What Works Hub for Global Education

Insight note

The middle tier we think we know

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November 2026

BLAVATNIK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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About this piece

This piece is based on: Language and Learning Foundation (2025). *The 13-headed wrench: India's Block Education Officers' quest for purpose*. Language and Learning Foundation. Full report: https://languageandlearningfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/BEO-Report-Digital-FINAL.pdf

Study conducted across seven districts of Uttar Pradesh using in-depth interviews (n=16), structured survey (n=44 BEOs), full-day shadowing, ethnographic fieldwork, and systematic analysis of government KPIs and WhatsApp communication logs. Fieldwork by Anweshak Sathi LLP.

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Citation

Lall, S. (2026). *The middle tier we think we know*. What Works Hub for Global Education. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-WhatWorksHubforGlobalEducation-RP_2026/004

What Works Hub for Global Education

The What Works Hub for Global Education is an international partnership, funded by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Gates Foundation, working out how to effectively implement education reforms at scale.

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The middle tier we think we know*

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It is 8 am on a Monday. A Block Education Officer (BEO) in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, opens his phone. Before he has reached his desk, messages are already waiting: a data submission due by noon, a follow-up on a scheme compliance report from yesterday, a reminder about an infrastructure inspection, a WhatsApp from the district office demanding Aadhaar[1] identity-linkage figures by 3pm. He oversees 130 schools, nearly 500 teachers, and tens of thousands of children learning to read and write. By the end of this day, as with most days, he will not have had a single substantive conversation about how those children are actually learning.

He is not a disengaged officer; he is exactly the kind of committed professional that India's public education system depends on. His Monday is a story about a system that has, over years, taught him what it values, and about the very human ways in which individuals navigate, and are shaped by, the institutions they inhabit.

The missing middle: a problem of signals, skills and the system

The global education community has, rightly, turned its attention to the middle tier. A recent review by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) describes this layer of district and sub-district officers and academic supervisors as the vital link between central policy and classrooms (Tournier et al., 2025). In India, the Block Education Officer (BEO) occupies exactly this position. Working at the sub-district level and reporting to the district education officer, the Block Education Officer (BEO) is responsible for both administrative oversight and academic quality across roughly 100–150 schools. How this role is exercised, day to day, shapes whether national learning ambitions reach the classroom or stall somewhere along the way. India has articulated an ambitious commitment to foundational learning**.** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat mission together represent a serious, evidence-informed commitment to universal foundational learning.

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[1] **Aadhaar:** A 12-digit unique identity number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to residents of India after verification of demographic and biometric information. It serves as a means of establishing identity and is used for accessing a range of public and private services.

What the existing literature has done less is go inside that argument. If the problem is compliance crowding out instruction, what does that actually look like in a specific system, on a specific Monday morning? What mechanisms (structural, supervisory, and deeply human) produce that outcome, day after day, in a country where the political ambition for foundational learning is as high as anywhere in the world? And what, precisely, would it take to change it?

This piece attempts to answer those questions from the inside. It is based on original primary research (interviews, surveys, full-day shadowing, and systematic analysis of government performance documents) conducted with Block Education Officers (BEOs) in rural Uttar Pradesh in 2024–25. India's most populous state, with 826 blocks and nearly 880 BEO positions, offers a concentrated window into dynamics that are recognisable across low- and middle-income country contexts but rarely examined at this level of granularity. The findings speak to the structural and supervisory dimensions that the existing literature identifies (Tournier, Chimier & Jones, 2023; Tournier et al., 2025), and add a third, underexplored layer: the individual behavioural dynamics through which people make sense of, and respond to, the systems around them.

Three arguments run through the piece. They are stated plainly here, at the outset:

- **The compliance–instruction gap is not primarily a capacity problem.** It is a signal problem (what the system measures), a trust problem (where confidence is vested), and a behavioural architecture problem (what the working day makes easy or costly).
- **Messaging platforms have become governance instruments in their own right.** WhatsApp now operates as a real-time compliance channel that fragments middle-tier attention in ways formal reporting cycles never did, a dynamic the global literature has not yet reckoned with.
- **The missing ingredients are professional development and trust.** Instructional leadership is not something officers arrive with or absorb on the job; it has to be built through sustained practice and coaching, backed by the trust, time, and autonomy to use what is learned. The goal is not to redefine the BEO's role, but to build a system in which instructional leadership is possible, expected, and valued.

