

School Based Management – The Issues for Controlling

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing awareness around the world for incorporating professional management into traditional public services hitherto dominated by the governments to achieve resulted *pro rata* to the investments. Similar trend has been encompassing the school education sector. Many countries have been initiating reforms to facilitate school based management. It would be appropriate to analyze the prevailing practices of school management in the context of similar reforms being initiated in India. This paper is an integral part of the doctoral dissertation – ‘A study of Management Practices of Secondary Schools’. The principal objective of the study is to find out the status of the two critical issues – student dropouts and teacher absenteeism in the select schools at secondary level. A sample of 188 secondary schools – about 34% of the population in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh in India, was selected through stratified sampling technique. The primary data was collected through self designed questionnaire and interview schedules. The findings reveal that around three-fourths of the schools managed by public sector are facing the student dropout problem. The teacher absenteeism is not a major problem in the sample schools thus contradicting the results of some of the earlier works. But non-residence of teachers in local area and commuting from distant places to the schools is observed to be a major issue in the select schools.

KEYWORDS

School Based Management, Controlling function, Student dropouts, Teacher absenteeism.

INTRODUCTION

After many years in the comfort of general public trust, education has come under scrutiny, and everyone has an opinion about how to reform it. Think tanks, commissions, business forums and government reviews have decried the state of public education and prophesied grave future unless rapid change is initiated. The 1990s have been a decade of economic, social and political uncertainty during which virtually every public institution has been criticized for failing to live up to the expectations. In education, this criticism has ranged from questions of educational purpose, practices and reform to questions of accessibility and justification of expenditures (Earl, 1999). The educational goals of the countries, even though vary with the social and cultural traditions and also with the

political institutions of each country, can generally aim at total national enlightenment and the training of human capabilities required for the rapid development of the State. Educating children eventually produces more educated adults, and many economists have suggested that this type of investment raises incomes in developing countries more than in others. This opinion is backed by Nobel prize-winning research (Schultz, 1989). Investment in human capital has caused economic growth in East Asia (McMahon, 1998). A year of education is associated with a 3 to 14 percent increase in wages and productivity in Sub-Saharan Africa (Simon, 2000). In Taiwan, it is found that rising education rates positively correlated with growth since 1960 (Lin, 2003).

When people feel anxious and concerned about the future for themselves and their children, they look to schools and teachers for reassurance, and they worry whether schools are fulfilling their responsibilities. Schools are expected to produce the kinds of learning that students need to enter the world that awaits them. Educators are under pressure to show the public that what they are doing is working, and governments everywhere have seized on education as a cornerstone for their political agendas. Recently, large-scale assessment has become the vehicle of choice for accountability around the world, and testing has changed from an instrument for decision-making about students to a lever for holding schools accountable (William, David & Janet, 1998).

At the dawn of industrialization, schools were called upon to produce qualified workers, managers and servants. In most countries it is assumed that students are prepared for quite different societies than what their parents have experienced. In such a situation of national priority given to education, simply investing in the system and letting it develop in its own way and produce the results as a natural output will not be the spirit of management. There must be some type of controlling mechanism incorporated in the system itself for ensuring the performance of the system towards the envisioned goals of the nation as well as the society.

The Indian system of school education has established a wide array of hierarchical framework to look after the school system. The entire bureaucracy acts as controlling agency rather than a supporting mechanism. The roles of the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), State Councils of Education Research and Training (SCERTs), and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) are confined only to supportive function. DIETs came into existence for the realization of one of the five components of a centrally sponsored scheme namely reconstructing and reorganisation of teacher education, approved in October 1987. DIETs are the most significant educational intervention in the country. While the NCERT came up in the 1960s and the SCERTs came up in 1970s, the need for a third tier of training and resource support structure, right at the district level was genuinely felt in order to improve the quality of basic education. As a result, DIETs were set up in almost all the districts of all the States in the country. DIETs have been established with the mission to provide academic and resource support at the grass root level for achieving quality and 'Universal Elementary Education (UEE).' It was envisaged that DIETs' activities would help the elementary education achieve excellence. While the DIETs cater to the supportive and

