

Module









5

Management of
supervisory work



Module 5

.....MANAGEMENT OF SUPERVISORY WORK

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Module 5

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Introduction

Supervisors face a heavy workload. This is a major complaint of both supervisors and school staff, as Module 2 describes in quite some detail. Their heavy workload results in schools receiving few, mostly superficial, visits, which therefore limits their impact. As seen earlier, a redefinition and clarification of the roles and functions of the supervision service will help in overcoming this problem. But even if the tasks of supervisors are limited and as a result become more focused, there will still be a need to improve the management of the work they undertake. The impact of this will not only be better planned and therefore more efficient work: supervisors spending more time in schools and preparing their work better could lead to their presence bearing more fruit and to them becoming more appreciated.

The management of the supervisory work is first the task of the officers themselves. However, several decisions must be taken and parameters can be fixed at the central and/or regional level, such as: the numbers of schools to be supervised, the characteristics of the schools on which to focus, the type of visits to be made or the type of reports to be written – all of which have a profound impact on the effectiveness of supervision.




What this module will discuss

When discussing the management of the work of supervisors, a first question concerns the amount of work given to each single supervisor, or in other words, the numbers of schools and teachers under their responsibility. This influences their workload as well as their potential impact on schools.

This module will then examine how supervision visits – the most important task of supervisory staff – are undertaken. This implies looking at the planning of such visits and their actual implementation. Different issues will be discussed: what types of visits have to be undertaken? Which criteria are used to select schools for visits? What information is available to supervisors for planning and preparing their visits? What precisely are supervisors expected to do when undertaking a visit?


The visible result of a visit is a report; the third section of this module will therefore look at reporting. ‘Follow-up’ will also be discussed, as visits and, in general, supervision work should lead to improvements. Analysis will centre on the following questions: What is being done by supervisors and by school staff after a visit? What actions are taken, and what impact do they have on the functioning and the quality of the schools? Only visits that ultimately lead to improvement can be considered successful.



Expected outcomes

At the end of this module, participants should be able to:

- identify the different elements that relate to the management of supervisory work;
- appreciate the importance of school/supervisor and teacher/supervisor ratios;
- identify factors that will help supervisors in planning school visits;
- understand the role and importance of reporting; and
- appreciate the challenges in ensuring proper follow-up to visits.



Supervisor/school and supervisor/teacher ratios: norms and realities

The supervision system has as a main objective to influence teaching and learning practices, but such influence depends at least to some extent on the number of schools and teachers to be supervised. In many countries, the numbers of schools and teachers per supervisor are so high that supervisors can never have more than a brief contact with each school. As a result, they seldom have more than a superficial impact.

It is difficult, however, to determine an ideal supervisor/school or supervisor/teacher ratio, as all depends on what supervisors are expected to do and the context in which they are to operate. If a supervisor is expected to concentrate mainly on school management and administration, having 15 or 20 schools to monitor could be considered quite manageable, depending on the geographical conditions prevailing in the country. But if a supervisor has to offer systematic pedagogical support to teachers, the ratio of supervisor to teachers must be considered; and having about 100 teachers per supervisor is probably an upper limit, depending again on the distances between schools, the transport facilities, the strategies used to work with them and the relative number of small schools.



Task

Do norms exist in your own country regarding school/supervisor and teacher/ supervisor ratios?

Calculate the existing ratios by comparing the numbers of teachers, schools and supervisors in the country. How do they differ from one area to another, and from one type of school to another?

Completing the task: some hints

Your immediate response to the first question might be that no such norms exist. Many countries, however, have defined such norms, but they are not well known or no longer applied.

Calculating the existing ratios should in principle be quite easy, as the only data needed are the number of supervisors and the number of schools (and if possible teachers) for a given year. It is at times difficult, however, to get such information for the country as a whole, as no database exists on supervisors. What might be useful, then, is to examine the situation of only a few district offices. You might need to take into account the fact that sometimes posts exist but are vacant.

What is in any case important is to analyze the differences between regions and districts, and between types of schools (e.g. primary – secondary).

A comparison between the official norms (if they exist) and the actual ratios is a central issue when examining the challenges facing the supervision service.

Official norms regarding the number of schools and/or teachers to be supervised per officer do not always exist and when they exist, they are often not respected in reality.

Example

*In **Uttar Pradesh**, every Assistant Basic Education Officer (ABSA) is supposed to be responsible for 50-60 schools. In 1996, the total number of primary and upper-primary schools in the state being 103,077, the regular number of ABSA posts should have been about 1,900. However, the number of posts officially sanctioned for ABSA was only 1,569, out of which 330 remained vacant. Consequently, the number of schools per sanctioned post was 68 and the number of schools per occupied post was 83.*

*In **Chile**, the situation is quite different. Schools are divided into two groups: those whose performance on a number of criteria (examination results in particular) is weak and the other schools. Supervisors only focus their interventions on the first group. They do so by making very regular school visits to discuss and organize workshops with teachers. All supervisors have only about three such schools to work with and are expected to be out of their office for three days per week. The better-performing schools are supervised only once a term.*

The case of Uttar Pradesh is undoubtedly less of an exception than Chile. In many developing countries, the rapid expansion of schooling has not been accompanied by a corresponding expansion of the supervision services. Moreover, the official norms, when they exist, are often not realistic and imply a systematic overburdening of the supervision services.

Tables 1 and 2 present school/supervisor and teacher/supervisor ratios for the African and Asian countries that took part in the IIEP research programme on trends in supervision. The data refer to the situation in the late 1990s.

