Introduction

Community participation in education in India has always been thought as an integral part of the educational set up. The First Education Commission clearly spelt out the need of decentralization of school education and involvement of local bodies in the processes related to school improvement in 1966. According to the Commission, the immediate goal was to associate communities with the schools in their locality. Community participation as a primary strategy for ensuring decentralization in school education got a major boost with the adoption of National Policy on Education in 1986. The NPE 1986 visualized direct community involvement in the form of Village Education Committees (VECs) for management of elementary education. The Policy envisaged people's involvement and participation in educational programmes at the grass-root levels as very important. The Policy viewed Village Education Committees as bodies that could ensure participation of every child in every family in primary education either formally or through non-formal means.

The Programme of Action (POA) 1992 further strengthened the Village Education Committees by providing that the State Government will lay down general guidelines regarding the constitution of village education committees and establish norms of accountability in respect of the Heads of these institutions. The major responsibility of the village education committee was to operationalise micro level planning and school mapping in the village through a systematic house to house survey and discussions with the parents.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 also provided a fillip for decentralisation activities and facilitated the transfer of power and participation of the local self-government institutions or the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by delegating responsibilities with regard to location and relocation of existing primary and upper schools on the basis of micro planning and school mapping. Decentralization of school management to grassroots level bodies is an important policy initiative under these Acts.
District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) one of the most comprehensive programmes launched in 1994 with international assistance from World Bank and European Union was designed primarily as a decentralized program to address local needs and circumstances by involving local stakeholders. The communities were required to establish Village Education Committees (VECs) under DPEP. Local groups including Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and Mother Teacher Councils (MTC) were also encouraged to participate in VECs. The Lok Jumbish (LJ) and Shikhsa Karmi Programmes (SKP) launched in 1994 stressed on mobilizing the village community to take responsibility to universalise and deliver quality education. The positive impact of the LJ and SKP served as a model for designing innovative approaches for community involvement in all educational activities of a village school in the country.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched in the year 2002, aims to Universalize Elementary Education (UEE) through people’s involvement and participation. SSA assigns greatest importance to systematic mobilization of the community and creation of an effective system of decentralized decision making. It calls for community ownership of school-based interventions through effecting decentralization. It puts a great deal of emphasis on the civil society for ensuring the effectiveness and viability of our school education. Institutions such as Village Education Committee/School Management and Development Committee/Ward Education Committees have been set up at village or school level in almost all the states to ensure community participation in the school education system. The Right to Education Act 2009 is another historic step which recognizes the role of local governance in school education. The Act specifies that a School Management Committee (SMC) shall be constituted for every school to monitor and oversee its working, and to plan and facilitate its overall development with representation of parents, teachers and community and local authority members, as may be prescribed by the appropriate State government.

As such community participation in education through Village Educational Committees has been given utmost importance in most policy documents of the Government relating to school education and the crucial link between community participation and equitable quality education has always been given due recognition.

The review of related literature shows that most of the research studies relating to community participation have considered the importance of participation of
community in school management without a doubt. But at the same time, these studies also accept the fact there are many factors that act as impediments in the path of achieving a more inclusive and equitable school education through Village Education Committees. Menon (1999) reiterates that the women still observed purdah and many of them do not even look up to male members and speak in Haryana. Tyagi (1999) while studying Village Education Committees in Ranchi District revealed VEDC members do not attend the meetings regularly and also not taking part in any school activities. Government of Karnataka (2004) in collaboration with Azim Premji Foundation found that 2% of the schools in Karnataka didn’t even have a School Development and Management Committee. The monitoring mechanism seemed to be ineffective. There was low representation of girls as student representatives in SDMCs. Mor (2008) points out that the quality issues have no place in VEDCs meetings in Punjab. A great majority of VEDCs/PTAs and gram sabhas don’t have education on their priority list. VEDCs members did not even attend the meetings. Those who attended did the same just to complete formality and had no interest in quality issue of elementary education. Nayak (2009) finds that the working of the SMCs in Orissa was not at all satisfactory. The meetings are either not held at all or, if held, they are just once in a year. The SMC members did not attend the SMC meetings whenever they are held. Various problems perceived as impediments in the working of the SMCs were inadequacy of teachers, poverty of members, lack of sufficient financial aids, lack of coordination among members, inadequacy of classrooms, lack of incentives for SMC members, political interference and reservation of SMC seats in the village community. Interestingly gender of the chairman of SMC was perceived to be important for the effective functioning of these bodies. The study by Institute of Rural Research and Development (2010) reveals that more than half of the VEC members in Mewat in Haryana are inadequately informed about their roles and responsibilities. Their participation in activities to ensure quality formal education in the villages is also inadequate. The members admitted to having received no formal training, before being made members of VEC. Aikara (2011) while studying the decentralization of elementary education and community participation in Kerala stressed that decentralization of education in Kerala has not resulted in greater participation of the stakeholders like teachers and parents in school management. There is a need for more convergence of state support and the social
capital of the civil society. The major aspects of school education are with the centralized state department of education.

On the whole, most of the research studies make is clear that mere presence of a VEC in a village may not transform the educational scenario so long as the members of these committees are not active and sensitized. It is very important to understand how these committees can work more effectively, what mechanisms and strategies should be used and what are the expectations and perception of the people about the whole process and how can they be made more proactive about their involvement in the school related activities at the village level. In this context, the above background provides the necessary basis and justification for this research study which primarily intends to evaluate the functioning of Village Education Development Committees in educationally backward districts of Punjab.