training needs of the elementary level, the SCERTs are established as overall nodal agencies of school education. The SCERT, Andhra Pradesh was established in 1967, amalgamating the institutions like the State Institute of Education; the State Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance; the State Science Education Unit; and the State Evaluation Unit.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pramanik and Nangia (2010) tried to find out the main factors causing drop outs at the primary school level across the nation where a comparative study among the states / UTs have been conducted as shown through chart diagram. Many programmes have been adopted by the government to reduce the drop outs. But still the number is not reducing significantly in rural areas. The authors also recommend some strategies for dropout prevention at the government, school, guardian / parent and community level along with a collaborative effort. These strategies have been successfully experimented at all education levels and environments throughout the world in today's educational arena. It's simply not enough to tell the children the benefit of an education but they should be guided into the proper direction. The most important thing is the maintenance of communication among student, school, guardian government & community so that the risk of dropping out of a student can be identified well ahead to really make a difference in the outcome.

Raegen, Richard and John (2007) compares that on average, public school teachers in the United States are absent five to six percent of the days schools are in session (Ballou, 1996). This rate of absence is low relative to those in the developing world, where teacher absence rates of 20% are common (Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan and Rogers (2006) and estimates that 10 additional days of teacher absence reduce student achievement in fourth grade mathematics by 3.3 percent of a standard deviation is large enough to be of policy relevance.

Editorial Projects in Education (2007) opines that if USA's secondary schools improved enough that they were able to graduate all of their students, rather than the 70% of students that are currently graduated annually, the payoff would be significant.

A report by Civic Enterprises for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006)), opines that there was no single reason why students drop out of high school. Respondents report different reasons: a lack of connection to the school environment; a perception that school is boring; feeling unmotivated; academic challenges; and the weight of real world events. But indications were strong that these barriers to graduation are not insurmountable. Nearly 69% said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard, half (47%) said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. Many students gave personal reasons for leaving school. A third (32%) said they had to get a job and make money; 26% said they became a parent; and 22% said they had to care for a family member. It is clear that some dropouts, but not the majority, leave school because of significant academic challenges. As complex as these individual circumstances may be, for almost all young people, dropping out of high school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of

disengagement; attendance patterns are a clear early sign. While there are no simple solutions to the dropout crisis, there are clearly 'supports' that can be provided within the academic environment and at home that would improve students' chances of staying in school. While most dropouts blame themselves for failing to graduate, there are things they say schools can do to help them finish.

In another survey of high school dropouts, respondents indicated that they felt alienated at school and that no one even noticed if they failed to show up for class. High school dropouts also complained that school did not reflect real-world challenges. More than half of respondents said that the major reason for dropping out of high school was that they felt their classes were uninteresting and irrelevant (Bridgeland & di Iulio, 2006).

A UNESCO (2006) report found, while the dropout rate was 39%, vast differences within states and between social groups, with very low rates of enrolment reported for socially disadvantaged groups such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. 50% of scheduled caste and 56% of scheduled tribe children drop out of school (Save the Children, 2006).

The National Center for Educational Statistics found that students from low-income families have a dropout rate of 10%; students from middle income families have a dropout rate of 5.2%, and 1.6% of students from high-income families dropout (NCES, 2002).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The principal objective of the study is to find out the status of the critical issues – student dropouts and teacher absenteeism in the select schools.

METHODOLOGY

Stratified sampling has been utilized to draw the sample from the finite universe of 557 secondary schools operating under four major types of management in Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh in India. The sample has been made largely representative by selecting 188 secondary schools accounting for around 34% of the population and representing 49 out of a total of 50 mandal administrative units. The primary data is collected through self designed questionnaire and interview schedules from the Headmasters / Principals of the select secondary schools. The data is analyzed through Chi-Square Test with the help of SPSS version 17, to establish the consistency of the responses.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

'Policymakers who seek to strengthen education policy and deliver better results need to be keenly aware of existing shortfalls and approaches that can help resolve them,' said Elizabeth M. King of the World Bank. The two issues, identified by the past research, which deserve utmost attention, are student dropout and teacher absenteeism. The status of these two issues in the select secondary schools is discussed hereunder.

