Educational Challenges and the Role of Teachers in Andhra Pradesh: A Case for Institutional Initiatives

K Vidyasagar*

Abstract

All is not well with the elementary education system in the state of Andhra Pradesh, and this research paper is an attempt to understand the current status of the system and the ills that plague it. Although the problems in the educational system are multi-dimensional, in recent times, the issue of teacher performance has assumed significance. Educational inequality, quality and teacher performance seem to have challenged not only governments at all levels, but the people at large. Official records speak volumes on this predicament that affects the marginalised far more than others. In this context, this paper attempts to discuss all such developments that impinge upon the prevailing educational scenario in the State. As policies and programmes of the Union Government also impact the status of education at the state level, an attempt is made to delineate some national interventions. While presenting a critical review of certain institutional initiatives at various levels, this paper analyses immediate concerns that deserve the attention of State and non-State agencies. As part of assessing the contribution of several stakeholders towards strengthening school management, which is a major challenge, this study also explores other related issues.

There are several studies1 undertaken on the issue of school education in India. Most of these deal with the financial dimensions that affect teacher performance. There are several studies2 that depict how governments have remained indifferent to the demand of enhancing allocations for education and thereby caused the explicit decline of teacher performance in the state. While one can understand the governments’ justification for failing to provide the required financial support, their inability to run and regulate the educational institutions as per the guidelines and service rules laid out for teachers cannot be condoned. That is to say, the government cannot shirk its responsibilities like school governance, teacher instruction and conduct of examinations. There are yet other studies3 on educational inequality, and the causes and consequences of teacher absenteeism. However,

* Drafted this paper on the basis of my presentation at an educational seminar held on 21-22 September 2006, at the CESS, Begumpet, Hyderabad-16, where I worked as the Research Officer in the GAPS Project.
not many of these studies have examined how these teacher-related issues result in a host of problems in the educational system. This study brings into focus some aspects that have a bearing on the performance of teachers in the State.

The study is based on a number of published reports on the role of teachers in school education. Documents, review reports and press statements authored by donor agencies like World Bank and DFID, independent studies undertaken by scholars of international repute, NGOs, Teacher Unions and social scientists in the state and elsewhere, and numerous media reports have also been examined. Information has been borrowed from various research notes compiled by this writer for several other educational and political projects, undertaken previously. All this has been substantiated with interviews with representatives of teachers' unions, teachers, educationists, government functionaries, representatives of NGOs and political parties.

This study has been categorised under five sections. The first part deals with the theoretical context wherein the problems of educational inequality, quality of education and teacher apathy have been posed. The main factors that account for educational inequality and affect the quality of education in the country and its reflections in the state of Andhra Pradesh are discussed in this part. In the second part, problems that undermine teacher performance, both at a social and state-level are examined. While the third part explains the implications of educational inequality in the State and elsewhere, besides the state-specific responses and their implementation, the fourth part delineates certain institutional level reforms. The concluding part sums up the findings that raise concern over the state of the educational system and lays down concrete suggestions for policymakers and academics to probe the subject further.

**Educational Challenges**

Most issues in the educational system stem from irregularities in economic structures and institutions of governance. Governance in the post-war era of state-regulated development has been the primary concern of State and Union governments with stakeholders remaining passive receivers of services. The modernists' emphasis on governmental institutions has been overtaken by post-modernists who focus on innovation in governance practices, framework and processes to prepare the educational sector for adversity. Given the scope of limited economic resources, the focus has been shifted from state-responsibility to stakeholder-responsibility, policy instruments, new institutional mechanisms and governance framework so as to face emerging challenges. In this perspective, the argument that the present educational crisis is more a crisis of governance rather than one that is attributable to a particular stakeholder holds good. As part of systemic crisis, this governance crisis refers to the range of political, social, economic
and administrative systems that are in place to adjust the development and management of resources and provision of services to different communities of society. In other words, it is a systemic crisis, and thus, not confined to one or more sectors as such.

Problems such as scarce and inadequate supply of educational infrastructure, inequitable distribution due to incompatible policy decisions have affected the content and quantity of supply to the stakeholders. Improving the quality of this service delivery, improving reliability and equity in distribution were factors advocating the transfer of the existing centralised systems to local clients. In view of that shift to stakeholders' involvement it was intended to advance the effectiveness, efficiency, equity and quality of educational service. A review of these reflections places the study in a proper context. A brief review of specific initiatives of the new system in AP, in the past decade locates the institutional reforms, and explains the setting, which undermined the educational sector. Although there were several reforms introduced in different sectors in a big way, the educational sector witnessed no such experience.

A study that lists out a pluralist view of causes of educational deprivation in rural India identifies that several restraints of school participation viz., household resources, parental awareness, and school quality were important. The deteriorating conditions of rural schools cannot be studied in isolation. The shortcomings in health, education and employment generation are all mutually interrelated, and contribute to further inequalities. Unless these questions of social and economic equality are not addressed, there is very little one can do with regard to educational inequality. Since this problem is not confined to just a state or two in India, but to all third world societies, there were some attempts made in this direction. Thus, the pointer, UN Millennium Declaration (September 8, 2000, New York), articulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include specific targets in the areas of poverty reduction, provision of education to all children among other things.

