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Innovations as a Tool for Improving Governance of Public Education System Insights and Evidences from the Field

Kumar Suresh
V. Sucharita



National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi-110016, INDIA

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V. Sucharita**



National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi - 110016
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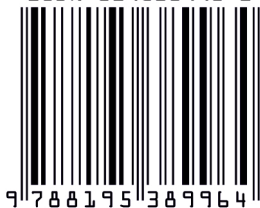
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This paper is an outcome of the research on Innovation and Good Practices in Educational Administration sponsored by NIEPA. The data mirrors the diversity of cases of innovations in educational administration at district and sub-district levels across the country. The innovative initiatives taken by the district and block education officers to improve the public system of education and various aspects of educational administration form the basis of data and data analysis. Field visits to some of the districts and blocks for validating the cases of Innovation and Good Practices in Educational Administration have provided ground-level insights and understanding of nuances of the context, initiatives and impact of innovations on improving the educational administration system. The data is supplemented with in-depth interviews and discussions with the education officers. An empirically grounded research paper on this critical theme was made possible with the support of the education officers. Besides being key respondents, the education officers have been instrumental in linking us with the field which, in turn, served as an important resource for field-level insights. We sincerely thank all the officers for the opportunity they have provided us to study the cases of their innovative initiatives. Their facilitative role in visits to the concerned districts and blocks is highly appreciated. Our sincere thanks to the State Authorities for their support and cooperation in linking us with the district and block-level education officers who work at the grassroots levels.

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Innovations as a Tool for Improving Governance of Public Education System Insights and Evidences from the Field

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Abstract

Innovations in educational administration can be considered as one of the central mechanisms to ensure the efficiency of the educational system. Administration, by its definitional construct and characteristics, is rule-bound and follows rationalisation of the system. In such a situation, the concept of innovation may look as a paradox. However, innovation in educational administration, firstly, does not challenge the systemic and well-defined rules and procedures, and secondly, attempts to bring some changes at the structural and functional level which are coherent and congruent with the existing administrative structures and procedures.

Against this backdrop, some cases related to innovations in educational administration are discussed to understand the dynamics and modus operandi of changes brought by the innovators who are primarily government officials in their respective state education department. While some innovations had far-reaching implications in enhancing the efficiency of the system, others might appear miniscule but had positive impact on the functioning of the system. Nevertheless, the innovations, however small they appear, are emanating from the bureaucratic environment where introducing change is a daunting task. The administrators are trying to bring change by working relentlessly within the larger framework of well-established norms and procedures.

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1. Introduction

The term ‘Innovation’ is undoubtedly a catchphrase in different sectors and is often used to improve the efficiency and productivity of any particular sector. Despite its ubiquity, the term is difficult to define as it means different things to different people and there is no consensus on what constitutes an ‘innovation’. One of the earliest interpretations of the term was put forth by Schumpeter (1934) wherein he focused on the role of innovation in social and economic development and defined innovations as new combinations of existing resources - new products, new methods of production, new sources of supply, exploitation of new markets and new ways to organise business. As rightly pointed out by Kahn (2018), to truly manifest innovation and reap its benefits, one must recognise that innovation entails three different things: innovation is an outcome, innovation is a process, and innovation is a mindset. Nevertheless, there is a common agreement that innovation requires change in the existing system and contributes positively towards the functioning of any organisation. It is a departure from current practice—deliberate or not, originating in or outside of practice, which is novel (Cohen and Ball, 2007).

Furthermore, the context in which an innovation is perceived and implemented also varies as the challenges in introducing an innovation in a private sector are entirely different from that of a public sector. In addition, the very nature of innovation also undergoes change as we move from business models to grassroots level interventions in public systems. While the former is related to the creation of new products, markets and technology, the latter is more directed towards improvement of the system. Nonetheless, the scale of the innovation need not always be of a very wide magnitude. Within the public system, an officer needs to introduce a change amidst the environment of well-defined rules and regulations, hierarchical structure and the deeply entrenched bureaucracy. Thus, even a small incremental change within the public system goes a long way in enhancing the efficiency of the system.

In its broadest sense, Sullivan and Dooley (2009) define innovation as the process of making changes, either radical or incremental, in organisations

(both profit or non-profit) by introducing something new. They further highlight that it can happen at all levels in an organisation, from management teams to departments and even to the level of the individual. Within the context of education, innovation is an inescapable feature of contemporary educational policy agendas that have reform, improvement and professional development at their core (Towndrow et al, 2010).

The centrality of innovations has been highlighted in the National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020) as well wherein encouraging innovation and out-of-the-box ideas through autonomy, good governance, and empowerment has been mentioned as one important fundamental principle guiding education system at large. Innovations in teaching-learning process, management of school complexes, governance of the school education system are some of the key areas mentioned in the policy document which can bring transformation within the school system.

Nevertheless, there are many instances in which innovation is used as a substitute of change. There is a need to understand the nuances of innovation and how it is different from the idea of change. This understanding of innovation may help us to locate the context and modus operandi of any intervention in the public system and how it influences the broader framework of change. Change is a constantly occurring phenomenon. It is the process through which structures and institutions are reconstructed, undergoing a transformation. Change takes place when processes, patterns, interactions, or organisations encounter modifications from their everyday functioning. There are some structural changes whereas some are the functional ones. Innovation is a mechanism or an agent of change in the institution or organisation. It is a planned change in the system for making it more efficient and productive. In fact, innovations in public institution or organisation are brought as per the established norms and it ensures better functioning of the system.

Innovation is considered as a tool of organisational change which aims to bring new practices and norms for maintaining the efficiency and productivity of the system. Precisely speaking, the key difference between change and innovation is that change is the difference in the state of affairs related to different points of time whereas

innovation is something original and new, being introduced to the world. It can be new idea, new device, or new processes. Drucker (2002) emphasised that innovation is a specific function of entrepreneurship and its ability to create new wealth, producing resources or improving wealth creation ability of existing resources. We need to understand that innovation is not a value addition but the creation of a new value itself. He differentiates change and innovation on some fundamental premises that are knowledge, comparability, need, and continuity. According to him, change requires previous knowledge and resources whereas innovation does not necessarily need previous knowledge and resources. Change is comparable with a previous situation and is relative in nature whereas innovation is not easily comparable as it does not have significant factors to be compared with as it may be unrelated. Moreover, Drucker mentioned that change will only improve on the ability to satisfy a need which already has a solution whereas innovation will be the answer to satisfy an unsatisfied need which did not have a solution earlier. Finally, change is a continuous and natural process of adoption and efficiency improvement whereas innovation is discontinuous in nature and usually originates from change in the perception.

Time and again, one can hear innovations and best practices introduced at the school level from various non-governmental agencies. They act parallel to the system and eventually attempt to bring change within the system. However, the challenge lies in being within the system and introducing change in it in order to achieve the desired goals. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that the genesis of any innovation emerges from the proactive involvement and keen interest of the administrator whose leadership qualities, when channelized in the right direction, takes the system to an unprecedented level. Thus, the fundamental premise which the authors of this paper share is that within education, the numerous roles and responsibilities which a school administrator has to oversee in order to make the system function effectively make the task of introducing an innovation extremely daunting, yet it is attainable with the right leadership skills and a motivated team.

The present paper is an attempt to put forth the grassroot level innovations initiated by the educational administrators across different states and the visible impact which it has made in improving the functioning as well as the perception of the public education system in India. The interventions taken under consideration include both system level administrative innovations as well as institutional level innovations directed towards teachers, students and processes. Thus, an all-inclusive approach to innovations is taken here which includes and not limited to changes in policy goals, curriculum design and implementation, assessment regimes, administrative arrangements, leadership, classroom practices, pedagogical technologies and resources, and teacher capacities (Towndrow et al, 2010). A word of caution is worth mentioning here – all the cases mentioned here may not technically qualify as innovative cases but the attempt here is not to debate on what is or what is not an innovation but to put forth the essence of such initiatives and the positive impact, they have made in improving the public education system.

1.1 Education System and The Functionaries – The Current Scenario

The present paper looks into the whole idea of innovation from two vantage points. Firstly, the government school system in India requires change, both incremental and radical, in order to transform the way it's been functioning and also to reinstate the faith in the government schooling system.

Secondly, the paper also focuses on the educational administrators, who are working within this system and face numerous challenges to initiate and sustain a change. There are not many studies that have dealt with the nuances of innovations within educational administration and the challenges of innovating within the given bureaucratic environment. Particularly, we are focussing on the district and sub-district level educational administrators, who are commonly referred as District Education Officers (henceforth, DEOs) and Block Education Officers (henceforth, BEOs). They are the key functionaries of the system at the field level and their role in improving the functioning of public system of education as well as government schools is of utmost importance.

The major change that has emerged during the last two decades in educational administration is that it has transformed itself from maintenance-based to development oriented wherein performance, accountability and transparency have become the mainstay of educational management (Sujatha and Tyagi, 2019). If we look at the trajectory of educational programmes in India, there has been massive physical expansion of schools and enrolment figures increased through DPEP, SSA, RMSA etc. but there has been little change in the administrative machinery of the States. The district and block level officers, who are the lynchpins of the administrative system, are overburdened with several responsibilities, both academic and non-academic, and work in a highly bureaucratic atmosphere wherein introducing a change is an uphill task.

In such a scenario, conceiving an innovation, implementing it and sustaining it by an administrator is extremely challenging. Moreover, given the atmosphere where activities are carried out within the given set of rules and regulations, introducing any change is easier said than done. The stakeholders may not only disagree to it but may resist as well and prefer to maintain the status quo within the system. The crux of the problem also lies in the weak or inadequate incentives for the public officials to deliver services efficiently.

However, the implementation of an innovation is directly related to immediate administrator support (Orlich, 1979). At this juncture, it is not only the change-prone attitude of the administrator which is imperative, but it is the self-motivation and an insatiable urge to change the existing system, which trigger ideas to germinate and take shape eventually. Thus, the administrators are not only looked as leaders but also as crucial change agents in bringing about the desired changes within the system. Though functioning of the school education at the local level may depend on a variety of factors, the role of the administrators in improving the functioning and efficiency of the system becomes important as their innovative initiatives can ensure effective functioning of the system and efficient delivery of educational services, which are at the heart of innovation in educational administration.

