

Quality of Education at the Grassroots: A Study of Government Schools in Rural Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Purpose: This study evaluates the operational efficiency and quality of primary and upper-primary public education at the grassroots level in rural Andhra Pradesh.

Methodology: Fieldwork was executed over a one-month duration in a semi-urban Mandal within the Prakasam district, capturing an area with a population footprint of 50,000 to 70,000 residents. The empirical data collection approach comprised direct school site observations, physical facility auditing, primary enrollment analysis, and qualitative, semi-structured interactions with school administrators and educational staff.

Findings: The assessment specifically tracks gender-wise student enrollment patterns alongside structural indicators, including infrastructural status, sanitation facilities, uniform distribution timelines, and the ground-level implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (PM-POSHAN). The preliminary observations reveal critical insights into resource accessibility, systemic bottlenecks, and the operational efficacy of public welfare delivery systems in rural-urban transition clusters.

Value: The insights gained highlight structural realities shaping foundational education, offering clear focus areas for regional policy implementation and local educational governance.

Keywords: Rural Education, Government Schools, Mid-Day Meal Scheme (PM-POSHAN), School Infrastructure, Gender Enrollment Ratio, Educational Governance

Introduction

This report presents an analytical study conducted across government schools in my Mandal, located in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. The fieldwork was carried out over a period of one month and included school visits, observation, basic data collection, and informal interactions with school staff.

The main focus was to understand how government schools are functioning in terms of Enrolment patterns regarding gender wise ratio, infrastructure, sanitation, and essential services like uniform distribution and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. While collecting this data, I also tried to observe the deeper structure of the education system — especially at the root level in a small town, with a population of around 50,000 to 70,000. Because I strongly believe that education is the root of wisdom, I wanted to see how accessible and effective it is for children in semi-urban and rural parts of our state.

Objectives

- To assess enrolment and gender participation.
To understand how many children are attending government schools and whether both boys and girls are getting equal access to education.
- To evaluate school infrastructure.
To observe the condition of classrooms, buildings, electricity, seating, and other basic facilities that support a healthy learning environment.
- To observe sanitation, drinking water, and hygiene.
To check if schools have clean toilets, safe drinking water, and proper hygiene systems, which are especially important for student well-being.
- To examine the implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
To see whether meals are being provided regularly, prepared hygienically, and whether students are actually benefiting from them.
- To look into uniform and textbook distribution.
To find out if students are receiving uniforms and textbooks on time, and whether the process is smooth and fair.
- To identify key challenges in government schools.
To understand the main problems faced by schools, such as teacher shortages, lack of resources, or student absenteeism.
- To suggest improvements based on field observations.
To offer practical recommendations that could help improve the functioning and public trust in government schools.

Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach to understand the functioning and ground realities of government schools in my Mandal Kanigiri, Prakasam district. In this research programme I personally visited a number of government schools ranging from primary to higher secondary levels.

I prepared a structured questionnaire covering the following key areas:

- Enrolment details (class-wise and gender-wise)
- Sanitation and hygiene (toilets, cleanliness, availability of sanitary materials)
- Mid-Day Meal quality and process
- Fire safety measures (presence of fire extinguishers)
- Drinking water availability
- Hostel facility (if available)
- Infrastructure (blackboards, lights, fans, classrooms, buildings, furniture)
- Staff details (teachers, non-teaching staff, and vacancies)
- Maintenance of school records
- Student feedback on overall school experience
- Academic environment and teaching-learning practices
- Implementation of government schemes like Vidhya deevana, Badi Bhata and others

Although the questionnaire provided structure, this was primarily a qualitative study. Alongside formal data collection, I relied on direct observation, field notes, and informal conversations with students, teachers, and headmasters to understand the context and challenges that numbers alone can't reveal. For example, the physical presence of infrastructure didn't always mean it was functional, and teacher attendance didn't always reflect engagement — these insights came through qualitative observation.

