



Research Article

Strengthening School Community Partnership for Quality Secondary Education in Odisha, India

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Abstract

Community participation has increasingly been recognized as a vital component in developing quality education at different levels of school education. This study explores the role of community participation in developing quality education at secondary school level. It analysed important policies and programmes on community participation while examining the perspectives of stakeholders such as school heads, teachers, parents and community leaders. It was also intended to explore the school-led initiatives to promote community participation for improving quality education. Problems and challenges in the process of community participation were identified, and suggestions were sought from stakeholders for improvement of school-community partnership. Survey method under descriptive research was adopted for conducting this study. Perception scale for School Heads and teachers, interview schedule for School Heads, parents and community leaders were used to collect data from informants. Analysis of data revealed that there is a progressive evolution of community participation in educational policies, where major programmes and policies highlight a shift from welfare-oriented approaches to participatory governance models. It also indicates that while various policies strongly advocate community involvement, there exists a gap between policy intentions and ground level implementation. The findings indicate that community participation significantly influences the quality of secondary education across multiple dimensions. Based on the findings, the study recommends a suggestive model for strengthening integrated participatory school-community partnerships through capacity-building programmes, awareness campaigns and structured engagement strategies.

Keywords

Community Participation, Quality Education, Secondary School, Stakeholders

1. Introduction

Education is considered as a powerful tool for transforming the society where community serves as a vital force for supporting and enriching formal education. The significance of education becomes even more significant at secondary school level where learners experience a crucial phase of intellectual growth, social maturity, and preparation for future academic or professional paths. While several educational reforms have

been made over the years in India, one often overlooked but highly effective strategy is the involvement of community in the process of education. Community participation in education helps in enriching learning environment, promoting student success and fostering strong school-community relationship by active engagement of parents, guardians, volunteers, experts and other members of the community [44, 49].

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In education quality occurs when schools and colleges create value for those they serve and those who serve them [13]. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Framework [65], learning environments, content, processes and outcomes. These dimensions are interconnected and operate within broader socio-cultural and economic contexts of the community where the school exists.

2. Importance of Community for Quality Education

Learning, both outside and inside schools happens through collaborative social interaction and social construction of knowledge. In the same line, the social learning theory of Bandura [5] emphasises the importance of observation and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. Constructivist theorists largely support community participation because learning is viewed as a social process of active knowledge construction. Knowledge is socially constructed and is not an objective reality waiting to be discovered but is created through interaction with others and the environment [68]. Community participation provides the essential social ground for individuals to share perspectives, negotiate meaning, and co-create knowledge that is locally relevant and functional. Hence the role of community is important in knowledge construction process of the learner.

Researchers like Banerji and Sahoo [6], Lema and Mwila [24], Meena [27], Parji and Prasteya [45], Sherawat and Roy [57] have identified the following categories of community involvement in school functioning.

- 1) Budgeting (i.e., budget formation and allocation)
- 2) Personnel management (i.e., appointment and dismissal)
- 3) Pedagogy and educational content (i.e., curriculum development, making of class schedules and school calendar and events, selection of textbooks, etc.)
- 4) School infrastructure and maintenance (i.e., improvement of buildings and other infrastructure, procurement of textbooks and scholastic materials)
- 5) Monitoring and evaluation (i.e., monitoring and evaluation of teachers' performance and students' learning achievement).

Community involvement in education facilitates the identification of community-specific educational issues and suggests different strategies to remove barriers to access, enrolment and retention and quality in education within a given community [52, 53, 56]. Community participation is needed in all aspects of school education including planning and organization of activities, material support, regular functioning of school, increasing the number of beneficiaries, supervision, and monitoring [9, 69]. Exploring the overall effect of community participation in school education, Russell [52] identified the following benefits of community participation in

school education. 1. Maximizing limited resources 2. Developing need-based and context-specific curriculum 3. Identifying and addressing problems 4. Promoting girls' education 5. Creating and nourishing community-school partnerships 6. Realizing democracy 7. Increasing accountability and ensuring sustainability 9. Improving home environment.

3. National Initiatives for Community Participation in School Education

The Secondary Education Commission, 1952 [28] and the National Policy on Education, 1968 [35] emphasized on the construction of a managing board of schools to ensure the proper running and maintenance of standards in secondary schools. Emphasizing the importance of the community, B.G. Kher Committee (1953) stated the need for decentralization of management to attract community involvement at the grass-roots level and involvement of all types of local bodies to promote and manage education [63]. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee [4] also suggested that primary education should become the responsibility of the Panchayats. Kothari commission [34] recommended to establish intimacy between local communities and schools for the development of quality education and decentralization of education at all levels. The National Policy on Education [29] recommended for the creation of District Boards of Education to manage education up to the higher secondary level.

