

Mapping the Hurdles in Innovation at the Level of Policy and Practice: The Way Ahead

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Abstract: *There is no denying that the educational policies are designed for the betterment of the educational processes to achieve the maximum learning. But desirable learning objectives are not achieved or remain under-achieved as per the findings of various studies. This paper suggests innovations at policy level and discusses the innovative measures that can be adopted by teachers at the classroom and school level to fill up this gap between the Desirable Learning Objectives and the Actual Learning Outcome of the students of the government schools of Haryana.*

Keywords: Innovation at Policy level, Innovation in Teaching-learning, Capacity-building for Innovation in Teaching, Government schools, Haryana

1. Introduction

There is no denying that the educational policies are designed for the betterment of the educational processes. No government wants to deteriorate education standards or diminish its quality by making new policy frameworks, but things not always change for the good. Most of the times, desired goals are either not achieved at all or remain under-achieved. Even after approximately 70 years of Independence, the outcome of rigorously planned educational policies remains abysmally low. Studies have been conducted by various organisations such as Pratham, an NGO working towards the quality education to the under-

privileged children in India, to know the „Reading level“ of students studying in public as well as private schools of Haryana. Reading proficiency forms the basis for all learning, therefore it can be treated as an indicator of general level of learning of the students. These studies give a bird’s eye view of our education system; its efficiency and inefficiency.

Trends over time- Percentage of children who can do DIVISION by class:

All schools 2009, 2011 and 2013

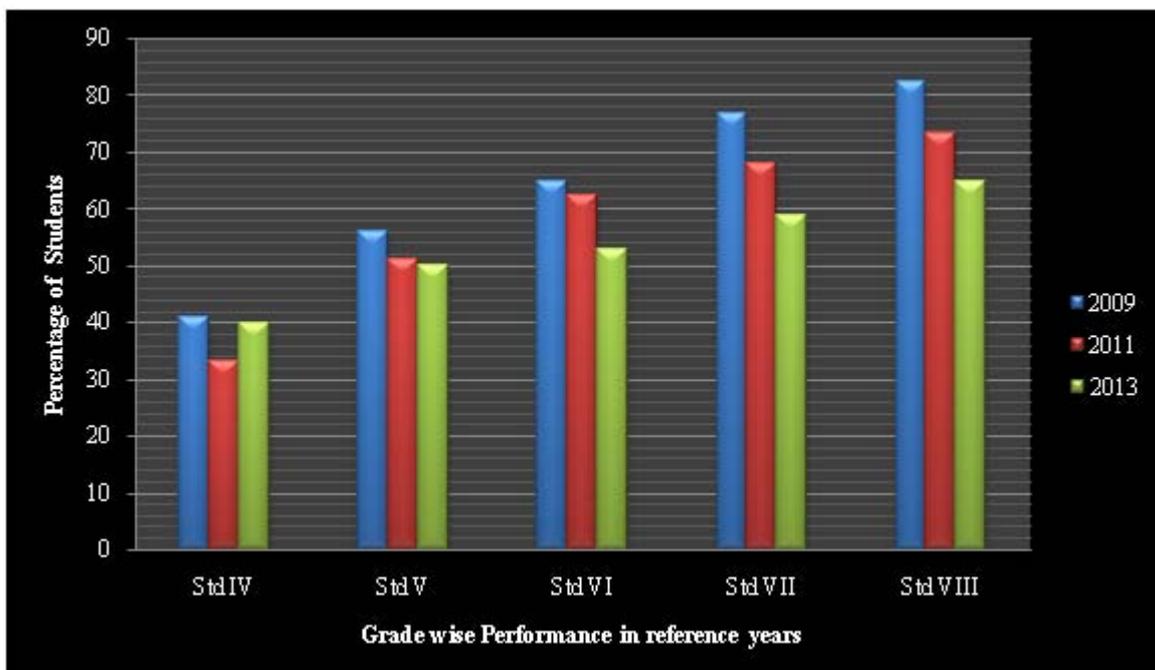


Figure 1: Depicting Percentage of children who can do DIVISION by class in Year 2009, 2011, 2013

This chart allows us to compare proportions of children who can divide a three digit number in different standards across years. For example, It shows that in the year 2009 (depicted by blue bar), approximately 41% of standard IV students,

57% of standard V students, 66.5% of standard VII students and 82% of standard VIII students can divide a three digit number. Likewise, data for the year 2011 and 2013 can be interpreted.