Statement of the Problem

“A Study of the Functioning of Village Education Development Committees in Educationally Backward Districts of Punjab”

Objectives

The specific objectives of the present study are following:

1. To study the composition, the process of formation and the functions delegated to Village Education Development Committees under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the state of Punjab.

2. To know the socio-demographic profile of the Village Education Development Committee members in terms of Gender, Age, Education, Caste and Marital Status.

3. To study the general facilities available in schools necessary for improving the standard of education to children.

4. To have an understanding about the awareness of the members of the Village Education Development Committees about composition, the process of formation and the functions of these bodies.

5. To study the contribution of Village Education Development Committees in the promotion of elementary education in terms of:
   - Increase in enrollment.
   - Improvement in school result and reduction in school drop-out rate.
➤ Contribution of members in individual capacity.
➤ Conduct of meetings.
➤ Activities undertaken with reference to improving infrastructure, fundraising and incentives to students.

6. To study the problems and constraints encountered by the Village Education Development Committees.

7. To know the views of the teachers about the working of the Village Education Development Committees in Punjab.

Delimitations of the Study

➤ The study examines the contribution of the Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) in universalizing elementary education in specific context of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and is descriptive and evaluative in nature.

➤ The study is confined only to two districts, Mansa and Muktsar, of Punjab which have the lowest literacy rates as per the Census 2001 and is delimited to only 52 government primary rural schools and 52 VEDCs drawn purposively.

Methodology

The present study attempts to evaluate the functioning of the Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) in the two of the least literacy districts namely Mansa and Muktsar of the state of Punjab.

The process of formation, composition and functions of these committees have been studied primarily from the secondary sources largely consisting of the documents, reports, circulars and guidelines of the State as well as the Central Government. In order to know the socio-economic profile and the awareness of the VEDC members, primary data has been collected with the help of pre-designed structured Interview Schedules. The availability of general facilities in the sampled schools was known with the help of a pre-designed School Information Questionnaire. For exploring the change in enrollment, the change in the class-wise and gender-wise gross enrollment was calculated across three years period (2000-2003) before the formation of the VEDCs and for three years period (2003-2006) after the formation of the VEDCs. Likewise, the change in school drop-outs and school results was examined by calculating the difference between the absolute numbers of the students failed and dropped out in each year in each class over a period of three years (2000-
2003) before the formation of the VEDCs and for three years period (2003-2006) after the formation of the VEDCs.

The research design followed in the study is descriptive and evaluative. The descriptive survey method has been adopted primarily due to the fact that it is one of the most commonly used method of investigation that attempts to describe and interpret what exists in the present conditions. The study describes the functioning of the VEDCs by securing evidence from the existing situations.

Sample

For the sample, a total of 52 villages as per required indices, have been selected from both the two educationally backward districts of Punjab. Accordingly 26 villages from Mansa and 26 villages from Muktsar were selected from the sample. The selection of a village eventually led to the selection of a school and the respective Village Education Development Committee (VEDC). Ultimately 52 rural primary schools and 52 VEDCs were studied for the present investigation. A total of 411 members of the VEDCs and 99 school teachers constituted the sample for the present study. The members of the VEDCs comprised of Head Teachers, Panchayat members, members of the PTA, Ex-servicemen, Retired teacher and Philanthropist/NRIs.

Tools used for the study

The Structured Interview Schedule for the members of the VEDCs and a separate Structured Interview Schedule for teachers was developed by the researcher in order to assess the functioning of VEDC and to know the views of the teachers. For studying the general facilities available in the schools monitored by the VEDCs, a School Information Questionnaire was also developed.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, the frequencies of the responses of the VEDCs members and the school teachers were counted and the percentages were calculated. The qualitative data requiring description was analyzed accordingly.

Findings and Recommendations

The Findings and Conclusions have been presented in seven sections depending upon the objectives of the study.
Section I: The Composition, Process of Formation and Functions

The Composition

The Composition of the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) has been studied from the Guidelines of the Government (Government of Punjab. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority. n.d. Norms for Village Education Development Committees. Chandigarh). As per the guidelines, it is mandatory for a Village Education Development Committee to have eight members. Two members have to be from the village panchayat, two from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), one member each has to be ex-military personnel, a philanthropist/NRI and a retired teacher of the Government of Punjab. The head teacher of the concerned school is the secretary of the VEDC. The guidelines make it mandatory that out of the two members from village panchayat at least one has to be a woman and so also from among the two PTA members, at least one member essentially has to be a woman. Thus, as per the government guidelines, it is essential for a VEDC to have at least two women members.

The Composition of VEDCs in the State of Punjab were amended vide Memo No. E-media/2010/VEDC/30340-379, Dated: March 19, 2010 and Memo No. SSA/Dec/VEDC/10/34328-367, Dated April 28, 2010. According to the new Guidelines, there would be three ex-officio members namely the school headmaster/principal, senior school teacher and an anganwari worker. Apart from the ex-officio members, there would be eight non-official members namely two members of local panchayat (at least one to be a female), two Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members (at least one to be a female), one ex-serviceman, one retired teacher, one philanthropist/NRI and mother/father of a disabled child (6-14 years). The school headmaster/principal would act as member secretary of the VEDC. The study found that the Composition of all the VEDCs was according to the Guidelines prescribed by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority of the Government of Punjab.

