
THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (SMC): A CRITICAL ANALYSIS WITH REFERENCE TO ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

School Management Committees (SMCs) constitute an important institutional mechanism for decentralising school governance and promoting community participation in elementary education in India. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 gave statutory recognition to SMCs and entrusted them with responsibilities relating to school monitoring, preparation of School Development Plans, financial oversight, enrolment, attendance, infrastructure, inclusion and community participation. In Arunachal Pradesh, the significance of SMCs is particularly important because of the state's geographically dispersed settlements, difficult terrain, substantial rural and tribal population, and considerable diversity in language and culture. This article critically analyses the role and responsibilities of SMCs with particular reference to Arunachal Pradesh. It adopts a qualitative, descriptive and analytical methodology based on secondary sources, including the RTE Act, Arunachal Pradesh RTE Rules, government guidelines, policy documents and existing empirical studies. The analysis indicates that SMCs have considerable potential to improve school accountability, community ownership, resource utilisation, enrolment and school development. However, the effectiveness of SMCs is constrained by inadequate awareness of their statutory functions, irregular participation, limited capacity-building, weak monitoring, socio-economic constraints, geographical difficulties and the gap between formal responsibilities and actual decision-making power. Studies from Arunachal Pradesh, including research conducted in Lower Dibang Valley and Kurung Kumey, indicate that

parental participation and awareness remain important areas requiring strengthening. The article argues that SMCs should be transformed from largely formal committees into active institutions of participatory school governance through regular training, transparent financial practices, stronger School Development Planning, inclusive participation and systematic institutional support.

KEYWORDS: School Management Committee, RTE Act, community participation, school governance, decentralisation, School Development Plan, Arunachal Pradesh, elementary education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an important instrument of social transformation, human development and economic progress. The quality of school education depends not only on teachers, curriculum and infrastructure but also on effective governance, accountability and meaningful participation of parents and the wider community. In a democratic education system, schools cannot function effectively in isolation from the communities they serve. Community participation creates a sense of ownership and enables local stakeholders to contribute to educational planning, monitoring and school development.

The institutionalisation of community participation in Indian elementary education received significant legal recognition through the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act). Section 21 of the Act provides for the constitution of School Management Committees in eligible schools and specifies their principal functions, including monitoring the working of the school, preparing and recommending the School Development Plan and monitoring the utilisation of grants.

The RTE framework envisages SMCs as instruments of decentralised and participatory governance. At least three-fourths of SMC members are required to be parents or guardians, with representation of disadvantaged and weaker sections, while 50% of the members are to be women. This composition is intended to ensure that school-level decision-making reflects the interests of children and their families rather than being confined to educational administrators.

Arunachal Pradesh presents a distinctive context for examining SMCs. The state is characterised by difficult geographical terrain, scattered habitations, remote villages, tribal communities, linguistic diversity and uneven accessibility to public services. Consequently,

community participation can be particularly valuable in identifying local educational needs, monitoring school functioning and connecting schools with their communities.

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has provided for SMCs through its RTE framework. The state's education department also identifies School Management Committee rules among its academic and administrative regulations. A 2010 Arunachal Pradesh government notification specifically laid down guidelines for the composition and functions of SMCs at the elementary level.

However, the existence of a statutory committee does not automatically ensure effective participation. The central issue is therefore the difference between the de jure role of SMCs and their de facto functioning. National studies have identified substantial gaps between the policy expectation of community participation and actual implementation (Bhuc & Singh, 2020). Recent research from Arunachal Pradesh similarly indicates problems relating to awareness, participation and satisfaction with the functioning of SMCs (Kumar & Saring, 2024; Meto & Saroh, 2025).

Against this background, the present article critically examines the role and responsibilities of SMCs and assesses their potential and limitations in the context of Arunachal Pradesh.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the article are:

To examine the concept and statutory framework of School Management Committees in India.

1. To analyse the major roles and responsibilities assigned to SMCs under the RTE framework.
2. To examine the functioning and relevance of SMCs in the context of Arunachal Pradesh.
3. To identify major challenges affecting the effective functioning of SMCs in the state.
4. To assess the contribution of SMCs towards participatory school governance, accountability and school development.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening the effectiveness of SMCs in Arunachal Pradesh.

3. Literature Review

The literature on School Management Committees broadly focuses on decentralisation, community participation, accountability, school development and educational outcomes.

3.1 SMCs and Decentralised School Governance

Singh (2012) argues that community participation is fundamental to the successful implementation of the RTE Act. SMCs provide a mechanism through which parents, teachers and community members can participate in school-level decision-making. However, the author also points out that decentralisation requires genuine empowerment rather than merely the formal establishment of committees.