1.2 Mapping the Innovation Cases – State, Region, Gender and District/Block Level Analysis

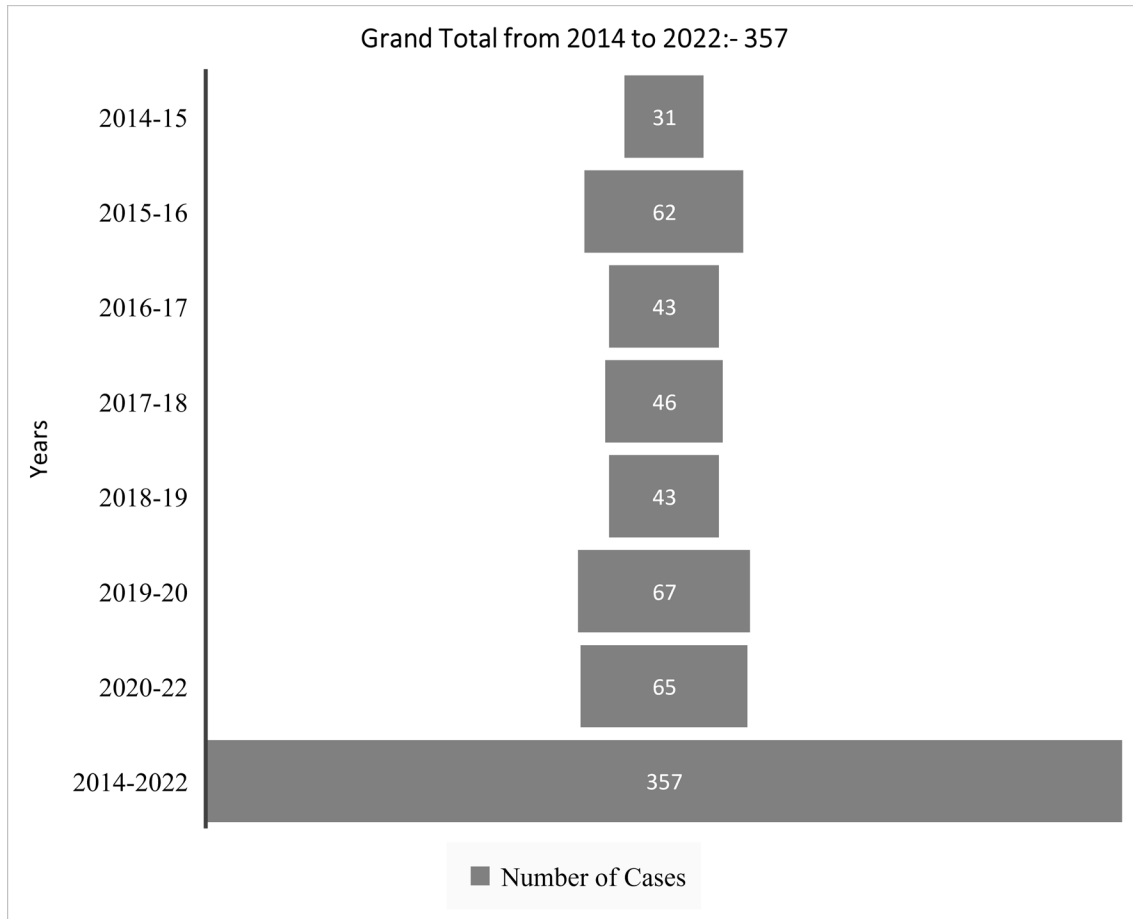
The cases discussed in this paper are part of the NIEPA's flagship initiative of National Awards for Innovations in Educational Administration for District and Block Level Education Officers (DEOs and BEOs) with the objective of recognising, awarding and disseminating innovations and good practices in educational administration at the field level. The Scheme was launched in 2014 with the objective to encourage innovations and good practices in educational administration for improving the functioning of the public system of education. The basic idea of the scheme is based on the premise that District and Block Level Education Officers may prove to be important agents of change at the district and sub-district educational administration through their innovative initiatives and interventions. The scheme also aimed to instil a sense of confidence among the education officers working at the field level.

The scheme received overwhelming response from the states and is a huge motivating factor for the administrators. Given this scenario, it will be worthwhile to map the total number of cases, year-wise trends, state representations, district/block representations and gender wise analysis over these years to gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire scheme.

If we look at the total number of cases recognized as innovations and good practices in educational administration (see Fig. 1), it shows that from 2014-22, about 357 cases have been identified for bringing positive change in the functioning of the system. These cases have gone through the process of multistage evaluation and substantiated with evidences like photographs, videos, newspaper clippings, etc. along with direct interactions with the innovators.

Figure 1

Total Number of Cases Recognized as Innovations and Good Practices in Educational Administration from the Year 2014 to 2022



Though the numbers have fluctuated over these years, the trend clearly shows that the culture of innovation has gradually percolated when compared to the first year with only 31 cases. The year 2019-20 witnessed highest number of cases suggesting that several good innovations were undertaken during this period. The table below (see Table 1) provides the year wise and state wise number of cases recognised from 2104-2022.

Table 1**States and Union Territories wise Representation of Cases from the Year 2014-2022**

Sl. No.	Name of the State/ UT	Total Number of Cases
1	Andhra Pradesh	18
2	Arunachal Pradesh	4
3	Assam	6
4	Bihar	9
5	Chhattisgarh	5
6	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	1
7	Daman & Diu	1
8	Delhi	20
9	Goa	2
10	Gujarat	26
11	Haryana	8
12	Jharkhand	1
13	Jammu & Kashmir	3
14	Karnataka	22
15	Kerala	8
16	Madhya Pradesh	6
17	Maharashtra	25
18	Manipur	4
19	Meghalaya	2
20	Mizoram	4
21	Nagaland	10
22	Odisha	28
23	Puducherry	1
24	Punjab	11
25	Rajasthan	5
26	Sikkim	6
27	Tamil Nadu	24
28	Telangana	14
29	Tripura	3
30	Uttarakhand	14
31	Uttar Pradesh	56
32	West Bengal	10
Total		357

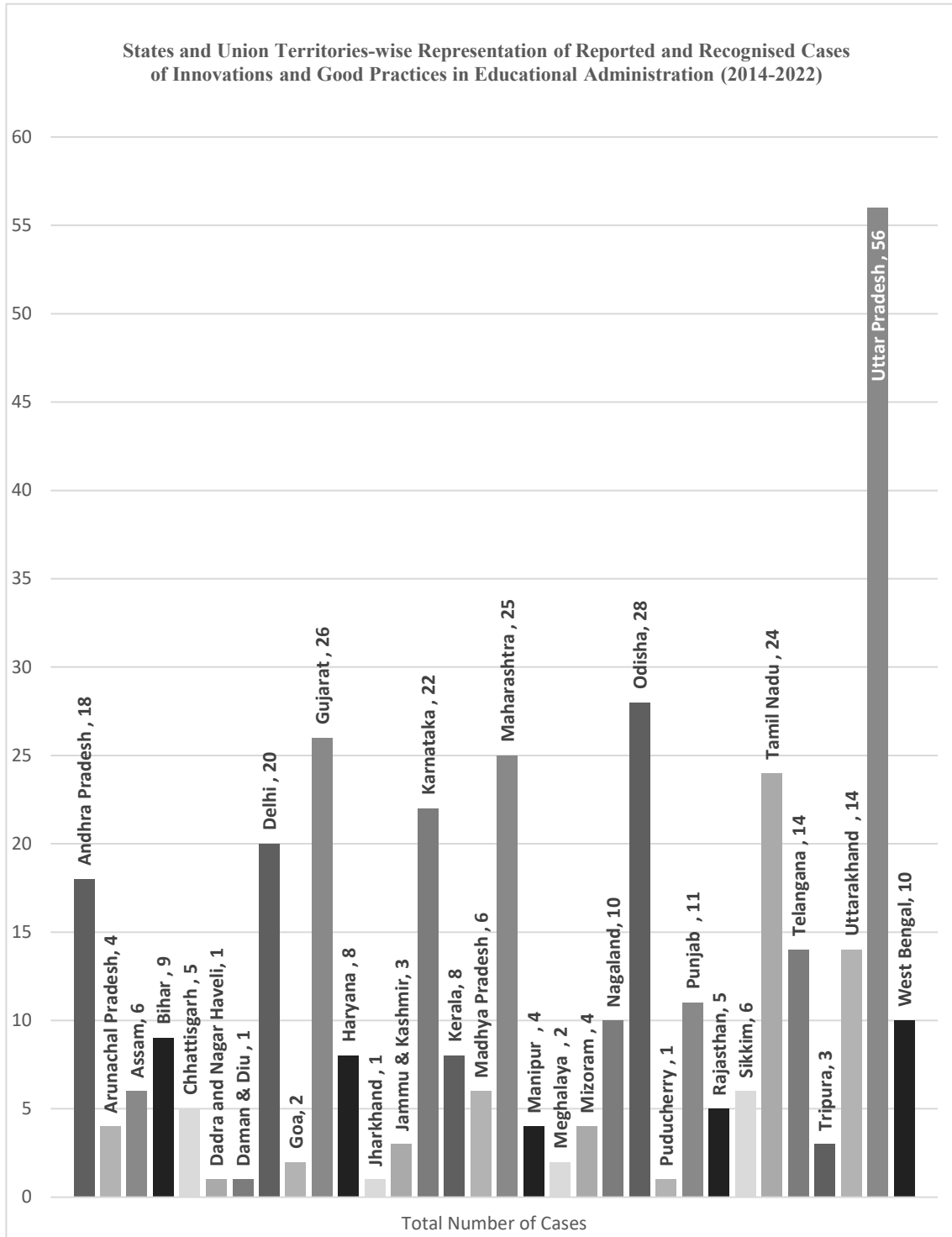
When these cases are mapped on the basis of their states and UT representation (see Fig. 2), maximum number of cases were recognized from the state of Uttar Pradesh (56). States like Gujarat (26), Maharashtra (25), and Tamil Nadu (24) also have significant numbers of reported and recognised cases. Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Jharkhand, Manipur, Meghalaya, Puducherry, Sikkim, and Tripura have the lowest numbers, with only one or two reported and recognised cases each.

States from different regions of India show varying levels of innovation and good practices in educational administration. Western states like Gujarat and Maharashtra have notable representation in the top performers. Southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh also feature prominently. Some northeastern states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland have also reported cases, but the numbers are relatively lower.

The variations in the number of reported and recognised cases could indicate differences in the focus on educational administration practices across the states. Higher numbers in some states could suggest a greater emphasis on innovation and good practices in their education systems. States with lower numbers may benefit from sharing best practices and learning from the experiences of states with higher numbers.

