



FAULT LINES IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TWO INDIAN STATES

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Key Highlights

- A key structural problem in both states was the lack of academic organizations to support schools for secondary education.
- Specialists to analyze and strategize the needs for vulnerable children were generally not recruited.
- The personnel management policies created an adverse incentive structure.
- Organizational processes were based on centralization and hierarchy, while there was little focus on analysis and knowledge generation.
- Inadequate institutional capacity to support schools academically was manifest in a general absence of discourse on learning issues among school administrators and teacher educators.
- The inadequacy of human resources, combined with patronage and rent-seeking, reduced that capacity to regulate commercial interests.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A growing body of work highlights the importance of adequate 'state capacity' to promote socio-economic development. In parallel, some scholars of public administration have focussed on 'new public service', with the goal of creating in citizen-centric public institutions of integrity and responsiveness. In this context, the paper analyses governing and supporting organizations for secondary education in two Indian states, Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Rajasthan. The analysis is based on a study, conducted in 2018-19, of state policy, a scrutiny of 20 organizations at the state, district and sub-district level and interviews with 57 officials, teacher educators, teacher union leaders and non-government organization representatives (Ref. Table).

At this juncture, secondary education is a critical issue for India, as employment opportunities are shifting from unskilled to skilled work. Moreover, investment in elementary education since the mid-1990s, has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of children who are ready to access secondary education. Additionally, high quality secondary education can address social inequity.

However, the status of secondary education is unsatisfactory. At this stage, school enrolment declines, drop-out rates increase and learning levels are very poor. Moreover, girls begin to trail boys and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students trail general category students. Existing government programmes to establish more schools, recruit more teachers and create better infrastructure are essential. However, as the experience of elementary education has shown, to provide high quality schools, it is equally important to improve management and pedagogic practices, for which the quality of institutions is critical.

The study showed that an important difference between the two states was that in Rajasthan, the policy was to establish integrated schools for classes 1 to 12, with a single department for school education, but in AP, there were separate intermediate colleges for



classes 11 and 12, governed by different departments. Both states had organizations to perform five broad roles, i.e., offices of commissioner or director at the state level, along with district and sub-district offices, for school administration; offices for programme implementation at the state and district level; State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) at the state, and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) at the district level for academic support; examinations boards to conduct examinations; and state open school societies, working through resource centres in secondary schools, for educating drop-outs.

The institutional design had three important shortcomings. One, the academic support structure for secondary education, to prepare the curriculum, make textbooks, and train teachers was patchy. In AP, SCERT was the leading organization for classes 1 to 10, but there was no clear academic support structure for classes 11 and 12. The curricula and textbooks were prepared by the Board of Intermediate Education, while the State Institute of Vocational Education was responsible for teacher training. Consequently, intermediate college teachers had not been trained since 2015. Moreover, DIETs did not train secondary school teachers and ad hoc arrangements were made. In Rajasthan, SCERT and DIETs were not involved in secondary education. The curricula and textbooks

were prepared by the Board of Secondary Education, and teacher training was conducted by identified teacher training colleges. Training initiatives were inadequate. Further, while Rajasthan had established a State Institute of Educational Management (SIEMAT), that trained educational administrators regularly, there was no such institute in AP, and training of educational administrators was sporadic.

Two, there was inadequate organizational support at the grassroots. In AP, below the district, there were no organizations to support intermediate education. To supervise high schools up to class 10, there were Deputy Education Officers at the sub-division level. In contrast, in Rajasthan, an integrated office of the Chief Block Education Officer was responsible for all schools. Moreover, principals of higher secondary schools, established in every Gram Panchayat, had been declared Panchayat Education Officers (PEOs) and mandated to supervise all the schools within the Panchayat. In neither state did Panchayats play a significant role in secondary education.

Three, there was excessive splitting of roles across organizations. In AP, the problem was acute. As intermediate education comprised only two classes, few supportive administrative and academic structures could be set up. In both states, programme support and administrative structures were

separate. However, some activities, such as supervision of schools were common, and in some organizations, there was role confusion.

The personnel structure was characterized by lack of expertise. Neither state recruited specialists in pedagogic areas, such as language, math or science teaching, textbook formulation, achievement testing, or any researchers. Instead, teacher training college lecturers and school teachers were posted to SCERTs and DIETs. The examination boards, with the responsibility of assessing several million students, were largely manned by clerks. Specialists to analyse and strategize for the needs for vulnerable children were not recruited, except in the case of children with special needs. In AP, the open school was staffed with teacher training college lecturers from and in Rajasthan with education department officials. None had training or experience in educating school drop-outs.

