

Delineating the Challenges and Remedies of the School Management Committees as Constituted under RTE Act 2009

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Abstract

The present article brings forth the challenges and suggestions in the context of functioning of the School Management Committee (SMC) in the schools of the Directorate of Education, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) as constituted under the Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009. Broadly speaking, the RTE Act has recommended the major functions to be performed by the SMC in schools which include monitoring the school functioning, preparing and recommending the 'School Development Plan (SDP)', and monitoring the utilisation of grants. Although, the RTE Act, 2009 has enlisted the responsibilities of the SMC in the functioning of schools, it did not elaborate on aspects such as monitoring, ensuring, bringing to notice, etc. Hence, numerous challenges were encountered by the SMC members in schools like lack of awareness regarding the roles and responsibilities, lack of participation of the parent members in SMC, lack of clarity about funds and finances for SMC, etc. However, over the past few years, the Delhi government has initiated several reforms in the area of the school management committee to facilitate the functioning of SMCs in the schools of DoE, GNCTD. The Delhi government has worked extensively to strengthen the functioning of SMCs through many new initiatives like organising 'Capacity Building Programmes', 'Reading Mela', 'Mega PTMs', 'SMC Sabha', 'SMC App', 'Mission Buniyad', etc., to involve all stakeholders in the education of children. The present article

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delineates the challenges and remedies to improve the functioning of SMCs in the government schools of Delhi. The discussion is even more significant, with a need to address the challenges in SMCs to empower the functioning of SMCs as conceptualised by the RTE Act, 2009.

INTRODUCTION

An influential and perfect system of education comes through the learners' capability, transformation of their interests, attitudes and values. This is more likely to be achievable through sound educational management. The transformation in education is possible through appropriate decision making and by building up a decentralised system of education to mobilise community participation in the education of children. Governments across the globe are coming up with a range of strategies targeted at improving the financing and delivery of education services of enhanced quality and increasing enrolment in schools. Many studies conducted show that the involvement of parents in children's education is directly linked to the learning outcomes of students and as a whole, to the development of the school (Bazik 2005; Blok, Peetsma and Roede 2007; Kumar 2011; Hara, Steven and Burke 1998). Thus, the partnership between schools and homes need to be prioritised.

One such strategy is moving towards a decentralised system of education promoting increased parental and community involvement in schools through the formation of School Management Committees

as mandated by the RTE Act, 2009. The School Management Committee identifies the out-of-school children and enrolls these children in schools. It also ensures education of children with special needs and those belonging to the disadvantaged communities (Josephine 2005; Blok, Peetsma and Roede 2007).

Further, it makes sure that the school teaching-learning process remains child-centred. Moreover, the SMC monitors the school infrastructural facilities and ensures proper maintenance of the school building. The SMC bears accountability in implementing the plans of the government towards quality education, and also monitoring the overall working of schools and fund utilisation. With the formation of the SMC under the RTE Act, 2009, teachers, parents, students and educationists have started participating in the school activities for its upliftment. The members of the SMC hold the responsibility to constructively plan holistic learning and creating ideal environments for students. Hence, SMC members also possess relevant management skills to enable them to perform the role of a member effectively.

The main aim of the SMC is to focus upon the school, its quality and

students. Therefore, as prescribed under Section 21 of the RTE Act, 2009, 75 per cent of the members should be parents. In addition to the above, one-third of the remaining 25 per cent should be elected members of local authorities, one-third should be teachers and one-third should be educationists. In case of unavailability of educationists, students can replace them. Moreover, about 50 per cent of the members should comprise women, hence empowering women to get involved in their child's education.

It is not only the teaching-learning process and physical infrastructure that makes the management effective, but also the overall school environment, school ethos, the quality of participation of the students, parents, community, the local resources available, etc. (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay 2010; Kumar 2009; Waseem 2009). Hence, the community may take initiatives for the welfare of the schools by improving its facilities and school effectiveness.

This paper aims at identifying the challenges faced by SMCs in schools and also to propose the possible remedies to overcome these

challenges. The reconstitution of SMCs as per the specified norms under the RTE Act, 2009 is not an easy task. A number of problems have emerged from time to time. There were some instances where norms were not followed. For example, persons who were not eligible, attempted to become the president of SMC or the process of election was unfair and not transparent; lack of participation of all parents, etc. (Kumar 2011; Kumar 2013).

