



A Case Study of SECMOL as an Educational Alternative based on 'Deschooling'

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Abstract:

*The Covid-19 pandemic emerged as a self-proclaimed teacher who taught us a lot about life and nature of human being. How helpless we are in front of such a tiny creature of the nature! This compels us to learn and differentiate between essential and non-essential commodities of our day today life. Suddenly everything started to control by this tiny creature across the globe and education is one of them. Who knows our **School Chalo Abhiyan** could be change into **Ghar par rhe, Surakshit rhe abhiyan!** The responsible authorities started to think about alternative ways of learning and found as well as created alternatives to continue teaching learning process. SECMOL (Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ldadakh) is also a sort of alternative that should be explored and understood.*

This investigation is an in-depth exploration of SECMOL as an educational alternative and an effort to understand the intricate phenomena of learning within. By keeping this in mind the researcher had tried to experience the on ground reality of a kind of uncommon and non-formal school that promoting learning beyond four walls, a particular uniform and of course without an Elian curriculum. The aim of this research paper is to explain the study done by the researcher using core qualitative method based on naturalistic observation, focus group discussion, and interviews.

Keywords: SECMOL, educational alternative, naturalistic observation, intricate phenomena, non-formal

1. Introduction

Once Mark Twain stated that I have never let my schooling interfere with my education (as cited on Nov. 16, 2017 by Seybold, Matt.).

Schools are a relatively new idea for ending child labour practices and replacing them with a more regulated atmosphere than existed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Furthermore, all schools follow the same curriculum. We were brainwashed into sitting down, paying attention to our teacher, and following the rules. This is not that awful, but ignoring and inhibiting a child's originality and turning them into a machine operated by a remote are not a constructive education.

What are your thoughts? The majority of us miss our college or school days, but for reasons other than classrooms and teachers. We may have wished every day for either an interval/game class or for school to be closed the next day so we could stay at home. However, there is a school where the most dreaded punishment is being sent home for two weeks; here, kids learn by doing things, where they engage in numerous inventions to solve real-world problems such as climate change, and where they govern the school themselves, just like they learn management and governance by controlling the campus newspaper and radio, science by designing and building their homes, solar heated, mud buildings, and kindness and compassion via introspection and meditation in a small country with an elected government. A school where the admissions criterions are not your grade point average, but the

rectification of a system that has failed you. That's incredible! Yes, the "Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh," or "SECMOL", exists in Ladakh, India's Union Territory.

About 28 years ago, as I was finishing my engineering education, I saw that schools were a burden for everyone, but it was doubly terrible and irrelevant for mountain youngsters, says Sonam Wangchuk (Founder of SECMOL). Children who grew up speaking Ladakhi were forced to sit all day memorising an Elian language such as Urdu or English... In a high-altitude freezing desert, F stands for Fan, S for Ships, and T for Trains. Until recently, 95 percent of students failed the all-important 10th grade examinations every year. We started the alternate school that you just witnessed for those who still failed, and the outcomes are as follows: Tewang Rigzen, a famous journalist who later became the Ladakh Hill Council's education minister at the age of 27, failed his 10th grade five times. Stanzin became a filmmaker and has won accolades all around the world, despite failing four times. Steanirous is a well-known social entrepreneur who had previously failed three times. You're aware! As we can see, the situation of education is not just bad for Ladakhis, who are already at a disadvantage, but even for you in the big cities. It is past time for us to work together to fix this.

So, let's go deeper to know and understand about this unique kind of school in a more comfortable and easy way to learn lessons to make our education much better those leads towards holistic development, focuses on the nourishment of innate power and humanisation of the child. A picture speaks more than thousands of words, this research paper has been written using pictures for better expression and vibrant understanding about the situation in SECMOL.

2. A Brief History of SECMOL

The Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) was created in 1988 by a group of Ladakhi college students who believed that the education system required significant reform. SECMOL has been working to change the government education system for many years. Simultaneously, SECMOL Campus evolved into an eco-village where students, employees, and volunteers live, work, and learn alongside one another. It's not your typical school; instead, it's a place where you may learn about practical, environmental, social, and traditional knowledge, values, and skills. Students learn old Ladakhi music, dances, and history alongside current academic knowledge on the solar-powered and solar-heated campus, which they mostly administer, administrate, and maintain. SECMOL aims to provide young Ladakhis and others growing up in Ladakh with the knowledge, skills, perspective, and confidence to select and build a sustainable future, particularly for those from rural or disadvantaged origins. (<https://secmol.org/about/>)

3. Objectives of the Institution

- Organize local communities to participate constructively in the operation of schools by organising Village Education Committees (VECs).
- To provide instructors with imaginative, child-centered, and activity-based teaching approaches in order to make schooling for children less unpleasant and more enjoyable.
- To create Ladakh-specific versions of elementary textbooks and instructional materials.
- Using the aforementioned factors to rekindle enthusiasm, boost confidence, and increase dedication among Government school instructors. (<https://secmol.org/about/education-reforms/education-in-ladakh>)

4. Research Question

- 1.How learning is possible outside of formal schools up to secondary level?

