

Reorganisation and Merger of Schools at the Elementary level in Jharkhand

Views of Stakeholders

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to study the views of different stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, Headmaster¹ is used to address a person of any gender who holds the head position in a school. Headmaster (HM) and education officers regarding problems and issues of reorganisation and merger of schools. Survey method was used with the help of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and interview. Sample of 31 merged schools, 310 students, 74 parents, 54 teachers, and 31 HMs were selected by using multistage sampling from Jharkhand. FGD for students of merged school, interview for parents, teachers, HMs and education officers were used as tool for data collection. The collected data was processed in Excel and analysed by percent and words. The study found that— i) Majority of students did not feel good when the school got closed as they were very much attached with old school and it was near to their habitation. They have difficulty to go new school regularly. ii) Seventy-three percent of parents expressed that they felt unhappy about merger of old school as it was near and children come to school on their own. Now, parents are dropping and picking their wards from new school, which is hampering their daily work. iii) Sixty-three percent of teachers feel good as the present school was in the same campus. Old school had fewer classrooms, single teacher and it was difficult to manage all activities. iv) Education officers responded that

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¹ The term 'headmaster' is used to address a person of any gender who holds the head position in a school.

merger of schools was done to reduce dropout and provide quality education. Old school building will be used for social purpose in the village. More school merger should be done but some assistance may be provided to students coming from more distance place. The study has suggested educational implications for all stakeholders to improve the quality of education at elementary level.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE PROBLEM

Elementary education is the foundation of all formal education as it helps individual in the development of personal, spiritual, mental, social, and physical potential. Different commissions and committees on education in India have stressed on the importance of elementary education. Kothari Commission (1964-66) has stated that "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms". It has given the idea of free and compulsory education of children under the common school system. The National Policy on Education (1986) and Programme of Action (1992) have laid emphasis on Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) to achieve the goal of universal access, enrolment and retention. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE), 2000 has emphasised on UEE by providing quality education, growth of children in a multi-dimensional way. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 observed that "the period of elementary education is one of tremendous cognitive development, shaping reason, intellect and social skills, as well as the skills and attitudes necessary for entering the work place". The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education

Act 2009, (RTE) recommended that appropriate government must provide free and compulsory education in neighbourhood to all children from 6-14 years of age. Accordingly, the Government of India and different states has taken systematic and planned efforts to achieve 100% literacy through free and compulsory education for children from 6–14 years.

Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar on 15th November 2000 by the Government of India. As per Census 2011, the literacy rate of Jharkhand is 67.63% which is low as compared to the other states and national level. In addition to the initiatives of Government of India, the Government of Jharkhand has taken different initiatives such as *Vidyalaya Chalen Chalayen Abhiyan, Prayas, Khel Khel Mein, Buniyad and Buniyad Plus, Bal Sangam, Shikshak Samagam, Bal Sansad, Learning Exchange Programme, Aavishkar, Mukhyamantri Vidya Lakshmi Yojna, Jharkhand Balika Awasiya Vidyalaya, Kasturba Sangam, State Educational Support Mission (SESM), Pahle Padhai Phir Vidai, Parivartan Dal, Ujala I and II* and school reorganisation and merger etc. for reducing dropout, providing quality education, caring of students for overall development.

One of the initiatives of the Government of Jharkhand was to reorganise and merge elementary schools with intention to provide quality education to all children of 6–14 years of age. The main criteria for reorganisation and merger of schools as per the Jharkhand Education Project Council (2018) are— (i) the primary or middle school in which enrolment is less than 20 can be merged with nearby primary or middle or high school available within the radius of 1 KM, (ii) the primary or middle school in which enrolment is between 21 to 60 students can be merged with other school available within the radius of 500 meter, (iii) the school in which 21 to 40 students are enrolled can be merged with the school available within the radius of 1 km, (iv) the middle school having more than 60 students at primary level and less than 60 students at upper primary level can be merged with middle or high school available within radius of 2 km (only for upper primary classes), (v) if two or more than two schools are running in the same campus, they can be merged to make one school, (vi) all the students of merged schools shall be admitted to the new school by the school authority, (vii) the movable and immovable properties of the merged school should be transferred to new school. It will be the responsibility of the Block Education Extension Officer/ Merged School Principal/ Senior Teacher / Head of Panchayat and School Management Committee.

