

SECONDARY SCHOOL INSPECTION SYSTEM IN WEST BENGAL - A CONTEMPORARY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the study is to focus on the current status of the school inspection system prevalent in West Bengal. Through a survey, it was tried to determine the positive and negative sides of the school inspection system in West Bengal. The main aim of the study is to get an overview of the whole inspection system. What are the deficiencies of the inspection structure, what are the needs of the system for its betterment are some of the aspects that have been discussed here. The perception of the teachers about the inspection is also discussed here.

KEYWORDS: *School Inspection System, Secondary School, Contemporary, West Bengal*

INTRODUCTION AND BACK-GROUND

School Inspection is the most important instrument for the quality control of the schools. UNESCO in 2017 in their report on 'School Inspection Challenges-Evidence from six countries' says that "School inspection is a quality control mechanism, which exists in almost all countries. This is also considered to be a medium through which education providers can be held accountable for the standards of services and outcomes. However, the purpose of the inspection is not only to ensure accountability, but also to enhance the performance of schools according to the education policy goals and purposes (Wilcox, 2000)." They also say that –"inspection systems in these countries are facing a number of common challenges that include human and financial resource constraints, lack of willingness of inspectors to regularly visit schools, as well as the lack of their capacity to point out schools' real problems. In addition, there is also a serious gap in communication between the school administration and inspectors. In other words, teachers' negative assumptions towards inspectors as well as inspectors' lack of professional orientation to constructively evaluate the schools impede the functioning of the inspection processes. This, in turn, makes it difficult to serve the actual purpose of inspection to improve school outcomes through strengthening mutual accountability system between schools and the superior administration." The key findings of the report were-

- Inspection is an irregular practice in all of these six countries for diverse reasons. The scarcity of human and financial resources is one of the main challenges making the inspector to school ratio very high. There is also less division of labor in public institutions. Thus, inspectors need to perform multiple
- The materials for inspection are poorly equipped to point out the aspects that are directly related to the learning achievement of students. Besides, inspectors' lack of professional orientation is a prime cause of perceiving inspection by the school administration as a control mechanism rather than a means of improving outcomes

responsibilities in addition to regular school visits.

The Government of West Bengal in August 2010, through an official order (No. 423- ES/O/P&B/10M-26/10), engaged the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (IIMC) to conduct a study on Restructuring of School Education System in West Bengal. The study revealed that there is a huge scarcity of staffs in the inspection department under the directorate of school education of West Bengal.

In this light, the present paper is about to find the problems related with the inspection system prevalent in West Bengal. The present paper makes an attempt to study the contemporary inspection systems of the Government schools of Nadia District, West Bengal.

SCHOOL INSPECTION SYSTEM IN WEST BENGAL:

School inspection system in West Bengal was institutionalized during the British Period. The Wood's Despatch in 1854 is the beginning of the first inspection system in India. It remarked that- "An adequate system of inspection will also, for future, become an essential part of the educational system; and we desire that a sufficient number of qualified inspectors be appointed, who will periodically; report upon the state of those colleges and schools which are now supported and managed by Government. They will conduct or assist at the examination of the scholars at these, institutions, and generally, by their advice, aid the managers and schoolmasters in conducting colleges and schools of every description throughout the country. They will necessarily be of different classes, and may possess different degrees of requirements, according to the higher or lower character of the institutions which they will be employed to visit; but we need hardly say that, even for the proper inspection of the lower schools, and with a view to their effectual improvement; the greatest care will be necessary to select persons of high character and fitting judgment for such employment."¹ This shows that the appointment of the inspectors was originated for aiding schools academically and financially. The inspectorate was established to evaluate the progress of the government schools of that time and also to evaluate the use of public money in a fruit-full manner. After that, the hunter commission had recommended a code of conduct for the guidance of the inspectors. Further changes in the school inspectorate system were made by the Public Service Commission in 1886.² In 1930-40 the inspectorate was in a bad situation with inadequate numbers of inspectors in the system. According to the Hartog committee of 1929 report, this resulted in educational inefficiency.³ On the eve of the independence of India Sir John Sargent emphasized for the strengthening of inspecting staff⁴. After the independence, this tradition was going on in a similar manner. Though the corresponding education commissions or the policy frameworks of education do not mention clearly about the school inspection systems, it has now become more democratic in the sense of school supervision from its earlier authoritarian version. The NPE -1986 and POA-1992 refer to an idea of establishing an Indian Educational service. Though it has not been implemented yet. Right To Education act -2009 provides for an inclusive inspection system which will ensure free education for all children within the age group of fourteen years. In spite of all this acts and rules, the inspection or the school supervision is the most neglected area in the Indian education hierarchy. The West Bengal is not different. It has a directorate for the monitoring and the supervision of the schools in the form of DSE or Directorate of School Education. It functions through secretaries, officers on special duty, District Inspectors of Schools (DI), Additional District Inspectors of Schools (ADI), Assistant Inspectors of Schools (AI) and the Sub-Inspectors of Schools (SI). There is almost no visit of schools from the DIs and ADIs end. Sometimes the Sis visits the schools but only for the administrative purpose. They scarcely show any interest to the academic portion of the schools.

