



REFLECTIONS OF SMC MEMBERS REGARDING FUNCTIONING OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES (SMCS) IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF TRIBAL AREAS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

The present investigation was undertaken to study the reflections of SMC members regarding the functioning of School Management Committees (SMCs) in elementary schools of tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. For conducting this investigation, survey method was employed and a total of 110 SMC members were selected from 60 elementary schools situated in two tribal districts i.e. Kinnaur and Lahaul - Spiti of Himachal Pradesh. The data were gathered with the help of a self- developed questionnaire for SMC members which contained both close-ended and open-ended items. The data were analyzed by employing frequency count and percentage analysis. It was revealed that SMCs are functioning in tribal elementary schools appropriately to a certain extent. SMC members have highlighted certain issues in proper functioning of SMCs and suggested the measures for improving the functioning of SMCs and quality of elementary education in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. The last section of the research paper discussed major findings and implications.

Keywords: School Management Committees, Tribal Areas



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Introduction

Universalization of elementary education has been long accepted as a pre-condition to socio-economic and political development of any society. Although this has been recognized as a need of an individual, this need has been given an expression of fundamental right in Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Constitution of India also recognizes right to education as a fundamental right. The international instruments which have been ratified by India including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights explicitly provide for Right to Education up to the elementary level or up to 14 years of age.

Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 or Right to Education Act (RTE) under Article 21A of Indian Constitution was enacted on 4 August 2009 which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 years in India. The Act provides that no child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. There is a provision for special training of school drop-outs to bring them at par with students of the same age. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, 2009 (RTE Act) is a landmark legislation which has following provisions:

- Every child in the age group of 6-14 has the right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school, till the completion of elementary education. Private schools will have to take 25% of their class strength from the weaker sections and the disadvantaged groups of the society through a random selection process. Government will fund education of these children.
- No donation and capitation fee is allowed.
- No admission test or interview either for child or parents.
- There is provision for establishment of commissions to supervise the implementation of the act.
- A fixed student and teacher ratio is to be maintained etc.

Specific provisions have also been made for democratization of schools and for parents and local communities to play their due roles in shaping and running of the schools. The school has to be viewed as a social organization, organically linked to the community. Community must have an effective say in the management of the school. Over the years, an almost complete disappearance of this space for the local community in managing schools, has significantly contributed towards the decline in the school quality. For communities to be able to effectively play that role, they need to be oriented/ trained and supported. To engage with the school system, members of community need to develop technical skills like collection of relevant information, analyzing it and finally designing appropriate interventions, basing on norms set in the RTE Act. Keeping this in view, it has been made mandatory under RTE Act to constitute school management committees (SMCs) in schools.

SMC has a very crucial role in actualizing the goals of RTE. It has tremendous potential to transform the existing system of education, characterized by cynicism and a defeatist outlook of the system functionaries and stakeholders, including teachers and parents. Through its positive action and a constructive dialogue with other stakeholders, the SMC can

work towards reinstating a well-functioning school system. Consistency of positive action by SMC will change the dynamics and solutions will begin to take shape, first at the local level and then at the larger systemic levels. The RTE Act envisions an SMC as the basic unit of a decentralized model of governance with active involvement of parents in the school's functioning. SMCs are primarily composed of parents, teachers, head teachers and local authorities. Active parental participation has the potential to improve the efficiency of a school as parents have the highest incentive to demand a better quality of education for their children. However, it has been witnessed that in government schools, the quality of education has declined to a great extent. The participation of local community in educational affairs is very low. The parental participation is not properly ensured in the schools. Previously constituted village education committees (VECs) in primary schools have not proved to be successful in realizing its goal of community involvement in school activities. The review of previous studies which shows the importance of community involvement also highlights such issues. A glimpse of some studies undertaken in past is provided here:

Tyagi (1999) revealed that nearly half of VEC members (4 to 5 members each) were not attending the VEC meetings regularly and not taking part in any school activities. They did not even know the specific objectives of these bodies. No efforts were being made by anyone to ensure that good people come to these committees who work with interest and devotion. There was neither any formal mechanism for decision-making nor there was any process for feed back to the VECs. One of the main difficulties which VECs face in performing their functions was that they didn't have any financial and administrative powers. Narayana and Chandrakant (2000) observed that no proper notice was given by the secretary of VEC to the members about the schedule of meeting. There was no proper representation in VEC of female and people belonging to reserved category. The educational authorities had done little with regard to proper monitoring the VEC meetings. No or very little attention was being paid towards conducting any training programmes for the VEC members. On the other hand, Sujatha and Rao (2000) found that the VECs had been clearly involved in planning and implementation of educational intervention and conduct at least one meeting in a month. Interestingly more than 80 percent heads of the household, even those who were not VEC members, attended the VEC meetings. There were cases where the VEC collected money from the community and paid salary to the teachers from the community funds. In about three-fourth of the villages, new school buildings were also constructed by the community either by providing manpower or material or money. Apart from this, Patil (2004) found that the Gram Shikshan Samiti (GSS) members participated in enrolment scheme and they

promoted education by checking attendance registers of centers after every three months. It was concluded that GSS understands its role in bringing about universalization of primary education, but still far, very few GSS had actually performed quality work. It was pointed out by Yadav (2006) that there was no sharing of the responsibility among the VEC members while only four VECs have made contribution towards construction of classrooms and drinking water facilities. There was no coordination and rapport between Parent Teachers Association and the VEC although there were two representatives of PTA in each VEC. In the similar manner, it was indicated by Banerjee et.al. (2007) that most parents do not know that a VEC exists, public participation in improving education is negligible, and large numbers of children in the villages have not acquired basic competencies of reading, writing, and arithmetic. It was suggested that in order to stimulate an active participation of village people in improving education, direct steps should be taken. It cannot be presumed that the mere presence of a VEC can create a basis for community-based activism that would substantially transform the educational scenario in these villages. In this context, it was remarked by Teron (2012) that SMCs were formed as per guidelines, its regular meetings were conducted and training was imparted to SMC members regarding their roles and functions. However, it has been revealed by Owusu and Sam (2012) that SMCs were ineffective in the monitoring and supervision of head teachers', teachers' and pupils' attendance. Even though SMCs are not doing enough to assist teachers to improve teaching and learning, they are seen as very effective in solving school community relations. Verma and Singh (2014) reflect that VECs has played a good role in overall functioning of the school but need to strengthen the regularity of students and teachers in school. Initiative taken by VECs for the education of children with disability needs special attention. There is also a need for the VEC to report the educational deficiencies to higher authorities. The overall functioning of the present VECs need to be strengthened.

On the basis of review of previous studies, it appears that community participation is very essential for improving quality of education at elementary level. There is dearth of research studies in this area, especially in the state of Himachal Pradesh which is projected as one of the leading state in education sector in India. Hence, it was thought worthwhile by the researcher to undertake present investigation and study the reflections of primary stakeholders of SMCs i.e. SMC members regarding functions of these committees especially in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh so that RTE can be made accessible for all irrespective of their social or other characteristics.

Objectives:

1. To study the views of SMC members with regard to following aspects related to functioning of SMCs in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh:
 - (i) Necessity of constituting SMCs in schools.
 - (ii) Training programmes for SMC members.
 - (iii) Impact of SMCs on school improvement.
2. To identify the problems in proper functioning of SMCs in elementary schools of tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.
3. To suggest measures for improving the functioning of SMCs in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.

Research Method Employed:

Survey technique under descriptive method of research was employed for present investigation.

Sampling:

The data were collected from i.e. Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh. A total of 60 elementary schools were selected from these tribal districts by adopting incidental sampling technique. Further, a total of 110 SMC members were selected on the basis of their willingness to supply the required information related to functioning of SMCs in elementary schools.