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Trends over time- Percentage of children who can READ Std II level text by class: All schools 2009, 2011 and 2013

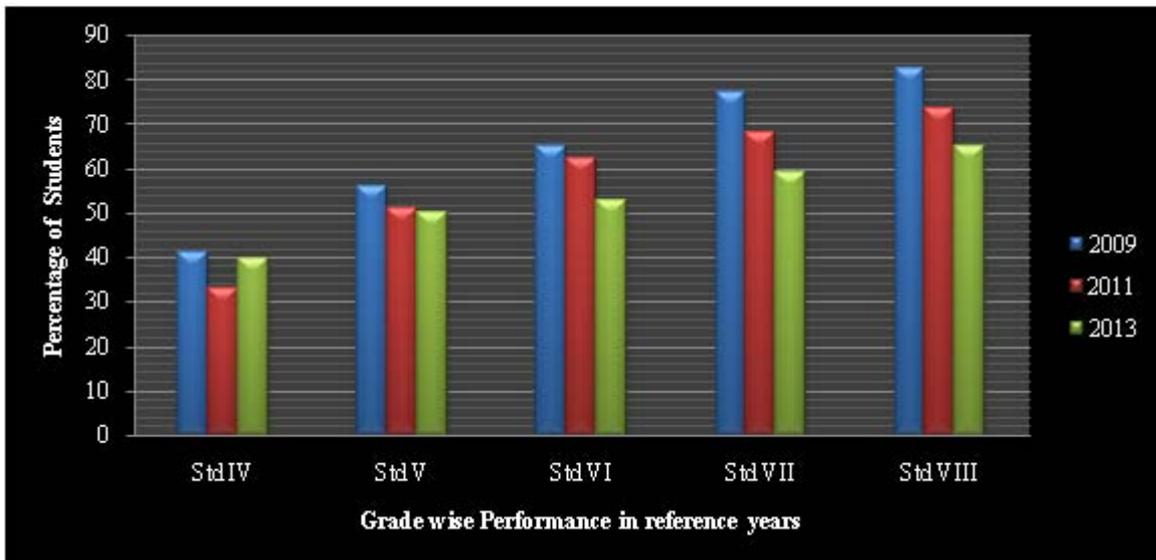


Figure 2: Depicting percentage of children reading at least Std II level texts in different standards across years

This chart allows us to compare proportions of children reading at least Std II level texts in different standards across years. For example, it shows that in the year 2009 (depicted by blue bar), approximately 48.5% children of standard IV, 68% children of standard V, 72% children of standard VI, 82% children of standard VII and 88% children of standard VIII could read at least class II level text. Likewise, data for the year 2011 and 2013 can be interpreted.

Clearly, it may be concluded from the above data that much more remains to be accomplished than what has already been achieved. But the question is “How?”

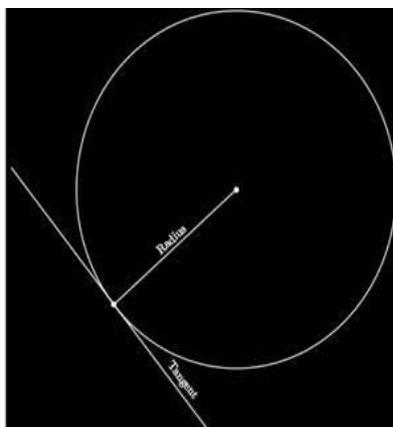
Can traditional methods of teaching being used by teachers in the classroom, fill up this gap between the Desirable Learning Objectives and the Actual Learning Outcome? Or we need to find out some new ways, some innovative techniques to maximise the learning? Is there any innovation taking place in our classrooms? If no, then why is it not happening in spite of the innumerable policies & programs and huge investments of public funds in education sector

grants? If yes, then why is it not disseminating further? First of all, let’s discuss what is meant by “Innovation”.

