

Regional Workshop on School Education, Bangalore – 17th-18th July, '07

School Education, Regional Workshop, Bangalore (17th-18th July '07)

Summary of discussions at the Workshop:

The National Knowledge Commission held a regional workshop on School Education in Bangalore on the 17th and 18th July 2007. Participants from across the range of stakeholders were invited from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry including administrators, teachers, and civil society representatives. The discussion was broadly structured around quantity, quality, access, and management issues in school education. Important issues regarding pedagogical reforms, methodology of data collection and use, expansion of secondary education and administrative reforms emerged from this workshop. A summary of the main points raised at the meeting is given below.

I QUANTITY

Issues relating to quantity must be concerned with the establishment of a *mass* system

- Central funding is too low to meet school education needs of states, especially for investment in infrastructure and for innovative local schemes for improving quality
- Rigid norms for the disbursement of funds are perceived as an obstacle. Flexibility in funds transfer and selection of schemes is desired.
- Dimensions of quantity must be defined more flexibly – i.e. beyond number of classrooms, toilets etc. New variables of ‘quantity’ must be identified and linked with quality
- Parallel structures of administration and lack of convergence between the education department, project staff etc lead to dissipation of funds and energy. This is especially a problem in tribal dominated areas with the Tribal Welfare Department creating yet another parallel administrative structure.
- There is a severe personnel crunch for the inspection of schools.
- Corruption and lack of accountability at different levels lead to siphoning of available funds. Monitoring/accountability mechanisms need to be stringent and transparent.
- A lot of pilot projects lose their edge because they do not address the last mile problem. For instance, provision of free textbooks to SC/ST children should be expanded to *all* children to prevent social resentment. Also, provision of free uniforms is limited to ONE set, per child, per *year*.
- Monetary help from the state should be extended to private schools which charge low fees and run on a not-for-profit basis.
- Scaling up of pilot projects must also take into account local needs and adapt accordingly to be made relevant.
- The community must be encouraged to contribute in the provision and maintenance of infrastructure. Unwillingness of the community to have stakes in

school infrastructure is largely due to the poor quality/ lack of relevance of school education. Thus, issues of quantity must be linked with quality

Universalisation of Secondary Education

- Universalisation of secondary education (from 14 to 18 years) must be a priority for the State and funds must be earmarked for this purpose
- Livelihood skills and training must be provided in addition to the regular curriculum for students enrolled in secondary schools. However, there should not be a rigid separation between the two, nor should parallel structures be allowed to operate.
- Appointments of *subject teachers* must be increased on a massive scale, especially for secondary education, to address the severe lack thereof.
- Resources must be mobilized especially for quality *science* education (labs, textbooks etc)
- A portal should be set up to provide information to students enrolled secondary education (and their parents) on the options available to them, both in terms of career choices and well as higher education ('Sakshat', as set up by MHRD, is perceived to be inadequate in this regard). In addition, counselors must be appointed in schools to impart regular counseling for the students for this purpose
- There is a strong endorsement for revision of the vacation schedule to incorporate shorter, more frequent breaks which are perceived to be more conducive to school attendance and pedagogical retention.
- Course requirements and criteria for completion must be re-examined, especially notions of 'exams', 'school-leaving' and 'failure', for the benefit of the learner
- Pedagogy must be strengthened for Mathematics and English at the secondary level (subjects with the lowest pass rates), and funds demarcated for this purpose

Data Collection and Use

- India has an extensive and regular mechanism of data collection for primary education. However, its methodology and use leave much to be desired
- If data is collected for the benefit of *planning*, it must be better presented (for instance, a separate column for 'availability of water' in addition to availability of toilets)
- Safeguards must be instituted against "creative readjustment" of data as it moves up the levels
- Data collection is too extensive, time-intensive and done almost entirely by *teachers*. It needs to be streamlined, made less time consuming and more relevant.
- There is minimal cross tabulation, coordination and cross referencing of data
- Results are revealed to schools etc too late to be relevant; often a year or two after the survey takes place.