Student Dropout:

While the rest of the world frets about the economic effects of an aging population, one country that will grow increasingly younger is India. By 2050, its 1 billion population will hit 1.57 billion. According to India's census bureau, 40% of the populace is below the age of 18, and by 2015, 55% will be under 20. That sounds like plenty of worker bees to fulfill the promise of making India a services and manufacturing power over the next two decades. The bad news is that While 96% of India's children enroll in primary school, by the age of 10 about 40% have dropped out (Manjeet, 2005). The nation's economy and competitive standing also suffers when there are high dropout rates. Dropouts represent a tremendous waste of human potential and productivity, and reduce the nation's ability to compete in an increasingly global economy. Research by Cecilia Rouse, professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University, shows that each dropout, over his or her lifetime, costs the nation approximately \$260,000 (Rouse, 2005). The study of McKinsey and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on India's manufacturing exports in 2004, projected that India will need 1.5 million trained technicians every year for the next decade - twice the number it currently produces - to be able to boost its manufactured exports from \$40 billion a year to \$300 billion, the amount exported by China (Manjeet, 2005). The actual situation prevailing in the Indian context is that while 96% of India's children enroll in primary school, by the age of 10, about 40% drops out. Just over a third of high school students graduate. The National policy on Education, 1986 and the subsequent Programme Of Action, 1992 admitted that education was at the crossroads and it needed to change the direction of where it was going. Neither normal expansion, nor existing pace and nature of improvement can address the need of the situation.

The World Bank's recent (2009) report on secondary education opined that 'with larger numbers of India's children now finishing primary school, the demand for secondary schooling is growing. India, however, does not compare favorably with its global competitors in terms of the overall educational attainments of its people. Even countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh which have lower per capita incomes than India have higher gross enrollment rates (GER) in secondary schools. India's GER in secondary school is 40%, compared to 70% in East Asia and 82% in Latin America. The challenge now for the Government of India is to dramatically improve access, enrollment and quality in secondary education.' The report further stated that enrollment varies greatly between States, from 92% in Kerala, 44% in Tamil Nadu, 22% in Bihar, and to 4% in Jharkhand. Another startling fact is that around 37% of the secondary students fail, and 11% of them dropout before exam.

Furqan Qamar of Jamia Millia Islamia University, who is a member of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on secondary education, points out that only 6 to 8% of all students take up higher education in India, while in developed countries, it is at least 50% and the number in India should go up to at least 20%. Anil Sadgopal, another member of the CABE committee, argues that the term 'dropout' is in itself a misnomer - a misused terminology that doesn't put any accountability on the system. He feels that the children were actually walking out because there is no

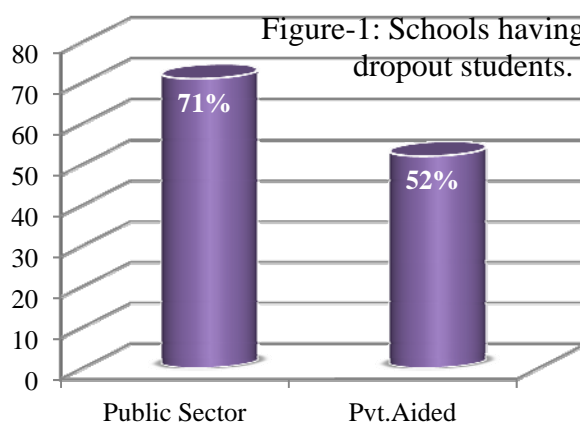
quality education system. The Economist (2007) reported that by 2013, 58 million more secondary school dropouts could join the labor force, unless significant change is initiated soon.

