ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 8| August 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION VIS-A-VIS VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEES: ROLE AND CHALLENGES

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra23686
DOI No: 10.36713/epra23686

ABSTRACT

"Real education enhances the dignity of a human being and increases his or her self respect ,if only the real sense of education could be realized by each individual and carried forward in every field of human activity, the world will be so much a better place to live in……….." ***A.P.J Abdul Kalam***

Education is an instrument that could be the key in enhancing the socio economic status of any country, enhance citizen with analytical skills that resulted in enhanced confidence strengthens with power and goal setting skills. It not only improves efficiency but also increases democratic participation, improve health and overall equality of individual and social life which is most important input to empower people with skills, knowledge and provide them access to productive and gainful employment in the future. Therefore, so much stress should be laid on elementary level for the betterment of education, which is said to be the basis of higher education, child development and nation's future.

This article emphasizes on to identify the conceptual framework of village education community(VECs) which is the form of community participation. How community participation has a pivotal role in improving quality education? It would be about without local availability of education, along with peer pressure and commitment; education is hard for children (and others) to access. The paper will also address the difficulties experienced by the members of the village education community in performing their functions and responsibilities.

KEYWORDS: *Community Participation, Village Education Committee, Role, Quality Education, Challenges*

INTRODUCTION

Learning is an intrinsic element of personal emancipation and success. It allows people to earn a fair income, to live without the apprehension of poverty, and to construct healthy and successful lives. Amartya Sen (1999), in his book Development as Freedom, puts learning as a central element of 'social opportunity' along with health infrastructure at a civic level. However, education also underlies political liberty and economic development and could reinforce transparency and security. The impact of the crucial role of education in both personal and societal development is compounded due to the inter-linkages amongst education, health and economic development. The function of education in promoting social as well as economic advancement is well understood enhancement of the functional and analytic capacities of children and youth since it create opportunities leading to individual and group entitlement.

Education is enshrined as a human right in international law and also a key element supporting social and economic development. International normative values and states obligations under international law support the Right to Education (RTE). Article 26 of UDHR[i] 1948 says "Everyone has the right to education". Convention on the Rights of the Child reaffirmed the commitment of states to ensure primary education for all children under Article 28. In 2000, 164 countries pledged collectively at the World Education Forum in Dakar towards the Education for All (EFA) goal. The EFA objectives cover guaranteeing access to basic and quality primary education, and fighting against gender and ethnic discrimination. The U.N. General Assembly integrated the EFA objectives of universal primary education and gender equality into two of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Indian Government has also realized that education is a 'critical input' for the formation of human capital, employment and growth. It has rolled out a flagship primary education program called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan focused to get all 6-14 year olds in school. With a cost of $3.5 billion, it is the world's largest such programme. It incorporates an effort to enhance access, to track the quality of education and to develop capacity of Village Education Committees (VECs).

Some milestones of journey of development of education

A period of reconstruction of education naturally came in the aftermath of social and economic reconstruction launched by the National Government post-1947 [Pathania, 2009]. Education being the major tool for reconstruction and reshaping of society, numerous commissions were formed. Besides them, several policies and schemes were initiated or ongoing. Some of the prominent key initiatives that shaped the growth of education in India are presented as follows:

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S. No.	Year	Programme
1.	1986	National Policy on Education
2.	1987	Operation Blackboard'
3.	1992	Revision of National Policy on Education
4.	1993	District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)
5.	1995	Mid-day-meal (MDM)
6.	2001	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
7.	2002	86th Constitutional Amendment
8.	2004	Launch of EDUSET, a satellite exclusively dedicated to education
9.	2005	National Curriculum Framework
10.	2009(came into force from 1st April 2010)	The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009
11.	2014	National Youth Policy, 2014 adopted.
12.	2020	17. 'New Education Policy-2020

Table 1

Community Participation vis-a-vis Village Education Committees (VECs)

Involvement of Community involvement has been vision as an indispensable tool/method for the effective management of primary education in almost all the policy documents at national as well as international level. Policy-makers whether they are, in the role of practitioners, as academicians or researchers, are contributing significantly as a community participation to achieve the objectives of universalizing education. The World Conference[ii] have also stressed on the importance of the community participation movement across the globe.

In India the concept of community participation for the effective management of primary education is not new phenomenon. In India, community has always been regarded as the central point of the educational infrastructure. Though in the early years of Post-independence India, there was the concept of centralization of education system which favors the perception that everything belongs to the government and not the general public and was against the effectiveness of local bodies (Wankhede and Sengupta: 2005) but this perception could not be survived long as it was seen that this concept of centralization became failed in bringing any change to the standard of school education (Noronha: 2003). The 1st Education Commission articulated in a very express way that decentralization of school education is the the necessity of time in order to improve the standard of educational infrastructure and for this, involvement of local bodies is crucial Thus, the commission focused on to connect the schools within their locality(community) (GoI: 1966).

