilization where SMCs are active and well-informed (Rout, 2014; Rout & Jena, 2021). Also Nanda (2024) reported that the goals of the RCFCE-2009 are considered achievable under proper financial support. These findings indicate a promising foundation that, if strengthened through targeted capacity-building and inclusive governance, can enhance SSA's impact.

Therefore, this article fills an essential gap by systematically exploring the perceptions of parents and SMC members regarding SSA's implementation in Odisha. It offers evidence-based insights that go beyond quantitative outcomes, contributing to a more holistic evaluation of elementary education reforms. By aligning with the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on community participation, this article aims to inform future policy directions under programs like Samagra Shiksha.

5. RESERCH QUESTIONS-

The present study seeks to address the following research questions.

1. How do parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members perceive the effectiveness of SSA provisions such as free textbooks and uniforms in improving student enrollment, attendance, and retention in Odisha?
2. What are stakeholders' perceptions regarding the adequacy and quality of school infrastructure developed under SSA, including electricity, drinking water, classrooms, libraries, and computer facilities?
3. To what extent do stakeholders believe that SSA has contributed to enhancing students' academic performance and learning outcomes?
4. How do stakeholders view SSA's role in promoting inclusive education, especially in supporting girls, children with special needs, and students from SC/ST communities?
5. Are there significant differences in the perceptions of parents and SMC members regarding the implementation and impact of SSA initiatives?
6. What challenges and gaps do stakeholders identify in the implementation of SSA at the school level, and what suggestions do they offer for improvement?

6.OBJECTIVES

- To assess stakeholders' perceptions of SSA's effectiveness in providing free textbooks, uniforms, and their impact on student enrollment, attendance and retention .
- To evaluate stakeholders' views on the adequacy and quality of school infrastructure, including electricity, drinking water, libraries, classrooms, and computer facilities, under SSA.
- To examine stakeholders' perceptions of SSA's role in enhancing student overall academic achievement.
- To findout stakeholders' views on SSA's effectiveness in promoting equity through inclusive education for children with special needs, support for SC/ST students, and initiatives for girls' education.
- To analyze differences in the perception scale between parents and SMC members regarding the effectiveness of SSA initiatives.
- To identify challenges and areas for improvement in SSA's implementation as perceived by parents and SMC members.

7. SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

- The study is confined to selected blocks—Badachana and Dharmasala blocks in Jajpur district, Cuttack Sadar and Mahanga blocks in Cuttack district, and Hindol and Dhenkanal Sadar blocks in Dhenkanal district of Odisha.
- Only parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members are included as respondents.

- A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who are directly involved with or affected by the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- The study focuses exclusively on perceptions related to the implementation and outcomes of SSA at the elementary education level.
- The findings are context-specific and are intended to reflect the conditions within the selected districts and blocks; they may not be generalized to other regions or states beyond the study area.

8. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method was used to conduct the study.

8.1 PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study comprises a total of 150 participants, evenly divided between parents and SMC members across three districts. Districtwise, population and sample respondents are stated below in table No.2

8.2 DISTRICTWISE, BLOCKWISE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Table No 2.List of Sample districts and respondents

District	Block	Population	Sample Size	Sample Respondents	
				Parents	SMC Members
Cuttack	Cuttack Sadar, Mahanga	Parents and SMC members	50	28	22
Jajpur	Badachana, Dharmasala	Parents and SMC members	55	26	29
Dhenkanal	Hindol, Dhenkanal Sadar	Parents and SMC members	45	30	15
Total			150	84	66

This table provides a clear overview of the sample distribution across the three districts, totaling 150 participants.

8.3 Description of Tool

The primary tool utilized in this study is a perception scale developed to collect data from parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members regarding their views on different interventions of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Odisha. This scale comprises 43 items specifically designed to gather quantitative data, which will be analyzed to evaluate the impact of SSA on educational access and quality, in alignment with the research objective of understanding stakeholder perceptions. Each statement in the perception scale was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where respondents could express their level of agreement or disagreement. The response options included: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The items are categorized as follows: Provisions (2 items), Infrastructure (5 items), Enrolment (3 items), Attendance (2 items), Retention (3 items), Achievement (5 items), and Scholarship (2 items) to assess aspects of equity. Additionally, Inclusive Education is represented by 7 items, SC/ST Education by 5 items, and Girls' Education by 9 items. Together, these categories comprehensively cover various dimensions of SSA, resulting in a total of 43 items on the scale.