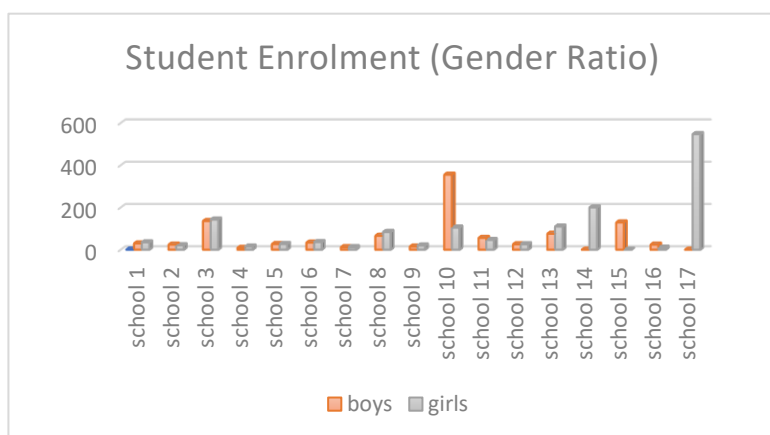
I also collected official data like enrolment registers and scheme reports wherever schools allowed access. The combination of documented figures and field-level interactions allowed me to build a more complete picture of the school environment and functioning.

This approach helped me understand not just what exists on paper, but how things are actually working — which is at the heart of any grassroots educational study.

Summary

This report is based on a one-month research carried out in various government schools across Kanigiri Mandal in Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh. The primary aim of this field study was to understand the day-to-day functioning of public schools and to assess their strengths, challenges, and implementation of state-run welfare schemes. During this period, I visited a range of institutions — from primary to higher secondary schools — and collected both quantitative and qualitative data related to enrolment, infrastructure, sanitation, academics, and school management.

To gather this information, I prepared a detailed questionnaire covering areas such as drinking water availability, toilet hygiene, fire safety, student-teacher ratio, mid-day meal practices, and awareness of schemes like Vidhya deevana and Mana Badi. I also recorded student feedback and observed the real-time learning environment inside classrooms.



Through this research, I not only collected relevant data but also developed a deeper understanding of the ground-level realities of the education system in a small-town context, where the population ranges between 50,000 to 70,000. I realized that while many schools are making sincere efforts with limited resources, several gaps still exist in terms of facilities, staff strength, and community confidence in government education.

Fig.1: Student enrolment ration

Key Findings

School data

Overview

A total of 2,472 students are enrolled across 17 schools.

Out of these, 1,019 are boys and 1,452 are girls, showing a positive gender ratio in favour of girl students.

The chart clearly shows that girls have a higher overall enrolment than boys across the schools surveyed. This indicates a positive trend in female participation in education at the Mandal level.

Schools with Single-Gender Enrolment

Girls high school and KGBV School is girl-only institutions (547 and 200 girls respectively).

AP Tribal welfare school boys is a boys-only school with 129 boys enrolled.

These may be specialized or higher secondary institutions.

Bhavitha Special Education School

It is one of only two special schools in the entire Mandal dedicated to supporting children with special needs, including those with hearing, speech, and developmental disabilities.

The school currently has a total of 34 students – 24 boys and 10 girls. It caters to children who are differently abled, such as those who are deaf, mute, or have cognitive or learning challenges.



Fig.2: special education school

Unlike regular schools, Bhavitha has a dedicated team of professionals to support the holistic development of the children:

- 1 Physiotherapist
- 2 Special Trainers,
- 1 Psychologist,
- 1 Vocal/Speech Trainer,
- 1 Doctor (available for periodic medical check-ups)

The presence of this multi-disciplinary team shows that the school is not just focusing on academics but also on the physical, emotional, and communicative needs of the children. This reflects a child-centric and inclusive approach, which is extremely important for special education.

