



A Study On The Problems And Constraints Of School Management Committees In Sikkim

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to understand the problems in the proper functioning of School Management committees in the state of Sikkim through a convergent parallel design of mixed method research. The investigator selected ten elementary schools from East district of Sikkim through purposive sampling technique. Data was collected with the help of semi structured interview schedule and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that amongst all a lack of awareness about the role and functions of the committees was a major hindrance for parent members particularly. For teachers and school heads lack of proper orientation to their roles, to build capacity as members was a setback.

Key words: School Management committees, problems.

Background of the Study

The Constitutional mandate to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years remains elusive even after 66 years of its implementation. Although the Indian government made series of policy commitments (National Policy on Education (1968), National Policy on Education (1986) and revised policy in 1990) and launched a number of educational reforms through various schemes and program, a vast majority of children remain outside the education system and thus the goal of achieving universal elementary education remains a challenge for the Indian state. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the flagship program of Government of India was conceived at the end of 9th Five Year Plan to improve the education status in the country through interventions designed to improve the accessibility and quality of learning. The program also aimed at reducing gender and social gaps. It is in this context that the study on the role of school based committees in school management and supervision under the mandate of the SSA assumes a lot of significance. This is essential in evolving and implementing viable and working models to involve communities in schooling. Therefore, it is important to understand the mechanism of community participation, how it functions, the techniques used, the benefits it might possibly yield and what our expectations through this process are. Since the link between community participation and quality education itself is a complex issue, it calls for a deeper understanding of the issue. Community participation and parental involvement in school management have been an integral part of India's school education policy. Community participation has been viewed as an essential element of decentralizing education. School Management Committees (SMCs), as

mandated by the Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009, have a critical role to play in ensuring accountability in the education system. The Act empowers parents to monitor school functioning and oversee the utilization of school grants in government and government aided schools. SMCs, as elected bodies consisting predominantly of direct beneficiaries, are the closest to schools and have the highest incentive to hold them accountable. As part of this larger commitment, the Government of Sikkim has taken a pioneering step in establishing School Management Committee (SMCs) across the state since 27th of May, 2011 as participatory democratic institution to ensure community participation in the process of schooling. SMCs are also tasked with utilizing school grants to prepare annual and three-year long School Development Plans for the school. These aggregated school plans lead to the creation of Annual Work Plans for every district, and subsequently for every state. In this way, the RTE envisions an SMC as the basic unit in a decentralized governance model, where parents are actively involved in the school's functioning and decision making process. However, the implementation of SMCs faces several challenges such as lack of clarity on official guidelines, low community awareness, inadequate capacity building and limited fiscal decentralization. While the legitimacy and significance of involving the community in the management of the local school is unquestionable, implementing the policy has not been smooth. Field functionaries often point out that SMCs do not function systematically. While school authorities often complain of parental apathy, community members counter this view asserting that teachers and school authorities do not value their inputs. In some case, SMCs also become platforms for power struggle. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the consensus is that wherever community members have been effectively mobilized to participate in management, schools have shown improvement in functioning. Rao (2009), Dash and Panda (2001). In this scenario, it is evident that community participation in education through has been given utmost importance in most policy documents of the Government of India relating to school education. As such, new areas of research have been thrown open for the academics on various issues of community participation. The review of literature on community participation indicates that there have been very limited efforts to evaluate the functioning of these committees at the grass roots level. There are a number of problems that plague the proper functioning of community based structures like the SMC in school management, major among them are poverty, lack of awareness and lack of interest among its members, Vinayak (2001), Mathew (2001), Devi (2002). Besides these the inherent caste class struggle also hinders the function of SMCs as pointed out by Nayak (2009). Most of the SMCs were also struggling due to the large scale apathy from government functionaries as expressed by Yadav (2006), Vinayak (2001). Reddy & Devi (2015) concluded that the SMCs suffered from political interference.

Although some studies on the working of community based structures have been carried out in some states of the country but no comprehensive study, as such, has been undertaken in the state of Sikkim so far.

Ultimately, to fulfill the potential of SMCs, all stakeholders ranging from government, funding organizations and non-profits, must collaborate towards a shared vision of

leveraging communities to improve school quality. Therefore, there is a felt need to assess problems and constraints in the functioning of the School Management Committees. Therefore, this study was conducted to answer the following research question:

What are the problems encountered by SMCs in implementation of the RTE Act?

Objective of the study

To study the problems and constraints encountered by SMCs in monitoring and supervision of implementation of Right to Education Act, 2009.

Methodology

Research Design

Convergent parallel design of mixed method research was used for the study.