The Process of Formation

The Village Education Development Committees are formed by the process of nomination at various levels except that the Chairman can be elected. As per the Guidelines of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority, Government of Punjab, the formation of the VEDC is the responsibility of the DEO (Elementary Education). Nomination of the members of the VEDC is done at various levels. The village
panchayat pass a resolution and nominate two of the members of panchayat to the VEDC. Similarly the PTA of the school nominates two members to this committee. The nomination of ex-serviceman as the member of the VEDC is also done by the PTA whereas, the rest of the members are nominated by the DEO (Primary) on the recommendations of the head teacher of the school. The Chairman of VEDC is elected by the members only if there is no consensus among the members on any one. The head teacher, however, is not eligible to vote as a member in the election of the chairman of the VEDC. After receiving all the nominations, the DEO (Elementary Education) constitute the VEDC which has tenure of three years. As per the Guidelines of the of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority, Government of Punjab, after the completion of the term/tenure of the panchayat, the new panchayat will nominate the new members to the VEDC and get them approved by the DEO (Elementary Education). Any change or substitution of VEDC members is done by the DEO (Elementary Education) only as he is solely responsible for the smooth functioning of the VEDC and the VEDC is under the overall control of the DEO (Elementary Education).

The norms of formation of VEDC have been slightly modified by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority, Government of Punjab in 2010 (Memo No. SSA/Dec/VEDC/10/34328-367, Dated April 28, 2010) under which the chairman of the VEDC has to be elected by the majority from amongst the VEDC members other than the ex-officio members. For nominating the PRI members, the Panchayat shall pass a resolution and send to the Head teacher. The tenure of Panchayat members as the members of VEDC shall be co-terminus with the tenure of the Panchayat. With the formation of new Panchayat, new nominations shall be done. The nominations of the PTA members will be done by the school PTA by passing a resolution. Only those PTA members shall be the members of the VEDC whose children study in that particular school. The PTA members shall remain the members of the VEDC till the time they are members that particular PTA. The responsibility of nominations of the ex-serviceman, philanthropist, retired teacher and the senior-most teacher would rest with the head master. For ex-serviceman, the highest rank and length of service shall be given preference. As philanthropist such person from amongst the villagers shall be nominated who has donated the maximum amount to the school. The senior-most teacher from among the school staff would be excluding the head master. This teacher is also authorised to act as the Secretary of the VEDC in the absence the head teacher.
The formation of the VEDC shall be sent to DEO (Elementary Education) by the head teacher for approval. The DEO (Elementary Education) shall approve the formation and sent it back to the head teacher. The tenure of VEDC shall be three years from the date of approval by the DEO (Elementary Education). The VEDC can change any unfit member by passing a resolution but such a change can be made only with the approval of the DEO (Elementary Education).

The present study found that all the VEDCs are formed strictly in accordance with the Guidelines as laid down by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority Punjab from time to time.

The Functions

As per the Government Guidelines, the specific functions of VEDCs in Punjab are presented in this section. For clarity and better understanding an attempt has been made to classify the functions under four broad heads although the Guidelines of the Government does not enlist the functions of the VEDCs as per the given classification.

Planning and Management Functions

i. The VEDC will consider new plans for improvement of the school and the standard of education.

ii. The VEDC will appoint education volunteers and to make payments of honorarium to them and supervise the annual grants of the teachers and the school and keep an account of their utilization.

iii. The VEDC will work to enroll out-of-school children in school and prepare the list of children who are enrolled and those who are not-enrolled.

iv. The VEDC will maintain discipline in the school in such a way that the process of learning is not hindered and the children have a joyful experience.

v. The VEDC will initiate and undertake other appropriate activities aimed at development and growth of the school and the students and to work towards fulfillment of educational needs of the school.

Motivation and Awareness Functions

i. The VEDC will attempt to create awareness among the community people regarding the use of utilization of funds and projects meant for school.
ii. The VEDC will inform the village people about the improvement plans and management processes meant for the school development.

iii. The VEDC will ensure participation of the community to the possible extent in the activities undertaken for effective functioning of the school and will mobilize volunteers towards achieving these goals.

iv. The VEDC will provide full and proper information to all the stakeholders regarding ongoing developmental activities / work undertaken by the VEDC and will make efforts to solve all types of local problems of the school.

v. The VEDC will motivate the children engaged in labour, their parents and the employers to send all working children to the school and the VEDC will monitor and motivate out-of-school children and their parents for their retention in the school.

Monitoring and Supervisory Functions

i. The VEDC will review the progress of the work/activities undertaken for the improvement of the school and prepare the progress report.

ii. The VEDC will monitor and ensure the timely distribution of scholarships, textbooks etc. to scheduled caste, handicap and girl students.

Development Functions

i. The VEDC will undertake repairs and renovation of school building and grow trees and plants around the school building and to look after them.

ii. The VEDC will help make arrangements for basic facilities like water, electricity, open air, light and fans etc., make provisions for the black board, will purchase the furniture for the school and ensure their proper upkeep and care.

iii. The VEDC will help maintain cleanliness and sanitation in and around the school and ensure beautification and development of the area around the school.

iv. The VEDC will help make arrangements for playgrounds in the school and ensure their proper upkeep and maintenance.

v. The VEDC will help provide help in the academic work of the school like procurement of Teaching Learning Material (TLM) etc. and make
arrangements for the school library and ensure the availability of newspapers and magazines etc essential for the intellectual development of children.

vi. The VEDC will help make arrangements for sports materials to the students and organize sports competitions for them and arrange/organize educational tours for the students and to organize cultural programmes in the school and make arrangements for recreational facilities for the students.

vii. The VEDC will help organize intellectual, social, academic and physical activities essential for overall development of the children.

viii. The VEDC will help make arrangements for medicines and first aids for students during emergency and to provide help to the students in need.

ix. The VEDC will address the personal problems of the children of the poorer families and from lower castes and ensure that these children go to school.