The importance of community involvement has also been highlighted in National Policy on Education 1986 [31] through its Programme of Action, 1992 [33, 48]. It emphasized the establishment of District Boards of Education (DBE), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET), and Village Education Committees (VECs) to go a long way towards the school improvement programme.

National Curriculum Framework 1975 [39], 1988 [40], 2000 [41], 2005 [30] have emphasized the importance of involvement of community members for curriculum development and school management. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 highlights community participation as a vital component of a rich and relevant education system. It advocates for connecting school knowledge to life outside the classroom and leveraging the community as a valuable learning resource.

The Right to Education Act 2009 [17, 64] came into force on April 1, 2010. One of the important provisions of the RTE Act 2009 is to constitute School Management Committees (SMCs). SMCs are entitled to monitor the working of schools and grants received from the governments or local authority or any other source and prepare a plan for school development. The purpose behind such participation is to establish democratic values and ensure the right to education as a fundamental right.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 200) is a Government of In-

dia's flagship programme [14, 54] for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). Like previous policies, it also suggested the involvement of the community for success of the programme. Different types of community-based institutions such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Mother Teacher Association (MTA), Village Education Committee (VEC) and Gram Panchayat have been involved in school activities under this programme.

The government of India has initiated a programme for universalization of secondary education, i.e. "Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan" (RMSA, [36, 50]) in 2009. According to RMSA, involvement of Panchayati Raj and Municipal bodies, community, teachers, parents and other stakeholders are important in the management of Secondary Education. RMSA acknowledged the community not just as beneficiaries but as co-planners, co-implementers, monitors, and resource partners, which reflects a shift from a welfare-oriented to a partnership-oriented model of secondary education.

Vidyanjali [32], a school volunteer programme (2016) is an initiative to enhance community and private sector involvement in government schools to strengthen implementation of co-scholastic activities through the services of volunteers. Volunteers under the programme will conduct one or more co-scholastic activities like helping children in reading, creative writing, public speaking, play acting and preparing story books.

The Samagra Shiksha, 2018 [11] strengthened community participation further by integrating it into an inclusive school education framework which extends community involvement to governance, equity promotion, student support services, vocational experience and sustainability of secondary school reforms.

In school education section, the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) [15, 66] focused on curtailing dropout rates and ensuring universal access to education at all levels, through more community involvement in school education. It is clearly mentioned that "Efforts will be made to involve community and alumni for enhancing learning by providing one-on-one tutoring; the teaching of literacy and holding of extra-help sessions; teaching support and guidance for educators; career guidance and mentoring to students; etc." (NEP, 2020, p. 11). The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE, [43]) 2023 emphasizes significantly on community participation as a vital element for enhancing the quality, relevance, and inclusiveness of education.

4. Research Questions

Based on the above discussion, the present research attempts to answer the following questions in the context of an Indian state viz. Odisha.

- 1) How does the community contribute towards quality education at secondary school level?
- 2) What are the major challenges in the process of school-community participation?

5. Methodology

Accordingly, the study was carried out to identify the contributions of the community for quality secondary education with reference to infrastructure and resource support, financial support, student enrolment, academic support, school governance and decision-making process. It also studied the key factors that hinder community participation in promoting quality education. Data was collected through Interview schedule for School Heads, parents and community leaders along with questionnaire for teachers working in different regions of Odisha.

5.1. Population and Sample

The state of Odisha comprises three Revenue Divisions out of which one district from each division, leading to a total of three districts, was selected for the study. The school heads, teachers, parents and community leaders were considered as key informants. The study consisted of three districts, six blocks, 30 schools, 30 school heads, 210 teachers, 90 parents and 30 community leaders selected through multistage random sampling.

5.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The study employed Perception Scale for School Heads and teachers, Interview Schedule for parents and community leaders and Questionnaire for teachers to collect information on contributions of community members for ensuring quality education, school-led initiatives for fostering community participation and issues and the challenges associated with community participation. These tools primarily aimed at measuring the stakeholders' awareness and understanding of community participation for ensuring quality education, school led initiatives for strengthening school-community relationship, barriers and challenges in the way of community involvement in school developmental activities and future outlook for a better school-community partnership. Tools were validated on the basis of expert advice and pilot testing.