8.4 Procedure for data collection

The data collection process for this article involved administering the perception scale to participants in the selected districts of Odisha—Cuttack, Jajpur, and Dhenkanal. To facilitate meaningful interaction between parents, teachers, and SMC members, information regarding the scheduled dates of SMC meetings was obtained from the schools in advance, and the data collection dates were finalized accordingly. Parents and

School Management Committee (SMC) members were informed about the article and invited to participate, with assurances regarding the confidentiality of their responses to maintain their anonymity. The perception scale was distributed along with a brief explanation of the article's purpose and the significance of their feedback. Participants completed the scale based on their experiences and perceptions regarding the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and were encouraged to respond honestly and thoughtfully. Data collection took place in Jajpur district on 4th & 5th February 2025 in Badachana and Dharmasala blocks, in Cuttack district from 8th to 9th February 2025 in Cuttack Sadar and Mahanga blocks, and in Dhenkanal district on 18th to 19th February 2025 in Hindol and Dhenkanal Sadar blocks. Once completed, the scales were promptly collected to secure all responses for analysis. The gathered data were then analyzed quantitatively to identify trends, patterns, and correlations regarding the impact of SSA on educational access and quality in Odisha. This structured approach to data collection and analysis aimed to yield valuable insights that would inform the evaluation of SSA's effectiveness and contribute to policy improvements in elementary education.

Table No.3- Fieldwork Schedule for Administration of Perception Scale to Parents and SMC Members

Date	District	Block	Work Done
4th February 2025	Jajpur	Badachana	Perception scale administered on parents and SMC members
5th February 2025	Jajpur	Dharmasala	Perception scale administered on parents and SMC members
8th February 2025	Cuttack	Cuttack Sadar	Perception scale administered on parents and SMC members
9th February 2025	Cuttack	Mahanga	Perception scale administered on parents and SMC members
18th February 2025	Dhenkanal	Hindol	Perception scale administered on parents and SMC members
19th February 2025	Dhenkanal	Dhenkanal Sadar	Perception scale administered on parents and SMC members

8.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed in two stages: percentage-wise analysis and inferential statistical analysis using the Chi-square test.

Table 4- Summary of Chi-Square Test Results for Perception Differences Between Parents and SMC Members on SSA Implementation

Item	Item Description	Chi-Square Value	Significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ (df = 4)
Item 1	Timely distribution of free textbooks and adequacy of textbook suppl	35.37	Significant
Item 2	The quality of the school uniforms is good.	62.87	Significant
Item 3	The school is connected with electricity and there is no major power cut.	47.84	Significant
Item 4	There is safe and adequate drinking water available for all children.	58.30	Significant
Item 5	The school library has enough books and resources for children to learn.	33.50	Significant
Item 6	The classrooms are clean, spacious, and good for learning.	51.31	Significant
Item 7	There are enough working computers for the children to use at school.	35.23	Significant
Item 8	SSA has made it easier to enroll my/our children in schools nearby.	48.78	Significant
Item 9	I am not aware of the importance of sending children to school because of SSA campaigns.	42.45	Significant
Item 10	The school is accessible to all children in our community, including those from poor families, due to SSA.	27.08	Significant
Item 11	My children attend school more regularly since SSA was implemented.	41.76	Significant
Item 12	Financial difficulties are less of a reason for my/our child(ren) to miss school because of SSA support.	45.74	Significant
Item 13	More children in our community are completing primary school now compared to situation before SSA.	52.58	Significant
Item 14	SSA has helped in reducing dropping out of children from school.	36.27	Significant
Item 15	The support provided by SSA encourages children to continue their education beyond primary school.	31.37	Significant
Item 16	My/Our child(ren) are learning better in school because of the support from	27.98	Significant