Participation of people by means of community participation has been also regarded as a important tool/technique of securing as well as guaranteeing the concept of decentralization in school education by adopting National Policy on Education, 1986. It was inclined towards decentralized administration of elementary education for the nation by envisioning direct involvement of people by means of establishing VECs. The 1992 POA too reaffirmed the consolidation of VECs by mandating that the Government of states is bound to issue general guidelines for the constitution of VECs along with norms of accountability for Heads of these institutions. Constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) also conceptualized the decentralization of the activities and allowed power transfer and participation of the institutions of local self government or the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the school administration.

SSA laid the great emphasis on organized mobilization of the community. It stressed on the establishment of a robust setup of decentralized mechanism of decision making. The RTE Act 2009 also reiterated the role of local bodies in school education by having the requirement of establishment of a School Management Committee (SMCs) in every school. Thus, it is evident that community participation as a new and innovative method, have always been primary concern and has been highlighted in all the education related policy documents of India with having the perception to establish a synergic coordination between the government and the community with a view to develop a sense of ownership and more effective resource management.

Conceptual Framework of Community Participation

Generally speaking, community participation relates to the kind of involvement and the domains in which the phrase is used, such as resource mobilization, management, monitoring, and evaluation, advocacy, and policy formation. However, community involvement has been discussed in education literature in relation to parents, the general public, and elected officials from PRIs, VECs, etc. Two distinct viewpoints have been linked to community in general (Noronha: 2003). First, if the community is taken to imply parents, then community participation refers to

(a) Parents who assist their children at home as partners in their education

(b) Parents and community leaders who show concern for schools by contributing time or resources to help schools develop, ease space or facility issues, or lend a hand in school-related matters,

Second, if the community is an elected representative , the community engagement means

(a) to carry out role of watchdog, to keep an eye on the instructor.
(b) to oversee the deployment and use of resources;
(c) to ask the questions about significant changes in education; and
(d) to influence the curriculum and suggest how it is implemented.

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As per Govinda's (2003) perspective, community leaders and parents must be involved as partners in supporting educational initiatives that contribute to their own personal growth. He discovers community participation is a situation-specific manifestation that depends on the level of involvement. The goal is to bring about certain systemic changes with the ultimate goal of improving and developing the participants' quality of life, whether in the areas of social security, education, health, etc. Additionally, he has distinguished between two types of community involvement in the context of primary education:

(a) first to motivate community members to actively participate in their children's education.
(b) second to liberalise the administrative framework in such a way that instigate participation of community members in educational management.

According to Shaeffor (1991), community involvement in elementary school might take any one or a mix of the following form :

(a) simple use of resources (e.g., primary health care facility);
(b) contribution or extraction of resources (e.g., labor and materials);
(c) attendance (e.g., school parent meetings);
(d) consultations on specific issues;
(e) service delivery;
(f) as implementers of the delegated powers;
(g) Engagement in actual decision making at every stage, including problem identification, feasibility study, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Community participation, in a more general sense, means co-operation, assistance and involvement of agencies, community people and families, school personnel, at school or in the community, in efforts and activities that positively influence students' outcomes (Rani and Arora: 2004).

In recent years, paradigm shift has been taken in process of participation of the community; It has been shifted from an informal movement to a formalized policy intervention. This can be seen through the reports and recommendations of various commissions established after Independence. There is a shift from non participative administration controlled educational planning towards participative community conscious process. (Mohan, Devi Dutt, Antony: 2003). Establishing VECs and delegating power to them to oversee the operation of primary school is one such example. These committees are involved to act as a participatory system where all the stakeholders like the teachers, parents and community leaders will get together with a common objective to adhere to maintenance of school infrastructure as along with school environment conducive to the effective learning platform.

The term 'community' in the study context is meant to denote the village community at large and VECs specifically. Thus, community involvement has been considered the organized action of the parents, teachers and other sections of the society such as the members of Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs), Mothers Teachers Associations (MTAs) and social activists (who themselves have been elected to the VECs).

Universalisation of Elementary Education and the Community particiaption

India has a rich tradition of community participation in education. In pre-colonial times, there was the system of Pathshalas and Madrasas which were run by the local communities where the education to the masses was provided. All the arrangements from engaging the teachers, looking space for the school and the providing facilities to the students all were done by the local communities. There was education board to frame the curriculum but it was framed by the teachers and community members together (Rani and Arora : 2004). During the British era, task to organize and framing the school education was partly left to the Panchayats and municipalities. Whereas the Government planned the education curriculum, organization and administration of the schools were left to the local authorities (Noronha: 2003).

