



School Complexes As A Strategy For Improving Education Quality: An Economic Perspective

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Abstract: As a solution for the financial hardship brought on by the economic crisis and the budget shortfall in the school education system, the New Education Policy has suggested "School Complexes." It is widely acknowledged that because of initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha, the Indian educational system has made significant progress toward achieving universal access. The number of small-sized schools rose as a result. the problems with teaching in various grades, having one instructor teach all topics, having insufficient resources, and having problems with administration and management. As a result, delivering quality education became difficult. In order to collaborate and make use of one another's resources, it was planned to cluster all the other grades that were within five to ten miles of a secondary school. It will require administrative integration rather than the physical relocation of schools, with each school operating as a separate institution with some autonomy. These school complex activities are economic functions that attempt to maximize resource utilization while decreasing cost, which is a cost-effective technique, through sharing of resources, experiences, cooperation, collaboration, etc.

Keywords: School Complexes, Quality Education, Economic Perspective, NEP 2020

Introduction

The majority of Third World education systems are under tremendous pressure. On the one hand, they experience financial hardship brought on by local and international economic depression. On the other hand, they must meet a demand that is constantly growing due to population growth, a general desire for higher qualifications, and ongoing concerns about quality. Governments have been forced to find creative ways to accomplish their goals as a result of the need for quantitative and qualitative advancements within the constraints of financial austerity.

School complexes are one such innovation. They have been notably popular in Latin America, and have been increasingly popular in other continents in recent years. They have been introduced in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru, as well as Burma, India, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka.

An education council in Maharashtra State originally advocated school complexes in India. However, no action was done, and the advice was reaffirmed in 1966 by a national government through Education Commission popularly known as the Kothari commission in 1964. India has the world's largest school education system, serving nearly 260 million young people each year. Management is shared at the national and state levels. School education's goals include universal access and quality education that leads to learning for all pupils. It is commonly acknowledged that the Indian education system has made

tremendous progress toward universal access as a result of programs such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha.

Our school expansion plan has resulted in the establishment of very small schools, i.e., schools with a limited number of pupils, a huge number of single-teacher primary schools, multi-grade and multi-subject teachings, and the neglect of vital areas such as music, arts, and sports. In small schools, there is a lack of labs, sports equipment, library volumes, and so on. This is now a structural issue in our educational system, and it underpins several important concerns that pose serious hurdles to increasing educational quality. To address these difficulties, NEP 2020 recalls the Education Commission's (1964-1966) recommendation to construct a broader group structure known as the school complex.

The formation of school complexes removes the numbing isolation of schools and allows a small group of schools working in an area to collaborate to raise standards. It is also intended that resources and experiences would be shared and exchanged. The first National Education Policy, issued in 1986, also stressed school networking and synergistic alliances to encourage teacher professionalism and enable the sharing of experiences and facilities. Various (NPE – 1986) committees and commissions also suggested the establishment of School Complexes within the framework of local area planning.

In terms of the demands and value of the School Complex, it overcomes the isolation of schools and provides for the sharing of instructional works and material facilities. Furthermore, it promotes collaborative efforts for improvement and facilitates in-service training. A well-planned educational complex can ideally serve the objective of closer supervision, improving educational quality, maximizing resource utilization (both staff and materials), and improving the personal connections and professional consciousness of all workers.

Because many individuals are unfamiliar with school complexes, it is necessary to begin with a definition. A complex, in the context of this study, is a grouping of nearby schools for administrative and instructional purposes. The significance of the concept can be clarified by focusing on structures. Figure 1 depicts a popular complex architecture in which one school is designated as the 'core' or 'lead' school generally a secondary school and is the head of several member schools. The work of the complex is coordinated by the head of the lead school. He is usually very concerned with resource sharing and the professional development of teachers.