On the basis of the above criteria, the Government of Jharkhand had identified 6414 and merged 4602 schools at elementary level after careful survey in different districts by the middle of 2019.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Elementary education is the requisite for secondary and higher education as well as for democratic citizenship. It is necessary to strengthen the elementary education by providing necessary facilities both human and infrastructure. The Government of India has taken initiatives like Mid Day Meal programme, SSA, RTE Act etc. to universalise elementary education. The latest and important Act in the field of elementary education is the RTE Act, 2009. There must be a primary school within 1 km and upper primary school within 3 km as per the provision of the Act. To realise the objectives of the RTE Act and provide educational facilities in every neighbourhood, the Government of Jharkhand has initiated the process of school reorganisation and merger at elementary level. Total 4602 primary and upper primary schools were merged with nearby upper primary schools and high schools. Officially, all the infrastructure facilities and students were also shifted to nearby schools and teacher's distribution was rationalised as per the Pupil Teacher Ratio.

Further, research studies on school reorganisation and merger are few in India. But, many studies have

been conducted on different aspects of elementary education. Khan (2019) reported that the merger of schools in Rajasthan by the Government has reduced enrolments across social groups (SC, ST and OBC) by around six percent. Kumar et.al. (2019) found that far from the universalisation, exclusion is getting entrenched across gender, sector, and socio-religious and economic groups. Logan (2018) revealed that teachers experienced various emotions while transitioning in a merger. Mohalik (2018) reported that most of the provisions of the RTE Act, 2009 relating to school provisions, infrastructure and teaching learning materials, teachers and head teachers etc. have not been fully implemented in elementary schools. The civil society expressed that the enrolment norms is not strictly followed and in some places like Odisha and Rajasthan schools were arbitrarily closed down, (Rao et.al., 2017). Mo et.al. (2012) found that there is a positive effect on academic performance of students when they are transferred from less centralised school to more centralised school. Liu et.al. (2010) reported that there is no negative effect of primary school merger on academic performance on either merger-guest student or merger-host.

The above discussion reveals that number of studies have been conducted on different aspect of elementary education in India and abroad. But, limited number of studies are conducted on the merger

of schools and its effect on students and teaching learning in India. Further, no comprehensive study has been reported on reorganisation and merger of schools at elementary level in Jharkhand. Hence present study is relevant.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Old School or Merged School— The primary and upper primary schools that are mixed with nearby schools and closed down by the Government.

New School: The schools to which primary and upper primary schools are merged. It can be a primary school, upper primary school or high school.

OBJECTIVE

To study the views of different stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, HMs and education officers regarding problems and issues of reorganisation and merger of schools.

METHODOLOGY

The investigator used survey method to examine the views of students, parents, teachers, HMs and education officers on reorganisation and merger of schools. Total 31 merged schools are involved in this study as sample. These selected 31 schools were merged with 24 schools nearby by the Government of Jharkhand. Further, 310 students, 54 teachers and 74 parents and 31 HMs of merged schools and 24

education officers were involved in this study. The sample was selected through multi-stage sampling techniques. Initially, three districts such as Deoghar, Dhanbad and Lohardaga were selected randomly from 24 districts of Jharkhand. Then, eight present schools (to which other schools merged) were selected from each district. Further, all the schools merged with present school, HMs, teachers and students of merged schools were taken as sample for this study. Focused Group Discussion (FGD) for students, interview for parents, teachers and education officers were used as tool for data collection. All these tools are developed by the investigator, finalised and contextualised in the workshop involving experts in education. Data was collected by visiting selected schools. The collected data was processed in Excel and analysed by percent and words.

DATA ANALYSIS

The investigator has conducted focus group discussion with students, interviews with parents, teachers and education officers to find out the feeling, effects, benefits and problems of school reorganisation and merger at elementary level. The views of all stakeholders are presented in following pages.

