

Supervision and Support Services in Asia

Results of an ANTRIEP Research Exercise

Recent research on the state of school supervision is scant and the evidence is mainly anecdotal. In order to collect more detailed information, which is indispensable to any programme to improve on the existing services, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), in co-operation with other ANTRIEP member institutions, has recently completed a series of national diagnoses in five Asian countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and India (State of Uttar Pradesh). Each national research team relied mainly on two sets of information: existing official and other documents and interviews with a selected group of supervisors, teachers and school heads. The research results were discussed at a regional seminar, organized at the Korean Educational Development Institute, in May 1997. This contribution summarizes the conclusions of the research work. A more detailed comparative analysis, together with each of the five national diagnoses, will be published soon by the IIEP.

The Present State of Supervision Services

Everywhere the structure of supervision and support services is relatively complex and intricate, for several reasons:

1. Different types of schools are supervised by different actors. This is most obvious in Sri Lanka, as five distinct types of schools are visited by supervisors posted at different levels, at times in collaboration with each other. In Nepal, until a few years ago, supervision of primary and secondary schools was also the responsibility of different actors. But, in 1989, it was decided to combine these tasks and to assign supervision of both the school levels to the same person. This reform, however, is now also being contested by some supervisors, who feel inadequately equipped to offer subject-specific guidance at secondary level.
2. It is not always easy to distinguish supervisors from other officers, who have purely administrative tasks, such as the district education officer in Nepal, who shares offices with the supervisors. In Sri Lanka, all officers of the Sri Lanka
3. In at least two countries a special category of staff is responsible for offering support to teachers by visiting them in their schools (as opposed to control and supervision as such). This is the case of the "resource persons" in Nepal and of the "master teachers" in Sri Lanka. In the other countries, support seldom consists of visiting schools, but is more in the form of teachers going to "support" centres.

Notwithstanding this complicated and sometimes confusing picture, it is possible to identify one or two actor(s), who is/are mainly, if not exclusively, in charge of supervision through regular visits to schools. In Korea, this is the "junior school supervisor", while the "school supervisor" reviews reports and manages the supervision tasks. In Nepal the "school supervisor" is the real super-

vision agent. In India (Uttar Pradesh) and Bangladesh, where, different levels of staff work in supervision, the “real” supervisors are respectively called “Assistant Basic Shiksha Adhikari/ Assistant Basic Education Officer)” (ABSA) and “Assistant Thana Education Officer” (ATEO). The officers at higher levels generally have more of an administrative task and less of visiting schools. As explained above, the situation in Sri Lanka is somewhat more complex.

An important criticism of the supervision system is that the supervisors are burdened with too many schools and teachers. Table 1 shows that this critique is certainly valid in Bangladesh, Nepal and Uttar Pradesh, and somewhat less so in Sri Lanka. It is not surprising, therefore, that supervisors in these countries pay very little attention to academic guidance and carry out school visits merely as administrative routine. In addition, many officers fail to visit all schools under their responsibility regularly. To illustrate this well-known complaint, some data can be quoted on Sri Lanka. In this country, about half of a sample of 69 school heads stated that their school had not been visited during the last year by an education officer and about one-fifth said that their school had not received any visit of a “master teacher”. Interviewing a sample of 292 teachers, it was found that a quarter of them had not been supervised by any officer or by any master teacher. On the other hand, while some schools were not visited at all, four head teachers indicated that their school had been visited three or more times by supervision teams over the last year. This leads to the conclusion that, even if time is probably insufficient to visit all schools, the distribution of time between schools is equally problematic. Because of the heavy workload of the supervisors, which is aggravated by the problem of the lack of transport facilities and remoteness of certain schools, and in spite of the official norms set for planning vis-

its, the most important criterion for selecting schools for supervision becomes the assessability of the school. The situation was found to be quite similar in Bangladesh, Nepal and India. In Korea, the picture is different altogether because school visits are far less important than in the other countries. Furthermore, a significant shift has recently occurred: “school visits have changed from supervisors randomly selecting schools to schools actually requesting them”.

