

SAMAGRA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN –ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF SCERT’S AND DIET’S

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Abstract

Indian school education system is moving a step ahead by shifting its focus from quantity to quality in education. A milestone step in this direction is the launch of “Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan – An integrated scheme for school education”. It’s the first attempt in the country to view school education in a single continuum and aims to improve the quality of school education by focusing on two T’s i.e., Teacher and Technology. Teacher and his/her professional development believed to be the major contributor to the quality of education, the scheme has emphasized on strengthening of SCERTs and DIETs. The present paper is an attempt to analyze and relook at the new role and responsibility of these institutions in improving the quality of school education.

Introduction

Education is an important fulcrum in social, economic and political transformation of a country. It is linked to almost all the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mentioned in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By 2030, India will not only have a young workforce to fulfill its domestic needs, but it also has the opportunity to become the global hub for skilled workforce. This window of opportunity is also a challenge, especially when quality education is still a major issue in school education. The outcome of the implementation of various schemes in school education proved that just focusing on inputs like better infrastructure, lower pupil-teacher ratios, higher salaries and more teacher training etc. will not improve the education especially the students learning outcomes. Factors like effective pedagogy, outcome linked incentives and smooth governance which enables the system to operate smoothly prove to be effective in improving the quality of education. The NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog in its document on “India: Three year action agenda, 2017-18 to 2019-20” recommends that in the next three years, we must focus on introducing changes that would improve learning outcomes in the short term and lay the foundation for long term strategic change. Realizing this, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has launched Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SmSA) –an integrated programme for school education with effect from year 2018-19. Its draft framework was launched on 5th April, 2018. The chief goal of the scheme is to improve the quality of education in terms of opportunities and learning outcomes. The scheme is merger of the three flagship programmes of Government of India i.e., Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education (CSS-TE). SmSA is a first attempt in the country to bring all school levels

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of education i.e., from pre-school level senior secondary level into a single education continuum with the aim to build a single and unified administrative structure in school education.

As specified under section 29(1) of the Right to Education Act, most of the states have assigned SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training) the responsibility of being the academic authority in school education. SCERT and DIETs are the grassroots level institutions working for school education. Realizing this, the SmSA laid importance on expansion and strengthening and of SCERTs and DIETs as nodal agencies in school education. In the present article, an attempt is made to study the new role and responsibility of SCERTs and DIETs in this context.

The draft framework came out with many ideas and suggestions to strengthen and improve the performance of SCERTs and DIETs. It suggests that all the states which still have SIEs (State Institutes of Education) should upgrade them to full-fledged SCERT as per the MHRD guidelines. It also recommends that, SCERTs now being an apex body for academic support for all stages of school education should preferably operate under the Department of School Education of the State/UT Government. It also proposes that the entire fund flow for various academic activities in school education up to senior secondary level should be routed through the SCERT.

On a positive side, the scheme also mentions about the financial grant norms to meet various expenses in SCERTs like inviting resource persons, purchasing library books, office/library equipment's, stationery and other office expenses, etc. It also suggests SCERT to make proposal for its own restructuring and also to create a cadre of teacher educator. The scheme suggests two models for restructuring as per the size of population of the state.

With regard to the recruitment of personnel in SCERT/DIETs under teacher education cadre, the scheme suggests that high quality personnel as per NCTE norms should be recruited and also their pay scales need to be upwardly revised. It also suggests that, SCERTs should open few visiting positions to give opportunity to teachers and others in the field of teacher education to gain exposure about activities of SCERT and to work with student teachers and teacher educators.

Training

SCERT in its new role, to remove the duplication of the training programmes and also to identify the correct training programmes for in-service teachers has to develop an integrated calendar of in-service training programmes not only for all levels of school

teachers but also for teacher educators in SCERTs, DIETs and other Teacher Education Institutions. It suggests that SCERT should ensure the strict implementation of its annual in-service training calendar which should also include aspects like date, duration, venue, number of participants etc. Rather than planning the activities of teacher training in isolation, the scheme suggests that SCERT should collect the training needs from DIETs which collect the needs from the block and cluster level resources persons. It suggests that SCERT/DIETs should plan for need based programs for teachers, heads of schools, teacher educators and educational administrators supporting various levels of school education. To give importance to quality over quantity, the scheme suggests that SCERT/DIETs should ensure that “quantitative targets of training programmes should not lead to a compromise on quality”. The scheme also recommends that DIETs should take the responsibility of training the teachers of residential schools also.

