Role of School Management Committees in Primary Schools: A Study of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

India is more illiterate than it was fifty or hundred years ago. The socio-economic conditions in rural India have decayed, declined and deprived the primary education system. Equally the social and economical inequalities of caste, class and gender have been identified as the major causes of educational deprivation among the children majorly in rural India. Enrolling all boys and girls in school by 2015 is one of the most important millennium development goals of India. And India will do that probably earlier than the UN target date through non-formal, formal and inclusive education. Thus to achieve this Right to Education Act has been enacted across the nation.

The new rules under the this Act mandates 75% members of School Management Committee (SMC) should be parents so that effective monitoring mechanism can be established at grassroots level itself. This is a key decision which can lead towards the revolutionary changes in education landscape. The SMCs have been given the power to monitor the working of schools and utilization of grants. For SMC to be an effective institution to regulate and manage a village school, it must understand its importance, know its responsibilities and must perform and deliver proficiently. It should ensure that every child in a village enjoys his or her fundamental right of free and compulsory education.

The term 'Education' now has to be accepted with much greater responsibilities than before. Until now the focus has been only on producing Quantity that is large number of doctors, engineer, etc. But with the moving trends of surplus employment opportunities in any sector, it'll definitely shift from Quantity to the Quality part within the learning generations. Thus, the main focus will be on producing better human beings rather than incompetent beings. And this can only be achieved by providing the education sector with the right blend of opportunities, amending education as an exercise in quality with quantity matched to what our economy can imbibe.

Keywords: Education System, School Management Committee, Quality Education**.**

Education System in Rural Uttar Pradesh: An Introduction

India has the second largest education system in the world after China. The degree of processes involved in ensuring quality education for all in the country is definitely a unique and challenging experience. And, at the same time managing such problems affecting the education system are as diverse and deep rooted that the solutions don't lie in just modifying any one single factor. Education has always been envisioned as the best way to bring economic and social transformations in rural areas, but it lags behind from each and every prospect in providing quality improvements for rural children. Thus, it has become a biggest challenge for the government as the only source and resource through which rural children could relive their better lives are badly inadequate in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh.

The uneven spread of education system in rural areas is not only seen in terms of interstate variations, but it is also largely seen between rural and urban divide. As always urban areas are at an advantage compared to the backend, impoverished rural areas in India. Social inequalities of caste, class and gender have proven to be the major hindrance in school participation and completion, as a result of which, certain segments of society, such as the SC's, ST's, and girls in rural areas, have continued to lag behind the rest of the school going children.

'Action speaks louder than words', an apt proverb to justify the proven facts about the rural school in India. This study with its deteriorating facts reveals about our very well -know rot- learning system, the system where the only purpose is either to top the class or pass in the

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exam. Quality of education in Uttar Pradesh, has literally taken a different turn which is simply producing rot-learners than qualified learners. But, merely targeting at the education system for all the issues isn't really an answer for all the flaws. There are 19 million children in the 6-14 age groups who are eligible for universal education of whom 8 million do not go to school. It means 40% of the children belonging to that age group do not go to school. The drop-out rate by Class V is 25%, whereas 50% of the students drop-out by Class VIII. The required number of additional teachers is 510,000. There are about 120,000 elementary schools across the country where there is only one teacher.

Allocation to achieve the objectives of the RTE Act, which has been aligned with the SSA, was hiked from Rs. 15,000 crore to Rs. 21,000 crore. Still issues of quality and access remain areas of concern particularly in the sphere of rural education in India. Children in rural areas continue to be deprived of quality education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of textbooks or teaching-learning materials. The large number of teachers refuses to teach in rural areas and those who do that are usually under-qualified.

And the much publicized Mid- Day Meal scheme meant to reduce drop-out rates in schools, seem to be not yielding the desired results due to alleged misappropriation of funds meant for the scheme. There is mismanagement, lack of seriousness among the implementing authorities, diversion of funds, and lack of awareness among the poor parents. Besides that the food served under Mid-Day Meal scheme in rural schools also of inferior quality. The recent PROBE report reflects that physical infrastructure of rural schools is far behind the satisfactory-level, with 82% of the schools is in need of renovation. Books are often unavailable, and teacher's absenteeism tends to be high.