Functions as Stated by the Members of VEDCs

According to 76.4 percent VEDC members, the main function of VEDCs is to undertake civil / construction and maintenance work in the school while more than two-fifth (42.3 percent) members were of the view that the VEDCs have to assist in proper utilization of grants/funds received from the government from time to time for the development of the school. An almost equal proportion (40.4 percent) of the VEDCs members was of the opinion that the major functions of these committees are to identify the needs and problems of the school. Other functions as stated by these respondents were to organize functions and celebrations in the schools (25.3 percent), to monitor performance of children, attendance and quality of education (23.6 percent), to inform higher authorities about the problems of school and teachers (22.1 percent) and to ensure that the teachers come on time and take class (20.9 percent).

Section II: Socio-Demographic Profile of VEDC members

➢ The presence of women as members of the VEDCs was bare minimum as in all the VEDCs in the present sample, the number of women was only up to the extent to which it met the mandatory requirement of the Government Guidelines. The study concludes the entry of women into VEDCs is mainly due to the mandatory provision of having at least two women as VEDC members (out of the total eight) provided in the Government Guidelines. The
VEDCs, by and large, remain a male bastion and the personal merit of woman remains overshadowed by the patriarchal stereotypes and culture factors adverse to gender equality.

The study finds that out of the total VEDCs members, 29.4 percent were female while the rest (70.6 percent) were male members. The mandated proportion under Government Guidelines comes out to be 25 percent as the Guidelines specifies that a VEDC is supposed to have at least two women as members out of the total eight members. The percentage was higher (29.4 percent) than the prescribed 25 percent because of the presence of female head teachers as ex-officio members.

The study finds that 45.3 percent respondents were in the age group of 45-60 years and 18.7 percent respondents were in the age group of 60 years and above. This clearly indicates that 64 percent VEDCs members were older than 45 years of age. The findings establish the fact that the older people continue to outnumber the younger people in Punjab as far as the participation in the school related issues is concerned. The survey clearly indicates that age still remains an important criterion in determining the leadership positions in rural areas particularly in the school related activities. The VEDCs in Punjab continue to be dominated by the not so young people.

The analysis revealed that just 08 of the total 411 respondents (1.9 percent) were illiterate while the rest of them had formal education ranging from primary level to post graduation level. Among the educated respondents, 28.7 percent VEDCs members were graduates while 10 percent were post graduates, nearly one-fourth (22.6 percent) of them had passed higher secondary while 29.7 percent were matriculates. This means that the VEDCs members in the present sample were fairly educated as more than 90 percent of the total members had formal educational qualifications higher than matriculation.

Nearly three-fifth (59.4 percent) members belonged to general castes followed by the scheduled castes (31.1 percent). Nearly one-tenth (9.5 percent) members belonged to the other backward castes groups. From the analysis it is clear that the VEDCs are primarily dominated by the people from the general castes. This is mainly because of the absence of caste-based provisions of
reservation for VEDC memberships in the Guidelines of the State Government. Though the Guidelines mentions that there must be reasonable representation of all the castes residing in a village community, the people of dominant castes continue to form the bulk of leadership positions in rural areas, at least, as far as the membership to VEDCs is concerned. Thus it is concluded that in absence of specific reservation provisions, the people of dominant castes tend to monopolize the leadership positions with reference to community participation in the school related activities.

The study finds that a huge majority (97.3 percent) of the VEDC members were married while only a few (2.7 percent) were unmarried. The findings reinforce the argument that the marital status of an individual certainly has a positive role in the process of acquiring leadership roles in villages like the membership to a Village Education Development Committee at the community level. The marriage as an institution certainly provides an enlarged social space to an individual in the rural communities.

**Section III: Availability of Facilities in Schools**

As regards the school building, it was found that there was no school in the sample without a building or a school housed in a *kucha* building. All the school buildings were owned by the government and nearly 90 percent school buildings were in a fairly good condition, but very poorly maintained. They are not properly white-washed or painted on regular basis. About 17.3 percent school buildings did not need any repair whereas significantly three-fifth (75 percent) school buildings required one or the other minor repair work. However, there was no school whose building was found to be in dilapidated condition and nor there was any school whose building paused a danger to the life of the teachers and the students. The study underlines that the VEDCs can certainly play an important role in proper maintenance and upkeep of the school buildings in the villages.

The present study finds that all schools in District Muktsar and Mansa had drinking water facilities whereas 96.2 percent schools in Mansa and 100 percent schools of District Muktsar had girls’ toilets. In total 98.1 percent schools in the sample had girls’ toilets within the school premises. As regards
the availability of a proper electricity connection in the school, the analysis revealed that there were a little more than one-third (36.5 percent) schools in the sample which had a government approved electric connection.

As regards the availability of chairs to teachers, the situation was good as all the schools had chairs for the teachers. The tables to teachers were not available in about one-fifth schools. So far as the availability of benches to students is concerned, the situation was very unsatisfactory as in about three-fourth schools; there were no benches for the students. In these schools, the students either sat on mats provided by the school or they carried their own mats (fertilizer bags) along with them. The present study finds that the participation of VEDCs members in maintenance, upkeep and the purchase of furniture was minimal. All the arrangements were being made by the head teacher alone. The VEDCs are expected to ensure more cooperation towards upkeep and maintenance of furniture in the schools.