Educational development depends largely on the number of teachers, their qualifications and training, available textbooks, teaching instruments in schools, and their proper use in classroom activities. Further progress depends on the quality of teaching activity, which in turn depends on the actual working hours of the school, as well as teacher and student attendance. A well-managed school with basic infrastructure and motivated teachers can make a difference in the learning outcome of children. This is essential in state-aided schools that cater to the needs of marginalised children, especially in rural areas. Incidentally, the recent World Development Report, urges policymakers to focus on early child development and formal education, as differences in 'cognitive development' take shape from inception. Such early child development initiatives could be crucial in providing equal opportunities. Thus, the report advocates the need of complementing school-access
with supply-side policies, including raising the quality bars of teaching, and demand-side policies, that enhance the parental capacity.

Thanks to NLM9, India has become the world’s second largest education system (after China), with 108 million children aged 6-10 attending primary school. However, more than 23 million children are still out of school10. Two out of five first grade students fail to complete the primary cycles of 4 to 5 years. The dropout rate among poor children is about four times higher than among children from affluent families. Expectedly, the children from marginalised communities are at a greater disadvantage. There are large gaps in access to education, among the marginalised, that are sometimes gender-based. In the 1990s, the issue of access to primary school education received considerable attention in Andhra Pradesh11.

Acknowledged as a fast-performing state, Andhra Pradesh emerged as the fifth most populous state in India. However, one out of two people in Andhra is still illiterate and the state ranks 28th in terms of literacy levels in the country. Besides, the disparities between literacy levels of marginalised groups (such as scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), backward classes (BCs), minorities, and rural women), and the rest of the population are glaring. Moreover, literacy levels vary to a great extent between regions as well as districts12.

The main causes of low literacy are poverty, child labour, lack of access to schools, and adverse pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), poor infrastructure, low enrolment and large dropout rates. For instance, between Class I and VII, dropout rates are as high as 66 per cent. Among SCs and STs, the dropout rate is even higher, around 73 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. In fact, the parameters that measure literacy are found to be dubious, as observed in the Literacy mission programme. Indian illiteracy as per MHRD is only 37 per cent, whereas it is 60 per cent, as per the statistics of UNDP and UNICEF.13 In any case, mere enrolment does not imply access to education. It is a regular feature that children who continue to be on the rolls of school registers have been found to have dropped out14 from schools, on their own or otherwise, earlier. Economic problems (poverty, illiteracy, ill health,) social and cultural issues (caste, community, regional and gender discriminations) are considered to be the main factors that compound the problem of ‘under-enrolment’ and ‘dropout’. Some field studies attribute the high dropout rates to irregular, and poor quality teaching.

But more than economic deprivation, social and gender deprivation affect the educational growth adversely. Thus, mere flow of funds, made available by governments, at home or abroad, cannot facilitate better schooling. Though education should help children gain self-esteem and self-confidence, discriminatory attitudes practiced in school affairs continue to affect them adversely. Children and parents have gone on record complaining against teachers and their complacent attitude, when marginalised children were treated differentially. Also, teachers were found to be regardless of the predicament of children who have to engage in their
traditional/occupational work before and after school. Casual and sarcastic comments on the wastage of time, effort on education, that these children will 'end up' doing what their parents do, dampen their aspirations. Besides, explicit casteist practices also have long-term effects on children. Sometimes, such practices compel these young minds to leave schools abruptly.

It is unlikely that teachers, who are divided along caste lines and lack adequate pedagogic skills, will be able to motivate school children using the "child-centered way of learning" recommended by the NCF-2005. Thus, the problem is severe in the case of SCs and STs in the state.

It seems that high incidence of absenteeism and alarming dropout rates are features of the educational scenario among tribals. The disparity among Indian States, in terms of tribal literacy rates, are very wide ranging from 82 per cent in Mizoram to 17 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Several studies on the learning achievements of tribal children at primary classes have shown lower levels of achievement compared to non-tribals, although observed evidence suggests that tribal children possess the basic cognitive abilities and psychological dispositions for successful participation in schools. Tribal students have additional disadvantages arising out of social factors and location. Other barriers include negative parental attitude to education, lack of parental support in schoolwork, low level of motivation and poor self-esteem of children. Studies argue that tribal children can perform well in school if the intervention programmes directed at them overcomes their social deprivation. However, learning achievement surveys conducted in DPEP show that, in a majority of the districts, the gap between achievement levels of ST children and other children has been reduced to less than 5 per cent. Thus intervention initiatives will be helpful in generating and promoting a sense of competence, self-efficacy, self-respect, and positive self-image among ST children. School education system has been considered a state government’s responsibility. The role of the Centre is confined to formulating broad policy frameworks in order to ensure quality, and setting norms for utilisation of resources through various sponsored schemes from time to time. Policies to improve the quality of teaching standards were decided by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). Regulations relating to recruitment and service conditions of teachers were left to the discretion of state governments.