Views of Students on School Reorganisation and Merger

The investigator has conducted FGD with 310 students having 31 groups

and, in each group, there were 10 students. The purpose is to enquire about feeling of student about closure of old school, distance of new school, teacher and teaching learning process in present school and problems faced due to school merger.

The investigator enquired about the feeling of students about closure of old school. Majority of students responded that they felt very sad when they heard that their school is going to close as they were very much attached and the old school was near to their house. One group of students felt well about the closure of the old school as the school was merged with a high school. In two groups, students were happy as the school was in same campus and there was single teacher in the old school who was always busy in maintaining and reporting school record.

Further, 58% of students were of the opinion that school is not far to reach every day. On the other hand, 42% of school students were of the opinion that it was far from their habitation and it is difficult to go to school every day, especially during rainy season. Regarding missing of old friends, 71% of students reported that they felt good as their old friends and teachers were also coming to the new school. Twenty-two percent of school students are of the view that they are missing their friends, as they did not come to new school but took admission in other nearby school. Few students expressed that they

are adjusted to new environment but missing old friends.

When students were asked about the activities in which they are involved in present school, 77% of students are of the opinion that teachers were involving them in class activities such as reading, writing on blackboard and asking questions during teaching. Some students expressed that poem is not taught in the class and we are not involved in any activity except listening to teachers in present school.

The discussion reveals that majority of students were facing difficulty in reaching school as it is far from old school. Further, they expressed that no playing materials are available in the present school and some students opined that they don't have any problem as the school was in the same campus. One major issue they mentioned is that there is only one hand-pump available in two schools so after lunch they have to wait for long time to clean the utensils and they clean toilet by themselves. Further, 55% of school students responded that they like the behaviour of new school teachers. Other students expressed that old school teachers were good as we were very much attached to them; they love us after scolding and sometimes give rewards for our performance.

Majority of students expressed that after merger of the school, they were enjoying the company of new friends, as they were friendly, sharing lunch and helping in home work.

Initially, during quarrel, they used to tell us to go to old school and no need to be with us but with the passage of time we have adjusted to new friends. Further, majority of students are of the opinion that they are enjoying football, skipping and badminton in the school. Most of the schools do not have the playing materials and students bring their own and sometimes enjoy local games like Kho-Kho, Kabaddi, Hide and Seek, Kit-Kit etc.

Views of Parents about School Reorganisation and Merger

The investigator has conducted interview with 74 parents regarding the effects and problems of education of their wards after school reorganisation and merger. Initially they were not comfortable to answer the questions but after making rapport and ensuring that their responses will not be disclosed to anyone, they were ready to interact.

Seventy-three percent of parents expressed that they felt sad when they heard that school is going to close as the old school was nearby, teachers and school were familiar to us. Few parents viewed that the old school was in same campus; hence we are happy of school merger. Fifty percent of parents replied that their wards are interested to go to new school but 39% of parents stated that they have to convince them to go to new school with seniors.

Regarding the admission of the students to the new school, parents

did not face any problem as the authority took responsibility for admission to new school directly without any issues. Sixty-two percent of parents expressed that they don't have any problem in sending wards to new school, except the distance of the new school. Some of them replied that "we have to hamper our work to pick and drop the children from school" and sometimes, they fear how the new school students will behave with students. Eighty percent of parents reported that new school teachers are cooperative in each and every aspect and 16% of parents are of the opinion that new school teachers were not cooperative.

Regarding facilities available in new school, 32 per cent of parents reported that there is a delay in providing uniform, textbook and transfer of money to the account of students. Further, 69 per cent of parents responded that their child is not facing any problem in new school. Some parents viewed that teaching is not regular, children were unable to mix with the new students and sometimes they quarrel with new friends.

Views of Teachers about School Reorganisation and Merger

The investigator has conducted interview for 54 teachers of the merged schools about different aspects of the school reorganisation and merged.

