




FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: A CROSS-STATE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES' FUNCTIONING AND OUTCOMES

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250304066>

Abstract

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009, mandated the establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) in all government and government-aided schools to encourage inclusive, participatory, and accountable school governance. This review compiles insights from more than twenty-five peer-reviewed studies, government documents, and case reports published between 2011 to 2024, with a sole focus on the Indian context. The evidence is organized into three key objectives (i) To evaluate the function and overall effectiveness of School Management Committee. (ii) To identify and analyze the challenges hindering the effective functioning of School Management Committee. (iii) To access the outcomes and impact of School Management Committee. The findings indicate that active SMCs have contributed to better monitoring of school activities, improved infrastructure planning, and enhanced community awareness and in some contexts, higher student enrolment and retention rates. However, these gains are uneven across states and regions. Persistent challenges include inadequate training for members, low awareness of roles and responsibilities, socio-cultural and gender-based barriers, political interference, and irregular meetings. Capacity gaps in preparing and implementing School Development Plans (SDPs) remain a critical limitation. While SMCs have strengthened community participation, improved planning, and contributed to school oversight, their performance remains inconsistent. Recent policy directions, including the “National Education Policy” (NEP) 2020 and the “National Framework for School Curriculum” (NFSC) 2022, place greater focus on capacity enhancement, locally relevant curricula, and collaborative decision-making. To fully realize the potential of SMCs, sustained capacity building, adequate resource support, and equitable participation must be prioritized. Recommendations include linking SMC functions with Panchayati Raj Institutions, implementing digital tools for monitoring, and promoting greater gender and caste inclusivity. This review adds to the body of knowledge on decentralized school governance in India and offers practical, evidence-based guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders.

Keywords: *Cross-State Analysis, School Management Committees, Literature Review*

Introduction

The introduction of the “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act” (RTE) in 2009 marked an essential shift in India’s approach to educational governance. For the first time, the legislation made it a legal obligation for all government and government-aided schools to establish “School Management Committees” (SMCs) (Government of India, 2009, 2010). Designed to advance decentralization, inclusivity, and participatory decision-making, the provision formally integrated parents, teachers, and community representatives into the school governance structure. According to RTE 2009 norms, SMC members must comprise at least 75% parents or guardians, with a minimum of 50% women, and equitable representation from marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.

Historical Background of Community Participation in India

Community participation in education has deep historical roots in India. Before the colonial era, local panchayats and village elders played a central role in overseeing and managing schools (Chugh, 2021). This tradition weakened under colonial rule as education became increasingly centralized, fading community authority. After independence, while the government focused on expanding access to education, the administrative structure remained predominantly bureaucratic and top-down. Growing dissatisfaction with this centralized model prompted a wave of reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. Key policy milestones, including the “National Policy on Education” (1986), highlighted the need for decentralized governance and stronger community

engagement. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992–1993) cemented these principles by providing a constitutional framework for local self-governance, thereby laying the groundwork for more participatory approaches to school management.

Pre-RTE Institutional Models

Prior to the enactment of the RTE Act, several community-oriented school governance bodies existed, including “Village Education Committees” (VECs), “Parent-Teacher Associations” (PTAs), and “Mother-Teacher Associations” (MTAs). These were established through programs such as the “District Primary Education Programme” (DPEP, 1994) and the “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan” (SSA, 2001). Despite their intent to involve local stakeholders, these committees operated without standardized membership structures, legal backing, or clearly defined mandates (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). The RTE Act wanted to resolve these shortcomings by introducing uniform guidelines for the composition, authority, and responsibilities of School Management Committees nationwide.

SMC Mandates in NEP 2020 and National Framework for School Curriculum (NFSC) 2022

The “National Education Policy” (NEP) 2020 confirms the central role of School Management Committees (SMCs) in strengthening community-based accountability and enhancing transparency in school governance. It highlights the need to align school development initiatives with local priorities through collaborative planning. Key recommendations include organizing structured capacity-building programs for SMC members, implementing digital systems for record management, and fostering partnerships with Panchayati Raj Institutions to improve decision-making and oversight (Ministry of Education, 2020). Likewise, the NFSC 2022 advocates for active SMC participation in adapting curricula to local contexts, tracking progress on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) goals, and encouraging context-specific pedagogical innovations (NCERT, 2022).