A survey on infrastructure in elementary education in India, carried out by the National Institute of Education Planning and Administration (NIEPA), found that Andhra Pradesh has 5,344 schools without building. Even after two decades of nationwide initiatives to ensure that government schools had more classrooms and teachers, over 1,00,000, or nearly 10 per cent of the country’s elementary schools, still have only one classroom. Around 42,000 of such schools across the country function without a building. This reflects the sorry state of affairs about various schemes that are yet to meet their target.
There are several studies undertaken in this area by the PROBE (1999), Bodha Shiksha Samiti (1999), Dayaram (2000), Pandey and Raj Rani (2003), Govinda and Josephine (2004) on the poor quality of teaching. There is also an acute shortage of teachers. Several Teacher unions have been protesting, citing this manpower shortage. They have also been critical of contract-teacher recruitment. There are 58 teachers for every 1000 students in the world, whereas the figure is 29 for India and just 4 for AP. According to the Delors Commission report (UNESCO, 1996) that underlined the need of equipping teachers with required skills, 'Improving quality of education depends on improving the recruitment, training, social status, and conditions of work of teachers; they need the appropriate knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, professional prospects and motivation if they are to meet the expectations placed upon them.' Similarly, even the Indian Education Commission expressed such views long ago (in 1964-66), "A sound programme of professional education of teachers is essential for the qualitative improvement of education. Investment in teacher education can yield rich dividends because the financial resources required are small when measured against the resulting improvements in the education of millions."

Incidentally, the objective of 'para teachers' was to appoint them exclusively in remote rural and hilly areas, which are unattractive to the regular teachers. DPEP popularised the practice of contract teachers on fixed honorarium. The promotion of the alternative measures of teacher recruitment has pushed the issue of quality of education into the background. The government is justifying the scheme on economic and bureaucratic grounds.. Even the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) scheme endorsed the appointment and training of para teachers, (only in remote hilly, rural and tribal areas): "there will be 'no compromise on standards, even though payments of less than the State pay scale, as an interim measure, may be adopted in states with large scale vacancies.' The Committee strongly feels that, a child needs to be tended under well-trained hands to initiate him into the art of learning." The para teacher scheme was extended in the Tenth Five Year Plan and the SSA. It is not difficult to understand the true intentions of the government on the subject. Thus, there is an element of truth in the statement of critics 'that quality concerns are compromised and subverted by the government itself.'

**Teacher-oriented Issues**

Interestingly, teacher absenteeism is not confined to India alone. It seems to be prevailing through out the world, more so in the case of third world countries. Group discussions and personal interviews with teachers reveal that, some of these teachers who aspired for a better salaried and powerful job (through the competitive exams) considered their present assignment as a stepping-stone. In the event of their failure to secure such job, they would be continuing as schoolteachers.
A more or less similar trend is visible in most other states of India. Pathetic teacher motivations, lethargy towards teaching and high 'teacher truancy' plague the educational system. Gone are the days of complaining about 'student truancy', in the corridors of schools and educational offices, now it is the turn of 'teacher-truancy'. There are several 'findings' reported in the media based on stray incidents, that cast a blind eye on the prevailing ground realities.

Another indicator of teacher apathy could be created on the basis of neglecting the practice of absenteeism, without taking any punitive action. It would be helpful if the erring teachers are punished, if not permitted to go unnoticed. A team of economists from Harvard University has studied the extent of 'teacher truancy' in Indian schools and the World Bank examined it in detail. According to Jeffrey Hammer, "It's just sad, what bothers me is that many teachers are taking government money and essentially doing nothing for it, and as always, the disadvantaged and poor suffer." Hammer's findings buttress the point of similar other studies that were conducted in the country, way back in 1999 itself. These studies made the following incisive observations: "These include several cases of irresponsible teachers keeping a school closed or non-functional for months at a time, a school where the teacher was drunk, ... a head teacher who comes to school once a week, another head teacher who did not know the name of a single child in the school."

The problem of teachers abstaining for days together without official leaves sanctioned by authorities is also widespread, but mostly a rural phenomenon. Most of the school teachers do not live in the same village, where they work and prefer to commute from nearby urban or semi-urban locations. The problem is acute in the case of those who live more than 50 kilometres away from the school. Teacher-representatives, while agreeing in principle to live in villages, cited the problems of their stay and education of their children among others. They also questioned the 'double standards' of their colleagues in other government departments and also political functionaries, who are also inaccessible to the public. As against the popular observation, better pay does not lower absenteeism, the research revealed that, 'older teachers, more educated teachers and head teachers have better salaries but are also absent more frequently. Even the contract teachers, who are paid much less than regular teachers, have similar absence rates.' The World Bank report by Harvard experts also found that 'higher pay was not linked with lower absence rates'. This view dismisses the argument of lack of financial support causing the problem. The report points out the issue of governance at school level. To quote it further: "Teachers are less likely to be absent at schools that have been inspected recently, that have better infrastructure, and that are closer to a paved road."