The various dimensions that an effective inspection team is to supervise are the basic infrastructure of schools, management and community support, school and classroom environment, curriculum and teaching-learning material, teacher and teacher preparation, teaching-learning time, classroom practices and process and the monitoring of learner's assessment. But all these dimensions are implemented or not in its true spirit is the basic question that should be answered.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objective of the present paper is to study the present inspection system of the secondary Schools in West Bengal with respect to

- How inspection is implemented in the schools by the District Inspector of Schools, Additional Inspectors of Schools and the Assistant Inspectors of Schools in West Bengal.
- Problems in the Inspection system of West Bengal.
- Perception of the teachers about the Inspection systems prevalent in West Bengal.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey method was used for the present study.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The study was carried out in the Nadia District in the state of West Bengal. There is total 434 Government sponsored secondary and higher secondary schools in Nadia District following the West Bengal Board syllabus. Seventy-five schools were randomly selected from the Government sponsored schools under the Kalyani subdivision of Nadia district. All the Head Teachers of these schools formed the sample of the study. Thus it became a cluster study.

TOOLS USED

An unstructured interview of the teachers was used as the main tools for the collection of the data for this study. As the teacher were not ready to formally admit any faults with the school inspection system the unstructured system of the interview process was adopted as an effective tool to bring out the real situation regarding the inspection system in schools of West Bengal. The teachers were ready for any kind of criticism of the School education system in private but not in public. Therefore through informal talks, necessary data were collected for this study. Three main questions were asked during the interview of the teachers. First, when their school was visited by any higher authority? Second, what was the purpose of the visit? Third, are they satisfied with the current school inspection system or not?

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected during a three-day orientation programme of the Head Teachers of the all secondary and senior secondary schools of Kalyani subdivision held at Kalyani. The Head Teachers were selected randomly and were briefed about the purpose of the study. Through an informal conversation with the most of them, the questionnaire was placed before them and the replies were collected. As they were reluctant to any formal question and answer, their request for the privacy was adhered to. For that, the unstructured way of the interview process was followed.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using frequency and percentage. And the data collected through the informal talking and unstructured interview were analyzed through content analyzing method.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The major findings of the study were

- Eighty-six (86.66%) percent of the teachers responded that their school was not visited by District inspector of school(DI) or by Assistant District Inspector of schools(ADI) or by Sub Inspector of schools(SI) for at least ten years.
- Ninety (90.66%) percent of the respondent admitted that their school was not visited by DI or ADI or SI within five years.
- Ninety-three (93.33%) percent of the teachers said that their school was not visited by anyone within two years.
- Ninety-four (94.66%) percent of the respondent said that they have not been visited by DI or ADI or SI in the previous year (2017).
- Four schools among the seventy-five schools were visited by the SI and DI previous year (2017).
- The purpose of the visit to those four schools was only for the administrative reasons and not for the academic one.
- Most of the teachers (96%) were of the view that the School Inspection System is not up to the mark and almost in West Bengal and they are not satisfied with the present School Inspection system.

DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Quality feedback is very much important for the improvement in the student's outcome in our school education system. And quality feedback is only can be given by proper and scientific way of inspection. Qualitative studies by Courtney, Dougill *et al.*, Baxter and Clarke, and Tymms and Jones (in prep)⁶ indicate that head teachers from schools that were inspected in the year before they were surveyed focus more on inspection framework priority areas and on improving their capacity-building and school organization compared to head teachers who were inspected a longer time ago. Jones and Tymms also report of teachers teaching to the test and to inspection criteria, and of head teachers who narrow the curriculum and teaching in order to meet the Ofsted framework.⁷ Analysis by Francis using data from all inspections showed that particularly in areas where children faced multiple disadvantages schools often failed to improve from one inspection to another.⁸ These schools received 'satisfactory' ratings in two successive inspections with 'satisfactory' capacity to improve. Francis comments that although Ofsted reports highlight what needs to be done, there is little guidance on how to do it. Ofsted's latest annual report, on the other hand, indicates that overall schools and colleges across the country are performing better than a year ago. According to Ofsted, more focused inspections and the changing of the 'satisfactory' grading to 'requires improvement' has resulted in over 90% of schools judged as requiring improvement to make satisfactory progress in remedying their weaknesses.⁹ So from the studies cited above it can be concluded that school inspection is very much necessary for the betterment of the overall performance of the education of any country. But the

inspection system needs to be scientific and in a time bound manner.

The problems in the Current Inspection System of West Bengal

Recently The Times of India, reports-“In a recent, Director, School Education, formed two committees to inspect the private schools but none of them includes the district education officer (DEO) even though under RTE Act, this responsibility lies with the DEO. The committees have completed the inspection of most of the schools while the DEO was not even informed about it. “From the discussion above it is clear that professionalism is totally absent in the inspection mechanism of West Bengal. The school visits are very rare and almost invisible. Nowadays all the necessary works and papers, documents and reports are sent to the DEOs in online mode. This is also one of the reasons for the irregular visit of schools by any higher authorities. The focus points related to the problems of the inspection system are-

- Irregular visit to schools by any authority.
- No inspection for at least five to ten years in ninety percent of schools.
- An inadequate number of staff in the school inspectorate.
- Lack of proper guideline for the school inspection.
- Lack of public awareness and public scrutiny of the school inspection system.
- Lack of coordination among the various authorities of the school education department.
- Lack of a proper future planning to improve the inspection infrastructure.
- Lethargy among the inspectors to view the academic aspects of schools.
- Lack of political will to take stringent measures for the proper implementation of rules and regulation related to the inspection system.

Teachers' Perception about the Inspection System of West Bengal

The Head teachers who were interviewed for the study, are all aware of the bad impact of this inadequate school inspection system. They also want a timely inspection of their schools. It really helps them to maintain a proper hierarchy in the maintenance of school rules and regulations. Sometimes the teachers become unruly and do not adhere to the headmaster or the school rules. And as the head teachers have a very low authority to act upon these teachers, the inspection by the higher authority helps them to regulate all these problems. Sometimes the teachers face problems to implement some new ideas in their day to day academic programmes. The Inspection system could help them. The implementation of CCE is such a problem for the head teachers. Most of the teachers do not want to comply with the order of the headmaster and implement CCE in their classes and keep a proper record. If proper inspection system is executed and the teachers are counseled, it will highly improve the quality of the education in West Bengal. The authorities have an essential duty to arrange and monitor the special orientation and skill improvement programmes. But in the absence of the officials, these programmes become a mockery of the whole system and almost nothing constructive happens in this kind of workshops for the teacher's training. As there is no mechanism to make the School education directorate or the Inspectorate to be accountable this problem is continuing. The teachers or the general public are not

aware of the roles and duties of the inspectorate of the West Bengal Government. Therefore there is no public scrutiny. This makes the inspection system more and more evasive. The whole idea of utilizing the public money for the betterment of the education system is therefore in a very poor condition for the faulty inspection system in West Bengal.

Recommendation for a Proper Inspection System

For a proper and effective inspection system the following aspects of the inspection system, should be taken care of-

- A proper planning with proper implementation
- Necessary guidance and monitoring from the higher authority.
- Increasing the staff strength of the school inspectorate.
- Introducing the group or social supervision of schools.
- Proper training of the inspectorate staff.
- A proper rule and guide for the inspectors should be developed with the specification of duties and accountabilities.

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