It also recommends that the findings of various national, state and district level interventions/achievement surveys should be used as basis of planning the training programmes and also recommends DIETs to plan Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP) on the basis of these interventions. It also believes that involvement of various stakeholders like teachers, Resource Persons, Cluster Resource Center Coordinators (CRCCs), Block Resource Center Coordinators (BRCCs), School Management Committee (SMC) members, community, etc. would help in improving the effectiveness of training programmes.

Apart from the regular training programmes, the DIETs can also plan trainings in multi-lingual education, trainings for non-tribal teachers to work in tribal areas, special drives to address the needs of nomadic and migrant workers children, trainings of anganwadi workers, training all the teachers with regard to needs of CWSN (Children with special needs) etc.

It also suggests that SCERT/DIETs should ensure that the learning outcomes developed by NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) for each subject reach the teachers at grassroot level. Further, to link the effectiveness of training programmes with the students’ learning outcomes, the scheme recommends SCERT/DIETs to use Training Management Information System (TMS) which will also help them to call the right teachers for the right training.

Due to expansion of its area of work and also due to its increasing responsibility in improving the quality of school education, the scheme recommends SCERTs to constitute/reconstitute Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) and Research Committee. It suggests that the annual training calendar should include atleast two meetings in a year to discuss about all programmes and research activities of the SCERT.

The scheme also emphasizes on effective use of technology in teacher education. It says that as an academic authority, SCERTs should promote the use of technology in teacher education in its various functions like teacher training, curriculum and material development, onsite support, research and other extension activities.

Resource Center, Curriculum and Material Development

With the bringing of whole school education under one continuum, the role and responsibility of SCERT/DIETs has not only increased but it is also diversified. Now, SCERTs/DIETs should become the best resource center in the state for whole school and teacher education. They can do this by establishing various subject specific/area specific/theme specific special cells and tinkering labs to provide hands on experience/exposure to teachers. For this, the scheme has provision of one time, non-recurring grant (50 Lakh per SCERT and 10 Lakh per DIET). To materialize this, SCERT can identify and assign each DIET with the responsibility of setting up a special cell as per the uniqueness of the DIET. Also they should ensure to prepare training modules for each and every training programme organized by them.

Curriculum development is also one of the crucial functions of SCERT. For this to happen qualitatively, SCERTs should develop curriculum, textbooks and learning material in tune with the objectives reflected in our national frameworks and also should consider the international best practices. To leverage the benefits of ICT, SCERTs can develop textbooks having QR codes and e-learning content linked to them. For this purpose, SCERTs should identify and develop a strong team of professional. To improve the transition and retention rate of students, the scheme proposes to introduce the choice of vocational skills from upper primary level which at present is available at secondary level. Apart from this, it suggests that SCERT should take the responsibility of curriculum development for pre-service teacher education curriculum for pre-primary and elementary teachers.

On the other side, it also recommends SCERTs to translate the learning outcomes developed by NCERT into their regional languages and ensure that it reaches to each and every teacher in the school. Also, to improve the level of performance of students in NAS (National Achievement Survey) and other state level achievement surveys, SCERT/DIETs can take the lead to develop item banks for all subjects covered under NAS. They can also be supported by ICT based learning resources.

The framework also suggests that SCERTs should plan a mechanism to qualitatively assess the learning achievement of students on a continuous basis and it can support it by providing ICT based evaluation software to the schools. Further, DIET's can develop base

line assessment tools to help the teachers to identify the learning difficulties of the students and plan the learning and teaching activities accordingly.

Research and Innovation

Along with many other aspects, the framework has laid a great emphasis on research and innovation in SCERT/DIETs. The research advisory committee of SCERT on the basis of the huge and authentic raw data available related to teachers, learner, infrastructure and the process with respect to various dimensions through various state and national level interventions like achievement surveys, DISE school report cards should help SCERTs to identify the priority areas of research. A scientific study of this data can help SCERT/DIETs to suggest innovative inputs with regard to policy planning and various other pedagogical interventions in school education. Such data can also guide SCERT/DIETs regarding innovative and need based research projects that they can undertake.

