

Role and Challenges of Assistant Block Resource Coordinator in Inclusive Education: In the Context of Haryana (India)

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Abstract

India's government schools educate the widest range of students, including children with special needs and children from lower socio-economic classes of different genders, castes, and religions, through inclusive education. Government schools strive to improve students' outcomes by offering resources such as study materials, innovative pedagogies, strategies, and infrastructure. To monitor the schemes, teaching methods, and learning environment for children, the Indian government introduced the Cluster Resource Coordinator (CRC) concept in schools under the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) in 1994. In the state of Haryana, CRC offers its services at the block level, with the Block Resource Person/Coordinator (BRP/BRC) and the Assistant Block Resource Coordinator (ABRC) serving in this capacity. This study aims to determine the role and challenges faced by assistant block resource coordinators.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Government school, Assistant Block Resource Coordinator, Challenges

1.0 Introduction

The learning crisis in India can be attributed to three factors: inadequate learning standards, significant differences in students' learning abilities, and disparities in learning among students from diverse social backgrounds (NEP 2020). After independence, the Indian government periodically implemented policies, programs, and acts to cater to socio-economic disparities and make education accessible for everyone. In 1964, the Kothari Commission emphasized equitable education for all, and the government should spend 6% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on the education system (Johansson, 2021). There was a milestone in 1971, when the Indian government started "Integrated Education for Disabled Children" (IEDC), which emphasized the composite approach of special education and general education. In spite of all these facilities, IEDC met with limited success; only somewhat more than 100 thousand children with disabilities have been covered; however, it was successful in raising awareness of the importance of integrating all types of children in the mainstream. In 1986, the National Policy on Education noted IEDC facts and focused on making schools inclusive (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007). The NPE 1986 emphasized distance and open learning opportunities for all major target groups—disadvantaged classes, women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, the adult working class, etc.—and formulated the concept of inclusive education (Sanjeev & Kumar 2007). The government

implemented two noteworthy programs that prioritized local communities in school administration and child welfare: the District Primary Education Programme of 1994 (DPEP) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan of 2001 (SSA), which sparked community involvement and the goal of universalizing education (Narwana, K. 2015). The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) focuses on providing inclusive education for children. This comprehensive policy addresses every facet of children's development for the better, including increased community involvement, infrastructure accessible to students with and without special needs, knowledgeable and resourceful faculty who come up with creative ideas that boost students' interests in learning, and appropriate parental and teacher supervision that lessens dropout rates and other antisocial behaviour (Bhatt, 2023). While government schools in India are well-known for teaching the general public, they guarantee that every child in the age range of six to eighteen receives education. Proper implementation of education policies is necessary, as is making sure that education reaches everyone at the local level.

1.1 Assistant Block Resource Coordinator

The Indian government periodically implemented policies, programmes, and acts to cater to inequality, exclusivity, and socio-economic disparities in the education sector and make education accessible for everyone (Gohain, 2024). There is requisite active participation and support from the community, parents, and school management to take care of children's growth and address socio-economic disparities. The government implemented noteworthy programs that prioritised local communities in school administration and child welfare: the District Primary Education Programme of 1994 (DPEP), which sparked community involvement and the goal of universalizing education (Narwana, 2015). This can be achieved through creative and innovative teaching methods, as well as the active involvement of stakeholders. And this active participation of stakeholders could be possible through strict supervision, monitoring, and assessment, so the central government undertook an audacious step to establish Assistant Block Resource Coordinator (ABRC) and Cluster Resource Coordinator (CRC) at the district and block level under the DPEP 1994–95 in a phased manner. It was later extended through SSA 2001, and at present, this program continues through SSA 2018. ABRC's main focus is to provide training to teachers and support to improve their teaching practices; they also organize workshops, training sessions, and seminars to enhance teachers' pedagogy and teaching methods, skills, and knowledge in different areas (Narwana, K. 2015). Despite its success, ABRC faces various challenges in its mission to empower rural communities: a lack of adequate infrastructure, such as centres, libraries, and resources in rural areas; budget constraints, which restrict its ability to provide necessary training and support to teachers; identification of children's issues; and visits to remote areas. There is a need to perform an active role in all development activities of children and to understand behaviour, emotions, problem-solving, etiquette, psychosocial issues, family and school environment problems, etc. In an inclusive school, children belong to diverse backgrounds, and they face problems related to disabilities, linguistic, caste, colour, capability, and financial disparities. Children's distractions and difficulties that they encounter in school are caused by poor parenting, ignorance, groupism, stressful environments, domestic violence, and alcoholic environments; these are contributing factors in increasing absenteeism, dropout rates, substance use, and social crime (Harikrishnan & Sailo, 2020). There is a requisite to concentrate on other aspects that influence children's fastest growing age because overall child development cannot be achieved solely through infrastructure and other resources.

