

During my visits to elementary schools across Karnataka, in my various capacities, I used to ask school children quite a standard question: 'What would you like to become, when you grow up?' The children would give me various types of answers – doctor, engineer, pilot, etc. But in cases, where the children said that they would like to become a teacher, it would come as a pleasant surprise to me. It told me many things about the school itself –

- A. Invariably it turned out that in such cases, the students were quite impressed with their teachers,
- B. Their school had a dedicated team of teachers,
- C. A good leadership was provided by the Head Teacher.
- D. Hence, one could conclude that the teachers and the Head Teacher had proved to be the 'role models' for the children to emulate.

This required a certain amount of dedication on the part of the Head Teacher, in order to provide effective leadership in the school and motivate her colleagues to perform to certain standards set by her. But such cases were also few and far between.

The quality of education provided by a school is also directly related to the role of the Head Teacher in providing effective leadership in the school. In fact, a survey conducted by Azim Premji Foundation in Learning Guarantee Program Schools of north-east Karnataka, showed that the presence/absence of the Head Teacher in the school made a significant difference to the quality of learning in the school.

Due to the states' efforts at Universal Elementary Education (UEE) over the years, many children who are entering government schools today are first generation learners from economically weaker sections, from urban slums, belonging to migrant populations, etc. In short, children of those communities who had no access to education previously are accessing government schools today. Are our schools, teachers and head teachers equipped to handle such children effectively and provide quality education to them?

In this context, let us discuss the role of the head teacher in providing effective leadership to the school and the limitations under which she has to play that role.

Areas Where a Head Teacher can Make a Real Impact

The Head Teacher can effectively provide a leadership role in several areas in the school:

- 1. Administration:** She prepares the Institutional Plan, Annual Academic Plan, and School Time Table with the help of other teachers of the school and implements the same efficiently.
- 2. Academic supervision and motivating of the teachers:** She also acts as an internal academic supervisor of the academic work of all the teachers of the school. She has to supervise the 'Annual Programme of work' and 'Weekly Lesson Plans' prepared by all the teachers of the school. She also has to effectively supervise classroom teaching of all the teachers and provide the much needed professional and resource support. Another important task of the Head Teacher is to supervise the conduct of tests and examinations, and timely declaration of results of students. This will help in monitoring the achievement levels of children and establishing effective remedial measures to help slow learners.
- 3. Discipline:** In order to provide an effective leadership role, she has to enforce discipline in the school. She has to be punctual in attending to the various duties of the school. In her administrative capacity she has to monitor the attendance of both students and teachers on a regular basis.
- 4. Efficient management of existing facilities in the school:** This includes efficient use of existing infrastructural facilities, effective staff management, and other available resources –laboratory, library, TLM, teachers' guides, sports and play materials, etc.
- 5. Effective Liaison with the Local community:** She interacts with the community through 'School Management Committee' meetings. She also uses community resources effectively for the development of the school,
- 6. Supervision of the extra-curricular activities organized by the school** – organization of sports,



games, cultural activities, school exhibition, observance of national and other important days, annual tour and visits of students to places of academic, cultural and historical interest, participation of school students in various types of competitions conducted at different levels, etc. – the Head Teacher plays a crucial role in all these activities.

Factors Influencing The Head Teacher To Adopt A 'Leadership Role'

However, the ability of the Head Teacher to take on an effective leadership role in the school depends on a host of factors – her age, gender, qualification, experience, professional training, seniority over other teachers in the school, size of the school, size of each class, number of classes which come under the multi-grade category, the ability to effectively manage various incentive schemes including the mid-day meal programme, and the amount of support she gets from her colleagues in the school and the supervisory staff like the Cluster Resource Person (CRC), the Block Resource Coordinators (BRC) and others at the Block level. Besides her leadership role is also limited by the physical, human and academic resources available to him within the school.

Limitations For A Government School Head Teacher

While discussing the leadership role of a Head Teacher, we should consider the significant differences (and also limitations) that exist in the roles played between government and private school head teachers. In a private school, there is little community (or even governmental) interference in the working of the school and the question of discipline (both among teachers and students) is usually taken for granted.

But not so in a government school, where the Head Teacher has to negotiate with all her skills in these matters – treading cautiously with community leaders as well as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and the perennial problem of maintaining discipline at both student and teacher levels. There is also the other important issue of maintaining cordial relationship with all the (government) supervisory staff right from CRP to the Block level education officer.

Besides, a government school Head Teacher faces a whole lot of issues, which are not faced in private schools –

- (i) Make significant efforts to bring out-of-school children back to school.
- (ii) To be constantly on the lookout for drop-outs and

continuously interact with the parents of such children to minimize the prevalence of drop-outs.