Research Tool Developed:

For ascertaining the views and perception of SMC members regarding different aspects of SMCs and its functioning, a questionnaire was developed and validated by the researcher. This questionnaire was comprised of a total of 12 questions which were either close-ended or open-ended in nature. The content validity of questionnaire was appropriately ensured by the researcher.

Data Analysis:

Data collected with the help of questionnaire on an individual basis were analyzed with the help of frequency count and percentage analysis.

Main Findings of the Study:

On the basis of analysis and interpretation of data, the results were extracted which are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Reflection of Smc Members Regarding Functioning of School Management Committees (Smcs) in Tribal Elementary Schools

Sr. No.	Item Statement/ Responses	Frequency	Percentage
	Necessity of constituting SMC in elementary schools		
1.	(i) Yes	100	90.91
	(ii) No	09	8.18
	(iii) No Response	01	0.91
	Process of electing members for constituting SMCs in school		
2.	(i) On the basis of caste	-NIL-	-NIL-
	(ii) Economic basis	41	37.27
	(iii) On the basis of educational status	58	52.73
	(iv) No Response	11	10.00
	Training provided to SMC members for smooth operation of tasks assigned to SMCs		
3.	(i) Yes	71	64.55
	(ii) No	39	35.45
	Evaluation of training needs of SMC members		
4.	(i) Yes	43	39.09
	(ii) No	43	39.09
	(iii) No response	24	21.82
	Usefulness of topics covered in training programmes for SMCs		
5.	(i) Very Useful	22	20.00
	(ii) Useful	67	60.90
	(iii) Useless	-NIL-	-NIL-
	(iv) No Response	21	19.09
	Support material provided to SMC members to have more information about SMC and its functions		
6.	(i) Yes	63	57.27
	(ii) No	41	37.27
	(iii) No response	06	05.45
	Enthusiasm among SMC members for ensuring effective functioning of schools		
7.	(i) High	44	40.00
	(ii) Less	54	49.09
	(iii) Forcibly enthusiastic	09	08.18
	(iv) No Response	03	02.73
	Annual evaluation of various school affairs/activities by SMC		
8.	(i) Yes	69	62.72
	(ii) No	32	29.09
	(iii) No response	09	08.18
	Improvement in functioning and quality of school due to activation of SMC		
9.	(i) Yes	75	68.18
	(ii) No	19	17.27
	(iii) No Response	16	14.54

The major findings of the research study are presented below:

It was reported by almost all selected SMC members (90.91%) that it is necessary to constitute SMCs in elementary schools. There were very few members who were not in favour of this. It was indicated by the members that constitution of SMCs is necessary for improving the quality of education (18%), for bringing better coordination between parents and teachers (42%), for proper management and solution of school problems (28%) and due to RTE Act, 2009 (26%). Majority of SMC members (52.73%) reflected that members for executive body of SMC are elected on the basis of their educational status and there were about 37% SMC members who pointed out that the election of executive body of SMC is done on economic status of the individuals.

About two third (64.55%) SMC members agreed that they are provided training for smooth functioning of SMCs. However one third SMC members had refused in this regard. There was no consensus among the SMC members with regard to the evaluation of their training programmes. Although majority of SMC members (60.90%) have indicated that the topics covered in training programmes are useful for them. Further were about 37% SMC members who pointed out that no support material is provided to them to have more information about SMC and its functioning. Although, majority of SMC members (57.27%) were not in agreement to this aspect. Half of the sampled SMC members (49.09%) had reflected that less enthusiasm is shown by SMC members for ensuring effective functioning of school. Further, about 63% SMC members revealed that different school affairs and activities are evaluated by SMCs on annual basis whereas, 29% SMC members refused with regard to this aspect. It was also reported by SMC members that suggestions given by them on the basis of annual evaluation are taken into consideration for further improvements by school authorities. A large majority (68.18%) of SMC members reflected that due to activation of SMCs, there has been improvement in functioning and the quality of school. The major improvements witnessed in school functioning due to activation of SMCs included; (i) proper use of school grant, (ii) improvement in students' results, (iii) start of smart classrooms, (iv) more contact between parents and teachers, and (v) increase in enrolment of students and teachers' attendance.