2.1 Review Literature

According to **Harikrishan & Sailo (2020)**, school-age children encounter difficulties on a personal, domestic, and educational level. Children have benefited greatly from their parents and teachers, who play a significant role in their school lives. Parents and teachers revealed experiences irrespectively that their children's bad study habits led to low self-esteem and subpar performance, as well as social media addiction, being stubborn, disrespecting elders, and comparing themselves to others, and according to teachers, these things occur as a result of poor parenting, poverty, labour-intensive jobs, ignorance, stressful home environments, domestic violence, and alcoholism. **Makhwana (2022)** explained that the inclusive education journey in India began with the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in 1974, followed by policies such as the National Policy on Education (1986), the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), and the Right to Education Act (2009), all of which aim to integrate children with disabilities into regular schools. However, challenges remain, such as a lack of awareness, insufficient teacher training, rigid curricula, inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, peer rejection, and poor collaboration among agencies. **Narwna (2015)** asserts that effective community participation necessitates context-sensitive mechanisms, enhanced training, and authentic empowerment of marginalized voices, rather than the adoption of global models without local adaptation. For instance, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) often fail to adapt to local realities, but the assistant block resource coordinator facilitates as a bridge in the scheme's implementation.

2.2 Research Gap

This study focuses on the ABRC's role and challenges in their service; there is a dearth of literature related to this context. It is challenging to locate relevant literature for this study; however, this current study highlights the ABRCs and their services in the identification of major social issues and gaps between children and teacher relationships, school and community relationships, and other areas of intervention.

3.1 Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and based on the use of secondary data to ascertain the role of ABRCs in government schools. The study uses secondary data obtained from books, journals, and websites on the internet. This study is based on the state of Haryana, which surrounds Delhi on three sides, forming the northern, western, and southern borders of the capital. The literacy rate in Haryana has seen an upward trend of 76.64 percent, and male literacy stands at 85.38 percent, while female literacy is at 66.77 percent (2011 Census). Despite having a higher unemployment rate than the national average, Haryana is one of India's most prosperous states and significantly contributes to the GDP. The Haryana government aims to implement the NEP 2020 by 2025 to achieve the 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio for schooling by 2030, but it is challenging to achieve that target due to the high dropout rates that are currently in place and the lesser contribution of all stakeholders.

4.0 Role of Assistant Block Resource Coordinator

The Assistant Block Coordinator (ABC) plays a crucial role in strengthening the functioning of schools at the block level. They act as a supportive link between schools and the Block Resource Centre (BRC), ensuring that educational policies, programs, academic standards, and administrative tasks are effectively implemented. Their work improves the quality of teaching–learning processes, monitoring, and resource utilization in all schools under the block.

4.1 Academic Support to Teachers

Delivers on-site academic assistance to educators in lesson planning, utilizing teaching-learning resources,

and implementing child-centered instructional methods. Exhibits exemplary lessons and instructs educators in activity-oriented, competency-driven, and experiential learning methodologies. Assists educators in comprehending curriculum modifications, educational objectives, and evaluation trends.

4.2 Monitoring and Supervision of Schools

ABRCs conduct regular school visits to observe inclusive classrooms, confirm attendance, evaluate classroom processes, assess teacher performance, and also assist in identifying areas of weakness in the teaching-learning process and offer recommendations for improvement.