This research paper is part of a PhD thesis done on 'School Management Committee: A Study of Delhi Schools' in which the data has been collected from 20 government schools of Delhi. A parent, a head teacher, the local authority, a social worker and a teacher from each SMC were selected through random sampling technique. Hence, a total of 100 SMC members were selected as respondents. The tools comprised semi-structured interview schedule and observation schedule for gathering data along with field notes and government circulars related to SMC which were also used for data interpretation.

Table 1
Major Challenges Faced by SMC Members with Regard to its Functioning in Schools

Functions of SMCs	Challenges
Monitoring the working of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to lack of awareness among the SMC members regarding school activities, they could not contribute much in this process

Preparation of the School Development Plan (SDP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SMC members had no clarity on the preparation and usage of the SDP.
Monitor the utilisation of grants received from the appropriate government or local authority or any other source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No separate funds have been earmarked for SMCs. However, the grants under <i>Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti (VKS)</i>/ Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE)/Parent Teacher Association (PTA) are being utilised by the SMCs to meet the expenditure incurred in respect of its functioning.
Communicate in simple and creative ways to the population in the neighbourhood of the school, the right of children as enunciated in the Act, as also the duties of the government, local authority, school, parents and guardians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMC members are not aware about the expected roles. No provision for funds to support such awareness programmes. Lack of education among parent members, who fail to understand the very purpose of organising such programmes. Largely, the parents belong to the daily wagers' category who hardly have any time to devote to such school activities.
Hold regular meetings with parents and guardians and apprise them about the regularity in attendance, ability to learn the progress made in learning and any other relevant information about the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is pertinent to mention that the schools do not have a provision for organising general body meetings with the SMC members. Only during PTMs, the issues related to a child are discussed which include areas like academics, performance of child, health and hygiene, attendance, results
Monitor that the teachers are not burdened with non academic duties other than those specified in section 27 of the RTE Act.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is acute shortage of human resource in the school system; hence, the teachers are overburdened with non-academic work. Some of the SMC members reported that due to urgent information sought by the education department, most of the times, teachers are absent from the classes, which makes the student suffer. The qualified SMC members tried to volunteer to support the teachers in their non-academic work. However, the teachers denied their help on account of accountability and accuracy required in undertaking a task.

<p>Ensure enrolment and continued attendance of all the children from the neighbourhood in the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The problem of student absenteeism was resolved to a great extent by the interventions made by SMC members, by constant interaction with students and parents, home visits, etc. • However, the SMC members reported that the Government schools also cater to the children belonging to the migrant families. These families are away from the city for longer duration. Hence, the children are at greater loss as they are not able to attend the school regularly and perform poorly in their academics.
<p>Bring to the notice of the government or local authority, as the case may be, any deviation from the rights of the child, in particular mental and physical harassment of children, denial of admission and timely provision of free entitlements as per section 3(2) of RTE Act, 2009.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SMC members reported that the cases related to child harassment, denial of admission and late arrival of free entitlements are resolved at the school's level by the Head of School (HoS) and hence, such cases were never reported to the higher authorities. • Majority of SMC members reported that the students were often denied admissions due to issues like missing or incomplete documents, etc. • For instance, most of the schools insist on submitting Aadhar card of students and parents. This is demanded due to the fact that students get enrolled in multiple schools. Hence, this step was taken by schools to curb duplicity. However, the parents who did not have Aadhar cards faced difficulties in getting their child enrolled in the school. • Another document required in support of admission is birth proof of the child, whereas, cases were reported wherein the parents did not possess the said document. Although the schools have a provision for accepting affidavits in this concern, but the parents belonging to the lower socio-economic strata could not bear even the expenses of the affidavits. • Given the lack of financial provisions for meeting such petty expenses in support of a child's education, any powers given to SMC become meaningless.