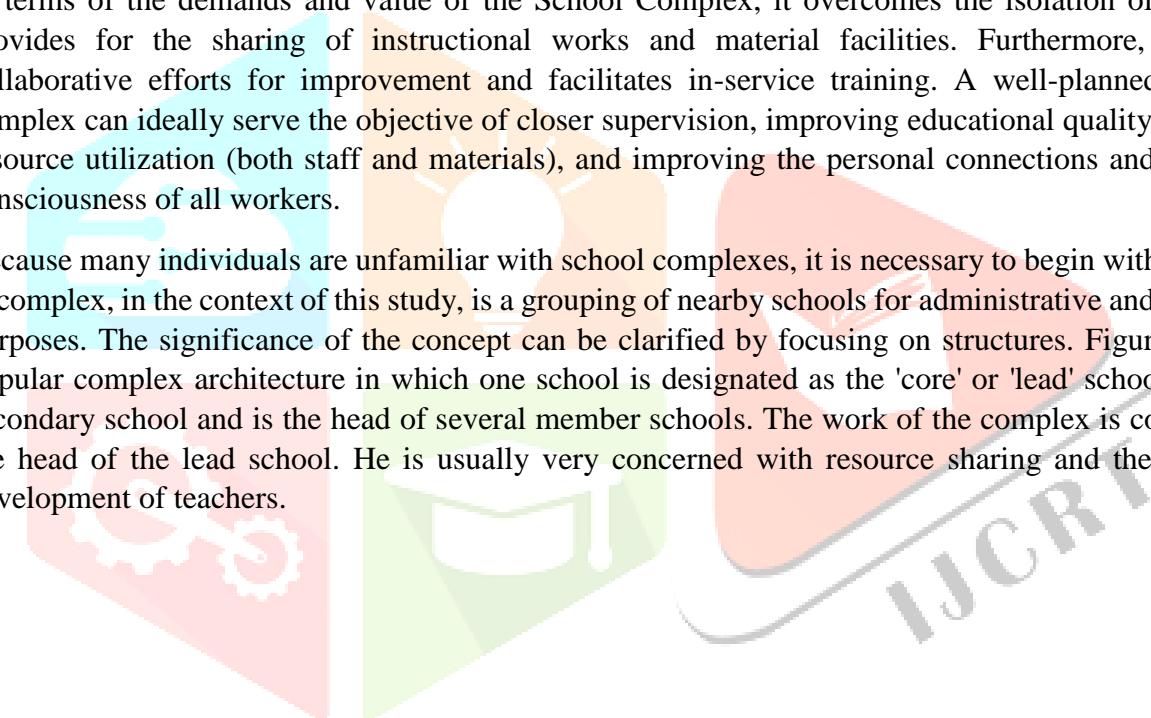


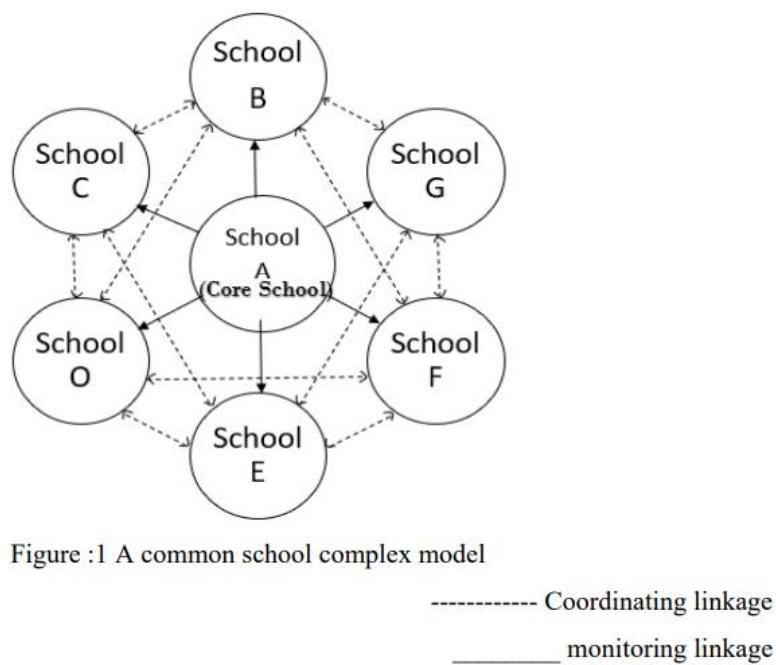
Figure1: A Common School Complex Model

Figure :1 A common school complex model

----- Coordinating linkage

— monitoring linkage

Source: Bray, M. (1987) *School clusters in the third world: Making them work* UNESCO-UNICEF

Figure 1 depicts a complex of seven schools, with School A serving as the lead school. The complex could be made up of only primary schools, only secondary schools, or both primary and secondary schools.

The Functions of School Complex

A survey of the school complex reveals several shared functions.

these are Economic functions, pedagogic functions, administrative functions, and political functions (Mark Bray 1987).

The author of this study concentrated solely on the economic functions of the school complex. The present article concentrated solely on the economic functions of the school complex.

❖ Economic Functions:

The primary economic objective of school complexes is to increase cost-effectiveness. This can be accomplished in three ways:

- (I) by sharing facilities,
- (II) by sharing staff, and
- (III) by allowing bulk orders of materials.

Several other strategies to improve cost-effectiveness are discussed. The most important ones are

- (iv) improved educational quality and
- (v) simpler administration.