	SSA.		
Item 17	I have noticed an improvement in my children's reading skills since the implementation of the support programs under SSA.	26.44	Significant
Item 18	I have noticed an improvement in my children's writing skills since the implementation of the support programs under SSA.	30.00	Significant
Item 19	There is periodic examination in school.	29.59	Significant
Item 20	I receive progress report of my child's progress	45.75	Significant
Item 21	The process of getting scholarships is clear and fair.	24.02	Significant
Item 22	The scholarships help students to meet their needs to go to school.	19.21	Significant
Item 23	The school has effective methods to identify children with special needs early.	17.87	Significant
Item 24	The school is a welcoming place for all children, including those with special needs.	8.45	Not Significant
Item 25	Teachers are well-trained to help children with special needs learn.	20.45	Significant
Item 26	The school provides enough support (like special equipment) for children with special needs.	26.07	Significant
Item 27	The school placement process for children with special needs ensures they receive the right support.	22.04	Significant
Item 28	Curriculum adaptations are made to cater to the learning requirements of children with special needs.	18.43	Significant
Item 29	The evaluation methods consider the specific needs and progress of children with special needs.	18.98	Significant
Item 30	The school provides adequate support to encourage SC/ST children to enroll and stay in school.	43.92	Significant
Item 31	The school offers specific programs or initiatives that help SC/ST children succeed academically.	36.04	Significant
Item 32	Teachers are trained to understand the unique challenges faced by SC/ST children.	46.77	Significant
Item 33	The school provides financial support or scholarships for SC/ST children to help with their education.	46.92	Significant
Item 34	The school ensures that SC/ST children have access to equal opportunities and resources for learning.	35.94	Significant
Item 35	Special programs or campaigns focus on improving girls' education in our community.	32.43	Significant
Item 36	The school has facilities to ensure the safety and well-being of girls during school hours.	41.91	Significant
Item 37	The school provides counseling or mentoring programs specifically for girls.	37.91	Significant
Item 38	The school encourages and supports girls' participation in extracurricular activities.	37.83	Significant
Item 39	There are awareness programs aimed at addressing challenges like early	29.69	Significant

	marriage and child labor for girls.		
Item 40	The school ensures gender equality in the classroom by promoting equal participation of girls and boys.	25.81	Significant
Item 41	There are adequate sanitary facilities for girls in the school.	42.81	Significant
Item 42	The school actively works to prevent and address any form of gender-based violence or harassment.	46.92	Significant
Item 43	There is regular meeting of Parents, SMC members in school.	28.65	Significant

Firstly, a percentage-wise analysis was carried out to describe the distribution of responses across five categories—Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)—for each of the 43 perception statements. The number of respondents selecting each response option was converted into percentages relative to the total number of participants. This descriptive analysis helped to capture the general trends in perceptions of both parents and SMC members regarding various aspects of SSA, such as the provision of educational materials, infrastructure quality, enrollment accessibility, attendance patterns, retention support, achievement levels, scholarship benefits, and equity measures.

In the second stage, a Chi-square test of independence was employed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions between the two stakeholder groups across each of the 43 items. For each statement, the observed frequencies of responses from parents and SMC members were compared against the expected frequencies under the assumption that there was no difference between the groups. The Chi-square values for each item were calculated by summing the contributions across all five response categories. The calculated Chi-square values were then compared against the critical value at a 5% significance level with 4 degrees of freedom to establish whether the differences were statistically significant.

The results are presented in a consolidated table showing, for each item, the calculated Chi-square value and the corresponding significance status. The analysis revealed that for 42 out of 43 items, there were significant differences between parents and SMC members in their perceptions regarding SSA implementation. Only one item (related to the inclusiveness of the school environment for children with special needs) was found to be statistically not significant, indicating similar views between the two groups on that particular aspect.

Overall, the findings from the analysis point to substantial divergence in the perceptions of parents and SMC members, highlighting the need for more inclusive communication and stakeholder engagement strategies within SSA initiatives to ensure that all voices are heard and acted upon.

The Chi-square test of independence was conducted on each of the 43 items measuring stakeholder perceptions under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to assess whether the observed differences between parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members were statistically significant. With a significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ and degrees of freedom (df) = 4 for each item, the critical Chi-square value of 9.49 was used as the threshold for comparison.

The results revealed that 42 out of the 43 items had Chi-square values surpassing the critical value, indicating statistically significant differences in stakeholder responses. This suggests that parents and SMC members do not share a uniform perception regarding the implementation and impact of SSA across most indicators.

