Strengthening School Education through Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres
An Assessment

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Abstract

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a centrally sponsored programme of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India for ensuring quality education in schools. It has widened the scope of school reform efforts by ensuring improved participation from parents and the community. It also envisages bridging of gender and social gaps. Since ensuring quality was the main target under SSA, many interventions were made so as to make the school system more effective. One among these interventions was the establishment of Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) and Block Resource Centres (BRCs). These academic support structures were visualised as the structures for ensuring quality in schools by providing necessary academic inputs and coordinating community mobilisation activities on a regular basis. This paper discusses the role, objectives and status of BRCs and CRCs across various States and UTs in the country. The paper also tries to explore how useful are BRCs and CRCs in delivering their academic inputs for the betterment of elementary education in India. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) with the support of the MHRD has launched a programme for the implementation of Quality Monitoring Tools (QMTs) across various States and UTs in the country. Responses received from various States and UTs have been used as secondary data for the study.

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INTRODUCTION

The Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres were visualised as a series of resource support institutions from the school to the state level and vice versa, which provide necessary inputs both on academic and administrative grounds. Among the various interventions under the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)* for quality enhancement, setting up of sub-district academic support institutions bears significance. This is because it involves mutual learning from each other's experiences and expertise on a continuous basis, thereby bringing qualitative improvement of schools in its own locale. The need and importance of quality education has been emphasised from time to time in the country.

Providing universal elementary education of comparable quality to all children in the age group of 6–14 years without any discrimination on the lines of caste, creed, location and sex

– National Policy on Education (1986)

With a view to managing the quality of elementary education under *SSA,* the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) through the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), put in place a massive programme of monitoring quality dimensions of elementary education throughout the country during 2005–2006. Quality Monitoring Tools (QMTs) consisting of a set of seven formats were developed and have been rolled out in the entire country. Various States and UTs are in different stages of implementing these tools. Different aspects of quality dimensions covered in these formats are children's attendance, community support and participation, teacher and teacher preparation, curriculum and teaching learning material, classroom process and learners' assessment, monitoring and supervision (NCERT 2005). The process of flow of information and provision of feedback through the implementation of QMTs is two-way. Information collected at the lower level (for example, at school) flows to the next higher level (cluster) where it is consolidated and analysed to provide necessary feedback and take measures for improvement at the lower level (school). This is a process-based monitoring in which the purpose is not to document or pile up the data but to use it for improving the educational processes.

The paper is based on the responses received through Quality Monitoring Tools from 28 States and Union Territories (UTs). These include Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Puducherry, Rajasthan Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telengana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

An attempt has been made to explore how helpful the Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres are in fulfilling their assigned duties and responsibilities towards the betterment of academic standards in primary and upper primary schools. The paper is expected to provide insights into the various stakeholders involved in elementary education on how these centres are functioning and what further may be supplemented in enhancing their capacity for delivering the services expected from them effectively.

Background of Establishment of BRCs and CRCs

BRCs and CRCs were originally established under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) which was launched in a phased manner in selected districts of the country, and later extended during the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).* They were conceptualised to substitute the existing system of school inspection for providing resource support, teachers' training and supervision. These centres explicitly work in association with other state level educational bodies so as to improvise the quality of education at the elementary level.

There are various factors like the infrastructural facilities, syllabi and curriculum, teaching-learning materials, effective monitoring and evaluation system which play a major role in shaping the quality of education. However, the crucial impact factor is the teacher and the ability with which way they handle the classroom processes. In recognition of this and of the present challenging conditions that impact teachers' effectiveness, attention needs to be laid on how to improve the overall teacher development scenario along with offering quality training, tools, resources and infrastructure. It is in this context that the role of BRCs and CRCs find utmost importance.

Position of BRCs and CRCs in States and UTs

The sub district academic support institutions play an integral role in school improvement by facilitating necessary professional services for teachers and associated functionaries. They play an integral role in teacher training and other academic inputs. Table 1 reveals the status of CRCs and BRCs in various States and UTs across the country. As per the norms of persons to manage the CRC/BRC in *SSA*, on an average, one CRC Coordinator may be placed in charge of 18 schools in a block and one BRC for 10–15 CRCs. Table 1 reveals that out of the total twenty eight States and UTs, CRCs of only 45 percent States and UTs were fully occupied. Likewise, for BRCs it is revealed that only half of the BRCs are in position. Efforts are needed for filling up the remaining posts so that they can provide regular academic and administrative support at the grass root level.

