



**LANGUAGE and
LEARNING
FOUNDATION**

Strong Foundation, **Stronger** Future.

THE '13- HEADED WRENCH':



**INDIA'S BLOCK
EDUCATION OFFICERS'
QUEST FOR PURPOSE**

Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), India

Lead Department at LLF:
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

This report is dedicated to India's middle-tier educational officials, the Block Education Officers, whose quiet perseverance upholds the promise of public education amidst enduring systemic challenges.

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The '13-Headed' Wrench: India's Block Education Officers' Quest for Purpose

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Abbreviations

ARP	Academic Resource Person
BDO	Block Development Officer
BEO	Block Education Officer
BSA	Basic Shiksha Adhikari
CDO	Chief Development Officer
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DBT	Direct Benefit Transfer
DIB	Development Impact Bond
DPM	District Programme Manager
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
GeM	Government e-Marketplace
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
Gol	Government of India
IDI	In-depth Interview
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LLF	Language and Learning Foundation

LMIC	Low and Middle-Income Countries
NEP	National Education Policy
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NIPUN	National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy
PMSHRI	Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
TPD4E	Teacher Professional Development For Equity
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UP	Uttar Pradesh

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About Language and Learning Foundation

Language and Learning Foundation (LLF) is a system-focused, impact-driven non-profit organisation working to improve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes for children in government primary schools across India. LLF partners with State Governments to strengthen teaching quality through continuous professional development, demonstration of effective classroom practices, and systemic reforms that enhance learning at scale.

Our work focuses on remote and aspirational districts, where children face multiple disadvantages such as resource constraints and language barriers. At the core of LLF's mission is a commitment to equity – ensuring that every child, regardless of background, can build strong foundational learning.

Since 2015, LLF has reached over 2.18 crore children and 11.82 lakh teachers, mentors, and educators across 10 states. By 2030, we aim to support governments in achieving strong foundational learning for 6 crore children nationwide.

In a recently concluded Development Impact Bond (DIB) project in Haryana, implemented for 125,000 children, LLF achieved learning gains nearly four and a half times the set targets. Building on this success, new DIB initiatives are underway in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Since 2019, LLF's Multilingual Education (MLE) programme in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan has improved learning outcomes for children whose home languages differ from the language of instruction. An independent evaluation in Rajasthan, using a difference-in-differences approach, found that students in LLF-supported schools improved twice as fast as those in comparison schools, and three times as much in specific competencies such as familiar word reading and oral reading fluency.

In recent years, LLF has deepened its equity and inclusion focus through initiatives such as gender-sensitive FLN classroom practices, teacher and system actor orientations, textbook reviews, and teacher professional development for equity under the TPD4E project. These efforts demonstrate how evidence-based, systemic interventions can transform foundational learning outcomes at scale.

By working in close partnership with governments, educators, and communities, LLF continues to strengthen education systems so that every child in India has the opportunity to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

Chapters

The Middle Tier in Educational Administration: A Global and Indian Blind Spot

1.1 Introduction: Reclaiming the Middle Tier in India's Educational Reform

Positioned at the intersection of policy and practice, the 'middle tier' of the education bureaucracy serves as the crucial link between state directives and school-level implementation. However, this intermediate layer has largely remained marginal in both policy debates and mainstream research. Much of the literature has focused either on high-level structural reforms or on frontline service delivery, overlooking the bureaucratic mediators whose daily decisions and actions substantially shape the effectiveness of system-wide reforms.

Over the past decade, however, this bureaucratic middle tier has gained increasing global recognition in policy and academic discussions on governance in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). Emerging scholarship is beginning to develop a more systematic understanding of who these actors are, what they do, and how they operate – seeking to address a long-standing empirical blind spot (Aiyar & Bhattacharya, 2016; Elías, 2024; Mansoor & Khan, 2020; VoxDevLit, 2023). Within global education policy, in particular, there is a broad consensus that this analytically under-explored and largely invisible 'black box' requires deeper examination (Childress et al., 2020; Tournier et al., 2025). This evolving framing positions officials in this intermediary layer as potential 'instructional leaders' – pedagogical 'change agents' strategically located to mediate policy and strengthen learning outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the present diagnostic study by the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF) investigates the role of Block Education Officers (BEOs) in rural Uttar Pradesh (UP) – India's most populous state – and situates this cadre within the education system's middle tier. The report contributes to the evidence base by providing a grounded account of BEOs' operational realities and demonstrating how the institutional configuration and capacity of this intermediary layer shape the implementation of India's foundational learning reforms.

1.2 Defining the Middle Tier: India's BEOs

A recent IIEP–UNESCO report defines the educational middle tier as comprising ‘subdistrict, district, or regional levels of education systems’ – encompassing both organisational structures and personnel liaising between schools and higher policy authorities. Cast as key ‘intermediaries’, these actors are responsible for ‘implementing and monitoring national education policies at the local level’ (Tournier et al., 2025, p. 2).

In India, BEOs in rural government schools function as administrative and supervisory heads for elementary education (Grades 1–8) at the block level, which circumscribes a cluster of villages. Embedded within a top-down hierarchy (State → District → Block → Village), the BEO represents the ‘last-mile’ bureaucrat (Aiyar & Bhattacharya, 2016), charged with overseeing school functioning, managing teachers, and implementing state education policies within their jurisdiction.

In this report, the terms middle-tier bureaucracy, last-mile bureaucracy, and frontline bureaucratic actors are used interchangeably to refer to BEOs. Drawing on existing scholarship (Aiyar, 2024; Aiyar & Bhattacharya, 2016; Bhatt & Saraf, 2016), we define BEOs as a distinct cadre occupying an intermediate position within the education administration hierarchy. While the broader literature often reserves the term ‘frontline’ actors for school-level personnel, this report extends the concept to include BEOs as the frontline bureaucratic interface between higher administration and schools. They translate policy into practice at a sub-school level, shaping both the form and the rhythm of implementation.

UP has 75 districts and 826 blocks, with a total of 880 sanctioned BEO positions. Some districts, such as Varanasi, which has nine blocks, have more BEOs than blocks; for instance, 11 BEOs are deployed there, with the urban area subdivided and managed by three.

BEOs report to the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA), the district-level authority for elementary education. They supervise Academic Resource Persons (ARPs) – educators deputed to support pedagogy, teacher training, and academic monitoring – as well as headteachers of primary and upper-primary schools. The reporting structure is presented in Appendix I.

1.3 Rationale for Deeper Inquiry: Why Study the BEOs?

The sustained attention given to the middle tier in the education policy field across LMICs reflects a recognition of its influence on policy implementation and public service delivery.

1.3.1 Global Perspectives



Systemic importance

The middle tier forms the 'connective tissue' between high-level policy and classroom practice. It aligns school functioning with broader system objectives, interprets national directives, and facilitates local adaptation – thereby shaping the success of educational expansion and decentralisation (Childress et al., 2020; Tournier et al., 2025).



An empirical 'black box'

Despite its significance, this layer remains underexplored. Little is known about its organisational routines, staffing patterns, or decision-making logics, rendering it analytically invisible in both policy and research (Tournier et al., 2025).



Potential for pedagogical leadership

The literature increasingly recognises this tier's potential as change agents and instructional leaders in advancing foundational learning outcomes (Asim, 2023; Childress et al., 2020). Yet its pedagogical function remains under-theorised and inadequately institutionalised.



The missing link in decentralisation

Global education reforms emphasising school-level autonomy and accountability often bypass subnational administrative actors. This oversight represents a significant gap in understanding how the middle tier can enhance instructional quality and foundational learning at scale (Asim, 2023; Childress et al., 2020).

1.3.2 The Indian Context: Rethinking Bureaucratic Effectiveness

- **Limited organisational focus:** Analyses of Indian state capacity often diagnose inefficiency or prescribe reform, but rarely attend to the organisational processes – work cultures, routines, personnel policies, intrinsic motivations, and decision-making logics – that shape bureaucratic behaviour and effectiveness, as well as state capacity (Aiyar, 2024; Kapur, 2020).
- **Beyond technocratic solutions:** Dominant ‘principal-agent’ approaches focus on incentives and monitoring – the ‘disciplining-plumbing’ model (Aiyar, 2024) – assuming that data-driven tools alone can resolve implementation challenges. Such views ignore the institutional constraints and motivational realities of frontline governance.
- **Foregrounding the everyday:** A growing body of scholarship advocates for a ‘quotidian’ lens on bureaucracy, emphasising how middle tier actors perceive their roles, exercise discretion, and navigate contradictions. This perspective reveals how incoherent institutional design and inadequate systemic support erode policy ownership and effectiveness (Bhatty & Saraf, 2016).
- **Beyond the ‘implementation failure’ trope:** Policy failures are frequently ascribed to ‘poor implementation’, with little analysis of how policy design itself constrains the daily practices of middle tier officials (Aiyar & Bhattacharya, 2016).
- **Critical to welfare delivery:** BEOs, along with other similarly placed officials, play a critical role in translating welfare policies into practice. However, they have been insufficiently studied as institutional agents requiring reform – not merely in terms of headcount or monitoring capacity, but also in task clarity, role autonomy, and professional support (Bhatty & Saraf, 2016; Vaishnav et al., 2017).

By centring the middle tier, this research addresses these critical gaps, providing insights into its functioning and its implications for foundational learning outcomes.

1.4 What This Study Investigates

Focusing on BEOs as frontline bureaucratic intermediaries, this report examines their potential to serve as instructional leaders and change agents in advancing foundational learning goals. Through close engagement with BEOs and detailed analysis of their mandates and everyday practices, the study explores how the last-mile actors interpret, negotiate, and enact their responsibilities – often in tension with idealised policy expectations and educational theory.

It asks:

- How do BEOs operationalise their formal responsibilities, particularly regarding improving academic practices at the school level?
- What structural, institutional, and temporal constraints shape their ability to exercise instructional leadership?
- To what extent can BEOs serve as change agents for foundational learning, given their actual working conditions?



1.5 Instructional Leadership Under Strain

The core finding is that systemic contradictions in governance fundamentally undermine the aspiration for BEOs to act as instructional leaders.

- **The structural disjunction:** The administrative state defines the BEO role in procedural and compliance-oriented terms. Official task-lists prioritise infrastructure, logistical adherence, and data reporting, with minimal indicators for assessing instructional quality.
- **The operational reality:** BEOs are fulfilling the role the state has structurally assigned – that of a compliant administrative manager – rather than the educational one envisaged in global policy discourse. Their engagement is mediated through checklists and mobile applications, reducing them to conduits of data rather than leaders of learning.
- **The paradox of authority:** The resulting operational dynamic is defined by the chronic absence of both time and trust. BEOs are held accountable for learning outcomes, yet their time, authority, and incentives are overwhelmingly aligned with bureaucratic compliance. They enforce rules downward without corresponding authority upward, leaving them authoritative to teachers but subordinated within the bureaucracy.

This paradox is poignantly captured in the words of one BEO:



Auzār ek hai – 13 khāne wālā wrench – BEO aisi position hai ki inko kahin bhi fit kar do.

(The BEO's position is like a wrench with 13 heads – It is expected to fit into any slot).

– (IDI, BEO).

This metaphor cuts to the core of the findings that the BEO's role is one of mandated versatility rather than defined expertise, constraining their capacity to lead pedagogical change. The report argues that systemic reform must begin with a re-evaluation of bureaucratic purpose, repositioning the BEO from a compliance officer to a facilitator of academic enablement through trust-based institutional arrangements.

Research Design and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods, triangulated approach to examine how BEOs in UP perceive and experience their roles, including the constraints they face and how these experiences reflect broader systemic patterns. To ensure depth and cross-verification, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to capture the formal architecture and everyday realities of BEO work.