Figure 2

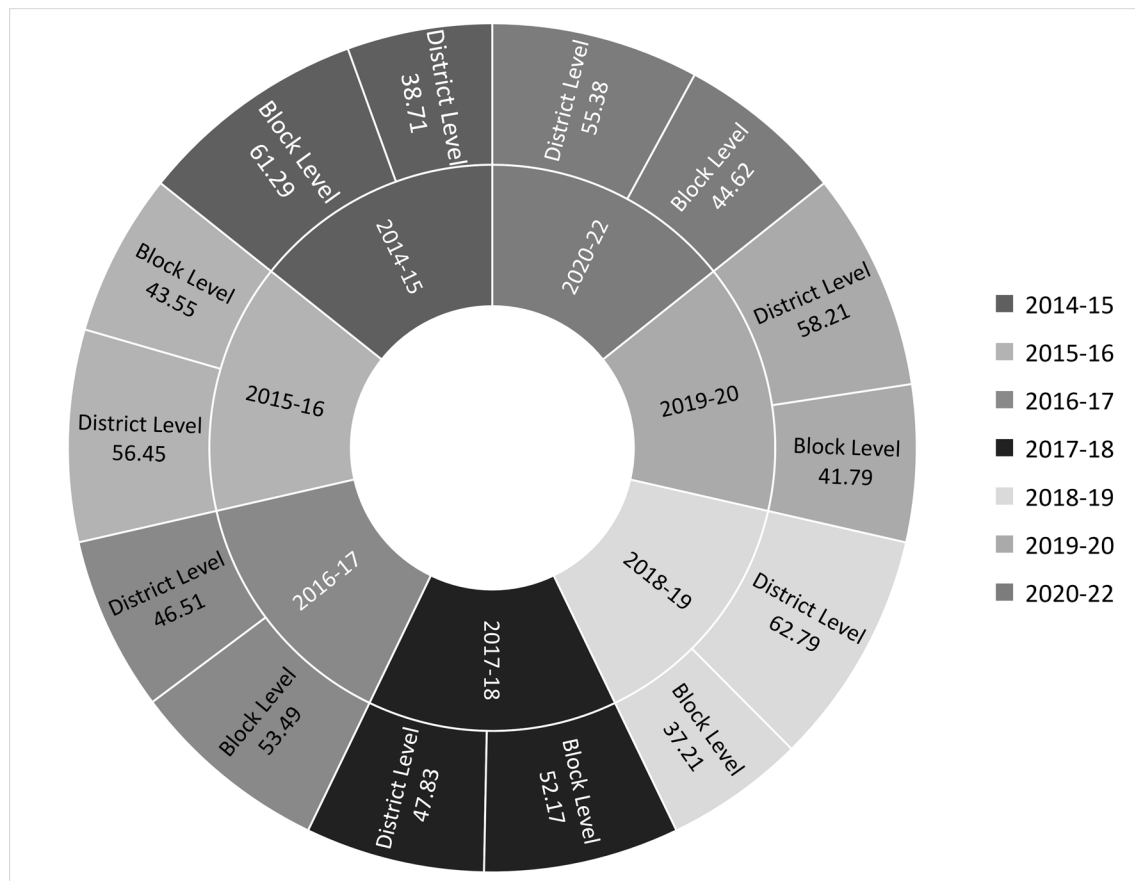
States and Union Territories wise Representation of Reported and Recognised Cases of Innovations and Good Practices in Educational Administration from the year 2014-2022



From 2014 to 2022, about 53.5% of district and 46.5% of block level officers were recognised and awarded for their innovations and good practices in educational administration. When the data is split year wise (See Fig. 3), the percentage of reported and recognised cases by District Level Education Officers and Block Level Education Officers vary from 2014 to 2022.

Figure 3

Year wise Percentage of Recognized Cases by District and Block Level Education Officers from the Year 2014 to 2022

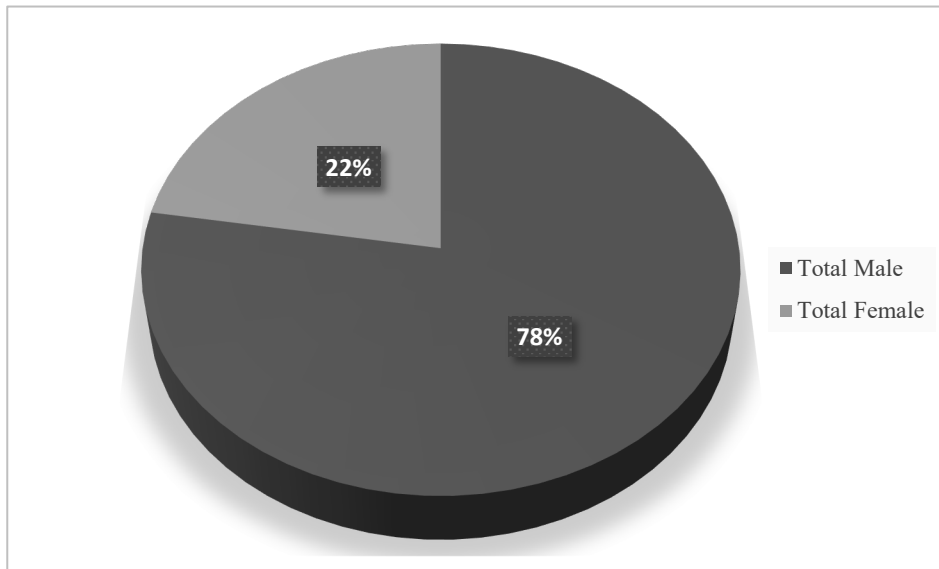


In the initial years (2014-2016), a higher percentage of cases were reported by the District Level Education Officers compared to the Block Level Education Officers. This suggests that the District Level Officers were more active in reporting cases during this period. However, from 2016-17 onwards, there was a shift, and the Block Level Education Officers started reporting a higher percentage of cases compared to District

Level Officers. This indicates a change in reporting patterns or an increased focus by the Block Level Officers on detecting and reporting cases. From 2019-20 onwards, once again, there was more representation from the district education officers. Overall, the percentages of recognised cases for both District Level and Block Level Officers have shown some fluctuations over the years, indicating varying levels of efficiency and effectiveness in their roles.

Overall, the figure shows that the District Level Education Officers' involvement in reporting and recognising cases has generally increased over the years. Meanwhile, Block Level Education Officers' involvement has fluctuated but still remained significant. These changes in reporting and recognition patterns could be influenced by various factors, such as changes in administrative policies, training initiatives, or variations in the prevalence of education-related issues at the district and block levels.

Figure 4
Year Wise and Gender-wise Recognized Cases - 2014 to 2022

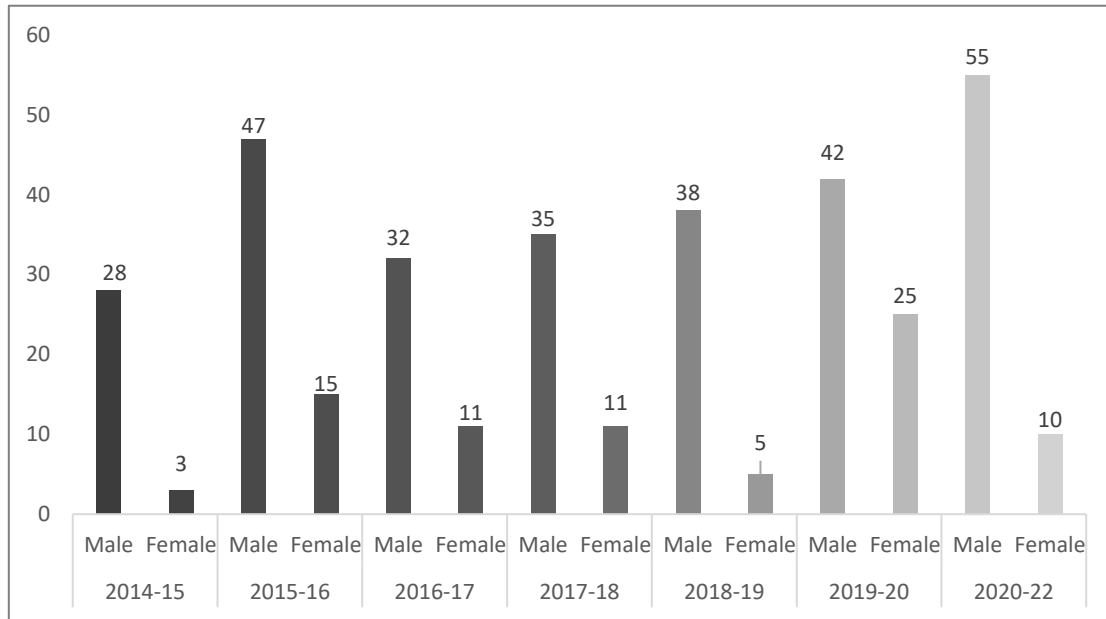


When we map the gender wise data of the cases (Fig. 4), it clearly shows that about 78% of the cases awarded were from the male administrators while only 22% of the awardees were females. This suggests that there is lesser representation of women in the administrative positions and majority of the district and block level leadership

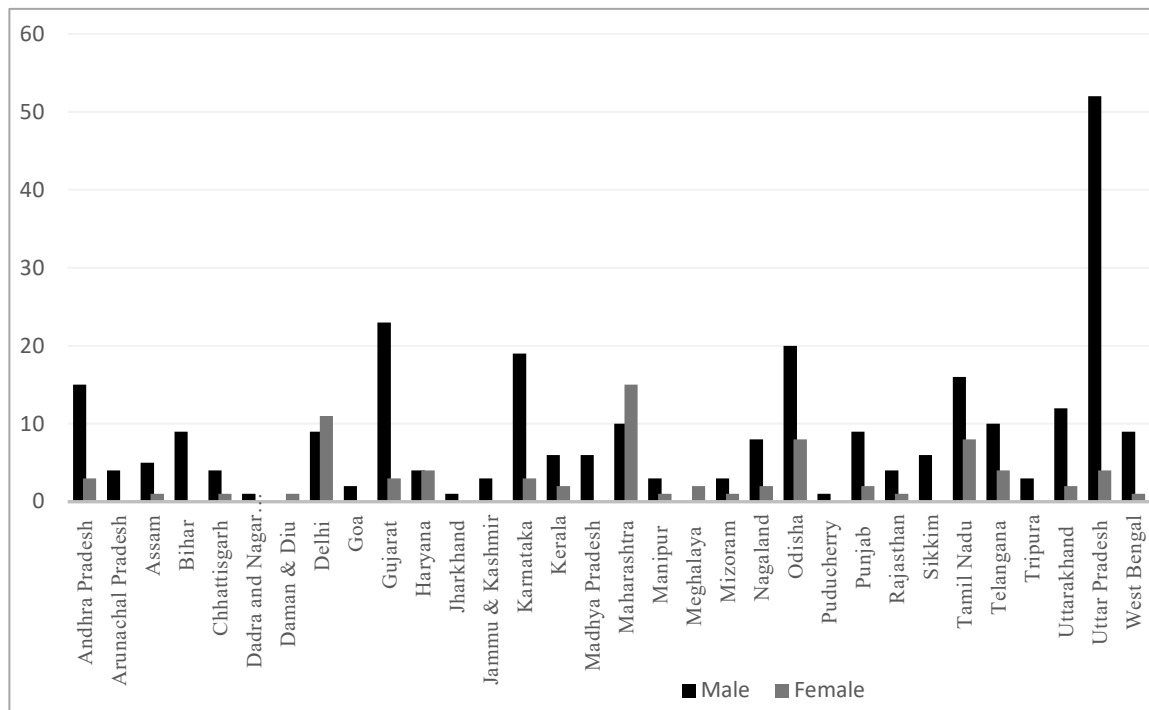
positions are being held by men. It is worth noting that the lower percentage of reported and recognised cases related to females might also indicate a gender bias. This could suggest that either female cases are underreported or face more challenges in getting reported, recognised, and acknowledged.

Figure 5

Number of Gender wise and Year wise Recognized Cases - 2014 to 2022



Analysis of the year wise data on gender aspect reveals (Fig. 5) that in the first year, i.e., in 2014-15 when the awards scheme was introduced, there was least representation of women. The percentage of women awardees marginally increased over the years and remained highest in 2019-20, but the picture still remains very unsatisfactory.