Table 1
Position of CRCs and BRCs (State response towards Quality Monitoring Tools)

S. No.	Name of States/UTs	CRCs			BRCs		
		Sanctioned Posts	*In Position*	*Average Vacancy in %*	*Sanctioned Posts*	*In Position*	*Average Vacancy in %*
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	18	18	00	92	83	10
2.	Andhra Pradesh	3,714	3,714	00	666	666	00
3.	Bihar	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*
4.	Chandigarh	20	20	00	NA	NA	NA
5.	Chhattisgarh	2,703	2,682	1	150	150	00
6.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	22	11	50	18	13	28
7.	Daman & Diu	07	00	100	02	00	100
8.	Delhi	136	64	53	11	08	27
9.	Goa	110	105	5	12	12	0
10.	Gujarat	4,268	3,458	19	239	224	06
11.	Himachal Pradesh	2,102	2,087	01	248	248	00
12.	Karnataka	4,103	3,728	9	204	185	9
13.	Kerala	1,385	1,385	00	159	159	00
14.	Madhya Pradesh	6,198	INP	INP	322	322	00
15.	Maharashtra	6,170	00	100	2,105	2,031	4
16.	Manipur	225	225	00	35	35	00
17.	Meghalaya	611	611	00	234	234	0
18.	Nagaland	134	125	7	52	46	12
19.	Odisha	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*
20.	Puducherry	34	22	35	40	21	48

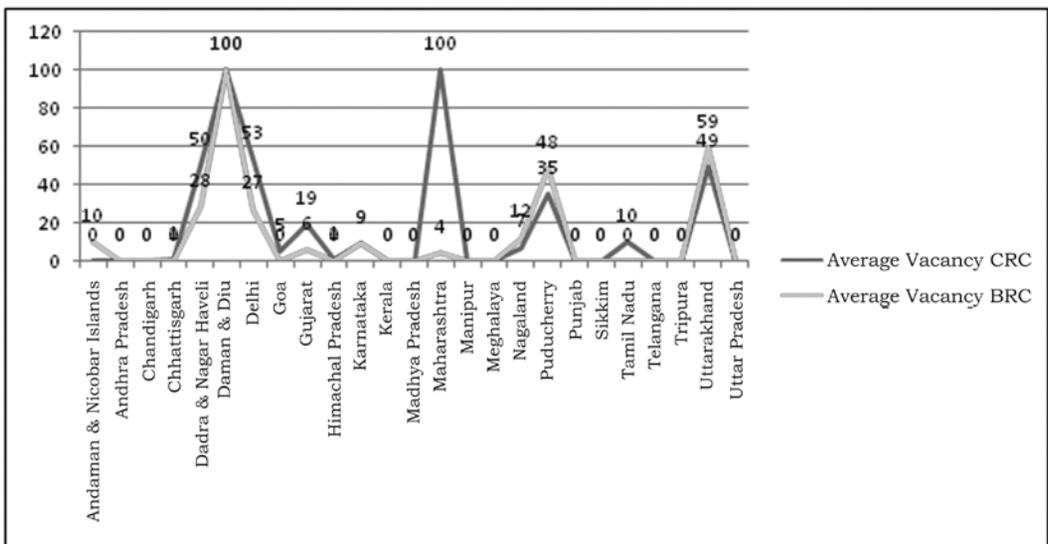| 21.	Punjab	1,499	1,499	00	852	852	00
22.	Rajasthan	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*
23.	Sikkim	111	111	00	29	29	00
24.	Tamil Nadu	4,088	3,688	10	402	402	00
25.	Telangana	1,766	1,766	00	467	467	00
26.	Tripura	332	332	00	41	41	00
27.	Uttarakhand	994	509	49	285	117	59
28.	Uttar Pradesh	8,249	8,249	00	880	880	00

*INP – Information Not Provided

Figure 1. Average Vacancies in CRCs and BRCs

The average vacancies in CRCs and BRCs is represented in the graph below.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF BRCs AND CRCs

The BRCs and CRCs perform a combination of academic and administrative activities. The extent of contact made by the BRC and CRC coordinators with the teachers, students, community, etc., gives a measure of the functioning of BRCs and CRCs. The frequency of visits made by the functionaries to schools and meetings held with the Village

Education Committee (VEC) give some indication of not only the level of academic inputs provided, but also the usefulness of the monitoring and supervision activities.