Obvious ways to stem dropouts would be to strengthen government schools, providing for a higher number of qualified teachers and better infrastructure. The CABE committee report has already set down comprehensive norms that secondary schools should follow. Experts also suggest granting scholarships to those hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds to encourage enrolment in secondary schools. In 2004, the Azim Premji Foundation implemented an incentive scheme, whereby State schools with the best student and teacher attendance and the biggest improvement in scores, win \$500. Others, such as Madhav Chavan of Pratham, are developing village parent-teacher associations to improve State schools. The Government of India is planning to introduce a National Means cum Merit Scholarship Scheme to check the dropout ratio in schools and encourage students to continue their education beyond class eight (GOI, 2007). According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the government is planning to introduce Rs 6,000 per year scholarship during the 11th Plan period for students in classes IX, X, XI and XII through a proper selection process.

However, children cannot be blamed for not being in the school as their perception is ignored to the extent that they don't feel involved in whatever they are taught (Khokhar, Garg and Bharti, 2005). Bharat Gyan Samiti attributes 62% of the dropout rate in standard X to lackluster teaching; and financial constraints accounted for another 22.22% of the dropouts. The CABE report notes that expansion of secondary education can be achieved by setting up new schools, upgrading existing elementary schools into high schools by providing more infrastructure and adding to the facilities in the existing secondary schools so as to accommodate more number of students. About 2.5 lakh additional high schools can be created by upgrading elementary schools, notes the report. Whether the government will heed to the Committee's recommendations, however, remains to be seen.

In this direction, the Government of India made schooling compulsory for all children under 14 and pledged to double spending on education, to 6% of GDP. However, there is not much concentration on the dropouts at the secondary level in India, where the government's efforts are to reduce the dropout rate at primary level by expanding the access of schooling to achieve 'Education For All (EFA)' targets by 2015. But the issue of the dropouts at secondary level is more serious and needs

sincere attention by the government. The governmental machinery is admitting that around 50 percent of students drop out of secondary level schools, and it is trying for 100 percent retention in secondary



level by 2020. In this context, the study attempted to find out the severity of the student dropout problem at the secondary level in the select schools. The survey results are presented hereunder:

Discussion:

Around 70% of the public sector schools and 50% of the Private Aided schools have the student dropouts, as evident from Figure-1. The majority of the dropouts occur from Grade VI to VIII. Another fact is that around 90% of the dropout students belong to the under privileged and backward communities and girls. The Private Unaided schools are not concerned with this problem since they don't have dropout students. The schools concerned are instructed to regularly maintain the data of the dropout students and communicate the same to the supervisory officials. From time to time, the Headmasters are pressurized by the administration to monitor and contain the dropout rate at their schools. In the beginning of every academic year, educational administration is conducting special drives such as 'back to school' to attract the dropped out students to the schools. These special drives prove to be temporarily fruitful but the problem again persists during the course of time due to lack of a constructive approach. Due to the absence or inactiveness of the Planning and Development Bodies at schools and community involvement through Village Education Committees, the Headmasters alone have to tackle the problem of dropouts in their schools. Around 50% of the school heads are taking measures to control the dropout problem by approaching the parents of such students and sometimes requesting the help of the village heads and elder community members. But, such efforts at the school level do not result in improving the situation due to lack of strong motivation and attractive schemes to the dropped-out students. The Headmasters do not receive enough constructive support in this effort. Regarding the severity of dropouts problem, the public sector schools are the major sufferers as the average rate of dropped out students during the past three years vary between 15 to 25%, depending on the factors such as rural/urban background of the school, seasonal agricultural activities, and socio-economic background of the parents. The same in the aided schools (around 50%) hang around 7%. The major reason attributed for student dropout problem in the aided schools is the socio-economic status of the parents.

Teacher Absenteeism:

The World Bank opines that teacher absenteeism is a substantial and a growing problem in developing countries. In the absence of a comprehensive research on teacher absenteeism at the secondary level in India, the same at the primary stage can be analyzed to be an indicator of the entire system of school education in India. On the basis of three surprise visits made to 3,700 randomly selected schools in 20 Indian states, a team of economists – Michael Kremer and Muralidharan of Harvard university and Chaudhury, Hammer and Rogers of the World Bank (2005), found that 25% of primary school teachers were absent from school, and only 45% of teachers were actively engaged in teaching at the time of random visits to the schools. Within India, the absence rate ranged from 15% in Maharashtra to 42% in Jharkand. Absence rates are considerably higher than could be accounted for by non-teaching duties. Based on the responses of each school's head teacher, official non-teaching duties account for about 4% of total absences. In other words, on any

given day, only about one percent of primary teachers are absent because they are carrying out official non-teaching duties. India has the second highest average absence rate, next to Uganda, among the eight countries for which absence calculations based on a similar methodology are available. According to the investigators, only 8 to 10 percentage points of absence could potentially be attributed to annual leave, medical leave and other officially sanctioned reasons.