2. Meaning of Innovation

Wikipedia defines *Innovation* as “...a new idea, more effective device or process. Innovation can be viewed as the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs. This is accomplished through more effective products, processes, services, technologies, or ideas that are readily available.”

In the field of education, “Innovation” may be understood as any new idea, more effective device or process to improve educational processes to maximise the learning of the students. For example if a Maths teacher uses a chalk tied to a thread to draw a perfect circle on the board instead of drawing a rough circle by free hand so that students get a better idea of what a circle exactly is, then this may be termed as an innovation.



Where should ‘innovation’ happen....??? In the class room...? In the School....? ...at the Policy Level...? or somewhere else....???

3. Innovation at Policy Level

a) Mechanism for Feedback

Innovation at Policy Level is done from time to time by government bodies generally at state and sometimes at centre level (education being a subject in concurrent list). It is required to adapt to the changing needs and adopt newly emerged practices to improve the classroom practices. But whenever a new policy is implemented, proper and prompt feedback is required, for further improvement in the policy framed so as to ensure maximum learning outcomes. The biggest problem in the present system is that policy makers hardly get any feedback from the people actually working at the other end and the reason behind this is obvious that no well-defined mechanism, such as an official portal, has ever been developed to receive feedback. There is no such practice of inviting compulsory feedback from the end users i.e. the teachers on "Academics" and "Non-academic" aspects of the policy or program thus framed. If this innovation is done at the policy level, it can help the authorities to take up the cases for suggested amendments and take action accordingly.

Feedback becomes even more important as there is rarely any teacher found among the policy makers of education and if, at all, there is any, he/she is usually not the deciding authority. For example, for New Education Policy (still in the making), some vague suggestions have been taken from the teachers and it is difficult to comprehend how these suggestions are being consolidated. Therefore, there is a need to devise a full-fledged feedback mechanism to give room to meaningful innovations at policy level.

b) Capacity Building Programs for handling virtual platforms

When we talk about the innovative techniques of teaching such as incorporation of ICT in teaching learning processes, capacity-building needs to be done of teachers at pre-service, induction or in-service stage to handle virtual platforms like Moodles. In the last 20 years, no serious training program or regular course is there for newly appointed or newly promoted teachers or heads of the institution, in spite of having institutions like SCERT, NEUPA, NCERT etc. Then how can it be expected from the newly appointed / promoted teachers/headmasters to be an expert in using modern ICT tools? It is more remote possibility in case of the Heads who are on the verge of retirement? Therefore, there is a need to start Capacity Building Programs for Incorporation of ICT in Teaching-learning, and these courses should be made mandatory for promotion.

c) Training the Teachers for managing Non-academic affairs

A newly promoted Headmaster or Principal is expected to manage all the academic and non-academic affairs such as answering the post and handling court cases without attending any specialised entry level training program? When he is unable to perform the requisite non-academic functions itself, how will he think of innovation in teaching? Therefore, training programmes at various levels should also be made compulsory in the field of education on the lines of other sectors like banking, because an inefficient Head of the

educational institution causes irreparable loss of resources both material & human as well.

d) Organising the Workshops to Promote Innovative Thinking

The onus of innovation falls largely on the teacher as it is he who is responsible for improvement in the learning outcomes of the students by adopting and devising innovative strategies of teaching. But the question is whether he has the capacity/capability to innovate i.e. has he been trained sufficiently to think innovatively? Therefore, workshops should be organised to promote innovative thinking.