(iii) To efficiently handle all incentive schemes, so that there are no complaints from parents and supervisory staff in this regard.

(iv) Multi-grade situations which are prevalent in most of the government schools today do not give much lee way or freedom for the Head Teachers either to innovate or try new strategies academically.

(v) Achievement of gender parity among children, which is a challenge especially in rural areas and urban slums,

(vi) Supervision of mid-day meal programme on a daily basis.

(vii) Ability to work with teachers who have varied qualifications, training, experience, backgrounds, and who have varying levels of knowledge of content and pedagogy.

(viii) Tackling various equity related issues and walk a tight rope so that she is not alienated either by own colleagues or by the local community.

There are also various other factors which act as limitations for Head Teachers in providing effective leadership role in a government school:

a) Systemic Factors:

(i) Large scale expansion of primary education facilities by respective state governments, without addressing quality concerns,

(ii) Inefficient transfer policy which takes into consideration the needs of teachers but not those of schools,

(iii) Existence of vacancies in the school for long duration,

(iv) improper filling up of vacancies by the authorities,

(v) Overburdening of Head Teachers with distribution of several incentives,

(vi) Mass recruitment of teachers and low achievers opting for teachers' jobs,

(vii) Poor and inadequate infrastructure facilities in the school,

(viii) Lack of adequate academic resources within the school,

(ix) Frequent summoning of head teachers to Block offices

for collection of incentives, collection of data, meetings, etc.

(x) A high Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) and consequently a bigger class size,

(xi) The mid-day meal scheme in several states has put severe strain on the professional work of the head teachers

(xii) Use of Head Teachers in several non-academic and non-departmental activities – revision of voters lists, census, all types of elections, - which consume a lot of academic time and force the head teachers to neglect school work.

b) Professional/Academic Factors

(i) Lack of professionalism by Head Teachers in the discharge of their duties,

(ii) lack of proper training of Head Teachers in school leadership,

(iii) Poor academic support from the supervisory staff.

(iv) Low quality of textbooks, and Teaching learning material (TLM)

(v) Inadequate teacher resource materials,

(vi) No detention policy at the elementary stage which is a disincentive for children to learn,

(vii) Lack of motivated teachers,

(viii) Multi-grade teaching is a major factor, especially in a majority of government lower primary schools, as both the Head Teacher and other teachers will have to strive to maintain discipline - sidelining other academic activities.

(ix) Teacher absence which is a major hindrance in the effective functioning of schools,

(x) Size of the school – a smaller school has got obvious advantages,

(xi) Size of the Class – a larger class means that students get individual attention for shorter duration,

C) Social Factors

(i) Indifference of the local community towards the affairs of the school,

(ii) Inability of the community to provide requisite facilities in the school,

(iii) Local leaders sending their children to private schools and

hence indifferent to the affairs of the government school,

(iv) Too much interference in school affairs by local leaders,

(v) Local level politics which usually hinders the efficient functioning of the school,

(vi) Functionally non-existent school management committees.

In the current scenario, there are also several other factors which act as disincentives for a Head Teacher to perform his leadership role effectively:

1. In several states, there is no separate cadre of Head Teachers in primary schools, and the senior most teacher in the school, is designated as the Head Teacher. This is also true in the case of smaller schools in almost all states (as well as, in all lower primary schools in all states) where the senior most teacher is simply designated as the Head Teacher.

2. When a senior teacher, for some reason, declines to work as a Head Teacher, then invariably the mantle falls on a junior teacher who cannot perform the role of the Head Teacher effectively, given the various constraints under which she has to work.

3. In some states, where the Head Teacher's post exists, the ratio of the head teacher to regular teachers is so small, that only some of them get promoted on seniority basis, that too, at the fag end of their service, when they may be having only a few years or a few months to retire. In such cases, they would like to retire peacefully, and not worry about improvement of the school.

Finally, I feel that it is for the departmental supervisory staff to instill a sense of confidence in the Head Teachers, motivate and train them to perform their leadership role effectively in the school.

Looking back at the vintage 60's and 70's, when there was no element of compulsion of schooling, I would put the number of dedicated Head Teachers at the elementary level at more than 70%. Even without professional training, they were performing admirably due to their scholarship, seniority and respect that they commanded among their colleagues and students.

Perhaps, I can also say the same thing about the performance of a majority of students, who at the primary class 5 level, could then fluently read, write and perform

basic mathematical operations. This percentage has declined considerably in recent years due to factors already discussed.

I feel the role of Head Teachers has also been a critical factor in this regard.

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