



Mahindra Academy, Malad

Impact Assessment

2020-21

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Limited

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Executive Summary

On behalf of Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd (M&M), DevInsights conducted a research study to assess the impact of the timely Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) intervention at Mahindra Academy, Malad, in the financial year 2020-21. In view of the challenges thrown up by the pandemic, when the parents of students of Mahindra Academy found it challenging to pay the fees on time, a CSR grant was given to the Academy to continue operations efficiently and to undertake maintenance work related to safety issues.

In order to execute the study, a research team from DevInsights visited the school and administered in-depth interviews with the school authorities, to understand and assess the impact of the grant provided and how it led to smooth functioning of the school in the face of the pandemic.

The study was designed to adopt qualitative approach with information and data primarily sourced through in-depth-interviews (IDIs) with the key stakeholders and respondents. Research questions were formulated, based on which a qualitative tool was developed to guide and steer the interviews.

Mahindra Academy was set up in June 1970 to enable access to quality education for the children of M&M Ltd employees based at their Kandivali Plant. Over time, however, the school was opened up to the larger community. Recently, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the entire education system grappled with its inevitable impact on the students, teachers and parents, Mahindra Academy too faced its own set of challenges, in terms of transitioning to online classes, ensuring quality education and adequate attendance, and providing a supportive environment to students as well as parents.

In the sudden transition to an online education system, maintaining the quality of education was the school's paramount concern. However, on top of the technological and skilling challenges of conducting effective online classes, the school also faced a financial crunch as parents found themselves unable to pay the fees, which impeded the income flow required to pay the faculty and staff's salaries as well as for the running repairs and maintenance required at the premises.

In order to avoid disruption in the online classes, the school's governing council requested monetary support from Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. The request was approved on priority basis and a grant of Rs 1 crore was provided to the school to defray their urgent expenses, such as timely disbursement of teachers' salaries and safety-related repair work at the school premises.

As per the disclosures by the school authorities, the grant amount was well spent in accordance with the purpose for which it was requested, i.e., paying teachers' salaries and carrying out urgent repair and maintenance work at the school. This study, thus, assesses the positive impact of the timely pecuniary intervention by Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. for the smooth functioning of the Mahindra Academy, Malad during pandemic times.

Mahindra Academy – Malad East

The Mahindra Academy, Malad, was originally established in 1970 for the employees of M & M Ltd. based at Kandivali Plant. The academy is managed by a Governing Council comprising members of the Mahindra Education Society. The school was set up so that children of the employees of Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. can continue to have access to good schools and quality education.

The Academy is now open to the larger community and is housed in a spacious three story building surrounded by beautiful gardens, where over 1200 students receive education in preparation for the SSC examination conducted by the Maharashtra State Board for Secondary Education.