Figure 6**State/UT Wise Gender Representation of Recognized Cases from the Year 2014 to 2022**

State wise gender representation (See fig. 6) reveals that in states and UTs like Maharashtra and Delhi, there was more representation from women than men whereas in states like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar and Karnataka, there is clear under-representation of women. The gender distribution varies across states. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the majority of cases (52 out of 56) are among males. On the other hand, in Delhi, there are more female cases (11) than male cases (9). Furthermore, from 2014 to 2020-22, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Goa, Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura have reported no female cases as far as cases concerning innovations and good practices in educational administration. Interestingly, states from the north-east such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram & Tripura and small States and UTs such as Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Jharkhand, and Puducherry have not reported and recognised cases of innovation and good practices in educational administration initiated by male officers during 2014 to 2020-22 period. Additionally, Maharashtra has reported the highest

number of female cases (15), followed by Delhi (11) and Odisha & Tamil Nādu with 8 cases of innovation and good practices.

Thus, the data and figures given above provide an overview of the number of cases as per the state/UT, administrators and gender. In the subsequent section, a few selected cases are identified for the present paper to understand the nature of innovations undertaken by the administrators. The thematic organisation of the cases has been undertaken for positioning the cases in the broader context. However, the broader themes are overlapping in terms of the overall impact of the innovation.

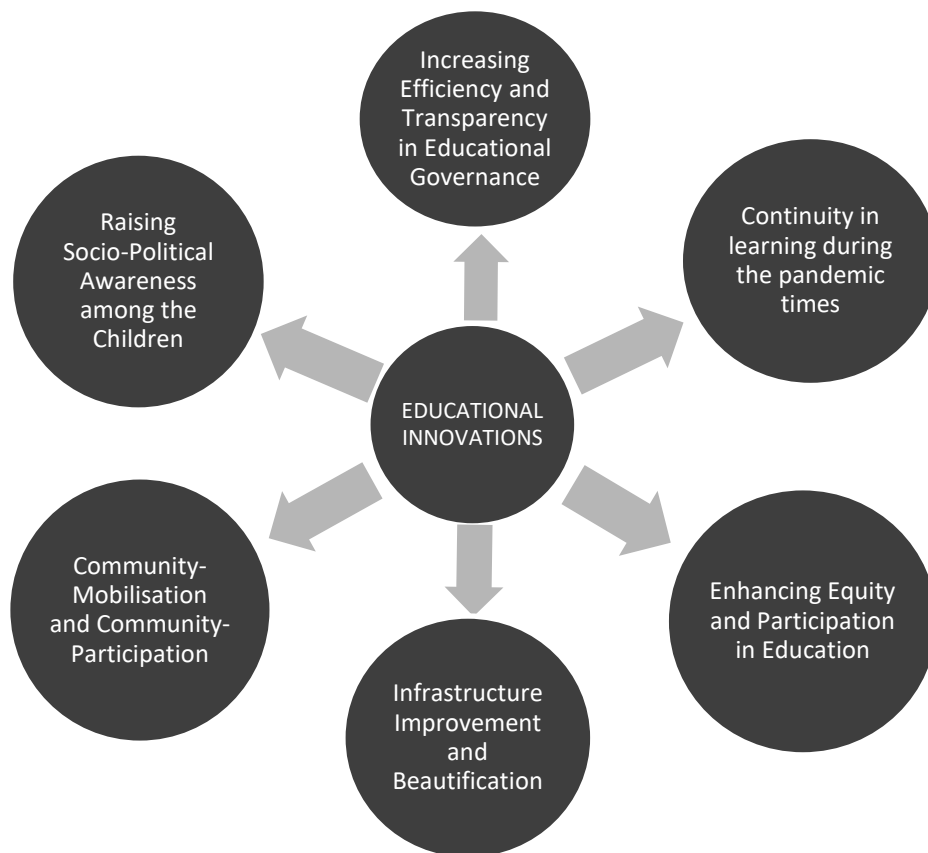
2. Innovations in Educational Administration – Evidences from the Field

The educational administrators often undertake wide range of innovative initiatives in different areas of educational administration. The success of any innovation and desired results is contingent upon the district and sub district level of educational administration. In the backdrop of the critical role and responsibilities of district and block level education officers in implementing policies and programmes of educational development and bringing about change in overall functioning and performance of government schools, it is important to connect to the basic issues that confront the public school system. Some of the areas of innovative initiatives include improving teaching-learning process and quality of education in government schools; improving schools and school facilities; improving access and participation, especially of the children subjected to disadvantaged situation, bringing transparency and accountability in the system of educational administration etc. A recurrent concern across all these initiatives is about the dismal state of government schools. The declining public trust on government schools is adversely affecting even the poor households. Majority of parents including poor parents prefer to send their children to private schools. As a result, there has been a general trend of migration of children from government schools to private schools, especially at the elementary level. In such a situation, affirming and regaining the trust on government schools have been a major goal for the district and block level education officers.

It is worth mentioning that district and block level education officers have been able to change the scenario with their innovative initiatives at their respective places of work. It is equally important to note that there are many commonalities in the areas of innovative interventions despite the geographical and socio-cultural variations. All the innovative initiatives cumulatively attempt to improve the functioning of the public system of education, schools and schooling process in government schools.

Against this backdrop, the innovations are broadly discussed under five major areas: Efficiency and Transparency in Educational Governance, Teaching-learning during the pandemic times, Equity and Participation in Education, Socio-Political Awareness among the Children, Community-Participation, and Infrastructure and Beautification. Figure 7 provides an illustration of the areas focussed in the paper for educational innovations.

Figure 7
Areas of Innovations



However, the broad areas mentioned here are only a selected few amongst the wider gamut of areas where the administrators continue to innovate and in no way downplays the other innovations initiated by the administrators. These innovations have been adopted without breaking the broader framework of administrative norms and rules, but with innovative ways of expanding the scope of governance through several mechanisms. The following section primarily highlights some of the cases and evidences from the field. The subsequent section puts forth the analytical framework regarding what has worked in these innovations.

2.1 Increasing Efficiency and Transparency in Governance

Governance comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (Kamla, 2012). Giving a broad interpretation of good governance, the World Bank report (1994) mentioned that

Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open, and enlightened policymaking (that is, transparent processes); a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law.

Within the context of education, good governance promotes effective delivery of education services and is expected to be participatory, transparent, accountable, effective and equitable and promote rule of law (Sujatha and Tyagi, 2019). Accountability is a process, aimed at helping actors meet responsibilities and reach goals. Ensuring inclusive, equitable and good-quality education requires all actors to make a concerted effort to meet their responsibilities (UNESCO, 2017). Education systems (especially public systems) in developing countries are plagued by high rates of teacher absenteeism, ineffective school monitoring systems, and poor parental engagement, which are all symptomatic of low levels of accountability in the system (Mbiti, 2016).

Thus, guaranteeing accountability and maintaining transparency in the educational administration remains one of the greatest challenges for the administrators. Inefficient administrative mechanism at the school level turned out to be a catch-word among critics of public schooling system in India. Transparency is often associated with democracy and accountability, but it also carries connotations of responsiveness and efficiency (Erkkila, 2020). Lack of transparency on the question of public-school administration engendered serious mistrust among parents as well as citizens. At the same time, emergence of low budget private schools in the villages and remote areas and their claims of providing efficient and transparent administrative mechanism in the form of continuous monitoring and regular parent-teacher meetings at the school fuelled the apprehension regarding efficiency and transparency in the public-school governance. The myriad problems of poor governance—misplaced priorities, overstretched budgets, outright corruption often seem intractable (Kosack and Fung, 2014). Against this backdrop, a few cases from the field are discussed here in which the District Education Officers and Block Education Officers took initiatives for ensuring efficient and transparent governance at the school level.

One noteworthy administrative innovation was initiated by a district level officer from Manipur, titled 'Gift Deeds for School Lands'. In this innovation, he has concentrated primarily on the idea of conversion of school land into the full-fledged government asset. The land offered by the Chiefs of the villages, the Chiefs themselves, the other government representatives and the minimal fees for school land registration are the important resources for this whole phenomenon. He took initiatives for the conversion of all school lands in the Un-survey land/ Hill areas of the state in the name of government school through registration. He got the school's land registered as government property and initiated this for the school under his jurisdiction. This also prevented any controversies or litigations related to the school assets between the community members/villagers and the state government. The cooperation and support were received from the village Chiefs and community and enabled the process of transferring of school acquired land into a common property of the government. An awareness program was also conducted to mobilise the community members and

clarify them about the process of overall transformation and its related benefits. The Gift Deeds for the land under the purview of concerned Government School and the Registration fees of the Gift Deeds are the main resources involved in implementing the whole idea of innovation. The cooperation and support received from the village Chiefs and the community enabled the process of transferring school acquired land into a common property of the government. This innovation gave a special security to the school land which has now a public property document in the Government Registration Office. Innovation has brought mutual respect and better cooperation between the Public and the Employees of Education Department as a whole. The administrative mechanism in the schooling system also becomes effective, and thereby, enabling the school function smoothly and effectively. The innovation is sustainable in spite of the transfer of the officer of this innovation. Thus, it is very evident that if the officer is motivated and has an urge to bring about change within the system, several initiatives, which are not only sustainable but replicable as well, can be undertaken.

Several administrative reforms have been started with the use of IT for enhancing ease of governance. In fact, e-governance within education has become one of the most critical aspects for enhancing good governance. In several states, recruitment and posting of teachers, transfers, admissions of students, decisions in respect of administrative, academic and financial matters are done through e-governance, making the administrative procedures transparent and facilitating timely completion of the task (Sujatha and Tyagi, 2019). Some of the e-governance initiatives introduced by the officers to make administrative processes within the system effective within the system deserve attention.

For instance, a block level officer from Chhattisgarh started an educational innovation titled ‘Shikshak Mitan App’ for enhancing ease of governance and increasing transparency within the system through the use of IT. With regard to the maintaining of service books of teachers, it used to be done manually and quite often, entries were either missing or not updated. Teachers were also unaware of how entries were being made in their service books. The concerned block officer wanted to change

this situation and came up with the idea of app-based entries. The ‘Shikshak Mitan App’ was developed to ensure all up-to-date entries in the service books of teachers. This app was developed with the technical support of the NIC. For developing ‘Shikshak Mitan App’, a team of computer-trained clerks were formed. All entries in service books were updated, scanned, and converted into soft copies. Then, the data of every teacher of the block was uploaded to the server and linked to the app. The benefits of this app were apparent and manifold. Before this app, teachers were not fully aware of the entries in their service books. Also, teachers were completely unaware of the important entries in their service books like increment date and leave balance in their service book. But now, with the help of this app, teachers can access information and status of not only entries in their service books but can take printouts of pages as well. This app was introduced to bring transparency within the system. For successful running of this app, the staff was adequately trained to use the App and to keep the information updated from time to time. This initiative is not only sustainable but also replicable. The transfer of the innovator to other places will not cause many difficulties in running this app successfully. It is apparent that ‘Shikshak Mitan App’ as an educational innovation can enormously contribute to bringing transparency in the system, and job satisfaction among the teachers.