As can be seen from the tables, the situation varies considerably from country to country. The State of Uttar Pradesh in India, Nepal and Tanzania appear deprived, while Korea and Sri Lanka (SLEAS Officers) look rather privileged. But comparisons are difficult to make due to differences in responsibilities, working conditions, the geographical environment, communication and road network, etc. That being said, and taking the African data as a reference, at first sight the number of schools for which a supervisor is responsible does not seem unmanageable, with the

school/supervisor ratio varying from 15 to 30. Indeed, if the main task of a supervisor is to inspect a school once a term, and if traveling and working conditions are not constraining, the ratio could be considered acceptable. But if, as is more often the case, supervisors are supposed to have more regular contacts with schools and give them consistent support, and if distance and scarcity of transport renders traveling arduous and time-consuming, the actual number of schools is too high. Furthermore, a balanced judgment cannot be made on the basis of national averages alone, since the disparities between regions within the same country (most often at the detriment of remote rural areas) can be fairly important, as illustrated in *Table 3*.

Table 1: Number of supervisor posts by schools and teachers in selected Asian countries

| | | <u>School/ supervisor</u> | <u>Teacher/ supervisor</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Bangladesh</i> | Assistant District Educ. Off. | 18.6 | 80 |
| <i>Korea</i> | Junior supervisor & supervisors | 3.2 | 63 |
| <i>Nepal</i> | Supervisors | 32.9 | 173 |
| | Supervisors + resource persons | 16.3 | 85 |
| <i>Sri Lanka</i> | SLEAS officers | 10.6 | 193 |
| | Master teachers | 44.0 | 796 |
| <i>Uttar Pradesh</i> | Assistant Educ. Off (all posts) | 67.9 | 188 |
| | Assistant Educ. Off (occupied posts) | 83.2 | 231 |

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. Note also that resource persons in Nepal were, at the moment of the data collection, functioning in only 40 of the 75 districts and that the information given on 'supervisors + resource persons' refers to those districts only.

Table 2: Numbers of schools, teachers and supervisors in selected African countries

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Posts</i> | <i>Numbers of staff</i> | <i>Numbers of schools</i> | <i>Numbers of teachers</i> | <i>School/ Supervisor ratio</i> | <i>Teacher/ supervisor ratio</i> |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Botswana</i> | Primary supervisors | 35 | 718 | 12,785 | 20.5 | 365 |
| <i>Botswana</i> | Secondary supervisors | 28 | 230 | 6,214 | 8.2 | 222 |
| <i>Botswana</i> | External advisors | 67 | 948 | 18,999 | 14.1 | 284 |
| <i>Botswana</i> | All officers | 130 | 948 | 18,999 | 7.3 | 146 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----|--------|---------|------|-----|
| <i>Namibia</i> | Inspectors | 50 | 1,449 | 16,759 | 29.0 | 335 |
| <i>Namibia</i> | Advisory teachers | 148 | 1,449 | 16,759 | 9.8 | 113 |
| <i>Namibia</i> | All officers | 198 | 1,449 | 16,759 | 7.3 | 85 |
| <i>Namibia</i> | Occupied posts | 129 | 1,449 | 16,759 | 11.2 | 130 |
| <i>Tanzania</i> | Primary inspectors | 428 | 11,151 | 105,916 | 26,0 | 247 |
| <i>Zanzibar</i> | Primary inspectors | | | | 14 | 161 |
| <i>Zanzibar</i> | Secondary inspectors | | | | 5 | 64 |
| <i>Zimbabwe</i> | Primary supervisors | 309 | 4,670 | 63,900 | 15.1 | 207 |
| <i>Zimbabwe</i> | Secondary supervisors | 156 | 1,531 | 29,074 | 9.8 | 186 |


Note: Data in italics are taken from the UNESCO Statistical yearbook and concern 1996 (for Botswana) and 1997 (for Tanzania). For Tanzania, the data had to be computed on the basis of the information available in the UNESCO Yearbook (which concerns the United Republic) and deducting data obtained separately for Zanzibar. For Zanzibar, the national report contains only the ratios, not the raw numbers.

Table 3: Disparities in supervisors' posting by region

| | <i>School/supervisor ratio</i> | | | <i>Teacher/supervisor ratio</i> | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | <i>Average</i> | <i>Lowest</i> | <i>Highest</i> | <i>Average</i> | <i>Lowest</i> | <i>Highest</i> |
| Botswana | 20.5 | 17.5 | 22 | Not available | | |
| <i>Namibia</i> | 30.2 | 18.0 | 43.6 | 349 | 220 | 510 |
| <i>Zimbabwe</i> | 15.1 | 8.2 | 18.2 | 207 | 194 | 240 |

Note that for Botswana existing posts were used rather than occupied posts, while the opposite is the case for Namibia, which explains the difference with Table 4.

For the existing situation to improve, it is important to establish clear and realistic norms. Statistics about supervisor/school and supervisor/teacher ratios should also be regularly calculated and made available (which today is rather the exception than the rule). In the same way as pupil/teacher or pupil/class ratios, these statistics should serve as a real management tool for those in charge of monitoring education quality.



Organization of school visits

Supervisors undertake several tasks: participating in meetings, reading and writing reports, and settling administrative problems of teachers. Their most important task, however is to visit schools and teachers to do their actual supervision. The following paragraphs look first at the planning of school visits and then at their implementation. When examining planning, the following issues are addressed: How are schools being distributed among supervisors operating in the same area? What are the different types of visits? Which criteria are used to select schools? The preparation reflects on the visits done by supervisors and on the actual work they do when in school. These are some issues that must be properly examined and regulated in order to ensure that supervision services are functioning efficiently.