Mahindra Academy Building

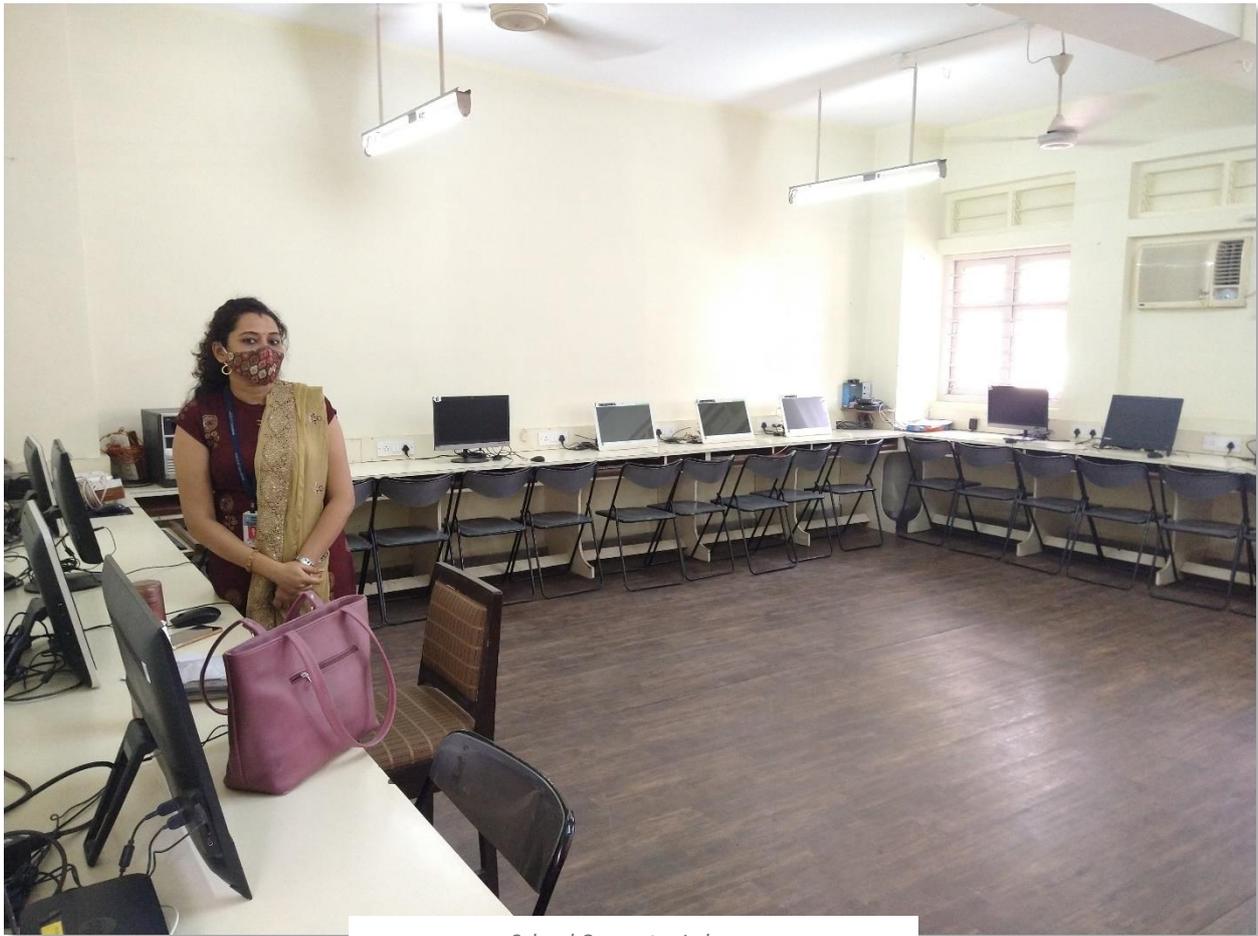
Some of the Photographs of the Mahindra Academy can be seen below



Teacher teaching online from school



School Assembly Area



School Computer Lab

1. Objectives

The Project

The project under study is the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Grant of Rs 1 crore that was given to Mahindra Academy, Malad, for maintenance of the Academy, as well as to facilitate continuance of operations during the COVID period cash crunch, when students were finding it hard to pay their fees.

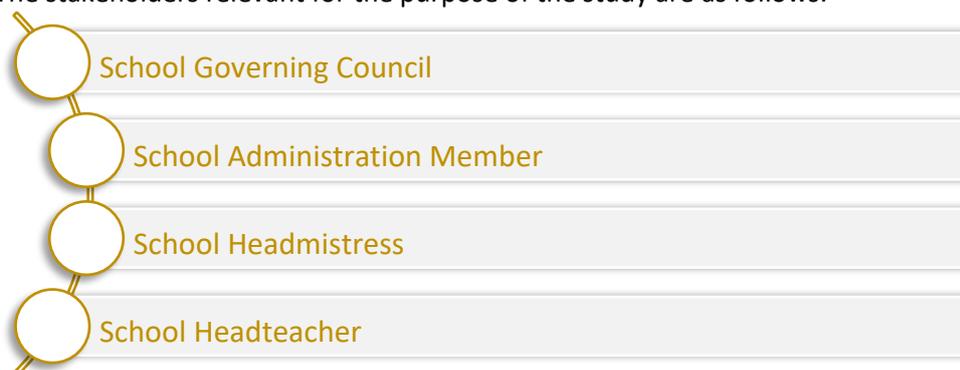
Objective of the Study

The sum disbursed by way of the CSR grant was meant to fulfil threefold objectives of paying the staff salaries, undertaking repairs and maintenance work, and to ensure smooth functioning of the Academy in the face of pandemic challenges and fiscal constraints. The current study was conducted by DevInsights on behalf of Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd., in order to assess the impact of this pecuniary intervention at the Mahindra Academy, Malad in the financial year 2020-21.