A note on scope. Throughout, the piece distinguishes what is specific to the BEO role in Uttar Pradesh (the breadth of the formal mandate, the 40-visit quota, the architecture of the visit application, the July 2025 KPI document) from the underlying dynamics of signal incoherence, low-trust accountability, and behavioural default-setting, which are recognisable in middle-tier systems across low- and middle-income countries. The Uttar Pradesh evidence is the case. Whether the mechanisms identified here operate similarly in other middle-tier systems is a question that cross-country research will need to address, but the diagnostic lens this piece offers may be useful starting points for inquiry elsewhere.

Going inside the working day: study design

The study was conducted by Language and Learning Foundation across seven districts of Uttar Pradesh in 2024–25, with the support of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, a reflection of the state's own investment in understanding how its middle tier actually functions. Four methods were combined:

- **In-depth interviews (IDIs)** with 16 Block Education Officers (BEOs) (all men, reflecting the gender composition of the cadre) across four districts (Bhadohi, Chandauli, Fatehpur and Varanasi), conducted between February and April 2025. The interviews explored role perceptions, internal hierarchies, daily routines, professional aspirations, and constraints. The themes that recurred most insistently, the sheer breadth of the mandate, hurried school visits, accountability experienced as data compliance, and the gap between what officers aspire to and what their day allows , shaped the design of the survey instrument that followed. The interviews also did important triangulation work: where survey respondents reported providing instructional feedback to teachers, the interviews rarely surfaced concrete examples of it, which is how the study established that the compliance–instruction gap is a structural reality rather than self-reported modesty. The same gap showed up around time itself. Over half of surveyed BEOs reported spending up to an hour per school visit, but shadowing and interviews told a different story: even on longer visits, the additional time went into administrative checks, not instructional conversation. Self-reported duration, in other words, measured presence, not engagement.
- **A structured survey** of 44 BEOs (38 men, 6 women) across seven districts – Bhadohi, Chandauli, Fatehpur, Jaunpur, Kaushambi, Shravasti and Varanasi – administered between February and April 2025, capturing time allocation, workload, professional development history, and self-reported priorities. The headline indicators are summarised in Table 1.
- **Situated ethnographic conversations and full-day shadowing**, the most methodologically distinctive element of the study. Two field researchers each shadowed one BEO across a full working day in February 2025, observing school visits, meetings, office work, travel, and unscheduled digital demands as they unfolded in real time. This was complemented by situated ethnographic conversations with five BEOs (including two women) and a Master Trainer during a three-day state-level training in June 2025. Together, these methods generated observational data on how time is actually spent across an officer's working day, not just how it is reported.
- **Systematic documentary analysis** of the state government's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) issued to BEOs (July 2025) and BEO WhatsApp communication logs, treating official performance documents as primary evidence of what the system signals it values.

Fieldwork was conducted by Anweshak Sathi LLP, an independent research consultancy. Each source does distinct work in the analysis, and it is worth being explicit about which findings rest on what. The survey and the key performance indicators (KPI) document analysis provide the systematic evidence: patterns across the cadre, and the formal record of what the system measures. The interviews explain those patterns from the inside, in officers' own terms. The shadowing and ethnographic observation are deliberately illustrative (two officers, two full days, one training) and are used to show how the systematic patterns materialise in an actual working day, not to generalise from. Where a finding rests on illustrative rather than systematic evidence, the text says so.

Table 1. The structured survey at a glance

Indicator	Result
Prior teaching experience	30 of 44 (68%)
Named the NIPUN Bharat mission among their three most important work areas	100%
Report spending under 20 minutes per school visit	Approx. 40%
Identified FLN pedagogy as a key professional development need for themselves	Approx. 40%
Expressed interest in strengthening their leadership skills	Over 60%
Expressed interest in strengthening their administrative capabilities	Over 55%
Formal meetings attended per month (reported range)	11–18
Mandated unique school inspections per month (tracked via mobile applications)	40

Note. n = 44 BEOs; 38 men, six women; seven districts of Uttar Pradesh; February–April 2025