About 3.8 percent schools in the sample did not have boundary walls. Nearly one-fifth (19.2 percent) schools in the sample did not have an open space worth playing for children. No school had manpower for maintaining the playgrounds nor were there any sport facilities like the balls, nets, rackets etc. In about 9.6 percent schools there were no library/book banks. First aids kits were not available in about 2 percent schools. About 7.7 percent schools did not even have a wall clock.

The analysis shows that the things like black boards, chalks, dusters, almirahs/boxes, school bells and mid day meals were available in all the schools but the quality and the maintenance of these facilities required immediate attention. The study underlines that apart from the availability, what is more important is the proper care and maintenance of the facilities by the appropriate stakeholders.

The study finds that there is an utter lack of will and involvement of the community in the processes of school governance like micro planning and preparing habitation plans etc.

The study underlines the urgency to further improve the school infrastructure so as to make it at par with the private schools. Secondly the human factor in
terms of teacher’ characteristics and the community people should also be focused upon. The focus of attention needs to be both on the infrastructural facilities as well as the characteristics of teachers and the parents. Unless this paradigm shift take place, it is highly unlikely that the government schools would have any visible impact on the quality of education at the grassroots level. It is high time that the government bring some radical changes in the school education apparatus itself like the appointment of good teachers and strict monitoring mechanisms for truants and shirkers.

Section IV: The Awareness of the Members

- As regards the awareness of the VEDCs members about the Composition of the VEDC it was found that about one-third (32.1 percent) respondents were fully aware about the Composition while only 5.1 percent respondents were not at all aware about it. A huge chunk of more than three fifth (62.8 percent) respondents were in between i.e. neither were fully aware nor were absolutely ignorant about the Composition of the VEDCs. Overall, the awareness of VEDCs members to an extent of 32.1 percent respondents being fully aware while 62.8 percent being partially aware present a fairly good scenario. Nevertheless, the study underlines that the awareness and thereby the performance of the members of VEDCs can further be improved by providing regular periodic trainings to the VEDC members on this aspect. The respondents who were in the middle category of awareness (partially aware) can certainly be made to cross over to the first category (fully aware) provided they are given proper knowledge inputs by way of organizing some lecture/seminar/workshops etc. at the school level.

- As regards the awareness regarding the process of Formation, about 17.3 percent of the members of the VEDC did not know anything about the procedure followed for nominating various members while a little less than one-third (29.0 percent) respondents were fully aware and 53.8 percent were partially aware about the process of formation of VEDCs.

- From the analysis, it is suggested that there is a possibility of sharing more information with the VEDCs members on the procedures followed for formation of this Committee. As majority of the members were in the middle category of awareness scale i.e. partially aware, the study underlines the
urgency of motivating this chunk so as to enable them to cross over to the fully aware category of awareness. The information sharing coupled with motivation can possibly lead to more involvement of the members in the school related activities, thereby, improving the functioning of the committees.

- In order to know the awareness level of the VEDC on whether the membership to VEDCs is determined by nomination or election, 72.5 percent were of the view that the members to the VEDC are nominated rather than elected. There were just 2.7 percent respondents who replied that the membership is determined through elections while unexpectedly 24.8 percent expressed ignorance on this aspect. As regards the awareness of members about as to who nominates whom, nearly three-fifth (59.6 percent) respondents knew that the panchayat members are nominated by the village panchayat, 68.6 percent knew that the PTA members are nominated by the PTA. The PTA also nominates the retired teacher was known correctly by 66.7 percent respondents. 34.8 percent respondents knew that philanthropist/NRI is nominated by the DEO (Elementary Education) on recommendations from the head teacher.

- From the findings it is inferred that although the respondents were reasonably aware about the fact that the nominations is the principle criterion for determination of VEDC membership, however, the awareness on as to who nominate whom was relatively less. Saying more generally, the actual procedure adopted for determining the membership was not very well known by the members.

- As regards the awareness about Functions, only a little more than one-fourth (25.8 percent) respondents replied that they were fully aware about the functions of this body whereas 70.8 percent were partially aware and 3.4 percent respondents were totally ignorant about the functions. The findings suggested that the members of the VEDCs need more information on the functions. This can be done through periodic trainings or awareness lectures by appropriate officials of the Government.

- The VEDCs members mainly perceived VEDCs as the bodies meant to undertake the construction/civil works and for carrying out activities relating to the utilization of grants or organizing social functions/celebrations at the
school level. The study underlines the need of changing this general perception and make the members realize that VEDCs are the people’ forum made to encourage community participation in school activities so as to improve the quality of educational services by performing functions of a varied nature and not just the functions relating to utilization of grants/funds and organizing the cultural programmes. Ironically, no member (except Secretaries) in the sample perceived VEDCs as a community owned institution made to achieve better standards of school education at the grassroots level.

