ABSTRACT

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

The participatory management of schools involving communities has been recognized as a crucial aspect in India. The on-going Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) strives to achieve community participation through Village Educational Committees (VECs) with specific mandate that include enhancing enrolment and retention, micro planning and school management, fiscal responsibility and accountability for bringing improvement in the quality of education in elementary schools. But the fact remains that the socio-economic and cultural constraints like poverty, patriarchy and gender-based stereotypes, lack of awareness among people continue to act as impeding factors towards achieving the intended goals of the Village Education Committees. As community participation remains an important factor in achieving better educational outcomes, a need is now being felt that the Village Education Committees must be made more affective by evolving some ways with which the people could get closer to the quality issues of elementary education in government schools. It is important to know how far the Village Education Committees have been able to achieve their goals. What are the views of the people about these bodies? What problems and constraints do these committees face? What can be the mechanisms by which the functioning of Village Education Committees can be strengthened? These are a few questions that can be answered through the proposed research.

Against this backdrop, the researcher took up a study of the functioning of village education development committees in educationally backward districts of Punjab. The Study primarily aims at knowing the composition, the process of formation and the functions delegated to village education development committees apart from understanding about the awareness of the members and studying the contribution of these bodies in the promotion of elementary education in terms of increase in enrollment, improvement in school result and reduction in school drop-out rate etc. at the village level. 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. A total of 411 members of the VEDCs and 99 school teachers constituted the sample for the Study. The members of the VEDCs comprised of Head Teachers, Panchayat members, members of the PTA, Ex-servicemen, Retired teacher and Philanthropist/NRIs. For data collection, the researcher visited the identified villages during December 2008 and thereafter visits were made during April 2009, July-August 2009 and December 2009. During these visits, interviews of VEDC members and the teachers were conducted with the help of pre-designed structured interview schedules for getting the required information. Along with this, the information was also gathered relating to the school infrastructure, students’ enrollment, drop-out and the school results with the help of pre-designed School Information Questionnaire. The information relating to students’ enrollment, drop-out and the school results was collected for three years before the formation of VEDCs (i.e. 2000-2003) and three years after the formation of VEDCs (i.e. 2003-2006). 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 responses of the open-ended questions/items were analyzed keeping in view the nature of the data. The qualitative data requiring description was analyzed accordingly. The questions in the schedules and questionnaire were pre-coded for easy analysis and tabulation. The findings of the Study have been presented in a separate chapter followed by Bibliography and Annexure.