Planning school visits

Generally, supervisors everywhere are requested to prepare yearly and/or shorter-term plans (per trimester or month) and to get them approved by their superiors. Of course, such plans are not always fully implemented for several reasons, including transportation difficulties and the need to attend unscheduled activities such as meetings and workshops. Nevertheless, even if not fully respected, planning remains important not only because of the need to ensure availability of funds, but also to ensure co-ordination of activities between supervisors and with other officers involved in quality improvement activities. The recent trend towards team supervision has made planning even more important than before.

That being said, proper planning implies that clarity has been reached beforehand and that some norms and rules have been fixed concerning the criteria for distribution of schools between supervisors, the nature of the visits to be carried out and the criteria for selecting which schools to visit.

Distribution of schools between supervisors

Several criteria for the distribution of schools between supervisors can be envisaged. In many cases, a geographical criterion is applied, using educational circles or sub-divisions as a unit. This has the advantage of allowing supervisors to get to know 'their' schools well, as long as they are not too many. But when posts are vacant, there is the risk that some schools will not be visited at all. Such an arrangement could also carry the risk that the relations between school staff and supervisors become too intimate and that a certain complacency set in. Some countries therefore regularly change the posting of supervisors.

Sri Lanka relies on a different organization. A group of officers within a divisional office, rather than an individual, are in charge of all the schools in the relevant geographic area. As such, the total number of schools assigned to one group of officers can be fairly large. The advantage is that short vacancies can be more easily managed.

But other criteria for school distribution can be used, such as: random distribution in densely populated areas; a rotation system; distinction between public and private schools; and the cultural and linguistic background of the supervisor (such as in the case of supervisors of indigenous education in Mexico). Although the

geographical criterion is the most common one, no standard practice exists and each country or region must define its own formula, taking into account specific local needs and constraints.

Questions

In your own country, which formula is used to distribute schools between supervisors?

Types of visits

Most countries make provision for different types of visits, ranging from the most comprehensive, full inspection visit to an incidental, short, spot-checking visit (see *Box 1*). Of course, the same label can cover dissimilar realities. Indeed, the boxes and the examples show the wide difference between a full supervision in Botswana, which can take five days and be undertaken by a team, and Zimbabwe, where it represents a four-hour visit. Much depends of course on the size of the school and on what the full inspection is expected to cover. In some cases, it only implies that the classroom performance of all teachers will be supervised; in other cases, full inspection visits are supposed to go beyond the supervision of teaching and be more comprehensive by covering both general management and administration and curriculum and classroom teaching. Various countries have defined what a full inspection should cover. One example is Sri Lanka (see *Box 2*).

Box 1: Different types of inspection visits in a selection of African countries

These four countries (Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) draw a distinction between different types of supervision visits. The following tables present, for each country and, in the case of Namibia for separate categories of staff, the duration of these visits, and indicate if they are undertaken by an individual or a team.

a. Botswana, inspector

| Type of visit | Duration | Actors |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Full inspection | 5 days | Individual/team |
| Partial inspection | 2 to 3 days | Individual |
| Teacher inspection | 1 day | Individual |
| Follow-up visit | 1 to 2 days | Individual |
| Courtesy visit | 1 day | Individual |

b. Namibia, advisory teacher

| Type of visit | Duration | Actors |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Advisory visit | 3 days | Individual or team |
| Follow-up visit | 2 days | Individual or team |
| Teacher inspection | 1 day | Individual or team |
| Panel visit (to a group of schools) | 3 weeks | Team |

c. Namibia, inspector

| Type of visit | Duration | Actors |
|--------------------------|----------|------------|
| Full inspection | 1 day | Individual |
| Teacher inspection | 1 day | Individual |
| Visit of teacher advisor | 1 day | Individual |
| Follow-up visit | ½ day | Individual |
| Courtesy visit | ½ day | Individual |

d. Tanzania, inspector

| Type of visit | Duration | Actors |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Full inspection | 8 hours | 4 officers on average |
| Teacher inspection | 3 hours | 2 officers on average |
| Visit of teacher advisor | 3 hours | 1 officer on average |
| Follow-up visit | 3 hours | 1 officer on average |
| Courtesy visit | 1 hour | 5 officers on average |

e. Zimbabwe, education officer

| Type of visit | Duration | Actors |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Full inspection | 4 hours | Team |
| Institutional inspection | 2,5 hours | Team |
| Spot checks | 1 hour | Individual |
| Teacher inspection | 2,5 hours | Individual |
| Follow-up visit | 3 hours | Individual or team |
| Courtesy visit | 1 hour | Individual or team |
| Advisory visit | 2 hours | Team |

Examples

Typically in **England**, a team of two inspectors will do a full inspection of a small primary school over 3 days, while a big secondary school might mobilize 12 inspectors for 15 days, not including the additional time spent in planning beforehand and preparing the report after the visit. In **Sri Lanka**, a team consisting of four to 14 officers will also carry out a full inspection, but the team visit will normally not last for more than one day (5-6 hours). In **Bangladesh**, full visits are expected to be carried out by only one supervisor, who will fill out a rather ambitious checklist of about 150 items in, again, normally only one day.