In all the countries, supervision staff have many tasks to perform, including duties of an administrative nature. In Uttar Pradesh, supervisors are expected to undertake 31 tasks, of which most are administrative, including collection of statistical data, handling payment of salaries and pensions of teachers and other employees, supervising school construction programmes, etc. Everywhere they have to play different roles, some of which are difficult to combine: the tension between giving guidance and support to teachers and, at the same time, controlling and disciplining them is easy to imagine. The conflict between visiting

Table 1 Number of School and Teachers per Supervisor

Country	Official Supervisor	School Supervisor	Teacher
Bangladesh	ATEO	29,8	121,0
Korea	Junior Supervisors	3,2	55,5
Nepal	Supervisors Supervisors+ Resource persons	32,4 170,5	20,9 109,8
Sri Lanka	SLEAS Officers Master Teachers	10,1 41,6	185,2 764,8
India	ABSA Uttar Pradesh	67,9	188,8

Note: For Bangladesh, Korea and Uttar Pradesh, only primary schools are taken into account; in Nepal and Sri Lanka, both primary and secondary schools are considered. In Nepal, resource persons are functioning only in 40 of the 75 districts.

In order to get some information on the distribution of time between the different tasks, a sample of supervision and support staff and of school heads and teachers was interviewed in four of the five countries (Nepal being the exception). A few points which emerged are the following.

The relative importance of visiting schools, supposedly the main task, differs much from one country to another. In Sri Lanka, both supervisors and master teachers spend about 70 per cent of their time on such visits, in Bangladesh and Uttar Pradesh respectively, about 55 per cent and more than 40 per cent of supervisors' time goes to such visits; in Korea, on the other hand, school visits occupy only 7.5 per cent of their time. The relative importance of academic supervision as compared to other more administrative tasks also varies greatly. In Sri Lanka, classroom observation and assistance to teaching are for both supervision staff and master teachers the number one tasks. Sri Lankan supervisors are engaged for about 40 per cent of their time in classroom supervision, about 20 per cent in supervision of school administration, but only about 15 per cent in writing reports and clerical work. In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, the most important tasks are "supervising construction of buildings" and "collection of information", each taking up about one-third of the supervisor's total workload, with less than ten per cent going to "academic supervision". In South Korea, the number one task is "administrative/office work", which keeps supervisors busy for just over half of their time.

On the whole, the above presentation of basic facts shows that - to varying degrees depending on the country concerned - supervision services are not functioning very well. While this is due in part to the heavy workload of the supervisors, it has also to do with a number of problems related to the way supervision services are being managed. Without entering into any detail, some major problems can be highlighted:

- * The material working conditions of supervisors are generally poor in the four countries of the South-Asian region. In addition, the lack of sufficient support for traveling is a serious problem;
- * Recruitment procedures differ from one country to another, but one issue needs to be stressed: an analysis of the profiles of existing primary school supervisors indicates that they do not necessarily possess -either the essential professional training for teaching in primary classes or the experience of teaching at that level;
- * Professional training for supervisors is not satisfactory. This is true both for induction and in-service training;
- * Lack of motivation on the part of school supervisors, as a result of the poor career prospects is a serious constraint; and
- * The procedures to ensure that follow-up be given to supervision reports are inefficient: in all five countries, these reports are put to some use, but seldom to remedy quickly problems noted in specific schools.

New Trends in Supervision

In the face of the many and diverse problems facing supervision, education authorities have attempted to improve its efficiency and quality in several ways. While a few of these attempts have been fully implemented, a number of trends can be discerned.

Supervision staff is asked to focus on giving support to teachers and on their professional development. The change of terminology in different countries is the first expression of this trend. In general, there has been a move away from using the term "inspector", in view of its pejorative connotations. In most cases, these cosmetic

changes in terminology have aimed at a more fundamental reform, namely one in attitudes. In both Korea and Nepal, the transformation of supervisors to “change agents” was put forward as an objective in a context of increased democratization of the society during more recent years. It is worth noting that such reorientations in the job descriptions have not automatically led to changes in the way supervisors actually undertake their tasks. Indeed, one of the recurring complaints by teachers everywhere is that the emphasis of supervision is still too much on control.