Sixty three percent of teachers responded that they felt very good about school merger as the new

school was in same campus; the old school had less classrooms, TLMs and teachers, single teacher school, burden to manage all activities and low enrolment. Some of the teachers expressed that they felt unhappy as the old school was near to their residence and we were able to bring students from their home, attached to the environment and could meet with parents as and when required. Further, 37 per cent of teachers expressed that they got full cooperation from teachers and HMs in every aspect from new schools. Some of the teachers opined that teachers of new school cooperated but HM did not. Fifty two percent of teachers expressed that the new school has better teaching learning environment as the school have more students and teachers. Forty two percent of teachers are of the opinion that old school had better teaching facility as they could able to pay individual attention to students.

About difficulties teachers are facing after school merger, 89 per cent of teachers reported that they did not face any difficulties in reaching to the new school as merger is within 1-2 km from the previous school. Few teachers are facing problem in reaching the new school, as it was 5-8 km distance from their habitation. Majority of teachers viewed that they are organising co-curricular activities, different competitions like quiz, awareness programme, tree plantation and meeting with parents. Other teachers use TLM

while teaching, focusing on *Gyan Setu* programme, play way method of teaching, cultural programme etc. for the overall development of students.

Views of Education Officers about School Reorganisation and Merger

The investigator has collected data from 24 education officers such as District Education Officer, Block Education Officer, District Superintendent of Education, District Education Extension Officer, Block Programme Officer, Block Resource Person etc.

Majority of education officers expressed that school organisation and merger was done to reduce dropout, provide quality education and increase attendance. Education officers responded that they did not face any problem and some of them told that there are some issues from parents and some teachers. Regarding academic problem, they reflected that they did not face any major issue after merger of schools. Regarding infrastructure of old school, it was expressed that building will be used by Aganwadi and it may be used for social purposes. Some of the parents opposed to send their child to present school and not allowing to shift infrastructure to the new school initially.

The school merger saved money, fulfilled teacher requirement, maintain proper pupil teacher ratio, beneficial for quality education, improvement of students result and equipment of

infrastructure. Regarding the steps taken for retaining all the children to the merged school. Most replied that they will do inspection, training of teachers, regular check of registers, scholarship, involvement of students in teaching learning, providing cycle, parents meeting and extra classes for better learning outcome. Majority of education officer expressed that they are planning for residential school, providing transportation facilities, Mid Day Meal, *Gyan Setu*, books and uniform for increasing retention.

More schools should be merged rather than many schools at one place. The education office is planning for smart classroom, transportation facilities for students coming from long distance, increase pupil teacher ratio, provide sports materials library, laboratory, facilities like private school for the quality improvement of education.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Majority of students did not feel good when the school got closed as they were very much attached with their old school and it was near to their habitation. They have difficulty to go to new school regularly.
- Seventy-seven per cent of the students are of the opinion that teachers of new school were involving them in reading and blackboard work. Fifty-five percent of the students are of the opinion that they like the behaviour of new school teachers.

- Seventy-three percent of parents expressed that they felt unhappy about merger of old school as it is near and children went to school on their own. Now parents are dropping and picking their wards from new school, which is hampering their daily work.
- Sixty three percent of teachers felt good as the present school was in the same campus. Old school had fewer classrooms, single teacher school and it was difficult to manage all activities. The present school has more students and teachers which are conducive for learning. Fifty-two percentage of teachers responded that new school has better teaching learning environment.
- Education officers responded that merger of schools was done to reduce dropout and provide quality education. Old school building will be used for social purpose in the village. More school merger should be done but some assistance may be provided to students coming from more distance place.
- Education officers viewed that school merger will fulfil teacher requirement and maintain proper pupil teacher ratio. For retaining all children in the new school, proper inspection, training to teachers, scholarship and cycle may be done by the state government etc.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The views of students, parents, teachers and education officers indicated a mix response about the school reorganisation and merger. Majority of stakeholders treated school merger is good for quality education by way of providing adequate facilities, teachers and teaching learning materials thereby enhancing students learning outcomes. This is supported by Mo.et.al. (2012) who reported that there is a positive effect on academic performance of students when they are transferred from less centralised school to more centralised school. The study by Liu. et.al. (2010) reported that there is no negative effect of primary school merger on academic performance on either merger-guest student or merger-host.