The collected data were organized, categorized and classified for the purpose of data analysis and interpretation. Quantitative data were analyzed by using percentage calculation whereas qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis followed by thick description.

6. Findings on Perception of Stakeholders Towards Community Participation

The perception of school heads revealed 100% agreement with the statement that community participation is vital for improving quality education in secondary schools. This validates a strong institutional appreciation of the importance of

collaborative agreement between schools and the community. Reflecting the opinion of the school heads and teachers, researchers like Ahmed and Said [1] and Ayeni [3] revealed that community participation is essential for ensuring quality education and long-term school improvement.

With regard to the functional benefits of community participation, majority of school heads (53.33%) strongly responded that community involvement has a positive impact on students' academic progress. Falling in line with other researchers, majority of the teachers and parents perceived that community participation positively influences various dimensions of quality education such as improved academic achievement, reduced dropout and absenteeism and improved school discipline and infrastructure [16, 19, 25, 47, 62]. Moreover, findings indicate that community participation is more prominent in financial and material support in comparison to academic support and decision-making processes [8, 45]. This strong consent indicates that teachers clearly appreciate the worth of involving parents and community members in the educational process.

A substantial proportion (66.67% agreed and 23.33% strongly agreed) of respondents indicated that community members and parents are not aware of their roles in school development. This shows a significant awareness gap at the community level, which could limit meaningful involvement in school events and decision-making processes. While teachers and school heads possess adequate awareness, parents and community members exhibit comparatively low awareness. This is supported by the finding of Prasad and Bara [46] and Mishra and Rout [37], who also reported that lack of awareness among community members significantly restricts meaningful participation.

6.1. Findings on Perception of Stakeholders on Challenges of School-Community Relationship

Regarding the challenges of community participation, considerable proportion of school heads and teachers strongly reported the lack of awareness among community members as obstacles in the way of effective participation. Practical and logistical challenges such as time constraints, communication gaps or lack of organized platforms are likely to hamper smooth collaboration between school and community. Factors like poverty, occupational commitments, inadequate educational backgrounds and other socio-economic limitations are identified as strong barriers restricting community members from active participation in school developmental process. These findings strongly support the results of Mungleng and Parimala [38], Lauwo and Mkulu [22], Srivastava [60] who identified similar barriers including poverty, ignorance and lack of communication as barriers in effective community participation. Hence the need for more vigorous, structured, and systematic approaches to facilitate community participation in

school governance and development was recognised by teachers and community members.

Like previous studies the findings highlight that community participation with activities such as awareness campaigns, counselling and attendance monitoring [51, 61, 67], infrastructural support, extracurricular supporting programs and provision for mentorship [20, 23, 26] help immensely in increasing enrolment and retention. It is considered as one of the strongest contributions for quality education.

While acknowledging the importance of school-community partnership, more than 57.77% of parents reported that most of the time communication was largely one-way, with limited opportunities for dialogue or shared decision-making with school authorities. Only a small number of parents (34.44%) reported their active involvement in planning or governance-related activities.

Parents identified several barriers that hinder effective community participation at the secondary school level. The major barriers include lack of awareness about the roles and responsibilities of local community, time constraints due to work and livelihood commitments, financial limitations, and the perception that education is solely the responsibility of school and teachers. This is consistent with Deka [10], Sherawat and Roy [57], Prasad and Bara [46], who found that despite willingness among community members, lack of training limits their effective participation. Problems such as lack of awareness [21, 27, 37, 58, 59] and inadequate understanding among parents are identified as critical barriers leading to passive participation of community [7, 37].

Social and cultural factors were also mentioned, particularly by parents from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, who felt uncertain in engaging with school authorities due to low educational qualification. These findings clearly specify that barriers to participation are structural, economic and perceptual, rather than stemming from unwillingness among parents. More than 50% parents conveyed their involvement in basic school-related activities such as joining parent-teacher meetings, monitoring attendance and supporting enrolment drives, while participation in academic or governance-related activities was reported to be minimal.

Interestingly, a large majority of parents expressed willingness to participate more actively in the future, provided schools would clearly define the roles of parents, create inclusive and respectful participation opportunities and offer guidance and orientation programmes for them. This positive attitude reflects a covert potential for enhanced community participation, which can be harnessed through active school leadership.