Bhue and Singh (2020) examine decentralised school governance through community participation and observe a gap between expectations and implementation. Their study identifies both internal and external challenges affecting SMC members. Internal challenges include limitations in awareness and participation, while external challenges include institutional and administrative constraints.

3.2 SMCs and Accountability

The SMC framework seeks to create accountability between schools and the communities they serve. Parents and community representatives can monitor school functioning, examine the utilisation of resources and raise concerns relating to educational facilities and children's participation. Recent evidence from India suggests that strengthening community participation can increase SMC meetings and the completion of School Improvement Plans, although improvements in infrastructure and learning outcomes may not automatically follow (**Azgaldova et al., 2026**).

This finding is important because it demonstrates that SMCs should not be viewed as a single intervention capable of solving all educational problems. Their effectiveness depends on the institutional environment, capacity of members and the extent to which their recommendations are acted upon.

3.3 SMCs in Tribal and Remote Areas

The role of SMCs becomes especially significant in tribal and geographically difficult regions. **Tyagi et al. (2023)**, in their study of tribal-concentrated areas in Meghalaya, found positive potential for community participation in school development, enrolment and monitoring, while also emphasising the need for stronger measures to empower SMCs.

The findings have relevance for Arunachal Pradesh because many communities are similarly located in remote and tribal areas. Local participation can help schools understand community-specific educational needs, cultural practices and constraints.

3.4 Studies from Arunachal Pradesh

Recent empirical research provides useful insights into the functioning of SMCs in Arunachal Pradesh. **Kumar and Saring (2024)** studied parents' perceptions regarding SMC functioning

in Kurung Kumey district. Their study reported concerns regarding participation in SMC elections, awareness of SMC provisions, school infrastructure and parental satisfaction. The authors recommended increasing awareness among SMC members and improving cooperation between teachers and parents.

Meto and Saroh (2025) examined the composition and formation of SMCs in Lower Dibang Valley district and compared them with the norms of the RTE Act. Their study highlights the importance of SMCs in connecting parents, teachers and communities with school governance and identifies their potential contribution to transparency, accountability and school development.

Overall, the literature indicates that SMCs have considerable institutional potential, but the effectiveness of the committees depends on awareness, capacity, participation, resources and the willingness of educational authorities to recognise community inputs.

4. Concept and Legal Framework of SMC

The School Management Committee is a school-level participatory body intended to involve parents, teachers, local authorities and the community in the governance and development of schools.

Under Section 21 of the RTE Act, eligible schools are required to constitute SMCs consisting of elected representatives of the local authority, parents or guardians and teachers. At least 75% of the members must be parents or guardians; representation is to be provided to disadvantaged and weaker sections, and at least 50% of members must be women.

The principal statutory functions are:

- i. Monitoring the functioning of the school;
- ii. Preparing and recommending the School Development Plan;
- iii. Monitoring the utilisation of grants; and
- iv. Performing other prescribed functions.

The Arunachal Pradesh framework further provides for the preparation of a School Development Plan. The plan is designed as a three-year plan comprising annual sub-plans and includes projections concerning enrolment, additional teachers, infrastructure, equipment and financial requirements.

Thus, the SMC is not merely an advisory group. It is intended to function as an institutional mechanism for participatory planning, monitoring and accountability.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of School Management Committees

5.1 Monitoring the Functioning of the School

One of the central responsibilities of an SMC is to monitor the overall functioning of the school. This includes observing whether the school is operating regularly, whether teachers and students attend regularly, whether educational activities are taking place and whether children receive the facilities and entitlements to which they are legally entitled.

Monitoring does not mean interfering in the professional responsibilities of teachers. Rather, it involves community-level oversight and constructive engagement with the school administration.

5.2 Preparation of the School Development Plan

The School Development Plan is one of the most important responsibilities of the SMC. It provides a framework for identifying the educational, infrastructural, human-resource and financial requirements of the school.

Under the Arunachal Pradesh RTE framework, the plan covers matters such as projected enrolment, additional teachers, infrastructure and equipment, and additional financial requirements.

An effective School Development Plan should therefore emerge from local needs rather than being prepared merely to fulfil an administrative requirement.

5.3 Monitoring Utilisation of Grants

SMCs have an important accountability function in relation to school grants and other resources. Community monitoring can promote transparency and reduce the possibility of inappropriate or inefficient utilisation of public funds.

The presence of parents and community representatives can also ensure that expenditure is linked to actual school needs.

5.4 Enrolment, Attendance and Retention

SMCs can help identify children who are out of school or irregular in attendance. This is particularly important in remote communities where distance, household responsibilities, seasonal migration, poverty or other social factors may affect children's attendance.

Parents and community members are often better positioned than external officials to identify children who are at risk of dropping out.

5.5 Monitoring Infrastructure and Basic Facilities

SMCs can monitor the condition of classrooms, toilets, drinking water facilities, electricity, boundary walls, furniture, libraries, playgrounds and other infrastructure.