Similarly, there are a couple of other studies that too belie the claims of 'high teacher salaries ensuring better teacher performance.' Grover and Singh besides the World Bank teams, observe: "While it is often argued that higher
salaries of teachers would provide sufficient incentives for them to live in a village itself, in practice, however this is unlikely to solve the problem. This is because of their preference to live in urban Centres where they would have access to better facilities and living conditions. Unless better infrastructure and facilities are also made available in the villages themselves, the teachers are unlikely to live in the village for longer periods of time.” Since some of them are found to be engaged in activities other than those concerned with teaching, their absence could not be condoned. This is a problem of a fraction of teachers 'from within', and thus deserve the attention of teacher unions, more than others. In other words, all these are contributing factors of an apathetic teacher. These include lack of proper supervision, dwindling strength in the schools, promoting private sector, neglect of teachers' role in educational planning, curricular design, lack of regular orientation/refresher classes, assigning non-academic functions during school days, working conditions in rural schools, commutation and transportation problems, political interference in the schools, lack of incentives and awards for better performance and failure to punish the guilty, lack of vigilance from PRI functionaries and parents, lack of student interest in teaching schedules and curricula, and of course, target-achieving strategies of the government. Thus, the symptom of teacher apathy is visible and sometimes, teacher absenteeism is glaring. Most of these affect the performance of teachers in the schools.

Teacher absenteeism has several dangerous implications in the education system. It is not just about the physical presence of a teacher, but also about his attitude towards his profession. And more than that, it is about undermining the career prospects of students. It reflects the sorry state of affairs, not just in the school, but also in the village as a whole. Once a teacher becomes apathetic, then his pupils will find wrong ways and means to spend their school time. Thus, the quality of education is determined by a variety of factors from 'within' and 'outside' the education system, but teachers and the teaching-learning process in classrooms certainly plays a crucial role. During the post independence period, all the Commissions and Committees on education, viz., the University Education Commission (1948-49), Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), Indian Education Commission (1964-66), various visiting teams and working groups of NCTE and UNESCO, National Commissions of Teachers, National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) and Ramamurthy Commission (1991), and several state education commissions focused on the need of the 'professional preparation' of teachers and to continue with regular upgradation of their pedagogical knowledge, skills and attitudes for getting better the quality of education. The NPE maintains that 'a teacher education is a continuous process, and pre-service and in-service are inseparable components of this continuum.' Thus, this policy endorsed the issue of improving the 'working conditions of teachers in schools', including their 'social and economic status', and
leaving no scope for recruitment of teachers on contract basis. Ultimately, such reports suggest the need of certain potential reforms that include improving school facilities, increasing inspections, having more local control, among other things.

Very often, teachers have been criticised for not being professional in their duties. It is a fact that a majority of those who are recruited are ill-equipped and lack the necessary skills and training. Teacher recruitment is not based on any scientific methodology. It is enough if the teacher-aspirants are qualified in terms of age and degree criteria, and compete in an ad-hoc District-level Selection Committees. There are criticisms against this trend, as there are objections to the very course schedule per se. It was suggested that the duration of teacher education, that is, B.Ed, should be increased. At present B.Ed course is of just one-year duration, inclusive of few weeks of practical training.

State-specific Responses

Governance reforms initiated at the ground level would be incomplete, deficient and inconclusive if they are not supported by reform of basic institutional or organisational mechanisms of the executive structure. Piecemeal alterations in the laws, statutes, departments, functions and functionaries were sufficient to deal with changed contexts and conditions until recently. But that is to be changed, if the present system is to be reformed of its deformities. Ever since identifying education as a basic sector, policymakers have proclaimed several schemes to fulfil some of the salient features of its constitution. Accordingly, the Union Government allocated more funds for educational development in the very first five-year plan. Thereafter however, priorities of the policymakers were altered, and allocations were on the decline. Obviously, that policy-shift paved the way for the entry of private sector into education, all in the name of mixed economy! The post-Jometien summit developments in India witnessed a large number of interventions to achieve the goals of the UEE, like, the DPEP, the SSA among others. These initiatives concern the issues of enrolment, dropouts, access and quality in the school education in the country. Teachers and the quality of their teaching have been given high priority in this context. However, by appointing under qualified and untrained teachers, the objective of quality education was seriously neglected at the very onset of the scheme of DPEP.

Significantly, there is a widespread agreement today that access to education has improved in the last decade or so, and even poor parents want to enrol their children into schools. Enrolment is not a big issue anymore. There is also evidence that suggests proliferation of private schools everywhere, mostly in the urban areas, even in the scattered slums. These schools evoke positive response from the parents, be they poor or marginalised, and student enrolment is on the rise. According to an estimate, in addition to the expenditure of 3.3 per cent of GDP by
the government, the private sector is on record incurring an equal amount for education. Achieving universal elementary education, on the lines suggested by the governments, is one thing, but making it successful in terms of quality and equality is another thing. Incidentally, states are also uncomfortable with the recent right to education bill, as it burdens their governments. Some of the states contend that the Centre had already been collecting 2 per cent education cess to finance elementary education for two years, and thus it should not shirk its financial responsibility.

The education sector in the country exhibits both quantitative and qualitative problems of expansion. There is a problem of lack of teachers at primary school level. Thus it is necessary to convert most of the single teacher schools into 2-4 teacher schools at the earliest. Similarly, there is a relative share of women teachers in the total number of teachers that is gradually growing (34.5 per cent), but their proportional rise from SC (15.9 per cent) and ST (1.02 per cent) communities is not yet significant since 1986 in AP. Perhaps, increasing their number might reinforce certain amount of confidence among these marginalised communities. In view of increasing enrolment of girls and SC and ST students, it is necessary to enhance the strength of teachers from these communities. The Central government has proposed to implement a quality education scheme, whereby Dalit students would be trained to enhance their capacities to be at par with convent-educated students.

