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## School Cluster

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### Abstract:

In the present scenario, the Indian education system faces challenges like a shortage of teachers, an increase in the number of small schools, an increase in the number of single-teacher schools and a shortage of infrastructural facilities. Because of all these problems, it becomes difficult to administer the school properly and maintain the quality of education. Education policy 1966-68, National Education Commission 1986 and now national education commission 2020 recommended a solution for all the above problems and that is school cluster. The present paper explains the concept of cluster school, recommendations of various commissions regarding school clusters, challenges in the implementation of school cluster system and remedies for it.

**Key Words:** School Clusters, Definitions of school clusters, Benefits and challenges.

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### Introduction:

For the Universalization of Elementary Education, the Indian government started a scheme named Education for all campaign, which is Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). One of the aims of this campaign was to establish new schools in such a habitation with schooling facilities. To fulfil this aim Indian Government established numerous small schools in many small towns.

The small schools are not economically suboptimal and it is difficult for them to maintain quality of education due to a shortage of physical resources and teachers. Many times these teachers have to teach multiple subjects to multiple grades in which teachers may not have any prior background. Areas like art, music, and sports are often neglected. The geographically isolated small school also faces challenges like the development of teachers, provision of physical resources including children with disabilities, governance, and management. It is also difficult for the administrative structures to reach these schools equally.

According to U-DISE 2021-2022, Total enrolment of students in schools (Class 1 to 12) has increased by 0.76 % in 2021-22 as compared to 2020-21 whereas the total number of teachers has declined by 1.95 % in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. The Current

education system along with a shortage of teachers also faces major challenges like lack of adequate infrastructure, and low government expenditure on Education (less than 3.5% of the GDP), UNISCOs report 2021 says that India has nearly 1.2 lakh schools that run with just one teacher each. 89% of these single-teacher schools are in rural areas.

To overcome all these challenges of schools, National Policy of Education 2020 suggested the establishment of a grouping structure called the school complex or School Cluster.

### Objectives Of The Present Research Paper

1. To Explain The concept of School Cluster
2. To Explain the Guidelines for school clusters suggested by various authoring Committees
3. To enlist The Challenges in the implementation of the School Cluster
4. To recommend the ways to face these challenges.

### Concept Of Cluster School:

A school complex comprises a network of schools or institutions and individuals then a same geographical area in which physical facilities and human resources are shared to improve the quality of Education. School cluster brings schools institutions and individuals together, breaks the isolation of school facilities, exchange of intellectual

ideas among the learning community. Some of the definitions of school cluster are given below.

In the context of education programming, a cluster is group of schools located in close proximity to each other whose staffs meet regularly to build their capacity to improve quality at their schools.

**Bray (1987)**, School clusters, that is, the grouping of schools within the same geographical location, for economic, pedagogic, administrative and political purposes.

#### **Unesco**

A 'school cluster' is a group of neighbouring schools around a larger 'core' school.

It is a grouping of schools located geographically close to each other for the purpose of administration and pooling and sharing resources, including teachers, learning and physical resources.

**Chikoko (2007)**, School clusters are the grouping of schools within the same geographical location aiming to improve the quality and relevance of education in the schools.

**Turkey (2004)**, defines school clusters as a tool that schools can use to promote collaboration, reflection, sharing and learning among the teaching fraternity.

#### **Recommendations Of Various Committees Regarding School Cluster In India**

##### **Education Commission 1964-66 (Kothari commission Report)**

1. The Education Commission first recommended the school cluster concept in 1964-66. According to this commission, a cluster can be a "very small and manageable group that can work in face-to-face relationship with easily accessible distance."
2. The clustering system was a two-stage process. At the first level, some lower primary schools were inseparably associated with upper primary schools on a close basis of area. Headmasters of upper primary schools will provide extension services to the respective lower primary schools. He will constitute a committee of headmasters of all the appointed lower primary schools under his chairmanship. This committee will plan, guide and develop all the components of the schools as a complex.
3. The second tier shall include upper primary schools along with middle school.

A committee of principals of all upper and lower primary schools was to be formed under the chairmanship of the principal of the secondary school which would be solely responsible for the functioning of the school complex.

4. A school complex may consist of a group of primary and upper primary schools. (five to six lower primary schools and one upper primary school, within a radius of 5-10 miles) attached to a high school, a training school, a technical school, etc. (may also include six to seven upper primary schools including a secondary school or a college six to seven secondary schools)
5. This will provide equal educational facilities and opportunities to share experiences in all schools. School complexes were conceived as institutions to improve educational standards at all levels of schooling.
6. The Principal of the Upper Primary School shall act as the Chairman and lead the school complex

##### **The National Policy on Education, 1986 (National Policy of Education 1986 Report)**

1. The idea of school complex is reiterated by National Policy of Education 1986. It defined a wide range of functions relating to the running of schools, but confined the spectrum bringing schools together to share and exchange resources.
2. At the same time, the policy, however, is not explicit on the autonomous nature of the school complex in a decentralised governance framework.
3. The CAGE Committee Report on NPE, 1986, recommended 'Educational Complexes' as autonomous registered societies.
4. Janardhan Reddy Committee in 1992 that expanded the conceptualisation of school complexes as the lowest viable unit of planning emanating from a cluster of 8-10 institutions. The report brought to the fore the element of 'autonomy' of school complexes in the decentralised governance system. The Committee visualised school complexes to work in close collaboration with the education department of the state at block and district level; the local bodies, Panchayati Raj Institutions and local development and social welfare agencies voluntary or

government and the Institutes of Higher and Technical Education.