Another innovation, once again directed towards the teachers, has been the Casual Leave Apply SMS System (CLASS) Online system which aims to address the issues of efficiency and transparency in the public-schooling system. Started by a district level education officer from Uttar Pradesh, the aim of this innovation is to facilitate the teachers regarding issues of leave, monitoring, maintaining the balance of casual leave, and encouraging a paperless administrative system. Before this innovation, it was noticed that teachers often missed submitting their casual leave application at the concerned schools in due time. Through this portal, one could easily track the details of casual leave of teachers from January only. Earlier, it could be known only in July-August months. Under this initiative, the details of all teachers like the name of the teacher, school’s name, mobile number of all 16 blocks of the district are fed in the software. Now, any teacher can apply for leave one day before just by sending an SMS

namely CLASS on providing a mobile number from 12 p.m. to 8 a.m. The SMS System is very much helpful in emergency. The message can only be sent through the registered mobile number of a teacher. Thus, it helps the teacher to track her/his available leave. At the same time, Block Education Officers remain aware of the availability of teachers at their respective schools. This portal also helps to facilitate the Leave report to the BEOs on the 21st of every month. This simple and easy educational innovation is an example of efficient use of technology in administration for monitoring of the services and facilitating the available resources for smooth functioning of the administrative system.

Another IT based innovation was started by a district level officer from Uttar Pradesh. This innovation is called the PAYROLL Module and directed towards online salary linkage of teachers. The target group of this innovation was all the teachers and peons (teachers and non-teaching staff working under the Establishment of Basic Education Office, BKT) working in the block. The main purpose of this initiative was to manage employees' information working within the department. It stores all salary records of every employee within the organisation to disburse timely salary to every eligible employee. It also manages employees' information efficiently like earnings, deduction, leave, taxes, generate and manage payroll process according to the salary of the employee. With the successful implementation of the PAYROLL module innovation, managing the salary details of employees got easier. This module increases the efficiency of managing employees' records. It also deals with monitoring the information and transactions online. Additionally, it helps in adding and updating the employees' salary records. With this module, employees can take print-out of their salary details as well. The Payroll Module, as an educational innovation, is ICT driven intervention in administration and helpful in easing the process salary payment at the administrative level.

In recent years, to ensure transparency, several reforms are designed across the world to yield highly tangible and concrete results by resolving specific concerns of governance and government performance (Kosack and Fung, 2014). The cases from the

field are examples of intervention made by educational administrators for ensuring efficient mechanism and bringing transparency in the system. Keeping pace with changing times and technological advancement, school administration too requires changes without compromising the nature and defined responsibility of the bureaucratic system. In the light of it, abovementioned cases attempt to ensure efficiency through ICT-driven intervention which resultantly manifest in the more transparent governance and job-satisfaction among teachers and employees of the public-schooling system.

2.2 Continuity in learning during the pandemic times

The year 2020 witnessed a public health crisis due to the Corona Virus pandemic. The issue is not just about its prevalence, but also about its impact on every institution of social life. The severity of Corona pandemic could be understood with the fact that it has not only impacted the health but also led to economic, learning and psychological crises. A public health crisis can severely affect every aspect of human life and schooling too is not untouched by it. According to UNESCO (2020), nearly 200 countries shut down schools with over 90% of these learners ranging from early years through higher education facing some sort of disruption to their education (UNESCO, 2020). The report further highlights that schools and higher education institutions across the globe have been shut, impacting the learning of over 90% of world's student population.

Closure of educational institutions in India due to the onset of the pandemic was completely unexpected and unprecedented. It affected the learning of over 320 million students (UNESCO, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic totally collapsed the ongoing and smooth functioning of educational system worldwide. While technology became the dominant means in ensuring continuity of teaching-learning process, it also created a huge digital divide with students in high-income countries and communities much more likely to have access to online, virtual schooling than their peers in low- and middle-income countries and communities. A developing country like India is no exception to this. The educational administrators tried their level best to overcome the challenges and introduced both technology-led as well as non-technological initiatives.

They came up with innovative and out-of-box ideas that could ensure continuity in learning despite closure of the schools. Some cases, which give an overview of the initiatives undertaken by the administrators during the pandemic period, are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

To start with, one initiative during the pandemic worth mentioning is the 'Home Schooling during Pandemic Time' started by an officer from Sikkim for addressing the issue of continuance of classes during the COVID-19 outbreaks and subsequent school closures. Ensuring learning continuity during the time of school closure had become a priority requiring teachers to move towards online delivery of lessons. However, the online mode of teaching learning created a divide between those students who had the access to technology and are continuously learning and those students who not able to get in touch with teachers or schools. The impact of the situation was more severe for the disadvantaged children and their families who had lack of access to technology and other resources interrupted learning, childcare problems etc. This was particularly true for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have the parental support and were expected to learn on their own. The lack of access to technology or fast internet access has prevented students especially from disadvantage families from taking the benefits of online mode of teaching. Keeping in mind all these concerns together and also in order to work out a system for enabling the elementary students have their basic right to education protected, the concept of home schooling was introduced by the Education Department, Government of Sikkim for enabling the elementary students to have continuity of learning during the pandemic with the theme "If the child is not able to come to school, let the school go to the child".

The concept and purpose of home schooling was to cater to the educational needs of students from K.G. classes to class VIII as per the provisions of the Right of the Children to Free and Compulsory education Act, 2009. The Block and Cluster Centre Coordinators (BRCCs and CRCCs) were given the responsibility of surveying and mapping physical location of students and teachers. The heads of institutions were given the responsibility to formulate strategies and map challenges. Once home schooling was implemented, the HOIs would have to monitor and support the teacher in

making learning take place effectively. Utilisation of open spaces as centres of learning as per the convenience of students, visiting homes of students or calling students to the homes of teachers with precautions against COVID-19 were adopted.

One more initiative of community classes under ‘Mera Ghar Mera School’ was started by a district level officer from Uttar Pradesh for ensuring the continuation of the schooling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were not opening and teachers were not able to teach in the school premises. For community classes under ‘Mera Ghar Mera School’ initiative, a cadre of community volunteers was formed to organise classes in the community due to the school closure because of the COVID-19 restrictions. The department mobilised 421 youth volunteers with the support of community adults to support the teachers in organising community classes. The volunteers identified safe community spaces that were suitable for the children to sit and study while maintaining norms of physical distancing. The parents were motivated by the teachers to attend PTMs and they were oriented on Prerna Lakshya (Learning Outcomes) so that they understand their children’s current learning levels and support them to attend classes regularly to improve their learning levels continuously. Community-level support was also critical to driving the campaign ‘Mera Ghar Mera School’. As a result, more than 1.98 lakhs students enrolled in the Varanasi district benefited from the community classes under Mera Ghar Mera School’ initiative. All these interventions were done following all covid protocols like social distancing, using masks and hand sanitisation.

A mobile library van was also started by an officer to promote reading habits and give direct access to books and other learning resources such as videos and stories against the backdrop of school closures. In the 1st phase of implementation, around 5000 children from various blocks were covered while in the 2nd phase, the mobile van intensively covered more than 54 villages in the block and reached more than 1599 parents and 5577 children. A toll-free number was circulated to create awareness in the district to listen to stories from the toll-free numbers. For the successful implementation of this innovation, several meetings with Headmasters and teachers were conducted through the Google meet. Frequent meetings were also conducted to take feedback from

the parents. Additionally, the Academic Resource Person (ARP) and State Resource Group (SRG) within the district were put into action to supervise the objectives. District Magistrate and Chief Development Officer supported and guided this innovation at various levels. State-level officers also had given educational and administrative support.

As per the current educational pattern, the revival of the learning and teaching process through digital mode has become a necessity rather than an optional mode of learning. Seeing the potential of IT to reach students during the pandemic, an officer from Punjab initiated an educational innovation titled 'Digital School Bag – Punjab Educare App'. The Punjab Educare App has been especially created to develop the educational standards of the government schools of Punjab. It is an educational app which facilitates all the students to access all the study materials prepared by the respective team of Padho Punjab and Padhao Punjab. The initiative taken by the respective education officer opened up new pathways to elevate the education status of the district in particular and maximum districts of the state as a whole. The innovation has added a one stop solution to the problem of accessibility to the study material, which was a chronic problem especially for the students of government schools during the pandemic. The app is a useful tool for the students to keep themselves updated with their studies and provide access themselves to the compendium of E-books and other relevant materials, transcending physical and geographical barriers and replacing the time zone with comfort zone. The strategy during the program involved all the stake holders who had processed the design and also personalised the app to promote active, engaging, and meaningful learning. With the approval from the Google, the app was uploaded, launched and was made available free of cost on Play Store.

The intellectual human resources with digital literacy and expertise, financial resources and software and hardware equipment were essential for the app to be designed, developed and implemented. The allocation and assignments were given to the concerned officials; the guidance of the higher authorities ensured on time mobilization of resources. The right mix of illustrations, examples, videos and other

forms of reinforcement went a long way towards achieving the desired outcomes. The overwhelming impact of the innovation could be gauged by the fact that it witnessed the viewership to the tune of 16 crore and that too within a short span of time where users reached the mark of 21 lakh. During the process of innovation, there were teething problems and challenges in the beginning due to inevitable structural and functional bottlenecks. However, the channelisation of resources and effective management overcame the initial issues related to it. The cost to develop, the time to develop, ease of maintenance and ease of adaptability along with delivery and accessibility were some of the challenges which were addressed by the officer successfully. The teaching learning gap which occurred during the pandemic was filled up with students achieving minimum level of learning outcomes.

With these innovations, continuity in the teaching learning process during the pandemic times was ensured by the administrators. Through their novel ideas and with the help of the ICT and other means, they ensured that no child was left behind in the learning process. Given the severity of pandemic, their efforts are even more remarkable.

2.3 Improving Equity and Participation in Education

Enhancing equity in education has been reiterated time and again within the domain of Indian education system. While the notion of equality is derived from justice where everyone is treated equal whatsoever socio-economic and cultural background, the notion of equity is aligned with fairness and takes an individual's socio-economic, political and cultural underpinnings into consideration. Needless to mention, equity recognises uneven socio-economic opportunities apparent in the society and considers some extra measures to overcome these disadvantage positions of an individual in the society. Thus, the similarity with regard to equity and equality is about giving everybody equal treatment whereas the difference between them is about taking socio-economic and historical contexts into consideration.

Educational participation remains one of the most important issues in the contemporary India and is determined by several important factors such as caste, class, region, language, and religion, etc. Since the decade of nineties, there have been significant developments and concerted efforts by many countries to make education more inclusive and equitable. The recent National Education Policy 2020 also envisions to facilitate learning for all students, with special emphasis on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). As mentioned in the policy document, the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).