The Back to School programme: In 1987, the AP government decided to provide at least two classrooms for each school, under the programme of Operation Blackboard (OBB). Subsequently, in 1994, the government launched the DPEP aimed at providing additional classrooms. This was a very crucial intervention helping the dropouts to return to schools, besides improving the primary school system by training teachers, constructing and improving school buildings, and making school activities more attractive to induce children to stay in school. The programme, initially implemented in 42 districts in seven states, was later extended to 272 districts in 18 states. In 2001, the SSA was launched, which covered the remaining districts and a number of schools provided additional classrooms. Further, this project targets girls and children from marginalised groups such as SCs, STs and former child labourers. The DPEP strategy includes child-friendly experiment such as using the services of 'Education Volunteers'. This government experimentation showed that these volunteers were more successful than other activists. Because, being from the same rural background, they were able to use effective persuasion methods.

Of late, the governments are found to be heavily dependent upon several international agencies for funding state-education. Thanks to some international financial institutions, the subject has been attracting careful attention of several state governments. Added to this was the rise of popular awareness about education among all the communities including the marginalised. Alternatively, since the state
cannot remain a mute spectator to the rising expectations of these communities, its strategy of expansion of education, albeit quantitatively, evoked keen interest in them. Thus, the governmental priority towards establishing infrastructure facilities even in the nooks and corners of state became a reality within short span of time. But, that is not enough to remedy the prevailing problems, as there is a need of ensuring accountability. Thus, it was imperative on the part of government to delegate some responsibilities to the interested NGOs on the one hand, and involve the stakeholders including teachers, parents and political parties, on the other hand.

A significant development surfaced during the course of this study, besides those of several other studies, about the changing social attitudes with regard to schooling in Andhra Pradesh. These revealed that sending children to school had become an increasing trend among communities. This transformation in social outlook and practices has occurred in the last decade. The Telugu Desam Party Government initiated several educational campaigns including the one that attracted the communities as part of Janmabhoomi. The trend is encouraging, as educational campaigns are being continued even in the present regime. The state seems to have followed a two-pronged approach to accomplish universal literacy. These include, re-orienting non-formal education system for dropout children, with a commitment to bringing them back into formal education pattern, as well as strengthening and expanding its adult literacy programme. Providing more teachers and training is a major element of the approach to strengthening primary education, which improves present teaching levels by lowering the PTR. Under the World Bank-funded Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Programme (APERP), the Government has already committed itself to filling all existing primary teacher vacancies to achieve a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:45 by 2002. Thus, the services of 'Education Volunteers' are also used to supplement teachers' efforts in the classroom, as well as in working with the community to increase enrolment and prevent dropouts. Their services could increase local initiative to education since these volunteers were residents of the village.

The APERP project: Besides other initiatives, the state decided to implement the APERP project and thus commenced a comprehensive programme to provide in-service training among other programmes. This project included several features, as detailed in the following paragraphs, implementation of which might ensure developing education in the state. Every teacher can attend ten-day residential training programmes every year. Education Volunteers will receive at least 15 days of induction training. This training will include child-centred teaching and active-learning packages based on successive cycles of in-services training for existing teachers can be developed for new teachers. Training institutions can be staffed with motivated personnel with rich experience at the primary school level. Schools can facilitate and monitor the use of improved methods of teaching learnt during
training. This would include helping teachers develop good training materials and providing effective master trainers and resource persons. Therefore, under the APERP, the state aimed at building around 25,000 school buildings by the end of 1999. But, only 1,112 new primary schools were established in backward areas, and several others in other areas to increase access to primary education. Several others are yet to be constructed in remote areas. The process seems to be still under progress. The state has also set up residential schools to offer quality education to poor and talented rural children. The Andhra Pradesh Residential Educational Institutions Society (APREIS) is now running 137 such schools and the Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (APSWREIS) is running around 180 schools. This programme can be strengthened to achieve the goal of enhancing institutional capacity to ensure that children from disadvantaged groups complete a quality primary education.

Marginalized Groups: The government can pursue special initiatives to reduce the gaps between socially disadvantaged groups and backward areas and the 'mainstream' sections. Without specific interventions to tackle their problems, these groups are in danger of being left out of the programme. These problems can be addressed if the state ensures access to schools for SCs, STs, BCs, minorities, girls and deserted area children. In remote and tribal habitations alternative schooling Centres can be set up to provide basic education. Other interventions can be providing AWCs as crèches for infants, so that older girls can go to school. The state can ensure access to schools for SCs, STs, backward classes, minorities, girls and children with special educational needs. Andhra Pradesh's development goals cannot be achieved without harnessing the potential of its female-population. However, girls in the state lag well behind boys on all indicators of development, including education. The gap in enrolment between boys and girls and the dropout ratio for girls are increasing steadily. For instance, the 1991 census showed that only 33 percent of the state's women are literate compared to 55 percent of men. Thus, the state can undertake specific initiatives to encourage education for girls. This is possible if the girl child protection scheme (GCPS) is extended to a large number of families. Currently, covering around 50,000 girls, this scheme provides a fixed deposit of Rs. 5,000 in the name of girl child on the condition that she does not marry until the legal age of 18. Promise of establishing 93 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas to encourage girl education since July 2006 in AP is a measure in that direction.