2.1 Research Methods Overview

Table 1: Research Methods Overview

Method	Timeframe	Participants	Purpose	Contribution
Desk Review	Pre-fieldwork (December 2024–January 2025) Post-fieldwork (May–July 2025)	Pre-Fieldwork: Consultants Post-Fieldwork: LLF Team Member	To develop analytical framing using literature on middle tier governance and state capacity	Anchored the study in contemporary academic, development and governance policy debates.
In-depth Interviews (IDIs)	December 2024	14 BEOs across 4 districts: Bhadohi, Chandauli, Fatehpur, Varanasi	To explore BEOs’ role perceptions, internal hierarchies, and constraints	Generated narrative data that informed theme development and survey design
Survey with BEOs	January – February 2025	43 BEOs across 7 districts: including the above + Jaunpur, Kaushambi, Shravasti	To quantify patterns in job scope, data use, collaboration, workload, and support systems	Enabled pattern recognition across a broader sample; supplemented qualitative findings

Situated Ethnography	June 2025 (3-day workshop)	5 BEOs + 1 Trainer (selected informally during a state-level training)	To gather unstructured, trust-based reflections on role expectations and day-to-day challenges	Captured context-specific perspectives often missing in formal interviews
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Shadowing	February 2025	3 BEOs	To observe real-time administrative practices, daily routines, and disruptions	Revealed gaps and alignments between formal job descriptions and actual professional routines
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Fig 2.1 Number of BEO respondents in each district.

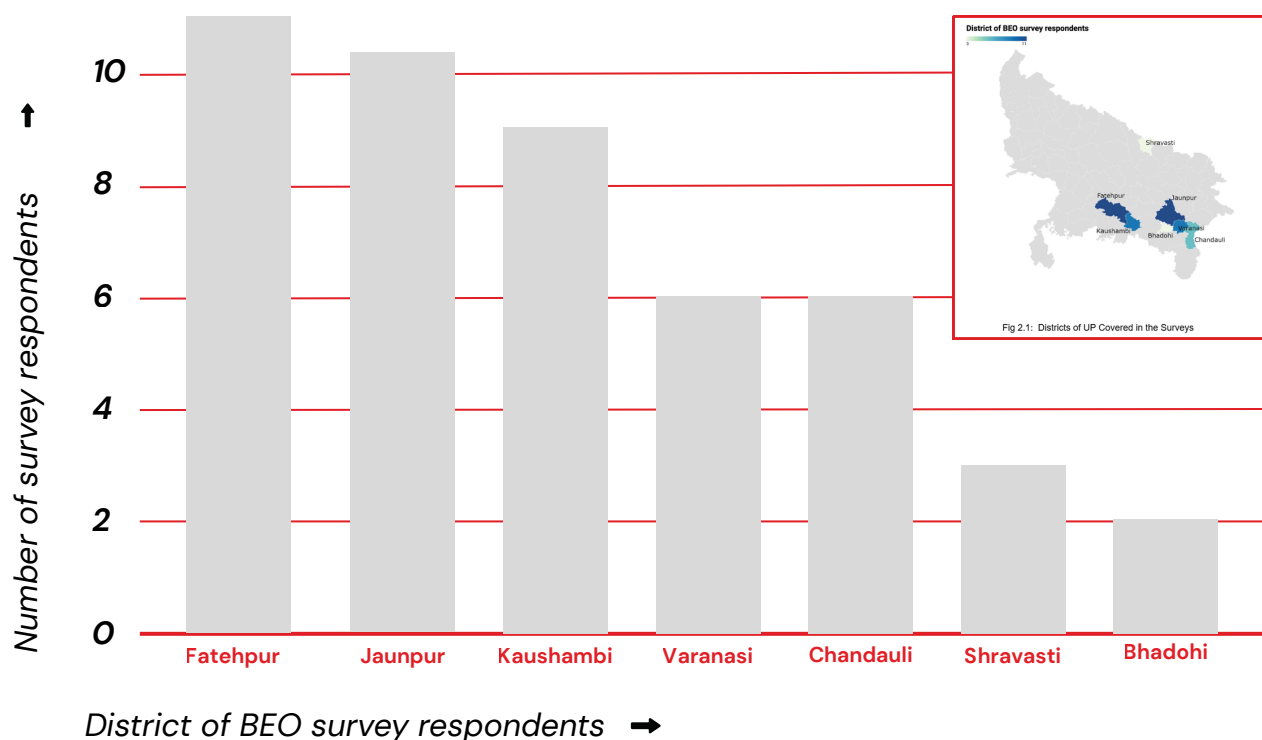
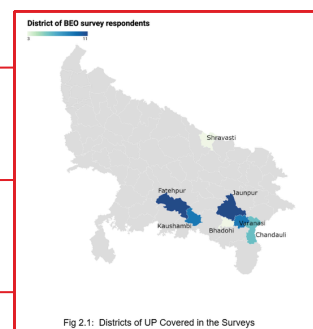


Fig 2.2 Districts of UP covered in the surveys



2.2 Desk Review

To develop a comprehensive analytical framework for interpreting BEOs' experiences, we conducted a multi-layered desk review comprising the following components:

2.2.1 Mid-Tier Governance and Role Mapping:

- We reviewed academic and policy literature that foregrounds the opacity of middle-tier governance – often described as a 'black box' – to situate the BEO within broader discussions of bureaucratic structures and implementation challenges. We also mapped the complex and overlapping roles assigned to the mid-tier actors, particularly BEOs, drawing on four key sources:
 - IIEP–UNESCO reports (Childress et al., 2020; Tournier et al., 2025; see Appendix IV) and related literature to frame middle-tier governance in LMICs.
 - Aiyar and Bhattacharya (2016) for task-specific BEO roles (see Appendix III).
 - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for BEOs issued by the UP government (July 2025; see Appendix II).

2.2.2 Documentary and Communication Analysis:

- We analysed government documents, including policy reports, official circulars, and internal communication channels such as BEO WhatsApp groups. These materials provided insight into formal bureaucratic expectations and informal governance practices, allowing us to ground the analysis in the everyday communications that shape the BEO's work environment.

2.2.3 State Capacity through a Systems-Thinking Lens (not included in this report):

- We engaged with critical literature on Indian state capacity using a systems-thinking lens to examine how bureaucratic roles are historically sedimented and functionally distributed. This analysis is not included in this abridged report.

2.2.4 Socioeconomic Indicators and Gendered Bureaucratic Representation (not included in this report):

- We examined two socioeconomic dimensions:
 - Literacy disparities and related structural inequalities at the national and state levels, with a focus on UP.
 - Trends in female labour force participation, with particular attention to gender disparities in employment and the underrepresentation of women in BEO positions in rural UP.¹

These indicators illuminate the broader governance context in which BEOs operate and the gendered structural dynamics shaping both educational outcomes and bureaucratic representation.

1. We use the gendered terms 'women' and 'men' – and, when relevant, the biological descriptors 'female' and 'male' – to align with current policy discourse, which relies on this binary to advance rights-based frameworks and address the persistent gender inequalities faced by women in India. However, we recognise that gender identities and lived experiences extend beyond this binary, and these terms have analytical limitations.

2.3 Field Research

Field Research was conducted primarily between December 2024 and February 2025, supplemented by a three-day workshop, in June 2025, using the following methods:

2.3.1 In-depth Interviews (IDIs):

- We conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 BEOs (13 men and one woman) across four districts – Bhadohi, Chandauli, Fatehpur, and Varanasi – to examine their role perceptions, internal hierarchies, operational barriers, and accountability structures. Open-ended questions yielded narrative depth, with key patterns informing the subsequent survey design.

2.3.2 Situated Ethnographic Conversations:

- During a three-day BEO training workshop in Lucknow (June 2025), we held open-ended conversations with five BEOs (including two women) and a male Master Trainer. These informal exchanges during breaks and activities, facilitated by a CPD team member with established field relationships, yielded candid insights captured in immediate field notes. These are treated as analytically generative ethnographic data, shaped by the relational and temporal dynamics of the training environment.

2.3.3 Shadowing:

- Field researchers shadowed three BEOs for an entire working day, enabling close observation of task prioritisation, travel schedules, bureaucratic negotiations, and unplanned disruptions. This revealed gaps between formal role definitions and the lived realities of BEOs.

2.3.4 Survey:

- A structured survey was administered to 43 BEOs across seven districts – Bhadohi (2), Chandauli (6), Fatehpur (10), Jaunpur (11), Kaushambi (8), Shravasti (1), and Varanasi (5). The instrument included both closed- and open-ended questions on job responsibilities, inter-departmental coordination, data-use practices, workload, and institutional support. Among the respondents, six were women and 37 were men.

2.4 Study Limitations

This study has three main limitations:

2.4.1 Limited gendered insight: Only six of the 43 BEO survey respondents (14%) and one of the 14 interview participants were women. This limited representation – both in the cadre and in our study – reflects the broader underrepresentation of women within the BEO workforce in rural UP and constrains the extent to which gendered experiences can be fully analysed. The two women BEOs we interacted with during the Lucknow training in June 2025 offered valuable perspectives, but additional research is needed to understand how gender shapes work at the middle tier administrative level. While this diagnostic study does not explicitly adopt a gender lens, LLF recognises the urgency of doing so. We are therefore preparing a separate policy document that will examine the structural constraints shaping women’s leadership within middle tier educational governance, particularly in a state like UP.

2.4.2 Geographic scope: While our seven districts represent diverse contexts within UP, findings may not generalise to all 75 UP districts or to other Indian states with different governance structures, resource levels, or administrative cultures.

2.4.3 Timeframe: Field research spanned from December 2024 to February 2025, capturing BEO work during a specific period. Seasonal variations, policy shifts or election cycles may create different pressures at other times.

The following chapter presents our key findings, organised around six challenges that emerged consistently across our data. These findings reveal how system design, rather than individual capacity, shapes the BEO’s role as a middle tier administrator.

Key Research Findings: Administrative Overload and The Crisis of Instructional Leadership

This chapter presents evidence from our mixed-methods study across seven districts, examining both the administrative dimensions that dominate BEOs' time and the instructional dimensions that remain underdeveloped. While policy discourses increasingly emphasise the importance of academic leadership at the block level, our shadowing data reveal a stark contradiction: BEOs spend the vast majority of their time on administrative compliance and meetings, rather than on instructional leadership, mentoring, and teacher support. Their role as critical frontline actors blurs the boundaries between education and social welfare, further constraining their capacity to act as instructional leaders.

The findings are organised around six core challenges that emerged consistently across our data:

- Administrative duties form the gravitational core of BEO work.
- Focus on compliance limits classroom engagement.
- BEOs struggle to provide instructional guidance.
- Inadequate professional development leaves BEOs unprepared for instructional leadership.
- BEOs collect data without capacity or support for analysis.
- BEOs have limited autonomy within a highly centralised governance structure.



These findings illuminate how the broader bureaucratic and policy context shapes the BEO's role.