School Visit and Classroom Observation

Besides normal classroom observation, the duties of BRC and CRC coordinators include regular monitoring and assistance, supporting teachers, observing their performance, assessing their needs both in formal schools and alternative education centres, and mobilising community support for enriching school education. Monthly meetings held at the cluster level by the CRC Coordinators address these needs through mutual exchange of ideas. In this regard, the average number of visits made by BRC coordinators presented in Table 2.

Table 2
School Visits made by BRCCs

S. No.	States and UTs	Total Number of BRCCs in the State/UT	Number of BRCCs who Prepared a Schedule for Visit of Schools	Number of Times Each School was Visited by BRCCs on an Average
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	09	9	02–03
2.	Andhra Pradesh	1,137	785	2
3.	Bihar	INP	INP	INP
4.	Chandigarh	Nil	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
5.	Chhattisgarh	150	150	01
6.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	01	01	01
7.	Daman & Diu	02	01	01
8.	Delhi	08	08	01
9.	Goa	12	12	03
10.	Gujarat	239	224	Data Inconsistent
11.	Himachal Pradesh	248	207	01
12.	Karnataka	204	Data Inconsistent	Data Inconsistent
13.	Kerala	159	Data Inconsistent	04
14.	Madhya Pradesh	322	109	31 times
15.	Maharashtra	355	Data Inconsistent	3

16.	Manipur	210	210	Once in a month
17.	Meghalaya	39	16	8
18.	Nagaland	46	46	4
19.	Odisha	316	316	Once in three months
20.	Puducherry	06	3	5
21.	Punjab	22	22	2
22.	Rajasthan	INP	INP	INP
23.	Sikkim	29	29	05
24.	Tamil Nadu	413	413	2
25.	Telangana	467	368	2
26.	Tripura	41	41	01
27.	Uttarakhand	95	89	24
28.	Uttar Pradesh	880	315	02

The school and classroom visits made by the BRCCs are very important for providing on-site academic support to teachers. It is observed from the table that all the BRCCs in States and UTs like Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Delhi, Goa, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Tripura are preparing their schedule for a school visit. However, in States and UTs like Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh,only less than half of the existing BRCCs are making their school visits. Also,

the average number of visits made by BRCCs to schools was less than five in majority of the States and UTs. As BRCCs are the key persons for helping teachers in improving classroom transaction and thereby the quality of education, their sincere involvement in the process becomes imperative. As Chandigarh does not have any block, so this item is not applicable for the UT.

With regard to school visits, it is noted from Table 3, that CRCCs in most of the States and UTs make a school visit either monthly or bi-monthly.

Table 3
School Visits made by CRCC

S. No.	States and UTs	Total Number of CRCCs in the State/UT	Number of Times Each School was Visited by CRCCs		
			Once in a month	Once in two Months	Once in Three Months
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	37	20	17	00

2.	Andhra Pradesh	6,973	3,934	2,379	660
3.	Bihar	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*
4.	Chandigarh	20	20	00	00
5.	Chhattisgarh	2,703	2,703	00	00
6.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	11	11	00	00
7.	Daman & Diu	07	07	00	00
8.	Delhi	64	64	00	00
9.	Goa	110	110	00	00
10.	Gujarat	4,268	4,268	00	00
11.	Himachal Pradesh	2,002	389	640	973
12.	Karnataka	4,103	3,249	854	00
13.	Kerala	1,385	1,371	14	00
14.	Madhya Pradesh	6,198	3,685	2,072	441
15.	Maharashtra	6,170	1,200	1,703	3,267
16.	Manipur	225	225	00	00
17.	Meghalaya	611	466	114	31
18.	Nagaland	125	125	00	00
19.	Odisha	4,806	2,037	1,300	1,469
20.	Puducherry	34	34	00	00
21.	Punjab	1,499	1,499	00	00
22.	Rajasthan	INP*	INP*	INP*	INP*
23.	Sikkim	111	11	33	67
24.	Tamil Nadu	4,088	3,901	112	75
25.	Telangana	1,766	1,340	302	124
26.	Tripura	332	332	00	00
27.	Uttarakhand	994	847	108	39
28.	Uttar Pradesh	8,249	8,249	00	00