Linkage with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Upgrading the functioning of School Management Committees (SMCs) aligns with “Sustainable Development Goal 4” (United Nations, 2015), which seeks to provide inclusive, equitable, and quality education while promoting lifelong learning for all. Within India, well-performing SMCs have the potential to lower student dropout rates, boost academic achievement, and promote gender equity in school leadership and decision-making.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To evaluate the function and overall effectiveness of School Management Committee.
- ii. To identify and analyze the challenges hindering the effective functioning of School Management Committee.
- iii. To access the outcomes and impact of School Management Committee.

Methodology

The literature review process employed search terms such as “school management committee,” “school performance,” “school effectiveness,” and “school governance” in various combinations. Sources were identified through platforms like Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and official Government of India repositories. Studies were included if they: (i) appeared in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings; (ii) were written in English; (iii) specifically examined the role of SMCs in school functioning or educational outcomes; and (iv) were published between 2011 and 2024. Exclusion criteria encompassed: (a) research unrelated to the topic; (b) duplicate entries; and (c) works without accessible full texts.

The initial search produced 55 publications. Following a systematic screening of titles, abstracts, and complete texts, 46 studies met the inclusion criteria. These were classified into three main themes: (a) functioning and effectiveness of SMCs, (b) operational challenges, and (c) outcomes and overall impact.

Findings

To evaluate the function and overall effectiveness of School Management Committee.

Multiple studies indicate that the “Right to Education” (RTE 2009) Act’s mandatory provision for forming School Management Committees (SMCs) has enhanced structural compliance, with most government schools now maintaining committees in formal terms (Mehendale, 2014; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). However, the actual effectiveness of these bodies is closely linked to the capacity, awareness, and engagement of their members.

In Bihar, Sharma (2014) documented that active SMCs mobilized mothers’ groups, improved student attendance, and ensured the quality of mid-day meals. In Assam, the introduction of structured planning instruments such as School Development Plans (SDPs) and social audits helped improve accountability (MoE, 2021). Singal and Raghavan (2016) reported that effective SMC engagement led to better infrastructure upkeep, higher teacher attendance, and stronger community oversight, while in Kerala, SMC-led initiatives successfully raised funds and promoted financial transparency (Varghese, 2019).

In Maharashtra, Bhaware and Purohit (2022) found that most schools had established SMCs, many operated passively due to weak collaboration between parents and teachers and limited awareness of their statutory powers, highlighting the need for robust capacity-building measures. Similarly, Shrivastava, Singh, and Ojha (2018), applying a SWOT framework in Madhya Pradesh, observed that SMCs significantly contributed to improving educational quality, especially in urban areas, with members from

Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and general categories demonstrating genuine commitment. Nonetheless, participation in rural and semi-urban areas remained comparatively low.

In Assam, Rajbongshi (2020) examined 147 lower primary schools across four educational blocks in Sivasagar District, revealing that SMCs played an active role in monitoring and supervising universal and compulsory elementary education through regular oversight, school visits, and structured interactions with headmasters. Likewise, Luitel (2021) found that SMC members effectively fulfilled their responsibilities by monitoring attendance, addressing absenteeism, engaging parents, initiating infrastructure improvements, ensuring proper fund utilization, and aligning school development efforts with local educational needs.

In Odisha, (Rout, 2014b), according to researcher, SMCs achieved full enrolment of children aged 6–14 years in elementary schools, regularly monitored attendance with follow-ups on absenteeism causes, interacted with students to address learning difficulties, encouraged community participation through motivational talks and shared experiences, and utilized government funds effectively for school development.

To identify and analyze the challenges hindering the effective functioning of School Management Committee.