Regarding the correlates of absence, the researchers concluded that higher teacher salaries do not seem to be associated with lower teacher absence as, in every Indian state, teacher salaries increase with education, experience, and rank. Being 10 years older increases the probability of absence by around 1.0-1.5 percentage points. The Head teachers, true to their designation, are 4 to 5 percentage points more likely to be absent than regular teachers. Although regular teachers are typically paid much higher salaries than contract teachers, there is no significant difference in absence between the two groups. Only one head teacher in nearly 3000 public schools reported ever dismissing a teacher for repeated absence.

The study reveals other facts of interest that teacher absence was considerably lower in schools with better infrastructure, a potentially important element of working conditions. Other working conditions that might be expected to affect teacher motivation are the remoteness of the school and the teaching conditions. Teachers in schools that are far from a paved road are nearly 4 percentage points less likely to be in school than those closest to a road. Teachers in schools that practice multi grade teaching-which can be taxing for teachers-have a slightly higher rate of absence. The teachers in schools that had been inspected in the 3 months prior to the visit were about 2 percentage points less likely to be absent. Schools with Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) that have met in the past three months have lower absence. This could reflect either the importance of local community monitoring or a tendency for more conscientious teachers and headmasters to organize PTA meetings. Private schools have much lower wages than public school teachers but also a greater chance of dismissal for absence. Around 35 out of 600 private schools reported a case of the head teacher dismissing a teacher for repeated absence or tardiness, compared with the one in 3000 in government schools noted earlier. Private school teachers are 8 percentage points less likely to be absent than public school teachers in the same village. A 10% increase in teacher absence is associated with 1.8% lower student attendance. Finally, the researchers conclude that with one in four government primary school teachers absent on a given day, and only one in two actually teaching, India is wasting a considerable share of its education budget, and missing an opportunity to educate its children.

Initiatives to reduce absence rates in schools range from hiring more teachers on short contracts and instituting school committees to decentralize management to local governments. Unfortunately, it is rarely clear whether initiatives to fight absence have their desired effect. The evidences linking the impact of teacher absenteeism on student outcomes are thin even for developed countries (Woods & Ray, 1997). As an exception, the study conducted by Das, Jishnu, Pramila, Stefan, and James (2005) in Zambian schools showed that a 5% increase in teacher absence rate reduced learning by 4 to 8%

of average gains over the year, for both Mathematics and English. An evaluation in India found that reduced absenteeism meant students learn more (Banerjee & Esther, 2006). There is also some evidence in the country studies of the World Bank's recent absenteeism project (Rogers, 2006).

Another study, conducted by UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP, 2004), says absenteeism costs 22.5% of the salary budget meant for teachers in India. Pointing out that the absenteeism directly impacts the performance of students, the report says: 'Teacher absenteeism is a key variable that policymakers should not overlook if they want their plans to be efficiently put in practice.' A randomized experiment using impersonal monitoring was implemented, in 2003, by Seva Mandir, a non-government organization in the rural Udaipur district, resulted in an immediate improvement in teacher attendance, which persisted during the entire year. The absence rate of teachers was cut by half in the treatment schools, dropping from an average of 36% in the comparison schools to 18% in the treatment schools and treatment schools taught the equivalent of 88 children-days more per month than comparison schools -a one-third increase in the number of child-days. This program showed that a straightforward incentive programme, is a very effective way to reduce absence in schools.