Teacher Distribution

- A total of 149 teachers are working across these schools.
- On average, there's 1 teacher for every ~16.6 students, which is acceptable by norms, but distribution is uneven (e.g., one school has 5 teachers for 65 students; another school has 15 teachers for 200 students).

Non-Teaching Staff

- Only 29 non-teaching staff were reported across all schools, indicating limited administrative or support help.
- Several schools have no non-teaching staff at all, which may affect maintenance and record work.

Cooks and Mid-Day Meal Staff

- 33 cooks are employed across all schools, generally 1–2 cooks per school.
- This suggests that mid-day meal schemes are functioning with basic staff in place

Primary vs High Schools (P/H Classification)

Out Of the 17 schools:

10 are primary schools (p)

7 are high schools (h)

Most larger enrolments and higher staff numbers are found in high schools.

Primary Schools

- In the primary schools I visited across the Mandal, a total of 505 students were enrolled — 257 boys and 248 girls, reflecting a healthy gender balance in early education. These schools had 35 teachers, indicating that on average, each teacher

is responsible for around 14–15 students, which is a positive student-teacher ratio for present

- However, there were only 2 non-teaching staff members across all these schools, which places extra administrative and maintenance burdens on the teaching staff. Despite this, 19 cooks were employed to support the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, suggesting that food is being regularly prepared and served — a key factor in encouraging attendance and supporting student nutrition.
- Most of these primary school's function with limited infrastructure

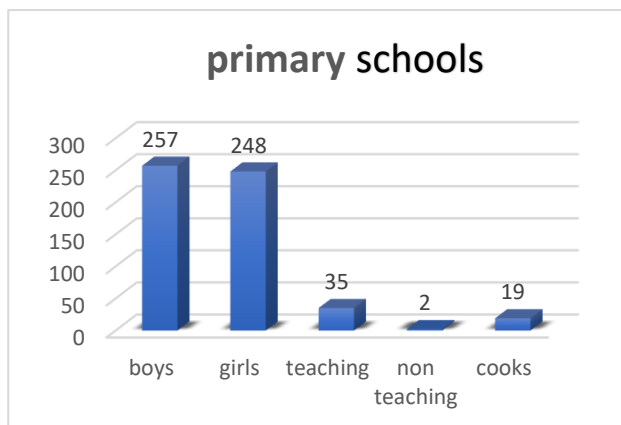


Fig.3: Primary schools data

High Schools

- In the high schools I visited across the Mandal, a total of 1,951 students are enrolled — consisting of 762 boys and 1,189 girls. This indicates a significantly higher Enrolment of girls, which may be influenced by targeted welfare schemes such as Vidhya deevena, KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas), and the availability of girls-only schools in the region.
- There are 114 teaching staff working across these high schools, suggesting a decent teacher-student ratio overall. However, the non-teaching staff count stands at just 27, which means administrative responsibilities often fall on teaching staff, potentially affecting their academic engagement. The number of cooks is 14, which may be adequate for meal preparation, but workload and meal quality should still be reviewed.
- The higher number of girls attending high school is a positive social shift, reflecting growing awareness among families about the importance of educating Girls beyond primary level. However, to support this momentum, schools may need better infrastructure, hygiene facilities for adolescent girls, and more staff to maintain quality and safety.

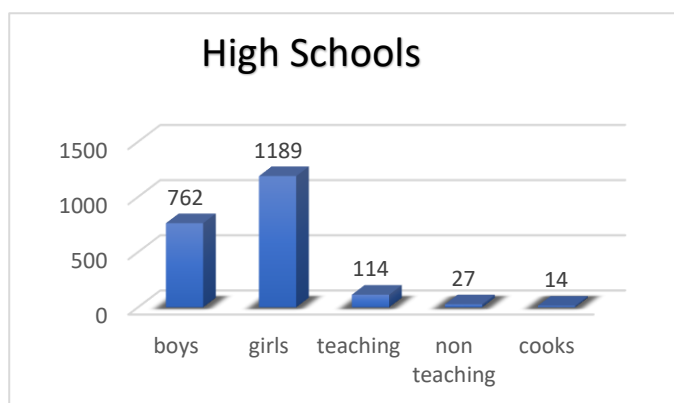


Fig.4: High schools data

Resource Imbalance

Some schools with high student strength (e.g., School 3, 279 students) still have limited non-teaching staff and cooks as well as scavengers too