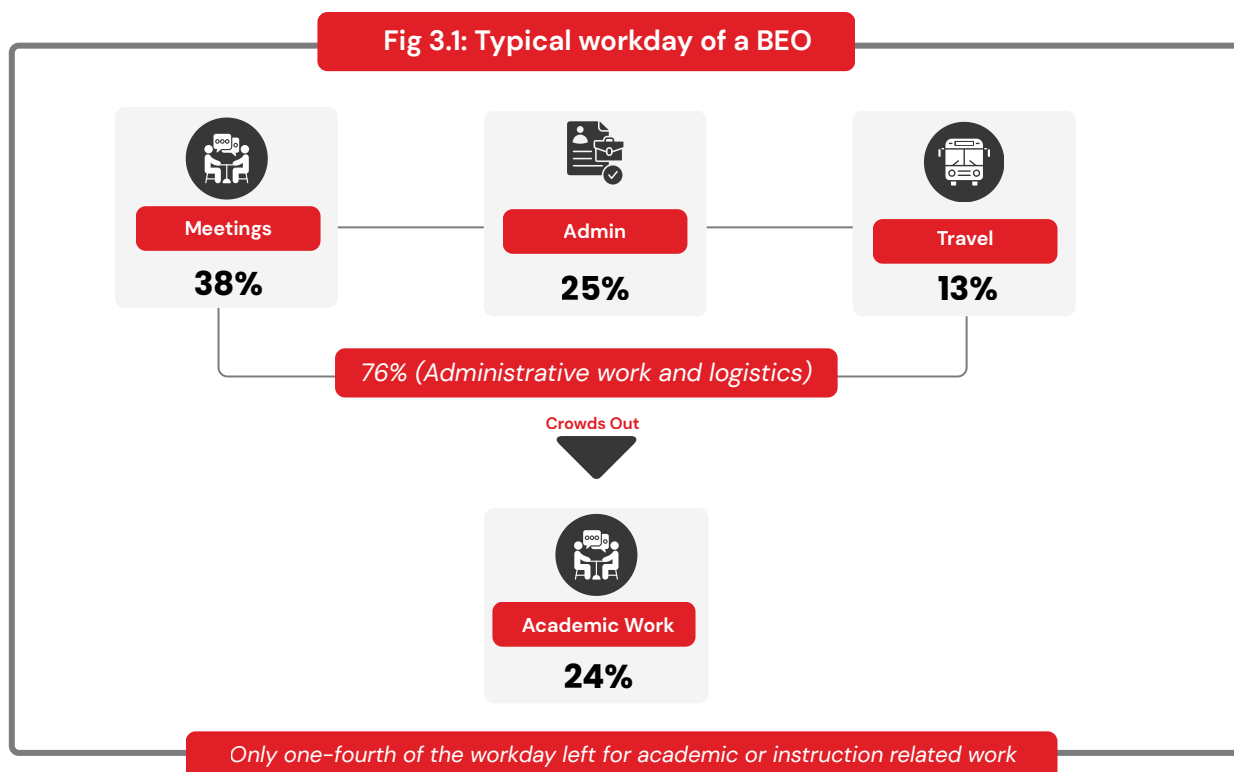
3.1 Administrative Duties Form the Gravitational Core of BEO Work

In a typical month, BEOs attend 11–18 meetings, many lasting at least two hours, with a significant proportion related to non-educational mandates such as health campaigns, election duties, and welfare scheme coordination. This administrative saturation systematically constrains their capacity to support teaching and learning.



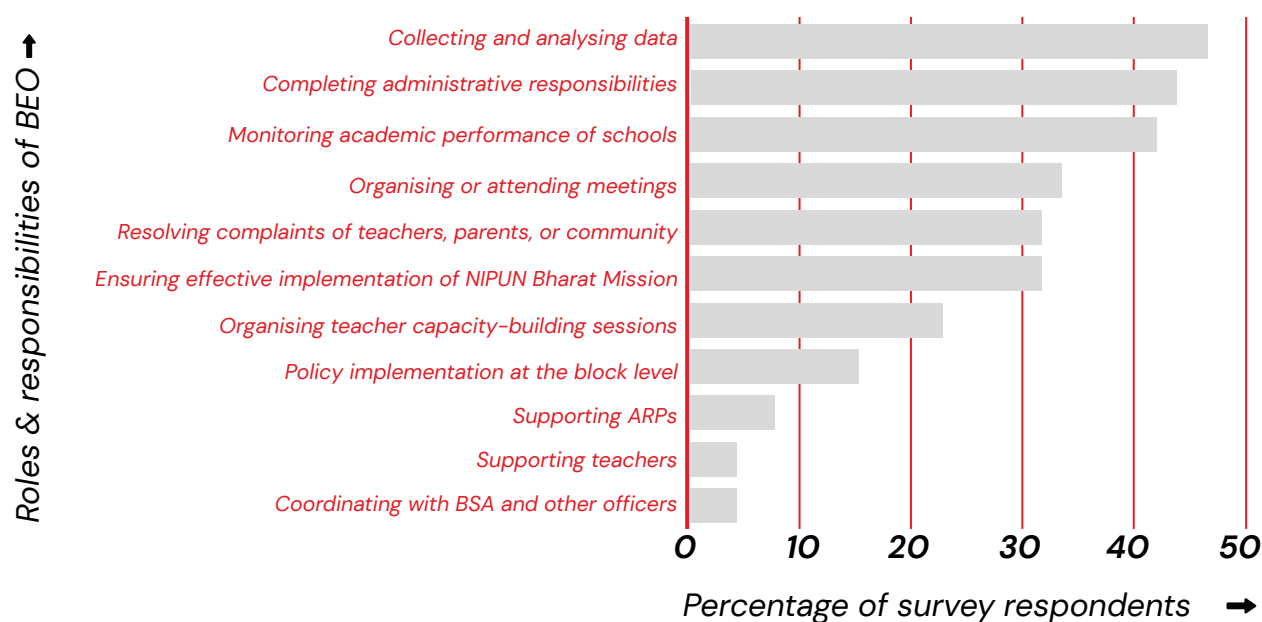
3.1.1 Three-Quarters of the Workday Is Spent on Meetings and Administration

Our shadowing data reveals that meetings, administrative work, and travel together account for an overwhelming 76% of a BEO's workday, leaving only 24% of their time for academic or instruction-related responsibilities – the very core of improving educational quality. These figures are corroborated by their own accounts of a typical workday. According to BEOs, the bulk of their workday is consumed by data collection,² administrative duties, and the monitoring of schools' academic performance, often carried out through predefined checklists. Conversely, direct pedagogical engagement – whether through supporting ARPs/teacher mentors or interacting with teachers at the school level – occupies the least amount of their time.



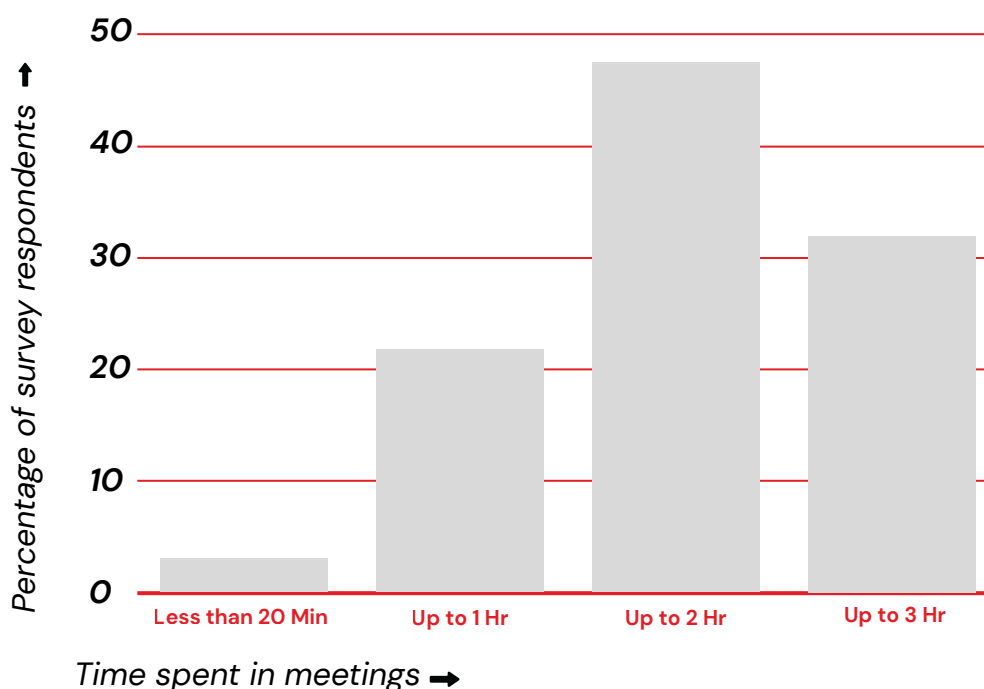
2. Although the survey tool lists 'collecting and analysing data' as a core responsibility, our interview findings indicate that BEOs neither hold the authority nor, in many cases, possess the requisite skills to analyse data in ways that respond to local conditions. This limitation is examined in detail in the sections that follow.

Fig. 3.2: Which three duties take the most time for a BEO?



Over the course of a typical month, BEOs participate in 11–18 meetings, each generally lasting a minimum of two hours. These range from routine reviews with the BSA or District Magistrate to sudden meetings called in response to block- or district-wide emergencies or administrative directives. Notably, many of these meetings fall outside the core education mandate and instead relate to broader governance responsibilities – such as public health campaigns, election duties, or monsoon-season disease prevention.

Fig. 3.3: On average, how much time do BEOs spend in meetings?



Even when meetings are ostensibly educational, they remain largely driven by performance indicators. Despite references to discussions on the causes of low attendance or strategies for improvement, these sessions typically prioritise disciplinary measures and heightened monitoring of teachers and students, rather than enabling contextualised, collaborative review, understanding, and problem-solving.

Our observations on time use, together with interviews with BEOs, highlight the acute challenges of time management arising from administrative overload. As a couple of BEOs reflected:



'Pehli chunauti – time management. Kām kā svarōp aur jo samay ki māng chal rahi hai, kai dishāon mein ek sāth kām karne ki chunauti (The first challenge is time management – balancing the nature of the work with its time demands, as we are often required to act in multiple directions simultaneously.

– (IDI, BEO).



The BEO is a field-based position. We are responsible for supervising and inspecting all schools, which comes with a heavy workload. At times, even 24 hours in a day feel insufficient.

– (IDI, BEO).

3.1.2 The System Trains BEOs to Monitor, Not Mentor

To understand both the everyday practices and the normative self-conceptions of BEOs, we posed two distinct questions:

1. 'What are your main duties as a BEO?'
2. 'What are the three most important duties of a BEO?'

The first question was designed to elicit accounts of routine, day-to-day responsibilities, while the second encouraged respondents to reflect more normatively on what they consider central to their role.

For the first question, the tasks most frequently cited were:

- Implementing the NIPUN (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) Bharat Mission³
- Organising teacher capacity-building programmes
- Conducting and attending meetings
- Implementing policy at the block level; and
- Monitoring schools for academic performance.

Support for ARPs and teachers was ranked lowest.

3. NIPUN Bharat sets out curricular goals, learning competencies, and assessment frameworks across multiple domains – cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, ethical, physical, and aesthetic – to promote holistic child development. NIPUN – a word-play – meaning proficient or skilled in Hindi (नितुन) and several other Indian languages, emphasises foundational learning as both a national priority and an educational emergency (NCERT, 2022).

For the second question, BEOs again prioritised monitoring school performance and implementing the NIPUN Bharat Mission. Support for ARPs and teachers was, once more, perceived as least important.

BEOs see inspection as a core responsibility. They enforce discipline, punctuality, and attendance. They check timetables and verify that teachers maintain daily instruction diaries. Some BEOs take pride in having ‘disciplined’ teachers during their tenure, often linking this to perceived improvements in student attendance and performance. However, the long-term sustainability and verifiability of these outcomes remain uncertain.

Fig 3.4: What are your main duties as a BEO?