In geographically challenging areas of Arunachal Pradesh, local monitoring can help identify infrastructure problems quickly and communicate them to the appropriate authorities.

5.6 Promoting Inclusion and Equity

The SMC has an important responsibility to ensure that children from disadvantaged groups and weaker sections are not excluded from educational opportunities.

Women's participation in SMCs is particularly significant. The statutory requirement of 50% representation of women creates an institutional opportunity for mothers and women community members to participate in decisions concerning children's education.

5.7 Supporting Children with Special Needs

SMCs can identify barriers faced by children with disabilities and other special educational needs. They can advocate for accessible infrastructure, appropriate learning materials, inclusive classrooms and support services.

5.8 Monitoring Mid-Day Meal and Other Child Entitlements

Community participation can strengthen monitoring of school meals and other entitlements. Local representatives can help ensure that children receive the benefits intended for them and can raise concerns regarding quality, regularity or implementation.

5.9 Strengthening Parent-Teacher Relationships

SMCs provide a formal platform for interaction between parents and teachers. Better communication can help teachers understand children's home environment, interests and difficulties, while parents can better understand the educational requirements of their children.

5.10 Mobilising Community Resources

Schools can draw upon local knowledge and resources. In Arunachal Pradesh, community members may possess valuable knowledge of local history, culture, traditional ecological practices, crafts, agriculture, environment and indigenous knowledge systems. SMCs can facilitate appropriate connections between such community resources and school activities.

6. METHODOLOGY

The article adopts a qualitative, descriptive and analytical research design based primarily on secondary sources. The study does not claim to present primary field-survey results. Instead, it critically analyses existing legal provisions, policy documents, government guidelines and published research relating to SMCs.

The major sources include

1. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
2. Arunachal Pradesh RTE-related rules and government guidelines.
3. Government publications concerning SMCs and school governance.
4. Research articles published in academic journals.
5. Studies specifically relating to SMCs in Arunachal Pradesh.
6. Relevant literature on decentralisation, community participation and school-based management.

The collected material was analysed thematically under the following dimensions: participatory governance, school monitoring, financial accountability, School Development Planning, inclusion, enrolment and attendance, infrastructure development, community ownership and implementation challenges.

The study is therefore a critical secondary analysis rather than an empirical survey of a particular district.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 SMCs Have Strong Legal and Institutional Foundations

The first major finding is that SMCs have a strong statutory foundation. The RTE Act clearly identifies school-level community participation as an important component of educational governance. Arunachal Pradesh has also institutionalised SMCs through its state-level framework.

Thus, the problem is not the absence of a legal framework but the extent to which the framework is translated into effective practice.

7.2 There Is a Gap Between Formal Responsibility and Actual Participation

The literature suggests a persistent gap between the formal responsibilities of SMCs and their actual functioning. Bhue and Singh (2020) identify a gap between decentralisation as envisaged in policy and community participation as experienced in practice.

This gap may arise when SMC members are not adequately informed about their powers and responsibilities or when meetings become procedural rather than deliberative.

7.3 Awareness and Capacity Building Are Major Requirements

Research from Kurung Kumey indicates that parents may not have adequate awareness of SMC provisions and procedures. Kumar and Saring (2024) specifically recommend improving awareness of the rights and duties of SMC members.

Therefore, constitution of an SMC should always be accompanied by orientation and capacity-building programmes.

7.4 SMCs Can Improve Accountability

SMCs can provide a mechanism through which school administration becomes more responsive to parents and communities. Monitoring of grants, infrastructure and school activities can strengthen transparency.

However, accountability will be meaningful only when SMCs have access to relevant information and when their observations and recommendations receive an appropriate institutional response.

7.5 SMCs Are Particularly Relevant to Arunachal Pradesh

The geographical and socio-cultural context of Arunachal Pradesh makes community participation especially important. Remote schools cannot always be effectively monitored through frequent visits by officials. Local stakeholders can provide continuous community-level oversight.

Moreover, the participation of parents and community members can help schools adapt educational activities to local cultural and linguistic contexts.

7.6 Representation Does Not Always Guarantee Effective Participation

Although the legal framework provides for substantial parental and women's representation, representation alone does not guarantee meaningful participation. Social position, education, confidence, time availability and awareness can affect the ability of members to participate actively.

Consequently, SMC empowerment should include capacity-building, accessible information and transparent decision-making.

7.7 School Development Planning Needs Greater Community Ownership

The School Development Plan has the potential to become a powerful instrument of participatory planning. However, it should not become merely a document prepared to satisfy administrative requirements.

The plan should be based on actual needs identified by parents, teachers, students and community members and should establish priorities that can realistically be implemented.