4. Innovation at Class-room level

a) Providing Flexibility in Dividing Sections, Choosing Units of Syllabus and Pace of Teaching

In a scenario, where the amount and duration to cover different parts of syllabus have been so rigidly defined at levels higher than that of his own, a teacher is hardly left with any freedom to try something new? In the present system, if a teacher wishes to teach the third part of fourth unit after teaching the second unit because these parts have some connection with the portion just finished, then the teacher doesn't have freedom to do so. After the inception of MIS portal system of monitoring students' enrolments etc., even the sections are being allotted from head office, purely on the basis of numerics without considering the individual pace of learning or IQ of the students. How can the required Multi-level- teaching be done? Where is the scope left for innovation? Such internal liberty should be given to the teacher under a broad framework. Strict norms (such as fixed part of syllabus, fixed time frame) should be done away with, in order to provide the teacher reasonable liberty to try something new.

b) Providing Access to Modern IT tools & Resources

Other than training, there is a need to provide the technological paraphernalia, such as wi-fi connection in the school campus, laptop to each and every teacher for successful inclusion of ICT in education. Otherwise a teacher is at a handicap when faced with sudden and difficult questions from the students whose answer he doesn't know. If a well trained teacher has laptop along with wi-fi connection in the classroom, his ability to find innovative solutions to the recurring as well as current problems of the students increases tremendously. Such provisions have unimaginable capacity to enrich the teaching-learning mechanism.

c) Gradual Transition from Traditional Classroom to Smart Classroom

"Smart class uses instructional material, 3D animated modules and videos, and all the renowned schools are using this concept. Now the students are thrilled at this concept of innovation and interactive learning process. The concept of digitized classroom has not only made education interesting but a chance to students to enhance their performance. A student's better engagement with the content on a smart board is dynamic and visually more appealing. Benefits of smart class include storage of teachers written notes, voice recording possibility, showing various videos, scope for the

integration of different types of technology and other novel ways for the teachers to present lesson” (Smart classroom, ukessays.com)

In Haryana too, attempts should be made for gradual transition of traditional (Chalk and Talk Method based) classroom to the smart classroom for enriching students’ learning environment using technological innovations in more ways than one.

5. Innovation at School level

a) Providing the platforms for ‘Testing & Sharing of Novel Techniques/Strategies’

In the schools, innovations are done intermittently by some gifted teachers, or by chance some new and useful process or technique is devised. But there is nothing like an official mechanism for the sharing and discussing these innovations in the entire school. Innovations can spread out of the class within the school through discussion with the other teachers. The critical appraisal of an innovation is a must before introducing it into the classroom. After thorough discussion and criticism, amendments should be made to the innovation and then only it can be implemented at the school level. Innovations should be shared so that improvement can be introduced in the innovative strategies by doing away with the oddities that might have rendered it useless at the end of the day, wasting students’ precious time. A teacher might have kept on using some wrong technique for years if a systematic appraisal is not done in the school that can criticise and improve it.

b) Providing Time to the Teacher to Read, Write or Plan something new

In the present scenario, a teacher doesn’t get adequate time during the school hours to read, write or plan something new. Most of the teachers have only one or two free periods in the school which are not sufficient to think of innovations. Therefore, a teacher should be allotted separate time to sit in the library or in the language lab or any other resource unit during the school hours and do reading and writing, experimenting or brainstorming on the innovative teaching strategies.

c) Division of Academic & Non-academic work

Also, there is a need to segregate academic and non-academic work on the lines of Air Force schools where personnel looking after academic and non-academic works generally do not interfere with each other. This saves a lot of time for teacher to innovate and improve classroom practices.

Promoting Innovative Strategies through Sharing at Cluster Level

After successful implementation of the innovative idea at the school level with positive results, it can be implemented at the cluster level. The innovator teacher can be sent to the different schools of the cluster to impart training to other teachers to use that innovation in their classrooms. Then the experiment can be repeated at the block and district level. At block or district level, the supporting devices for the successful implementation of innovation can be designed and distributed among all the teachers.