Section V: The Contribution of VEDCs

Increasing Enrollment

- The analysis suggested before the formation of VEDCs in the high literacy villages, the gross enrollment increased by 0.51 percent during the year 2000-01 and 2001-02 and by 2.10 percent during the second year (2001-02 to 2002-03). After the formation of VEDCs, the gross enrollment increased by 2.25 percent during 2003-04 and 2004-05 while by 11.46 percent during 2004-05 and 2005-06. This shows that the rate of increase in the gross enrollment in the high literacy villages was higher after the formation of the VEDCs in comparison to the period of two years when VEDCs were not in place. Thus it can be said that the Village Education Development Committees contributed positively towards the rate of increase in the gross enrollment in the high literacy regions. Across gender, the VEDCs had a positive contribution towards increasing girls’ gross enrollment as well as boys’ gross enrollment in the high literacy regions.

- In the low literacy regions, before the formation of VEDCs, there was a decrease of 5.03 percent during the year 2000-01 and 2001-02 whereas in the following year (from 2001-02 to 2002-03), the enrollment increased by 3.54 percent. After the formation of the VEDCs, the gross enrollment dropped by 2.72 percent during the first year (2003-04 to 2004-05) and by 3.13 percent in the following year (2004-05 to 2005-06). Thus from the findings it is concluded that the formation of VEDCs did not make any significant contribution with regard to the increase in enrollment of students in the low
literacy villages. Across the gender similar pattern was followed. Thus it is concluded that VEDCs did not have any role across gender of students.

**Improving School Results**

- In high literacy villages, before the formation of VEDCs, the number of failures declined by 42.33 percent during the year 2000-01 and 2001-02 while the number of failures increased by 62.02 percent during the year 2001-02 and 2002-03 while after formation of the VEDCs, the number of failures increased by 24.27 percent in year 2003-04 and 2004-05 while it decreased by 11.7 percent during 2004-05 and 2005-06. Thus from the findings it is suggested that the VEDCs did not play any role in improving the school results in the high literacy villages.

- In the low literacy regions, before the formation of VEDCs, the number of failures increased by 1.29 percent during 2000-01 and 2001-02 and by 5.73 percent during 2001-02 and 2002-03. After the VEDCs were formed, there was a drop of 56.7 percent in the number of failures during 2003-04 and 2004-05 and further a drop of 22.89 percent was witnessed during 2004-05 and 2005-06. Thus it is suggested that since the school results have improved after the formation of VEDCs in the low literacy regions, the VEDCs has played a positive role towards reducing the number of failures thus improving the school results.

**Reducing Dropout**

- In high literacy villages, before formation of VEDCs, the dropout rate has decreased by 16.67 percent during 2000-01 and 2001-02 and by 34.28 percent during 2001-02 and 2002-03. After the formation of the VEDCs, the dropout increased by 196.7 percent during 2003-04 and 2004-05 and there was a decrease of 65.21 percent during 2004-05 and 2005-06. This means that the VEDCs did not play any positive role in reduction of dropout rate in the high literacy villages.

- In the low literacy villages, before the formation of the VEDCs, the dropout rate has witnessed an increase of 57.14 percent from 2000-01 to 2001-02 whereas the dropout rate decreased by 32.72 percent during 2001-02 and 2002-03. After the VEDCs were formed, the dropout rate increased by 105.17
percent during 2003-04 and 2004-05 and it got reduced by 35.25 percent during 2004-05 and 2005-06. From the findings it is suggested that the VEDCs did not play any significant role in reducing the school dropout rate in the sampled schools situated in the low literacy villages.

**Contribution of Members in Individual Capacity**

- The findings revealed that only about one-fifth (20.0 percent) members discussed the problems of the school with the appropriate officials or the parents while a little more than one-fifth (22.4 percent) members had paid one or two visits to the school with an aim of monitoring the school environment. As regards the member-teacher interaction on issues relating to school improvement only 35.8 percent members gave an affirmative reply. 44.0 percent members has collected money for organizing sports activities in the school and contributed towards arranging funds/donations for the school. In general, the findings suggest that the contribution of individual members of the VEDCs with regard to school improvement has not been very encouraging except for the head teachers. Thus the study underlines the need for initiating some programme for morale boosting of the VEDCs members so that they develop a feeling of belongingness towards their school and contribute significantly in their individual capacity.

**Conduct of Meetings**

- The present study finds that the meetings of the VEDCs are not held in accordance with the Guidelines laid down by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority Punjab and most of the norms regarding conduct of meetings of these bodies are not followed in letter and spirit.

**Number of VEDC Meetings**

- The meetings of the VEDCs are not at all a monthly feature. In fact, no formal meetings of the VEDCs are held. The meetings of the VEDCs are held on papers only. Whenever a grant is received, the head teacher /secretary after recording the minutes of the meeting on his own, sends the register to the residences of the VEDCs members for signatures. This way the paper formality is completed.
**Attendance in VEDC Meetings**

- The VEDC members don’t come to the school for meetings inspite of requests from the Secretary. It is the primary reason why the VEDC meetings are to be held in circulation. A huge majority (89.5 percent) of the VEDC members themselves agreed that they don’t give any importance to the VEDC meetings as they viewed the meetings of VEDCs just as a formality. As per them, the VEDCs meetings don’t serve any purpose; attending or not attending them does not make any difference. The study finds that there is a general lack of interest among the teachers as well as the VEDC members towards VEDCs. Therefore it is suggested that there is a need to reorient the VEDC members such that they begin to value the importance of VEDC meetings.