Mobilization of extra resources is a slightly different form of economic goal. According to Mark Bray (1987), several Indian school complexes have expressly tried to generate extra resources from the community. However, this is a more peripheral economic goal, and the discussion below focuses on cost-effectiveness.

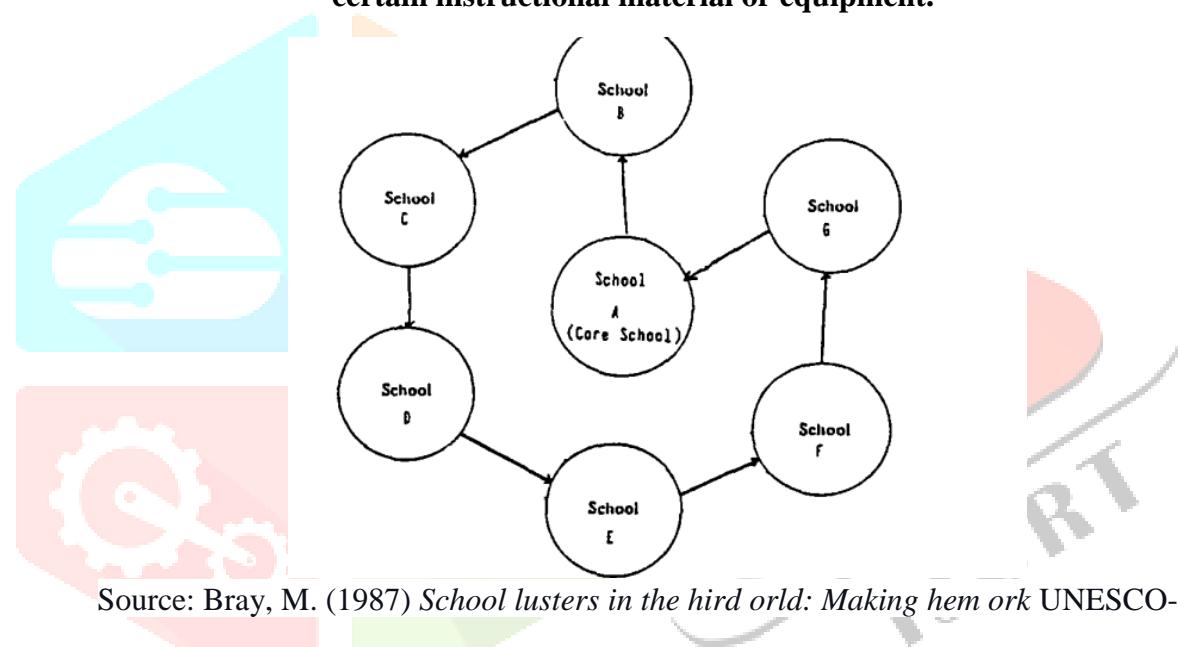
❖ Sharing Resources

Equipment (e.g., for science labs, and sports), books (e.g., library books, and multiple copies of class readers required for only a few weeks each year in English classes), and buildings (e.g. science laboratories, and workshops) are examples of facilities that can be shared among schools within a complex.

Individual schools that invest in these facilities on their own are likely to find that the resources are underutilized for the majority of the time. Only a large enough school can properly utilize a gymnasium, laboratory equipment, sports equipment and school vehicle, for example. After initial investments have been made, structures must be maintained, storage space for equipment must be given, and measures against theft and damage must be implemented.

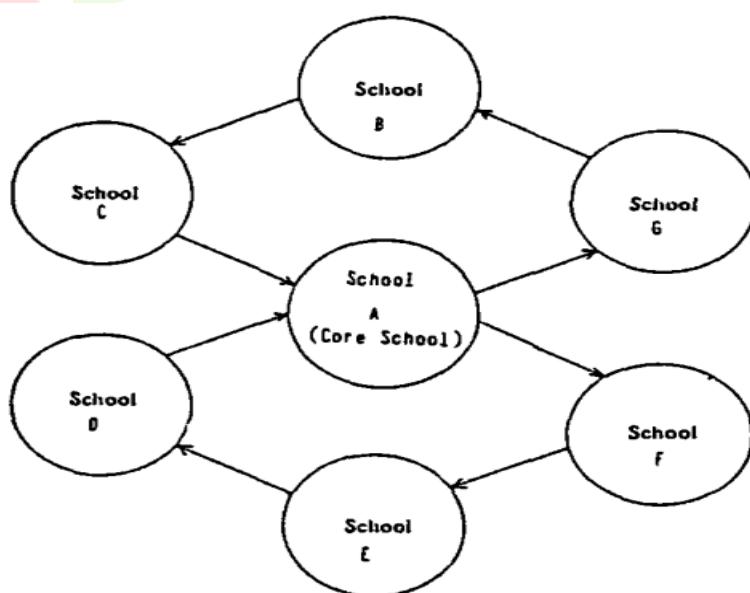
Schools that are grouped together can share costs and resources more effectively. Grown intensity of use may shorten the life of buildings and equipment, but production would have increased, and the intensive usage would have been justified. Furthermore, some goods (such as computers) rapidly become outdated; as a result, a short life span resulting from intensive use may be quite desirable.