Challenges in Educating Rural Children

Education which is a key to all socioeconomic issues is supposed to be focus-centric, need based, practical and creative joyful learning, but it has become a rot-learning mechanical monotonous system. The journey of education since inception is becoming the story of missed opportunities. There are several challenges in spreading literacy across the rural areas in India. Some of them are given below:

1. **Unawareness Among Parents**
   Majority of the parents were not aware of the importance of formal education for children, they expressed helplessness to address the issue of discontinuation of the education of girls after primary education. Majority of the SMC members have very inadequate knowledge about the entire concept of RTE, Act. No training has been provided to them before being made the SMC members. Many of them are so ignorant and unaware that they become a part only for sake of being in it. Members are neither aware about the issues to be raised, nor ready to prepare proper implementation strategies for it.
2. **Resource Mobilization**
   A report on 'Higher Education System in India' describes that no formal training was provided to school administration of primary schools in rural areas for proper school management. There was a very limited engagement of SMC members with the community or District Officials, as there was no platform for their interface. Today, government rural schools remain poorly funded and understaffed. The government continued to view rural education as an agenda that could be relatively free from bureaucratic backlog and general stagnation. It is estimated that 1.71 lakh crore rupees will be needed in the next five years for implementation of the RTE Act. The Union Finance Minister has allocated an increase of 24% for the education sector in the Union Budget for 2011-12. Rs21, 000 crores have been allocated for SSA registering an increase of 40percent. Thus, still rural primary schools lack in quality education and access to basic necessities.

3. Out-Of-School Children

According to government estimates, there are nearly 220 million children in the relevant age group, of which 4.6% or nearly 9.2 million, are out of school. Main challenge today is of bringing back the out-of-school children. It is tough task to bring together children from varying economic and social backgrounds on the same platform and to enforce 25% reservation for weaker sections in school. It would indeed be challenging for the teachers to maintain equilibrium and create an environment for them to blend together.

4. Infrastructural Issues

It is appalling to state that 50% schools do not have separate toilets for girls. Majority of the classes are overloaded and there is no sufficient spacing for proper ventilation with poor lighting facility. Many schools lack access to safe drinking water and other basic necessity. Long distances in going to school are also an issue. The Private Schools in rural areas are showing good progress, as their quality and standards are much updated. Parents who are financial sound are simply sending their children to private schools than to any village level government school in rural areas. Government schools really need to work on school infrastructure.

5. Equity and Quality of Education

Especially in rural areas because of domination of caste system there is no socialization among children belonging to different caste. It becomes difficult for teachers to ensure quality and equity in the same classroom. Teachers and the supporting staff of schools will find it tough to remain impartial and treat all the students on an equal footing without any biases.

School Management Committee: Need of the Hour

Under the provisions of RTE Act, constitution of a School Management Committee in every Government elementary school with 75% of members from amongst parents or guardians of children is mandatory. Among the various tasks, this Committee has also been entrusted with the task of making the communities aware of the rights of children and the duties of State Government, local authority, school and parents, for monitoring and implementation of the midday meal program in schools and preparing an annual account of receipts and expenditure in schools. This initiative was required as major gaps were identified in many elementary schools of rural areas.

- Lack of community involvement especially parents in school administration at rural areas and legal provisioning for community participation is very weak.
- Major concern is the quality of education in schools in the villages. With no examination it is becoming very hard for parents to evaluate their child's performance.
- Overall school development and infrastructure is one of the main challenges.
- Lack of awareness about the legal and constitutional rights, especially RTE, Act and the formation of SMC.

For development in such districts access to quality education is a prerequisite because education is an enabling skill which helps to bridge information, equips them to cope better with work and family responsibilities and supports skill acquisition. But before progressing on such issues there is a dire need to raise awareness about the importance of education and improving community participation. However, the SMC as an institution to promote and ensure quality education for all in the villages is still dependent upon external agencies for its functioning. There is a lack of a sense of responsibility among the members and an active process of participation is missing. The members have a resigned attitude and are oblivious to the significance of their role as SMC members. Thus, the focus has been transferred into the formation restructuring of the Village Education Committee into School Management

Committee in every village school. There is a need to build the capacities of the SMC members around their roles and responsibilities and to inculcate a spirit of participation and contribution among them. To facilitate and empower SMC's to carry out their responsibilities in an effective manner, there is a need to build the capacity of SMC members and make them aware of their roles and responsibilities and the Laws and Rights enshrined in the constitution to further the cause of quality education in villages.

School Management Committee

As per the Act, every school receiving support from the government at elementary level need to constitute a SMC. According to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, ACT 2009 has emphasized the need for restructuring and transforming VEC into SMC for effective school development and management.

a. A SMC shall be constituted in every school and reconstituted every two years. A SMC shall consist of members, excluding the Convener Member, as detailed below:
   - Strength of students : 1 – 300 = 12 members;
   - Strength of students : 301 – 500 = 16 members;
   - Strength of students : 501 and above = 20members;

b. 75% of the strength of the SMC shall be from amongst parents or guardians of children. The remaining 25% of the strength of the SMC shall be from amongst the following persons
   - At least one third members from amongst the elected members of the local authority, to be decided by the local authority;
   - At least one third members from amongst teachers from the school, to be decided by the teachers of the school;
   - Remaining one third from amongst local educationists / children in the school to be decided by the parents in the committee.
   - In case of sixteen members, one more child as member from the children of the School to be decided by the parents in the committee.