Variation in Stakeholder Perception

The significant divergence in perception can be interpreted in several ways. Parents, as the primary beneficiaries of educational services for their children, may evaluate SSA provisions based on direct benefits such as the availability of textbooks, quality of uniforms, scholarships, and child learning outcomes. In contrast, SMC members may assess SSA more from a governance or oversight perspective, focusing on administrative processes, infrastructure delivery, and program implementation.

For instance, on infrastructure-related items (Items 3–7), SMC members may rate the availability and adequacy of infrastructure more positively, given their role in monitoring these aspects. Parents, however, base their responses on the daily realities of the classroom, which may result in differing perceptions.

In relation to achievement and retention indicators (Items 13–20), the observed divergence suggests that while SMC members may assess outcomes at a broader level, parents tend to form their perceptions based on their children's individual academic progress and experiences.

Notably, even in the domain of Equity and Inclusive Education (Items 23–42), the significant differences in perceptions suggest varied levels of awareness, expectations, or exposure to inclusive practices, support for SC/ST education, and gender-sensitive policies. These differences point to the potential for diverse interpretations and understandings of the program's inclusivity among the two groups.

Consensus in Item 24

Item 24, which addresses whether the school is welcoming to children with special needs, is the only item where no statistically significant difference was observed between parents and SMC members. This indicates a shared perception between the two groups, suggesting a common understanding or consensus regarding the inclusiveness of the school environment. This finding could reflect widespread agreement or observable practices at the school level that both parents and SMC members recognize and accept similarly.

9. Major Findings-

The major findings of this study regarding the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Odisha, based on perceptions of parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members, are summarized as follows:

1. Provisions:

Strengths: 68.67% of respondents were satisfied with the timely and adequate distribution of free textbooks.

Weaknesses: Only 64% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of school uniforms, and 43.33% were satisfied with the functionality of computers, reflecting ongoing issues with material quality and digital infrastructure.

2. Enrollment:

Strengths: 72.67% of respondents felt SSA made enrollment easier, and 71.33% agreed that SSA improved accessibility for disadvantaged groups.

Challenges: Despite high gross enrollment ratios (95.59% in 2022-23), the net enrollment ratio for 11-14-year-olds dropped from 93.24% in 2011-12 to 65.89% in 2022-23, indicating difficulties in maintaining consistent enrollment among older children.

3. Attendance:

Strengths: 70% of stakeholders reported better regularity in attendance post-SSA.

Challenges: 58% of respondents felt financial constraints continued to be a barrier to regular attendance, echoing concerns about the persistence of financial hardship even after policy interventions.

4. Retention:

Strengths: 64.66% of respondents felt more children are completing primary schooling, and 70.67% attributed the reduction in dropout rates to SSA.

Challenges: Dropout rates at the upper primary level, particularly among Scheduled Tribe (ST) students, remained a concern, with the ST dropout rate at 6.72% in 2022-23.

5. Achievement:

Strengths: 56.67% of respondents felt children's learning had improved, with 60% noting better reading skills and 58.66% citing better writing skills.

Challenges: While the promotion rate at the elementary level improved, more focus is needed on actual learning outcomes beyond grade completion.

6. Scholarships:

Strengths: 68% of respondents found the scholarship process clear and fair, and 67.33% agreed that scholarships helped meet students' needs.

Impact: Scholarships played a significant role in improving transition rates from primary to upper primary, which rose from 85.48% in 2011-12 to 98.68% in 2022-23.

7. Equity:

Strengths: Perceptions regarding the inclusion of children with special needs (CWSN) and support for SC/ST children were generally positive, with 55–67% of respondents agreeing on adequate mechanisms.

Challenges: 13-25% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the support for CWSN and SC/ST children, reflecting ongoing disparities in implementation, especially for tribal students.

8. Girls' Education:

Strengths: Approximately 70% of respondents acknowledged efforts to ensure girls' participation, safety, and leadership in education.

Challenges: Despite progress at the primary level, challenges remain for adolescent girls, particularly at the upper primary level, where girls' dropout rates were higher (3.2%).

9. Community Participation:

Strengths: 62% of stakeholders confirmed regular parent-SMC meetings, indicating a reasonable level of community engagement.

