



## **PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES OF SCHOOL SUPERVISORS: AN EXPLORATION**

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### **Abstract:**

*Quality is a vital issue of concern for primary education system that posed a challenge for all those concerned with the system. There is an increasing advocacy for a holistic approach to quality concern in education and the holistic approach establishes the administration sub-system within the larger education system a key component of quality improvement models. Within the administration sub-system, the role efficacy and role-performance of different functionaries are important determinants of quality in education. Within this context, the block level education officers were considered as important administrative personnel and the difficulties perceived by them while on their job was explored using a phenomenological approach with 24 education officers from different districts within Varanasi Division as participants and using open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews as data collection techniques. The inductive analysis of qualitative data revealed that the education officers are facing a plethora of problems that are teacher related as well as finance related. The findings of the study are expected to enrich our understanding of the performance of BEOs in light of the problems faced by them and subsequently the findings could be used by those higher in authority to further ameliorate the working conditions for the education officers at the block level thus ensuring their contribution in quality improvement of primary education.*

**Key words:** Block Education Officers, Perceived Difficulties, Quality, Phenomenological Approach.

### **Introduction**

Quality has been a perennial concern for the different stakeholders of Indian education system and particularly the elementary education system has been the primary area of concern. Different policies, education reform documents and even the constitutional initiatives reflect the

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concern for quality of education in general and quality of school education in particular (Adams, 1993). Quality issue has several dimensions and any initiative to improve upon the quality of education need to take a comprehensive approach including all the aspects. Therefore any quality enhancement endeavour needs to take care of the administrative inputs into the system as well and the administrative aspect of the education system inevitably includes supervision and control as a mechanism to improve the quality of education. An increase in the input of resources without proper management is deemed to be a fruitless endeavour. Management of the resources at the school level through timely and effective supervision is essential where supervision should be interpreted in terms of such activities that provides support and guidance, that help in control of the different functionaries and their responsibilities and that helps in liason between functionaries at different levels of hierarchy in the system.

Education is a complex process and the system is spread widely across the nation and functions at the ground level through its micro-component viz, the classroom .In order for the system to function smoothly and improve perpetually it is necessary that there is some system of supervision as was also acknowledge by Jakir Hussein committee (Bhatt and Aggarwal, 1987) . It is believed that the supervisory staff is no less important than the well trained teaching personnel (McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978). Supervision is considered as essential and vital for any education system for several reasons. It helps the teaching personnel and the school administration abreast with the latest developments in their profession and hence help them sustain their professional relevance. it also helps the administration at higher levels to ensure that the policies and changes in the same are implemented at the ground level. Finally the supervisory-staff maintains the communication between the ground level implementers and those higher in authority that is essential for smooth functioning and efficiency of any system including the education system. thus we can say that supervision is an umbrella term that includes such functions as supporting some system in a developmental way by enriching the knowledge and skill required, exercising a control over the routine functioning of the system so as to ensure its effectiveness and to liason between one level of workers in a system and those at another level.Educational supervisor happens to be the catalytic agent in shaping, supporting, operating and controlling the educational program.

### **Conceptualizing the Study**

Any administrator that performs the support, control and liasoning functions could be designated as an educational supervisor and the process as supervision. Thus, any personnel overseeing the word of other personnel, is in fact supervising. Thus every administrator is ipso facto a supervisor(Jana and Chatterjee, 2015). A school headmaster manages the resources and personnel, helps them in their role performance, control the daily proceedings and act a communication in between the teachers and the block or district level administration and hence can be acknowledged as a supervisor. Similarly there can be personnel involved in providing instructional support and enrichment and they act as instructional supervisors.

However, for the present study the term school supervision and school supervisor has been delimited. School supervision is conceptualized as the supervision done by the administrative personnel designated as Block Education Officer (BEO) and the term supervision itself is conceptualized as the documented roles assigned to the BEOs (Carron, De Grauwe *et al.*, 1998)The documented role assigned are further classified as:

**Control Function** relates to the original meaning of the word 'inspection'. Control is considered to be the essential function of educational supervisors. Traditionally control of the teaching staff received to priority. At the same time supervision of material inputs is also on the list of core task.

**Support function** Simple control without support will not easily lead to quality improvement. This is why these two dimensions of supervision should be intimately linked. Support takes the form of advice given to teachers and head teachers during supervision visit; other modalities of support considered as demonstration lessons, in service training program me, and organization of peer learning.

**Liaisoning Function** Because of the two previous functions, which include regular school visits, supervisor are also the main liaison agents between the top of the education system, where norms and rules are set and the schools, where education really takes place. Educational supervisors have a double task, to inform schools of decisions taken by the district office and to inform the district office of the realities at school level.