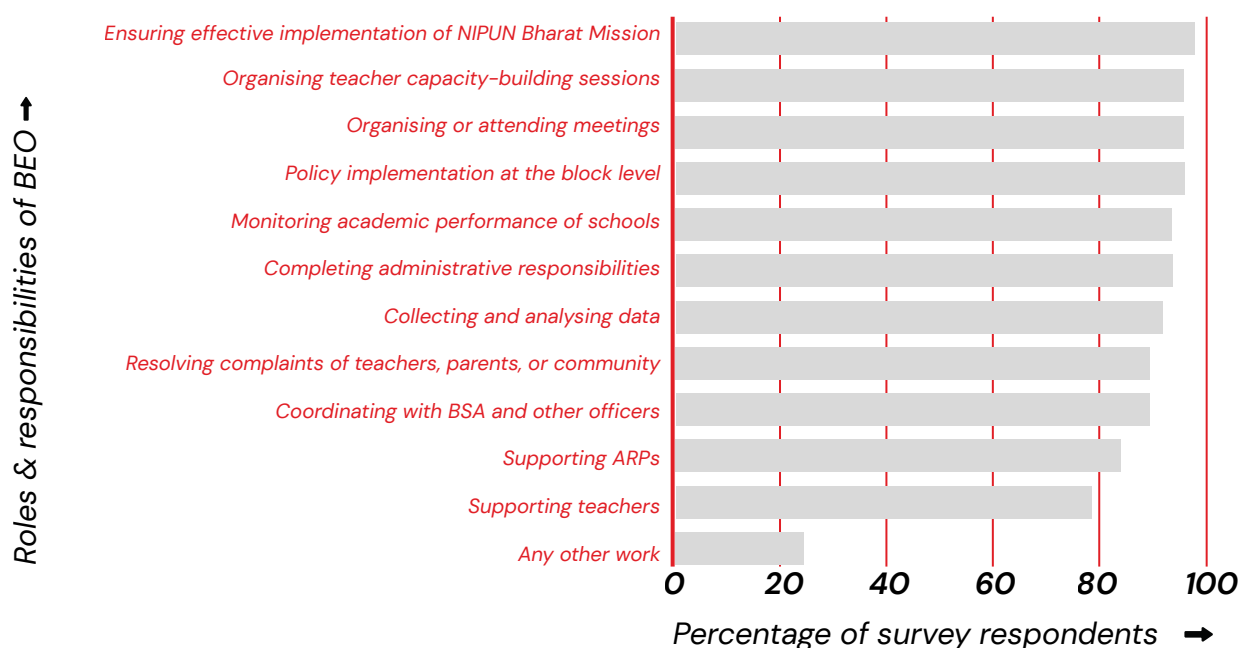
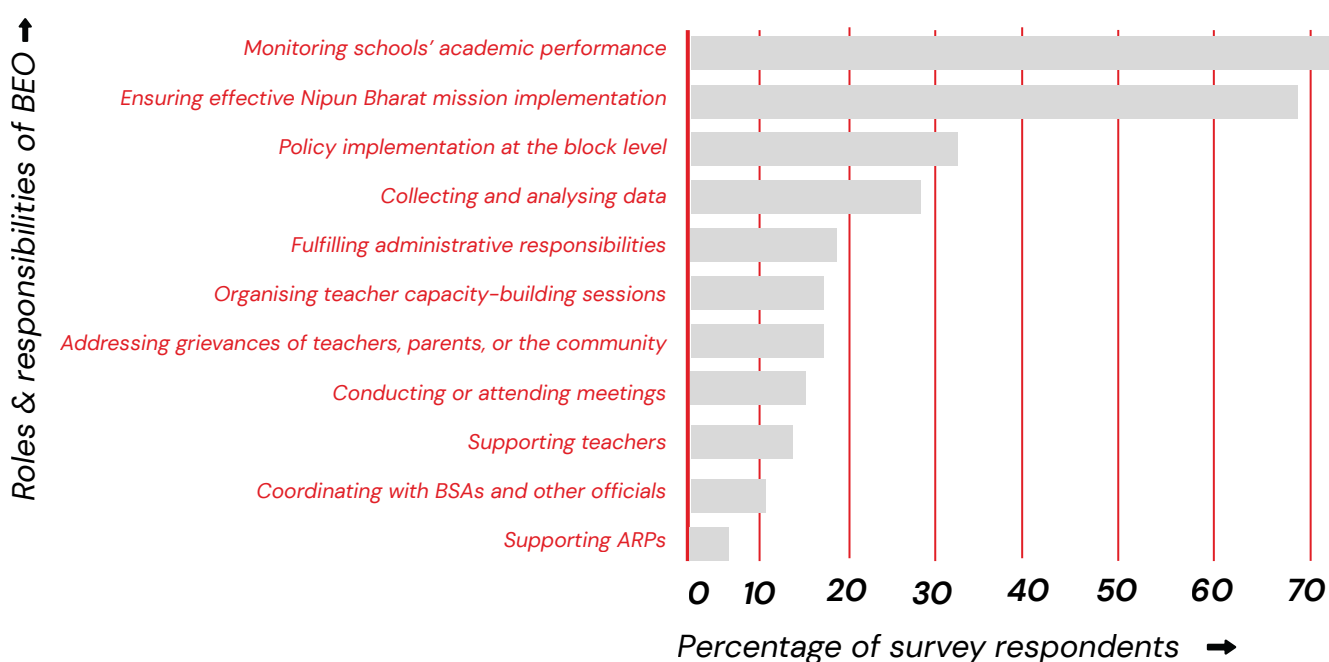


Fig 3.5: What are the three most important duties of a BEO?



At first glance, the convergence between actual practice and the perceived importance of duties might suggest a sense of clarity or coherence. Yet, a closer examination seems to reveal a form of institutional conditioning. This alignment is not the result of deliberate reflection or strategic prioritisation. Instead, it emerges from systemic pressures, dominant policy discourses, and institutional incentives that privilege measurable compliance, such as tracking attendance or test scores, over pedagogical mentorship and instructional leadership. Within such a system, it is unsurprising that BEOs internalise and reproduce the logic of top-down governance, even as they navigate complex and often contradictory field realities.

3.1.3 Responsibilities Extend Far Beyond Traditional Educational Administration

The administrative centrality in BEOs' work reflects a system where educational provision, social welfare delivery, and data management are deeply entangled. BEOs operate at the intersection of education, infrastructure, and welfare, shouldering an expansive set of administrative and logistical responsibilities. From school procurement and infrastructure audits to managing mid-day meals, Aadhaar records, and Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) compliance, their work is shaped by a proliferation of schemes and data-driven mandates. These duties, while essential to system maintenance and educational access, blur the boundaries between education and social welfare, diverting time and attention away from core pedagogical leadership.

At the heart of this condition lies a conceptual ambiguity: What counts as 'education' within a state-led, digitally mediated, and intersectoral governance system? This question underlies the collapsing of institutional mandates and the need to rethink the BEO's role not as a mere implementer but as a nodal actor navigating the confluence of welfare and education.



3.1.3.1 School Infrastructure and Procurement

BEOs are tasked with key infrastructural functions, including verifying the physical condition of school buildings and boundary walls. They also oversee the procurement of items such as televisions, desks, and computers, which requires them to work through platforms like the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) and understanding distinct procurement protocols across school types, including Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), which serve girls from marginalised communities, and Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PMSHRI), a centrally supported network of 14,500 'model' schools, of which 1,722 are located in UP.⁴

Under Operation Kayakalp, BEOs are required to assess infrastructure using 19 detailed indicators, resulting in a proliferation of data points and increased reporting demands.

3.1.3.2 Social Welfare and Logistical Mandates

BEOs' duties extend well beyond traditional educational administration to encompass social welfare and logistical functions. While essential for ensuring children's access to schooling, these activities are not directly related to teaching or learning processes. Responsibilities include:

- Monitoring mid-day meal compliance
- Overseeing the screening and certification of children with special needs for government benefits
- Managing and updating Aadhaar and DBT records

3.1.4 Unforeseen Cross-Departmental Mandates Disrupt Core Responsibilities

BEOs are routinely engaged in unscheduled duties originating from other government departments. These unforeseen mandates significantly disrupt their ability to make consistent school visits and provide instructional support.

3.1.4.1 Cross-Departmental/Non-Educational Mandates

The officials are frequently pulled into responsibilities unrelated to pedagogy. They often attend court proceedings concerning teacher litigation – cases that usually precede their own tenure – requiring them to spend time learning case history.⁵

4. As Bhatti and Saraf (2016) remind us, resource flows – whether infrastructure or teacher allocations – depend less on formal demand than on political influence. While schools routinely submit detailed requests, their fulfillment often rests on the Head Teacher's capacity to persuade elected or bureaucratic officials. Where needs outstrip resources, outcomes are determined by 'political settlements'. These settlements are shaped not only by proximity to power but also by citizen mobilisation: when collective demands are voiced and incorporated into party agendas, bureaucratic responses can, at times, be secured in favour of marginalised groups. More research is needed to understand how BEOs and other Middle Tier officials themselves negotiate the political economy, which acts as one of the 'structural determinants' of their behaviours and actions (Bhatti & Saraf, 2016).

5. Bhatti and Saraf (2016) note that the entanglement of political forces within the education administration is most clearly evident in the involvement of teachers in the electoral process. Teachers are responsible for preparing and updating electoral rolls and staffing electoral booths during elections. This role places them in direct patronage networks with the political class, which teachers often leverage to negotiate transfers and appointments. The result is a skewed concentration of teachers in towns, leaving interior areas underserved. As mentioned in the earlier footnote, further inquiry is required into how BEOs negotiate this politically fraught terrain, and with what long-term effects on teacher-BEO relations and educational processes, particularly as they confront court cases arising largely from disputes over teacher transfers and allegations of teacher 'corruption'.

District officials also summon them at short notice to coordinate events such as community fairs or sports tournaments. Though framed as community-facing work, these duties are primarily logistical, offering little substantive community engagement. Examples from fieldwork include involvement in street pothole maintenance, pension verification, housing scheme coordination, and Anganwadi verification.

This dense overlap of logistical coordination, data management, and welfare provisioning creates a structural dilemma that remains largely unaddressed in the educational literature. The notion of the BEO as an instructional leader becomes untenable when their daily work is defined by the demands of sustaining a vast public service delivery system – often under conditions of acute staffing shortages. The trade-off is stark – every hour devoted to DBT records or mid-day meal logistics is an hour unavailable for mentoring teachers or conducting school visits.



Anya vibhāgo ki zimmedāri, meetings hoti hain, matdān honā hai to kām ātā hai, vidhvā pension ke liye committee banā dete hain, Pradhānmantri Āwās, Ānganwādi kā satyāpan bhi mil jātā hai. Grām Sabhā kā kuchh kām milā thā – Grām Pradhān aur secretary se miley, report banānā, counter lagānā, suchnā ekatrit karnā, Lokayukt jānā (The responsibility of other departments; meetings are held, there is work during elections and polls, they make committees for widows' pensions, the Prime Minister's housing scheme, the verification of Anganwadis is also given to us. We used to get the work of the Gram Sabha as well – meeting the Village Head and Secretary, writing reports, setting up counters, gathering information, going to the Lokayukta)
– (IDI, BEO).

3.2 Focus on Compliance Limits Classroom Engagement

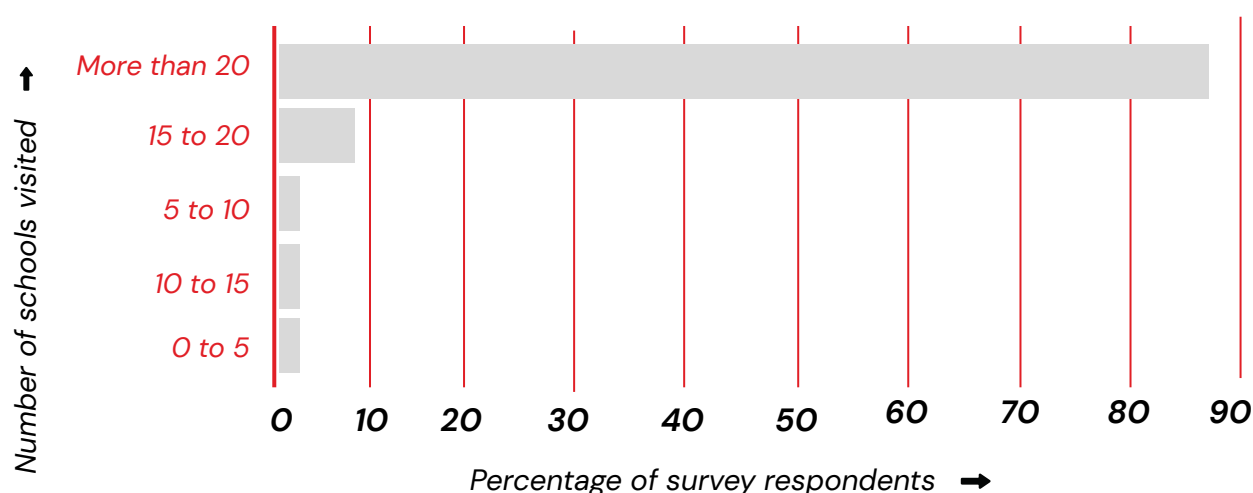
The system's design prioritises quantity over quality in school visits by BEOs. Mandatory digital reporting and a rigid monthly target of 40 inspections compel BEOs to engage in superficial, time-constrained interactions focused on compliance rather than pedagogical support. Approximately 40% of BEOs in our field research reported spending less than 20 minutes per visit. The emphasis on metrics generates a performative culture that obscures the genuine needs of schools and students, with visits typically focused on checking attendance, infrastructure, and NIPUN compliance artifacts rather than purposeful classroom observation or instructional feedback.