What the evidence shows

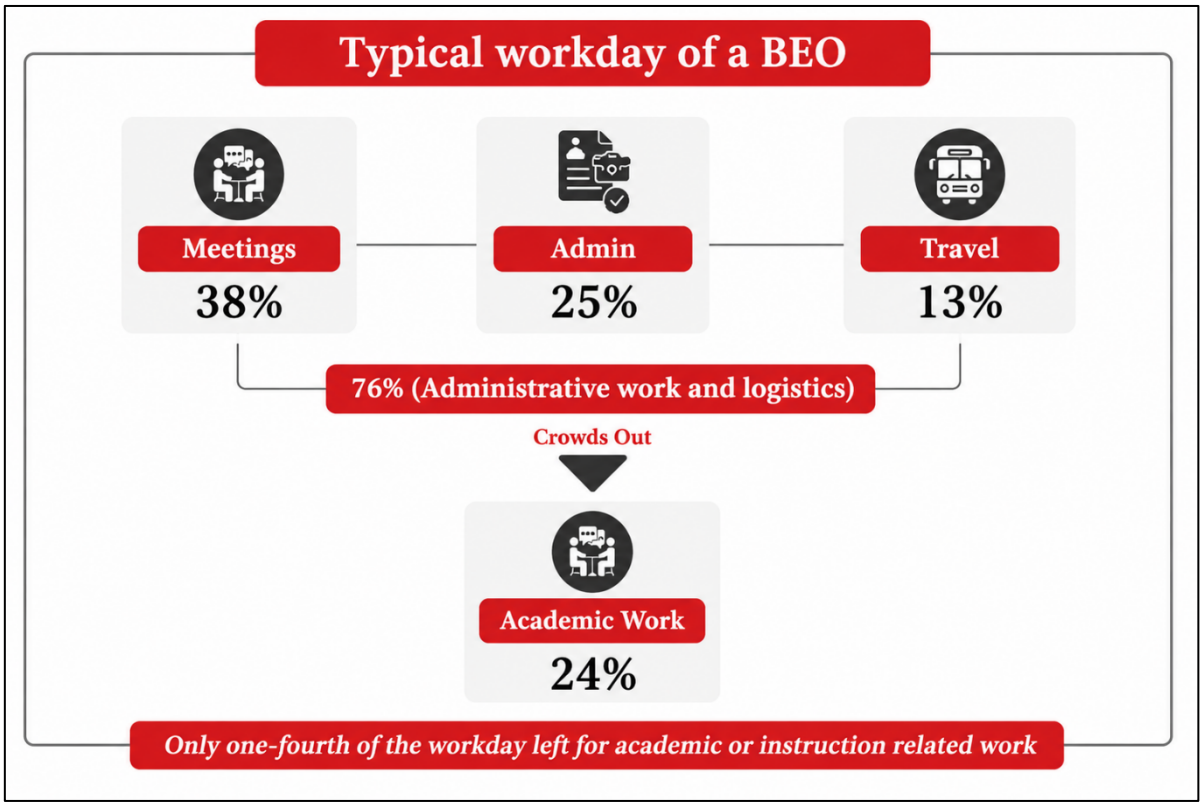
Finding 1: The administrative load is structural and the key performance indicators (KPIs) tell the story

The Block Education Officer (BEO) role formally spans at least six domains: academic oversight, administrative management, financial disbursement, school inspection, community interface and inter-departmental coordination. BEOs navigate this with considerable resourcefulness, and the breadth of the role reflects real ambition on the state's part. One BEO's metaphor captures the structural reality:

> *"Auzār ek hai – 13 khāne wālā wrench – BEO aisi position hai ki inko kahīn bhī fit kar do." ("The BEO's position is like a wrench with 13 heads, it is expected to fit into any slot.")*

Our shadowing data puts numbers to this: administrative work and meetings occupied 63% of observed working time. Travel consumed 13%. That left 24% for anything resembling academic or instructional engagement , much of which was itself structured around compliance, data entry, and infrastructure checks.

Figure 1. Typical workday of a Block Education Officer (BEO), from shadowing data



Source: Language and Learning Foundation, 2025

The most revealing evidence, however, came not from shadowing but from a document. The July 2025 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) issued by the Uttar Pradesh state government to BEOs list, in precise terms, what a BEO will be held accountable for each month. The indicators span

infrastructure construction targets, digital compliance metrics (tablet distribution, portal updates), and welfare delivery outcomes (Aadhaar identity linkage, school uniforms via direct benefit transfer). Each of these reflects a real priority of the state. The document does not include a single indicator that would register whether a BEO engaged substantively with whether a child is learning to read and write. There is no metric for classroom observation quality. No indicator for academic feedback given to teachers. Nothing that would show up on a monthly performance sheet if a BEO spent two hours in a productive pedagogical conversation with a struggling head teacher.