Community leaders regarded themselves as mediators between schools and the wider community, who are mostly responsible for passing community concerns, resolving conflicts and facilitating mutual understandings. However, some leaders acknowledged that decision-making authority largely rests with the school administration, with community involvement

often remaining consultative. Limited time or lack of systematic direction for community members were highlighted as obstacles for active community participation. Falling in line with other researchers like Aryal [2], Epstein [16], Dyantyi and Ncanywa [12], this study also found out socio-cultural barriers as major constraints in community participation.

Issues such as one-way communication, lack of trust, lack of administrative support and rigid school procedures generate feelings of exclusion among community members leading to mistrust and passive participation [18, 42, 55]. Some members acknowledged that parents hesitate to interact with teachers due to perceived authority differences, while others pointed to gender norms restricting mothers' participation. Although not universal, this barrier remains context-specific and deeply embedded, particularly in traditional communities.

6.2. Suggestions of Stakeholders on Improved School-Community Relationship

Suggestions given by stakeholders for school-community collaboration include the following:

1) Strengthening school-community communication

Periodic meetings, parent-teacher interactions and use of digital communication platforms can keep the community members informed about school activities, student progress and school needs. Schools should create more opportunities for community members to participate in school activities such as academic events, cultural programmes and other curricular activities to strengthen school-community relationship. It should actively seek parents' efforts through quick surveys, feedback loops or listening sessions and then follow up visibly on how the inputs influence decisions. This will build trust and make parents feel valued, encouraging their sustained participation.

2) Organizing awareness and orientation programme

Orientation programmes may help the community in understanding their roles in supporting student learning, school governance and decision making, preparing school development plans and overall institutional development. A few parents suggested that formal academic-focused meetings may be shifted to informal gatherings like picnics, cultural programmes, talent shows and competitions, community service projects etc. Some community leaders recommended that schools should offer practical workshops on topics such as supporting learning at home, understanding curricular and co-curricular activities, health and wellbeing of children etc.

3) Organizing capacity building events and activities

Training and capacity building programmes for parents, School Management Committee (SMC)/ School Management and Development Committee (SMDC) members and other stakeholders may be organized to develop their comprehension on school functioning, decision making processes and strategies to support students' education. Community efforts should be acknowledged (e.g. Parent/Community of the month/year or community appreciation events), to motivate

continuous involvement and reinforce positive relationships. Schools create structured opportunities for participation through committees, volunteering roles and involvement in several school activities. This supports Epstein's [16] framework of school-family-community partnerships, which emphasizes structured and meaningful engagement among the stakeholders for quality improvement in school education. Sehrawat and Roy [57] also stresses the need for systematic training for effective community participation.

4) Fostering active participation with local organizations and leaders

Cultivating mutual partnerships with local organizations, NGOs, religious groups and government agencies to develop mentorship programmes, resource donations, academic competitions etc. are also suggested. Teachers and some school heads emphasized that school premises (e.g. libraries or auditoriums and fields) can be used for organizing community activities to make the school a community hub. Relationship-building initiatives such as cultural programmes, school events and respectful interactions strengthen trust between schools and communities.

5) Mobilizing community resources and support

Mobilization of local resources such as materials, financial contributions and voluntary services from community members are some other ways for motivating community to support the school for the improvement of infrastructure and learning facilities.

6) Organizing community-based educational activities

Some community leaders suggested to organize educational programmes, cultural activities and events such as health and hygiene awareness campaigns, cleanliness drives, tree plantation campaigns, local festival celebrations, community dialogue forums and community sports tournaments in schools to boost community involvement and reinforce school-community relationship.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that in a developing country like India, community involvement is important to school governance, fund mobilisation, alumni involvement and student enrolment. Many policies in the country recommend community involvement in school education to improve the quality of education. However, there exists a gap between the school and community primarily due to less awareness of parents about their roles and responsibilities in school developmental process. Low socio-economic status and less parental education are other factors which contribute to less participation of the community. Organization of various capacity building and awareness programmes along with community-based educational activities by school authorities are likely to minimize the gap between school and community and enhance community participation for quality school education.

Abbreviations

UNICEF	UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
DBE	District Boards of Education
DIET	District Institutes of Education and Training
VEC	Village Education Committees
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
SMC	School Management Committees
UEE	Universalization of Elementary Education
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
MTA	Mother Teacher Association
RMSA	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
NEP	National Education Policy
NCFSE	National Curriculum Framework for School Education
SMS	School Management Committee
SMDS	School Management and Development Committee

Author Contributions

Sasmita Kar: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – review & editing

Purnabasi Rout: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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