3.2.1 Mandatory Visit Quotas Drive Brief, Superficial Engagement

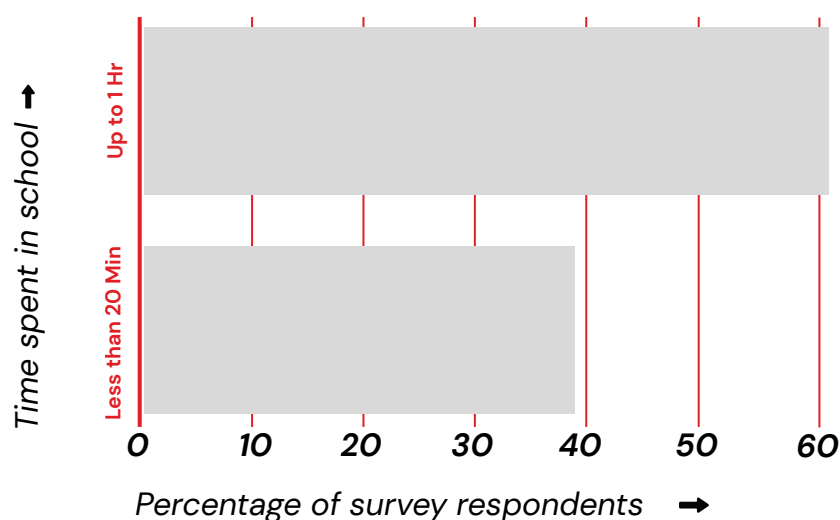
BEOs are mandated to conduct a minimum of 40 unique school inspections per month. The pursuit of this target leaves little time for dedicated interaction during visits. Data from our field research reveals that around 40% of BEOs spend less than 20 minutes per school visit. Their time in schools is mostly consumed by data collection on multiple mandatory mobile applications that standardise observations and record operational aspects of classrooms.

Fig. 3.6: Average number of schools visited by BEOs per month



While over half of respondents claim to extend visits to an hour, our interviews and extensive informal conversations suggest otherwise. Even when visits are longer, the additional time is typically spent on routine administrative checks, rather than providing support to teachers.

Fig. 3.7: Average time spent in schools by BEOs during a visit



A revealing incident from a June 2025 training session exposes the system's priorities. A young male BEO was publicly reprimanded by their supervisor for spending over an hour at each school visit, engaging closely with teachers and headteachers. The BEO was rebuked for prioritising quality over quantity, for falling short of the 40-visit target, despite doing more in-depth work. This incident highlights a system that disincentivises substantive pedagogical engagement in favour of rigid, performance-based metrics.

3.2.2 School Visits Become Scripted Performances

Due to the systemic disincentivisation of meaningful educational interactions between BEOs and teachers, school visits often become scripted performances. Interviews with BEOs reveal an entrenched dynamic of ritualised performance. Both parties know their lines. Teachers, under constant scrutiny, have learned to present a facade of readiness, offering pre-scripted affirmations that validate the BEO's oversight. BEOs, pressed for time, accept these assurances and move on.



Once a month, we come and then ask the teachers, “Have you filled so and so register, or are you using the math kit?”. In response, the teachers also say – “Yes, Sir, and your visit helps us” or “Sir, after your visits, we know how a particular kit or tool or tālikā is to be used.”

– (IDI, BEO).

This is not pedagogical dialogue. It is a managed encounter where both fulfill prescribed roles without engaging the substance of teaching and learning. Neither party explores actual classroom challenges, instructional gaps, or student progress. Complex educational work gets reduced to a charade of accountability.

This performative dynamic also extends to students. BEOs often ask children to recite lessons or read aloud – a quick way to verify that curriculum coverage matches with teacher diary entries. But this offers minimal insight into actual learning or the challenges teachers and students face daily. It simply reinforces the monitoring function, prioritising outward compliance over genuine assessment.

3.2.3 Brief Interactions Focus on Targets, Not Transformation

One hundred percent of the BEOs in our sample prioritised implementing NIPUN Bharat as one of their top three responsibilities. They see NIPUN implementation and school monitoring as inseparable, the overall goal being achieving 'NIPUN status' for schools and students.

BEOs repeatedly used phrases like '*school ko NIPUN banānā, uskey liye raN-nīti banānā*' (making the school proficient and strategising for it). But their fervent focus on NIPUN often translates into tracking observable indicators and ticking performance sheets instead of examining the deeper 'whys' and 'hows' of student learning. This 'accounting-based accountability' approach (Honig & Pritchett, 2019; also see Jhingran, 2023) risks sidelining critical teaching-learning processes and broader educational outcomes outlined in the National Education Policy and the National Curriculum Framework.

3.3 BEOs Struggle to Provide Instructional Guidance

Despite their pivotal role in the education system, BEOs offer limited academic mentorship to teachers and teacher mentors/ARPs, and the pedagogical guidance that does occur tends to remain superficial. BEOs themselves recognise significant capacity gaps, identifying foundational learning pedagogy, leadership skills, and administrative capabilities as key areas in which they require further professional development.



3.3.1 Moral Appeals Stand in for Pedagogic Support

BEOs struggle to provide teachers with substantive instructional guidance. While most acknowledge that offering academic feedback is part of their role, interviews reveal that such engagement is rare. The quality of pedagogical support, therefore, falls far short of both policy expectations and teachers' professional needs.

When asked for concrete examples of instructional interaction, one BEO described inspecting classroom posters to ensure they were displayed at children's eye level rather than high on the walls:



In some classes, posters are pasted on the top of the walls, which are not accessible to children. We ask teachers to paste them according to the students' heights. Teachers complain that children will tear them apart. We assure them that they will get new ones if that happens.

- (IDI, BEO).

This example – one of the few ‘pedagogical’ interactions BEOs could recall – highlights the superficiality of instructional engagement. Even here, the conversation remained procedural. There was no discussion of *why* accessible learning materials matter for student engagement, nor of *how* teachers might use them effectively. Moreover, the BEO overlooked the structural constraint behind the teacher’s hesitation – the chronic scarcity of materials, where even textbooks often arrive late. The exchange thus reflected a compliance check, not a pedagogical dialogue.

Moreover, when BEOs attempt to provide academic guidance, it often takes the form of ‘motivational’ talks rather than concrete feedback. Many see themselves as exemplars who inspire teachers and enforce accountability. One BEO articulated this sense of duty in explicitly moral terms, recounting what they told a teacher:



Āp padhāo, yeh āpkā kartavya hai, āpkā dāyitva hai. Āp un logon ko padhā rahe ho jinke pās kuch nahi hai’ (You teach. This is your duty. This is your responsibility. You are educating children who have nothing).

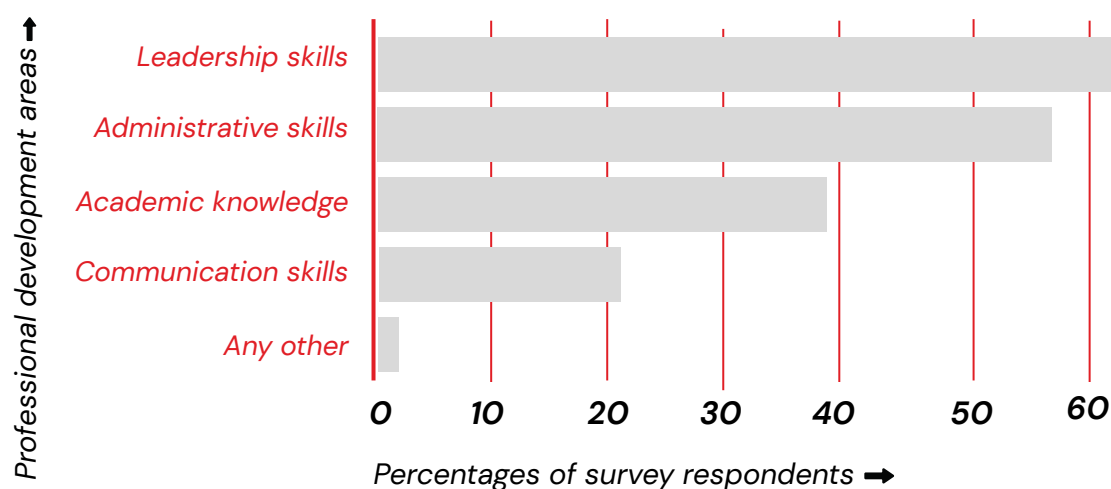
- (IDI, BEO).

However, teacher motivation does not stem solely from moral exhortation. It is configured by structural conditions – inadequate resources, weak recognition, administrative overload, and the persistent neglect of the public education system (Sharma, 2023). Within this broader context of a ‘flailing state’ (Pritchett, 2009), moral appeals become a substitute for systemic support, reinforcing the gap between administrative oversight and instructional leadership.

3.3.2 BEOs Recognise Their Own Capacity Gaps

BEOs themselves recognise the gap between their current capacity and what their role demands. When asked about professional development priorities, nearly 40% identified foundational learning pedagogy as an area where they need training. Over 60% want to strengthen their leadership skills, and more than 55% want to improve their administrative capabilities. But the current institutional structure affords them little opportunity to develop or exercise these capacities.

Fig 3.8: Areas of professional development BEOs prefer to pursue



3.4 Inadequate Professional Development Leaves BEOs Unprepared for Instructional Leadership

The professional development system for BEOs is severely underdeveloped. Infrequent, brief, and lecture-based training sessions do little to equip them with the practical skills required for their roles, particularly in pedagogy and leadership. The absence of any induction training upon appointment forces BEOs to learn through trial and error, creating a significant institutional gap in capacity-building. Moreover, the marginalisation of pedagogical support within existing training further compounds these challenges.



3.4.1 No Induction Training for Newly Appointed BEOs

One of the most striking gaps identified by BEOs is the complete absence of induction training upon appointment. When BEOs take up their positions, they receive no structured orientation to help them understand their role, responsibilities, or the systems they must work within. Instead, they learn informally, on the job, managing complex administrative and pedagogical expectations without structured guidance.

3.4.2 Training Is Lecture-Based, Infrequent and Inadequate

The available training for BEOs is sporadic and inadequate. A three-day session organised by the UP State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in collaboration with partner NGOs in June 2025 was the first such effort in four years. This prolonged gap in professional development is particularly concerning given the rapid pace of policy reform, new programme launches and evolving expectations around data systems and digital platforms.

BEOs unanimously stated that a three-day workshop was insufficient to address their extensive administrative and academic responsibilities. The short duration resulted in cursory coverage of topics, offering little scope for skill development and reflective practice.

Furthermore, the training format itself was widely viewed as ineffective. BEOs highlighted the need for practical, hands-on sessions – especially for data management systems – rather than lecture-based information delivery. When professional development prioritises content dissemination over interactive skill-building, it fails to equip BEOs with the competencies necessary for effective instructional and administrative leadership.

3.4.3 Academic Content Is Marginalised in Training

With respect to content prioritisation, BEOs reported that academic issues were treated as an afterthought and compressed into minimal time. Administrative compliance topics – such as reporting requirements, data entry procedures, and monitoring protocols – dominated the training agenda, while pedagogical content and instructional leadership received limited attention.

