

Leveraging Integrated Book Banks Scheme for SC Students in Telangana: Impact and the Way Forward

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The Setting

In 1976 the Government of India introduced the Book Bank Scheme for the students belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The Scheme aimed at mitigating the difficulties concerning the non-availability and unaffordability of textbooks and reference books for students pursuing professional or technical courses such as medicine, engineering, agriculture, veterinary science, polytechnic, MBA and pharmacy across the country.

In 1994 the scheme was renamed as “Integrated Book Banks Scheme” (IBBS). Under this scheme each SC and ST scholarship holding student is eligible to avail - free of cost - one set of textbooks for the academic session at under-graduation and post-graduation levels. The set of textbooks can be used for three years. The main objective of this scheme is to enable the poor SC students to have access to essential books or literature which they cannot afford otherwise.

The introduction of IBBS was a step in the right direction given the constraints encountered by the SC students in accessing essential textbooks. However, one of the crucial implementation questions that need to be asked is whether the IBBS with low budgetary allocations is viable in terms of procuring relevant and adequate number of books and enhancing the access of students. This question remains unexplored across the country, particularly through empirical and micro-level studies. The present study makes an attempt to study the implementation of the IBBS in Telangana state in terms of its impact, challenges and the way forward.

The methodology of the study is as follows: It covered 22 colleges/institutions in four districts on the basis of the spread of professional courses and colleges and physical and financial targets under the IBBS. The districts are: Hyderabad, Rangareddy, Warangal (Urban) and Mahabubnagar. The colleges include both government and private ones. The total number of SC scholarship holding students across all the courses and colleges during the academic year 2017-18 (study's reference period) is 1531 in the sample districts. The student respondents were selected based on convenience sampling with a target to cover 10% of the population. In addition to the students, the views and feedback from the other key stakeholders, that is, college librarians and officials of the SCDD (Scheduled Castes Development Department) are also analysed in the light of the implementation of the scheme.

The study focused on three core objectives: (1) To study availability and accessibility of books to the students and awareness levels among them about the scheme (2) To assess the implementation of the IBBS (3) To examine the impact of the scheme on the students' performance.

Awareness about IBBS, Accessibility and Utility of Books

Under the scheme, the books are to be supplied to the SC students who are admitted under the convenor quota of the respective entrance examinations and who have applied for Post-Matric Scholarship (PMS) awarded by the Government. Textbooks can be issued to the students for the entire semester period or academic year whereas reference books are to be issued for a period of 15 days only¹. With regard to awareness

¹ However, reference books are not procured and issued under the scheme.



of IBBS and its objectives and implementing agency, four-fifths of the students (80.2%) across the colleges replied in the affirmative. However, none of them are aware of the amount released or allocated for the scheme. Moreover, awareness levels are higher among the students of Government colleges than those studying in private institutions.

The study found a relatively low level of circulation of IBBS books among the beneficiary students on account of two major factors: since the courses are mostly semester based most students typically keep the books for the entire semester; and the supply of books is limited hence the students have little choice. Consequently there is a mismatch between the demand and the supply across the courses.

In addition to the IBBS books the students can also access books from the general library of their respective colleges. Slightly more than four-fifths of the students (84.2%) found the IBBS books to be useful. The students came to know about the IBBS scheme from various sources; the highest proportion (40%) of students came to know about the scheme from the librarians, particularly in government institutions; class mates are the source of

information for almost a fourth of them; and a fifth of them accessed scheme-related information from their seniors. By contrast, only a small fraction of students are aware of different committees - college committee, librarian committee and IBBS committee - that are constituted at the college.

Implementation of the IBBS

The IBBS is implemented through the District Purchasing Committee (DPC) headed by the District Collector. The SCDD authorities of the respective district are expected to monitor the implementation of the scheme by involving appropriate agency at the college/institution level. The textbook is a great learning instrument supplied by colleges and institutions to support the programme of instruction. One of the indicators for assessing the utilisation of IBBS textbooks by SC students is the frequency of issue of books. 40% of the librarians reported that books are issued regularly, i.e. once in a week. This indicates that the frequency is relatively low. Unlike textbooks, reference books cover the syllabus comprehensively and help the students to understand topics/subjects from diverse perspectives. The vast majority of the librarians (70%) issue a

Table 1: Key findings of the study

| Course | Aware ness about IBBS | Source of info about IBBS | | | Libraries/colleges covered by IBBS | | Books useful to course | Perfor mance improved | Totally satisfied with IBBS | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Yes (%) | Library Staff (%) | Class Mates (%) | Seniors (%) | Yes (number) | No (number) | Yes (%) | Yes (%) | Yes (%) | Yes (%) |
| Engineering | 87.5 | 42.9 | 28.6 | 14.3 | 4 | 0 | 85.7 | 92.9 | 67.9 | 32.1 |
| Medical | 100 | 50 | 8.3 | 16.7 | 4 | 0 | 100 | 91.7 | 83.3 | 8.3 |
| Agriculture | 100 | 50 | 0 | 50 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 0 |
| Veterinary | 100 | 20 | 20 | 60 | 1 | 0 | 80 | 100 | 80 | 20 |
| MBA | 66.7 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 4 | 0 | 66.7 | 66.7 | 66.7 | 16.7 |
| Pharmacy | 62.5 | 20 | 40 | 20 | 2 | 1 | 60 | 80 | 80 | 20 |
| Polytechnic | 70.4 | 47.4 | 21.1 | 21.1 | 3 | 1 | 78.9 | 94.7 | 31.6 | 42.1 |
| JNCFA | 66.7 | 25 | 25 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 0 |
| Total | 80.2 | 39.5 | 23.5 | 21 | 20 | 2 | 84 | 91.4 | 65.4 | 25.9 |

Source: primary data. N=101 SC students. The sample colleges comprise both government and private ones. JNCFA: Jawaharlal Nehru College of Fine Arts.

set of textbooks to the students across the colleges/institutions and the remaining 30% of them issue books selectively, that is, on a few selected subjects.