At the lowest level these functions are performed by the BEOs who is expected to support the school staff, control the processes- educative as well as administrative and to liason between the administration higher in rank and the school staff. However, the education officers often find their responsibilities as mutually incompatible. There is an understandable tension between giving guidance and support to teachers and at same time using control and discipline. The conflict between the core task of visiting schools and the less important but equally urgent duties such as administration & report writing is also difficult to solve (Tyagi, 2011). Besides the incompatibilityfactor there are other factors as well that might act as barrier in the discharge of their responsibilities such as poor resources, training or overload. These barriers that prevent the BEOs in successful discharge of their roles is conceptualized as the perceived problems since the problems identified are those that are the target group's own perception.

Studies in the past have reported a decline in the effectiveness of the roles assigned to BEOs and weakening of their role performance has been assigned a significant factor in the falling quality of education. However, it is also a fact that like any other professional the BEOs are also apt to face certain hurdles in their effective role performancethat usually constrains their output. Since the literature shows a dearth of studies related to BEOs problems in their role performance, it was assumed that the present investigation will enrich the literature on the administration aspect of the overall discourse on quality of elementary and primary education. It was further assumed that it is the BEOs themselves who can best reveal the practical problems in

the discharge of their role performance. As such the better way to understand the problems of the BEO is to start the investigation without any prior assumptions about the types of problems and provide opportunity for the BEOs to express their problems that they perceive while performing their roles. Absence of any such study that voiced the BEOs views on their roles and the barriers that they face while in their on-the-field job thus provides the needed rationale for this phenomenological study.

### **Purposes of the Study:**

It has already been stated that school supervision has a crucial role to play in the enrichment of quality of education particularly at the elementary level. However, like any professional the education officers are also expected to be facing certain context specific problems that serve as a barrier in the success of their role performance. The present study was completed with the purpose to explore the different problems perceived by the BEOs while they perform their roles. The present study aimed to document the various problems faced by the BEOs based on their perception of field experiences. in a nutshell the purpose of the study was to find answer to the research question:

*What are the perceived difficulties of the BEOs?*

### **Research Approach**

To find answer to the research question, a qualitative approach to research was used. More specifically the phenomenological approach was used in this study. The purpose of the study was to explore the block education officers' perspective on the difficulties they face while on their assigned job and hence phenomenological approach was considered as conducive for the present study that assumes existence of multiple realities and acknowledges understanding of reality from the experienter's perspective (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### **Participants**

The study was completed with 24 Block Education Officers (BEO) purposively selected as participants for the study from a list of 54 BEOs in Varanasi division of Uttar Pradesh that included the districts of Ghazipur, Chandauli, Jaunpur and Varansi.

### **Instrumentation**

An open ended questionnaire was used by the researcher to gather information regarding the difficulties perceived by the participants while on their job. The questionnaire included 16 questions formulated on basis of a survey of literature (UNESCO 1998) and researchers own experience with respect to the participants job and interactions with them while serving as a teacher in a government aided primary school in Uttar Pradesh. Additionally a semi-structured interview was conducted with six of the participants.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness of Interpretation**

The issues of reliability and validity in quantitative, is replaced by the concepts of credibility and trustworthiness of data in qualitative frame (Creswell, Plano Clark *et al.*, 2003). Credibility refers to the confidence in the data obtained from any inquiry. It is related with the confidence in the match between the account presented by the study and the reality. Member

check (Lincoln&Guba,1985) and triangulation of the data obtained from open ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interview (Denzin, 1970)was used to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data (Creswell 2003). Internal audit that demands maintenance of a detailed note of the entire procedure adopted in qualitative data analysis along with the record of dates and the notes taken during data collection (Creswell, 2003) was also done to ensure the trustworthiness of the interpretation from the qualitative analysis.

### **Data Analysis:**

Inductive method of data analysis was employed in the present study involved iteration and generation of data driven codes or categories (Boyatzis, 1998). The detailed procedure was as:

#### **Data Organization**

For the purpose of analysis, the BEOs' responses on Perceived Difficulty Questionnaire (PDQ) were first organized in a tabular form wherein each row represented a BEO and each column represented a question on PDQ.

#### **Data Reduction:**

The tabular chart thus prepared was subjected to an iteration process where in the BEO's response entered into the table were read and re-read to highlight the statement that were considered as relevant to the researcher's research question. The table was thus refined and it contained now only the relevant statements and the irrelevant statements are discarded. This step helps in reducing the voluminous data and subsequently making it more manageable.