Since decades, SCERT and DIETs are playing a very major role in in-service training of the teachers. However the effectiveness of these trainings in terms of improvement in quality of teaching learning has always been questioned. Hence, the framework suggests SCERTs to develop research indicators to monitor and evaluate the success of its own and DIETs initiatives. It also suggests that the students' academic performance in school education should be the yardstick to measure the success of SCERT.

Nodal agency

The framework suggests SCERT to be recognized as a nodal agency for In-service Teacher Education and other quality initiatives in the state. Hence, it should maintain coordination and collaboration with various bodies of the state education department and also play a vital role in extending handholding support with regard to various Teacher and Teacher Education based digital initiative being taken up at central level. As a nodal agency, SCERT should also develop quality monitoring mechanisms to assess the performance of DIETs and other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).

Onsite Support

Providing onsite support to various stakeholders in school education is also an important responsibility of SCERT/DIETs. In this regard, DIETs under the guidance of SCERT should provide quality onsite support to answer the questions and queries of teachers with regard to content and pedagogy. With the support of state/district resource groups and technology such guidance can be converted into an online helpline system or online pedagogic knowledge base. To improve the level of learning outcomes, SCERT should develop a continuous monitoring mechanism to measure the learning outcomes of the

students and use these findings to plan the training programmes. It can also encourage DIETs to use standardized tests to identify the needs of teachers regarding content and pedagogy. To improve the enrolment in primary education, SCERT needs to develop school readiness monitoring system for children entering from pre-primary to the primary level.

Continuous professional development

Professional development of in-service teachers is the primary responsibility of SCERT/DIETs. For this to happen dynamically and effectively, the faculty of SCERT/DIETs should also undergo continuous professional development programmes. Hence, SCERT should provide the opportunities for the same. It can encourage the faculties to carry out research projects independently or collaboratively between Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) and Universities/NGOs and also should give the faculty the scope to share their research findings in seminars, journals, magazines and newspapers. To motivate and recognize the work done by the faculty, Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) should be adopted for promotion of faculties to a higher level. Opportunities for faculties of SCERT to work with international experts can also be created.

Extension activities

SCERT/DIETs play multidimensional roles and to become successful in it, they should carry out various extension activities. With the integration of all types of schools under one scheme, SCERTs can take an initiative to organize mingling festivals to sensitize teachers towards the problems, challenges and issues in various levels of school education. It needs to develop a regulatory mechanism to utilize the services of NGO's doing remarkable work in the field of education. As a sign of environmental responsibility, DIETs can co-ordinate with the schools and NGO's for reuse of textbooks and develop book bank centers. DIETs can also take a lead to identify excellent performing schools and become a platform for encouraging the students exchange programmes. SCERT should become a key institution to develop coordination and synergies among all the concerned agencies like DIETs, BRCs, Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs), Institute of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs), school boards etc. Such coordination can remove the gaps that exist in various aspects like administration, curriculum, training programmes etc.

Conclusion

SCERT/DIETs are the crucial grassroot level organizations in school education. Quality improvement in education can happen only when such grassroot level agencies are given proper importance and power. SCERT/DIETs perform multiple tasks in school education like planning and organization of in-service and pre-service training programmes, curriculum and material development, evaluation and assessment in school education, research and innovation activities, onsite support, extension activities etc. With the advent of

SmSA, both the power and responsibilities of SCERT and DIETs has increased strongly. Now, SCERT has to take an important role and responsibility in improving quality in school education. To do all this successfully, SCERTs have to form, subject wise district and state level resources groups. Also, to harness the potential of ICT, it should develop a strong team of ICT experts who can effectively merge the pedagogical principles with technology and also can design and implement the training management system. It should also have few teams to spread the outreach of its innovative and research activities to other states and national level bodies like NCERT, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) etc. It should also take a lead in establishing subject specific cells and labs.

SCERT/DIETs should also evolve a strong and continuous support mechanism to help schools and teachers to improve their performance in various achievement surveys. It should also take up the responsibility of guiding the schools and teachers to organize the remedial programmes as per the level of performance of the child rather than organizing a common remedial programme. It should become an active agent to ensure that the benefits of various national level initiatives like Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat (PBBB); Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao; Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan; Udaan etc reach to the target group in correct time.

If we have to prepare the generation of learners who will support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, providing explicit provisions for capacity building of SCERT/DIETs and recognizing its role and responsibilities is very essential. However, in the coming time, students' academic performance in school education would be the ultimate yardstick to tell us about the success of SCERTs and DIETs.

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