Table 2. Key Performance Indicators of Block Education Officers in Uttar Pradesh (July 2025, issued by the State Project Office under Samagra Shiksha)

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[2] and PM SHRI initiatives.[3]	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 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) labs, and 503 digital library schools, ensuring compliance with standards.
Supervise the construction and handover of KGBV[4] 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[5] per district (75 total).	Ensure the allocation of teachers to classes and adherence to school timetables.
Monitor the construction of Mukhyamantri Abhyuday Composite Vidyalayas[6].	Notify district headquarters of the dilapidated school conditions and the need for asset auctioning.

[2] **Samagra Shiksha:** An integrated centrally sponsored scheme of the Government of India for school education, covering pre-school to senior secondary levels, with the objective of improving access, equity, quality, and learning outcomes in school education.
[3] **PM SHRI:** *Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI)*, a Government of India initiative launched in 2022 to develop more than 14,500 existing schools as exemplar schools that demonstrate the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and provide high-quality, inclusive, equitable, and holistic education.
[4] **KGBV:** *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya*, a Government of India scheme providing residential schooling facilities to girls from disadvantaged and marginalized communities, particularly at the upper-primary and secondary levels, with the aim of improving their access to and retention in education.
[5] **Mukhyamantri Model Composite Vidyalaya:** A Government of Uttar Pradesh initiative to establish integrated model schools offering education from pre-primary to Class 12, equipped with modern infrastructure and learning facilities in line with the objectives of NEP 2020.
[6] **Mukhyamantri Abhyuday Composite Vidyalaya:** A Government of Uttar Pradesh initiative, announced in 2023, to upgrade existing government primary and upper-primary schools into composite schools covering pre-primary to

	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).

> *This absence is not an oversight. It is the system speaking clearly about what it values. And in bureaucracies, what gets measured is what gets done.*

A second governance instrument compounds this. Messaging platforms, principally WhatsApp, have become real-time governance tools across education system in India. In Uttar Pradesh, BEOs now receive formal directives from district officers, from the Basic Shiksha Adhikari, and sometimes from state-level officials as instant messages, at any hour, demanding data within hours. A typical example from our fieldwork: a WhatsApp message from the District Basic Education Officer sent to all BEOs simultaneously, demanding Aadhaar kit activation data on a Google Sheet by 3pm. that day. These are not exceptional incidents; they are the ambient texture of a BEO's working day. WhatsApp has made the compliance demands of the system continuous, instantaneous, and inescapable in a way that formal reporting cycles never were. Any analysis of why middle-tier officials struggle to find time for instructional work, in Uttar Pradesh or elsewhere, must account for this.

> ***Implication for practice:*** *Addressing the time problem requires two moves beyond training: revising what the monthly KPI document measures, and rationalising the real-time compliance demands that fragment BEO attention – both policy decisions that sit with state and district officials, not with BEOs themselves. The link to foundational learning is direct: a BEO with time to sit with a head teacher and ask which children in Grade 2 are not yet reading creates accountability for learning in a way no compliance checklist can. And the problem is structural at both ends: BEOs lack time for such conversations, and the visit application they must complete carries no academic expectations at all, so the visit defaults to data entry regardless of how much time is available.*

Finding 2: Behaviour follows signal: three layers of a persistent problem

The Block Education Officers (BEOs) in our study were, almost without exception, not the disengaged actors that reform discourse implicitly assumes. Nearly 40% identified foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) pedagogy as a professional development priority, and over 60% wanted to strengthen their leadership skills (Table 1). Most spoke, with evident feeling, about the gap between what their role demands of them and what they believe education actually needs. And yet the same officers, when observed across working days, rarely translated that aspiration into instructional action. Understanding why requires looking at three reinforcing layers.

The structural layer

Meeting culture illustrates how the system channels and constrains BEO commitment. Between 11 and 18 formal meetings per month, many unscheduled, with content consistently organised around compliance and data. Our fieldwork found that academic discussion about what is happening inside

Class 8. Upgraded schools have a separate classroom for each grade and facilities such as science, mathematics and robotics laboratories, with around four to five schools planned in each development block.

classrooms rarely features, not because BEOs do not care about classrooms, but because the agenda they receive from above does not make space for it.

School visits follow the same logic. The mandatory 40-visit monthly quota, tracked through mobile applications, structures the visit around digital data entry rather than dialogue: completing the required fields alone consumes over ten minutes of a visit that, for roughly 40% of BEOs, lasts under twenty (Table 1). BEOs consistently expressed a desire to spend more time; the constraint is structural, not motivational.