The study also reveals that few students face problems in attending school regularly especially during rainy season because of distance of present school from child habitation. Parents expressed that they face difficulty in dropping and picking children from school. Some teachers also expressed they faced difficulty in coming to new school due to distance. This result is agreement with Logan (2018) who indicated that students and teachers experienced various emotions while transitioning in a merger. Further, Khan (2019) indicated that merger of school has reduced enrolments across social groups around by six percent.

From the prospective of the education officers, school merger can help in providing quality education at elementary level in Jharkhand. But, this result was contradicted by Mohalik (2018) who reported that most of the provisions of the RTE Act 2009 relating to school provisions, infrastructure and teaching learning materials, teachers and HMS etc. have not been fully implemented in elementary schools. Hence, concentrated effort is required by all stakeholders to make school reorganisation and merger an effective strategy for quality enhancement of elementary education.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- The Government of Jharkhand has reorganised and merged schools at elementary level to provide better educational facilities to each and every child. Majority of primary schools have less than two teachers and upper primary schools have five teachers with very poor infrastructure facilities including TLMs. The decision to merge elementary schools having fewer students with nearby upper primary or high school is a welcome step, which can help in providing quality education to all children. Hence it is suggested for identifying other schools with less enrolment and to merge with nearby schools so that teachers and other facilities can be rationalised in the state.
- The study indicated that some students and parents were not happy with school merger as the present school is more in distance than old school. Further, they were emotionally attached to the old school and teachers. Some parents' routine work schedule has been disturbed due to dropping and picking of children from new school. So, it is suggested to make travel assistance or arrangement to the children travelling more than one km from the habitation to reach the present school.
- Due to merger of schools, the strength of students has increased in new schools but the requirement of teacher is not fulfilled as per the students and classes. This study found that at primary level less than two teachers in average and at upper primary schools less than six teachers are available which is not adequate as per the RTE Act 2009. So, Government must fulfil the vacancy of teachers in all elementary schools so that the proper PTR can be maintained in schools.
- The teaching-learning material is the basic requirement for providing quality education at school level. The study found that majority of new schools does not have adequate infrastructure facilities, drinking water, playing material, classroom for every class, ramps, compound wall,

playground etc. So, it is suggested to the education authority for making necessary steps so that minimum infrastructure facilities can be available in all elementary schools.

- Learning outcomes is the important document for the quality improvement of education. NCERT has developed the learning outcomes for elementary schools class wise and subject wise for facilitating quality education. Further, the Government of India has informed to all the states for displaying documents of learning outcomes on the walls of every elementary school for the information of teachers, HMS, parents, SMC members etc. This study found that no school had displayed the learning outcomes in the school. So, it is suggested to the government for displaying learning outcomes documents in the school.
- Education system needs to have robust team of supervising education officers. It is observed during discussion with teachers and head teachers that education officers rarely visit the school. During their visit, less focus was on academic improvement of school, students and teachers. It is suggested to fill all the vacancy of Block Education and Extension

Officers (BEEEO) so that proper monitoring and supervision can be done at local level. This supervision and monitoring are more urgent for schools which accommodated merged schools.

CONCLUSION

School reorganisation and merger at elementary level is an initiative by the state Government to provide better educational facilities, proper PTR and develop learning performance of students. The Government of Jharkhand has proposed to merge 6414 schools after proper verification by education officers. By 2019, total 4602 schools have been merged with nearby schools. This study has indicated that merger of schools can help in providing quality education to each and every child as per the RTE Act 2009. Some students and parents felt unhappy for the school merger as the new school is little distance from their habitation. Majority of teachers, head teachers, parents and students have favourable opinion toward school merger. The facilities, classroom transaction and student's achievement has not been improved after school reorganisation and merger. Hence, it is high time for the Government of Jharkhand to look into the matter and take appropriate action for quality improvement of education.

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