7.8 SMCs Cannot Solve Structural Educational Problems Alone

The evidence also suggests that SMCs should not be expected to compensate for shortages of teachers, infrastructure or financial resources. Recent evidence from India shows that interventions supporting community-based management can improve SMC activity and

planning, but such changes do not necessarily translate automatically into improvements across all school outcomes (Azgaldova et al., 2026).

SMCs should therefore be considered one component of a wider educational governance system rather than a substitute for adequate government investment.

8. Major Challenges of SMCs in Arunachal Pradesh

The following challenges are particularly important:

8.1 Limited Awareness

Some parents and community members may not fully understand the legal functions, powers and responsibilities of SMCs.

8.2 Geographical Constraints

Difficult terrain, scattered settlements and transportation problems can make regular meetings and monitoring difficult, particularly in remote areas.

8.3 Irregular Participation

Household responsibilities, livelihood activities and limited time can reduce parents' participation in meetings and elections. Evidence from Kurung Kumey illustrates this concern.

8.4 Capacity Constraints

SMC members may require training in school governance, financial management, educational planning, child rights and monitoring procedures.

8.5 Formalistic Meetings

There is a risk that SMC meetings may become routine administrative exercises rather than forums for genuine discussion and decision-making.

8.6 Limited Access to Information

Effective monitoring requires access to information concerning grants, enrolment, attendance, infrastructure, school development plans and other relevant matters.

8.7 Teacher-Parent Communication Gaps

Weak communication between teachers and parents can reduce the effectiveness of SMCs.

8.8 Socio-Cultural Factors

Differences in education, socio-economic status, gender roles and social confidence may influence the participation of different members.

9. Suggestions for Strengthening SMCs in Arunachal Pradesh

9.1 Regular Capacity-Building Programmes

Every newly constituted SMC should receive an orientation covering:

1. RTE provisions;
2. roles and responsibilities of SMC members;
3. School Development Planning;
4. financial monitoring;
5. child rights;
6. inclusive education;
7. attendance and retention;
8. grievance mechanisms; and
9. community mobilisation.

9.2 Strengthening School Development Planning

The School Development Plan should be prepared through participatory consultation and should clearly identify priorities, timelines, responsibilities and expected outcomes.

9.3 Greater Transparency

Schools should make relevant information concerning grants, expenditure, enrolment, attendance and development activities accessible to SMC members.

9.4 Strengthening Women's Participation

Women's representation should go beyond numerical compliance. Women SMC members should be encouraged to participate actively in discussions, monitoring and decision-making.

9.5 Use of Local Knowledge

SMCs in Arunachal Pradesh can help schools integrate appropriate local knowledge, culture, traditions and community resources into educational activities. This can make schooling more relevant to children's lived experiences.

9.6 Regular Monitoring by Education Authorities

Block and district-level education authorities should periodically assess SMC functioning using measurable indicators such as meeting regularity, attendance, School Development Plan preparation, implementation of decisions and community participation.

9.7 Strengthening Grievance Redressal

Parents and community members should have clear channels through which they can raise concerns regarding school functioning, infrastructure, teacher attendance, children's entitlements and other issues.

9.8 Digital and Hybrid Communication

Where geographical conditions make physical meetings difficult, appropriate use of mobile communication and digital platforms can support information sharing and coordination, while ensuring that communities with limited connectivity are not excluded.

10. CONCLUSION

School Management Committees represent an important shift from centralised educational administration towards participatory and community-based school governance. The RTE Act, 2009 provides SMCs with significant responsibilities concerning school monitoring, School Development Planning and financial accountability, while the Arunachal Pradesh framework provides a state-level institutional basis for their functioning.

The critical analysis shows that the potential of SMCs is considerably greater than their actual effectiveness in many contexts. The principal challenge is not merely the formation of committees but their transformation into genuinely empowered and functional institutions.

In Arunachal Pradesh, SMCs have special relevance because of the state's geographical, social, cultural and demographic characteristics. Local parents and community members can contribute substantially to monitoring schools, identifying educational needs, promoting enrolment and attendance, supporting infrastructure development and connecting education with local knowledge and community life.

However, the available literature indicates that awareness, participation, training and implementation remain significant concerns. Studies from Kurung Kumey and Lower Dibang Valley demonstrate the need to strengthen the capacity and meaningful participation of SMC members.

The future effectiveness of SMCs therefore depends on moving from “committee formation” to “committee empowerment.” Regular training, transparent information systems, participatory School Development Plans, stronger parent–teacher relationships, inclusive representation and systematic government support are necessary. SMCs should be treated not as an administrative formality but as an important democratic institution capable of making schools more accountable, inclusive, responsive and locally relevant.

Ultimately, effective SMCs can contribute to building a school system in Arunachal Pradesh in which government, teachers, parents and communities share responsibility for children's education and school development.

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