- It is immensely difficult to access data lying with official sources, despite repeated requests
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) must be integrated for data collation and management, wherever required. A local area network with digital entry provisions could be set up to make it easier for the teachers involved in these surveys.
- More specialized micro-level surveys and research are required. All qualitative aspects cannot be covered by an All India Survey/ National Level data. Currently, such research is scattered and there is no coordination
- Two kinds of data are required (1) for analysis and (2) for execution/administration. For the former, the sample survey is a useful method for quantitative and qualitative analysis. For the latter, the parameters need to be readjusted to aim for data that is accurate and relevant for use, rather than excessive data.
- Meaningful use of collected data is embodied in certain models which may be emulated, for instance the Karnataka Quality Assessment Program, use of EMIS data for local planning, teacher training etc.

NKC may look into setting up a body for streamlining data collection and use, make it more relevant for planning and implementation and more accessible for everyone.

II QUALITY

Activity Based Learning (ABL) Initiative – Chennai Corporation Schools

Salient features:

- Instituted to address the problem of poor quality at the primary level which assails school education in Tamil Nadu, and oriented towards reform *inside* the classroom
- Textbook-centred learning replaced by attractive learning materials created and developed *collaboratively* by teachers
- Multi-grade teaching and peer learning is followed.
- Classroom environment made more learner friendly – blackboard at the eye level of the child instead of the teacher.
- Student joining after a period of absence are allowed to pick up where they left off due to multiple learning trajectories in the same classroom.
- Instead of periodic memory based exams (there is no annual exam, and therefore ranking system or fear of ‘failing’), evaluation is a continuous process. Scope created for remedial teaching/learning. Additionally, achievement cards created for self- evaluation by the students.

Observations:

- Similar initiatives have been undertaken in Karnataka

- Such experimental projects should be extended to other schools and regions but must take into account local variations and adapt innovatively when in the process of scaling up
- Mobilisation of parental support and teacher motivation are important factors
- Concerns expressed at having to conform to the mainstream teaching-learning process, with the attendant annual exams, time-table based learning and orientation towards the board exams, after class V.
- But the general observation is that the initiative has significant improved quality of education in the corporation schools of Chennai, increased student confidence and reduced dropout rates.

NKC may look into setting up a testing body at the national level for quality assessment in schools

Teachers and Teacher Training

- Qualified and trained teachers must be appointed, especially in schools/dharamshalas for tribal education where the assumption is that fully trained teachers may not be required for the task.
- Teaching must be professionalized and accorded the respect due to it. According to a survey, teaching as a profession is highly sought after in Himachal Pradesh, but the same cannot be said for most of the states in southern India.
- Teachers feel targeted and vulnerable as a professional group that is often attacked for the failures of the system, especially in context of the dangerous assumption that teachers are overpaid. Basic requirements for teachers and the protection of their salaries is important
- The dangerous deregulation of teacher salaries in the *private sector* and their inability to join unions is a major concern.
- Official perspective tends to view teachers as merely implementers, and not as the primary resource for school education which they are.
- Pre-service training must be given greater importance. The B.Ed. program must be reinvented especially to include a component on *how to read*, to help teachers help students in that regard
- Pre-service training also crucial in professionalizing training – teachers *need* to be educated for teaching
- Rigid structures which prevent primary school teachers from becoming teacher educators must be discarded.
- Teacher training programs must be oriented to the universalisation of education i.e. *the needs of first generation learners*, and take into account the lack of conducive home environments and social preparation for schooling.
- Teachers must be oriented towards curricular and not textbook objectives.
- Instead of compulsory teacher training, short term and long term measures also must be devised along the lines of those for university teachers (sabbaticals, teaching at other universities etc)