Box 2: Sri Lanka: areas covered by team supervision

| General management and administration | Curriculum implementation and classroom teaching |
|--|--|
| 1. Office management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - record-keeping - teachers' leave - student attendance - filing - financial records | 1. Teacher preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lesson planning - work schemes |
| 2. School planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - timetable - school development plan - school calendar | 2. Classroom environment teaching aids |
| 3. Establishment matters of teachers e.g. extension of service | 3. Teacher commitments |
| 4. Teacher requirements excesses and deficits | 4. Student evaluation and public examination results |
| 5. Teacher and student welfare | 5. Special education needs and remedial teaching |
| 6. School premises, cleanliness | 6. Implementation of innovation |
| 7. School climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - principal/teacher relationships - team work - leadership - principal's general conduct and discipline | 7. Teaching methodology |
| | 8. Co-curricular activities |

The differences in time spent in schools can be explained to some extent by differences in the size of the schools, in the complexity of the school management system and in the expected level of depth of the inspection. Nevertheless, it is probably too ambitious – not to mention self-defeating – to demand that a single supervisor gain a full image of a school's functioning and quality from a one-day visit, or even to ask the same from a team that stays for half a day. On the other hand, requesting that supervisors spend more than one day in each school will indeed limit visits to other schools and possibly pose a few practical problems, such as lodging. If supervision is of the compliance monitoring type (see *Module 1*),

the main objective of which lies in ensuring that all schools and teachers respect the official rules and regulations, then to a large extent the present arrangement of relatively short full inspection visits, interspersed with much briefer spot-check visits, teacher inspections and follow-up visits, could be considered applicable. Yet this arrangement poses not simply a problem of substance (should control be supervisors' main task?), at present it is ineffective, as it does not succeed in controlling all schools, particularly the most remote ones, where official rules may be more regularly flouted. If supervision is seen as a school and teacher development activity, then longer, more intensive and more regular visits will be needed.

This brings us to the criteria used to determine which schools to concentrate on.

Criteria for selecting which schools to visit

Research has confirmed the well-known fact that all schools do not receive the same attention from the supervision services. Although certain general rules exist (e.g. that each school has to be visited at least once, twice or three times a year), some schools receive far more visits than others and quite a number (mainly isolated rural schools) seldom receive any visit at all. As was mentioned earlier, this is because supervisors often have too many schools to supervise, are overloaded with too many tasks and are facing practical problems of transport and logistic support. Consequently, they must be selective in the way they distribute their time and services for school visits. The question, then, is: How do they carry out their selection?

Task

Ask yourself which schools should receive the most inspection visits and which schools the least. You may also want to interview a few practising or retired supervisors and ask them the same question.

Completing the task: some hints

Much depends on the purpose of the visit and on the orientation of the supervision system as a whole. If its function is to control the respect of rules and regulations in all schools, each school should be supervised. If however the supervision service aims at improving the performance of schools and bridging the gap between well performing and badly performing schools, supervisors should spend more time with schools that have poor results or face specific difficulties. In many cases though, practical issues will interfere, and, as you will read in the following paragraphs, these factors play a major role.

When asking supervisors the above-mentioned question, you may want to keep this in mind.

In many countries, supervisors interviewed give some vague answers such as: “we give some priority to schools with specific problems”; “schools with a new headteacher”; or even “we select schools randomly”. But in reality, and in the absence of clear official guidelines, the most important criterion is often the accessibility of the school. As indicated in various studies, there is a tendency to frequently visit schools situated along main roads. As a result, isolated schools in backward rural areas, which are probably most in need of support, are least visited.

A more rational procedure is waiting for schools to request visits. This is the procedure now followed in Korea: school visits have changed from supervisors randomly selecting schools, to schools actually requesting them. That is, school visits have changed from being authoritative to democratic in character. This approach is perhaps quite appropriate in a country such as Korea, where teachers are well-educated and motivated, where schools have quite some resources, where in-school supervision is encouraged and where schools are probably in a position to identify their own needs for external supervision. However, this demand-driven solution may be far less appropriate for other settings.

In other environments, two solutions seem available. One option could be to appoint more supervisors and improve their working conditions, especially as regards transportation. However, in view of existing budget constraints, this could be a rather challenging proposal. A more attractive strategy could be to demand that supervisors concentrate their intervention on schools most in need of their support, in other words, to develop a diversified approach that will serve schools in function of their needs.

Example

*This solution has been applied with relative success in **Chile** since the major educational reform at the beginning of the 1990s that, among other things, increased school autonomy and transferred management authority to the municipalities and the private sector. At the same time, a compensatory development strategy was put into practice to concentrate quality improvement efforts on the weakest schools. There was also a radical transformation of the supervision system: supervisors were given an exclusively advisory role and requested to focus on schools centrally regarded as performing badly. Currently, in urban areas each of these schools must be visited by the supervisor once a week during the first year and once every two weeks thereafter. In rural areas, each school must receive at least four visits a year and the supervisor must every two to three months bring together the teachers of a given limited geographical area to exchange experiences, discuss problems, identify solutions, take stock of ongoing innovations and provide information and training inputs as required. Recent*

research demonstrates that this 'focalization' strategy (which extends beyond supervision and generally includes additional attention and resources for the schools performing badly) has indeed had a positive effect on learner achievement.

Implementing school visits

Officers in charge of managing supervision services cannot be satisfied with fixing the parameters for planning school visits; they must also see how they can improve their actual implementation. Again, this can be done by setting some norms, preparing guidelines, promoting good practices and providing the necessary resources to facilitate such practices.

Two key phases of the implementation process must be considered, namely the preparation of visits and their actual implementation.

Preparation

Supervisors are expected to make some advance preparations for their visits by in particular consulting previous inspection reports. The extent to which they are able to do so, however, is not always clear. Moreover, the quality and relevance of the preparation depends, to a large extent, on the quality of previous inspection reports. Unfortunately, poor or absent filing systems are a major weakness of many countries, which makes the consultation of previous reports difficult.