5. School complexes, in this setup, were seen as a network of institutions collaborating on a flexible pattern with support from institutions such as DIET, Teacher Education College, ITIs, and Polytechnics (particularly community polytechnics).
6. This arrangement expects a school complex to reinforce intellectual discourse among the professional learning community on curriculum, syllabi, content and processes, evaluation, monitoring, teacher training, exchange of resources, personnel, materials, teaching aids, etc., ensure observance of norms and conduct and follow its self-monitoring system and quality mechanisms.
7. Post NPE (1986) and POA (1992), several efforts were made to establish different models of school networks/complexes across the country. One such model was conceptualised by the Central Board of School Education way back in 1987 with the introduction of the premise 'Freedom to learn; Freedom to Grow through Sahodaya school complex.' It began more so as a movement to invoke the dormant, creative potentials in every teacher and every school through friendly interaction between schools, to re-energise the hidden potentials existing in the different schools.
5. The District Education Officer (DEO) and the Block Education Officers (BEO) will interact primarily with each school complex/cluster as a single unit and facilitate its work.
6. The complex itself will perform certain tasks delegated by the DSE and will deal with the individual schools within it. The school complex/cluster will be given significant autonomy by the DSE to innovate towards providing integrated education and to experiment with pedagogies, curriculum, etc.
7. Under this organization, schools will gain in strength, will be able to exercise greater freedom, and will contribute towards making the complex more innovative and responsive. Meanwhile, the DSE will be able to focus on the aggregate level goals that need to be achieved, improving overall system effectiveness.
8. The culture of working to a plan, both short-term and long-term ones, will be developed through such complexes/clusters. Schools will develop their plans (SDPs) with the involvement of their SMCs. These plans will then become the basis for the creation of School Complex/Cluster Development Plans (SCDPs).
9. The SCDP will also involve the plans of all other institutions associated with the school complex, such as vocational education institutions, and will be created by the principals and teachers of the school complex with the involvement of the SCMC and will be made available publicly.

#### **National Education Policy, 2020 (National Education Policy 2020 report)**

1. National Education Policy 2020 strongly recommended the idea of complexes to ensure universal access, participation and quality of education under the broad agenda of providing equitable and quality education in schools.
2. NEP 2020 visualises the school complex as an integrated semi-autonomous unit for improving accessibility, effective school governance, resources sharing and community participation.
3. NEP 2020 recommended that the school complex include one secondary school with all other schools offering lower grades in its neighbourhood including Anganwadis in a radius of five to 10 kilometers.
4. First, the DSE will devolve authority to the school complex/cluster, which will act as a semi-autonomous unit.
10. The plans will include human resources, learning resources, physical resources and infrastructure, improvement initiatives, financial resources, school culture initiatives, teacher development plans, and educational outcomes. It will detail the efforts to leverage the teachers and students across the school complex to develop vibrant learning communities.
11. The SDP and SCDP will be the primary mechanism to align all stakeholders of the school, including the DSE. The SMC and SCMC will use the SDP and SCDP for oversight of the functioning and direction of the school and will assist in the execution of these plans. The DSE, through its relevant official, e.g., the BEO, will endorse and confirm the SCDP

of each school complex. It will then provide the resources (financial, human, physical, etc.) necessary to achieve the SCDPs, both short-term (1-year) and long-term (3-5 years). It will also provide all other relevant support to the school complexes to achieve the educational outcomes. The DSE and the SCERT may share specific norms (e.g., financial, staffing, process) and frameworks for development of the SDP and SCDP with all schools, which may be revised periodically.

12. To further enhance cooperation and positive synergy among schools, including between public and private schools, the twinning/pairing of one public school with one private school will be adopted across the country, so that such paired schools may meet/interact with each other, learn from each other, and also share resources, if possible. Best practices of private schools will be documented, shared, and institutionalized in public schools, and vice versa, where possible.
13. Every State will be encouraged to strengthen existing or establish "Bal Bhavans" where children of all ages can visit once a week (e.g., on weekends) or more often, as a special daytime boarding school, to partake in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Such Bal Bhavans may be incorporated as a part of school complexes/clusters if possible.
14. The school should be a point of celebration and honour for the whole community. The dignity of the school as an institution should be restored and important dates, such as the foundation day of the school, will be celebrated along with the community and the list of important alumni may be displayed and honoured. Furthermore, the un-utilized capacity of school infrastructure could be used to promote social, intellectual, and volunteer activities for the community and to promote social cohesion during non-teaching / schooling hours and may be used as a "Samajik Chetna Kendra".

