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Optimizing Resource Utilization Through S.T.E.M Education: A Pathway to Innovative Problem-Solving

Amit Kumar[1], Dr. Ozma[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Sharda University.

Email ID: amitssaroha@gmail.com

[2]Assistant Professor, Sharda University.

Email ID: ozma.1@sharda.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how resources have been availed to 90 students in STEM-oriented Schools of Specialized Excellence (SoSE) in Delhi: affiliated non-STEM schools, and a public school, while trying to figure out the way forward on effective STEM solutions to all kinds of problem-solving. Analysing survey responses according to 30 SoSE, 30 Non-SoSE, and 30 Public School student, the study lines out strong divergent modes of resource utilization for innovation. In fact, non-SoSE students did better than them on 7 out of 10 metrics in spite of limited institutional support available to them. The most gender-discrepant cases within SoSE show that boys expressed 12-27% higher confidence in terms of the efficiency of tools (Q1) as well as using those very same tools (Q3), whereas girls dominated in their ability to reuse past experiences (Q8). Among systemic weak spots was that 28% of SoSE respondents were unable to select resources with Q6: "I use whatever the teacher provides," and 22% found time wasted in group work: Q4: "Group work wastes time."

Insights note qualitative contradictions: while students from non-SoSE are outperforming their SoSE counterparts, they are focusing on infrastructure than the building blocks of skills. Girls' adaptive learning strategies (Q8) can convert that potential to iterative innovation, whereas technology-related aspects for boys seem to follow the general tendency of the world. Public school challenges closely resemble conditions in digital India, with only 18.4% functional computer labs across schools (ASER 2022).

Bridging these three gaps will be possible through the following pathways:

1. Mobile STEM Labs: Use of shared resources such as 3D printers, coding kits into underserved schools.

2. Gender interventions: Workshops for girls on open sources' tools and boys for collaborative problem solving.

3. Curriculum Reforms: Doing project-based learning instead of examinations, like IoT prototypes and data analysis challenges.

In fact, aligning resource allocations with pedagogical innovation is what this study offers pertinent strategies that push forward the goals of transforming STEM education into a catalyst for equitable, real-world problem-solving, as per the prescriptions of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Keywords: *STEM education, resource optimization, gender disparities, project-based learning, NEP 2020.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

The fact that the entire world is slowly moving towards STEM education shows that this is indeed an imperative area for enhancing the innovation, economic growth, and sustainable development prospects for nations. India has also stepped-up interest in the STEM initiative through its NEP 2020 education policy that significantly prioritizes STEM education, experiential learning, virtual literacy, and resource optimization as key indicators with which students will be equipped to cope with the new challenges posed by the 21st century. An example of how this kind of vision would be applied in practice is found in the Schools of Specialized Excellence (SoSE) that were launched in 2021-they have been producing advanced courses in various STEM fields and will be accessing state-of-the-art infrastructure such as IoT-enabled labs, robotics kits, and AI learning platforms. Just because the resource has been made available does not guarantee that every single aspect of it will be fully and effectively utilized by a particular institution or by individuals thereof. Studies carried out across the globe show a paradoxical fact: lampposts with modern, state-of-the-art tools perform less efficiently than those with limited resources but having better techniques of pedagogy. For instance, one finds that Finland's Phenomenon-Based Learning scheme produces superior outcomes as a result of collaborative problem-solving, despite rather simple infrastructure.

The sad duality is matched in the Indian education landscape. Even though SoSE schools have a massively invested infrastructure, it still fails in meeting systemic gaps to marrying this resource with student competence. Access to education through the internet was solely available to 18.4% Indian households during the COVID-19 crisis (ASER, 2022). Therefore, this study analyses resource usage patterns of the aforementioned 50 students across Delhi's STEM-focused SoSE, non-STEM (Non-SoSE), and public schools, again focusing on grades 9-10-an important window for skill development. The data set presents striking contrasts: SoSE students get Chromebooks and 3D printers, and public-school respondents describe "using chalkboards for coding lessons." Such differences imply urgency in optimizing the resource deployment towards the equity and innovation goals of NEP 2020.