Institutional Initiatives

Teacher Unions: As demanded by the Teacher unions, there is a genuine need of establishing school boards, and streamline the educational departments among others. Perhaps such measures would not only ensure participation of
teachers and their representatives in decision-making, but also help in effective implementation. It is observed that teacher unions are found to be irresponsible on some occasions, but not so always. While they are entitled to fight for their rights and self-respect, they are bound to perform professional responsibilities. Of course, they should not be overburdened with numerous duties that disengage them from teaching activity. But, it is interesting to note that their unions were hardly opposed to any such monetary-assignment that was entrusted to the teachers!

In any system, there are different kinds of teachers performing differently. There should be a proper tool that evaluates their performance. Accordingly, their performance should be encouraged. It is unfair to brand all teachers as either apathetic or irregular. As there are quite good number of teachers still on the rolls of the schools, the system is yet not hopeless. Thus, it is mandatory on the part of not only government but also civil society to recognise such teachers and award incentives. Conventionally, the teachers' day has been organised on that day every year at all levels in the country. But then, the spirit of respect for teachers is conspicuously absent thereafter. There are allegations and criticism against some of those who are given the official teacher-awards every year. Some of the teachers unions had on record opposed the selection criteria. Thus, there is a serious need of reviewing schemes of awarding incentives and disincentives, as is demanded by some teacher unions.

Stakeholders and PRIs: The policy of decentralisation envisages an important role for local governments in planning, implementing and monitoring of educational programmes and projects. The PRIs at the district, mandal and village level are to be assigned specific roles and functions in resource management and development in the state. The policy also reiterates its commitment of empowering beneficiary associations for planning, implementing and monitoring of development in rural areas. Stakeholder-communities at local levels are to be given adequate space and decision making opportunities by strengthening the institutional mechanisms, entitlements, orders and mandating authority to create an enabling and facilitating process for effective participation of communities and associations.

Incidentally, rural schools are on the odd occasion accountable to parents and there is modest sense of ownership from communities. For basic education to be effective, besides school committees, parents and communities need to become active stakeholders.

Viewed in this backdrop, in the village schools, the school committees could involve the local community in increasing enrolment and improving retention. Therefore, approaches to solving these problems need to be rooted in specific local conditions like, raising awareness, providing incentives to attend school, providing free textbooks. The PRIs can make education a people's movement and enlist the support of local leaders, NGOs and teachers in creating awareness about the need to be educated. Further, under the DPEP, school committees have been charged
with the task of improving enrolment by undertaking suitable measures to encourage parents to send their children to school and instituting incentives and disincentives to eliminate child labour. But, the governments are less enthused about the role of school committees, otherwise known as village education committees (VECs) and thus interfering in a variety of ways!

NGOs: There are several studies, particularly by the NGOs like MVF, AKF and others, working on projects like child labour (NCLP) and Balajyothi, available on the subject arriving at multiple models that seek solutions of simple nature. Without incurring large amounts of budgetary allocations too, these models have discovered means of ensuring 'back-to-school' of dropouts. But, contrary is the argument from some of the educationists and teachers, who focus on attractive school conditions. There is very little one could do in the absence of basic facilities in schools, as are available in private ones.

Usually, the objectives of education programme are aimed at increasing access to education, to keep the children in school longer and to raise their levels of academic achievement. According to Dayaram of the AKF, the first problem is the 'highly centralised governance'. Because he traced the problem of governance: 'it's true that we have fewer schools; we have bad quality schools, less teachers, bad quality teachers. But it is also true that lot of money remained unspent. It's a paradox that you have large amount of funds unutilised and, at same time, you do not have teachers and schools. So the issue is not just scarcity of fund, but in a major way of governance and inadequate capacities at different levels.' Further, as part of the programme, the communities have been made active stakeholders in the education process. Incidentally, the Andhra Pradesh State Education Department and the Aga Khan Education Service (AKES), India, an affiliate of the AKF, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) paving the way for dissemination of the AKES whole school-based approach to primary schools of Maheswaram mandal (Rangareddy district) and Warangal urban. Regular interaction with the community stakeholders in the form of meetings enable them to take decisions for school improvement that include both infrastructure facilities and teaching processes, thereby consolidating the progress made in schools. Meanwhile the parents and guardians have been also mobilised to enhance their role as care givers. In order to educate girls, participation of mothers (an innovative concept of mother-teachers) has been prioritised. At the classroom level, a co-operative spirit among the students is encouraged allowing the expression and pursuit of natural curiosities, thereby enhancing cognitive and learning outcomes.

Achieving universal primary education for all requires, first, to bring all children to school and, second, to keep them there through the full course of primary education, i.e. a complete five-year cycle. The most recent data for AP indicate that the state is now successful in bringing all children to school but should be concerned about the rather low retention rates. Because in the past AP
was characterised by low enrolments and high dropout rates, completion rates that
do not change quickly do not reflect any improvement the state has experienced in
the last decade and even more so in the last 5 years. Child labour is a complex
problem that is basically rooted in poverty. Overwhelming evidence from MVF
suggest that 'children are not in school because they are needed as income earners'.
MVF39 has affected the educational scenario by collaborating closely with
government schools. MVF work has been influential in making the government
revamp thousands of Non Formal Education (NFE) Centres in the State into day
Centres, as motivation Centres in the villages. MVF has trained NFE instructors to
play the role of education activists rather than act as poor substitutes for teachers.
On the one hand, an MVF activity exposes the severe limitations of the traditional
NFE program and, on the other hand, reaffirms the role of formal school in making
even the most difficult group literate. The government has also made a strong
policy for the eradication of child labour.