Frequent visits made by the CRC Coordinators to schools for monitoring teachers' performance and providing on-site support is crucial for enabling teachers to identify the gap areas with subsequent solution of problems.

Providing Professional and Academic Support

Being functional for so many years, the responsibilities of the BRCs and CRCs bear significance for achieving those desired outcomes for which these academic structures were conceived. Providing academic support to schools is one among the major tasks of BRCs and CRCs. The major activities involving BRCs and CRCs as pointed out by the different BRCCs and CRCCs of the sample States and UTs are consolidated below.
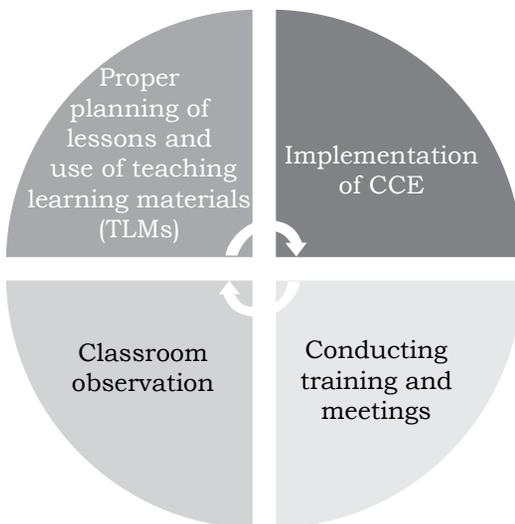

Figure 2. Academic Support to Schools by BRCs and CRCs

Miscellaneous Functions Performed by BRCCs and CRCCs

Apart from the major academic duties mentioned above, BRCCs and CRCCs also perform various other functions like monitoring of children's attendance, encouraging School Management Committee (SMC) members' participation in school improvement, organising medical camps for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), maximising the use of ICT facility in classroom, monitoring of funds provided under the *SSA,* activity-based learning, regular survey of the area to identify out-of-school children, distribution of resource material (books and other stationeries) to schools, monitoring civil works, streamlining admission process for ensuring admissions to disadvantaged groups, smooth conduct of Mid-day Meal (MDM) activities, etc.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

It is found that of the sample twenty eight States and UTs, CRCs of only 45 percent States and UTs had Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators. Likewise, it is revealed that only half of the BRCCs were in position. It is observed that all the BRCCs in States and UTs like Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Delhi, Goa, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Tripura were preparing their schedule for school visit. However, in States and UTs like Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya,

Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh, only less than half of the existing BRCCs are making their school visits. Also, in majority of the States and UTs, the average number of visits made by BRCCs to schools was less than five. With regard to the school visits, it is noted that CRCCs in most of the States and UTs make a school visit either monthly or bimonthly.

The major activities involving BRCs and CRCs as pointed out by the different BRCCs and CRCCs of the sampled States and UTs are proper planning of lessons and use of Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs), implementation of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), classroom observation, conducting trainings and meetings. Apart from these major duties, BRCCs and CRCCs are also involved in several miscellaneous activities.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was on reviewing the existing working pattern of Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres in the sample States and UTs. A look at the different components covered reveals that BRCCs and CRCCs are not fully in position except in three States and UTs. This vacancy needs to be filled up for proper execution of the assigned roles. As far as schools and classroom observation is concerned, it is found that most of the BRCCs and CRCCs are making prior planning for school visit. However, the frequency of such visits should be increased so that they may extend academic support at different levels and bring about qualitative improvement.

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