Examples

In Uttar Pradesh, due to their excessive workload, it was found that many supervisors were unable to carry out any advance preparations and only about a quarter could somehow prepare themselves for academic support and supervision.

Case studies of four African countries show a rather more optimistic picture. Once a school has been selected, supervisors prepare themselves fairly straightforwardly: they obtain, if necessary, permission from their superior; they identify the main objectives, prepare whatever materials and documents are needed (checklists, standard report forms) and carry out practical arrangements. The inspectors interviewed in the Central Region in Botswana mentioned that, in addition, they take along policy documents relating to the visits' objectives (syllabi, code of regulations) and also consult several documents related to the schools to be visited. In Botswana, this includes the report of the last visit, the teachers' timetable and recent correspondence with the school, which may have prompted the visit. The schools themselves are not asked for any particular information. The Namibian advisory teachers and inspectors examine a more complete file, which contains some information about both the quality of the school, such as pupil/teacher ratio and examination results, and individual teachers. In Zimbabwe, the importance of consulting previous reports is stressed, as this offers the supervisor an entrance point into the school by examining the implementation of previous recommendations. However, a regional case study comments that previous reports are seldom available, partly because of poor or absent filing systems and partly because official regulations do not stipulate that a copy should be kept in the district office.

Consulting previous reports and their precise recommendations can be considered the minimum preparation required. It can also be very useful to consult other relevant data and information about the school gathered by statistical and other

services (personnel, examination, buildings, etc.) of the ministry. Here again, the problem is that a good information base is rarely available at local offices. Thus the rapid expansion of microcomputer technology could potentially lead to great improvement. For instance, in a project on improving the functioning of primary schools that was implemented in some of the plantation areas of Sri Lanka in the 1990s, a computerized information base proved to be an efficient tool for supervisors and resource persons. These tools, if used properly – with the participation of school site actors – will move supervisors towards support and improvement based on empirical information, instead of mere emphasis on adherence to administrative norms. Indirectly, the indicators developed through an information base also act as a means of assessing and monitoring the performance of schools in a context-specific manner.

Finally, preparation of full inspection visits is increasingly seen as the joint responsibility of the external supervisors and the school staff themselves, to the extent that self-evaluation by schools is being stressed. Indeed, the success of a full inspection will, to a large extent, depend on the quality of the information provided by the school.

Examples

*Extensive in-school preparation of full inspection visits is common practice in both England and New Zealand. In **New Zealand**, for example, a notification letter asking for specific information is sent to the schools under review prior to the Review Officers' visit. The letter requests operational information such as: the school's strategic plan and self-review data, a completed self-review questionnaire and information about student achievement. In **England**, the registered inspector leading the inspection team must contact the school beforehand and make an initial visit to help the school prepare for the inspection. Headteachers must fill in special forms as stipulated in the Inspection Handbook in order to communicate as much detailed information about the school as possible to the inspection team, thus providing a good foundation for all aspects of the inspection.*

Although this procedure may not be applicable in many countries where self-evaluation practices have yet to take root, associating schools can offer useful inspiration when preparing and implementing full inspection visits.

This leads us to a matter of concern in many countries: should schools receive notice of visits or not?

Naturally, much depends on the purpose of the supervision visit. If its purpose is faultfinding, through brief spot-checks, giving notice would be contradictory. Visits aiming at a complete overview of the school's functioning through full inspection are, however, generally announced to allow the school and the teachers to gather and update all necessary information. When supervisors pay visits to teachers to offer them support and advice, the teachers are also generally informed beforehand to ensure a mutually trusting relationship between them and the supervisor as well as to allow them to prepare themselves. Inspections of teachers in many cases are not announced, although there again different traditions exist. Some inspectorates are of the opinion that inspecting teachers without informing them beforehand shows a lack of courtesy towards a professional colleague.

The above 'rules' only seem to apply insofar as a number of practical problems do not occur. What is indeed at times more important than the rules or the convictions of the supervisors are the practical constraints they experience. Many visits take

place unplanned, many planned visits cannot be held as foreseen and schools are difficult to contact because of the lack of means of communication.

Implementation

How often are schools visited? Although certain general rules exist (for example, that each school must be visited at least once, twice or three times a year), some schools receive far more visits than others and quite a number (mainly isolated rural schools) seldom receive any visit at all.

Example

Information collected from the six District Education Officers of the Kwekwe district in Zimbabwe shows that they could visit between two thirds and four fifths of their schools, and inspect between 7 and 30 per cent of the teachers under their responsibility during the previous year. Thirty-five teachers in the same district were also asked how many times they had received a supervision visit during the whole of their career. As illustrated by the table below, the results revealed that, on average, a teacher received a supervision visit about once every two and a half years, which is far below the unwritten official expectation of three visits per year.

Zimbabwe: regularity of teacher inspection visits

| Location | Number of teachers | Average years between visits | Number of visits in 1997 |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Urban | 12 | 3.14 | 2 |
| Peri-urban | 13 | 1.70 | 3 |
| Rural | 10 | 4.22 | 0 |
| Total | 35 | 2.65 | 5 |

The table also shows that there is a sizeable disparity according to their location: teachers in the peri-urban area received about three visits every five years, those in rural areas about one. In 1997, only five teachers out of the sample had been inspected, and none of them were working in rural areas.

What happens during the visits? As indicated earlier, most visits in the IIEP case study countries are relatively short: five to six hours for a full inspection and one or two hours for an incidental visit. We also know that visits are often routine affairs devoted to checking registers and documents, with very little time devoted to classroom observation (except in the case of specialized advisory staff). In addition, we know that teachers often complain about the authoritarian attitude of the supervisors and their subjective and non-transparent judgements.

