

Raising Student Enrolment in Government Schools: The Way Forward

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Abstract- *The enrolment in government schools is sharply dropping due to various reasons such as accountability of teachers, small schools which have fewer teachers and not providing quality education, etc. Many of the elementary schools in India are started and operating in remote, tribal, rural and hilly areas to provide easy accessibility of education to every child and majority of these schools are running with low enrolment. The idea of merging (clubbing) and consolidation of small schools transforms in to one common school and establish at nearby common locality (habitation) may lead to tremendous changes in Indian School Education System. This idea has several benefits such as one class one teacher, less financial burden to government, etc. Fulfilling parental aspirations and expectations is also one of the key elements to improve the enrolment in government schools. This paper explores the way of possibilities to improve the enrolment in government schools.*

Keywords: Enrolment, Small Schools, Merging of Schools

Introduction

Our country is observing low enrolment in government schools over last few years, even though at present more number of students is enrolled in government schools. To improve the enrolment in government schools one of the key factors is positive perception of parents towards government schools. When we are going to market to purchase some item, naturally one can see the quality and price of the product. It is high time to take necessary steps to raise enrolment in government schools by fulfilling the parental and societal expectations, providing quality education, teacher accountability, providing specific subject teachers, strong political will, merging and consolidation of small schools, etc.

Some of the Key Facts

The National Policy on Education 2016, Report of the Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy, Government of India (GOI, 2016, p.64) observed that school education in India is provided mostly in small schools. Nearly 33% of all schools taken together have less than 50 students and 54% less than 100. About 77% of schools have less than 200 students. The proportion of small schools in the government sector is relatively higher than in private. The preponderance of small schools not only affects quality of teaching and learning, but also makes school education inequitable, and expensive in terms of per pupil expenditure. Such schools are neither academically nor financially viable.

The GOI (2016 p.65) recommended that each State undertake a detailed exercise of school mapping to identify schools with low enrolment and inadequate infrastructure. Wherever possible, efforts should be made to convert existing non-viable schools into composite schools

for better academic performance and cost effective management. It will be easier to consolidate, improve infrastructure and provide more teachers when smaller schools located in the same neighbourhood are merged. Ideally, when schools are merged they should be located in the same campus as the secondary/senior secondary school. At other places where very small schools are to be merged with other schools, students will need to be provided transport facility through School Management Committees. With merger and consolidation, teacher availability will improve due to redeployment, and it will also be possible to appoint full time principal/headmaster for schools with viable student population. The Committee was informed that some states like Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat have started the process of consolidation, which is yielding good results. The Committee, therefore, recommends that Centre in consultation with States should issue common guidelines for mergers and consolidation without diluting the spirit of easy access laid down by Right to Education Act (2009). The Committee is of the view that the consolidation referred to above will enable the country to achieve one class – one teacher norm in a foreseeable future.

To accelerate the enrolment in government schools the following measures need to be taken care of, they are:

Merging (Clubbing) and Consolidation of Small Schools

In our country normally we observe that most of the government small schools are running with low enrolment and one or two teachers are working. This is one of the major hurdles to improve the quality of school education. Most of the private management schools are managing with required staff or giving more additional work load to teachers. They also maintain with each class having one separate teacher and preferably they appoint at least one teacher with specific subject specialization.

Due to impact of Globalization, Commercialization and Privatization tremendous changes are taking place in Indian school education system. At present the concept of multi grade teaching is not working in realistic nature due to various reasons such as difficult to managing/handling of the different classes at a time, lack of specific subject specialization teachers, parental aspirations and expectations of their child, etc.

The teachers working in government small schools may face following problems.

1. Working with less number of staff due to rationalization.
2. Difficulty in managing all classes at a time.
3. Spending more time in writing reports.
4. Attending more meetings at school complex, district level, etc.
5. Difficulty in handling of all subjects.
6. Poor infrastructure facilities.

The following measures are suggested for improving the enrolment in government schools.

1. High care to be taken in appointing teachers without considering the enrolment of students, i.e. one class one teacher.
2. Maximum efforts to avoid writing reports.
3. Teachers have to spend more time on academic work (teaching).
4. Merging (clubbing) and consolidation of nearby small schools in to one common school.

To provide education for all, the central and state government schools are started in every possible habitation for providing easy accesses for every child. Unfortunately, this formula is not effectively working due to above discussed factors. This is one of the major hurdles to improve quality education in government schools. It is also suggested that nearby (with in five kilometers) all government small schools will be merged (clubbed) and consolidated in to one school in common locality (habitation) and deployed all teachers in to this common school.