4.3 Teacher Professional Development

ABRCs are designated as Master Trainers (MT) and undergo training in pedagogical techniques and the application of ICT in education prior to facilitating and assisting in-service teacher training programs. The position also entails organizing exposure visits, peer learning groups, workshops, and professional learning communities. They ensure that teachers are kept up-to-date on new teaching strategies, NEP 2020 guidelines, ICT tools, and inclusive practices.

4.4 Implementation of Government Schemes

ABRCs are crucial in ensuring the effective implementation of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan 2018, the RTE (Right to Education) Act 2009, and other educational initiatives such as the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program, provision of free uniforms and textbooks, scholarships, and support for inclusive education and the proper use of funds for school improvements, libraries, sports equipment, and small repairs.

4.5 Student Learning and Assessment Support

They advocate for the adoption of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) or competency-based assessment methodologies. Quarterly examinations were administered in grades 1 to 3 to assess the development of foundational learning and numeracy skills. They monitor educational outcomes, identify underperforming students, and create remedial instructional strategies for educators, while also assisting in the execution of baseline, formative, and summative assessments.

4.6 Data Collection, Documentation and Reporting

ABRCs/CRCs are significantly more aligned with the administration than the educators. They submitted aggregated data on school enrollment, attendance, teacher capacity, infrastructure, and educational indicators. They generate monthly, quarterly, and annual reports for district education offices, which facilitate record-keeping for planning and monitoring under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan 2018.

4.7 Ensuring Inclusive Education

ABRCs conduct surveys and home visits with teachers to identify absenteeism, dropouts, and children with special needs. The ABRCs advocate for inclusive educational practices, facilitate accessible infrastructure, and collaborate with special educators to deliver suitable aids, devices, therapies, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for Children With Special Needs (CWSN).

4.8 Strengthening School Infrastructure

ABRCs in their compiled reports provide data concerning the repair and maintenance of school infrastructure, including buildings, toilets, ramps, drinking water facilities, and boundary walls, and are capable of advocating for funding. They can collaborate with the School Management Committee (SMC) to comprehend and utilize grants.

4.9 Coordination with Stakeholders

ABRCs serve as a conduit among schools, Block Resource Centres, District Education Offices (DEO), community members, NGOs, and local institutions to facilitate effective coordination for educational initiatives, events, and school development activities.

4.10 Community Mobilisation and Parent Engagement

Teachers' principal responsibility is facilitating student learning; however, they are encumbered by excessive duties and insufficient community mobilization and parental involvement. ABRCs can enhance the involvement of SMCs and parents in education, enrollment, consistent attendance, gender equality, and inclusive practices.

4.11 Administrative Support

ABRCs provide assistance in the implementation of government schemes, Teacher Learning Material (TLM), and making UDISE (Unified District Information for School Education) reports. They can also advocate for the needs of teachers in school.

4.12 Monitoring Student Welfare Programs

The government focuses on nutritious food through the midday meal and monitors healthy nutrition and hygiene by ABRCs in every school, and reports are submitted on the block level. Facilitates health assessments in schools and counseling services and monitors at-risk children, dropouts, and socially disadvantaged students.

4.13 Promoting ICT and Digital Learning

ABRCs facilitate data entry in educational institutions, help educators for grades 1-3 upload their daily lesson plans online, and utilize animated videos to enhance digital learning for primary students.

5.0 Challenges Faced by Assistant Block Coordinators in the School Setting

ABRCs encounter numerous operational, administrative, and contextual obstacles that influence the efficacy and significance of their efforts. These challenges stem from constrained resources, excessive workload, coordination difficulties, and structural deficiencies within the education system.

5.1 Heavy Workload and Multiple Responsibilities

ABRCs frequently manage a diverse array of responsibilities: academic oversight, data acquisition, scheme implementation, educator assistance, reporting, supervision of mid-day meals, and activities related to inclusive education. This multitasking hampers their ability to concentrate thoroughly on academic support or school enhancement.

