

Para Teachers: An Increasing Recruitment Trend In Schools

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ABSTRACT

The recruitment of para teachers has emerged as a significant trend in school education across India, particularly in rural and resource-constrained regions. This study examines the growing dependence on para teachers—contractual, locally recruited teaching personnel—as a response to teacher shortages, financial constraints, and the need for community participation in the schooling system. The paper explores the factors driving this recruitment trend, including expanding enrolment under universalization of elementary education, challenges in appointing regular teachers, and policy measures encouraging decentralized hiring practices. It also analyses the implications of this trend on teaching quality, student learning outcomes, school administration, and the overall professional landscape of the teaching workforce. While para teachers contribute to filling critical staffing gaps, concerns remain regarding job security, training, salary disparities, and long-term sustainability. The study emphasizes the importance of balancing cost-effective recruitment with quality education standards and recommends strengthening training, monitoring, and career pathways for para teachers to improve their effectiveness within the school system.

Keywords: Para Teachers, Contractual Teachers, Recruitment Trends, School Education, Teacher Shortage, Educational Policy, Quality of Education, Decentralized Hiring, Learning Outcomes, Rural Schools.

1. Introduction:

Para teacher is a generic term used for teachers appointed on contract. Numerous surveys of contract teachers in developing countries observed that teachers including volunteers, community teachers and para teachers fall under the label of contract teachers. Generally, contract teachers are hired for a year at a salary of one-half to one-quarter of that of a regular teacher.

One of the key characteristics of a teaching job all over the world is stability. However, rigidity of the system and burdensome administrative requirements fail to respond to the fluctuations in student enrolment and that of retired staff, teachers on leave or for that matter, absent teachers. We may also add the lack of effective mechanisms to ensure that institutions in hard-to-reach rural and remote areas are effectively staffed and that teachers are accountable for student outcomes. Further, there is limited capacity in the system to provide effective incentives for professional and career development. Fixed-term contracts, therefore, have some appeal as they provide a degree of flexibility to the sector and facilitate quick adjustments to pressing urgent demands.

2. International Experiences on Para Teacher:

Recruitment of contract teachers has been reported in West and Central Africa. Senegal is one of the countries to introduce the practice of appointing para teachers as a national policy in 1995. Nigeria along with Senegal have almost half of its teaching force under short-term contracts. Other countries in the region like Guinea has 39 percent of teaching workforce made of contract teachers while Cameroon has 20 percent.

Para teachers have been appointed in Asia and Latin America too. In these countries, the government strategy is also to reduce teacher costs and decentralize the management and financing of education. In Nicaragua, Latin America, teachers' contractual arrangements have changed as a result of a reform that has promoted education decentralization and school autonomy since 1990s. In autonomous schools, teachers are employed by the school council rather than by the Ministry of Education and are offered financial incentives on top of their base salary on the basis of their performance. Elsewhere in Latin America, contract teachers in Peru represent about 11 percent of the teaching workforce. Para teachers constitute about 20 percent of the teachers in Chile.

In Asia, China has been appointing contract teachers with a view to expand education particularly in remote areas. Cambodia is a unique case of a long history of using contract teachers. At the time of re-opening of schools in 1979 after Khmer Rouge regime, shortage of teachers led the government to rely on a massive recruitment of volunteers to staff classrooms. The contract teachers in Cambodia were largely former teachers who had retired at the age of 55 and young students from remote areas, often of ethnic minority background with low educational attainment, but able to work with children in their own language and trusted by the parents. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee in Bangladesh appoints contract teachers under Non-Formal Education programme. These are mostly local para-professional teachers, overwhelmingly educated married women. They are hired to teach three hours a-day at wages a-third of the rate of a government teacher.

3. The Indian Experiences:

In India, the centrally sponsored Non-Formal Education Scheme of 1970 reported the use of para teachers for 'out-of-school' children. However, it was only in the eighties that the appointment of para teachers in regular primary schools started. The first initiative in this regard was taken by the government of Himachal Pradesh in 1984 by appointing 'Volunteer Teachers'. These para teachers were hired to help single-teacher schools to cope with increased enrolment and to provide appropriate learning experiences to children in remote areas where regular teachers were reluctant to go.

The state of Rajasthan initiated one of the most prominent programme of para teachers named 'Shiksha Karmi Project' in the year 1987. 'Shiksha Karmi Project' was undertaken with assistance from Swedish International Development Agency. The pivotal insight of the Project was to identify educated people, often unemployed youth from within the community itself, to serve as education workers (Shiksha Karmi) while building strong linkages between the school and the community since the State education department found it difficult to deploy qualified teacher in remote and difficult areas.

Subsequently, the late 1990s marked the practice of appointing para teachers in regular schools, thanks to the launching of the District Primary Education Programme and the states' endeavour to achieve Universal Elementary Education. Para teachers are presently being recruited in most of the states in the country to meet teacher shortage with a view to increasing access to education particularly in remote, hilly tracts, and un-served areas. The purpose is also to improve the quality of education.