**Issues Discussed in the Meetings**

- There are two major issues that always find a place in the minutes of the VEDC meetings. The first relate to making provisions for infrastructural facilities like construction of rooms, repair of buildings, purchase of furniture and other such civil or maintenance jobs while the second is regarding the utilization of grants. The major focus of VEDCs remains on the issues relating to financial matters. An omission in the matters involving money like not discussing them in the VEDCs meetings etc. entails serious disciplinary action. Therefore, the Secretary /head teacher is particularly careful in completing all the paper work in this regard. To escape any reprimand or punishment from the higher authorities, such issues are always recorded in the minutes of the VEDCs meetings. The quality issues like teaching learning material, classroom processes and learning achievements etc. are not considered of much worth for the meetings as avoidance of these issues don’t entail any serious punishment.

**Activities Undertaken by VEDCs**

- Majority (81.1 percent) of the VEDC members informed that the main activities undertaken by the VEDCs were about repairing and constructing the classrooms followed by repairing and constructing the toilets and ramps (70.4 percent). Nearly one-third (28.19 percent) respondents (N=376) told that the VEDC repaired/constructed boundary wall of the school whereas a little more
than one-tenth (11.1 percent) of these respondents informed that the Committee purchased furniture for teachers and students.

➢ The VEDCs don’t give any importance to fundraising activities. 87.3 percent VEDCs members replied in the negative when asked if the VEDC had undertaken any fundraising activity in their community. About 12.7 percent members informed that the VEDC they represent had collected donations for organizing some sports events.

➢ The VEDCs participate only in those activities which are sponsored either by the State or the Central Government. As regards the incentives to students, 82.5 percent VEDC members informed that the VEDCs organized exposure visits for the school children whereas 79.6 percent respondents told that free text books/notebooks schemes being monitored by these committees. As per 77.6 percent respondents, the VEDCS were involved in giving cash prizes to the first three toppers of each class in every school. Other activities where the VEDCs participated related to vocational courses for girls like the course on computer literacy, embroidery and soft skills. There was no scheme/incentive known to have been launched by the VEDCs themselves i.e. by generating their own funds.

➢ As regards the activities of general nature, a huge majority of respondents (85.4 percent) were of the view that the VEDCs did not undertake any activity other than those mandated under government norms. Only about 14.6 percent respondents told that the VEDCs they represented had undertaken one or the other activities for increasing enrollment and school results and reducing dropout. These activities were putting up of boards at various places within the village displaying the details of civil works and utilization of grants, making announcements from the gurudwaras from time to time regarding various school related issues, organizing cultural programme and sports, holding door to door meetings, organizing lectures and speaking to local activists/community leaders about the problems at the school.

➢ Overall, the contribution of VEDCs towards school related activities other than those mandated under SSA norms is very poor. This aspect is indicative of the lack of initiative and motivation among the VEDCs members towards
school improvement. Therefore the study underlines the urgency to design some mechanisms for activating the VEDC members for a more proactive involvement in initiating new activities for quality school education.

Section VI: The Problems of VEDCs as perceived by the Members

- The major problem as perceived by 87.1 percent members of the VEDC is regarding the lack of attendance of the members in the VEDC meetings.
- Second problem as perceived by the VEDC members was relating to composition of the VEDC. The nominations of the members remain confined to those families who are rich and powerful and whose children necessarily are not enrolled in the same school. Thus there is a need to restructure the composition of VEDCs so that the nominations to the VEDCs should be only of those parents whose children study in the same school.
- Lack of interest among the community people towards the government school was yet another problem highlighted by 77.6 percent respondents. People did not seem to own the village school as much as they did for a religious organization such as a mandir or a gurudwara. This situation necessitates attitudinal reorientation of the members as also of the community.
- Another issue that put great impediment in proper functioning of VEDCs is the unreasonable burden over the head teacher as stated by 64.2 percent VEDC members. The head teacher has to act as the secretary of the VEDC, take care of the general administration of the school besides taking classes.
- Three-fifth (60.8 percent) members were of the view that the groupism among the community people is a serious problem in the smooth functioning of VEDCs. This situation demands tactical judgments on the part of the nominating authorities to observe and grapple with the distribution and dynamics of power relations of the community people. The head teacher or the PTA of the village should hear and understand the people’ perceptions before making nominations to this committee.
- For more than two-fifth (41.4 percent) VEDC members lack of financial incentives to VEDCs members was as issue that acted as a de-motivator for the members to actively involve with the school activities.
Suggestions as Prescribed by the VEDCs Members

- An overwhelming majority (92.2 percent) of the VEDCs members were of the view that there is a need for some financial incentives or rewards for the VEDC members for their contribution to the school related activities. These incentives or rewards can be helpful in providing positive motivation to them thereby strengthening the VEDCs.

- Majority (81.5 percent) of the VEDC members suggested that the school teachers should not be involved in the activities (other than teaching and learning) like the management of mid day meals or attending seminars or carrying dak (official correspondence) from the school to the other offices and vice versa. It is suggested that the involvement of teachers in non academic activities should be minimized to the extent possible or the government should appoint some non teaching staff in each school so that the burden of teachers can be shared and reduced.

- About 80.5 percent respondents were of the view that the community people who are educated and aware about the importance of community involvement be nominated to the VEDCs as far as possible.

- Three fifth (74.9 percent) respondents suggested restructuring the composition of the VEDCs. Only those individuals should be nominated to the VEDCs whose children are enrolled in the same school. This means that the parents whose children study in other schools should be rendered ineligible for nominations.

- Effective periodic training of the VEDC members on various aspects of the functioning of the VEDCs was stressed by a little less than three fourth (74.5 percent) respondents.

- More than three-fifth (62.4 percent) VEDC members suggested that the burden of the head teacher should be reduced or shared by others. In order to improve the overall functioning of the VEDCs, it is very urgent to provide some helping hand to the secretary of this body.