In both states, at the very top administrative posts, generalist administrators were posted. For other administrative posts, in AP, educational administrators were recruited specially and formed a 'state education service', for classes 1 to 10. For intermediate education in AP, and in Rajasthan, no educational administrators were recruited, and teachers were promoted to administrative posts. Though in both states, teachers formed the largest

Table: Number of Organizations Studied and Interviews Conducted

Level	AP		Rajasthan	
	Number of Organizations Studied	Number of Interviews Conducted	Number of Organizations Studied	Number of Interviews Conducted
State	4	16	6	17
District	4	7	4	8
Sub-district	1	3	2	6
Total	9	26	11	31



share of government employees, there were no personnel management experts in the education departments. Further, though both states attempted to promote community participation, neither hired experts in community mobilization and communication. In SIEMAT in Rajasthan, there were no experts in management, finance, community relations, etc. In addition, in AP, even the designated manpower was not available as recruitments had come to a halt because of a 30 years long court case. In Rajasthan, there were a large number of vacancies in academic institutions.

Several field level organizations along with a lack of experts, had very scanty staff. In AP, though the District Education Office was responsible for programme implementation and academic issues for classes 9 and 10, it had no academic personnel, or experts in community communication, gender and marginalized groups. Below the district, the Deputy Education Officer's office, charged with supervising classes 9 and 10, had merely one officer. District offices for intermediate education had one or two officials, or even one part time official. In Rajasthan, district administrative and programme implementation offices were manned by school principals and teachers. However, at the sub-district level, resource persons, selected from among teachers had been provided for academic support.

The personnel management policies created an adverse incentive structure. Promotions were slow and seniority based. Postings were ad hoc, not based on expertise or interest. Instead, political patronage played a critical

role, especially in Rajasthan, though in AP, at junior levels, there was transparent system for postings, but at senior levels, politics was important. Consequently, the two states were unable to use the talents that they had within the system. Moreover, neither state provided opportunities for professional development to teacher educators and senior-most managers.

There was a high degree of centralization, leaving little scope for context-specific activities. State policies were guided by national programmes, as substantial funds came from central government schemes. In both states, state governments controlled human resources tightly, determining salaries, promotions, postings etc. There was little institutional autonomy. Not only were curricula, textbooks etc. developed at the state level, but matters such as the academic calendar and school timetable were prescribed at the state level too. Hierarchy was emphasized and academic organizations were placed under the supervision of administrators. There was emphasis on monitoring and discipline, rather than facilitating teachers.

Given the lack of appropriate expertise, neither state conducted research or analysis on issues such as what teaching strategies worked best, which children had learning difficulties, etc. Instead, information generated was oriented towards managing, accounting and reporting. Both states focussed on using digital technology, and had created online databases. In AP, medical cases, transfers etc. could be done online, and an online platform and online courses to enable the

professional development of teachers had been created. However, excessive enthusiasm about technology meant that it was sometimes rolled out hastily, and functioned poorly. Further, the use of technology gave an appearance of modernization and efficiency, but did not compensate for the lack of research and analysis on core issues. Moreover, in an already over-centralized system, technology had been used to centralize further through more rigorous monitoring.

There was political interference in day-to-day working. In Rajasthan, officials reported that action against errant teachers was often followed by political pressure to withdraw. Moreover, with a change of government, textbooks had been revised, leading to intense media and public criticism. In AP, the most important manifestation of political patronage was that chains of private schools, known as 'corporate schools', focussed on preparing students for entrance examinations to engineering colleges, dominated the education scenario at the secondary stage. These schools flouted pedagogic principles and fleeced people. Though officials were aware of these questionable practices, they said that they could not do anything, as the school management exercised considerable influence at the very top levels of government.

The above institutional structure, human resources and working processes resulted in fault-lines in the system that constrained it in achieving goals. One, the dearth of analysis and emphasis on hierarchy eroded the capacity for logical decisions. Consequently, states could be influenced easily by ideas that were not

necessarily appropriate, especially by powerful actors. For instance, in Rajasthan, administrative reforms had been undertaken to integrate schools, but pedagogic reforms were missing, as changes in curricula and textbooks were guided by politics. The outcome was an improved structure without better pedagogy.

Two, the central goal, i.e., learning, remained at the periphery because of lack of expertise. For example, there was a general absence of discourse on learning issues among school administrators and teacher educators. When asked to describe characteristics of an ideal school or ideal teacher, they mentioned non-pedagogic issues a significant number of times. The curriculum structure simply reflected the Gol curriculum, and so on.

Three, the space for substantive work was reduced. The employee motivation structure, produced by a combination of slow, seniority-based promotions and patronage-based postings, was skewed. Employees gained little by working hard. Centralization meant that officials could not respond to contextual needs or use resources optimally. Officials focussed on tasks that were monitored closely from the top, rather than those that were the most productive. Moreover, there were frequent changes in leadership, which led to discontinuities in work.

Four, commercial interests often became dominant, as inadequate human resources, combined with patronage and rent-seeking, reduced that capacity to regulate commercial interests. This was visible in a large

number of dubious private 'teacher training' colleges in both states. In AP, as noted above, corporate schools followed questionable practices.

Finally, the needs of underprivileged children were addressed only partially. Strategies were focussed on providing physical access to schools, though in AP, at the intermediate college stage, even this was not provided, and mitigating the cost of schooling, by providing free textbooks, scholarships etc. Learning and motivational issues faced by educationally marginalized children were not addressed, because these were not understood and analysed.

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