2. Scope of the study

The primary respondents were identified at the study site and were approached for the purpose of the study. A research team from DevInsights reached the site of study, Mahindra Academy, Malad, to conduct interviews with the target respondents. In keeping with the research ethics, the respondents were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used strictly only for the purpose of this research study.

The stakeholders relevant for the purpose of the study are as follows:



The approach of this study was purely qualitative, primarily comprising of in-depth-interviews (IDIs) with the respondents. Key research questions were formulated, based on which a qualitative tool was developed to guide and steer the interview.

3. Findings

3.1 Challenges faced by the Management, Teachers, and Students during COVID-19 period and steps taken to address the challenges

Covid-19 was, indeed, a challenging period for everyone concerned – especially during the lockdown phase, which necessitated shutting down the schools and working from home. The mandate to work from home carried multiple challenges for everyone – management, staff, faculty and student, alike.

Transition to Online Classes

During the lockdown phase, when face-to-face classes came to a standstill, the Management Committee and Governing Council of the school were tasked with the twin responsibilities of ensuring that the students received quality education in the online mode on the one hand, and of preventing absenteeism and truancy to ensure regular attendance online, on the other. The initial challenge in the smooth transition from offline to online classes was that of capacity building of teachers, to enable them to adapt seamlessly to the rigours of online teaching. Once the transition to online teaching was accomplished successfully, the next hurdle was to make sure that the students were not missing their classes and continued to study.

The Governing Council and Management Committee had to put in place certain measures in order to rise to these challenges. The students were provided with unique school IDs which the management used to track the status of their attendance and keep the parents suitably informed. Further, since the government was unable to announce firm guidelines for conducting examinations while the schools remained shut, the teachers were faced with the challenging task of keeping the students motivated

and prepping them for their exams in this fluid scenario, as well as deciding on the course structure. This involved rescheduling classes and creating timetables to meet the convenience of every student on a dynamic basis in response to the evolving pandemic and lockdown situation. The teachers were given regular briefing about the various guidelines issued periodically by the Education Department with regards to functioning of the school classes, syllabus, and in ensuring that the students are not being pressurized.

It was found that the students in the primary classes took longer to adapt to the new environment. Older students, on the other hand, did not face a lot of trouble with the online classes and were regular with their attendance. However, a few students faced the issue of not having access to an undisturbed internet connection to facilitate their online classes, which often necessitated the use of their parents' smartphones.

Infrastructural Challenges

As a result of the exigencies of the pandemic, teachers had to adapt, virtually overnight, to a new infrastructure regime which was still a work in progress. They were to conduct classes from their homes, and since the screen time for online classes was limited as per government guidelines, the teachers had to combine classes to accommodate as many as 100 pupils in one Zoom session class.

The younger students, who were used to interacting with their teachers and peers in-person, could no longer do so. Additionally, the teachers, apart from taking classes, had to make sure the primary class students who are academically weaker weren't lagging behind due to discomfort with the online mode of teaching. The teachers were, therefore, called upon to conduct online counselling and remedial classes for such students to help them better cope with their studies and the ongoing pandemic situation.

As per the government guidelines, examinations were not to be held online, and so, the school conducted online revision tests instead. The teachers created groups on WhatsApp to share the study and practice materials with the students. For younger students, drawing sheets and craft learning videos were made and shared to keep them engaged in constructive activities.

Apart from coping with the transition to online classes and its attendant challenges, the school administration also implemented infrastructural improvements such as cleaning water filters, and installing high quality internet connection in the classrooms and laboratories so that teachers could conduct online classes from the school premises. This improvement served to support the teachers emotionally and mentally, as they could now conduct classes from the school, without the distractions of home.

Financial Challenges

Due to the financial turmoil in the wake of COVID pandemic, innumerable people lost their jobs – among them, a number of parents of school-going children, who consequently, found it difficult to pay their children's school fees. Moreover, quite a few parents weren't willing to have their children attend the online classes, stating that online schooling was not their preferred mode of learning. Such parents, therefore, refused to pay the school fees altogether, despite polite reminders from the school. In this scenario, the CSR grant from Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. facilitated the timely disbursement of staff salaries.