The students avail themselves of the IBBS books at different times of an academic year - at the beginning of the academic year, during the mid-course and towards the end of the course. 45% of the students access books at the beginning of the academic year followed by 21% who use the books towards the end of the course. With respect to difficulties faced in accessing and using books under the IBBS, 60% of the students reported that there are no issues while the remainder reported difficulties. The reported constraints include: inadequate number of textbooks; outdated versions of textbooks; grossly inadequate number of reference books; books issued for a limited period; textbooks issued are not relevant to the new curriculum; issue of damaged books; non-cooperation on the part of library staff; and discrimination in issuing books to the students. The above stated constraints are encountered by the students mostly in government institutions.

It may also be noted here that according to the government norms, every college library has to maintain a dedicated room and racks for the storage of IBBS books. But this study found that half of the colleges do not have a separate room for keeping IBBS books. More to the point, 95% of the institutions (government as well as private) are confronted with infrastructural deficiencies. According to the norms of the scheme, at the end of the course or completion of the stipulated three years, the IBBS books are to be given to SC students permanently. But in practice the books are not issued permanently to the students on account of a variety of factors such as inadequate number of books with the institution, delay in receiving books from students, irregular distribution of books, sharing of books among students, and passing of books to juniors by seniors.

It is also mooted that a Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) – transferring the allocation directly to the beneficiary students – would be more effective. But it would be very difficult to monitor as to how the students use the transferred amount. Another major implementation constraint of the IBBS is that most of the participating institutions - government as well as

private - do not have regular or full-time librarians which adversely affects the smooth circulation of books.

Impact of IBBS on Learning and Performance

The IBBS books have contributed significantly to the improved educational outcomes among the users as an overwhelming proportion of students (91%) reported that there have been improvements in their learning and performance levels. Two-thirds of the students representing both private and public institutions are totally satisfied with the IBBS.

The IBBS is highly beneficial to SC students particularly to those hailing from poorer sections who cannot afford the expensive books. But only a minority of the students are aware of the implementation particularities of the IBBS. However, as stated above, the vast majority of students – spread across the colleges and different courses – reported improvements in their performance levels and expressed happiness with the IBBS.

As table 1 shows only two of the sample institutions were not implementing the IBBS during 2017-18 academic year. One is a private pharmacy college where there were only a few SC students who were not covered under the PMS. Further, priority is accorded to government institutions under the IBBS. The second is a government polytechnic which could not submit the required documentation in time due to the transfer of the principal. Even so each year some institutions in the state are not covered by the IBBS on account of budgetary constraints.

Policy Recommendations

- Budget allocation per student for purchase of books under the IBBS needs to be substantially increased since the current level of funding is rather inadequate to meet the demand; to illustrate, in engineering stream the present per student per course allocation is Rs 7,500 which works out to Rs 1,875 per year. Not only that the allocation needs to be upwardly revised every year in line with the price escalation of the books.
- It needs to be ensured that textbooks and reference books are procured and made available well in advance, that is, before the beginning of an academic year. Because at present the procurement of books is delayed since the actual supply of books is preceded by several procedural requirements.

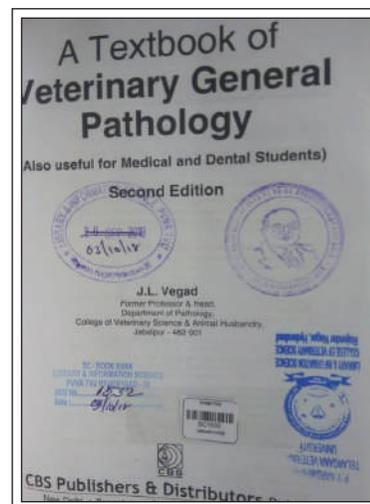
In this context, the SCDD may adopt the procedures followed by the School Education Department in the state. It needs to be ensured that the approval and procurement processes are completed prior to the start of the academic year. Alternatively, advance procurement may be considered on the basis of previous year's experience.

- Colleges participating in the scheme may be requested to conduct orientation sessions for the students at the beginning of an academic year in order to enable them to understand the provisions of the IBBS.
- The scheme is meant for providing only essential textbooks but there is no provision for purchase of reference books which are expensive particularly with respect to professional courses.

- It will be useful to create an online portal for the IBBS with all relevant data and regular updates. This will also promote accountability and transparency in the implementation of the scheme.
- Information technology can be leveraged to cut the costs and make the scheme more efficient and student-friendly. For instance, books can be digitized and their e-versions (PDF) can be shared online or through mobile devices with students rather than buying hard versions of the required books (a special arrangement with publishers needs to be explored to address copy rights related concerns).
- Monitoring of the scheme by the SCDD is also needed. Officials of the Department need to visit libraries of the participating colleges – at least on a random basis – to interact with students and librarians to take feedback from them.



IBBS library at CBIT, Hyderabad



Dr B R Ambedkar seal on a textbook supplied under IBBS

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