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Strengthening Teacher Professional Development through Structured Complex Meetings: Early Learnings from Telangana, India

Apurva Sankar, Alokit, apurva.sankar@alokit.org
Baidurya Sen, Alokit, baidurya.sen@alokit.org
Saipramod Bathena, Alokit, saipramod.bathena@alokit.org

Abstract: Teacher professional development (TPD) in India often depends on large-scale training and monthly cluster meetings, which tend to be unstructured and disconnected from classroom practice. This study presents early learnings from two Telangana districts where District Resource Persons (DRPs) supported Mandal Resource Persons (MRPs) to plan and facilitate structured, need-based participatory complex meetings. Findings from two meeting cycles show that targeted preparatory support significantly improves facilitation quality, teacher engagement, and the overall effectiveness of complex meetings.

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) of India mandates 50 hours of annual Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for every teacher. In Telangana, monthly complex or cluster meetings bringing together 50–60 teachers from 15–20 schools serve as key platforms for Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Led by Resource Persons (RPs), these sessions focus on state programs, pedagogy, and creating opportunities for teachers to share best practices and challenges (Guruvu, 2023). Despite their potential, many complex meetings remain administrative and lecture-driven. RPs often receive limited facilitation support while balancing full teaching responsibilities, resulting in low teacher participation and limited classroom relevance.

The intervention is anchored in a simple causal pathway: structured support to District Resource Persons (DRPs) improves the facilitation practices of Mandal Resource Persons (MRPs), which in turn strengthens the quality of teacher learning experiences in complex meetings. Improved facilitation and teacher engagement in complex meetings are expected to strengthen classroom instructional practices over time.

Intervention: District resource persons (DRP) model

Rather than creating a new platform for teacher professional development, the intervention focused on strengthening existing complex meetings to make them more structured and practice-oriented.

The emphasis on participatory facilitation and structured preparatory meetings was driven by the need to move beyond one-way information sharing toward active teacher engagement with instructional practices.

To address gaps in structuring and facilitating complex meetings, a District Resource Persons (DRP) model was introduced in Peddapalli and Narayanpet districts, Telangana. A cohort of 5–6 District Resource Persons (DRPs) trained and supported Mandal Resource Persons (MRPs) to lead participatory, outcome-focused complex meetings (table 1).

Table 1
Resource Persons Cascade Model at District Level

Role	Role Description	Description of geography reached
District Resource Person	Capacity-building officials supporting teacher training at district level	District-level administrative unit covering several hundred schools
Mandal Resource Person	Capacity-building officials supporting training at mandal and cluster level	Each district is divided into sub-units called mandals, which are further divided into clusters. Each district has up to 12-15 mandals and each mandal up to 8-10 clusters

These DRPs were responsible for:

- Facilitating preparatory sessions for MRPs on content and participatory facilitation.
- Providing ongoing support through observation, feedback, and content clarification.

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- Using school visits and classroom observations to adapt meeting agendas to district needs.

The intervention aimed to create a consistent, reflective, and data-informed structure for teacher learning at the district level. Each complex meeting cycle included a preparatory meeting where DRPs supported MRPs on content and facilitation, followed by complex meetings facilitated by MRPs for teachers.

Methodology

Across two cycles, in each district, a group of 5-6 DRPs trained around 100 MRPs, who in turn led complex meetings for nearly 1,000 teachers. Each complex meeting brought together 50–60 teachers facilitated by 3–4 MRPs, creating a cascading but supported structure for district-wide TPD. Insights on the effectiveness of these spaces were gathered through a mix of tools, like observations of preparatory meetings and complex meetings by our team members, feedback forms shared at the end of preparatory meetings and complex meetings and informal interviews conducted with DRPs, MRPs and teachers around the effectiveness of these spaces.

Early results: Signs of change in facilitation and participation

Data were collected through structured observation rubrics and teacher feedback forms during the first two complex meeting cycles.

1. Preparatory meetings strengthened MRPs

Preparatory meetings enabled MRPs to engage with training content, practice facilitation strategies, and plan participatory complex meetings. Special emphasis was placed on adult facilitation techniques to increase teacher engagement and move beyond passive lecture-based training. DRPs demonstrated strategies such as checking for understanding, managing disruptions, and planning hands-on activities, which MRPs later implemented during complex meetings. These preparatory meetings also gave MRPs opportunities to practice facilitation and content delivery, leading to greater confidence and preparedness. MRPs rated the usefulness of preparatory meetings at 3.3 out of 4. In addition, training topics were selected based on prioritized student outcome areas identified through baseline assessments conducted at the beginning of the academic year. MRPs also reported greater clarity on practices such as model reading and question creation.

2. Complex meetings became more structured and participatory

Preparatory meetings contributed to more structured and participatory complex meetings. MRPs demonstrated greater clarity on training content and used activities to create more hands-on learning environments for teachers. Insights generated through DRP school visits and observations were also used to make complex meeting agendas more responsive to district needs.

For example, DRPs identified challenges in teachers' use of facesheet pedagogy (a classroom instructional routine) during school visits and observations. In response, MRPs demonstrated effective implementation strategies and provided teachers opportunities for guided practice during complex meetings.

Teachers rated the overall usefulness of these complex meetings at 3.4 out of 4. Many teachers were also able to articulate specific instructional practices they planned to implement in their classrooms, including facesheet pedagogy and structured questioning techniques. Data from classroom observations conducted by DRPs across 240 schools showed that 79% of teachers were observed effectively conducting model reading to improve oral reading fluency, while 75% were observed creating 5W1H questions to assess reading comprehension. Both practices were key focus areas of the first two complex meeting cycles.

While these findings primarily capture shifts in facilitation quality and teacher engagement, they are viewed as intermediate indicators in a longer causal chain linking professional development to classroom practice and student outcomes.

Next steps and conclusion

Preliminary findings highlight the value of DRPs and preparatory meetings in making complex meetings more structured and participatory. The model supported MRPs with facilitation, content clarity, and contextualized agendas, contributing to stronger teacher learning spaces. Early outcomes from Peddapalli and Narayanpet suggest promising directions for continuous teacher professional development.

References

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