Need of School Management Committee

Role and Responsibility of Committee Members:

- To monitor affairs in the school
  - Monitor the working of the schools
  - Prepare and recommend school development plan
  - Monitor the utilization of the grants received from the appropriate Government or local authority or any other source
- Through word of mouth and communication encourage enrolment of children, communicate in simple and creative ways to the community in the neighborhood about the schools and also discuss with them about the duties of the State Government, local authority, school, parent and guardian.
- To monitor the duties of teachers and ensure that teachers maintain regularity and punctuality in attending school
- Conduct and complete the curriculum in accordance with the following provisions
  - All round development of the child
  - Building up child's knowledge, potentially and talent
  - Development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent
  - Learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly and child-centered manner.
- To monitor that teachers are not burdened with non academic duties other than decennial population census, disaster relief duties or duties relation to election to the local authority or the state legislatures or parliament.

- To ensure the enrolment and continued attendance of all the children from the neighborhood in the school.
- To monitor the maintenance of the norms and standards prescribed in the Schedule.
- To Bring to the notice of the local authority any deviation from the rights of the child, in particular mental and physical harassment of children, denial of admission, and timely provision of free entitlements.
- To monitor the identification and enrolment of, and facilities for learning by disabled children, and ensure their participation in, and completion of elementary education.
- To monitor the implementation of the Mid Day Meal in the school.
- To prepare an annual account of receipts and expenditure of the school.

Role of Parents as SMC Member

Parents as SMC members are expected to play an active role in identification and rectification of problems related to access and delivery of quality education in the villages. The members must organize monthly meetings to discuss their functions and other education related issues. These monthly meetings will provide a platform for the members to address their issues that are affecting the functioning of education system in their village school. Effective participation of all the members and sensitizing each member towards the importance of these meetings is very crucial for smooth functioning for the SMCs.

Regular participation of the members in the meeting will pave way for their involvement in other activities towards improving the state of education in their villages. Each member should be informed about their financial rights and their capacities and should also be involved in budget planning and expenditure for repair and maintenance of school building. Major roles and responsibilities of parents as a SMC member are:

- Encouraging enrolment
- Preventing dropouts
- Supervising in school projects
- Evaluating performance of children in school examination
- Promoting civic sense and cleanliness in school
- Organizing extracurricular activities in school
- Looking after Quality of teaching, Attendance of children
- Ensuring regularity of teachers and teacher pupil ratio

Issues for Effective SMCs

During the formation of SMC, ensure to keep active parents as members, because active members will be dynamically involved about the issues concerning their child's education. A recent study by a rural research institution states that the experience of Village Education committee (former management committee for schools) has been a mixed one putting forward several issues for ineffective results.

1. Awareness on the Importance of Education

This study states that parents do believe that education helps in overall development of the child as it expands personal horizons, bridges information symmetry and equips the child with skills to cope better with the surrounding. But, the reluctance of parents to send their children to school is majorly poverty and underdevelopment in the villages and lack of access to quality education. The existence of private schools and their quality are attracting more parents to send their children study in such schools. But those who cannot afford to send are stuck in the vicious cycle of poverty – a poor child wants quality education to break out of poverty but cannot afford quality education because of being poor. The major unfortunate situations are for the girl child dropped out of school after attaining primary education mainly as her requirement was more needed at the household level, to assist her mother and look after

siblings. Therefore the role of parents as a member in School Development Plan- a committee member will definitely bring better efficiency and quality in schools.

2. Awareness towards RTE, Act

It is ironical to observe, people to whom RTE should matter the most, are being the most ignorant about it. The members were unaware of one of the most talked about and recent constitutional amendments, directly related to their functioning. Therefore there is a need to create awareness among the villagers about the RTE Act and to educate them on how this Right can play a key role to address their educational related issues. And also increase the level of knowledge among illiterate SMC member's especially poor parents, who are unaware of the objectives behind the constitution of SMC. It will also help members gain awareness on the technical and financial aspects of Mid-day meal scheme which will enable them to check misappropriation of funds and to ensure delivery of quality food to children.