These problems were discussed in Module 2. It is thus sufficient to highlight here that one way of making visits more transparent and efficient is to equip supervisors with the necessary guidelines and handbooks, together with adequate training and professional development activities. Another way of making external supervision less authoritarian and more problem-solving is by including the school actors themselves (headteacher, teachers and community members) in the school review processes. This brings us back to the issue of promoting self-assessment in schools, which was mentioned above, and to which we shall return in more detail in Module 6.



Reporting

A school supervision visit generally leads to the preparation of a report. Without such a written record, it could be argued that a visit has no administrative existence. Does this imply that report writing is an indispensable part of a supervisor's job? The issue is not that simple and three questions need to be addressed: are supervision reports always necessary and useful? What should such a report contain? To whom should reports be distributed?

Are all reports useful?

Most countries put a lot of stress on the fact that supervisors have a duty to write reports for each visit they undertake. In Zimbabwe, for instance, a circular by the Chief Education Officer states: "Much value is attached to report writing, as the report is a permanent record and, in the majority of cases, is the only means by which the Ministry gets to know about the state of education provision in the schools". Most supervisors prepare reports consistently, partly because their superior judges their efficiency on the volume of reports produced. It is interesting – and preoccupying – to note that the background to this emphasis on reports seems to relate more to the need for the administration to control supervisors, rather than to the possible value of such reports to schools.



Question

What are the advantages and disadvantages of systematic report writing after visits?

The advantages are that reports help supervisors plan future visits; they enable the administration to act on specific recommendations; and by highlighting strengths and weaknesses and making feasible recommendations, they could be useful to schools themselves. The main disadvantage, however, is that supervisors may have to spend an excessive amount of time writing these reports – time which could be better used for direct interaction with schools and teachers. This is particularly an acute problem for staff working without a secretariat and/or computer, as in many district offices (see *Module 4*). In these circumstances, report writing is ritualized, and the reports themselves contain little useful advice for schools.

Where there is close and informal contact between officers and school staff, systematic report writing is often axed, as it is felt that supervisors know their schools very well and do not need reports to know the situation of each individual school. Moreover, time could be more usefully spent visiting schools than on writing reports. However, failure to write reports could threaten ‘institutional memory’, particularly when officers are moved or leave the service. It also makes co-ordination and follow-up more complicated.

Question

Can you identify possible alternatives to systematic report writing or do you feel that it is an obligation?

Several countries have developed alternative forms of written records, which are different to and less time-consuming than the traditional full-fledged report.

- One possibility is to equip supervisors with a checklist for reporting purposes that is easy to handle, but may lead to some form of superficiality.
- Another possibility is to create a file for every school in the district office and make a brief record for each school visit, containing simply the main

findings. A similar logbook, which includes the main comments of the supervisor, can exist in each school. If such files and logbooks are well kept, they can be a useful and timesaving alternative.

- Supervisors can be requested to prepare once every trimester or semester a brief report on each school, which will make systematic reporting redundant. The feasibility of this strategy depends, of course, on the number of schools for which a supervisor is responsible.

What should reports contain?

The above discussion avoids what could be considered the core issue: what is written in reports? Indeed, writing reports systematically will be of little use if their content is irrelevant and inappropriate to the needs of the school and the system.

Three factors play a role in making a report more or less useful:

- The nature of the visit itself is unmistakably crucial. When supervision reports are analyzed, it appears that they seldom address the more profound issues and are thus of little help to the school staff for future supervisions. Arguably this reflects the rather superficial nature of many visits. When a visit is simply meant to exercise some administrative control, the report will hardly have any impact on quality improvement. A visit that includes classroom observation could lead to a most helpful report, if that report is well written and contains clear recommendations. This brings us to the two points that follow.
- When supervisors have clear guidelines at their disposal on what elements and aspects of schools to concentrate on, their findings and their report will gain in value accordingly.
- Standard report forms, which compel the supervisors to focus on specific issues and to include recommendations, could equally be of use. There has been some discussion concerning to what extent such report forms constrain the creativity of supervisory staff, but it seems that in many countries their usefulness outweighs their possible disadvantages.

Examples

In the Central Province of Sri Lanka, the format for team supervision reports is fairly comprehensive. Part I gives an overall assessment of the 15 items to be covered (see Box 2 above); part II consists of reports of classroom observations by various officers. These contain four sections: introduction (class observed, teacher, subject, theme, preparation for teaching); observations (what actually happens during the lesson, the teaching/learning process); suggestions for improvement; and responsibility for implementation. Other provinces have their own fairly similar report forms. In the North-Western Province, the report contains a detailed evaluation of the lesson, using a six point (zero to five) scale on 20 criteria: five for lesson planning and objectives, nine for development of the lesson, three on assessment procedures and remedial measures and three for an overall evaluation.

In Zimbabwe, each report starts with some basic data on the individual or the school to be inspected. This is generally followed by an identification of the visit's purpose ("to assess the competence of the classroom practitioner" or "to assess the administrative ability of the head and to assist where possible"). Then follows a description of the workload and responsibilities of the teacher or headteacher and a

comment regarding his or her suitability for the job. The main part consists of an evaluation of the performance, which will be more pedagogical where teachers are concerned, and both pedagogical and administrative for heads. Regularly, reference is made to facts to underlie the evaluation: the marking of pupils' exercise books, the number of staff and parents' meetings held, and so on. Where criticism is given, generally this is accompanied by more positive and encouraging comments. With regards to the report on headteachers, the standard report form contains, for that purpose, a section entitled 'Noteworthy achievements'. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations. The nature of these recommendations, and the way in which supervisors will follow up on them, are crucial to the impact of a supervision visit and to the satisfaction of schools and teachers with the whole supervision service.