Challenges: 38% of respondents were undecided or critical, highlighting the need for improved clarity, capacity-building, and sustained communication between communities and schools.

10. A key finding of the study is that while both parents and SMC members recognized SSA's positive impact on access, enrollment, and retention, they differed in their emphasis on immediate educational outcomes versus broader systemic challenges, particularly in infrastructure and equity.

10. Conclusion:

SSA has had significant success in expanding access, improving enrollment, retention, and academic promotion, particularly for disadvantaged groups. However, challenges persist in areas such as infrastructure quality, digital resources, retention among tribal populations, and supporting children with special needs. Addressing these gaps with targeted, context-sensitive policies will be essential for ensuring the continued success of SSA in Odisha.

11. Discussion -

The present study sought to capture the perceptions of parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members regarding the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Odisha, focusing on seven major indicators: Provisions, Enrollment, Attendance, Retention, Achievement, Scholarships, and Equity. The findings reveal overall positive perceptions, but also highlight specific gaps that align closely with previous research.

Under Provisions, 68.67% of respondents agreed that free textbooks were distributed on time and adequately, indicating substantial improvement. However, perceptions about the quality of school uniforms (only 64% satisfied) and working computers (only 43.33% agreeing) point to persistent issues of material quality and digital infrastructure. These findings are supported by Mishra (2006) and Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008), who observed that while SSA expanded access, infrastructural quality remained uneven. This concern is reflected in secondary data trends, which show a decline in total schools from 58,134 in 2011-12 to 49,822 in 2022-23, suggesting that while consolidation efforts are underway, resource allocation per school must improve to meet qualitative expectations.

In terms of Enrollment, the analysis revealed strong positive perceptions, with 72.67% of respondents stating that SSA made enrollment easier, and 71.33% acknowledging that schools are more accessible to disadvantaged groups. This matches with Chand et al. (2013), who credited SSA with boosting enrollment. Secondary data supports this perception: although overall gross enrollment ratio (GRE) remained high (95.59% in 2022-23), the net enrollment ratio (NER) for 11–14 year-olds fell from 93.24% in 2011-12 to 65.89% in 2022-23, indicating challenges in maintaining consistent enrollment particularly among older children.

Regarding Attendance, 70% of stakeholders observed better regularity in attendance post-SSA, although only 58% felt financial constraints were no longer a major barrier. These patterns align with Mehrotra (2019) and Singh and Das (2020), who noted that financial hardship remains a critical factor even after policy interventions. Corroborating this, Odisha's out-of-school children (6–14 years) dramatically decreased from 30,591 in 2011-12 to just 261 in 2022-23, demonstrating SSA's success in bringing children into schools, although attendance consistency needs further strengthening especially in economically weaker communities.

For Retention, 64.66% of respondents believed that more children complete primary schooling now, and 70.67% credited SSA for reduction in dropout rates. This aligns with Odisha's primary dropout rate, which dropped from 0.43% in 2011-12 to nearly 0% by 2022-23. However, challenges remain at the upper primary level where the dropout rate for ST students was still 6.72% in 2022-23. These findings mirror concerns raised by Rout (2014) and Naik (2024) about sustained engagement through higher stages of schooling.

Stakeholder responses related to Achievement show moderate positivity: 56.67% agreed that children's overall learning had improved, while 60% and 58.66% noted better reading and writing skills respectively. Sahu (2019) and Choudhury and Panda (2017) similarly found evidence of improved basic literacy under SSA. Supporting this, Odisha's promotion rate at the elementary level improved significantly to 98.75% by 2022-23, suggesting that academic progression has become more streamlined under SSA. However, achievement in terms of actual learning outcomes beyond grade completion still needs focused attention.

In the domain of Scholarships, 68% of respondents found the scholarship process clear and fair, and 67.33% agreed that scholarships adequately helped meet students' needs. This aligns with findings by Patra (2020) and Verma and Behera (2019), who emphasized the critical role of financial aid in ensuring educational continuity among marginalized groups. Scholarship schemes have played a notable part in reducing the number of out-of-school children and improving the transition rate from primary to upper primary, which rose from 85.48% in 2011-12 to 98.68% in 2022-23.