Linked to this first change is a trend towards more transparency. For the moment, this is a transparency mainly within the education community: supervisors are supposed to discuss during and after their school visits with the staff they have evaluated; standard report forms and checklists are available, so that teachers have a better idea of the inspection procedures. In a few places, for instance in Uttar Pradesh, it is expected that supervision and support staff discuss with communities. Nowhere yet have school inspection reports been made open to the public.

Arguably, the most significant changes are structural ones. They are the result of a number of other trends, including the rapid expansion in the numbers of schools and teachers, a general policy of decentralization, and more specifically, the felt need to decrease the distance between schools and supervisors.

There exist in principle two ways of shortening the distance between schools and supervisors. The first one is to bring the administration closer to school, by creating, under the level which is presently closest to school, another level of supervision and support staff. In Sri Lanka responsibility for school supervision is assigned, according to the latest education policy, to the divisional education office which operates below district

level. In the same way, in Bangladesh supervisors who are in charge of visiting schools are posted at Thana level which is the smallest administrative unit below district. In Korea, the supervision department at central level has been recently closed down and all responsibilities for supervising primary schools have been decentralized at city or county level. In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, although each supervisor is responsible for one block, almost all are based in the district headquarters.

The second way of shortening distance between schools and supervisors is to bring schools closer to the administration, by assembling them into clusters and around resource centres. This strategy is used in at least three of the five countries under study. Such resource centres have been set up both in Nepal and Uttar Pradesh while in Sri Lanka a special category of advisors has been created in the form of the itinerant Master Teachers.

The next logical step in the decentralization process is to reinforce school-based supervision and support practice, a new trend which can be observed world-wide, including in the Asian countries studied under this project. In Korea, School Based Autonomous Supervision (SBAS) was recently introduced to allow schools themselves to develop and run supervision policies that are appropriate for their circumstances and demands.

Principals have now the following supervisory duties: “planning and organizing overall supervision work, encouraging staff for fostering of supervision work, using qualified resource persons from outside, and establishing overall management plans that reflect national supervision policy”. In many schools, peer supervision is equally becoming more prominent, with grade senior teachers in elementary schools and sub-

ject senior teachers in middle schools being central in this process. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, head teachers have also received a growing number of supervisory tasks, although the policy is not as fully developed as in Korea.

Conclusions

Three conclusions, which can be drawn from this analysis of supervision and support, deserve special attention.

Firstly, reforming supervision, in particular to ensure that its impact is felt in schools, is presently a priority in almost the whole Asian region. It is realized that a strong and coherent supervision and support system is needed to improve on the quality and efficiency of schools. That realization is not just based on some theories and research work, but, in a number of countries, grew out of the negative experiences, which these countries underwent, when they either abolished or totally neglected school supervision.

Secondly, this does not imply that inspection, as it used to exist, can be restored. To some extent, inspectors had only themselves to blame for the neglect they suffered from: their services were in most cases of little help to teachers and to the system, because of their ritual focus on administrative control. Supervision should become a more comprehensive and more frequent exercise, which gives increased attention to pedagogic issues. Supervisors must spend more time in classrooms and with the teachers. In order to achieve this goal, all countries have embarked upon serious structural reforms which aim at bringing supervision and support services closer to the school.

The final conclusion is, however, that the successful implementation of these reforms implies that original answers are given to the vari-

ous management problems cited above. Further reflection is needed on how to improve on recruitment and training practices and on how to keep staff motivated throughout their career. Excessive workload certainly will have to be overcome. One way of doing so is to ask the system to concentrate more on poorly functioning, inefficient or isolated schools. An efficient supervision and support system should be truly flexible and diversified. Schools, which function properly, with competent and experienced principals and efficient internal control mechanisms, have less need for external supervision and support. On the other hand, poorly functioning schools, with untrained principals and poorly motivated teachers, do need systematic and sustained supervision and support services, of different kinds, via locally posted supervisors, resource centres, master teachers and so on. The implementation of such diversified services demands the development of a reliable and relevant information system on the quality of schools.

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