It has been observed that high degree of inequalities in educational opportunities and intergroup disparities is explicit at the school education level (Tilak, 2018; Govinda, 2011; Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010; to cite a few). In such a scenario, it is extremely challenging for an educational administrator in India to ensure the equity and participation in overall educational processes given the myriad layers and forms of inequalities. Nevertheless, there are officers within the system who are self-motivated and possess change prone attitude and an unwavering urge to see positive changes within the system.

Here, some innovations are shared and discussed to understand the efforts taken by educational administrators for ensuring equity and participation of students at the school level.

One such initiative to enhance equity and participation has been to translate textbooks into mother tongue language. This also helps in making classroom pedagogy of primary schools more comprehensible. The concerned officer took the initiative of

translating the textbook ‘Kalrav’ into the Bhojpuri language. Bhojpuri is a local language of the Azamgarh district, Uttar Pradesh and students of the primary age group speak it as their first language. It is a known fact that learning in the first language has several positive implications. Considering this aspect, under the programme titled ‘Hamar Kitab Hamar Pdhai Hamari Boli Me’, standards 1, 2, and 3 textbooks were translated into the Bhojpuri language. This translation work aimed at presenting concepts ‘From easy to difficult’ in the process of pedagogy. Interestingly, this innovation is in congruence with the National Education Policy 2020. As a result, it was found that students were very much comfortable in classroom transactions taking place in their native language and found it easier to understand difficult concepts from the translated textbook. Before this initiative, communities were apprehensive about this innovation but successful implementation of this educational innovation convinced them of its importance. Similarly, textbook translation of the Standard 1,2, and 3 in the Awadhi language under the programme titled ‘Chal Padhin Jaye Awadhi Ma’ was also started. In this effort too, the result was encouraging and appreciated by educational administrators and communities as well. Here, the educational administrator was able to comprehend the difficulties faced by students during pedagogic transactions due to their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and understand the contextual realities. Keeping this into consideration, an effort was made by designing textbook in the local language to ensure the equitable and participative learning of students in the school.

Another important innovation and good practice for equity and participation in educational processes was started by a district level officer from West Bengal under the title ‘Bharosha (Trust)’, which aims to address the issue of child rights and safety. It is an undeniable fact that awareness about child rights and safety is extremely important as children are the greatest wealth of the nation. However, it was found by the officer that there was limited awareness about it amongst children and parents. The goal behind launching this initiative was to make children and their teachers and parents aware of child rights and safety measures. The major objectives of this initiative were spreading awareness about child rights and child safety among all stakeholders – Children, Parents, and Teacher building confidence among the children to stand against any

wrong doing with the help of administration, spreading awareness about “Good Touch” and “Bad Touch” by a known person or unknown person, providing guidance to all stakeholders regarding the pathways to deal with the victim students after any unwanted incident, and counselling the children through experts. The focal point of this innovation was the students, especially those who were enrolled in the government and government aided schools. The main objective of this program was to create awareness among the children of their rights and to support them to stand against any wrong doing against them.

While implementing the programme, it was observed that the teachers in government schools and parents were mostly unaware of the different facets of child safety and child protection. Therefore, the programme was designed in such a manner that it is not only beneficial for the students but teachers and parents should also get oriented and will play a vital role for dissemination in the society at large in achieving larger objectives of the programme. As a part of the community, the parents of every student were involved in this process. Along with the self-help groups, the elected Panchayat members also actively participated in building a strong network to address this issue in a comprehensive way. The necessary advertisement was released using different local media to all the people to make aware regarding the dedicated email and phone number of the District Education Officer for giving information and feedback. The district level orientation workshop was conducted. In addition, the other participant members were school teachers of 4177 schools of the district. Orientation sessions for the headmaster of 835 High schools in 4 (Four) venues in 4 (Four) sub-division were also undertaken. Organisation of School level workshops for the students were initiated on Saturdays so that the teaching-learning process was not disturbed. Special Parent Teacher Meetings (PTM) were organised for the orientation of the parents and the help of local level Panchayati Raj Institution members was sought for maximum presence of parents in the special PTM. An official email was created for any communication from the schools or S.I of schools or parent or any other source. Large number of cases were reported through child helpline and dedicated phone number after launching the program in July 2017.

Another district level education officer from Kerala initiated an innovation for ensuring the equity and participation of migrant children in the overall schooling processes. In the recent years due to many large-scale development projects, especially in the construction sectors and information technology substantial employment opportunities have been generated in Kochi and this has witnessed increasing migrants in the district. These migrating groups take temporary shelters in the nook and corner of bus stands and railway stations. Both men and women go in search of jobs and children of these migrating groups are deprived of education and other basic amenities that any other child enjoys. Some of these children are indulged in child labour and anti-social activities and some others are misused and exploited. With due consideration for coverage and bringing the urban deprived children, such as street and working children, domestic girl children, children of construction sites and migrated children, etc. into the mainstream, focussed interventions were planned and implemented by the district level education officer. The main focus was about enrolling and ensuring retention of children belonging to the most marginalized group, including migrant laborers, street vendors, beggars, access less tribals, sex workers and wandering groups. To start with, she initiated a bridge course so that migrant children can be integrated into the classroom and retention can be ensured through the focusing academic support adopting their cultures and languages. She also initiated mass awareness campaign and community mobilisation for garnering support needed for migrant children.

In the district, these migrants, who are mostly from Uttar Pradesh, come here every year during the month of August and stay till March. These are seasonal migrants. There are also out of school migrant children coming from Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha, Rajasthan and a few from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Migrants from these states face number of problems pertaining to education of their children, health, shelter, etc. Enrolment of migrant children in regular classes are hindered by a number of issues such as language barrier, age difference, etc. In order to address these problems while enrolling the children in ordinary classrooms, special training centres were initiated. Trainings for newly appointed teachers and volunteers were also given. Learning cards were prepared for these children for the easy

transaction of curriculum objectives. By conducting these programmes, an effort was made to bring migrant children into the mainstream education and help them get its benefits.

Educational volunteers who were appointed for the children taught them in Hindi. With the cooperation of Child Line and various other like-minded people, clothes, shoes, bags, slates etc. were provided to the children. The bridge course materials were transacted to the target group by the educational volunteers. About twenty awareness camps were organised at different target colonies and sixteen special training centres and 15 more educational volunteers from northern states were appointed. The intervention was extended to other districts as well. Direct mass awareness through house-to-house visits, street visits, migrant colony visits, and campaigns, tribe hamlet visits and campaigns were created. After the intervention, continuous enrolment and continuous retention of children belonging to the marginalised groups and migrants were reported and the intervention was well-received by all the stakeholders.

This case is an example of a well-planned and inclusive educational innovation to ensure the equity and participation of all children in the formal educational process. The educational administrator took an all-encompassing approach to address the issue of schooling of migrant children in her district.

With regard to the gender, the gendered stereotypes prevalent in Indian society deprive girls of their access and continuation in schools. Even if girls succeed in finishing their school education overcoming all the barriers, the same might be very challenging at the higher education level. Endemic female illiteracy and low participation of girls in schools in India are due to many reasons like early marriage, household responsibilities, parental apathy, dissonance between social role and perceived function of education, social practice such as secluding purdah, instruction in language other than the mother tongue, and indifference of the teachers towards girls (Chanana, 1996). Then compelling benefits associated with girls' education are numerous. These include crucial matters such as lowering infant, child or maternal

mortality rates, improving mother and child health, protecting females from HIV/AIDS viruses, domestic violence and pressures, exploitations and abuses, decreasing troubles about women's equal work and equal pay labor force, and regarding women's role in domestic and public life, their contribution in the economic productivity and growth, and their social and political struggles (Sahin, 2013).

In order to address the gender disparities in education, an educational innovation titled 'To Put Nameplates of Girls on Their Houses' was started by an educational officer from Maharashtra with the aim of promoting gender equality and honour of girls. To implement this, primary teachers were given the responsibility to counsel villagers and tell them about the main motive behind these girls' nameplates and change their patriarchal mindset. Several street shows were also organised to make villagers aware of the importance of girls and their education. Officials surveyed scores of the villages to encourage people to adopt this practice and the majority of them happily accepted the proposal. The results of this innovation were quite heartening. Several homes in Nashik district started putting nameplates with their daughters' names written on them. More than 10,000 nameplates with names of daughters were put up on the doors of the houses in various villages. Families who do not have daughters started putting the names of their wives or mothers on the nameplate. The gloomy record of having one of the lowest sex ratio numbers in India makes it really important for the Nashik administration to consistently adopt measures to improve gender disparity in the district. Interestingly, this is a Zero Budget programme.

There are several instances in which girl students withdraw from coming to the school because of unsafe physical and mental environments. It leads to lack of enrolment of girl students in schools and subsequently better life-opportunities. From them, this kind of innovation by educational administrators helps to establish the confidence in public schooling system and ensures the equity and participation in educational processes.

Another intervention was initiated by an officer from Kerala who particularly focussed on the children with disabilities. In conjunction with the officials of the SSA,

the officer ensured equity and participation of such children in the overall schooling processes. *Kootukoodan Pusthakachangathi* i.e., Books my Companion (Home Library for Bedridden Children) is an important innovation that helps the physically challenged students to access the educational resources for continuing their schooling. Home based education (HBE) is an important focus area of SSA. The teachers were assigned to make a visit to the houses of bedridden children for assisting them with proper care and affection through the HBE. Bedridden children were facing various challenges such as not being able to come to the school, psychological and social problems. It was felt that apart from education, these children need social and emotional support. Thus, the initiative aimed to lead these children to the wider world of reading and so this project was named '*Koottukoodaan Pusthakachangaathi* (Books my companion)'. These children were ensured with their right for equity in education. The officer tried to empower these children who were isolated in their homes through effective implementation of this initiative. The attention of the representatives of the people, LSG agencies and educational officials was brought back to the bedridden children. Additionally, the confidence of the bedridden children and their parents was significantly raised and they started to believe in the potential of their children with special needs. *Kootukoodan Pusthakachangathi* was well recognised by the State authorities and well-executed by the district officer as a state-wide programme. Physically challenged students, apart from many other issues, find it difficult to access the educational opportunities. With the help of this kind of educational initiatives, their participation is made possible which is a prerequisite for equitable education for all sections of the society.

These are some of the most important cases of educational innovation which aims to address the question of equity and participation in education. Moreover, these cases show that understanding the ground level realities, designing a focussed intervention and well-planned implementation are the key to the success of any innovation.

2.4 *Raising Socio-Political Awareness*

During the years between 6 and 14, i.e., middle childhood and early adolescence years, children make strides toward adulthood by becoming competent, independent, self-aware, and involved in the world beyond their families (Eccles, 1999). Building democratic citizenship and developing a sense of criticality & scientific temper among students during this age will certainly lead to positive outcomes. Creating socio-political awareness helps students develop understanding of their cultural and social surroundings. Moreover, ensuring socio-political awareness among students at the level of school education is in the alignment of larger aims of education. Children's social and political engagement is increasingly seen as a valuable and integral asset of democracy (British Youth Council, 2006). Given the vast development changes that characterise the children and the importance of social and political orientations, few officers made attempts to inculcate the social and political awareness amongst students through their novel ideas in the pedagogical and schooling practices. These cases are reflection of efforts of educational administrators at the block and district levels for helping students to get familiar with socio-political issues of Indian society.