<p>Identify the needs and monitor the implementation of the provisions of Section 4 of the Act which states— ‘where a child above six years of age has been admitted in any school or though admitted could not complete his or her elementary education, then, he or she shall be admitted in a class appropriate to his or her age’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the children were given age appropriate admissions under the said circumstances, but, their learning gaps were never addressed which ultimately created a pool of students who qualified Class VIII without any barriers but failed miserably in Class IX. • The RTE Act has mandated the creation of Special Training Centres for such children to bring them into the mainstream with other children. However, the SMC members are not well aware of such provisions due to lack of guidelines/awareness programmes to support the functioning of SMCs.
<p>Monitor the identification of facilities for admission of children with disabilities and ensure their participation in, and completion of elementary education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a dire need for appointing special educators in each government school to identify Children with Special Needs (CWSN) and to facilitate SMC in ensuring the admission and completion of elementary education of such children in schools. • There are no such special provisions to support education of CWSN like availability of wheel chairs, recreational activities, etc. However, the SMC member reported that one of the MLA representatives had donated a wheelchair for ill students.
<p>Monitor the implementation of Mid-day Meal in schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the SMC members checked the food quality and proper distribution of Mid Day meals regularly, but they did not ensure whether the food provided sufficient nutrients to the child to ensure their proper growth and development.

In view of all the stakeholders (SMC members), the overall intricacy of SMC is considered to be the main weakness of the model. The school heads complained about the lack of cooperation among parent members and their irregularity in attending meetings, parents not being aware of school operations, teachers being

overburdened with non-academic work, etc. Hence, it is quite evident that the overall functioning of SMCs is not going well. Even though the training programmes are being organised at a massive scale for the SMC members by the State Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi. The members feel not

much is being done specifically for the parent members to build their capacity with respect to the technical and professional know-how of the school functioning.

Furthermore, the RTE Act recommends providing a six-day training to SMC members in which three days of the training should be in residential mode. However, there is no evidence regarding the implementation of the aforesaid provision with respect to SMC trainings. The funds allotted by the government are not being utilised in the areas where they need to be used. Under such conditions prevailing at the school level, the stakeholders remark that resources are insufficient to allow schools to exercise flexibility or introduce school level initiatives that can meet the local needs.

Hence, in the above circumstances, the following remedies may prove useful to resolve the issues hindering the functioning of SMCs in the schools.

- All members of the committee should be provided adequate training regarding their expected roles and functions to build awareness.
- The SDP can be developed by assessing the current situation (financial, social or economic in nature) and looking out for solutions which best fit the ground realities.
- As per the government's circular, the format of SDP was uploaded on the website of the department which is to be filled by the Head of School with the involvement of SMC.
- It is a good way to spread awareness regarding the rights of children and delineate the roles and responsibilities of parents, local authorities and SMC members towards a child's education.
- A major emphasis of the training programmes should be on the preparation of a School Development Plan (SDP) with actionable goals which can act as a blueprint to support the activities of the SMC members.
- Adequate funds should be allotted for such training.
- Clarity with respect to fund utilisation for varied activities for school development
- All the selected companies' tender lists should be displayed on the notice board with a prominent reason and a copy of each tender should be submitted to the education department of the state government.
- Minutes of the SMC meetings should be widely circulated among community members to gather larger support for enhancing school performance.
- A copy of the minutes should be displayed on the schools' notice board for the information of all concerned the activities undertaken by the SMC should be displayed on the notice board for

motivating the passive members of the committee.

- Mobilisation is the most important aspect of the committee.
- The unspent funds should be made available to the committee for organising innovative activities in the school.
- There should be greater transparency and accountability in the functioning of SMC.
- As most of the students in government schools belong to the marginalised groups whose parents are daily wagers, the participation of such parents may be ensured by giving away some basic allowances (like allowances for travel, food, refreshments, etc.) to support the activities related to SMC.

CONCLUSION

As per the RTE Act, 2009, the SMC mostly consists of parents, and they are responsible for planning and managing the school operations. The newly constituted School Management Committees are facing issues of comprehensive participation, low enrolment, clarity in the expenditure of the allotted money, teachers as well as students' absenteeism and lack of

quality interventions in schools. The challenges mentioned above have badly affected the management of SMC; therefore, some considerate suggestions have been given such as spreading awareness by displaying the activities carried out by the SMC on the notice boards, clarity with respect to fund utilisation, rewards, allowance and accountability of members as well as school authorities. The remedies outlined above are important to strengthen the overall functioning of the SMC members in schools.

Though the government is making constant efforts to support the effective functioning of the SMCs in schools, it can further be enhanced by incorporating the aforesaid remedies which will help in increasing awareness and removing confusion arising with respect to the terms that are used in the RTE Act, 2009 like monitor, ensure and bring to the notice for SMC. The suggested remedies focus on general problems obstructing the development of the school, so as to help improve the school's functioning by bridging the gap between actualities and the provisions enlisted in the RTE Act, 2009.

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