Figure 2: Sharing method among complex schools when the head school only has one set of a certain instructional material or equipment.



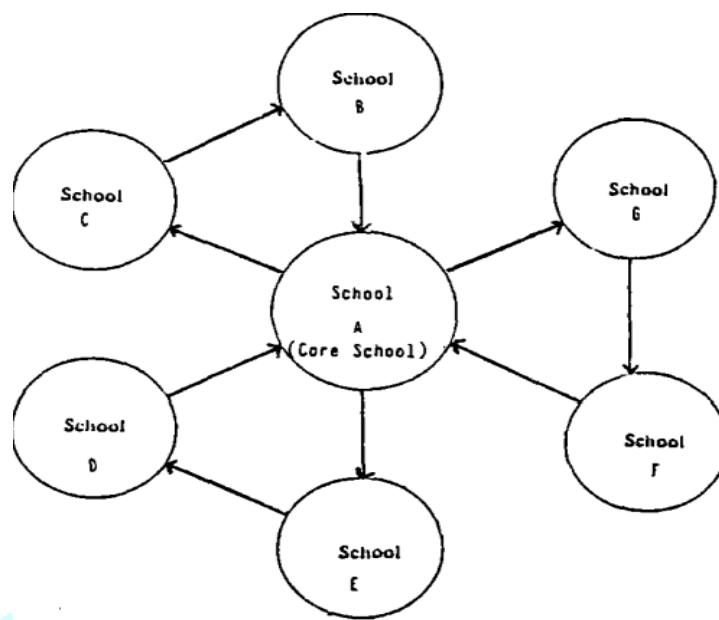
Source: Bray, M. (1987) *School lusters in the hird orld: Making hem ork* UNESCO-UNICEF

Figure 3: Sharing method when two sets of materials can be lent to schools



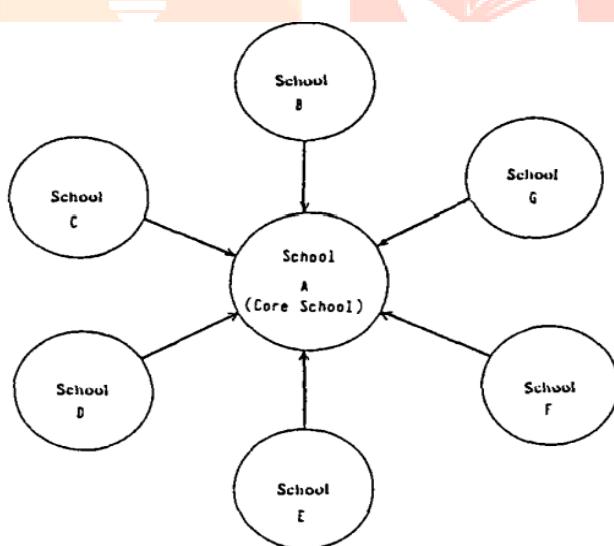
Source: Bray, M. (1987) *School lusters in the hird orld: Making hem ork* UNESCO-UNICEF

Figure 4: Sharing method when three sets of materials can be lent to the school.



Source: Bray, M. (1987) *School clusters in the third world: Making them work* UNESCO-UNICEF

Figure 5: Equipment usage in the head school at the same time.



Source: Bray, M. (1987) *School clusters in the third world: Making them work* UNESCO-UNICEF

Figures 2-4 depict how school complexes can be configured to share moveable resources. Figure 2 depicts a method for schools to share an instructional item when the cluster only has one; Figure 3 depicts a method for sharing when there are two sets of materials; and Figure 4 depicts a method for sharing when there are three sets.

In other circumstances, the central school's resources may be immovable. Laboratories and sensitive scientific equipment are prime examples. In this instance, students from the satellite schools must report to the central school, as illustrated in Figure 5.

❖ Staff Sharing

Similar strategies are available with specialist staff, such as

- teaching staff: specialist teachers of languages, art, music, physical education, computers, and so on; and
- non-teaching staff: typists, maintenance workers, accountants, gardeners, and so on.