One such case is from Maharashtra where the block level education officer initiated an innovation called the 'Children Constituency at the Block Level' in which the officer took initiative for developing a 'mock constituency' for the children of the 3rd to 7th grades in 72 schools.

Under this initiative, two different teams were formed as opposing political parties in every school. Each party had their own agendas. The students conducted rallies of their chosen political party. Teachers used a mobile app called 'Voting App' for simulating the voting experience. A set-up similar to an election centre was recreated in the school and students voted for the party which they wanted and a Bal Sansad was formed by the elected representatives. They nominated electives for posts such as Health minister, Cleanliness minister, Disciplinary minister, and Sports minister among themselves. These elected representatives had to hold a mock constituency on the first Friday of each month. Also, these elected representatives had the additional

responsibility of conducting the Independence Day program in their own schools. In the month of September, a Bal Sansad at the cluster level was organised. On the 14th November, on the auspicious occasion of the Children' Day, a Bal Sansad was organised at the block level. In this Bal Sansad, school development agenda was finalised. The agenda was read out in front of the school management committee.

Before the implementation of this innovation, children were unaware of the processes of voting and the importance of exercising voting as a right. This programme made some remarkable interventions. With this programme, the children, who were unaware of the voting process, got an understanding of how the democratic system functions and they were made familiar with the voting system and its relevance in a democratic system. This educational innovation is an interesting and thoughtful intervention in which educational administrator took out of the box initiative and emphasised some important aspects of the democratic practices of India.

In similar vein, another innovative case also reflects the importance of electoral participation for ensuring the true and visible representation in democracy. Although electoral process in India is complex one but it can be made easy through step-by-step approach for making it participative. Public school can play a major role in this process and realising its potential, an officer from Tamil Nādu initiated an educational innovation titled 'Developing the Electoral Participation and supporting the Election process through ELC (Electoral Literacy Club) Children constituency at the block level' for educating the targeted populations about voter registration, electoral process and related matters through hands on experience. The officer initiated the innovation of forming The Electoral Literacy Clubs for the secondary and higher secondary schools for guiding and creating awareness on electoral process, voter's registration, value of votes, responsibility etc. An Electoral Literacy Club is a platform to engage school students through interesting activities and hands-on experience to sensitise them on their electoral rights and familiarise them with the electoral process of registration and voting. The idea of innovation was translated into action with the help of students, teachers, District collector, Chief Educational Officer and other officials. A preliminary

training was conducted for the teachers, especially Social Science teachers of all schools under school education and a plan of actions was drafted. The activities like conduction of awareness campaign, competitions, and games were planned for implementing the innovation. The students were facilitated to learn about election and its processes. The students involved themselves in all the activities of ELC wholeheartedly and made it a successful one.

Another educational innovation for inculcating the sense of scientific temperament and eradicating the superstitions among school students was initiated by an education officer from Maharashtra. The educational innovation titled 'Suryotsav Sangli' was an attempt to challenge the superstitious practices of the society and inculcate scientific temperament among the students. Some of the important objectives of 'Suryotsav Sangli', as an educational innovation, were to celebrate Suryagarhan as Suryotsav with children, to inculcate scientifically logical thinking, to eradicate superstitions among students about Suryagrahan, to develop an interest in subjects like Geography, Science, Geology, Astrology, etc, and to mould the students as astronomers, scientists, geographers, and geologists as professionals in future.

For the purpose of successful implementation of this educational innovation, a meeting of the District Education Officer (Secondary), AndhShardha Nirmulan Samiti members, and astronomers was organised for counselling and giving training to the science and geography teachers. A training programme for geography and science teachers throughout the Sangli district was organised. In the workshop, AndhShradha Nirmulan Samiti members discussed how to eradicate the superstition related to the Suryagrahan among teachers. Three scientists trained the teachers about how to observe space and which precautions should be taken while observing the solar eclipse. Near about 5000 students gathered at one place to observe the Suryagrahan collectively. They came over the superstitions of the solar eclipse in the community and freely gathered at the place to celebrate the Suryotsav during the Suryagrahan. Students were freely eating and drinking water during the solar eclipse. Children used scientifically prepared solar glasses to observe the solar eclipse. Further, students were counselled by

the astronomers about not to follow bad or good omen during the solar eclipse. It is evident that the programme addressed the issue of superstition and achieved its objective and aim of inculcating sense of scientific temperament as an educational innovation.

In addition to these, officers are also working towards protecting the biodiversity and promoting sustainable development. Understanding biodiversity and just use of natural resources are integral components of sustainable development in contemporary society. Special focus on the sustainable development has been made part of the curriculum and pedagogy by several state education boards and educational administrators. Keeping all these concerns into consideration, a block level officer from Odisha an educational innovation titled ‘Setting of Medicinal Plant Garden and Aquatic Animal Home in Schools: An Approach to Understand Biodiversity & Environment’ in five selected schools of his block. The block is situated in the interior parts of the tribal district and is naturally bestowed with rich flora and fauna. Thus, the idea germinated to make children aware of and to acquire knowledge and skill for sustainable use of biodiversity and other natural resources of the locality. The specific objectives of this innovation were to bring school and community together for sharing of knowledge on medicinal plants, fishes, snails, crabs, turtle, and environment of the locality, to create awareness among children and the community about protection of nature and biodiversity of the locality, and to create opportunity of enjoyable learning for children about environment, flora, & aquatic fauna of the locality with hands-on experience within the school.

For implementing this innovation, a discussion on indigenous medicinal flora involving a group of selected students (approximately 20), 3-4 teachers, and some people from the community having ideas on medicinal plants and traditional indigenous practitioners (local Vaidyas) was organised. An exhibition on indigenous medicinal plants by students in the school, for which parents, community members, and local Vaidyas were invited, was organised. A proper listing of indigenous medicinal plants to be grown in medicinal garden was done by students under the supervision of teachers. Collections of seeds and seedlings of listed medicinal plants by students with help of

community and teachers were done. A monthly discussion in a group involving students, teachers, community members, and traditional indigenous practitioners about uses of indigenous medicinal plants and their parts to heal different diseases was organised. For aquatic animal home, a discussion on indigenous aquatic animals like water fishes, crabs, snails, and turtle involving a group of selected students (approximately 20), and 3-4 teachers, some persons from community having ideas on fresh water aquatic animals and local fishermen was organised. Nurturing of the aquatic animals in aquatic animal home by students under the supervision of teachers and advices from the community and local fishermen was ensured.

The impact of this programme is huge and encouraging. Children began to understand the biodiversity better. It also brought school and community together and to think about biodiversity and environment of the locality. Many teachers, students of nearby schools, and blocks visited the medicinal plants garden and aquatic animal home of school where this project was implemented. They were highly inspired by this and some of them have been trying to establish these garden and animal home in their schools as well. Thus, similar efforts were replicated in other districts as well.

One more important educational innovation aimed to address the issue of environment protection was initiated by an officer from Assam and titled ‘Child as an Ambassador in Single-Use-Plastic Free Campaign’. It is a well-established fact that children are the important stakeholders of all social development initiatives in schools. Recognising children’s capability and potentiality as the change agents, the officer initiated this initiative for the children of government schools.

Under this innovation, the children played a pivotal role in spreading awareness about plastic-free schools and homes and they were made as ambassador in single use plastic free campaign. Communication with the corporate houses was initiated to provide 2 lacs for ‘Swachhata hi seva’ sticker and it was well considered. Thus, a ‘Swachhata Hi Seva’ Sticker was provided to all children having message as ‘My school and home free from single use plastic’. The teachers were oriented at cluster level monthly teacher meeting. The School Management Committee members were also made a part of the activity. Children took pledge on Swachhata during morning

assembly and pasted the sticker at schools and their respective homes. The CRCCs and teachers were entrusted with monitoring the entire activity. A report of implementation was collected and assessment at the field level was undertaken.

This initiative was found quite effective to erase the rampant use of single-use plastic specifically at schools and public places and making the school premises and neighbourhood plastic free. Children have been the change agents for home and masses besides themselves adopting healthy habits of eliminating plastic from their day-to-day activities. Given the nature and scope of this innovation, it is replicable in other districts and states across the country.

In sum, these field-level interventions by the educational administrators from different parts of the country are reflections of efforts made for addressing various socio-political issues at the school education level. These are essential interventions for making school education relevant and up-to-date in the changing socio-political scenario.

2.5 Community-mobilisation and Community-Participation

The significance of decentralisation and community participation in the governance of school systems at the district and sub-district level is widely established. The delegation and devolution of power and the creation of the new structure for the participation of all stakeholders are envisaged to foster autonomy, flexibility, productivity and accountability. Decentralisation and community participation in education has always been an important policy goal though it is indeed not a new concept in India. While there are different definitions of 'community participation school-based governance', conceptually, it can be viewed as a formal alteration of governance structures, and a form of decentralisation that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority through which improvements in schools might be stimulated (Gamage, 1993).

From last many decades, community participation has been used to mobilise communities for the purpose of transforming public educational structure and functions with the help of various policies and strategies (Govinda and Diwan, 2003). The term community participation is 'perhaps the most misused and misunderstood word' (Ramachandran 2001: p.2244). The meaning of 'community' may range from a small homogeneous aggregate of population inhabiting a specific geographic territory as small as a habitat in a village to a huge heterogeneous collection of population covering the whole territory of a nation. Committees such as VECs, SMCs, etc., which are elected and/or nominated from within the entire community in a geographic area or that of the parents of the children attending a particular school have been designed to ensure the community-mobilisation and community participation. In addition, promoting decentralized decision making through the "voice" mechanism allows local communities, civil society and the poor to participate in the decision-making process (Kulshreshtha, 2008). Community participation can also be seen as 'the participation of the disempowered; those who have not had access - as a community, as a geographic area or as a gender' (Ramachandran 2001: p. 2254). Here, some cases are discussed to understand the role of educational administrators at the Block and District level to ensure the community-mobilisation and community-participation in public schooling system. These educational innovations are an attempt to bring community to the forefront as far as the school ownership is concerned.

In one such case, the district education officer from Maharashtra initiated the practice of alumni meets in the schools and named it as 'Former Students' Meet'. This initiative was undertaken to motivate the present students by making them aware of the former students' success and their achievements. The officer wanted to present the former students as role-models to the present students and inspire them to achieve success in school activities and in their lives. Such school-community partnerships, which are the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses, are forged to promote students' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development (Sanders, 2001).