3.2 Support Extended to Students during COVID-19 Lockdown

Financial Support

The school authorities were made aware of the dire financial situation faced by the parents of many students who lost their means of livelihood as a result of the pandemic situation. Mahindra Academy did not pressurize such parents to pay the school fees and allowed them considerable leeway in the form of relaxed payment schedules. Additionally, the school implemented the 15% reduction in fees mandated by the Maharashtra government, from August 2021, extending the concession to all students. No student was prevented from availing the online classes due to non-payment of fees. Students were neither questioned nor pressurized about their fee payment status, and were allowed to participate in various activities and competitions as well as appear for their online tests, as usual.

Therefore, despite the financial crunch that the school faced due to the pandemic, the teachers were able to receive their salaries on time due to the CSR grant from Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. This grant was, thus, a huge financial support to the school and teachers, acknowledging as well as encouraging their efforts to impart quality education to students during these difficult times.

Mental and Emotional Support

In consideration of the impact of COVID-19 on the mental and emotional well-being of children, all competitions were held online, for which they were awarded prizes and the lists of winners were published online. The school provided drawing kits, books, and all study materials for the students. Additionally, the school teachers conducted counselling sessions to help the students cope with the pandemic emotionally. The teachers also imparted social awareness about wearing masks, physical health, hygiene, washing and sanitizing hands regularly through their online sessions. Other sensitive topics like POCSO and cyber-crime were touched upon in these sessions as well.

3.3 Upkeep of school building and infrastructure

Need for repair and maintenance work

The school being shut down during the pandemic presented an excellent opportunity to undertake essential repair and maintenance work in the absence of the students without having to worry about their safety or distraction from their studies.

The grant from Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd., in this regard, was used to repair the heavy leakage in the roofing of the school hall, along with jammed windows and cracked tiles inside, which had rendered the hall area so unsafe as to be non-functional.

Additionally, there were a few minor infrastructural needs such as Wi-Fi connectivity in the school, the construction and cleaning of the drainage pipe along the school, levelling of the flooring of the assembly area, cleaning of water filters, etc. However, in terms of repairs, the grant was used solely to repair the hall.

Impact of a Timely Intervention by Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.

The grant allocated by Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. to Mahindra Academy in Malad relieved the school of its financial worries. Today, the hall repaired from the grant money is accessed by students, teachers and their parents on different occasions. Since the repairing of the hall, it has been brought into use for award functions since it is spacious enough to allow students and staff to gather inside with social distancing. Additionally, the sheets of the roof were changed to the latest transparent ones which allow natural sunlight to light up the hall during daytime activities.

The repair work of the hall has also allowed students to utilize it for indoor sports such as badminton, chess, and table tennis. Other recreational activities are also conducted there. After the repair of the hall, both teachers and students feel safer especially the primary grade students as there is no leakage, the windows aren't broken or jammed which earlier posed a threat to students.

Hence, the CSR Grant was justifiable to support Mahindra Academy, especially at the time of the COVID pandemic. On the basis of the findings, we do believe the funds were utilized in a manner which helped in the smooth operation of the school. The school's Governing Council, Administration Committee members, and staff were highly appreciative of the timely support they got from Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. during the COVID-19 period.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study presented above provide evidentiary support to the challenges faced by the Mahindra Academy, Malad during the pandemic and how it overcame those challenges with strong financial support from Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.

Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. was approached by the school during the pandemic to help face the challenges pertaining to the inflow of income from their major source. The school wasn't receiving the due amount of fees from the parents of the students and this created an imbalance in income and expenditure for the school. The student fees is the school's major source of income which is utilised to pay the salaries of the teachers and other staff members as well as for maintenance and facility expenses. Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. allocated a generous grant amount that enabled the school to emerge from its financial problems immediately. The quick response by Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. to the school's request demonstrates the strong support the Mahindra Academy has from the company. Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.'s timely help came as a relief in the stressful times of COVID-19 which allowed the school to continue to impart high quality education to its students as it has since its inception.