In free India, the universalization of education was one of the goals of the constitution. This was a period of centralization of education during lack of efficiency of the local bodies in using their power in the proper manner came under severe criticism (Mallik, 1996; Varghese, undated). It was presumed that everything belonged to the governmentt and not the general public; hence, it was the government's duty to take care of them but this perception could not last long. This idea, however, came because of a desire to improve the level of education, since centralization did not lead to the change in school education quality (Noronha: 2003). National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 envisioned the increased role of the community in education at the local level and follow-up programmes and initiatives which certainly set emphasis on the role of community participation in school management. The follow-up governments formulated multi-pronged plans embracing the community as an equal partner in the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the school activities. According to the shifts in the Central Government's policies towards education, the educational development programs can be broadly classified into four varying phases for easy comprehension.

Phase	Duration	Developments
I	from 1951 to the mid 1960s	expansion of the formal system of education for universalisation of elementary education.
II	from 1968 to 1986	Development of first National Education Policy (NPE) to second National Education Policy
III	from 1986 to 1992	the NPE 1986 was reformulated and then the Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 was inaugurated
IV	from 1992 and onwards	73rd and 74th Amendments Acts, National Curriculum Framework 2005 and the Right to Education Act 2009 (Rao, V: 2008).

Table 2

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Role and Challenges of Village Education Committees: Doctrinal Findings

A careful review of the research journal, books dissertation, theses and other sources of information on the problem is to be done which is as follows:

Menon (1996)[iii]. The researcher is of the view that development at grassroots level can not achieved without the participation of the community. The Village Education Committees (VECs) play a vital role in the improvement of enrolment of children specially girls. These committees were active in ensuring retention and in reducing the drop- out rate. The study highlighted that the VECs emerged as effective instruments for people's involvement in the school management. Due to the proactive role of these bodies in this region, the rate of enrolment of girls increased from 7.37 percent to 37 percent and similarly for boys the enrolment increased from 44 percent to 88 percent. The writing and instructional materials provided by these institutions were received well and properly utilized by the students. The door to door canvassing by the VECs to improve the enrolment was very effective.

Govinda & Bandyopadhyay (2010) [iv] This study emphasizes that VECs, as part of the decentralization efforts under SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), play a vital role in school governance. However, it finds that real participation is limited due to lack of awareness, training, and empowerment among community members.

Jha & Parvati (2010)[v] The authors analyze the VEC structure across states and argue that while VECs have legal status in most states, they often exist only on paper. Capacity building, financial autonomy, and clarity of functions are often lacking.

PROBE Revisited Report (2006)[vi] The follow-up to the famous PROBE report found that although VECs were more widespread compared to the 1990s, their involvement in school management remained weak. Decision-making power was centralized despite the formation of committees**.**

Accountability Initiative (2015)[vii] This study examined the financial autonomy of VECs and found that although funds were being released to schools, VECs often lacked the capacity to plan and implement expenditures effectively due to limited training.

Kingdon & Muzammil (2009) [viii] This study finds that while VECs were created to increase accountability, they are often dominated by local elites. Without proper representation and training, they fail to serve marginalized groups effectively**.**

Azim Premji Foundation (2008)[ix] This internal study found that many VEC members were unaware of their roles and responsibilities. Training programs and regular monitoring were recommended to improve their functionality.

NUEPA Report (2012)[x]The National University of Educational Planning and Administration reported that although VECs are mandated in policy, their actual involvement varies widely across states. Capacity development is crucial for their success.

MHRD (2014)[xi]: This government review suggested that the impact of VECs depends on local context, training, and support from district education officers. Many VECs lacked access to school development plans or budgets**.**

ASER Reports [xii]

Various ASER reports have noted low community awareness and participation in school monitoring despite the existence of VECs. The reports call for more inclusive and active engagement of parents and women in these bodies.

UNICEF (2005)[xiii]**:**

UNICEF's review highlighted that for VECs to be effective, they need clear roles, transparency in fund use, and representation of marginalized groups. It supported integrating VEC training into regular district-level planning.

Experiences from Some Select States that, community participation in school governance has been emphasized in all policy documents in India particularly after the National Educational Policy 1968. The Village Education Committees (VECs) have proved to be very effective instruments for ensuring community participation at the village level. In many states where the community people have been pro-active and vigilant, VECs have played a vital role in reducing school dropout rates and improving enrollment of children in village schools. These bodies have done an impressive work in improving the overall teaching learning environment both within and outside the class rooms. However, in many states, the performance of these bodies has been far from satisfactory. The VECs in such states have drastically failed in meeting their predetermined goals. The VECs exist only on papers. No meetings are held. The parents didn't even know about the existence of a VEC in their village. A great majority of gram sabhas don't have education on their priority list. In nutshell, the VECs are yet to show the expected results towards achieving universalisation of elementary education through community participation. Some experiences are being presented from selected states in India depicting the success stories as well as the failures of the village education committees:

1. **Haryana**

A comprehensive NIEPA study (Pramila Menon, 1999) in Hisar and Jind districts indicates VECs established under DPEP significantly follow norms (including 50% women). They improved early-grade enrolment—particularly of girls—considerably with observed changes in attitude towards girls' education. However, active participation by women was restricted by traditional customs such as purdah

2. **Bihar**

Since 1988, Bihar made VECs official through an executive order, then they later re-named them School Education Committees (SECs) under a statutory act in 2000. The reform intended to enhance capacity and increase community involvement in primary education

3. **Ladakh**

A 2021 survey (Stanzin Nouskit & Ashu Rajput) of 104 VEC members in Leh and Kargil identified poor coordination

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among VEC members, teachers, and parents. VECs contributed some way towards enhancing attendance and quality but were without authority, training, and awareness to play their full role ilkogretim-online.org

4. **West Bengal**

Wider review added that though West Bengal VECs were designed under SSA, their implementation was not uniform. A paper "Village education committees. planned vision and beyond" quotes that most VECs did not realize their potential for community engagement

5. **Assam**

Though there are limited VEC studies specifically, the Gunotsav scheme under Samagra Shiksha Assam has "community participation and school management committee involvement" as a major evaluation criterion—showing formal acknowledgement of local bodies' role

. In addition, informal accounts indicate Assam's VECs (and SMCs) are concerned with utilization of grants, accountability, and attendance of students.

6. **Tamil Nadu**

Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and Alagappa University studies reported that Tamil Nadu's VECs meet every month, participate in school development, and adopt resolutions to enhance academic standards. Cashbook maintenance and grant utilization were also

7. **Sikkim**

Here, formal VECs weren't used—instead School Management Committees (SMCs) operate as the school-level body. Each school has a functioning SMC that meets monthly, ensures attendance, manages finances and grant utilization effectively.

8. **Madhya Pradesh**

While specific VEC-centric reports are sparse, ASER 2011 data show that despite high enrolment rates, learning outcomes dropped significantly. This suggests gaps in local monitoring and engagement mechanisms like those VECs are meant to provide

9. **Karnataka**

DPEP-supported micro-planning in Karnataka's villages included VECs actively engaging in social/resource mapping, enrollment surveys, and village education registers. The process improved local ownership and clarity of VEC roles in enrollment and retention activities.

10. **Himachal Pradesh**

Under DPEP in a hilly terrain, school mapping and micro planning were used, involving VECs indirectly. Teachers and communities surveyed non-enrolled children and advocated for new school openings; VEC-like structures supported this process

Strengths & Outcomes

- Increased enrolment, especially among girls (Haryana, Karnataka).
- Heightened accountability via local monitoring.
- Improved community ownership where training and awareness are given (Tamil Nadu, Sikkim).

Challenges & Limitations

- Limited capacity/training: many members lack clarity on roles (Ladakh).
- Gender and social norms restrict meaningful women participation (Haryana).
- Weak implementation despite strong policy frameworks (West Bengal).
- Varying effectiveness by geography: terrain, state capacity, and governance infrastructure influence outcomes.

Conclusion and Suggestion

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

- **Restructuring of the VECs**
  There is a need for restructuring the composition of the VECs. The parents whose children are enrolled in the same school should only be nominated to VECs while the rest whose children study in other schools be rendered ineligible.
- **Determination of Memberships**
  Paradigm Shift is required for determination of membership to VECs. There is no provision for entry of an individual who does not fall in any of the above categories or say for an individual who does not hold these positions even if someone may be a highly respectful and reputed person in the community.
- **The nominations in presence of teachers and DEO** should be made as far as possible in the Gram Sabha meetings in the presence of teachers and DEO (Elementary Education).
- **Strengthening School Infrastructure**
  . The focus of attention needs to be both on the infrastructural facilities as well as the characteristics of teachers and the parents. Unless this paradigm shift take place, it is highly unlikely that the government schools would have any visible impact on the quality of education at the grassroots level. It is high time that the government and the community bring some radical changes in the school education apparatus itself. a lot more is needed to improve the school education in terms of the quality, equity and the parity with the private schools.
- **Providing Incentives or Rewards to VECs Members**
  The VECs members should be provided some financial incentives or rewards. These incentives or rewards can be helpful in providing positive motivation to the VECs members and help boost the morale of the VECs members and develop a feeling of belongingness among the members towards their school.
- **Decreasing Workload of the Secretary**
  The work load of the Secretary should be lessened. As per the Guidelines, the head teacher is entrusted with all the responsibilities ranging from nominations
- **Ensure Regular Periodic Training**
  Periodic training are very important for increasing the awareness of the members on procedures followed for nominations, formation and functions of VECs .the training can further improve the functioning of these bodies and the standards of school education at the village level.

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