The distribution of reports

Even if the report contains very useful comments and recommendations, it will be of no use if those people who can take action on its recommendations do not read it. This brings us to the issue of the distribution of reports and to the very practical question: to whom should they be sent or made available to?

Questions

To whom should inspection reports be sent? What is the practice in your own country?

The answer is clear when it comes to some recipients; for others, it is more controversial:

- It is essential for reports to be filed in the supervisor's own office so that they can be consulted at a later date and used for follow-up and the preparation of future visits. In this light, it is deplorable that in certain countries supervisory offices do not have functioning filing cabinets or efficient filing systems.

- Reports should be sent to the school or teacher concerned for them to learn from the inspection visit, discuss its recommendations and define action. A positive finding to note is that most supervisors discuss their findings with schools before leaving and drafting their reports, which schools appreciate and find useful. It is not without importance that the time between the visit and the time when the school receives the report is rather short.
- In most countries, reports are also sent to the superior of the supervisor, not only to inform these officials of the conclusion of visits, but also to show that supervisors have done the work they are paid for.
- Ideally, reports on schools should be sent or made available to the other services in charge of quality improvement and/or monitoring – including staff in charge of examinations, teacher training and the curriculum. Indeed, these reports could contain useful information for this staff on, for instance, particular problems with the curriculum or recurring weaknesses among teachers in certain areas. In the same vein, when reports contain specific remarks or recommendations concerning the need for material inputs in schools, the relevant services should be informed. One problem, however, is that those services will seldom find the time to read through all reports to find the relevant sections. It is therefore important that reports be well and clearly structured, allowing all recipients to find the parts relevant to them easily.
- Where a service exists that is expected to monitor the development of the overall education system at central level (in Zimbabwe, for example), reports are generally also sent to this service.
- More controversial is the issue of making reports (or part of them) available to the school community and to the public at large. As indicated in Module 1, this is already the case in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden, some States in the USA and Australia. But it is an issue that meets much resistance elsewhere. An intermediate measure could be to make summaries of reports available to the members of the school board or school council, which generally contains representatives of the community. The following paragraphs comment on the situation in four African countries.

Examples

*There is some controversy about the usefulness of sending school supervision reports to school boards or similar bodies that include representatives of parents. In **Namibia**, the supervisors, heads and teachers interviewed mentioned two points: first, distributing reports may create conflicts; second, board members should be able to read and understand the content of the report. Most interviewees agreed that it could be useful to communicate to the board those reports that put emphasis on institutional issues (school enrolment, infrastructural and financial matters, relations with the community, school calendar and organization) and do not comment on individual teachers. Their reasons were that parental involvement should be encouraged, that reports could enhance collective accountability and create a sense of responsibility among the community. Moreover, it is useful for the community to be kept informed of such matters.*

*Actual distribution of school reports to the School Board or Committee seems only to occur in **Tanzania**, where, in principle, boards are informed of matters related to their role and function and an executive summary is presented to them together with a detailed report for their information. In the other countries, schools might*

*transmit the report or some of its findings to the Board, but the extent to which this is carried out is unclear. In **Botswana**, most secondary schools do discuss supervision reports with the Board, as these reports are more institutional, whereas primary headteachers prefer to keep their reports more confidential.*



Follow-up

One of the most recurring and finally most worrying points mentioned by supervisors as well as teachers in most of the countries studied in the IIEP project concerns the lack of follow-up to a supervision visit. The overall impression given is that, once a visit is undertaken and a report filed, nothing more will happen and any impact is quickly lost. This serious problem has at least three dimensions, as three different actors are involved: the educational administration, the supervisors and the school staff.



Task

Please list who, within your country, are the different actors or services that should be involved in the follow-up to a school supervision visit.

Completing the task: some hints

As mentioned above and as will be explained in the following paragraphs, you should think about three groups. The report may contain findings or recommendations of interest to other staff involved in quality improvement or quality control. The supervisors themselves will have to take action. Thirdly, within the school, the principal, the teachers and a school board can be mentioned.

- First of all, given that most supervision visits have a heavy bias towards administrative matters, many of the recommendations made concerning infrastructure, personnel matters etc. must be followed up by other officers instead of the supervisors themselves. In the absence of clear follow-up procedures, the required remedial action is often taken late or not at all. Efficient follow-up is clearly limited by the irregularity of school visits and the superficial nature of many supervision reports as well as poor filing and distribution. In some cases, political interference stops follow-up, particularly where teacher discipline is concerned. It is therefore not a surprise that, for instance, half of the supervisors interviewed in Bangladesh and Botswana and two thirds of those interviewed in Uttar Pradesh claimed to be dissatisfied with the administrative action taken upon their reports and recommendations.
- Supervisors themselves, however, do not give sufficient attention to the need for consistent follow-up. The reasons are well known: the lack of time to visit schools regularly; inefficient planning and organization of visits; lack of efficient filing on school visits; and lack of a good and regularly updated database on schools. In addition, it could be that some supervisors feel uneasy in going back to a school, knowing quite well that many of the recommendations that were made will not have been acted upon by the administration and their other colleagues and that what they will encounter will be mainly complaints.
- There are also follow-up actions (pedagogical and administrative) to be implemented by the schools themselves, but again, due to lack of direct guidance and control by the supervisors in the form of follow-up visits, recommendations are often not implemented.

The importance of systematizing follow-up visits and requesting schools to prepare concrete action plans for implementing recommendations made in reports is increasingly referred to as a key element to ensure a real impact of external supervision on quality improvement of schools. In a few countries, this awareness has led to important reforms of classical supervision practices as illustrated by the examples of a few OECD member countries.