Evidence from multiple studies indicates that challenges to effective School Management Committee (SMC) functioning can be broadly classified into “capacity-related”, “socio-cultural”, “structural barriers”, “Administrative Challenges” and “Awareness Gaps (Cross-Cutting Challenge)” alongside administrative and political constraints.

Capacity-Related Challenges – A significant proportion of SMC members lack adequate understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and legal authority. The “Centre for Budget and Policy Studies” (CBPS, 2014) reported that over 60% of members across five surveyed states were unaware of their decision-making powers. In Bihar, despite RTE provisions mandating SMC formation, implementation remains partial, with “Tadarth Shiksha Samitis” acting as interim bodies (Jha et al., 2014).

Although empowered to raise external funds, members in several states had limited knowledge of financial powers, receipts, and expenditures, with transparency remaining minimal, particularly among women members (CBPS, 2014). Awareness of the School Development Plan (SDP) was also poor, indicating broader governance and capacity gaps. In Vizianagaram district, Andhra Pradesh, (Ramakrishna Rao and Indira, 2021) found limited awareness of the RTE Act, with knowledge levels differing by role (chairperson vs. member), gender, and rural-urban location, emphasizing the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives.

Socio-Cultural Challenges – Deep-rooted caste and gender hierarchies often constrain participation by marginalized communities and women. In Rajasthan, female members attended meetings but rarely spoke due to prevailing social norms (Kumar, 2018; Jha & Parvati, 2010; Guha, 2022). Such cultural barriers result in passive participation and limited influence in decision-making. According to Surbhi (2025) the study found that SMC member participation was generally low, largely due to socio-economic constraints and a weak sense of ownership among community stakeholders in Jharkhand.

Structural Challenges- Operational inefficiencies such as irregular meetings, restricted access to official records, and delayed fund disbursements limit the committees’ effectiveness (PROBE, 2020). Political interference is another recurring issue, with some chairpersons influenced by local leaders, undermining independent decision-making (Ramachandran, 2013).

Administrative Challenges – Lack of awareness and conceptual clarity in preparing SDPs hinders meaningful participation in school governance. Shrivastava, Singh, and Ojha (2018) identified low community engagement, weak stakeholder involvement, and irregular functioning as major barriers to qualitative improvement in government primary schools.

Awareness Gaps (Cross-Cutting Challenge)- Low awareness levels about the RTE Act, decision-making powers, and financial processes are common across states (CBPS, 2014; Ramakrishna Rao & Indira, 2021). These gaps often overlap with capacity, structural, and administrative challenges, amplifying their negative impact on SMC performance.

To access the outcomes and impact of School Management Committee.

Evidence indicates that well-functioning School Management Committees (SMCs) contribute to “higher enrolment and improved retention”, “improved students achievement” and “enhanced school infrastructure”.

Enrolment and retention – In Assam, the active engagement of mothers’ groups under SMC guidance has boosted girls’ enrolment and reduced dropout rates (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2021).

Students performance – In Odisha, with the support of SMC students participate in various competitions and exhibitions. (Rout, 2014b)

Infrastructure and resources – Proactive SMCs have supported the construction of additional classrooms, ensured access to safe drinking water, and facilitated the timely distribution of learning materials (Banerji & Chavan, 2016). Researcher find that SMC ensuring adequate water supply for hygiene and drinking purposes, and initiating improvements in school infrastructure while raising related concerns with government authorities. (Rout, 2014b)

Despite these gains, the overall impact varies considerably across states. Kerala and Tamil Nadu have demonstrated sustained improvements linked to active SMC engagement, whereas states such as Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand have shown weaker associations between SMC presence and learning outcomes, largely due to irregular meetings and inadequate follow-up mechanisms (Accountability Initiative, 2021). A 2024 report highlighted that in several Tamil Nadu, SMCs have improved

transparency and accountability through regular meetings, better record-keeping, and active parental involvement, resulting in enhanced school governance and community trust. (Times of India, 2024)