This marginalisation of academic content within BEO training reflects a broader systemic pattern identified throughout this chapter – the persistent prioritisation of compliance over pedagogy, and administration over instruction. Even in spaces explicitly designed for professional growth, the underlying institutional logic remains unchanged. This concern reinforces findings from earlier discussions and survey data which show a clear need for investment in structured professional development in instructional leadership – areas where current training provides minimal opportunity for engagement or practical application.

3.5 BEOs Collect Data Without Capacity and Support for Analysis

Datafication is a double-edged sword. While it promises greater efficiency, in practice, it reduces BEOs to data-collection intermediaries with limited time or capability for analysis. BEOs devote a substantial share of their workload to compiling and transmitting data upwards, yet they lack the training and authority to interpret this information for school-improvement planning. Consequently, they perceive themselves as conduits rather than strategic users of data. The proliferation of digital platforms – particularly WhatsApp – has intensified this burden. Frequent, urgent data requests disrupt planned activities, fragment schedules, and further sideline academic support. Chronic staffing shortages compound the problem, leaving BEOs overstretched and unable to prioritise instructional leadership. The result is a one-way flow of information that undermines trust, produces minimal actionable insight for local decision-making, and – owing to the sheer volume and pace of reporting – compromises the accuracy of administrative data.



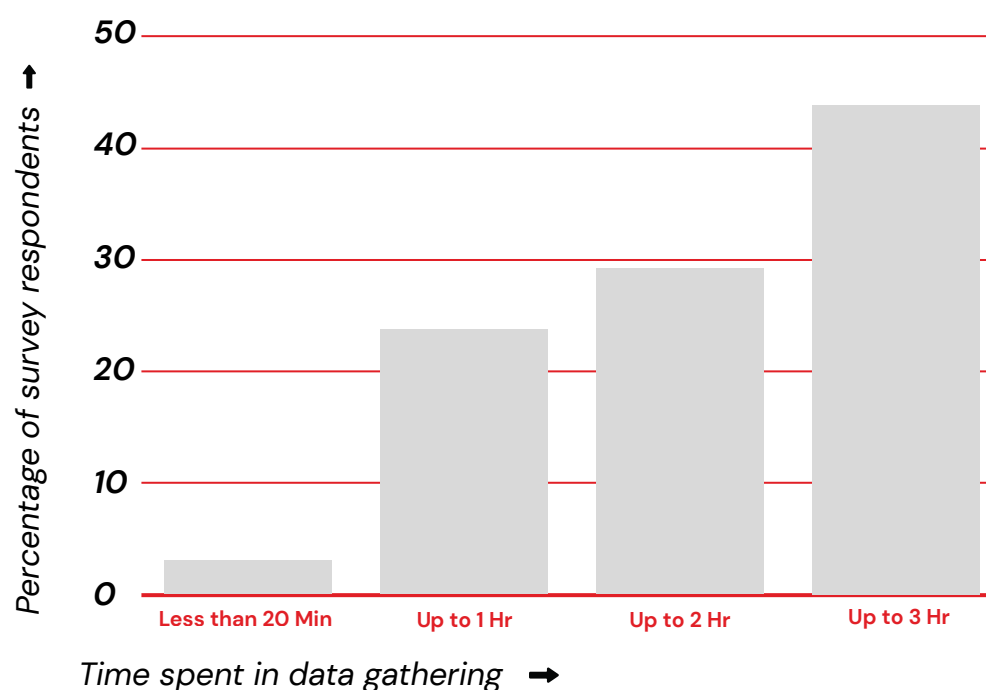
3.5.1 Data Collection Is Central, But Analysis Is Absent

Conversations with BEOs recurrently highlighted data collection as one of their primary responsibilities. Over 40% of surveyed BEOs reported spending up to three hours daily collecting data and forwarding reports. However, most indicated that their role effectively ended with the submission of data. There was little engagement with the data to assess progress, identify challenges, plan school improvements, or develop local strategies.

BEOs largely viewed themselves as information vectors rather than strategic analysts. Their function was limited to gathering and transmitting data while awaiting directives from higher authorities. Opportunities for peer exchange, collaborative reflection, or local interpretation of data were virtually absent. The disconnect between data collection and its analytical use was, therefore, complete.



Fig. 3.9: Average time taken by BEOs to gather data and report forward



3.5.2 Data Flows Up, Trust Breaks Down

While some BEOs report direct engagement with teachers, these interactions are primarily focused on gathering information for upward reporting to the BSA. The model is driven by monitoring routines and data extraction, rather than pedagogical mentorship or collaborative problem-solving. The excessive focus on reporting up also exacerbates a transactional dynamic between administrators and teachers, leading to fragmented governance characterised by mistrust.

This raises a critical question: Can a framework centred so heavily on inspection and documentation meaningfully address entrenched behavioural and pedagogical challenges? These dynamics reveal two dominant roles for the BEO: one as an inspector enforcing compliance through paperwork and digital reporting, and the other as a mediator attempting to bridge school-level realities with policy mandates. Both roles remain tethered to a system that privileges measurements and 'upward accountability' (Kapur, 2020).

The system provides no space for BEOs to use data strategically. They monitor attendance, track assessment results, and verify implementation. But these activities remain disconnected from any systematic effort to understand why problems persist or how interventions might be tailored to local contexts.

3.5.3 Urgent Digital Demands Disrupt Planned Work

The rise of digital communication platforms, especially WhatsApp, has introduced a constant stream of unscheduled data requests. These messages often demand real-time responses, upending pre-planned activities and further fragmenting the BEO's schedule. A typical example reads:

**Samast Khand Shiksha
Adhikari**

**Aadhaar kit active hone तथा
pratidin Aadhaar banne ki
sthati ki soochna Basic Shiksha
Parishad karyalay ke dwara
maangi ja rahi hai, jo diye gaye
Google Sheet par aparahna
3:00 baje tak dene ka kasht
karein.**

**Note: Yeh soochna keval B.R.C.
ki mail ID se bhari jayegi.**

**Aagya se
Jila Basic Shiksha Adhikari**

*(All Block Education
Officers. The Basic
Education Council Office is
seeking information about
the Aadhar Kit being
activated and the status of
Aadhar being generated
every day. Please provide it
on the given Google Sheet
by 3:00 PM. Note:- This
information will be filled
only from the mail ID of
BRC. Signed/by authority
of District Basic Education
Officer)*



Such directives create a perpetual mode of crisis management, forcing BEOs to prioritise administrative compliance above all else. Whatever instructional leadership work was contemplated gets deferred because urgent data requests take precedence.

3.5.4 Staffing Gaps Intensify the Data Burden

BEOs repeatedly described their role as being reduced to data collection, a function they attributed to acute staffing shortages, among other factors. They emphasised that adequate administrative and academic support would enable them to engage more fruitfully with data, using it to inform local planning and instructional improvement rather than merely reporting it upward.

The scale of the staffing deficit is significant. As noted in a June 2025 training session, over 4,400 ARP positions in UP remain vacant. These positions are intended to assist BEOs in academic leadership and administrative coordination. The ARP deficit not only signals a broader systemic shortage but also intensifies the data-related workload for BEOs. In the absence of adequate support, much of their time is thus absorbed in compiling and forwarding data.

3.5.5 'Data Flooding' Undermines Data Quality

The accuracy of administrative data is undermined by the volume and pace of reporting demands. During the June 2025 training, both master trainers and BEOs acknowledged the growing potential risk of data fudging, describing the system as one of 'data flooding'. The continual requirement to generate and upload large quantities of information within tight timelines erodes data quality and undermines its reliability for planning or monitoring purposes.

BEOs cautioned that unless the current expectations – such as the 40-school visit quota and the associated reporting requirements – are rationalised, data will continue to circulate rapidly but without rigour or verification. Excessive frequency and overlapping data demands force BEOs to choose between timeliness and accuracy, resulting in compromised datasets that have limited analytical value.

Technical and infrastructural barriers further exacerbate the problem. Levels of digital proficiency among BEOs vary widely – some can input data swiftly, while others struggle with basic computer operations. However, speed does not equate to accuracy, and uneven digital competence raises serious concerns about data reliability. Connectivity issues, frequent system downtime, and inadequate technical support exacerbate these challenges, further burdening an already unsustainable reporting load.

3.6 BEOs Have Limited Autonomy Within a Highly Centralised System

BEOs operate within a highly centralised system where they receive agendas and directives from above, with little to no autonomy to adapt them to local needs. This top-down structure creates a misalignment, holding BEOs accountable for learning outcomes that they are structurally ill-positioned to influence directly.



3.6.1 BEOs Implement Externally Defined Agendas

BEOs primarily act as implementers of externally defined agendas rather than designers of their own strategies. Their expected role is to receive agendas from above, operationalise them locally, and then diligently report data upwards, often under considerable time constraints. Many BEOs acknowledge that their primary engagement in implementation is fundamentally reactive rather than strategically proactive.

Even when state schemes do not align with local needs, BEOs have limited authority to adapt or innovate. This predominantly top-down structure provides no formal avenues for peer learning or collaborative problem-solving, as noted above.

The result is what Aiyar and Bhattacharya (2016) term the ‘post office paradox’: officers function less as leaders and more as administrative relays, transmitting instructions with minimal scope for initiative or judgment.



Meetings hoti hain, agenda milte hain. Yahān pe yeh kām karāna hai, vahān pe voh karvāna hai, aur hum karvāte hain. (Meetings are held where we are given specific agendas – do this here, get that done there – and we carry out the required tasks accordingly).

– (IDI, BEO).

3.6.2 A One-Way Flow of Directives from State Capital to Block Office

The role of the BSA, the immediate supervisory authority, further reinforces this top-down accountability structure. As one BEO articulated:



BSA Sāhab meeting agenda banāte hain, voh kām karke āne hote hain. BSA Sāhab Lucknow jāte hain meetings mein aur ākar humein brief karte hain vahān ke discussions ke bāre mein. Uske ādhār par instructions dete hain. In meetings mein hum week wise planning banāte hain apne kām ki’ (The BSA Sir sets the meeting agenda, and we are expected to implement it and come prepared during our meeting at the block level. The BSA Sir travels to Lucknow for official meetings and, upon returning, briefs us on the discussions held there. He issues instructions based on those meetings. During these sessions, we also prepare a week-wise work plan).

– (IDI, BEO).

The BSA reviews official documents, directives, budget allocations, and performance targets with senior officials in Lucknow, the state capital and centre of power. The BSA then translates the state's agenda to the block level through detailed briefings and specific instructions based on the Lucknow meetings. This results in week-wise work plans for BEOs.

This entire sequence reflects a highly centralised mode of governance. Directives originate from a distant power centre and flow downward with minimal room for local adjustment. There is no horizontal peer discussion about implementation challenges or contextual adaptations. The model is one of hierarchical transmission rather than collaborative problem-solving.



Rethinking BEOs and State Capacity: From Compliance to Trust

This report embarked on a journey to understand BEOs in rural UP – their daily functions, enablers, and constraints. What unfolded was far more complex than a diagnosis of institutional shortcomings or individual motivational deficits. Our inquiry revealed a deeply embedded story about the very architecture of Indian educational administration.

As noted earlier by a BEO, *'Auzār ek hai – terā khāne wālā wrench'* (There is only one tool – a 13-headed wrench. The BEO is expected to fit anywhere). This metaphor succinctly captures the structurally impossible position BEOs occupy. They are required – by mandate – to straddle an expansive set of functions (implementer, administrator, motivator, data node, and instructional leader) rather than cultivate specialised expertise in any one domain. Simultaneously, they operate without sufficient training, authority, or discretionary space, severely constraining their ability to tailor interventions to the specific demands of local contexts.

The BEO is not a malfunctioning element stalling school improvement, but rather a perfectly compliant product of the system's own design – kept in a state of perpetual busyness, overloaded with administrative burdens, conditioned to defer to authority, and trained to respond reactively to top-down demands. The challenge is not a deficit of intent, dedication, or even capability among BEOs; rather, it lies in the institutional design itself. The system conflates bureaucratic visibility with genuine accountability and values procedural compliance over substantive educational outcomes.