The supervisory layer

The most illuminating single incident from our fieldwork took place at a state-level BEO training in June 2025. A young BEO had been conducting school visits with unusual care, spending over an hour at each school, engaging closely with teachers about teaching and learning. He had not reached the target of 40 visits. He was publicly reprimanded in front of his peers.

A public reprimand in a room full of peers works as a signal event, broadcasting the system's true values to every officer simultaneously, far more powerfully than any policy document could. The message received by every BEO in that room was unambiguous: quantity mattered more than quality, completion more than depth, the metric more than the meaning behind it. This is what Aiyar and Bhattacharya (2016) term the 'post office paradox', officials functioning as administrative relays, not because they lack leadership instinct, but because the supervisory environment has made the cost of not complying with a metric viscerally clear.

The same dynamic operates through the NIPUN Bharat mission. Every BEO in our survey named it as among their three most important priorities. The commitment is genuine. But genuine commitment, channelled through a compliance-oriented system, produces a specific kind of engagement: one that confirms observable markers – Are materials present? Is the checklist complete? – rather than grappling with whether children are learning, and what is blocking those who are not. BEOs themselves describe the goal as 'making the school NIPUN', tracking indicators and ticking performance sheets rather than examining why children are or are not learning to read and write. This is what Honig and Pritchett (2019) call accounting-based accountability: a system that can verify compliance in detail while remaining largely blind to the instructional substance it was designed to improve.

Under sustained time pressure, school visits themselves have settled into a script that both sides know by heart. Teachers, aware they are being checked rather than supported, present a rehearsed readiness; BEOs, aware they have limited minutes and a quota to meet, accept the performance and move on. One BEO described the exchange plainly: "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." Neither party is being dishonest; both are responding rationally to a system that rewards the appearance of compliance over the substance of instruction. What looks, on paper, like regular instructional contact between BEOs and teachers is, in practice, frequently a managed encounter that leaves the actual state of classroom teaching and learning unexamined.

The individual behavioural layer

Systems create conditions, but individuals make decisions within them, and those decisions follow patterns that behavioural science has documented carefully (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein,

2008). Four mechanisms are particularly legible in the BEO context, and taken together they explain why structural reform and changed supervisory signals are necessary but not sufficient.

- **Salience and present bias.** A WhatsApp notification demanding data by 3pm. is immediate and visible. The developmental impact of a substantive classroom conversation on a child's reading trajectory is distant and invisible. Humans, not just BEOs, are drawn toward the urgent and salient over the important but deferred. When the structure of the working day is organised around immediate demands, longer-horizon instructional priorities are systematically crowded out, not through any lack of intent but through the ordinary mechanics of human attention.
- **Loss aversion.** The reprimand of the BEO who chose quality over quantity was not merely a supervisory event. It was a loss aversion trigger. The pain of being publicly called out for missing a target looms far larger, psychologically, than the abstract gain of having had richer school conversations. Once that signal is broadcast, every officer recalibrates, not toward more learning-focused work, but toward protection from the loss. Incentive redesign must account for this asymmetry, not simply add positive incentives on top of a negative incentive architecture.
- **Cognitive overload and default behaviour.** A BEO managing 13 WhatsApp groups, multiple simultaneous data requests, and unscheduled cross-departmental mandates is operating under sustained cognitive load. Research on scarcity shows that when mental bandwidth is stretched this thin, people tend to fall back on habitual, low-effort responses rather than deliberate reasoning (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). For a BEO arriving at a school with a mobile app open and 20 minutes available, the default is to fill the required fields and move on, which is precisely why changing what the default form asks for matters so much.
- **Identity and professional self-concept.** Our interviews consistently found that BEOs who conceived of themselves primarily as educators, rather than as administrators who happen to oversee schools, behaved differently within the same structural constraints. They asked different questions on school visits, noticed different things in classrooms, and described their work in terms of learning outcomes rather than data submission rates. Most had received no formal induction into the role and no training that explicitly framed their identity as instructional leaders. Professional identity is not fixed; it is shaped by what training emphasises, what supervisors ask about, and what peers model. It is also a behavioural lever that costs relatively little to activate.

These mechanisms reinforce one another: the salience of compliance tasks depletes the bandwidth instructional engagement needs, the reprimand's loss-aversion signal entrenches compliance-seeking, and without an identity anchored in educational leadership there is no motivational counterweight. Reform that ignores this layered dynamic will not hold.