On Equity, perceptions were supportive but cautious. For inclusive education for children with special needs (CWSN), between 55% and 67% agreed on mechanisms for identification, curriculum adaptation, and support. Yet, about 13% expressed dissatisfaction, echoing concerns raised by Das and Sahoo (2022) and Sahu (2020) regarding uneven implementation. Similarly, while 56–66% acknowledged school support for SC/ST children, about 20–25% showed dissatisfaction. Odisha's secondary data show that while SC dropout rates have dropped to 2.67% at upper primary in 2022-23, ST dropout rates remain higher, reflecting the continuing vulnerability of tribal students — a gap observed by Rout and Mishra (2021) and Kumar and Senapati (2020).

With respect to Girls' Education, approximately 70% of respondents acknowledged efforts in ensuring girls' participation, safety, and leadership, resonating with Meher (2021) and Singh and Das (2020). Odisha's data show that girls' dropout rate in primary education reduced significantly to 0.16% in 2022-23, though challenges remain at upper primary levels (girls' dropout rate: 3.2%), indicating that while SSA interventions have worked well at the primary stage, adolescent girls still face social barriers to continuing education.

Finally, on Community Participation, 62% of stakeholders confirmed regular parent-SMC meetings, while 38% were undecided or critical. This finding aligns with Patel and Mohanty (2018) and Rout and Jena (2021), who stressed the need for greater clarity, capacity-building, and sustained communication between communities and schools to strengthen participatory governance. Further Nanda (2024) identified a critical challenge that there is a lack of community ownership in elementary education.

Thus, the integration of primary stakeholder perceptions with secondary statistical trends strongly suggests that SSA has been largely successful in expanding access, improving retention, supporting disadvantaged groups, and enhancing academic promotion. However, pockets of vulnerability — notably among tribal populations, older children, and those needing inclusive education support — continue to require focused, context-sensitive policy action.

12.Educational Implications- The findings of the present study have important educational implications both in general for strengthening elementary education policies across India, and in particular for improving elementary education practices and outcomes in Odisha based on the experiences gathered from past initiatives.

1. **Strengthening Quality of Provisions:** Ensure that, along with timely distribution, the quality of textbooks, uniforms, classrooms, and digital resources is consistently improved.

2. Focused Support for Vulnerable Groups: Address the higher dropout rates among tribal (ST) students and older children (11–14 years) through targeted programs and transition support.
3. Enhancing Learning Outcomes: Strengthen classroom pedagogy, teacher training, and competency-based assessments to improve real academic achievement, not just enrollment and promotion.
4. Expanding Financial Assistance: Broaden and better target scholarships and other financial aids to reduce economic barriers to attendance, particularly for the most marginalized families.
5. Promoting Inclusive Education: Provide continuous training for teachers and SMC members on inclusive practices to better support children with special needs and SC/ST students.
6. Deepening Community Participation: Enhance the effectiveness of SMCs by building capacity, encouraging active participation from women and marginalized groups, and sustaining engagement beyond formal meetings.
7. Adopting a Holistic Educational Approach: Combine access, quality, inclusivity, and contextual adaptation to create a more responsive and equitable education system.

13. Limitations of the Study-

1. Perception of parents and SMC members may be subjective.
2. Perspectives of teachers, students, and education department officials were not included.
3. No classroom observations could be done and academic performance records were not analyzed.
4. The findings are based on responses collected during a specific timeframe (February 2025) and may not capture long-term or seasonal variations.

14. Suggestions for further Research- Based on the findings of the present study, the following areas are suggested for further research to deepen understanding and enhance educational practices.

1. **Longitudinal Analysis:** Conduct long-term studies to assess how stakeholder perceptions and educational outcomes evolve over time.
2. **Comparative Studies:** Compare rural, tribal, and urban regions to identify gaps and successful practices in elementary education.
3. **Focused Evaluation of Inclusion:** Investigate the effectiveness of inclusive education practices for children with special needs at the school level.
4. **Community Participation Research:** Explore strategies to strengthen and sustain the active involvement of parents and community members in school management.
5. **Impact of Digital Initiatives:** Study the role of digital learning tools and infrastructure in improving student engagement and learning outcomes in elementary schools.

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