Within such an audit regime, the gaze of accountability shifts away from the quality of core work towards the quality of control mechanisms (Power, 1994). There is systemic disregard for how implementing agents, particularly those in the middle tier, make meaning of their work. The result is a bureaucracy that can appear accountable on paper while leaving the educational core untouched.

4.1 The Missing Foundation: Trust as State Capacity

Why does the system prioritise compliance over capacity-building? The answer lies in trust – or rather, in its relative absence.

Trust is central to understanding how bureaucracies function. Degrees of trust determine how authority is exercised, how coordination occurs, and how information circulates within organisations. In high-trust systems, managers delegate responsibility, encourage collaboration, and promote open communication. In low-trust systems, managers centralise control, intensify monitoring, and design processes to pre-empt non-compliance.

The Indian bureaucratic system has historically been structured around a deep-seated mistrust of those responsible for implementation (Aiyar, 2019; Sharma, 2023). Administrative practices are therefore often driven by suspicion rather than cooperation, reinforcing hierarchical rigidity, excessive oversight, and minimal discretion at the frontlines (Aiyar, 2019; Corbridge et al., 2005; Mathur, 2017).

Yet, trust is not entirely absent – it is displaced. As Power (1994) notes, in low-trust systems, confidence is transferred from people to measurement systems. In the Indian administrative state, trust is vested in digital dashboards, WhatsApp-based reporting, checklists, and performance metrics rather than in professional judgment or experiential knowledge. The result is a culture of centralisation and procedural compliance, where accountability is maintained through data rather than through dialogue or capacity-building.

4.2 Trust-Based Systems as a Way Forward

Building systemic and interpersonal relations of trust has emerged as a central concern in improving educational quality and delivering FLN interventions in LMICs, cutting across both government-led and non-governmental initiatives (Asim, 2023). A growing body of scholarship highlights the importance of trust not only between citizens and state actors but also within the internal dynamics of education systems.

International evidence shows an alternative to audit-based systems is possible. Tournier et al.'s (2023) multi-country study finds that middle tier education actors are most effective when their professional identities are cultivated as change agents, supported through peer leadership and learning-by-doing approaches. A key enabling factor is '[f]ostering an empowering culture based on trust and autonomy' (p. 101).

When policymakers actively promote a culture of trust by granting middle tier actors the autonomy to exercise professional judgment in improving teaching and learning, and to interpret broad policy directives contextually, these actors can perform their roles with significantly greater efficacy (Tournier et al., 2023, p. 102).

As Honig et al. (2025) argue, state capacity resides not just in resources or formal structures but in the quality of everyday interactions between actors. Trust is a latent societal resource that emerges through intentional, ongoing relational work. This dynamic form of state capacity enhances collaboration, adaptability, and performance. Aiyar and Bhattacharya (2016) similarly emphasise that when bureaucratic actors feel heard, valued, and connected to shared purpose, they develop both trust and intrinsic motivation to perform effectively.

In place of the rigid deliverology that characterises the BEO's work, what is needed is sustained deliberation (Mangla, 2022). In place of simplistic, linear toolkits, we must embrace the rich analytical lens of relational capacity (Honig et al., 2025) and commit to the deliberate cultivation of relational infrastructure, creating dedicated spaces for collective learning, critical reflection, and strategic collaboration.

To engender instructional leadership at the block level, we must unequivocally design for building relational trust through: delegation of authority to make context-specific decisions, protection of time for pedagogical work rather than administrative overload, investment in comprehensive training and peer learning networks, accountability for instructional improvement rather than compliance metrics, and recognition of professional expertise through purposeful evaluation.

The following chapter presents concrete recommendations for this redesign.



LLF's Policy Recommendations: Improving Middle Tier Bureaucratic Trust and Instructional Leadership

The following recommendations propose three strategic shifts to reposition BEOs from compliance enforcers to instructional leaders. Each shift addresses a distinct aspect of the trust deficit identified in our research. Policymakers may adopt any combination of these shifts based on contextual needs and resources.

5.1 Shift 1: Realign Roles & Responsibilities: Cultivating Trust through Focused Mandates



Establish Dedicated Block-Level Administrative Support Units

- Create specialised administrative cells at the block level, staffed with trained personnel, to handle routine compliance reports, cross-departmental logistical coordination (e.g., elections, health campaigns), court visits, and urgent digital data updates.
- **Why:** Delegating non-educational responsibilities away from BEOs frees their time and personal attention, signalling a shift in priorities and building internal trust by respecting their professional expertise.



Empower Schools as Data Stewards

- Invest in training and empowering school-level staff (e.g., dedicated data entry operators through community participation and/or youth voluntarism) to manage routine digital compliance inputs related to attendance, mid-day meals, and basic infrastructure data.
- **Why:** This decentralises data entry and promotes mutual recognition by acknowledging schools as primary data generators, not just data points. BEOs can then focus on validation and strategic oversight rather than data entry.



Redefine BEO Performance Indicators for Relational Impact

- Shift BEO performance assessment away from purely quantitative administrative metrics toward qualitative indicators that evaluate instructional improvement, teacher professional growth, and collaborative problem-solving outcomes.
- **Why:** This incentivises deeper engagement over superficial coverage, allowing BEOs to demonstrate and build trust through meaningful interactions, rather than merely showcasing accountability or procedural compliance.

5.2 Shift 2: Build Pedagogical Leadership: Cultivating Purpose and Autonomy



Reorient BEOs as Enablers of Purpose through Facilitative Dialogue

- Transition BEOs from motivational enforcers to pedagogical mentors who facilitate a shared sense of purpose. This requires structured programmes that explicitly train and mandate BEOs to assume this role. As far as possible, officials should be enabled to devote unhurried time to classroom observations in which scheduled, reciprocal dialogues replace one-way instructions. These sessions should serve not merely as reporting moments but as opportunities for teachers to articulate challenges, exchange pedagogical practices, and co-design context-specific solutions.
- **Why:** This enables BEOs and teachers to internalise purpose through their agency and builds inter-professional trust by demonstrating investment in each other's growth while acknowledging shared challenges related to systemic resource scarcity.





Grant Pedagogical Autonomy to School Clusters

- Grant headteachers and teaching clusters greater autonomy in pedagogical decision-making, curriculum adaptation, and local resource allocation for classroom needs. BEOs should transition into a role of actively facilitating access to necessary resources (e.g., professional development modules, teaching aids, infrastructure improvements) and acting as channels for addressing systemic barriers identified by teachers.
- **Why:** This empowers teachers by providing choice and capacity-building, thereby enhancing their sense of competence and intrinsic motivation, and shifting supervision from a focus on monitoring to one of active support.



Establish Collaborative Learning Circles for School Actors and Communities

- Create regular, facilitated Teacher-BEO-Community Learning Circles or Community of Practice forums at the block level. These spaces allow BEOs, teachers, parents, and community representatives to collectively analyse classroom challenges, discuss innovative pedagogical approaches, and share solutions.
- **Why:** This generates horizontal trust and shared ownership of educational outcomes, moving beyond a top-down, one-way flow of information or directives, and acknowledging FLN as a social and public good requiring sustained collective commitment.



Integrate Relational Competencies in Training and Evaluation

- Incorporate rigorous modules on building trust, promoting empathy, conflict resolution, and collaborative communication into all BEO training programmes. BEO evaluations should include feedback mechanisms from teachers and community members on the quality of these relational interactions, reinforcing accountability for developing trusting environments.
- **Why:** Relational skills are critical for cultivating mutual recognition and vital for overcoming ritualised performance and enabling genuine dialogue.



Institutionalise Academic Engagement and Recognition Routines

- Develop short, targeted training modules for BEOs on effective classroom observation, providing academic feedback, and data-driven school support. Districts should facilitate quarterly academic review meetings where BEOs, ARPs, and teachers collaborate to analyse school-level data, identifying trends and planning responses, rather than relying solely on data aggregation. BEOs should be encouraged to set one academic improvement goal per school per term, supported by ARPs and headteachers. States and districts should institute annual awards or events for BEO-led innovations that support student learning and teacher development.
- **Why:** These routines convey a systemic shift from compliance to mentorship and academic leadership, recognising and motivating all actors for academic contributions and innovations (e.g., in FLN outcomes or community engagement).

5.3 Shift 3: Strengthen Capacities: Building Trust through Responsive Systems



Institutionalise Comprehensive Induction and Continuous Relational-Professional Development

- Establish mandatory, extended induction training (minimum 2–3 weeks) for new BEOs, equally prioritising administrative protocols, instructional leadership, and, crucially, relational governance principles. Implement mandatory annual refresher training (minimum five days), emphasising hands-on pedagogical content, data analysis for localised problem-solving, and advanced modules on fostering collaborative ecosystems that include parents and community members.
- **Why:** This addresses the lack of adequate quantity and quality of training, building capacities for nuanced policy translation.



Build Data Ecosystems for Localised Action

- Develop user-friendly, integrated digital dashboards that allow BEOs to access and analyse localised data on student learning outcomes, attendance patterns (including out-of-school factors), teacher performance, and resource utilisation in real time. Provide BEOs with the analytical tools and training needed to use this information for evidence-informed local planning and for collaborative strategising with school staff and community stakeholders.
- **Why:** Proactive use of data encourages mutual understanding and trust in data-driven decisions, countering the perception of BEOs as mere data couriers and addressing concerns about data integrity and uptake.



Cultivate Adaptive Autonomy

- Grant BEOs discretionary authority to adapt state-level policies to nuanced local realities, particularly in addressing complex issues like student absenteeism driven by out-of-school structural factors. Instead of relying on surveillance mechanisms, this approach should enable the co-creation of solutions to complex community-level challenges.
- **Why:** This empowers BEOs to move beyond quick-fix solutions and slapdash directives by facilitating sustained, collective action with teachers, parents, and community members.



Enable Peer Learning and Professional Networks

- Acknowledge that all educational actors, including BEOs and teachers, often operate in silos. Institutionalise state-level learning forums (twice a year) and monthly inter-block academic reviews for face-to-face lateral learning and the sharing of different kinds of practices, tools, and dilemmas.
- **Why:** This investment in professional identity and continuous learning is essential for intrinsic drive, where knowledge sharing and peer support are routinised to enhance motivation and professional efficacy for all actors.



Invest in Dedicated Human Resources for Data & Community Interface

- Recruit and deploy dedicated data entry and analysis support staff at the block level, as well as community liaison officers who can assist BEOs and schools in sustained parent and community outreach efforts. In addition, harness the support of existing Self-Help Groups and voluntary organisations.
- **Why:** This addresses the human resource shortage and acknowledges the immense burden of cross-sectoral duties and community engagement, allowing BEOs to nurture the relations necessary for improved educational outcomes. Such efforts may also help establish a democratic and enduring momentum for advancing the FLN's mission at the grassroots level.



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Appendix

Organisational Hierarchy for Educational Officers, Teachers and Headteachers in UP

The following outlines the larger administrative structure of education officials, including BEOs, at the district level and above in the state of UP.

I. District Level Oversight (General Administration & Development)

- **District Magistrate (DM)**
 - Role: The highest administrative and executive authority in the district. While not directly involved in day-to-day educational administration, the DM has overall oversight of all government departments in the district, including the education department.
 - Reporting Line (from Education Department): Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) reports to the DM on overall educational progress, issues, and compliance with government policies. The DM can issue directives and hold review meetings regarding education in the district.
- **Chief Development Officer (CDO)**
 - Role: Primarily responsible for development schemes in the district and acts as the vice-chairman of the District Planning Committee. The CDO also oversees the implementation of various government programmes, including those related to education infrastructure and development.
 - Reporting Line (from Education Department): BSA reports to the CDO on the progress of development-related education schemes, utilization of funds for infrastructure, and other development initiatives within the education sector.