> ***Implication for practice:*** *Reform must work at all three levels simultaneously. Structural changes create the space; supervisory redesign changes the signal; behavioural design changes the default. Each level alone is insufficient; together, they are mutually reinforcing, and each offers practical entry points, set out in the final section. The ultimate measure of this reform is not BEO satisfaction or workload balance. It is whether more children in Grades 1 to 3 are reaching foundational literacy and numeracy milestones.*

Finding 3: The missing ingredients – professional development and trust

Behind the crowded workday, the misaligned key performance indicators (KPIs) and the WhatsApp-mediated compliance demands, there is a more fundamental systemic feature: a low-trust administrative architecture. As Power (1994) observes, in low-trust systems, confidence is displaced from people to measurement systems. In Uttar Pradesh's education administration, trust is currently vested in digital dashboards, WhatsApp-based reporting, and compliance checklists, not in the professional judgment of the officers themselves. The data Block Education Officers (BEOs) generate is both the evidence of their accountability and, increasingly, the thing that crowds out the work it was meant to track.

This low-trust architecture sits alongside a near-complete absence of formal professional development designed specifically for BEOs. The system's implicit assumption is that instructional leadership is a capability officers already possess, or will absorb informally on the job; in practice it has to be built deliberately, the way any profession grooms its practitioners, and that building has not happened. Most BEOs in this sample had never received a formal induction into the role, and none had access to structured professional development tailored to instructional leadership at the block level. The survey data makes this visible: approximately 40% identified foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) pedagogy as a key professional development priority, and over 60% wanted to strengthen their leadership skills, aspirations that a well-designed capacity-building programme could directly address. For further evidence on the training gap, see the full study linked below. Trust and training are not competing explanations for the compliance–instruction gap. They are compounding deficits: an officer who has never been equipped with the frameworks of instructional leadership cannot easily exercise it even when a district supervisor is inclined to extend trust.

This is not a uniquely Indian problem, and framing it as one would misread the evidence. Low-trust accountability architectures are a recurring feature of education systems across low- and middle-income countries, and they consistently produce procedural compliance at the cost of substantive educational engagement. What is distinctive about the Uttar Pradesh context is the intensity (the WhatsApp-mediated real-time surveillance, the 40-visit quota tracked to the hour, the complete absence of instructional indicators from the monthly KPI document) and the resulting gap between what BEOs aspire to and what the system allows them to do. The mechanisms, in other words, may be more widely recognisable than the specific instruments that carry them in Uttar Pradesh. Whether similar dynamics operate in other middle-tier systems is a question this single-state study cannot resolve; but the diagnostic questions it poses, what does the performance document actually measure? what does the supervisory conversation actually ask about? may be worth applying in other settings as a starting point for context-specific inquiry.

The same BEOs, however, demonstrate that when trust is extended, even informally, even at the margins, it produces different behaviour. BEOs who described their most meaningful professional experiences were those who had been given some discretion by a supportive district supervisor, or who had participated in peer learning exchanges with colleagues from other blocks. These were not systemic features; they were exceptions. But they show that the capacity for instructional leadership is present and latent. What varies is whether the supervisory environment creates conditions for it to surface.

The Government of Uttar Pradesh's decision to support this diagnostic study says something in itself. It reflects an institutional openness to honest inquiry, and suggests that the architecture, while deeply rooted, is not static.

> ***Implication for practice:*** *Addressing the compliance–instruction gap requires working on both deficits simultaneously. On the professional development side: a formal induction that frames the BEO role around instructional leadership from day one; short, targeted capacity-building on FLN pedagogy and supportive supervision; and peer learning communities that build practical knowledge over time. On the trust side: peer learning forums, protected non-compliance time in monthly calendars, and district supervisors who explicitly ask what academic support a BEO provided and recognise it when they did. Neither alone is sufficient. An officer given trust but no training lacks the tools to act on it; an officer trained but not trusted lacks the conditions.*

Finding 4: Without deliberate design, the middle tier reproduces inequality

There is a dimension of middle-tier reform that the global literature has underexplored: not just whether Block Education Officers (BEOs) do instructional work, but which schools receive that work. BEOs oversee between 100 and 150 schools each. The study did not systematically track visit distributions across school types, but qualitative evidence from interviews and shadowing is consistent with a pattern that is likely in any high-volume supervisory role: without structured planning tools, support tends to follow the path of least resistance, geographically accessible schools, familiar clusters, head teachers who are easier to engage. The mechanism is logistical and cognitive rather than attitudinal: it is the predictable output of a high-volume role operating without equity-conscious planning tools, compounded by the same cognitive load that shapes all of BEO decision-making, not negligence on the part of individual officers.

