

Status of School Library Development in India

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1. Introduction:

India is a union of 28 states, 6 union territories and a national capital territory having a rich composite culture spanning many centuries. Since 1976 state and centre governments are responsible for education. Constitution of India provides for the following three lists: State List, Union List and Concurrent List.

Under the State list, state governments are exclusively responsible for education in their respective states. Union government is responsible for maintaining national and integrative character of education under the union list. But both state and central government share responsibility for education in case of partnership under the concurrent list. In the year 2002 the Parliament passed the Constitution 86th Amendment Act to make elementary education a fundamental right for children in the age group 6-14 years. In India the school education is imparted at different levels, namely;

Elementary level: Standard 1-8

Secondary level: Standard 9-10

Higher Secondary level: Standard 11-12.

There are different types of schools in India and this classification can be broadly done on the basis of administering bodies, i.e., Government (State and Central), quasi-government (Army Schools), Model Schools (Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs)), Public and Private schools. Under different boards they develop their curriculum and conduct examinations at state and central levels. e.g. CBSE, ICSE and state education boards.

JNVs are under Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, which is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. It has opened 506 schools in each revenue district to provide free quality education to talented children predominantly from rural areas with special focus on socially deprived and girl students. These schools provide free text books, stationery, boarding and lodging, uniforms, medical facilities etc.

The approximate ratio of teacher/ pupils in classroom is different in rural and urban communities. Infact, there is a wide gap. It could range from 1:25 in private and public schools

to 1: 45 in government schools in urban community. In rural communities the ratio varies from 1: 50 to may be one teacher for the whole primary school.

As per the Fifth All India Education Survey (1992) there are 7, 35,771 schools in all, out of which only 2, 93,427 (i.e. 39.88%) have libraries. Level wise analysis indicates that 26.18% primary schools, 66.97% upper primary schools, 90.12% secondary schools and 94.08% higher secondary schools have libraries. In the same survey, it was reported that only 15% of rural schools and 8.28% of urban schools have full-time librarians at the secondary school level. At the Higher Secondary school level only 29.58% rural schools and 46.10% urban schools have full-time librarians. However, the average of trained librarians is about 65% only in all schools.

There are 1441 full time trained librarians. Others include from a teacher incharge to a clerk or even personal assistant of the Principal of the school. The trained librarians have either a Diploma in Library Science or a Bachelor's degree in Library & Information Science. The statistics about the collection of books are quite revealing. 17.8% schools have less than 100 books, 9.6% have 100-249 books, 5.3% 250-499 books, 3.64% have 500-599 books, 2.55 % have 1000-1999 books, about 2% has 2000-3999 books, and 1.5% has 4000-4999 books.

The medium of instruction in government schools in India is mostly Hindi and the State/regional languages as India is a composite culture having a multiplicity of languages. In Public schools it is English. Majority of the schools are using more than one language as the medium of instruction.

In school libraries generally where there are trained librarians in case of Public, Private and a few Government schools, books are issued to children and there are story telling hours also. The situation in rural areas where there are libraries, the almirahs are mostly locked. Besides some book exhibitions once in a while, no worth mentioning activities are carried out by libraries.

The country's literacy rate in 2001 stood at 65.38%. The gap between male and female literacy is 21.70%. Overall male literacy in the country now stands at over 60% for females it is around 50%.

Student evaluation is through state and national level examinations depending upon the type of school, its level and its governing body.

2. Administration and Co-ordination System

As already stated above, both state and central governments are responsible for providing education and library facilities at elementary, secondary and higher secondary levels. There are directorates of education at state level and a Department of Education under the MHRD, Government of India. Each state directorate looks after educational and library needs in respective state. The Department of Education under MHRD is responsible for the national and integrative character of education. Both state and central governments are responsible for partnership programmes in education under the concurrent list. There is no uniformity in the hierarchical system. In Punjab state, there is a Directorate of Public Instruction (Schools). In fact there are two directorates, one for elementary education (1-8 standards) and one for secondary education (9-12 standards). At circle level, a number of revenue districts are grouped and there is a Circle Education Officer (CEO). At district level, there is a District Education Officer (DEO).

With 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments the responsibility for school education is being shifted to local government bodies, i.e. municipal corporations/committees in urban areas and village panchayats, panchayat samitis and zila parishads in rural areas. Central Schools, Army Schools, Model Schools are administered by autonomous bodies under the central government.

For curriculum development and evaluation, state and central education boards have overall responsibility. For example the Central Board of School Education (CBSE), and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) look after the curriculum and evaluation of centrally established schools. Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) does the same job for the schools situated in Punjab. But there are cross affiliations of schools as there are no hard and fast rules.

3. Special Projects

- Operation Blackboard (started in 1987) aims at improving physical and human resources available in primary schools.
- Lok Jumbish aimed at achieving education for all in year 2000 by mobilizing and involving people.
- Shiksha Karmi has universalisation and qualitative improvement of primary education in remote and socio-economically backward villages as its aims.
- Janshala has been recognized as one of the best practices in the world by ECOSOC. This programme provides support to efforts towards universal elementary education.
- National Population Education Project aims at institutionalization of population education in the schools.
- National Literacy Mission is an ambitious programme at national level to spread literacy among masses.
- Mahila Samakhya Programme (Education for women's equality) is a concrete programme for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly from socio-economically marginalised groups.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is also an ambitious project being run with the support of the World Bank, the UK and central and state governments in India. World Bank's \$550 million for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will be pooled with funds provided by the Government of India, the various states, the European Commission and the United Kingdom (\$340 million). It aims to reduce the number of children out of school by at least nine million, narrow gender and social gaps and improve quality of education.

4. Problems and Issues

- Lack of Skill, Will & Awareness
- Political instability & lack of National Policy on Library and Information System
- Language diversity
- Attitudinal problems

According to Pratham survey 25% of school children can't write a dictated sentence even at the age of 14 in the districts in a few states of India. Illiteracy is one of the root causes for poverty and unemployment. The people who are worried about their basic needs of food, clothing and

shelter can't imagine remotely using school or public libraries. Commercialization of education has now added a new dimension to the existing problems of school education.

School libraries in India, wherever they exist, face a multitude of problems ranging from inadequate space for keeping books and reading space in school buildings to less trained staff. Non availability of regular funds for acquiring reading materials is a major problem faced by school libraries in government and semi-government sector. These schools have only amalgamated funds and parent-teacher association fund from which only a limited number of approved books can be purchased. Schools in the private sector do not have much of a problem with funds but availability to library is subject to priority given to it by Head of School. The collections have not grown beyond the prescribed books in the syllabus with a few exceptions. Even the books approved by state directorates of education neither are of good quality nor directly relevant. The ad-hoc system of school libraries is running throughout the length and breadth of the country in the absence of any specific guidelines and standards for their sustained growth. Rural schools are lagging behind the urban ones in terms of professionally trained library staff. There are no incentives for trained staff for working in rural schools, besides the problems mentioned earlier are manifested to a greater degree. While there is need for training of professional librarians, mechanisms have not been developed and avenues are not available for this.

Besides, school libraries are facing problems on account of lack of skill, will and awareness; political instability and absence of National Policy on Library and Information System; Language Diversity; and apathetic attitude of authorities.