#### **Inductive analysis**

The relevant statements were first colour coded following an iterative process. In this process all the statements that were found to be clubbing together with respect to some specific problem were coded in one colour. Different colours were used to colour code different themes that emerged during the iteration process. The iterative process helped in further refining the themes or codes that emerged during the procedure.

The colour-coded notations were then grouped together in another table where each row represented a BEOs and each column represented one specific theme related aspect of BEOs role.

#### **Interpretation**

The respondents' notations included in each code or theme is then read and reread to draw out meaning and develop a descriptive account of the theme. This step also helped the learner to relate the perceived problems in the present study with the findings from studies in past or in other contexts as well as comparing and relating it with the theoretical perspectives that guided the study.

#### **Findings and Discussions**

The inductive analysis led to the emergence of certain broader categories. Each category represented a perceived difficulty as reported by the BEOs. A total of eight categories of perceived problems could be identified from the participants' response.

The different categories of problems and the frequency of BEOs expressing each problem category that were identified presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Problems perceived by BEOs as important barriers in their role performance**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
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Budget Deficiency	23	95.83 %
Work Overload	23	95.83%
School Micro politics	22	91.67%
Teacher Irrationality	16	66.67%
Negligence of Requests/Communication Problem	21	87.50%
Resource Problems	22	91.67%
Independence in Decision Making	14	58.33%
Teacher Motivation	20	83.33%

**Budgetary Deficiency** was a major problem for the BEO in their effective role performance as is evident from Table 1 with 23 BEOs (96%) echoing the concern. Every professional needs certain level of resources at their disposal that they are able to use and make their functioning more efficient and effective. However, the BEOs response clearly indicated that they were almost always deficient with respect to resources and specifically the budgetary allocation is very low. The poor economic support was perceived as a difficulty by 23(95.83%) of the 24 BEOs. They find lack of budgetary allocation needed to provide training for the BEOs as well as to recruit staff as support in their work. Thus when asked about the status of needed support provided to the BEOs for discharge of their duties, one of the participants responded that *there are lot of works to be completed....but no supporting staff or organized office ..there is no contingency fund...these shortcomings surely influence our effectiveness.*

The second prominent category was **Work Overload** expressed by 22 ( 92%) of BEOs. They believed that the assigned responsibilities together with the number of schools within their purview make their job over-loaded. They were of the opinion that their performance could have been more effective e has they been allotted reasonable number of schools for supervision. The participant expressed that *we are under pressure from D.M., A.D.B., Commissioner etc. to inspect 5-10 schools every day and communicate the report.....the overload of the work makes our work something like go, touch and report.*The views expressed by the participants clearly indicated that they find themselves overloaded with work. More precisely the matter of contention was that a large number of schools were assigned to each BEO that they find as unjustified and culminating in their poor performance with respect to their roles. Had they been allotted fewer schools they could have been able to focus more on the various aspects of the school and could have contributed more towards the development of the schools.

The **third** category of problem identified was the School Micro politics. 23(95%) BEOs found that they are perturbed by one or the other means of unnecessary political interference at the local level. It includes unethical political pressures exerted by the teachers for the desired posting or other matters. Even sometimes recommendations from official higher ups creates problem for the Block education officer. When asked if they had to face any political pressure while on work and the nature of the pressure they feel, the respondent (**BEO 13**) said that *unnecessary Political Interference frustrates any officer....recommendation from higher officers, pressure from Ministers and other immoral pressures ensued by teachers and others in pursuance of their interests.. Some colleagues compromise under circumstantial pressure.* The power play used by different stakeholders in any organization or system to pursue personal interests is defined as micro-politics. When the players of the school are engaged in such politics to pursue their personal interests against the rules it is termed as school micro-politics. This has been reported by the BEOs as one of the prominent problem that almost all of the samples BEOs

experience while performing their assigned roles. They also agree that man often they yield to such pressures and thus they are unable to perform their roles as expected.

The fourth category of problem identified was the **Teacher Irrationality**. Here it means that while knowing the official limitation of BEO in administrative matters, they still put pressure to get things done but when it does not occur they make complaint out of them and consider BEOs the reason for it. 16 (67%) out of 24 BEOs expressed their opinions in this regard. Expressing the specific contexts in which they have to face irrational demands from the teachers BEO 06 said that they....*are not authorized to do transfer in our Block but often teachers put pressure for such favour.... and then make complain out of them.* It is clear from above perceptual data from BEOs that there is some sort of irrationality in teachers' perception of their role and the teachers fail to appreciate the limitations in the official powers of the BEOs and therefore exerting undue psychological pressure on them. Such unfounded and unjustified demands and expectations from the BEOs bring them under pressure and they perceive it as a barrier in their role performance.