The likely consequence, plausible though not directly tracked in this study, is that schools most in need of academic support may receive less of it: the remote ones, the under-resourced ones, those serving children from the most marginalised communities, not from malice but from structural gravity. This matters acutely in the context of NIPUN Bharat, whose ambition is universal foundational learning. Universal outcomes require equitable distribution of support. That distribution does not happen by default.

Notably, our fieldwork did surface examples of BEOs who make deliberate equity-conscious choices, consciously prioritising schools they know have been neglected, seeking out the hardest-to-reach clusters. These examples do not contradict the finding; they illuminate it. Making equity-conscious choices requires deliberate, effortful counter-action against the structural pull. What is absent is precisely the structured support that would make this the norm: planned visit schedules with equity criteria built in, data that makes coverage visible, and district reviews that ask about distribution alongside compliance.

> ***Implication for practice:*** *Making equity-conscious practice the default requires choice architecture: visit schedules with explicit equity criteria, dashboards that make coverage visible, and district reviews that ask about distribution alongside compliance. When coverage becomes transparent in the supervisory relationship, accountability for equity follows. Under the current default, remote and under-resourced schools, those serving children most at risk of not reaching foundational learning milestones, may be at greater risk of receiving less frequent BEO support, particularly where visit planning does not explicitly account for equity of coverage. Equity of instructional support is not a values question; it is a design question with direct consequences for whether universal FLN ambitions can ever be met.*

What this suggests for embedding change

Language and Learning Foundation's implementation research, now underway across five districts in Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi, Chandauli, Bhadohi, Fatehpur and Shravasti) in partnership with the state government, is the practical translation of these diagnostic findings. The intervention is not primarily a training programme. It is a system-shaping effort, working simultaneously at structural, supervisory, and behavioural levels, designed to embed change within existing government routines rather than build parallel ones. The question driving the design is not "can we make Block Education Officers (BEOs) better at instructional leadership?" but "what would it take for the system around BEOs to make instructional leadership a realistic, recognised, and rewarded part of their role?"

The approach centres on four practical adjustments, each working with the grain of what already exists. Uttar Pradesh already has an important academic resource in its cadre of Academic Resource Persons (ARPs), whose pedagogical support to teachers is a natural partner to the BEO's instructional role. **Monthly review meetings** that BEOs already convene **with Academic Resource Persons and head teachers** are being redesigned, with government agreement, to include a standing item on instructional quality, so that academic discussion of what is happening in classrooms becomes a routine expectation rather than an occasional addition.

School visit formats are being supplemented with a short observation checklist and simple feedback templates, not to add burden to an already stretched role, but to give visits a structure that connects them to teaching and learning rather than defaulting entirely to data entry. A simple visit planning tool is being developed to flag schools that have been under-visited, making equity of coverage visible to BEOs before inertia sets in.

District review meetings are being redesigned to include a structured question alongside standard compliance review: what did you observe in schools this month, and what academic feedback did you give? The government's active participation in designing and owning these adjustments is what will make them embeddable rather than project-dependent.

Where to start: sequencing the reforms

If a system could make only one change, the evidence points to the school visit application. Embedding a single mandatory pedagogical observation prompt (one question that must be answered before the form can be submitted) sits entirely within an existing tool, adds no perceptible workload, requires no new cadre or budget, and changes the default behaviour of every visit from day one. It is also the most readily testable of the reforms: blocks using a revised application can be compared with blocks using the standard one, making it a natural candidate for an A/B test within the implementation research now underway, converting a plausible design insight into causal evidence.

The remaining reforms sort by the level of authority they require. Achievable immediately, within existing routines and the discretion of district officials: the standing instructional-quality item in monthly review meetings; the redesigned district review question; structured inter-block peer forums; and the equity-flagging visit planning tool. Requiring state-level decision: revising the monthly KPI document to include even two or three instructional indicators; rationalising real-time data demands (designated request windows, consolidated formats); and redesigning induction so that the first encounter with the role frames the BEO as an instructional leader. The sequencing matters. Early wins within existing routines build the working relationships, and the evidence, that make the state-level asks credible.