The obvious method to fight absence is to monitor more intensively, and to base incentives on measured performance. As advocated by the World Bank Development Report (2004) on social services delivery, an alternative way to improve incentives is to give greater control to the potential beneficiaries. But, the five Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) carried out in collaboration with MIT's Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) assessing different interventions in Kenya and India (Banerjee & Esther, 2006) showed that monitoring alone does not work and incentives can require some independent verification. The researchers opined that one possible explanation for the lack of impact of community monitoring is that everyone knows that the community lacks any formal authority to reward or punish the provider. In fact, the school committees set up in many developing countries often have no direct say in hiring, firing, or pay of the teachers. Even when local government bodies are ostensibly given the responsibility of monitoring the teachers, they may have no control over pay or postings, which are determined at a regional or national level. Hence, it is hard to resist the conclusion that most of the efforts to boost teacher presence have not been particularly successful. In this context, the study attempted to find out the status of teacher absenteeism in the sample schools. The results are discussed hereunder.

Discussion:

Regarding the issue of teacher absenteeism, around 25% of the public sector schools have one or two staff members absent for some time from the duty without proper sanction from the authorities concerned. However, the number of the teachers with unauthorized absence is only one or two and the duration of absence ranges from a few days to a few weeks. The reasons for such phenomenon are related to health, family and financial problems, preparation for competitive exams, lack of job satisfaction and in majority of the cases, unapproved requests for sanction of such long leave. The

Headmasters have no authority to take serious action against such staff. Not even a single teacher in the sample schools, during the last three years, has been dismissed or suspended for absence from duty. No punishments are initiated in such cases due to the influence of strong teacher unions. Teacher absence is not found in any of the Private Aided schools. Instead of teacher absence, teacher commutation from far off places has been an endemic problem in many schools.

Non-Local Residence and Commuting:

The government guidelines regarding the residence of the school staff say that all staff must reside within a distance of eight kilometers from the place of the school. The availability of teachers within the school purview creates a great impact on their performance. Regarding the local residence of teachers, the survey results are as follows.

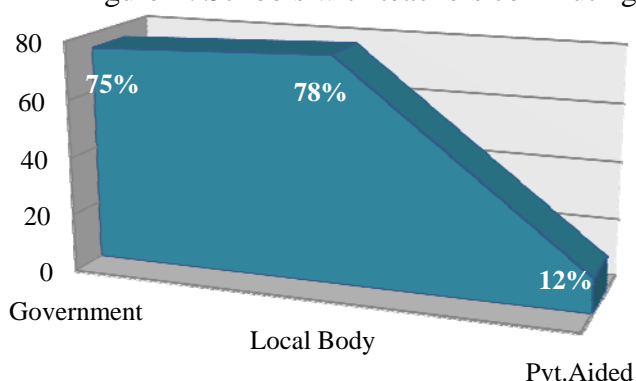
Discussion:

All the teachers of private unaided schools reside within the local reach of their schools since their managements made it mandatory where as three-fourths of the schools under Government and Local Body managements have some of their teachers commuting from distant places (Figure-2). The average distance of commutation is estimated to be around 20 kilometers from the school in the Local Body schools. Around 10% of the private aided schools have some teachers who do not reside locally. The average distance of commuting is observed to be around 15 kilometers and 10 kilometers respectively for Government and for Private Aided categories. Half of the heads of schools expressed their inability to implement the local residence norms stipulated by the administration and restrict their staff commuting from distant places.

CONCLUSION

The analysis provides some valuable insights into the severity of the prevailing issues in Indian school system. The study confirms with the previous empirical findings regarding the student dropout problem where a considerable percentage of the students are dropped out during VI to VIII classes in public sector schools. However, teacher absenteeism is found not to be such a severe issue in the select schools. But another problem persists in the form of commuting teachers from far off places to the schools. The problem appears to be severe in public sector schools where around 75% of the schools are having some teachers commuting from places as distant as 10 to 20 kilometers. The schools heads are not in a position to tackle the issue since they are not delegated with necessary authority to take disciplinary action against the erring staff and contain the problems which ultimately reflect on the quality of schooling.

Figure-2: Schools with teachers commuting



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