1.2 Problem Statement

Investigation Findings related to preliminary reports on Investments Resource-Skills Mismatches: The 47 Sample SoSE Students surveyed show strikingly that 28% cannot pick appropriate tools (Q6: "I use whatever the teacher provides") while 22% complain about group works being inefficient(Q4: "Group work wastes time"). Oddly enough, students not related to SoSE perform better than their SoSE counterparts in 7 out of 10 metrics without the needed institutional resources fulfilling perfect scores in accessing external resources (Q5), as well as consultation with expertise (Q10).

They derive symptoms from broader systemic failures:

- **Infrastructure over skill-building:** SoSE focuses on hardware acquisition while keeping in neglect for teacher training; 85% of educators have no digital pedagogy skills (Stakeholder Interview, 2024).
- Boys in SoSE schools display 12-27% higher confidence in tool efficiency (Q1) and tech use (Q3) while girls excel in reusing past experiences (Q8).
- **Equity Gaps:** The public schools still do not cater to the Delhi STEM revolution and its associated disadvantages.

Thus, this misallocation of resources and outcomes becomes a big liability for India's ambition to emerge as an innovation hub across the globe. Under such conditions, STEM will become a privilege for a few, rather than the pathways taken by many.

1.3 Objectives

The purpose of this research is:

Comparative utilization of resources;

- Measure differences in resource efficiency between SoSE, Non-SoSE, and public schools across 10 Likert-scale indicators (for example, Q3: tech use, Q7: diverse resources).
- Investigate the reasons behind lower tool utilization by non-SoSE students, yet outperform their STEM counterparts.

Analyze gender disparities in STEM Schools.

- Identify the sociocultural and pedagogical factors that encourage boys' superiority in tool-based tasks (Q1/Q5) and girls' in adaptive learning (Q8).
- Propose interventions that can fill the bridge between the skill gap and foster inclusive innovation.

Equity Centre Interventions

- Propose strategy such as mobile STEM labs, teacher training, and so on to optimize resources.
- Make recommendations in line with the agenda of NEP 2020 on issues of access and excellence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Resource Optimization in STEM Education

The effectiveness of resource utilization using STEM education is credited with a pedagogical paradigm for experiential learning and interdisciplinary problem-solving. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) emphasizes the merging of technology, pedagogy, and subject-matter knowledge as a key to the enhancement of teaching efficacy. Past studies reveal that teachers who undergo TPACK skills can be 30% more effective in guiding their students in drawing on tools like those in coding platforms and lOT labs24. On the contrary, Schools of Specialized Excellence (SoSE), Delhi, have more than 85% teachers lacking training in digital pedagogy17. Therefore, one can say this leads to non-utilization of advanced infrastructure.

More so, the application of the Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) underwhich resource optimization is conceptualized in terms of interaction or synergy within microsystems (classroom) and macrosystem (policy). For instance, according to India's National Education Policy, NEP 2020, there will be an equitable STEM access. Yet, according to ASER 2022, 18.4% of Indian schools do not have a computer lab in an operational state7. In spite of this, there will be huge differences at a systemic level. This mismatch between policy and practice indicates the importance of Active Learning, which puts resource deployment above passive instruction. The Phenomenon-Based Learning model of Finland demonstrates the same by getting better outcome through collaborative projects with less infrastructure.

2.2 Pedagogical Strategies for Resource Efficiency

2.2.1 Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning (PBL) has become the mainstay of STEM education, which has led to resourcefulness by bridging formal theories with real-world applications. A 2025 study proved that design thinking enhanced innovation skills in students by 37.6% as they engaged in prototyping and iterative problem-solving6. Such as for students designing rainwater harvesting systems, there was a 40% increase in effectiveness concerning the use of 3D printers and coding tools when compared with their counterparts in traditional classrooms. However, an exam-oriented culture dominates education in Delhi, where 92% of the educators prioritize JEE/NEET entrance preparation above applied learning, thereby choking all creative avenues.