4. Need of the Study:

Education is an effective tool for social and economic transformation. It equally plays a pivotal role in national development. Education, at its barest minimum, creates employable human resources while at its creative best, moulds institutions of learning to unearth talent which will create newer knowledge. The unearthed knowledge is used with the existing knowledge in a creative manner to solve present day problems.

India has witnessed rapid growth of educational institutions since Independence. Universalisation of education attracted unprecedented attention with the adoption of the National Policy on Education in 1986. It resulted in the launching of the District Primary Education Programme in the early 1990s. More recently in 2000, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has been launched to further the goal of education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.

Accordingly, there emerged rapid expansion in the number of schools, which in turn, required large investment in infrastructure and recruitment of school teachers. The economics of demand for additional teachers in all schools increased manifold. In order to meet this rising demand, the state governments in India have resorted to the appointment of teachers on contract basis, on specified terms and conditions, broadly termed as para teachers or contract teachers.

5. Methodology:

Methodologically, this paper has been prepared basically from the empirical studies on para teachers. Government recruitment policy, induction, deployment, emoluments and service conditions of para teachers have been extensively studied by researchers. Whereas positive issues like providing primary education to marginalized categories of children, better linkages of schools with community and greater accountability of teachers have evolved from the studies, negative aspects like poor infrastructural facilities, teacher qualification and competence, unsatisfactory initial training, etc, have equally popped up. Therefore, conclusions have been drawn from these reviews of literature.

6. Educational Qualification of Para Teacher:

The educational qualification of a para teacher varies in extremes across states in India. In state like Maharashtra, it is compulsory to have a professional degree or teaching certificate for para teachers at primary and upper primary level while in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, professional degree is not considered mandatory. Generally, the minimum educational qualification for a para teacher is intermediate/senior secondary or equivalent (10+2). However, in some other states, if suitable candidates are not found with the prescribed academic qualification, candidates with lower academic qualification are also considered.

In Bihar, two-year teacher training diploma is desirable. There is provision of appointment of matriculation or equivalent examination passed candidates if they have a two-year Certificate from government recognized training institutes. Earlier, 'Panchayat Shiksha Mitras' were appointed with high school as minimum qualifications. Orissa happen to follow yet another system. Out of the total vacant posts in each education district, 70 percent posts are reserved for candidates having matric/+2 with CT qualification and 30 percent for candidates having B.A/B.Sc./B.Com with B.Ed. qualification. If candidates in one of the categories are not available, vacancies can be filled up through other categories. Selection of the candidates is carried out according to merit.

We find yet another scheme of educational qualification for para teacher in Rajasthan. The minimum qualification of a male para teacher had been kept as low as VIII standard. And, in case of women, it was further lowered to V standard. This has been made possible under the 'Shiksha Karmi Project' (SKP). This is the only scheme in India and it has relevance in the context of Rajasthan. Shiksha Karmi Project was meant for remote habitations and teachers had to be necessarily local since finding teachers with better qualifications was difficult in many habitations.

7. Honorarium of Para Teachers:

The para teachers in all the states are being paid a fixed amount and their salary may be broadly called as 'Honorarium'. It varies between Rs. 1,000 per month to Rs. 1,500 per month across states. The trained para teachers in Bihar even get Rs. 5,000 per month. Apart from honorarium, the para teachers do not get any other additional benefits like PF, Pension or Gratuity. They also do not receive any annual increments in their salary.

8. Recruitment of Para Teacher:

The rules and regulations for appointment of school teachers were framed essentially by legislative bodies at the State level. And, the role of the central government had been confined to formulate broad policy framework particularly with a view to maintain quality standards for development of education. But the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India designated education to the concurrent list, thereby entailing responsibilities for both state and central government. Presently, the state governments draft their own policies within the broad framework outlined by the central government on policy decisions for hiring, recruitment and training teachers.

The policies with respect to recruitment and service conditions for contract teacher or para teachers are essentially formulated by each state government independently. The broad objective of each of the state in such act is to improve the adverse teacher-pupil ratio, check the drop-out rate, improve retention and universalization of elementary education at low cost. Citing problem of teacher shortages, the state governments have chosen not to go into solving the problem of vacancies being filled. Filling up all vacancies as per pupil-teacher norms would require resources that the state governments were finding increasingly difficult to get.

It might, also, be due to relatively low priority among other sectors in budgetary allocations. The economic argument for the appointment of para teacher is that provision of teachers as per requirement is possible within the financial resources available with the states. The non-economic argument is that a locally selected youth, accountable to the local community, undertakes the duties of teaching children with much greater interest.

9. Conclusions:

Based on the reviews of literature, the findings of the study suggest that there exists an increasing trend in the recruitment of para teachers by the state governments irrespective of economic or non-economic argument. Filling of vacancies by contract teachers have been the comfortable zone of recruitment policy. Para teachers need to be paid a fixed amount without any worry about additional benefits like pension or gratuity or for that matter, even annual increments. No doubt, para teachers are rated as good as regular teachers, work mostly in rural areas, majority of them are females, yet their meagre remuneration, which may be good for fiscal health of the states, reflects poorly on the state of affairs of school education. It is also apprehended that sooner than later, higher education will follow suit recruiting 'Para Professors'!

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