



Shortage of subject teachers: a festering wound in the Indian school system

VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN SUGGESTS THAT ISSUES THAT AFFECT THE SHORTAGE OF SUBJECT TEACHERS SHOULD BE STUDIED HOLISTICALLY AND THE SYSTEM FOR AGGREGATION OF DATA ON TEACHER DEMAND OVERHAULED TO BETTER SUPPORT DECISIONS RELATED TO TEACHER DEPLOYMENT.

As I was going through recent education data of India, three startling facts caught my attention. The first was the shortage of subject teachers in upper-primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools in many states, the second the percentage of schools without any teacher, and the third the number of surplus teachers who had not been deployed in any school. This may not be a surprising finding for those who have been following the trajectory of teacher recruitment, deployment, and transfers. Many researchers have commented on the deep political network that links teacher-related policies and the pivotal role of teachers in the election process. The shortage of subject teachers in schools has remained a

festering wound in the Indian school system.

Many states have not deployed the three subject teachers mandated by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, in more than one-fifth of their upper primary schools. According to the PAB Minutes 2019-20 published by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, the state of Uttar Pradesh suffers the most with 90 per cent of upper primary schools without all three subject teachers, followed by Maharashtra (80 per cent), Jammu & Kashmir (70 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (69 per cent), Jharkhand (57 per cent), Rajasthan (53 per cent), and Uttarakhand (42 per cent).

Schools without all three subject teachers

Maharashtra (80 per cent)
Jammu & Kashmir (70 per cent)
Madhya Pradesh (69 per cent)
Jharkhand (57 per cent)
Rajasthan (53 per cent)
Uttarakhand (42 per cent)

The problem is far more severe in secondary schools. Only 3.3 per cent of all government secondary schools meet the norm of employing five teachers (two language teachers and one teacher each for mathematics, social science, and science) and a headteacher. More than 14 per cent

of secondary schools have only one or two subject teachers, with the situation in Uttar Pradesh (over 30 per cent), Jharkhand (20 per cent), and Rajasthan (20 per cent) being particularly grim.

Discussions with school leaders, teachers, and administrators reveal that while information on subject-wise teacher requirements in every school is collected, this data seldom informs actual teacher deployment. Postings and transfers in many states are politicised and school leaders are rarely consulted in the process. Of the 14 states that do not have four subject teachers in secondary schools, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal have more than half their schools without four subject teachers. Jharkhand has only 2 per cent schools with all four subject teachers, Jammu & Kashmir 10 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 12 per cent, Punjab 6 per cent, Rajasthan 13 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 5 per cent, and West Bengal 28 per cent. This naturally has an impact on the quality of education provided by secondary schools in these states.

On the other hand, recent MoE data also reveals that there is a surplus of teachers, especially at the elementary stage. For example, Assam has 29 000 surplus teachers, Madhya Pradesh 23 000, Odisha 11 000, Punjab 8 364, Rajasthan 12 000, and Uttar Pradesh 78 372.

Schools with surplus teachers

Assam	29 000
Madhya Pradesh	23 000
Odisha	11 000
Punjab	8 364
Rajasthan	12 000
Uttar Pradesh	78 372

If we juxtapose the issue of ‘surplus teachers’ with ‘non-availability of subject teachers’, the picture becomes quite clear. Let’s take the case of the state of Assam.

There are 22 852 teacher job vacancies at the elementary level and 22 per cent of its upper primary schools do not have three subject teachers; on the other hand, 29 000 surplus teachers at the elementary level have to be rationally deployed to ensure availability of the required number of teachers in all schools. Uttar Pradesh is another example where although 41 per cent primary schools and 42 per cent upper primary schools have a high pupil-teacher ratio, 90 per cent upper primary schools are without three subject teachers, while there are 78 372 surplus teachers at the elementary level. Such instances of surplus teachers with gaps in the required numbers of subject teachers need to be studied in each stage to get a better understanding of the situation.

The third dimension of this conundrum is the existence of schools without any teacher or as UDISE (2016-17) puts it – percentage of schools with zero to one teacher. The highest proportion of such schools is in Jharkhand (17.2 per cent), followed by Uttarakhand (14.4 per cent) and Assam (4.2 per cent).

The issues of teacher shortages, surplus teachers, non-availability of subject-teachers, and schools with no teachers need to be studied together to understand the situation. Administrative mechanisms to address the situation should be devised based on the findings of robust research and data. Presently, information flows from the school to the district office where it is consolidated for submission to state officials in the concerned departments (elementary or secondary or senior secondary), before being finally sent for budgetary approval to the central or state government. The system of aggregating teacher demand needs to be streamlined so that data reaches the appropriate levels to guide decisions regarding teacher recruitment and deployment. India will not be able to make progress in ensuring quality education for all unless the government addresses such issues simultaneously and in a holistic manner. **T**

AUTHOR

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