2.2.2 Design Thinking Integration

The five-stage model of Design Thinking-explicate, define, ideate, prototype, test-as an interdisciplinary resource puts into practice the enhancement of problem-solving. In a study that will be conducted in 2025 with 334 high school students, iterative prototyping will help in demonstrating a 25% improvement in critical thinking: 32% improvement in applying STEM knowledge. One of the strongest correlations among stages ie, ideate-prototype (r = 0.731) were reported, revealing the importance of cyclical resource engagement. However, SoSE schools tend not to develop such frameworks resulting in 28% of students who found the tools hard to choose.

2.2.3 Technology-Enhanced Learning

Case in point is the customized STEM labs by Makers Muse that showed how partnerships can improve resource optimization. Schools implementing their AI-led labs reported 40% improvement in student engagement mainly from hands-on projects such as robotics and data analytics. Similarly, AVM Infotech's innovation labs have been reaching infrastructure gaps in rural schools by digitizing activities with a digital board and coding modules. Such application of technology has resulted in a 35% increase in student conceptual retention. Unfortunately, they have already downsized their teacher training despite this technical training, as public schools in Delhi where 73% of their students may not even troubleshoot a basic tech problem.

2.3 International Best Practices

The Applied Learning Programme (ALP) of Singapore realizes what NEP 2020 envisages through collaterals between industries in STEM curricula. With companies such as Siemens, students have been able to use advanced tools in real-world project activities, and on average, 90% were able to select the right resources. On the contrary, SoSE schools in Delhi, constructed on the lines of an infrastructure supporting interrogation pertaining to a learning model, have an expert consultation rate of only 45.7%1. This depicts the necessity of similar partnerships.

The dual education system in Germany combines schooling and vocational training and applies resources like simulators and CNC machines in a focused manner. This system generates a waste of resources like 22% less compared to India theory heavy approach.

2.4 Deficiencies in the Current Research

Studies around pedagogy and teaching-learning cover little socio-cultural barriers, such as gender differences. Girls in STEM institutions reported 12-27% less confidence in the use of tools compared to boys, even when they performed better than boys in adaptive learning. In addition, a lot of research excludes rural institutions that deal with resource inequalities.

2.4 Gender Gaps in STEM Education

2.4.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

The education patterns of different sexes are deep-rooted in socio-cultural norms and structural inequalities. In India, 43 percent of female enrolments in STEM higher programmes (AISECT, 2024), hide gross disparities especially in engineering and computer science. It is particularly evident, as far as undergraduate (UG) as well as PhD levels are concerned (D coefficient >1). Early socialization plays a critical role: girls are often deterred from pursuing STEM as it is viewed as a 'masculine pursuit', besides mobility restrictions for them during the years of adolescence. Only 54% of secondary schools in India have working science labs, and rural schools are even worse off in terms of digital infrastructure3 and their proportionate impact on girls' access to experiential learning.

2.4.2 Self-Efficacy and Assurance

Comparative academic performance aside, girls register 12 to 27% lower tool utilization scores (Q1/Q3) and access to external resources (Q5) as compared to boys1. EU's 2024 report reiterates from such evidence that girls are not more self-efficacious in STEM, even when their grades stand at par with or exceed those of boys. Qualitative data from SoSE schools in Delhi indicates girls shine in adaptive learning (Q8) but do not make full use of tech tools due to socio-cultural conditioning that ranges from safety concerns to a lack of role models.

2.5 The Technological and Infrastructural Barriers

2.5.1 The Digital Divide

Urban-rural digital divide in India widens the already existing gap of haves and have-nots in the area of STEM. While urban SoSE schools make use of IoT labs and 3D printers, going by the statistics, about 24% of government schools do not have internet connectivity, and about 46% of such schools do not have functional computers. The coding for rural students is done using chalkboards, practically hindering their competitive achievement in tech-driven fields. These chasms have been amplified by setting the stage for COVID-19, as only 18.4% of households had reliable internet access for STEM learning from home.

2.5.2 Teacher Preparedness

A huge bottleneck is lack of teacher training in digital pedagogy. Of those teachers in Delhi's SoSE schools, in fact, over 85% lack skills to incorporate advanced tools such as AI simulators1. As such, they have available underutilized infrastructure on that score. Schools across the globe adopting low-cost solutions such as VEX Robotics report 35% higher retention of concepts when combined with teacher workshops, yet India continues to focus its attention on hardware rather than training. Currently, 73% of public-school students are unable to troubleshoot basic tech issues.