- The Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program (HSTP) run by the volunteer organisation Eklavya was recommended
- A forum for teachers where they may interact, share experiences and ideas must be developed. This needs to be incorporated into teacher training programs, currently most of which are only reform-oriented. Cluster resource centres (CRCs) could be an important site for this kind of networking. In addition a *teachers' portal* must be set up as a networking forum
- Change phraseology from “training” programmes to “learning” programmes for teachers.
- Discard the cascade model of imparting training as it has high rates of attrition and dissipation
- Create a mechanism for feedback for teachers so that they may be active partners in their self-improvement
- Concerns were expressed regarding teacher absenteeism – the distance from school is one factor that may be addressed. The other is ensuring accountability, and involvement of the community in school administration is important in this respect.
- ICT must be integrated as a tool for teacher training
- Teachers and their views must be taken into account for all policy decisions regarding school education

III ACCESS

Special Needs Education, Access for urban poor and migrant children

- Language is an important aspect of access, particularly the English language, and especially for economically disadvantaged, tribal and minority students
- Pedagogy for language learning needs to be refined, and ICT may be integrated as a tool for this purpose
- Special provisions must be made for students with disabilities. The current allocation of Rs. 1200, per child per year is simply not enough.
- Efforts must be made to integrate physically disabled teachers as well. School buildings must have provisions for access and navigation by visually impaired, wheelchairs for the physically disabled, etc
- There exists an undeniable link between universalisation of quality school education and eradication of child labour, and their respective policies must feed into each other
- Some sort of monetary stipend may have to be paid to labouring children to bring them into schools
- Bridge courses must be devised for late entrants into school in light of the above
- Hostel facilities must be made available for children of migrant labour, especially in their place of origin
- ‘Study centres’ may be established in areas where the home environment is not conducive to learning

- Pre-school care systems like ‘balwadi’ and ‘anganwadi’ must be strengthened
- Tent schools/ mobile schools must be made a part of the urban landscape for migrant students
- Several pilots have been attempted for migrant children, many of whom have been given cards, but the language problem becomes a huge obstacle in this respect
- Synergies must be created with NREGA to look into school education concerns of labouring children.

SC/ST Students

- Most tribal dominated areas afflicted by acute poverty and exploitation, thus requiring special measures for redressal
- Appointment of qualified teachers who are *familiar with the language* is essential.
- Language is a major impediment – there is a lack of comfort level with both the state language as well as English
- Efforts must be made to appoint more ST teachers to boost confidence and provide role models to tribal students
- Study Centres which double up as Community Centres (library, television etc) are seen as significant in areas populated by marginalized peoples.
- Tribal students have to compete with SC students, most often to the disadvantage of the former. Also, for tribal students, entry into mainstream society is often accompanied by a profound cultural and financial shock.
- Norms promoting early marriage are major factors that adversely affect drop-out rates for ST girls
- Establishment of pre-school care systems is especially significant in the above context
- Imparting of vocational and skills training is doubly important in tribal areas
- There must be synergy between the Tribal Welfare Department, Education Department and local self governance bodies for school education.

Students from the Minority Community

- Lack of access due to poverty, not because of excessive dependence on the madarsa system
- Madarsa timings are usually able to accommodate government school hours (6-8 in the morning and/ or evening)
- However, the language(s) issue – Arabic for religious studies, Urdu for mother tongue, Kannada (etc) as compulsory state language and English - is perceived as a bit of a burden
- School environments fostering isolation and hostility are a major hindrance
- More Urdu teachers must be appointed in government schools to increase intake of Muslim students
- Availability of female teachers and separate toilets in co-educational schools is a must

- Ghettoisation along communal lines and lack of government schools in minority dominated areas are seen to be the biggest problems.

IV MANAGEMENT

- While local community participation is a must, there needs to be more clarity in terms of demarcation of roles; for instance, whether an elected representative be allowed to intervene in the classroom environment or not
- The powers that can be conferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) etc should be defined locally.
- The role of School Development Management Committees (SDMCs) in the determination and payment of salaries of teachers was hotly debated.
- Deregulation of private schools on the basis of language is a concern
- Multiplicity of bodies and fragmentation of accountability and responsibility is another major concern
- Mechanisms to check random corruption need to be devised
- Teacher appointments, deputation and transfers to be made totally transparent
- Revisit notion of state support to private, not-for-profit schools