Sample

The investigator chose 10 elementary schools from East district in Sikkim through purposive sampling technique. A detail specification of sample size is given below:

Table 1

Sample

S. No	Respondents	East Sikkim
		(Block Gangtok)
1	Elementary Schools	10
2	School Head	10
3	Teacher Representative in SMC.	20
4	SMC Chairperson	10
5	Parents member in SMC	10 FGDs (3/4 members per SMC)
6	Parents who are not members in SMC	30 (3 parents per SMC)
7	CRCCs	5
8	Assistant Education Officer	2/3

Method of Data collection

Focus group discussion for parent members

Semi structured interview schedule for other members and parents non members

Results and Discussions

Problems/ Constraints faced by SMC

Table No- 1: Problems faced by SMC

Nature of Problem	Heads	Chairman	Teachers
Level of Education of the members	30%	42%	83.75%
Political Interference	40%	35%	00
Lack of Awareness	100%	100%	83.75%
Apathy of functionaries	45%	27.50%	00
Financial Issues	100%	100%	71.25%
Lack of Training	100%	100%	61.25%

While discussing the constraints faced by committees in discharging their duties, majority of the respondents said it was lack of awareness. Another constraint that maximum members agreed to was lack of finance and lack of training of the members.

Discussion

The following are the major constraints in the functioning of SMCs as expressed by the members, in the focus group discussion:

Awareness: The inability of the members to fulfil their duties was because they were not aware of their exact roles. This fact was highlighted by almost all the members. One member aptly described, “we are not informed as to what we can do and what we cannot”. The implication of this lack of awareness was that even though they wanted to contribute in whatever ways they could for the development of the school, they restrained themselves. Even school heads and teachers reported that SMCs suffered because of lack of awareness amongst its members. “They are not aware of their duties” said one headmaster. Nayak (2002) concluded that the VEC members were not oriented regarding their roles and responsibilities. Lack of awareness was a major hindrance in exercising their duties as found through interaction with all SMC members. These findings are in conformity with the findings of Bhattacharya & Mohalik (2015), Institute of Rural Research and Development (2010), Thapa (2012) and Kumar (2016)

Lack of proper communication: Communication problem with the authorities was another major problem as expressed by many parents and school heads. Parent members perceived that there was an element of unwillingness among officials to listen to them at times. Many participants talked about the challenges that a lack of communication creates

for them, particularly the perceived unwillingness or inability to listen on the part of “higher ups.” Studies conducted by Reddy& Devi (2015), Vinayak (2001) and Sahayi (1997) had similar findings

Respect/Recognition: Many participants indicated they felt their knowledge and experience were not valued or sought out the heads/ chairman, and that when they did express their opinions and concerns that this feedback was often not listened to or acknowledged. “who will listen to us?” said one member curtly. This desire to be valued and their opinions to be sought was a need expressed by all parent members. Tyagi (2009), Vinayak(2001), Reddy &Devi (2015) had similar findings.

Capacity Building: Throughout the focus group discussions across all groups, it was evident that the parent members did take a keen interest in the functioning of the schools. There was no lack of interest in terms of them performing their duties. However, the gap in knowledge was one glaring gap across all groups. Members themselves acknowledged this gap and even expressed a desire for training/capacity building as a means to reduce the gap. These findings are in conformity with the findings of Singh and Sood (2016), Nayak (2002)

Control over Finances: One area that was continuously highlighted throughout was that the parent members had no proper knowledge and control over finances. This was looked upon as a major constraint by the majority of the members. Tyagi (1999) had similar findings.

Government Functionaries: Majority of the members thought that the government functionaries and the block and district level were not helping them in their works. When the parent members went to them for support, the approach was casual. But when other SMC members, who were considered locally powerful approached them, the follow up was satisfactory. The members mentioned that the power dynamics led to dilution of their powers. Vinayak (2001), Tyagi (1999), Sahayi (1997) had similar findings.

Major Findings

Major Findings on the constraints and problems encountered by SMCs

- Lack of awareness was a major hindrance in the effective functioning of SMCs as reported by all school heads, all chairman and majority of teachers and parent members.
- Communication problem was also another major area as highlighted by majority of the parent members.
- Lack of training was another constraint as reported by all heads, chairman and majority of the parent members.
- Apathy from government functionaries was another area as reported by more than a quarter of school heads (45%).
- No control over finances was also looked upon as a major constraint by some parent members that hindered them from functioning effectively.

Limitations of the Study

The study conducted had certain limitations which are as follows:

Tools used in the study have not been standardised in the strict sense of the term.

Conclusion

Empowering communities with all the key aspect of the provision is an important way for strengthening SMCs. The state should perceive SMCs as the last tier of decentralization and all mechanism must be put in place for their effective functioning. All possible means must be done to enhance the awareness level of SMC members. Community participation can play a great role in the overall development of the school. The school suffers on account of apathy and negligence of the community. SMCs as an institutionalized form of community participation must be nurtured and parents must be oriented properly so that the school benefits in all aspects.

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