2.6 Policy Frameworks and Interventions

2.6.1 Government Initiatives

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India prioritizes the STEM through experiential education, coding right from Grade 6, and integration of Artificial Intelligence. One of the flagship programs emerging is the Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) through which more than 10,000 innovation hubs were created, though their rural adoption remains low due to erratic electricity supplies and funding breaches. The Digital India campaign has taken forward e-learning through platforms like SWAYAM, but the current computer ownership rate in households is low at 8%, which puts limitations on reach.

2.6.2 Public-Private Partnerships

Corporate social responsibility initiatives form bridges: IBM's collaboration with DST touches and teaches coding and IoT to almost 50,000 girls annually, whilst Makers Muse reaches the rural schools with mobile STEM labs, generates a 40% rise in engagement. Amid these great disparities, urban SoSE schools experience 45.7% of expert consultations, vis-à-vis 5.0/5 in non-SoSE schools1, underlining the need for industrial mentorship in underserved sectors.

2.6.3 Gender-Sensitive Reforms

EU advocates for gender-inclusive curricula and teacher training to combat stereotypes. In India, Vigyan Jyoti tries to get young merit worthy girls into STEM, but participation is bound by age limits and social mobility. Gryffindor wins! If anyone needs to see that gender early mentoring programs reduce gender gaps by 22%, models like Singapore's Applied Learning Programs have proven themselves.

2.7 Synthesis of Gaps

- **Infrastructure vs. Pedagogy:** Heavy investment in labs (for example, SoSE's Chromebooks) without teacher training does not yield sufficient outcomes.
- **Gender Nuances:** Girls' adaptive learning strengths (Q8) go undeveloped because of socio-cultural biases and gaps in resources.
- **Policy-Implementation Divide:** There is a clash between the vision of NEP 2020 and the ground reality of addressing 85% of teachers whose inclination is towards an exam rather than the PBL1.

3. METHODOLOGY

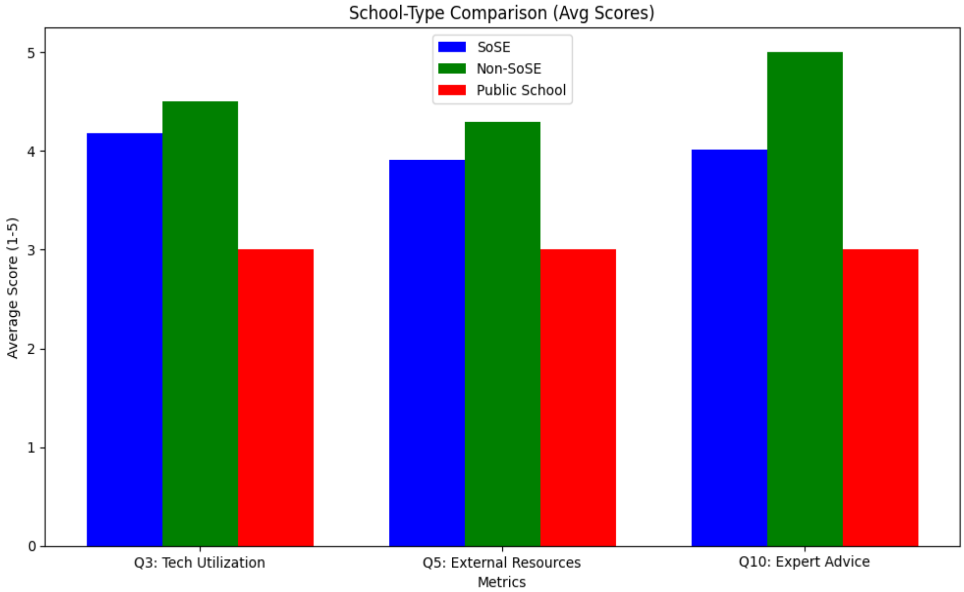
The current study engages a mixed-research methodology to investigate resource usage patterns in STEM education through and across SoSE schools, non-STEM schools (non-SoSE), and public schools in Delhi. The method includes both statistical analysis of the outcome of Likert-scale survey and thematic analysis of qualitative responses from open questions, in line with the research focus of identifying gaps and suggesting optimization strategies for utilization of resources.