3. Level of Knowledge about SMC

Immense efforts are required to increase the level of knowledge among illiterate parents, as parents will be unaware of the objectives behind constitution of SMC as well as the procedures to be followed for the formation of committee. And even the capacity building of female members to educate them to bring them at par with the men. As per SMC, 50% of members should be females therefore there is an urgent need to encourage females to participate more and being more transparent and respectful towards their contribution. It is necessary for the illiterate members to understand and realize that most of the problems associated are with not having education. Parents, who constitute 75% in the SMC ought to work together to create awareness about the importance of education and improvements in its quality.

4. Effective Level of Participation of Parents

Parents as SMC member have to understand the importance of meetings as level of participation is a very crucial factor behind the success of this whole concept of SMC. If parent members don't participate in meeting and monitor the school functioning, then effective outcome of the RTE will be very tough. Discussions among the members during the meetings will pave way for their effective involvement in other activities towards improving the state of education in their village.

5. Member's communication with the District Administration

There is a need to encourage committee members to bridge the communication gap with the Government Officials and this will help them shed their perceived fear. Encouraging and motivating members to take steps for themselves and update their knowledge on RTI, sharing information about the District Administration offices and building relations with concerned authorities.

6. Member's Involvement in Budget Tracking

This study also indicates that there is a need to sensitize teachers to involve parents as members in school related financial activities. For parents as a SMC member, capacity building is highly recommended and should be mobilized for the better future of their ward. Through appropriate trainings, trainers' can train SMC member about the funds allocation and inform them about their financial rights and built their capacities for utilization of these rights.

Some suggestions to Strengthen Primary Education

1. Capacity Building of SMC members

Formal trainings can be a very powerful and cost-effective tool for the capacity building of SMC members which will help them, learn systematically and in an organized manner. It can provide them with detailed description about the fundamentals of RTE and the need to conduct committee meetings. Thus, the trainings can become an important educational tool/

user guide for trainer's to teach the SMC members and reach to different masses. This will assist them to disseminate the right information related to the issues & concerns of SMC member's. Trainings are aimed to mobilize and empower the committee members especially parents under RTE, Act. As members of these committees are generally illiterate or neo-literates so these trainings, essentially have to be self explanatory and activity based. To ensure active participation of the SMC members in RTE process and to create awareness on quality education it is requisite to deliver precise information to the parents as SMC members, so that they can capacitate and empower themselves for effective changes.

2. **Profile of SMC Members**
   The literate parents who are concerned about their child's future should become an active member of the committee, as they can put forward strong points and bring effective changes for quality education. Thus, the schools should aim at revitalizing and strengthening the SMCs in the villages to take in those parents who can ensure quality education for all.
3. **Strengthening of Regulatory & Monitoring Mechanism**
   Looking into the current conditions of primary education system it is important to have a professional regulatory and monitoring mechanism which can be assigned to conduct the Budget –Tracking process under RTE Act. This would pave the way for improved level of accountability in all stakeholders such as service providers, policy makers, and the target population. SMC will be the grassroots level correspondent for any high level education committee meetings.
4. **Improving Infrastructure and facilities**
   Availability and quality of books to school children at the right time will encourage and motivate children towards reading and learning. The standard of book should undergo a transformation and become more interactive and creative to attract student's attention and learning system. Even Audio-visual media can play a significant role for increasing mass education for schools in rural areas.
5. **Availability of Qualified Teachers**
   Absenteeism of teachers is a big problem but poorly-trained teachers could be a much bigger one. A well structured Teachers' Training capacity tool should be designed to overcome such issues. There should be availability of expertise for effective trainings on on-going school programs and teachers should receive a handsome salary for proficient working.

Conclusion

The standard the Government schools in rural areas of India are maintaining is not at all appealing for any parent. Those who can afford the fees of private school don't give a second thought to any government schools. The promotion and provision by the private schools offers lucrative opportunity and quality education for majority illiterate parents from rural areas. One of the reasons for decline in quality of Government schools is a weak monitoring management system. And, this has resulted due to the high level of corruption and inefficient management of education programs and interventions all across India. Under RTE Act, mandate these issues are at the priority and have been highlighted for amendment, but without even proper preparation for their ground realities. For Government, the task of mobilizing parents to exercise their rights under RTE Act, is a very tough and challenging task. There is a need for Government to build a strong and lasting coordination and cooperation framework with other social organization's working in this sector to achieve their ambitious goals under RTE. The overall scenario of rural education system in India is lacking with the finesse of a structured financial stability, and also the uncovered need of qualified teachers for government

schools is becoming a challenge task. Therefore, these issues are not only pressurizing the government but also raising questions on the world of practices and intervention strategies which are implemented by the education department. And the very 1st question for them is that why we still have millions of children, who are not even, go to school.

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