Comparative Table

Table-1

	Author(s) / Year	Location	Focus Area	Key Findings
1	Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2011	National	Policy framework	The RTE Act requires that 75% of members be parents and at least 50% be women, ensuring a standardized structure for participatory governance.
2	CBPS (Jha et al.) 2014	Five states	Stakeholder engagement	More than 60% of members were found to be unaware of their decision-making powers, indicating ongoing structural and awareness gaps.
3	Mehendale 2014	National	Legal structure	Highlights the SMC's legal mandate under the RTE and its role in decentralized planning.
4	Sharma (2014)	Bihar, Assam	Community roles	Engagement of mothers' groups led to better student attendance and enhanced quality of mid-day meals.
5	Rout. S.K. (2014)	Odisha	Case study	SMCs promoted participation in competitions, ensured sufficient water facilities, initiated infrastructure upgrades, and raised concerns with the government.
6	Singal & Raghavan (2016)	Multiple states	Functioning & Inclusion	Proactive SMCs contributed to improved infrastructure, higher attendance, and stronger monitoring.
7	Banerji & Chavan (2016)	Multiple states	Infrastructure & enrolment	Active SMCs facilitated infrastructure improvements and better access to resources.
8	Kumar (2018)	Rajasthan	Gender participation	Social norms often led female members to remain silent during meetings.
9	Shrivastava et al. (2018)	Madhya Pradesh	SWOT	Urban SMCs performed effectively, while rural counterparts lagged behind.
10	Goyal & Pandey (2019)	National	Governance & Leadership	Effectiveness was influenced by leadership abilities and the surrounding political environment.
11	Varghese (2019)	Kerala	Resource mobilization	SMCs engaged in active fundraising and enhanced transparency in financial management.
12	Ministry of Education 2020	National	NEP 2020 reforms	Recommends strengthening SMC capacity, adopting digital record systems, and fostering collaboration with Panchayati Raj institutions.
13	PROBE Team (2020)	National revisit	Implementation challenges	Shortcomings exist in training, consistency of meetings, and equitable participation.
14	Accountability Initiative (2021)	Multiple states	State-level comparison	States holding SMC meetings more frequently demonstrate stronger school monitoring results.
15	Chugh (2021)	National (historical)	Policy history	Reviews the development of SMCs from the pre-independence era to the NEP 2020.
16	MOE (2021)	Assam	Case studies & outcomes	Mothers' groups and local audits boosted enrolment, lowered dropout rates, and strengthened accountability.
17	Bhaware & Purohit (2022)	Maharashtra	Awareness & RTE	Awareness of rights remained limited, and community-school partnerships were weak.
18	Guha (2022)	National	Gender & Composition	Women and elected representatives proved more effective, while marginalized groups were often excluded in practice.
19	NCERT 2022	National	NFSC 2022 reforms	Highlights the importance of tailoring the curriculum to local contexts and tracking progress on foundational learning goals.
20	Times of India, (2024)	Tamil Nadu	SMC Improvement, or School Governance.	Positive development in SMC functioning, improved governance, accountability, and community participation.

Conclusion

School Management Committees (SMCs), mandated by the “Right to Education Act” (2009), play a crucial role in decentralizing school governance in India. Evidence shows that active SMCs improve infrastructure, enrolment, retention, and accountability, with notable successes in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam. However, their performance remains inconsistent due to limited awareness, inadequate training, socio-cultural barriers, and weak transparency.

Recent policies such as the National Education Policy (2020) and the “National Framework for School Curriculum” (2022) provide opportunities to strengthen SMCs through capacity-building, digital monitoring, and integration with local governance structures. Sustained training, inclusion of marginalized groups, and stronger accountability mechanisms are essential for realizing their potential as effective community-led governance bodies.

Acknowledgment: No

Author’s Contribution: Aabha: Data Collection, Literature Review, Analysis, Referencing; Dr. Chandra Prabha Pandey: Methodology, Drafting

Funding: No

Declaration: All the authors have given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

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Publisher's Note

The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

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