Structural: reading the key performance indicator (KPI) document as a reform instrument

The monthly KPI document is among the most powerful levers available to state governments, and among the most underused for learning purposes. Adding even two or three indicators of instructional engagement (classroom observation quality, academic feedback given to teachers, equity of school coverage) would change what BEOs understand they are being held accountable for. This is a policy decision that requires no new infrastructure, no new cadre, and no significant budget. It requires a willingness to say, in the state's own voice, that learning quality is part of the mandate. Like the review-meeting adjustments described above, it is a nudge within existing workflow, far more likely to persist than innovations grafted onto the system from outside.

Supervisory: changing what conversations happen above the Block Education Officer (BEO)

Engaging the layer above the BEO, so that monthly review conversations surface what was observed in classrooms and what was done about it, not just whether the data was submitted , is as important as any direct intervention with BEOs. The reprimand story shows how powerfully supervisory signals travel. The same dynamic works in reverse: a district officer who explicitly celebrates the quality of a BEO's instructional engagement, in a room full of peers, sends a signal that every officer receives.

Behavioural: redesigning the choice architecture of everyday decisions

Structural and supervisory reforms establish the institutional conditions for action, while behavioural design shapes the decision-making environment within which individuals act (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Four low-cost interventions follow directly from the mechanisms identified above:

- **Defaults and prompts in existing tools.** The observation prompt in the visit application, described above, is the archetype: it changes behaviour without adding workload. What is in the default gets done.
- **Peer norm-setting through structured forums.** Monthly inter-block forums where BEOs share one instructional engagement from the previous month begin to shift what feels normal. The reprimand broadcast a norm; structured peer recognition can broadcast a different one.
- **Identity affirmation in training and induction.** Framing BEO training around the identity of an instructional leader, not just an administrator, activates a different motivational register. Most BEOs have never received formal induction; the framing of that first encounter with the role matters enormously.
- **Feedback loops on instructional quality.** BEOs currently receive almost no feedback on the quality of their instructional engagement because it is rarely measured. Regular feedback from Academic Resource Persons (ARPs), teachers, and district supervisors on the quality, not just quantity, of school engagement gives BEOs the information to improve and the recognition that sustains effort.

Three propositions for the global conversation

For the broader international community, our evidence points to three propositions that go beyond the existing consensus:

1. **The compliance-instruction gap is not primarily a capacity problem.** It is a signal problem, a trust problem, and a behavioural architecture problem. Diagnosis must precede intervention: what does the monthly KPI document actually measure? What does the supervisory relationship actually ask about? Until these questions are answered honestly in a specific context, reform design is working in the dark.
2. **Reform must work at all three levels simultaneously.** Structural changes create the space; supervisory redesign changes the signal; behavioural design changes the default. Each is necessary. None is sufficient alone. This framework is more actionable than 'train the middle tier', and more tractable than 'change the system'.
3. **Equity of support distribution is a design question, not a values question.** The middle tier's role in directing support toward underserved schools and communities does not happen automatically. It requires planning tools, data transparency, and accountability mechanisms that make coverage visible and inequitable distribution costly. Without these, average quality may improve while the most marginalised schools fall further behind.

A working day, redesigned

Consider what that same Block Education Officer (BEO) Monday morning might look like if the three levels had been deliberately redesigned.

He opens his phone. There are messages, there will always be messages. But one of them is a brief note from his district supervisor, asking what he plans to focus on in his school visits this week and flagging two schools in his cluster that have been under-visited this month. His visit schedule, built in advance using a simple planning tool that flags equity gaps, has already set the priority. When he arrives at the first school, the mobile application prompts him for one observation before he can submit his compliance data. He spends fifteen minutes watching a Grade 2 classroom, notes something about how the teacher is grouping children, and has a brief conversation about it before he leaves. In the evening, there is a short peer forum with three colleagues from neighbouring blocks, where each shares one thing they noticed in a classroom this week. It takes thirty minutes.

None of this is radical. No new cadre, no new budget, no systemic overhaul. The compliance demands are still there. The WhatsApp messages still come. But the architecture of the day has been nudged, in three small places, at three different levels, so that learning is not invisible.

The BEO who described his role as a 13-headed wrench was not asking for a different job. He was asking, in the most precise terms available to him, for a system that knew what it needed from him and gave him the conditions to provide it. That ask is not unreasonable. Meeting it is not beyond reach. And the evidence from Uttar Pradesh suggests that the appetite for it , among officers, among district officials, and within the state itself, is already there. So, too, is the appetite of the young officer who was reprimanded in June 2025. He had already decided what kind of education officer he wanted to be. The question is whether the system will one day decide the same.

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