For this the concerned Central/State Government and School Management Committee should care to provide free transport facility to all students.

It is also noted that this merging and consolidation of schools into one common school is possible. Special cases where small schools are located like hilly, tribal and very remote areas are to be exempted of this idea of merging and consolidation of schools.

The idea of merging (clubbing) and consolidation of small schools will have following benefits:

1. Less absenteeism of teachers.
2. Less financial burden to concerned Central and State Governments and Local Bodies.
3. Each class will be get at least one teacher, i.e. one class one teacher.
4. Availability of more specific subject teachers.
5. Easy to monitor by school education authorities.
6. Requirement of fewer infrastructures and resources.

The following are key factors to raise enrolment in government schools depending on quality parameters:

1. **Appointment of Principal (School Headmaster/Headmistress) and appointing Vice Principal:** In our country most of the government elementary schools are not having school principal post. It is high time to create one separate cadre of principal and vice principal post in each elementary government school. With move of merging and consolidation of nearby small schools, to create principal cadre post is essential to look smooth functioning of the school and it may not much more financial burden to the government. It is also suggested that while appointing the principal post 50 percent of posts should be filled through seniority and 50 percent posts to be filled through direct recruitment.
2. **Teacher Absenteeism:** To avoid teacher absenteeism in government schools, the concerned State/Central Government has to take step forward and introduce Aadhaar based biometric attendance system in all schools in phased manner. These devices will be directly connected with state/central monitoring servers.
3. **Teacher Autonomy and Accountability:** A special mechanism need to be established to maintain teacher autonomy and accountability. The special committee need to appoint to improve teacher autonomy and accountability at block, district, state and national level.
4. **Promotions and special increments need to be linked with Quality of School and Achievements of Students:** The stringent criteria shall be followed while giving promotions of government school teachers. Various quality key parameters will be chalked out to assess the contribution of teacher with respect to improvement of quality

functioning of the school. A special increment will be given to teachers who improve the quality education in school.

5. **Proper Monitoring Mechanisms:** Every Block/Mandal Education Officer, etc. must visit schools at least two times in a month. It is also suggested to create separate Block/Mandal Education Officer posts for academic and supervision separately and as same case will be followed in District Education Officer posts and State level also.
6. **Providing Infrastructure and Special Facilities:** A special care has been taken to provide infrastructure facilities at merged and consolidated schools with respect to laboratory, furniture, and toilets, etc.
7. **Parents Aspirations and Expectations:** It is one of the key elements to improve enrolment in government schools. Due to globalization most of the parents are attracting and looking to enroll their children in English medium schools. The other key factors like providing quality education, infrastructure, and fulfilling societal and global demands, etc. also attract the parents towards government schools. A massive step will be taken to enrol children from various sections of society, i.e. government teachers, all government employees, all constitutional positions who were holding like from Village Sarpanch (President) to Members of Parliament, etc. to attract parents towards government schools.
8. **Specific Subject Teachers:** A necessary step should be taken to appoint special subject teachers in each merged (clubbed) common school with the following formula, i.e. one Principal/Headmaster/Headmistress, Compulsory language teacher (preferably in mother tongue), Maths, Science, and Social studies teacher. It is also suggested that Physical Education Teacher should be appointed to make smooth functioning of the school and bring desired values in the children at school level.
9. **Enrolling Government Teacher Children in Government Schools:** It is high time to encourage all government teachers to admit their children in the government schools. A special point should be given to those who admit their children in government schools, in promotions, teacher transfers, increments and awards, etc.
10. **Strong Political Will:** This is also one the major key factor to raise enrolment in government schools. The political parties who were in the power have to take necessary steps to improve quality education in Indian Government schools from time to time.
11. **Amending to RTE Act 2009:** It is high time to amend RTE Act 2009 with respect to rationalization of teachers, enrolment, access of schools, etc. Special provision will be given to where schools are located in hilly, tribal, and very remote areas without merging and consolidation of schools.
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12. **Accrediting the Schools:** All the Government and private management schools will be accredited based on various quality parameters. It is high time to establish National Assessment and Accreditation Council for Schools (NAACS) will be established by Government of India. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) should be take major responsibility to create NAACS as its one of the wing to assess and accredit schools across our country with supporting and funding from Government of India or It may also start as one of the wing of existing National

Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The Government of India or NAACS will be release special grant/funds to such accredited schools.

Conclusion

The small schools having low enrolment should be merged in one school at nearby locality (habitation) and provide free transport facility to students as per provision of RTE Act (2009). The idea of merging and consolidation of small schools will have several benefits and it may lead to raise enrolment in government schools.

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