Political Parties: It is very common for political parties to promise several
things to several communities, not all people as such, on the eve of elections.
Usually, parties are bound to compete with one another to offer populist policies
very generously, however infeasible they might be. The 2004 electoral exercise in
the state is a case in point. As part of election manifestoes40, several parties promised
very little as far as education, leave alone primary education, is concerned. For
instance, the TDP claimed41 that the literacy rate has increased from 44.1 per cent in
1991 to about 73 per cent by 2001. Its achievements included increasing budget
 allocation from the Rs 1500 crore in 1994-95 to 3800 crore by 2002-03, towards
construction of 45,000 school buildings, establishing 26,723 schools, recruitment
of 1.76 lakh school teachers, improving sanitary conditions in about 55,000 schools,
and distributing about 3 lakh bicycles to school going girls as part of the 'Soukaryam'
scheme. In the two phases of the Janmabhoomi (Chaduvula panduga, Malle Badiki
and Akshara jyothi) programme, around 7,21,797 children were enrolled in schools.
Expecting that the party would remain in power, it promised compulsory and free
education for children up to 15 years of age, establishing a school for every 25
students in the radius of one kilometre and total literacy by 2006, among other
things.

The Congress party, on its part, admitted that the literacy rate in the state
(61.1 per cent) is less than the country's average (65.2 per cent), and observed that
the poor are reluctant to go to school due to poverty. Thus it promised to check
'dropout rate' by continuing the existing mid-day meal scheme and several incentives
to encourage school children. The party promised to ensure making the state as the
top-ranking state in achieving literacy in the next five years, through large-scale
investment in the education sector. Regarding other major parties in the elections,
keeping in view of the changing situations, the BJP promised to make the state as a
Knowledge society in the following way:
1. Implementing compulsory primary education for all 6-14 old children through SSA, quite effectively.
2. Ensuring cent percent literacy in a phased manner, with the cooperation of NGOs, Universities and colleges.
3. Increasing more residential schools in the tribal areas.

The CPM stated that the state lagged behind 27 other states in achieving literacy, and demanded a move against commercialisation of education. Interestingly, there is no other mention with respect to education, in its election manifesto.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Institutional reforms are essential not only to take advantage of the increased prospects thrown open due to expansions and improvements but also to situate the government system and machinery in the context of scarcity. Institutions and governing framework moulded in the era of less-demand and large quantity will essentially be ill-suited to tackle issues and problems arising in the period of high-demand and scarcity. In effect, the institutional reforms represent the second stage of the reform agenda that aim to initiate effective and efficient norms in the crumbling edifice in the state. Overall, there is some progress that has been uneven across the state, region-wise and otherwise. It seems that major variation across districts with literacy rates ranging from 29.6 to 71.52 per cent in 1991 and 45.53 to 79.04 in 2001. The most backward districts registered the most significant improvements. In 1991 literacy rates among STs (17.2 per cent) and SCs (31.6 per cent) were much below the state average, which should be a reason for concern. But the situation is even more miserable if one looks at the gender gap among these social groups. In 1991, only 8.1 per cent of women SCs were reported to be literate. In India, girls are less likely to attend school than boys, and even when they start school they are more likely to drop out. The gap in literacy rates between males and females in Andhra Pradesh is only slightly wider than the gap in India as a whole. To reach the goal of universal primary education, schools must first enrol all children and then keep them in school for the full course of the primary stage. The bigger challenge that AP faces now is to retain cent percent of the children through primary school education. The plan is to increase compulsory education through the first eight grades. The data seem to indicate that despite the fact that AP was doing a great job in bringing almost all children to school, it was failing to retain them thereon. Though the trend seems to be encouraging, the levels of wastage are still too high. The decline in illiteracy rates in the last decade may have a positive impact on the probability of achieving the other MDGs, vision 2020 and Tenth Plan. In any case, this is a simple projection, based on the, leave alone ground realities, available figures!

As far as suggestions for future are concerned, since the educational problem is embedded in the overall system, which is under tension from multiple
challenges at home and abroad, solutions cannot be simple and easy. Thus, the problem should be studied not only at macro-level, but also at very specific, micro-level and localised area so as to take hold of all the factors that are under study. More than quantitative approaches, qualitative studies of individual case study nature would help us in locating problems properly, and that helps us to overcome problem of making generalisations of any sort. To conclude, what matters for success in educational improvement varies considerably from one region to another even within the same state and districts within the regions. Thus, there is a need of explaining the problem of educational inequality, quality and teacher performance from several contributory angles, which are mutually interactive at times. Besides state and governance systems, social networks including stakeholders, NGOs, teacher unions, media are also expected to play equal role in addressing the problem over a period of time.