Section VII: The Views of Teachers about overall Working of VEDCs

- The general impression of the teachers about the VEDCs is that they can contribute significantly towards the improvement of school education.
However, that is not happening. The data elucidates that only a little more than one tenth (12.1 percent) teachers held the optimistic view about the contribution of VEDCs towards the improvement of schools at community level while a little more than one-fourth (26.3 percent) teachers held the opposite view. The rest were undecided about this aspect.

More than one fourth (25.3 percent) teachers were of the view that the formation of VEDCs would help improve the school education. They expressed that the VEDCs provide a platform to the parents to decide about the kind of education their children should get. The percentage of the teachers who rejected the very idea of formation of VEDCs was about 17.2 percent while about 57.6 percent of them were somewhere in between.

One fifth (19.2 percent) teachers were of the opinion that the VEDCs are very useful in realizing the goals of SSA while about three fourth (72.7 percent) teachers were of the view that the VEDCs are useful in realizing the goals of the SSA only up to some extent and that too when the community people are sensitized and mobilized towards realizing the importance of their involvement in school related issues like achieving universal enrollment, retention and equity with regard to education for all.

Nearly half (49.5 percent) of the teachers were of the opinion that the members of VEDCs don’t value the importance of community participation in school education and thus don’t attach any importance to school related activities.

Maximum teachers (82.8 percent) were dissatisfied over the performance of VEDCs towards monitoring of teachers’ attendance in the school. The satisfaction of teachers was highest with regard to performance of VEDCs in relation to utilization of grants (41.4 percent) and the creation of infrastructural facilities (40.4 percent). Satisfaction was the lowest for the performance of VEDCs towards the improvement in school results (5.1 percent) and the monitoring of teachers’ attendance (3.0 percent). This reinforces that the main focus of VEDCs remain on civil works only.

The views of the teachers about the contribution of members in their individual capacity were not very inspiring and positive and thus there is a
need for sensitization of VEDC members so that they can be more proactive towards enhancing the educational outcomes at the school level.

- Maximum (82.8 percent) teachers agreed that the VEDCs are involved in carrying out the activities relating to construction and maintenance to fulfill various procedural requirements. The teachers emphasized that whatever the VEDCs do is only on papers. In actual practice, it is the head teacher and not the VEDC that does everything. Once the work like constructing a room etc is complete, the head teacher gets the signatures from VEDC members for completing the official requirement. The contribution of VEDCs, as such, is only marginal.

**Recommendations**

The Study points to the need for improving different aspects of the functioning of the Village Education Development Committees based on the findings. The major changes needed for improving the overall working of VEDCs are ascertained below:

1. **Restructuring of the VEDCs**
   
   There is a need for restructuring the composition of the VEDCs. The parents whose children are enrolled in the same school should only be nominated to VEDCs while the rest whose children study in other schools be rendered ineligible.

2. **Determination of Memberships**
   
   The present criterion of determining membership is restricted only to the positions that the individual hold in the community i.e. one has to be either a member of panchayat or a member of PTA or a retired teacher or an ex-serviceman or a philanthropist or a NRI. There is no provision for entry of an individual who does not fall in any of the above categories or say for an individual who does not hold these positions even if someone may be a highly respectful and reputed person in the community. As such there is no weightage to the reputation that he/she enjoys in his/her community. Therefore the study recommends that individual’s reputation alone should be the criterion for determining memberships to the VEDC. The nominations should be made as
far as possible in the Gram Sabha meetings in the presence of teachers and DEO (Elementary Education).

3. **Strengthening School Infrastructure**

   The study underlines the urgency to further improve the school infrastructure so as to make it at par to that of the private schools and secondly the human factor in terms of teacher’s characteristics should also be focused upon. The focus of attention needs to be both on the infrastructural facilities as well as the characteristics of teachers and the parents. Unless this paradigm shift take place, it is highly unlikely that the government schools would have any visible impact on the quality of education at the grassroots level. It is high time that the government and the community bring some radical changes in the school education apparatus itself in terms of the quality, equity and the parity with the private schools.

4. **Providing Incentives or Rewards to VEDC members**

   The VEDC members should be provided some financial incentives or rewards. These incentives or rewards can be helpful in providing positive motivation to the VEDC members and help boost the morale of the VEDC members and develop a feeling of belongingness among the members towards their school.

5. **Decreasing workload of the Secretary**

   The workload of the Secretary should be lessened. As per the Guidelines, the head teacher is entrusted with all the responsibilities ranging from nominations of VEDC members to maintaining the accounts and records of this body. He has to convene the meetings, record the minutes and not only this, he is the one who has to compile and submit all the progress reports to the appropriate authorities all by himself. It is the sole responsibility of the secretary to maintain the accounts and get all SSA activities completed as per norms. This is something too much for one individual who is simultaneously expected to take care of general administration of the school apart from taking the classes. Thus the study recommends that as the burden on the head teacher is too much, there is a need to unburden him by providing a helping hand.
6. **Ensure Regular Periodic Trainings**

Periodic trainings are very important for increasing the awareness (thereby the performance) of the members on procedures followed for nominations, formation and functions of VEDCs. The trainings can further improve the functioning of these bodies and the standards of school education at the village level. As per the Guidelines, periodic trainings are an important component for capacity building of VEDCs members, however, the survey revealed that hardly any training on regular basis is held for the VEDC members.

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