5. Research Objective

- 1.To find out the scope of learning outside of the formal schools up to secondary level with special reference to SECMOL.

- 2.To explore new alternatives for learning along with existing ways of learning beyond formal education with special reference to SECMOL.
- 3.To experience the uncommon and unusual environment of learning that is trying to learn to live on the earth with harmony and promoting humanity.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Method

Core qualitative research method based on naturalistic observation.

6.2 Tool

Case study using observation, interviews, and focus group discussion.

6.3 Sample

All the Students, teachers and other staffs of SECMOL who were present during data collection.

6.4 Sampling and Data Collection

The sampling technique for the current investigation was snow ball sampling as per the nature of population and need of the study. To collect data researcher went to SECMOL and spent 28 days there as a volunteer. Researcher was part of the whole teaching learning process and lived the life of SECMOL for real and on ground experience.

7. Discussion

7.1 Understanding Conceptual and Functional Structure

The information displayed in the accompanying diagram was the impetus for the creation of educational alternatives such as SECMOL. Every year, according to Wangchuk, 95 percent of students fail the High School examination. They were unable to cope with the examination system, despite excelling in their innate abilities. They collaborated with the government and the education department to improve and alleviate the problems that children were experiencing, and as a result, students were failing.



Image source: Sonam Wangchuk's You Tube Channel

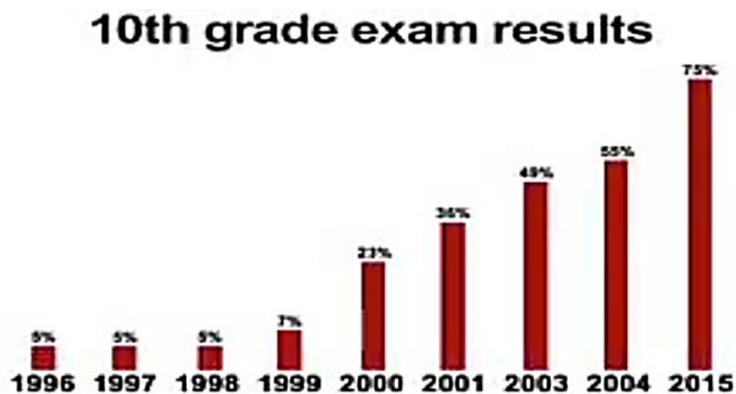


Image source: Sonam Wangchuk's You Tube Channel

Examination results had changed as a result of this revolutionary development. Gradually, the 5% of passing outcomes transformed into 75% passing results.

Despite this, many students failed their exams, so Wangchuk founded SECMOL in 1992 to help students appreciate the significance of Ladakhi culture, grasp current challenges, and enhance their self-esteem as Ladakhis. One of the most important goals was to inspire young people to do good for Ladakh.



Image: Students were performing their traditional dance in SECMOL

7.2 A Day in the SECMOL

The weather in Ladakh is very unique; one can sense a thoughtful positive energy; one's eyes will open inevitably at the right time in the morning, greeting you with the rising sun and soothing sunrays; the old rocks and stream of the Indus River cheer you throughout the day like your guardian; and one can feel motivated to achieve the goal they set for themselves. It is easy to see how a positive and appropriate physical environment can have a significant impact on a child's development. Learners undertake a brief non-religious introspection about understanding the mind and make plans for the day in the morning. The daily discussion of current events, educational issues, and the development of confidence to succeed in life are at the centre of the learning. Sonam Wangchuk gave the majority of the morning speech. Children go to the task of their choice after morning talk, introspection, and meditation, while remembering to complete the tasks assigned to them as part of SECMOL and their administration. By doing so, kids acquire the fundamentals of planning, management, administration, and governance; they chose to take the initiative, made mistakes, and learned from them. To learn all of this, they were not reliant on any theory or books.

They adapt to their surroundings and integrate what they're doing. They were demonstrating how education is more than just reading and writing; it is also practical experience in science and social studies, delivered in the mother language and with real-life analogies and hands-on practise.

They learn from every activity on their campus, and there are no hard and fast rules or regulations. For example, if a student wants to learn how to calculate the area of a triangle, he or she can do so by stepping up or down the stairs without having to attend a mathematics class at a specific time or with a specific teacher; they used to learn this on their own with the help of facilitators while playing or wondering during their free time. Actually, they constructed their campus in a really unique way to stimulate learners' curiosity, urge them to pursue their interests, chill them for their intrinsic abilities, and prevent them from destroying their creativity under any form of learning pressure.



Image: Door claims inbuilt in rooms of SECMOL to help students in learning geometry by using waste materials

This is the way they learn how a door claim works and can be made by using some waste or useless materials available at our home by entering in the rooms instead of spending huge money on expensive models. At what degrees, which position door would open, can be observe easily, and they learn geometry this way too.



Image: Solar Energy driven tools installed within SECMOL

Above are the instruments installed within the campus which are solar energy driven tools. Students learn to convert solar energy into electricity by using these tools in their daily routine. They used to get warm water for their basic necessities even in -5 degree to -10 degree celcius temperature using this 'Waaree' instrument run by solar energy.