Observations

Infrastructure

- Most schools had compound walls, spacious playgrounds, and well-functioning lights and fans in all classrooms.
- The overall classroom condition was good, with many schools showing visible improvements under the Mana Badi scheme.

- Bathrooms were mostly well-built, though in some cases, doors were broken and needed repairs.
- In all the schools I surveyed; Two primary schools lacked proper classrooms, and a few had small or poorly ventilated kitchens. Overall, infrastructure was found to be satisfactory, with only a few areas needing attention.

Sanitation and Hygiene

- In most schools, separate lady helpers (1 or 2 per school) were appointed to maintain sanitation. All higher schools had properly built and functioning toilets and washrooms.
- Sinks were well-built and clean, allowing proper handwashing.
- However, in a few primary schools, bathrooms were found to be dirty and unhygienic, needing better cleaning and upkeep.
- Overall, the sanitation system was functional but needs improvement in some locations to ensure a consistent hygienic environment.

Drinking Water Facilities

- Drinking water availability was good in all schools.
- Some well-funded schools had direct water purifying plants, ensuring safe and clean drinking water for all students.
- Proper water storage and access systems were observed in most schools, indicating attention to students' health and hydration.

Kitchen Conditions

- In most schools, kitchens were clean, and utensils used for cooking and serving were hygienic.
- Each school had 1 cook and 1 cleaner, and in some schools, the cleaner also helped with cutting vegetables and other preparation work.
- However, a few primary schools had very small, dark kitchens with poor ventilation, which made the space greasy and unhealthy.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme Implementation

- All schools were strictly following the government-prescribed menu. Every student was ensured one egg per day, except Saturdays, when eggs are not served.
- The weekly egg menu included: Boiled egg, Fried egg, Egg and vegetable curry. Additionally, schools served Raagi malt and chikki on day by day respectively promoting nutrition.
- Eggs, rice, and all ingredients were supplied weekly or monthly based on the student strength of each school.

Monitoring and Accountability

- In every school, one assigned teacher was made responsible to upload daily pictures of food ingredients, preparation, and serving into a government app, ensuring transparency.
- During my visits, no signs of misuse or cheating were observed in any of the 17 schools — all were complying with the scheme sincerely.

Additional Observations

Fire Safety Measures; None of the schools had fire extinguishers or basic fire safety equipment. This poses a serious risk, especially in kitchens and electrical areas. Schools should be equipped with extinguishers and basic emergency tools. Fire safety drills and regular monitoring are also recommended.

- In some SC/ST welfare schools, student care and engagement were relatively not much low but indicating the need for more focused attention and improvement.
- In a few places, Anganwadi centres and primary schools were operating within the same compound wall, which caused disturbances due to different departmental purposes and noise levels.
- Games, exercises, and physical activities were being conducted regularly, supporting the overall well-being of students.

Other Observations

Most of the schools I visited were functioning well in all key aspects. Infrastructure was in good condition, and classrooms were clean and properly maintained. Discipline among students was impressive, and schools maintained a positive and focused learning atmosphere. Along with regular subject teachers, P.E.T (Physical Education) teachers and craft teachers were also available in many schools, and subject-wise guides were provided from Class 9 onwards. Teaching quality appeared to be satisfactory, and sanitation and hygiene were properly maintained, reflecting overall good management and commitment by staff.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on my observations during field visits to 17 government schools in the Mandal, the following recommendations are made to strengthen the existing systems. These are grounded in the realities of school infrastructure, hygiene, staff behaviour, and student experience, aiming to enhance the quality of public education delivery.