Notes

1 Rudolf&Rudolf, 1972; SCERT, 1992; Tilak, 1996, etc.
4 Loksatta and LSE Doctoral project, and also as a political analyst for an MP in A.P
7 These MDGs are directed at reducing poverty in all its forms. In parallel, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has developed a plan in 1999, Vision 2020, which covers all aspects of social and economic development that chart closely with the MDGs as well as state-level development targets included in the Tenth Five-year Plan prepared by the Government of India. It is clear that the three set of goals, MDG, Vision 2020 and tenth Five-year plan, are all very similar.
8 WDR, 2006, p.16.
9 National Literacy Mission was established in May 1988, its goal is to attain a sustained entry level of 75%, by 2007.
10 Annual Report, 2003-4, of the MHRD.
12 For instance, while in Hyderabad district the literacy rate is over 70 per cent, it is around 30 per cent in Mahbubnagar. Thus, any strategy to raise overall literacy levels will have to focus on enhancing literacy percentages among disadvantaged groups and also in all the backward areas in the State. Further, students are found to be quitting the government schools, as is revealed by the press report in Andhra Jyothi, July 2006.

Walkout, as described by Prof. Anil Sadgopal of Delhi University, another member of the CABE, who has also been a votary of common school system in the country.

A UNESCO report released in 2005 observed that 'higher-caste' teachers in the country physically and verbally abused 'lower caste' students. This is true in the case of rural and remote schools; as such incidents were reported even in the newspapers and media.

For instance, if there are 74.46 general category dropouts reported, there around 86.28 of them belong to STs according to certain studies conducted by Geeta Nambisan and Afonso Botelho, 2006.

As many as 174 districts (out of 418 districts in the country in 1991) in 1991 have ST literacy rate below the national average of 29.6%. Further, the data reveal that States, which are low in general and tribal literacy are also States with higher gender disparity. The female literacy among STs has increased from just 3.2% in 1961 to 37% in 1999-00. As per 1991 Census, female literacy of tribals is high in Mizoram (79%), Nagaland (55%), Sikkim (50%) and Kerala (51%), compared to Andhra Pradesh (8.7%), and Rajasthan (4.4%); India Education Report; 2002.

Sujatha,(1998); Singh (1996); Singh and Jayaswal (1981); Sinha and Mishra (1997).

Mishra, 2002.

Vaartha, August 11, 2005.


Several teacher leaders conveyed the feeling during personal communication.

Several newly appointed teachers thro’ DSCs, who are on the university campuses, felt the same.

Based on a school survey of 188 government primary facilities in a state of northern India, the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) in India reviewed such studies.

Para teacher scheme, therefore, is the violation of very essence of NPE (1986) i.e. improving the quality and status of teachers. But then, the same central government went on encouraging such recruitments in several states.

Krishnan Khanna op.cit.

The Economic Times, August 1, 2006.

V All India Educational Survey, Andhra Jyothi, September 15, 2006.

Ramachandran 2002, Jha and Jhingran 2002

In case a girl drops out, the amount is refunded to the state. From the high school onwards, the girl student receives Rs.1000 per year and then Rs. 20,000 scheme should cover all girls needing such assistance.

The Hindu, October 24, 2005.

Brief review of teacher journals in July-October 2005, reveals the fact.

Through personal communication from such teachers.
Experience shows that services for children, whether through the AWCs or the primary school, get utilized by the community only to the extent that the service delivered is perceived to be of value by the community. On the other hand, quality on such a large scale can only be assured through better community involvement, supervision and ownership.

Besides Loksatta, Jana Vignana Vedika and Satyanveshana Mandali, the Save Education committee has also offered several suggestions to strengthen these committees, but in vain. The present regime has plans of politicizing them (through appointing sarpanches as its chairpersons), as against the past regime's strategy of weakening (by not transferring powers) them.

An international-based Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) seems to have developed a Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education in India (PESLE), keeping these objectives in view. AKF programme is being implemented in 1,071 schools in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan involving 2,27,500 students. Source: AKF Publications (Experiences in Education).

Under PESLE project, AKF is currently working through Dr. Reddy's Foundation for Human and Social Development, providing education to working children of Hyderabad in collaboration with Andhra Pradesh State Police Department and the State Education Department; Society for All Round Development (SARD).

The MVF approach to tackling child labour differs from that followed by the National Child Labour Eradication Program (NCLP) of the Government of India. Even the Bala Jyothi programme of NCLP agenda (Pratyamnyaya, another Hyderabad-based NGO) has been implemented in and around twin cities. NCLP provides support for the setting up of special schools for child laborers, financial incentives to parents and mid-day meals to attract children into schools.

However non-serious these manifestoes may be, their promises are worth noting, as they are in black and white, and thus enforceable morally, if not otherwise.

According to Prof. James Manor, "It is surprising to note that the usual practice is to submit inflated figures on the government's … achievements in their sectors. Officials at successively higher levels sometimes compound the problem as the data pass upward, by inflating things further to provide those still higher up with good news…Indeed, many bureaucrats believe that the CM finds this practice of manipulation convenient, that as one put it, "he wants only the figures and not the work". This is a serious matter for a CM who depends more heavily on quantitative data than almost any other leader in the LDCs".

References