Small and medium-sized schools may not have enough work to keep these personnel occupied full-time. Thus, expert teachers, for example, either have modest teaching loads or must teach subjects outside of their specializations.

Both choices do not make full use of their abilities. Sharing expert teachers between institutions, on the other hand, permits the staff to be completely busy with their own specializations.

Furthermore, school complexes provide pools of teachers for use in times of emergency. This is especially significant in small schools. For example, if the single instructor in a one-teacher school is absent (due to illness or important family business), the school must generally close until the teacher returns. In the school complex, a teacher from another institution can normally be transferred to keep the school running until the original instructor returns. The complex method also eliminates the need for each school to have its own reserve staff, which may be underutilized much of the time.

❖ Bulk ordering of materials

When schools band together to buy goods (such as stationery, chalk, and cleaning supplies), they may usually earn savings. They will also most likely save money on transportation. Furthermore, certain providers (for example, of scientific equipment) will only accept purchases of a certain magnitude.

Small schools may be unable to justify orders of this scale, making grouping orders with those of other institutions the only way to receive the materials.

❖ Improved educational quality

The main method that schools complexes can help in increasing school quality emerges from the earlier concept of resource sharing: by joining a complex, individual schools get access to the facilities and staff of other schools.

Furthermore, if no school in the complex currently has specific resources, the fact that numerous schools are clustered together boosts their 'bargaining power'. For example, an administrator may be unwilling to pay for a piano teacher for a single school because he believes there aren't enough students to justify the expense. However, when schools band together, the number of students increases, making it simpler to justify the teacher's compensation.

Other ways in which school complexes can boost educational quality include:

- Teacher Development: Many instructors, even in urban areas, feel isolated. School complexes can help them become more confident and sociable. School complex meetings facilitate teacher collaboration and problem-solving, and thus serve as a form of in-service training. The older and more experienced members of the staff can assist the younger and less experienced members, and the passionate teachers can revitalize the exhausted ones.
- Participation in school projects: Schools in a school complex can frequently collaborate on instructional visits, such as to industry and historical places. This may help to lower unit expenses while also increasing the number of peers with whom individual students can interact.
- Competition among students: Competitions for both academic and non-academic activities might be organized. It is recommended that school complexes organize common assessments to enable students to evaluate their performance and to urge them to work harder.

Many of these activities are especially beneficial to small schools. Staff in these schools are likely to be isolated because they have few colleagues with whom to discuss ideas. The same holds true for students, who have few peers with whom to socialize and compete. Additionally, schools with only one or two teachers are extremely vulnerable to teacher performance. If the teachers are good, the school is privileged; if they are bad, there is no one to compensate for the difference. A school complex strategy spreads risks by increasing the number of teachers available to the school.

These points can also be linked back to the initial goal of school complex systems: school complexes can improve cost-effectiveness by boosting quality.

❖ Simpler Administration

In certain countries, school complexes have been designated as distinct administrative entities between districts and schools.

This type of structure has various advantages:

- It simplifies the work of District Education Officers: Officers can work via the school complex heads instead of dealing with each school individually. Instructions, such as those concerning curriculum or staff conditions of service, might be forwarded to the school complex head for distribution to the schools.
- Similarly, the school complex head can collect school statistics and other information before transmitting it to the district and provincial levels.
- School complex heads can be delegated authority to make choices, such as leave arrangements and staff deployment within the complex. This can increase operational efficiency.
- Because school complex leaders are likely to be particularly familiar with their areas and employees, they may be more effective at some forms of planning. For example, they may be able to foresee local population shifts caused by the opening of a factory or the construction of a road, and they may be able to capitalize on possibilities to utilize local talent and other resources.
- Good reactivity to local settings is especially crucial in areas with significantly disparate climates, regions, languages, and so on.
- Complex heads can also help the planning process because they can see their systems as a whole.
- Complex leaders have been given permission to inspect teachers in some circumstances (e.g., Bihar State, India). Complex heads are thought to be geographically closer to their workforce and better familiar with the people under their supervision.

Returning to the cost-effectiveness goal, it should be emphasized that if the school complex system is successful in simplifying the administrative system, it encourages efficiency and saves money.

Conclusion: School complexes seem to have a future as a development strategy. The Draft National Education Policy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019) also mentions the increased financial burden of very small schools, recommending school complexes' as a potential partial solution to this challenge to enable peer support, resource sharing, and improved governance for establishing quality education in schools. If the spirit of school complexes is broadly accepted by school complex heads and stakeholders, this strategy will help small-size schools to lower the financial barrier in providing quality education.

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