Positive Aspects Observed

- **Healthy Gender Participation:** Girls' enrolment is significantly higher in many schools, reflecting community trust and the success of girl-focused schemes like Vidhya deevena and KGBVs.
- **Functional Infrastructure:** Most schools had proper classrooms, compound walls, fans, lights, and spacious playgrounds, showing visible improvements due to the mana Badi scheme.
- **Well-Managed Mid-Day Meals:** Cooks and helpers maintained good hygiene. Meals were nutritious, with eggs, chikkis, and ragi malt served as per the government menu. Transparency was ensured through mobile app monitoring.
- **Good Discipline and Teaching Atmosphere:** Teachers were found to be sincere, and student behaviour was disciplined. Activities like games, exercises, and craft work were regularly conducted.
- **Support for Special Education:** Bhavitha Special Schools were doing commendable work with physiotherapists, psychologists, and special educators supporting differently-abled children.

Areas Needing Improvement

- a. **Parent-School Relationship**
Teachers must communicate more respectfully and empathetically with parents, especially in government schools. This will build trust and encourage greater involvement from families.
- b. **Teacher Accountability and Training**
While many teachers are committed, there is a need to shift the mindset from pride to responsibility. Refresher training in pedagogy, empathy, and communication could strengthen this transition.
- c. **English Communication Skills**

Many schools lack fluency in spoken English. Introducing basic English-speaking programs for both students and teachers will help bridge the private-public school perception gap.

d. Mid-Day Meal Quantity

The meals, though nutritious, were not sufficient in quantity in some schools. Ensuring full, hunger-satisfying portions will improve student concentration and health.

e. Dedicated Dining Space (Mess Facility)

Schools currently lack a separate dining hall or mess area, causing students to eat in classrooms or corridors. A proper dining space will promote hygiene and dignity.

f. Kitchen Infrastructure in Primary Schools

A few primary school kitchens were dark, poorly ventilated, and cramped. Simple improvements like better lighting, chimneys, or expanding the kitchen space will help improve cooking conditions.

g. Sanitation and Bathroom Maintenance

Though most schools have bathrooms, a few had broken doors or unclean conditions. Regular cleaning, monitoring, and minor repair budgets should be ensured for dignified hygiene, especially for girls.

h. Monitoring and Maintenance

Officers at the mandal or district level should visit schools regularly and respond quickly to requests for repairs, water issues, or furniture needs.

i. Anganwadi and Primary School Co-location

In some areas, Anganwadi centres and primary schools share the same premises, creating disturbances. Physical or schedule separation will allow both institutions to function without conflict.

j. SC/ST Welfare Schools Attention

Some SC/ST focused schools showed lower levels of engagement. Special attention, counsellor support, or motivation sessions can improve student morale and participation.

Final Recommendation

Government schools have a strong foundation in place, and many positive steps have already been implemented. With more responsive systems, improved communication, and small but impactful upgrades, public schools can further increase parental trust and provide a learning environment equal to or better than private institutions.

Conclusion

This one-month research gave me a valuable opportunity to understand the ground reality of government schools in my Mandal. Through visits to 17 schools, I observed not only the positive developments brought in by government schemes like mana Badi and Vidhya deevena, but also the everyday challenges faced by students, teachers, and support staff.

Most schools had good infrastructure, dedicated teaching staff, and a welcoming environment for students. The sanitation, mid-day meal implementation, and classroom atmosphere were largely positive. However, there is still scope for improvement in areas like kitchen conditions, sanitation maintenance, food quantity, and teacher-parent communication.

What stood out most to me was the commitment of many teachers and school leaders, who are doing their best with the resources available. With small but focused improvements and stronger monitoring, government schools can become even more reliable and inspiring spaces for learning, especially in small towns and rural areas.

This research has not only enhanced my understanding of the education system but has also made me realize the importance of contributing to public service with compassion and responsibility.