Academic Support System at Block and District level

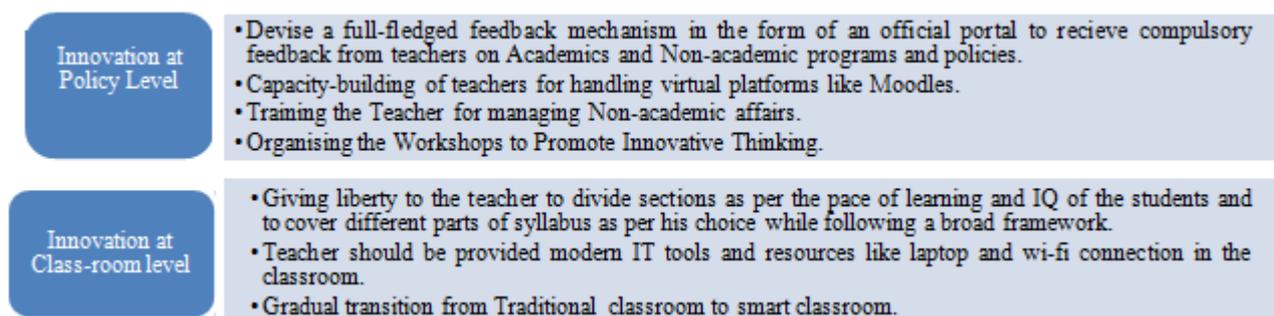
There should be a provision of Academic Resource Unit (ARU)/Resource Persons like BRPs appointed under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) from where teachers can get resource help for their professional growth. At present, either there is no such facility provided to the teachers of Haryana at all or is not effective, if any such arrangement exists.

At present, Block Resource Persons (BRPs) who are trained for the purpose of improving classroom practices are not given any liberty to peep into the classroom. In such a scenario, what he will be able to observe or induce? Therefore, in spite of devising the right mechanism, its proper utilisation is not being done. Therefore, amendments should be made in the current rules, regulations and policies to do away with such wastage of resources.

DEO (District Education Officer) or BEO (Block Education Officer) who are trained in using innovative strategies for teaching can also be a source of resource help for the teachers. They should also have sufficient spare time in their schedule so that when they inspect the class, they can guide the teachers in academics that how he should teach a particular topic and access & utilize resources from the ARU to further improve teaching-learning. In the absence of such expertise, untrained DEOs and BEOs tend to implement their own whims and fancies that they could not do during their tenure as a teacher. Such practices can be curbed by providing Induction Training to the DEOs and BEOs.

6. Conclusion

The problems in devising and adopting innovative strategies at various levels have been discussed in the present paper along with the plausible solutions. These are presented in the consolidated form in the following figure:



Innovation at School level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing the platforms for 'Testing & Sharing of Novel Techniques/Strategies• Providing the teacher sufficient time during the school hours to read, write, experiment, brainstorm and plan something new.• Division of Academic & Non-academic work
Innovation at Cluster level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After successful use of the innovation at school level, the innovator teacher should be sent to the different schools of the clusterschools in the capacity of Master Trainer to impart training to other teachers to use his innovation• Devices can be designed and distributed for the ease of implementation of the innovative idea or strategy.
Innovation at Block and District level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The experiment of sharing the innovation at cluster level can be repeated at the block and district level.• Providing Academic Resource Units (ARU) and appointing BRPs (Block Resource Persons) as appointed under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) from where teachers can get resource help.• BRPs should be allowed to inspect classroom practices and give suggestions to improve them.• DEO (District Education Officer) or BEO (Block Education Officer) should be trained in using innovative strategies for teaching.

If these corrective measures are adopted, it will have an over-arching effect on education by elevating general level of learning outcomes. The long-standing problems of underachievement of desirable learning objectives along with academic cheating and procrastination behaviour can be tackled with ease. Through these innovative measures, while improving the teaching-learning scenario prevalent in our schools, class-rooms can be turned into the hub of innovation and temple of learning.

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