It was found that almost in every Taluka, the school administration does not organise the former students' meet. Moreover, there was also lack of realisation among the schools that their former students would usher a positive change in their day-to-day activities, as well as in the attitude of their present students. Considering this possibility, the officer interacted and consulted the heads of the schools and teachers in this regard. Everyone supported the idea of former students' meets. The officer also interacted with some of the experienced and innovative teachers and sought their co-operation to make the initiative successful. A district level meeting of the headmasters was called to discuss the modalities and ways to make the alumni meets effective, need-based and objective oriented. Experienced people from different talukas were invited to guide the students. Experts were cordially invited to interact with the headmasters and teachers. They highlighted the importance, benefits and modalities of organising students' meet. In the same meeting, the headmasters were asked to collect information about their former students. They were also instructed to invite such former students who would inspire and motivate the present students by their success stories. It was decided that the schools would print invitation cards and send them to their former students, distinguished people, villagers, schools, members of the school committee, zilla parishad members, panchayat samiti members, former headmasters and teachers. The expenditure on such events was borne by the respective schools and teachers. The management bodies, Headmasters and teachers came up with the idea to raise funds for the former students' meets. The headmasters were asked to submit a detailed report of their schools' former students' meets in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their students' meets after alumni meets.

The former students' meets yielded wonderful outcomes. The current students were not only inspired but also made more aware of the opportunities, requirements as well as challenges in the fields of industries in which the former students of the school are presently involved in varied capacities. The success of this innovation largely relies on clear communication of the objectives and involvement of all the stakeholders in different stages of implementation.

One more initiative worth mentioning is the Mo School Abhiyan (MSA) that aims to create a platform for people to connect, collaborate and contribute to revamping the government and government aided schools in Odisha. Mo School literally means My School. In this Abhiyan, alumni and the people can contribute to their schools in the form of money, material and services. If an alumnus or community donates monetary donations to the school, the state government will provide double of its matching grants to that school for its development. Mo school Abhiyan is a first of its kind initiative in the country. The sole aim of the Abhiyan is to link the community with the school. It is a citizen –government partnership programme.

To make all-round development of the schools and to ensure the quality education by community participation through Mo School Abhiyan, the block level officer initiated Mo School Abhiyan campaign. Through several campaigns and persistent persuasion, he ensured good infrastructure facilities in the schools, to create a quality and student-friendly school environment and fulfil the needs of the school, to improve quality education by bringing together school, community and Alumni, and to monitor, assist and ensure the progress of the school through community participation.

The officer wanted to implement this innovation wholeheartedly in his block to develop emotional connect of alumni with their alma maters, inspire community action, facilitate stakeholder participation, and collaborate with various non-profits working in the area of education and child development. All government and government aided Primary, Upper Primary and High Schools of the block were taken as the target schools with a focus to 100 schools of the block in the first phase. The Mo School Abhiyan in the concerned block was implemented through orientation and motivation of Headmasters, teachers, SMC members, alumni, community members and PRI members & Mo school Abhiyan Committee in each school. Teachers, Headmasters, CRCCs, Community members & PRI Members were oriented, motivated and involved in the activities of the school to ensure the progress of the school. Community mobilisation was ensured through frequent meetings, workshops, role-plays by the teachers and by involving them in the planning and process of the school development.

After implementation of the innovation, the Alumni Associations and Mo School Abhiyan committees have been constituted in all schools of the Block. Alumni, community members along with SMC members are now reviewing the status of the school and preparing the action plans to address the problems of the school at regular intervals.

In another initiative, the district level officer was able to successfully renovate school building with the help of community mobilisation. It is a widely recognised fact that availability of sound infrastructural facilities are the basic necessities of any school. By emphasising this notion, the Deputy Director of School Education in Arunachal Pradesh tried to implement the innovative idea of renovating the school building of the government schools within the district. For instance, the school building of one Government Upper Primary School, which was located in the interior part of the district, was functioning in a dilapidated building for the last several years. Since 2016 renovation funds were sought from the government during 2016-17 and 2017-18 financial year but no fund could be provided. So, it was decided to mobilise and motivate the community for voluntary contribution to renovate the building.

In this initiative, the financial assistance was provided through the local villagers as per the capacity of the contributors. A meeting of the villagers was convened in the village community hall and community members were informed about the unavailability of government fund. The members were encouraged to take up the works through voluntary contribution. All the alumni of the school added other like-minded members through various modes of communication. A committee comprising retired Principal from the village as the Chairman, some village leaders, the SMC members and teachers as members was constituted. The serving Principal from the village was made the treasurer and contributions were accepted in cash, kinds, account deposits and cheques.

Before the innovation, building was in an awful condition and parents stopped sending their wards to the school and started sending them to other schools. But after the successful implementation of the programme, the physical structures have

completely changed and refurbished. New head teacher and teachers were also posted to this school. Seeing the positive changes within the school, parents were satisfied and started sending their children to the school once again.

These are some of the important educational innovations initiated for ensuring the community-mobilisation and community-participation in the public schooling system. These innovations are driven with the motive of reinstating the faith of the public in the government education system and making them realise their ownership in the overall schooling processes.

2.6 Infrastructure Improvement and Beautification

It would not be an overstatement to mention that better infrastructure and beautiful school campus motivates parents, teachers, and students alike to feel connected to the institution. The aesthetical importance of school campus is well-documented in educational literature. Administrators in Indian education system too have taken initiatives for the development and augmentation of school infrastructure as well as beautification of the school premises. Here, a few initiatives undertaken by the administrators at the Block and District education level for the improving infrastructural facilities and beautification of school campus are discussed.

Amongst many initiatives, kitchen garden is one which has been a common initiative across the states. With the help of teachers, students grow vegetables in the school premises. It serves the dual purpose of health as well as environment protection through organic farming. The vegetables grown in the kitchen garden are also used in the cooking of MDMs in the schools. For instance, an officer from Tripura initiated the creation of self-sufficient organic kitchen garden with healthy and disease-free vegetable seedlings for MDM in every school in his district. Plantation of 4650 different vegetable seedlings involving the Chairman and Members of SMC, Parents, PRIs, Social workers, Teachers, Educationists, Students throughout the year took place in at least 31 public educational programmes like Parent-Teachers Conference and SMC meetings, observance of birthday of the National- Religious Persons, etc.

It resulted in organic-pure vegetables with sufficient quantity from the schools own Kitchen Garden and enhanced regular participation of local people in school functionaries in a friendly atmosphere.

Use of ICT is emerging as an extremely critical tool for improving governance as well as teaching-learning process (TLP) in a variety of ways. Use of both synchronous and asynchronous platforms by the district and block education officers shows the centrality of ICT within the system. They are making optimum use of the available IT tools which may not require huge amount of money but innovative ideas and initiative to make use of them.

In order to curb the shift of children from government to private schools, one block level officer from Telangana not only introduced English medium education in government schools, but also opened pre-primary sections in some schools with the help of Anganwaadi centre's maids and workers. In addition, as per the parents' demand, the timing of Anganwaadis was increased from 1.30 to 4.00 PM so that it was convenient for the parents who were predominantly agriculture labourers and daily wage workers. The officer pooled about Rs. 22 lakhs through public donations and expenses towards appointing English teachers and purchasing of uniforms, shoes, ties, belts and badges were met from this donation. Desks, benches and computers were purchased for schools without adequate infrastructure.

Improving schools and school facilities and making them as smart schools, improving teaching-learning process in government schools are some of the areas, besides many others, that have been instrumental in changing the scenario in the specific area of geographical location of the work place of the district and block level education officers. For instance, an officer from Andhra Pradesh attempted to make classroom teaching more interesting and engaging by initiating digitisation of classrooms which implied that teaching-learning shall now happen through new methods of pedagogy using ICT. The equipment required for the digitisation drive were mobilised by engaging the village elders (donations). The teachers too collaborated for providing assistance and support in their respective subjects through technical

resources. The resource base included projector, computers, auditorium, seating arrangement, sound system, subject experts, etc. The unique feature of this innovation is that it is replicable across contexts as well as serving the larger purpose of improving teaching methods, compatible with the changing scenario.

3. Concluding Remarks

Innovations are the hallmark of any kind of organized and systemic activities. Innovations are purposeful disruptions in the system to bring in desired changes and are integral part of education system. Like any other societal system, innovations in education system make it vibrant and progressive. Although educational innovations are mostly the results of fundamental or applied researches conducted by researchers, educational practitioners within the system also undertake a number of innovative activities in order to bring in desired changes for making the education system more efficient and effective. The efforts of educational administrators to initiate different types of innovations within the domains of their administrative operations deserve attention as well as appreciation. Although administrators are mostly constrained by the well-defined rules and regulations of the institutions, their attempts to experiment innovations within the boundary of rule books demonstrate their leadership role in institutions.

It is an undeniable fact that the district and block level educational administrators constitute an essential link between system level administration and institutional level management of education. Hence, their role becomes crucial in the effective management of education and in the process of implementation of policies and programmes at the field level. Additionally, these administrators are putting every effort to make the public education system not just work but work well. A lot has already been researched and documented on the dismal state of government schools in India. In such a scenario, the administrators, through their innovations, are trying to reinstate the faith in the government schooling system. This paper is only a modest attempt to highlight a few amongst the gamut of outstanding cases.

Each of the innovation discussed in the paper has the potential to bring in systemic changes and address the challenges or issues faced by Indian school system, in particular, and Indian education system, in general. For example, Shikshak Mitan App developed for school system is an excellent e-governance initiative which can be applied to provide the employees of higher education institutions electronic information about their service books. Mobile Library and Digital School Bag are innovations which will form the part of hybrid model of teaching-learning that is fast emerging both in school and tertiary education sectors. Innovations like Bharosha and Schooling of Migrant children under category three; Setting of Medicinal Plant Gardens and Aquatic Animal Home in Schools and Single Use Plastic free Campaign under category four; Former School Meet and Mo School Abhiyan under category five; and use of ICT for improving Governance and Teaching-learning Process under category six can be replicated in the school system across the country. Furthermore, the innovations and interventions related to local language and textbooks in mother tongue have been proactively undertaken by the administrators since several years. The significance of mother tongue and the local language has also been further reinforced in the NEP 2020 document wherein it is indicated that all efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged. All innovations included in the paper can be a matter of larger government policy as well as policies of educational institutions. Given the profound significance of innovations, they need to be an integral part of the administrative culture within the schooling system.

It is worth highlighting that these innovations from different corners of the country are certainly encouraging and, in a way, try to counter the popular perception about the public school system. The emphasis here is not only on the novel ideas but also the sustained, coordinated effort that led administrators along with other stakeholders come together in support of common goals. These cases have made substantial impact on some of the significant areas of the educational administration and the schooling process. Involvement and participation of all the stakeholders in different stages of the implementation was essential for the success of the innovation.

It is pertinent to highlight that contextualised grass root level interventions have profound impact on the overall functioning of the system and improving their efficiency. It is evident from the cases mentioned in this paper that any intervention will lead to the desired outcome when the implementer is involved right from the beginning. Once again, it is well-established that bottom-up approach is inevitable in introducing positive changes within the system. In the present context, the field level administrators have not only undertaken the situational analysis of their district or block, but planned, designed, and implemented the innovations as per the needs of the situations and responses from the stakeholders and with the available resources. Such cases deserve wider dissemination within the domain of education so that the same can be replicated in similar context. Recognising the cases and rewarding the administrators for their tireless efforts is definitely a step towards the right direction. However, given the ease of replicability of the cases mentioned in the paper, these innovative cases need to have a ripple effect amongst the administrators and act as a catalyst in initiating change in similar contexts.

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