II. District Level Education Administration

- **Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA)**
 - Role: The chief education officer at the district level for basic education (Class 1–8). The BSA is responsible for the overall administration, supervision, and implementation of basic education policies and programmes in the district. This includes teacher appointments, transfers, training, curriculum implementation, and infrastructure development for primary and upper primary schools.
 - Reporting Line (Upwards):
 - Reports to the DM on overall district education status and major policy matters.
 - Reports to the CDO on development-related education schemes.
 - Reports to higher authorities in the State Basic Education Department.
 - Reporting Line (Downwards):
 - **BEOs report directly to the BSA.**
 - The BSA also directly supervises the functioning of block-level education administration.

III. Block Level Education Administration

- **Block Education Officer (BEO)**

- Role: The administrative and supervisory head of basic education at the block level. The BEO is responsible for implementing educational policies, supervising schools, managing teachers, and addressing educational issues within their assigned block.
- Reporting Line (Upwards):
 - Reports directly to the BSA.
- Reporting Line (Downwards):
 - Academic Resource Persons (ARPs) report to the BEO.
 - Headteachers of primary and upper primary schools in the block report to the BEO.

- **Academic Resource Person (ARP)**

- Role: ARPs are typically experienced teachers or educators who are deputed to provide academic support, conduct training, monitor teaching-learning processes, and offer guidance to teachers and headmasters within a cluster or block. They act as a bridge between the BEO and the schools.
- Reporting Line (Upwards):
 - Reports directly to the BEO.
- Reporting Line (Downwards):
 - Provides guidance and support to Headteachers and teachers in their assigned cluster/schools, but does not have direct administrative control over them in the same way a BEO does.

IV. School Level Administration

- **Headteacher**

- Role: The administrative and academic head of a primary or upper primary school. The Headteacher is responsible for the overall functioning of the school, including academic performance, discipline, infrastructure maintenance, financial management (for school grants), and teacher supervision within the school.
- Reporting Line (Upwards):
 - Reports to the BEO at an administrative and functional level on certain occasions.
- Reporting Line (Downwards):
 - Receives academic guidance and support from ARPs.
 - Teachers within their school report to the Headmaster.

- **Teacher**

- Role: Directly responsible for teaching students, preparing lesson plans, conducting assessments, and participating in school-related activities.
- Reporting Line (Upwards):
 - Reports directly to the Headteacher of their school.
 - Receives academic guidance and support from ARPs.

While ARPs provide functional/academic support to Headteachers and teachers, their administrative reporting is to the BEO. Headteachers maintain direct administrative control over their school's teachers. All district and block-level education officials operate under the policies, guidelines, and directives issued by the State Basic Education Department of UP.

Key Performance Indicators of BEOs in Uttar Pradesh

Below, we provide the KPIs of BEOs for July 2025 in UP. KPIs are issued monthly by the State Project Office to districts under the Samagra Shiksha scheme – an integrated school education programme covering pre-primary to Class XII. These KPIs aim to enhance coordination, identify implementation gaps, enable continuous monitoring, and support targeted academic interventions. All designated officials are expected to carry out and monitor the specified programmes and activities every month throughout the academic session. The BEOs have both exclusive and joint responsibilities, which they fulfill in collaboration with a range of other officials, including BSAs. **(The original Hindi document, issued by the UP government, can be provided upon request).**

Table 2: KPIs of BEOs in UP

Joint Responsibilities	Exclusive Responsibilities
Ensure that teachers adhere to the prescribed syllabus and subject matter outlined in the academic calendar.	Ensure the timely distribution of textbooks and notebooks.
Ensure the effective use of teaching-learning materials by teachers, such as teacher diaries and handbooks.	Ensure registration of newly admitted students.
Conduct monthly data review meetings with head teachers.	Ensure the timely implementation of FLN teacher training.
Monitor infrastructure and financial progress under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and PM Shri initiatives.	Ensure the timely completion of school pairing/merger processes as per government directives.
Oversee action on dilapidated school buildings, auctioning of unused materials, and ensure reconstruction.	Oversee the setup of 7,409 smart classrooms, 5,258 ICT labs, and 503 digital library schools, ensuring compliance with standards.

Supervise the construction and handover of KGBV schools on an annual basis.	Update all circulars and information on tablet distribution through both online and offline modes.
Monitor the construction of one Mukhyamantri Model Composite Vidyalaya per district (52 total).	Ensure the allocation of teachers to classes and adherence to school timetables.
Monitor the construction of Mukhyamantri Abhyuday Composite Vidyalayas.	Notify district headquarters of the dilapidated school conditions and the need for asset auctioning.
	Ensure student relocation to nearby composite schools during ongoing construction, if required.
	Coordinate with relevant departments on school infrastructure issues (e.g., water, boundary walls, electricity).

BEO Task Profile in India

The tasks reproduced below are drawn entirely verbatim from Aiyar and Bhattacharya (2016), which include self-reports by BEOs.

(i) Academic

- Assess requirement of new schools and take necessary steps to open new schools.
- Assessing requirements of teachers.
- Take steps to ensure proper and timely conduct of scholarship exams, and other events ordered by the state at the block level.
- Take steps to ensure teacher training happens in coordination with district and state training institutes.
- Ensure norms laid down under right to education (RTE)/SSA are enforced. • Head the monthly meeting of block resource persons, cluster resource centre coordinators (CRCC), and headmasters to take stock of all school related matters.
- Ensure cent percent enrolment, retention, transition of students and attendance of both teachers and students.
- Identify and make the required provisions for children with special needs and identify areas in block which need special attention.
- Take steps to ensure that the pupil–teacher ratio is optimum.

(ii) Administrative

- Disciplinary authority for all levels of teaching and non-teaching staff of government-run and aided schools.
- Ensure implementation of all activities relating to education and other programmes launched by the government.
- Approve formation of school management committee in primary and school management development committees in high schools.
- Take steps to ensure that activities of RTE and SSA are properly implemented.
- Ensuring compliance of private institutions (both aided and unaided) to rules and regulations.
- Ensure proper and timely collection of education related statistics and support other state authorities in doing the same when required.

(iii) General Administrative Vigilance and Grievance Redressal

- Could function as the state public information officer under the Right to Information Act.
- Grievance redressal officer pertaining to elementary and high schools.
- Deal with the matters pertaining to recognised and aided private schools and recognised and unaided private schools at senior secondary level.

(iv) Financial

- Act as drawing and disbursing officer (DDO) for all teachers and staff of elementary, secondary schools including aided schools (in places where a DDO is not designated or is unavailable).
- Disbursal authority in respect of block resource centre coordinators (BRCCs), CRCCs and staff of BRCC office, zilla parishad teachers, and other teachers.
- Sanction increment, leave, temporary withdrawal of general provident fund (GPF), part final advance from GPF in respect of the employees of elementary schools, staff of secondary schools (except headmasters of secondary schools) and teaching and non-teaching staff of aided schools.
- In-charge of budget formulation, allotment of funds, submission of utilisation certificates (UCs), all grants-in-aid and other grants received under different schemes/programmes under plan and non-plan.
- Maintenance of book of accounts, UCs, pensions, other finance and procurement related issues in the office of the BEO and offices in the jurisdiction.
- Maintain accounts statements, cashbook and expenditure reports, etc, in respect of funds/grants received under various programmes, including the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Directorate of Secondary Education (DSE) for various types of activities, salaries, loans and advances, and facilitate their audit process.

(v) Inspection

- Inspect all elementary and high schools in a timely manner (as laid down by the state).
- Test work of teachers and see the pedagogical improvement in schools by taking classes.
- BEO to inspect and submit report for grant of no objection certificate (NOC) to private schools in the block.
- Inspect the implementation of mid-day meal and other programmes under SSA, RMSA, civil works, etc.

(vi) Community Involvement and Coordination with Other Line Departments

- Chief coordinator to organise any event or activity assigned by the department from time to time.
- Convergence of schemes with other departments such as health, rural/urban departments, public works, and civil society organisations for implementation of various programmes.
- Take steps to strengthen the school management and school management development committees and arrange their training and orientation programmes.
- Any other task that the Government of India might assign.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Middle Tier: IIEP–UNESCO Reports

The roles and responsibilities of the middle tier are summarised below, as articulated in two major IIEP–UNESCO reports (Childress et al., 2020; Tournier et al., 2025).

Table 3: Roles and Responsibilities of the Middle Tier

Functions	Responsibilities
Instructional Leadership & Teacher Support	– Lead and support broad-based teaching and school improvement by catalyzing school-level reforms and building whole-school capacity for teaching and learning improvement. – Provide mentoring and ongoing professional development, including coaching and role modeling good practices. – Bridge the gap between theory and practice for teachers. – Advocate for a collaborative and rewarding teaching environment to boost teacher retention. – Promote equity and inclusion in learning outcomes.
Management of Financial, Material, and Human Resources	– Promote equitable teacher allocation. – Provide appropriate teacher incentives. – Target resources where most needed through continuous needs assessment and data collection. – Strategically allocate resources to reduce inequalities, for example, by pairing high- and poorer-performing schools.
Policy Implementation, Translation, and Scaling of Good Practices	– Implement new policies and strategies with adequate support and resources. – Translate policies into locally relevant practices. – Identify and scale successful initiatives across regions. – Encourage a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Functions to Ensure Systemic Coherence	– Promote alignment across different levels of the education system. – Strengthen linkages among schools, departments, and administrative units. – Set a shared vision owned by key stakeholders. – Define and align an "instructional core" that is adapted to context and resilient to short-term initiatives.
Promoting Professional Collaborations within and beyond schools	– Support professional learning through school and teacher networks. – Provide logistical support, facilitation skills, and subject matter expertise to these networks.
Ensuring Data-Driven Accountability and Monitoring	– Bring evidence and data-driven approaches to instructional support. – Ensure accountability and monitoring through effective data collection and use. – Combine student learning outcomes and classroom observations to provide diagnostic feedback, while ensuring supportive practices and a culture of trust. – Help school leaders interpret data and translate it into instructional strategies; for instance, evaluating the quality of professional development. – Lead a data-rich culture focused on learning and improvement, including examining local trends and evidence. – Ensure feedback is incorporated into long-term local strategies and plans.

Uttar Pradesh: Population and Educational Statistics

UP, India’s most populous state, exemplifies the complexities of educational governance due to its demographic, geographic, and administrative characteristics. As of July 1, 2025, UP’s population stands at 241.27 million (24.13 crore), projected to reach 259.5 million (25.95 crore) by 2036. UP accounts for 17.02% of India’s population, making it the most populous sub-national entity worldwide (Statistics Times, 2025). To put this into perspective, UP has a larger population than any single country in Africa, Europe, or South America. Its population also exceeds that of neighboring Bangladesh and closely approaches Pakistan’s estimated population of 255.22 million (25.52 crore) in 2025 (Kopf & Varathan, 2022; Worldometers, 2025).

UP operates an extensive educational network with approximately 255,000 (2.55 lakh) schools spanning all levels. Primary education forms the core of this system, comprising 133,000 (1.33 lakh) primary schools and 86,798 upper primary institutions. The system also includes 12,092 secondary and 22,866 higher secondary schools. The teaching workforce totals 1.54 million (15.38 lakh), with primary education accounting for the largest share, approximately 563,280 teachers (Gol, 2024).

Table 4: UP School Statistics

School Level	Number Of Schools	Number Of Teachers
Primary	1,33,331	5,63,280
Upper Primary	86,798	5,24,037
Secondary	12,092	86,384
Higher Secondary	22,866	3,64,778
Total	2,55,087	15,38,479

Source: UDISE+ data, 2023–2024 (Gol, 2024).

A woman with dark hair, a bindi, and a nose ring is wearing a blue patterned dress and a white shawl. She is standing in front of a light-colored wall. The background is a solid red color.

Empowering the
cadre of Block
Education Officers
at the **middle tier** of
India's public
education system,
who **bridge the gap**
between state-level
education
authorities and
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