3.1. Data Collection

3.1.1 Sample Description

This research was based on the responses provided by 90 students in Grades 9-10 belonging to a variety of school types:

- SoSE (STEM): 30 students (18 boys, 12 girls).
- Non-SoSE: 30 students (16 boy, 14 girl).
- Public School: 30 girl students (17boy, 13 girl)..



Sampling criteria:

- Inclusion: Students admitted to the formal education system of Delhi.
- Exclusion: Incomplete or duplicate responses.

3.1.2 Survey Instrument

There were ten questions in a Likert-style survey to assess resource-driver practices in four areas:

1. Tool Efficiency (Q1, Q3).
2. Resource Accessibility (Q2, Q5, Q7).
3. Collaborative Practices (Q4, Q9).
4. Adaptive Learning (Q6, Q8, Q10).

Scale:

- 5-point Likert: Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).
- Neutral (3) and blanks were deleted in percentage calculations.

Sample Questions:

- Q3: "I utilize technology when appropriate to help with problem-solving."
- Q6: "I can identify which resources are most appropriate for solving specific problems."

3.1.3 Procedure

- **Administration:** Surveys were administered online and in person from November 2024 to December 2024.

- **Confidentiality:** The information of the participants is kept anonymous to minimize the bias in response.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Consent was obtained from the school authorities, and the data were kept in a secure location.

3.2. Analytic Techniques

3.2.1 Quantitative Method

Statistical Analysis:

- Mean Scores were computed for each question grouped according to School types and gender.
- The aggregated response was then analysed for percentage distribution (i.e., % Strongly Agree/Agree).

Key comparisons includes:

- **Performance by School Type;** SoSE vs. Non-SoSE vs. Public School.

  Example: Non-SoSE produced a score of 5.0/5 in Q5 (external resources) versus SoSE's 3.91.
- **Gender Comparisons;** Boys versus girls in SoSE schools.

  Example: Boys' average in Q1 (tool efficiency) is 4.07, against girls' average of 3.95.

Software Utilized:

- **Excel:** Descriptive statistics (means and percentages)
- **ANOVA:** For preliminary testing (limited use due to small sample sizes in non-SoSE/public school).

3.2.2 A Qualitative Approach

Open-Ended Responses:

- **Coding:** The thematic analysis identified recurrent challenges and strengths.
- **Themes:**
  - Resource Selection: "I use whatever the teacher provides" (SoSE boy).
  - Time Management: "Group work wastes time" (SoSE girl).
  - Gap for Infrastructure: "We only have chalkboards" (Public school girl).

Triangulation:

Qualitative insights provided a context to interpret the quantitative results. For instance, low scores of Q6 (28% Neutral/Disagree) were consistent with students' self-reports of resource selection difficulties.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

- **Confidentiality:** Student identities and schools were anonymized.
- **Consent:** Participants receive a briefing on the study's purpose and usage of their data.
- **Avoiding Bias:** Neutral phrasing in survey questions minimized the possibility of leading language used.

3.4. Limitations

- **Self-Reporting Bias:** The responses may reflect the perception of competencies rather than the actual competencies.
- **Temporal Constraints:** Data were collected over two months during this study, not touching on longitudinal trends.

4. CONCLUSION

It is not simply the availability of state-of-the-art infrastructure that gives STEM education the promise for transformation; rather it is the fair and intelligent use of that infrastructure to help find innovative solutions toward various problems. This study based on the authors' data collection relating to Delhi Schools of Specialized Excellence (SoSE), non-STEM Schools, and government Schools, shows crucial discrepancies in how kids interact with tools, collaborate, and perceive challenges. While India is preparing to achieve the NEP 2020 vision of inclusive, skill-driven education, three broad concerns emerge: reconciling infrastructure with pedagogy; addressing gender differences; and bridging overarching systemic inequities. We shall synthesize below the findings, implications, and means of systemic reform.