5.2 Inadequate Staff and Role Overlapping

In Haryana, numerous blocks are understaffed, resulting in ABRCs assuming responsibilities designated for Block Coordinators, Cluster Resource Coordinators, and occasionally administrative clerks. The conflation of roles results in ambiguity and diminished efficiency.

5.3 Lack of Adequate Training

ABRCs often receive insufficient training in areas such as NEP 2020 (National Education Policy) reforms, ICT (Information Communication and Technology) integration in education, implementation of inclusive education, monitoring tools for teachers and students, and pedagogical practices for different teaching. Without proper skill development, it becomes difficult to support teachers effectively.

5.4 Transportation and Mobility Issues

Every day, ABRCs must make several school visits in isolated and rural locations. Inadequate road connectivity, absence of official vehicles, and elevated travel costs impose significant limitations. This impacts the frequency and quality of school visits.

5.5 Excessive Documentation and Reporting Burden

ABRCs allocate significant time to the preparation of monthly reports, survey data, school performance reports, assessment data, and infrastructure status reports. Academic mentoring and classroom observations suffer as a result of the heavy workload associated with documentation.

5.6 Limited Resources and Infrastructure

Numerous ABRCs are deficient in fundamental amenities such as computers, internet connectivity, training resources, and operational office space. They faced challenges in coordinating teacher training and managing accurate data in the absence of these vital resources.

5.7 Resistance from Teachers

Teachers may resist or refuse to cooperate if they perceive ABRCs' monitoring as inspection rather than assistance. Teachers may be reluctant to implement new pedagogical strategies or reforms recommended by ABRCs if they are overworked.

5.8 Lack of Clarity in Job Role

Due to insufficient training, many ABRCs lack clarity about their services and indulge in extra work without self-resistance. Disparities in duties among blocks lead to misunderstandings regarding fundamental standards, priorities, and performance metrics.

5.9 Administrative Interference and Political Pressure

ABRCs oversee UDISE Plus report data and school performance reports, and they frequently encounter interference from local administrators or political organizations. Pressure to show inflated enrolment numbers, infrastructure status, or "paper progress" affects their independence and accuracy of reporting. Their independence and reporting accuracy are impacted by pressure to display inflated enrollment figures, infrastructure status, or "paper progress."

5.10 Insufficiency in Addressing CWSN Issues

ABRCs lack the necessary skills to identify the needs and issues of children with special needs (CWSN). The scarcity of specialized educators, insufficient assistive technology, and inadequate parental awareness hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. During visits, ABRCs assess the conditions and requirements of CWSN and commence the organization of their needs.

5.11 Monitoring Numerous Schools with Limited Time

One ABRC oversees multiple schools within a designated block. They are unable to provide each school with the proper attention due to time constraints. Fast visits raise the possibility of falsified reports and lower the quality of observation and feedback.

5.12 Challenges in Community Mobilisation

ABRCs are instrumental in engaging parents, SMCs, and the community. Low literacy rates, societal taboos, and parental disinterest hinder community engagement, particularly in rural and marginalised regions, creating difficulty in community mobilisation.

5.13 Technological Challenges

ABRCs faced difficulty in data entry due to low internet connectivity, and also difficulty in using online monitoring apps or portals affects timely data submission. Occasionally, ABRCs lack adequate technical training and encounter difficulties in delivering ICT support to educators.

5.14 Psychological and Work Stress

An excessive workload, constant travel, pressure from superiors, and insufficient support can result in stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. This impacts their motivation and performance.

6.0 Conclusion

The ABRCs serve a diverse function in academic improvement, educator assistance, oversight, scheme execution, community engagement, and the promotion of inclusive and equitable education. Their efforts guarantee the effective implementation of state or national policies at the school level, thereby enhancing educational quality and student achievement. ABRCs encounter numerous challenges stemming from systemic issues, insufficient resources, role overload, and administrative limitations. Confronting these challenges necessitates explicit role delineation, robust institutional backing, enhanced transportation infrastructure, sufficient training, advanced digital capabilities, and minimised bureaucratic documentation. Enhancing the ABRC's services is crucial for elevating the overall quality of the education system and community and teacher acceptance at the grassroots level.

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