#### **Benefits Of School Cluster**

##### **Opportunity for Peer Learning and Support**

The cluster provide an opportunity to share their innovations and experiences. Various platforms and events, like exposure visits, monthly meetings, and orientation programs

can be used for this purpose. The teachers who have specialized skills like music, dance, drama, art etc. can provide platform and support to other schools to improve themselves by implementing good practices and innovations.

##### **Schools of varied capacities complement each other**

In a cluster, similar inputs are given to all schools though over time some schools specialize in a particular area. This provide an opportunity for the schools to experiment, demonstrate in which they have excellence and at the same time to learn from others experiences. This sharing approach promotes mutual growth and quality learning. Each school will be observe as an example of particular ability.

##### **Sharing of resources among schools**

While implementing an idea of school cluster, some of the physical resources, such as grounds, laboratories, libraries and instruments required for other co-curricular activities can be easily shared. Human resources can also be shared for improving the quality of learning. This will help to maximize access to resources, which is crucial to schools that operate in isolated areas.

##### **Professional development of teacher**

Teachers working in school cluster got an opportunity to share their knowledge, experiences with other schools, got an opportunity to lead the programmes for students welfare, which help to develop leadership quality in teacher. Teacher can also get various trainings regarding teaching and learning strategies that enhance teacher's content and pedagogical knowledge.

##### **Increase collaboration**

All cluster schools have same goals and similar challenges. For achieving these goals and overcoming the challenges, schools in a cluster need to plan strategies and implement it in appropriate manner. For this teachers exchange their expertise, knowledge and ideas in school cluster. This increases collaboration among the teachers and students.

##### **Challenges In Implementing School Clusters In India**

##### **Desired Change in attitude, behaviour and practice**

Teachers in the schools have been teaching by using traditional methods. Students are also habitual for rote learning. In this system, it is very difficult for them to

even imagine that children can perform a greater role in the teaching-learning process. In these situations, it is challenge to change the attitude of students and teachers to bring them in a regular flow through cluster system.

#### **Recommendations:**

Cluster schools can start small activity based learning at small scale based on student's day today experiences, which will engage them in learning. Implementing group-learning activities can also help to develop confidence in the teachers that students can perform to the greater extent in the teaching learning process. If teacher teachers implement activity based or experiential learning for one or two subjects. Students will observe the difference and then scaling up activity based learning can takes place. This help student to change the attitude of students regarding teaching-learning process.

#### **Transformation of theories into practice**

If implementing partners in the cluster school do not have teachers or co-ordinators experienced in active teaching and learning methodologies. The cluster schools can face the problem even when the teachers are good at the conceptual level but lack practical experiences with innovative methodologies. The cluster program wants to promote. Problems arise when co-ordinators are unable to provide workable solutions due to lack of experiences.

#### **Recommendations**

Cluster co-ordinators need to attend all training programmes organised for teachers and school managers. It is also important that there is need to give opportunity to the trained teacher to implement their knowledge in classroom practices. CRS/ India successfully convinced schools to allow the school co-ordinators to teach in classes. Its positive impact was seen in Uttar Pradesh programme. (CRS/ India- 2009)

#### **Equip new teachers**

When a new teacher joins the cluster school programme it is very difficult for both the teacher and programme to adjust. For programme it is not easy to conduct training for a single teacher. It is difficult for teachers to understand his role and practices in the school, what is expected from him. As a result new teachers fails to cope up with situations and faces problems.

#### **Recommendations**

The cluster school management can develop orientation package and orient teachers on the cluster school programme before they join the school. Orientation programme should be best to equip the teachers to implement the new strategies and methodologies.

#### **Community Participation in the programme**

In Indian context most of schools interact with parents only during half-yearly or annual parent teacher meetings. Most of the times parent teacher meetings are limited to discussing the child's progress. Participation of community members in school activities is missing in present scenario.

#### **Recommendations**

School should take initiatives to participate parents and community members in the cluster programmes. School can organise social events to include parents and community members in the cluster school. School can get help for parents in various aspects as per their expertise like art, music, sports, extra-curricular activities and sometimes in teaching learning process also. School can appeal parents for funding also.

#### **To ensure sustainability**

Success of school cluster programmes depends on the co-ordination and co-operation of all the feeder and central school. It is also depends on the availability of external resources and funding. If it fails, school cluster model faces the challenge of sustainability.

#### **Recommendations**

School cluster can develop their own internal resource team for all type of support in a school cluster. The internal resource team should consist of the co-ordinators, cluster school principals, Ngo representatives, community members and researchers also. This core team will get training in which participants will get knowledge of innovative teaching-learning strategies. This team will work sustainably.

#### **Conclusion:**

For the effective implementation of the school cluster system in India for ease in administration and effective sharing of resources it is necessary to visualize and overcome the challenges before it. When a Proper model of school cluster will be used according to local requirements and geographical situations school cluster models will be prove effective for the enhancement of quality in education.

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