Examples

*In a few OECD countries, rather comprehensive reforms have been put in place to strengthen follow-up actions after supervision. In **England**, for instance, not only are inspection teams explicitly requested to discuss the results of their evaluation with headteachers, staff and school governors, schools are also to produce action plans within 40 working days of an inspection, indicating how they will act upon recommendations. Copies of the plan or a summary of it must be distributed to all parents. “The practical result for the school of the requirement to produce an action plan after the inspection is self-evident: Governors and senior managers are provided with an agenda of key issues by a set of objective judgement and supporting evidence. The most confident and shrewd schools will ‘exploit’ their inspections thoroughly, using them as a form of valuable consultancy.”¹ However, evaluations of the first inspection visits after this supervision reform showed that, while more stress was put on the need for a well structured and planned follow-up, there remains dissatisfaction – both at the level of the school and the system. “In over half the schools, staff were disappointed that there was not more opportunity for discussion with inspectors after lessons and deplored, in particular, the lack of*

¹ Source: OFSTED, 1994.

professional dialogue between teachers and inspectors". Research on a small, reasoned sample of schools shows that schools do indeed prepare school development plans, but this does not guarantee the implementation of the recommendation of inspectors. Nearly a year after inspections, "only a third of the recommendations could be said to have been at least substantially implemented. (...) It appears that some types of recommendations were more likely to be implemented than others; for example, those concerned with management/administrative procedures and the production of school documentation. In contrast, recommendations regarding assessment issues, curriculum delivery and evaluation, and teaching and learning appear, at best, to have been only partially implemented. (...) Recommendations which implicitly assume some consequent change in the practice of teachers are likely to be among the most difficult to accomplish in the short term"². The authors relate the lack of implementation at least in part to the scarcity of professional support afforded to schools. Support services, which were mostly provided by the local authorities, have indeed suffered under these same reforms. In other words, this whole reform process "has proved an excellent framework for identifying a school's weaknesses, but does not address in any detail how to put them right"³.

Approaches adopted by **Scotland** and **Spain**, among others, demand that supervisors and schools work together to raise standards and integrate follow-up visits by supervisors in the inspection process. The supervisor thus conforms more to the image of the friendly adviser than the outside evaluator. In those countries, sanctions against poor-performing schools and teachers are very rare. This is less the case in **England** and **New Zealand**, where as a last resort, governing bodies can be dissolved and replaced temporarily by an agent or agency of the controlling authority. In England, a school can be closed if it does not improve after two years. This happened to 28 schools between 1999-2000 and 2002-2003 (oral information obtained from OFSTED).

² Source: Wilcox and Gray, 1996.

³ Source: OECD, 1995.



Lessons learned



Question:

The expected outcomes of this module were that you would be able to appreciate the different elements of importance to the management of supervisory work (including school/supervisor ratios) and to identify factors that help supervisors in planning their visits. The module also discussed issues related to reporting and follow-up. Summarize briefly what you learnt through reading this module. Does it compare with what follows?

The management of supervisory work relates to several issues, the most important of which are: defining supervisor/school and supervisor/teacher ratios; strategic planning of the different types of visits (including by reflecting on the selection criteria for visits); preparing the visit through consulting the relevant data; preparing and distributing a report; and finally ensuring that different actors undertake the necessary follow-up.

It is useful to identify norms for school/supervisor and teacher/supervisor ratios. They should take into account the expected role of the supervisor. A comparison should be made between the actual situation in the field and the norms, so that corrective action can be taken, if necessary.

When planning visits, it is crucial to decide on its precise purpose and to select the schools that are considered to be in need of a visit. The criteria for school selection are easily overlooked when practical matters take precedence. Before undertaking a school visit, it is essential to consult any information available on the school, in particular previous supervision reports.

Reporting can take much time and might result in supervisors spending less time in schools. Reports nevertheless are important, as they form part of the

institutional memory and allow all concerned actors to take action on the recommendations. If such report writing is felt to take too much time, then alternative solutions (keeping a school logbook; monthly supervision reports; synthesis reports) can be considered.

Follow-up to visits is a crucial issue that is too easily overlooked. Follow-up actions will have to be taken by the school staff itself (who could be asked to prepare a school improvement plan), by the supervisors (who might have to plan a follow-up visit) and by other administrative and pedagogical staff, to whom recommendations in the report might be addressed. It is essential that attention be given to improving the follow-up to visits by all these actors.

School supervision services exist in nearly all countries; they have played a key role in the development of the public education system, by monitoring the quality of schools and by supporting their improvement. However, in many countries, these services are under increasingly heavy critique, because of their failure to have a positive impact on quality of teaching and learning. This failure is, in part, the result of a strategic challenge: the mandate of the service outweighs by far its resources, and is also caused by a series of poor management and planning decisions.

Against this background, many countries have attempted to reform their supervision system. These reforms are also inspired by the need to improve educational quality and by the recent trend towards more school autonomy. Indeed, the ability of schools to use their greater freedom effectively will depend to a large extent on the support services on which they can rely, while supervision may be needed to guide them in their decision-making and to monitor the use they make of their resources. While these reforms have met with mixed success, their overall analysis allows us to gain profound insight into what can be achieved in a specific context. This set of training modules takes the reader through a systematic examination of the issues that a Ministry of Education, intent on reforming its supervision service, will face.

The public, which will benefit most from these modules, are senior staff within ministries who are directly involved in the organisation, planning and management of supervision services, staff of research and training institutions who work on school supervision, and practising supervisors.

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