The major problems in proper functioning of SMCs, as perceived by SMC members included; (i) Non-cooperation of administration (52.73%), (ii) lack of awareness among SMC members about role and responsibilities (39.09%), (iii) financial problems (35.45%), (iv) deficiency of resources (33.64%), (v) lack of interest among SMC members (30%), (vi) home-related tasks reduces the participation of SMC members in school affairs (29.09%),

(vii) less cooperation and mutual conflicts among SMC members (24.55%), (viii) lack of coordination among SMC members and teachers (25.45%), (ix) lack of knowledge among SMC executive members to make use of their powers (25.45%), (x) absenteeism among parents and SMC members (21.82%) and (xi) hard climatic conditions of tribal areas (19.09%). For improving the functioning of SMCs, different suggestions were given by SMC members which included; (i) SMC members should be made aware and devoted about their duties (40%), (ii) necessary training should be given to SMC members regarding their role and responsibilities (38.18), (iii) active participation of gram panchayat in school activities (33.64%), (iv) identifying school problems and finding their solutions (24.55%), (v) increasing frequency of SMC meetings (20.90%), (vi) electing active and right kind of person in executive body of SMC (20.90), (vii) ensuring compulsory parents' participation in SMC meetings (20%), (viii) bringing better coordination between SMC members and teachers (16.36%), (ix) making SMC financially more strong (18.18%), (x) evaluating functioning of SMCs and providing feedback for improvement (16.36%) and (xi) timely inspection and proper directions by BRC/CRC/DIET etc. to SMCs and schools (14.55%).

In order to bring improvements in elementary education in tribal areas, suggestions by forwarded by SMC members were; (i) ensuring availability of teachers in schools of tribal areas (40.90%), (ii) making parents in tribal areas more aware about their role in education (38.18%), (iii) frequent inspection of schools in tribal areas by higher authorities (34.55%), (iv) changing school timings specially during heavy snowfall (29.09%), (v) making all school-related facilities available in tribal areas (26.36%), (vi) teachers' professional needs and requirements should be fulfilled (25.45%), and (vii) ensuring maximum participation of community in educational affairs of school (20%). It was also suggested by SMC members that teachers are required to play a vital role in making tribal people aware about importance of education.

Discussion of Findings and Implications

On the basis of the findings of the present study, it may be concluded that constitution of school management committees and their appropriate functioning is very vital for improving the quality of elementary education particularly in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. For improving the participation of SMC members in various school affairs, it is essential that SMC members should be made aware of their roles and responsibilities and they should be provided appropriate training in this regard. However, higher authorities at elementary education level should devise certain mechanism for identifying the training needs of SMC members prior to the organization of such training programmes. Apart from this, the SMC members should be provided additional support material in different forms so that they can have more information about SMCs and its functions. This will be highly

beneficial in creating interest and more enthusiasm among SMC members for ensuring effective functioning of schools. It is very crucial to ensure the participation of gram panchayats and other local organizations in different affairs of schools. The SMCs and schools should be provided with more resources so that they can function in an appropriate manner. The SMCs in tribal areas should be assessed in terms of its functions and tasks undertaken and proper feedback should be provided to the SMCs for improving its functioning in the future. For this, it is imperative to carryout inspections of SMCs and its functions in a timely manner and proper directions should be given to SMCs by BRCs, DIETs and other higher level authorities.

In order to bring improvement in elementary education in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh, it is recommended that schools should be provided with adequate and appropriate physical and human resources. The training needs of teachers with special reference to their functioning in tribal areas should be identified and addressed in a proper manner. For enhancing the quality of elementary education in tribal areas, the key is “better and improved co-ordination between teachers and parents and effective functioning of SMCs” as conceptualized under RTE Act, 2009.

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