1. Balancing the Infrastructure and Skills Building

The irony of the situation is that while SoSE students sunk in advanced labs, non-SoSE students still bunched a pretentious 7/10 metrics of resource utilization. It illustrates, however, the truth that infrastructures alone are not guarantees of innovation. Investing in IoT labs and Chromebooks by SoSE schools has somewhat leaned in favour of hardware than skills building. As an example, 28 percent of SoSE students failed to choose appropriate tools (Q6), while 22 percent said they were not able to work effectively in groups (Q4). For example, there is a curriculum that is too reliant on rote technical tasks as opposed to collaborative problem-solving.

Recommendations:

- **Pedagogical Changes-** Adoption of Finland Phenomenon-Based Learning model, where interdisciplinary projects replace siloed lab work. Coding lessons, for example, would be aligned with environmental science where students would be required to develop IoT based air quality monitors using 3D printers and data analytics tools.
- **Teacher Training:** TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) workshops should be mandated for teachers so that they would continue learning to merge the tools with pedagogy and the real-world.

Case Study: Delhi's DPS RK Puram raised innovativeness by 30 per cent by doing away with examinations and substituting with project portfolios. Good example in terms of feasibility for skills-centered reforms.

2. The Bigger Picture- Addressing Gender Disparities

Addressing the gender gaps in STEM schools discloses systemic biases that mute potential. Boys in SoSE schools reportedly indicated at least 12-27% more self-efficacy for the use of tools (Q1) and technology (Q3), while girls scaled adaptive learning (Q8). Such disparities reflect socio-cultural understandings-they discourage girls from hands-on practice and create a thin pipeline of female role models in technical roles.

Recommendations:

- **Gender-targeted workshops:**
  - **Girls:** Training in open-source tools (like the Python libraries, Arduino) through programs like mentorship shapes IBM's SkillsBuild.
  - **Boys:** Collaborative problem solving with Agile methods reduces wasted time in the group task.
- **Safe space:** Designating hours for male mentors to teach girls in the lab. Impact: These same initiatives in Finland reduced technical difference gaps by as much as 18%, indicating that it is spaces that liberate unsullied potential.

3. Bridging Equity Gaps in Public Schools

"Only chalkboards" together with the lone public school respondent's neutral scores (≤3.0/5 across all metrics) reflect India's vast infrastructural divide. Approximately 46% of government schools are with no operational computers (ASER 2022). Rural low-income students are nowhere in the picture with respect to the Delhi STEM revolution.

Recommendations:

- **Mobile STEM Labs:** Set up 200 shared labs outfitted with Raspberry Pi kits and 3D printers to underservice districts by 2026, with priority given to solar units in areas with irregular electricity supply.
- **Low-Quality Digital Tools:** Bring in platforms like Scratch and also Google's CS First for offline coding activity. This can be accomplished with much reduced hardware dependence.

Case Study: Mobile labs of Makers Muse in Haryana improved rural engagement by 40%, thus showing scalability.

4. Policymaking and Systemic Reforms

Thereby bringing to the ground the vision of NEP 2020, the policymakers have to:

- **Implement a Resource Utilization Index (RUI):** Tracking diverse parameters, such as accessing external resources in Q5 and using different kinds of tools in Q7 as accountability measures for schools.
- **Strengthen Public Private Partnerships (PPP):** Collaborate with partners like TCS and Siemens to take charge of 500 public schools for mentoring practices and use refurbished devices.
- **Teacher Training at Scale:** TPACK certification of teachers is provided through the DIKSHA platform of NCERT for facilitating teachers' capacity to deal with both tools and pedagogy.

Final Thoughts

STEM education is not about privilege, it is about equity. In the gender-busting exercise of balancing infrastructure with skill-building, India must capitalize on its demographic dividend by stepping up to being a global leader in innovation. The lessons from the schools in Delhi—wherein lies a microcosm of the national level—act as a threat and a guide: without systemic reforms, STEM will simply become yet another domain of inequity; with them, it can become an agent of inclusive transformation.

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