Image: Green house in SECMOL

Above are the picture of greenhouse, where children grow vegetables in chilled winters for their own food and also learn about soil, different lessons of botany, and physics. Doing gardening students try new techniques and learn the old wisdom also.

In the following pictures you can easily observe that how the people of SECMOL learn waste management in such a young age and ofcourse to create some productive things of their need:



Image: Waste Management in SECMOL

Students are used to separate different kind of waste on daily basis, they don't used to procrastinate their work as this is the really a tough value to follow in behaviour for most of us. They don't have any 'moral values subject or syllabus' to 'learn and pass' but moral values can be observed in their behaviour.

The following pictures express the height of their creativity, one of the volunteer used this useless fourwheeler turned into a very interesting place to visit and learn, named as 'Car House.'



Image: Car House

They use this car house to learn and conserve their traditional and cultural knowledge and also they made a selfie point their to make learning fun. Just have a look inside the car house in following pictures.



Image: Inside of the Car House

In our mainstream schools the idea of classroom is about comfortable desks, a blackboard some essential tools and ofcourse surrounded with four walls. In SECMOL this myth had been broken.



Image: Open Classrooms of SECMOL

Learning can happen at any time, in any location, and in any way! All you need is a desire to learn and a supportive environment in which to do so. The images above depict SECMOL's discussion classes. When the weather isn't cooperating, they employ four-walled classrooms. These are just a few examples of SECMOL's teaching-learning style in terms of sustainable living, involving students who had failed their 10th grade exams. One major cause for Ladakhi pupils' exam failure is that English is not taught as a foreign language in schools. The SECMOL's English and conversation classes are a major draw. Field trips to historical sites and 'Gonpas' were organised to bring history to life. They teach Ladakhi history because it is not taught in schools.

Children and volunteers hear traditional Ladakhi folk songs honouring soldiers after dinner. Each student presents a lecture on a topic of their choice in order to gain confidence in public speaking. They participate in sports, games, and tournaments for the sake of fitness and cooperation.

8. Solar Campus



Image: Learning installation of Solar energy driven tools in SECMOL

The SECMOL campus is fully solar heated with simple low-tech design made of earth just like traditional Ladakhi buildings. Much of the campus was built by campers and volunteers.



Image: Bricks and building of SECMOL

The right one is the picture of bricks used to build such a sustainable buildings using lead bottles and principle of physics. Buildings are solar insulated when there is -15 degree celcius out side of the rooms, ther is +15 degree celcius inside the rooms and this is really something amazing to feel.

9. Selection of Teachers/Facilitators

To aid and assist students in their studies, they ask volunteers from all over the world to stay on campus for at least a month. The desire, interest, motives, and talents with which they want to join SECMOL are the selection criteria for volunteers, not their degrees or certifications. Volunteers used to not only offer their skills, but also their perspectives on one another's cultures. In formal schools, teachers are paid by the administration, but here, facilitators pay for their stay and contribute and assist in the learning of the children for free. As a result, they are able to raise funds to run their campus.

10. A way Forward

The research question was:

How learning is possible outside of formal schools up to secondary level? The answer of this is laid in discussion part of this research paper and will be discussed below also. The research objectives were:

- 1.To find out the scope of learning outside of the formal schools up to secondary level with special reference to SECMOL.
- 2.To explore new alternatives for learning along with existing ways of learning beyond formal education with special reference to SECMOL.
- 3.To experience the uncommon and unusual environment of learning that is trying to learn to live on the earth with harmony and promoting humanity.

SECMOL has learning information built in from the first step to the end, and its location was intelligently chosen by the founder to assist us study geography and science. Because Ladakh is a chilly desert, the living rooms feature black painted outlines, double glassed windows, and venting wholes for air circulation. It's immediately below the mountain to avoid the north wind head on; it faces the south, thus absorbing the greatest sunlight, heat, and solar energy. They live together, eat together, work together, and learn together throughout the summers, following the four pillars of learning established by the **Delors committee in 1997. They live together, eat together, work together, and learn together.**

Students use all of the contemporary technologies that are required and that they believe are necessary for them, such as a television, to watch movies, shows, sports, and news, among other things. They study computers in order to keep up with the current world. The nicest thing is that they don't abuse technology; for example, they used to play games on the ground rather than on their phones or computers. They use the 'art of introspection' to examine themselves on a daily basis during the morning discussion and after dinner.

The entire concept of creativity is really different here than it is elsewhere. They truly educate their children how to do things that they are good at.

Because it is a community learning centre and was founded with the goal of improving the lives of the people of Ladakh, most students from outside of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir will not be admitted, but as a volunteer, anyone from anywhere in the world can join this movement and learn a lot of their choice on campus.

If the people of Ladakh, a cold desert with a basic need for sufficient drinking water and many other things, can contribute to the education and learning of children, as well as for society, country, world, and, of course, the environment, why can't people who have everything take similar steps instead of destroying everything in the name of consumerism and capitalism?

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