The fifth category that emerged was **Communication Problem** expressed by 21(87%) out of 24 BEOs. The communication problem referred to the problems that arises when the BEOs perceptions on school and teacher performances is not heeded to by higher authority or when actions on our requests are delayed by the authorities higher in the level. Some interaction with the political factors were also reported by the BEOs that cause delay in actions or steps from higher authority on their suggestions or recommendations. Under this category, most of the BEOs attributed the unnecessary interference in communication with teachers and officers and hence cause poor liasoning role performance. Thus, on the question pertaining to their satisfaction regarding their communication with teachers and officers, one of the participant responded that *there is no issue while communicating with officers and teachers but sometimes things get complicated due to political interference.* Communication problem quoted by the BEOs provide some explanation for the poor liasoning role performance as perceived by the teachers during the quantitative data collection. Most prominently the BEOs perceived political interference as the root cause in such communication in both directions and they lament the situation.

The sixth category of problem identified was **Resource Problems**. This category of problem was expressed by 22 (92%) of BEOs. Any professional need a plan of action for timely implementation, training in latest techniques and skills of the profession to be effective performer in their roles. The BEOs as professionals also need training in skills from time to time. At the same time they also need well equipped office and staff to help them perform effectively. These requirements were in a combined way coded as resources and problems highlighted by the BEOs related to such resources were coded as Resource Problems. Thus **BEO 19** claimed that *orientation program, short training coursed could improve their abilities .....are not given such training that creates barriers to achieve the goals.*

The **seventh** category that emerged was endence in Decision Making Indep. Decision making as we know is most important aspect in any public administration. Unless independent decision making is given, no rational out should be expected. This category of problem was expressed by 14 ( 58.33%) of BEOs. The BEO, who manages the affairs at the grass root level, which demands that things should be arranged according the needs and requirement of conditions of the particular block/village/school but no decision making is given. In such

situation, single decision could not be implemented in all schools/block with same expectation. **BEO11** revealed that they *....are at the lower rung in official level..... have no authority in respect of decision making, policy making or organization of programs.....re just implemetors..... It seems that our function is clerical.* Thus almost a majority of the BEOs perceived the lack of independence as a perceived problem in their profession. They advocate for reconfiguring their role so that it is made more school oriented and development oriented rather than having greater orientation towards clerical functions and thus rendering them as mere technicians. Such lack of independence in decision making also makes them demotivated in their profession.

The eighth category that emerged was Teacher-motivation. This category of problem was expressed by 20 (83%) of 24 BEOs. The biggest human resource hurdle is disenchanted and disinterested attitude of teachers towards their assigned role. They are supposed to be involved in teaching and other works with zeal and motivation level but it turned out that teachers are less motivated with their job profile. As such the BEOs roles are perceived by them as mere rituals without assigning any seriousness to their suggestions or control and are thus not motivated towards development in a collaborative way. However, they also indicated the engagement of teachers in extra instructional tasks as yet another reason for the teachers de-motivation. One participant said that *..teachers are deputed in various activities like amendments in electoral list, BLO works, certification works in distribution of Cooking oil and grocery, which creates acute problem in deputing teachers for works of educational improvement.* Teacher has been acknowledged as the most vital player in the success of any education system. The BEOs are assigned roles to monitor their work and to support them in their work. However, even with their best effort the BEOs could not bring about qualitative change in the education system if the teachers are themselves demotivated.

### **Conclusion:**

The findings of this qualitative study revealed that the BEOs has to face a plethora of problems while they are in the field performing their stipulated roles. The BEOs response indicated that they faced a range for problems that was both teacher related as well as resource related, problems that arises out of work overload as well as problems due to political interferences and problems that are communication related as well economic. The qualitative data analysis provided some insight into the BEOs perspectives on their role performance and their perspectives help in better understanding and interpreting the teachers' perception of BEOs role performance and taking decisions about the status of BEOs role performance.

Quality is a perpetual concern for different stakeholders in education. It is also argued that discourse over quality issues should follow a holistic and multi-faceted approach including all the important aspects of educational system and for that matter including the administration aspect as well. Since BEOs are the lowest level administrative functionaries, efficacy of their role performance is essential for enhancement of quality of education as they are responsible for monitoring of the government policies and initiatives as well as supporting the school staff in successful implementation of the initiatives and innovations. Presence of a wide range of problems in the routine discharge of responsibilities by these functionaries, as evident from the data analysis in the foregoing section, has eventually far-reaching consequences on the endeavour to enhance the quality of education at the primary and elementary level. There is need

to take into consideration the range of problems that they face as expressed by them if we wish to improve the quality of education.

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