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A Pilot Study

SYNOPTIC REPORT

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The school administration is considered one of the most important areas of administration and the most significant in the community, as its role is no longer limited to implementing educational policies and objectives, but has become responsible for raising and qualifying generations in a rapidly changing era. Administrators play an important role in the efficient functioning of all educational institutions (Ahmed, 2020). Budgets, logistics, schedules, disciplinary actions, evaluations, and public relations fall under the purview of educational administrators.

Education in the State of Haryana

Haryana had been a deprived and underdeveloped state. But lately, Haryana has been the state with the third-highest per capita income. This was possible through the efforts of the people of the state and the Government. Despite the major strides made by the state, Haryana still ranks among the lowest in the country in many of the Human Resource Development (HRD) indicators. With respect to education, though the enrolment of girls has improved since the inception of the state, yet it remains low. The dropout rate among girls in the elementary stage is high, and also the percentage of girls' participation in education at the secondary and higher education is low. There was voluntary community participation at the time of the initial thrust for universalisation of elementary education. Most of the schools were established by the panchayats or the communities in the rural areas. Moreover, the land for the schools was given free of cost by the panchayats. The efforts of the state in universalising the elementary education have extensively increased the coverage, and it has led to a system of centralisation at the cost of community participation. Today, the community and the panchayats stand alienated from the monolithic educational infrastructure that has evolved in the state. Many of the disadvantaged, weaker, physically and mentally challenged groups have largely remained outside the ambit of elementary education, but the enrolment of children and accessibility of schools have improved considerably. Still, the needs of the special groups must be addressed to achieve universalisation of elementary education. There would be an increase in the demand for education if any further progress is made in increasing the percentage of enrolment by making it more relevant and flexible as per the requirements of these sections.

Significance of the Study

Decision-making is a fundamental activity of any organisation. It is one of the most important of all management activities. The decision-making role is the heart of the executive activities of the organisation. The quality of the decisions and the way these are made is highly dependent on the administrators and management. Decision-making is an inseparable part of any organisation, and educational organisations are no exception. Being able to effectively make decisions in the workplace can make one a better leader, and have a number of positive benefits for both oneself and the organisation as a whole. The benefits of making good decisions are that they save time and resources, improve productivity, and prevent mistakes and risks.

The present study examines the established decision-making process in educational administration and management in the district of Faridabad in the state of Haryana and the monitoring system at the District Educational Management level. The main function of any educational management is to make the educational institution more effective and efficient. The effectiveness of any institution is conceived

in terms of the achievement of goals, development of its people, expansion/growth of the institution, self-renewal and impact on the community. The study examined the decision-making process of District Educational Administrators and its implementation in the Faridabad district. It also studied the issues and challenges faced by the District Education Officer (DEO) and the District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) in decision-making. The present investigation is a pilot study on the decision-making process of the educational administration at the district level.

Sample of the study

The District Education Officer (DEO) and the District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) were selected for the study. They were selected because the district education officer plays an important role and remains the central source of influence at the district level in educational administration. At the district level, the District Education Officer/DEEO or District Inspector of Schools is the highest-level officer of education, having several roles and responsibilities.

Data collection and tools

The data was collected using both primary sources and secondary sources. Primary data for the study was collected through a questionnaire to study the decision-making process by DEO and DEEO in the district of Faridabad, Haryana. It also aimed to study various issues and challenges faced by them. It consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions were significant in collecting in-depth and qualitative information on the issues related to challenges and suggestions. On the other hand, closed-ended questions aimed at collecting background information.

The secondary sources used for the study included government publications, documents, reports, and e-resources. They were used to collect information regarding the policies, programmes, roles and responsibilities of district education officers related to the decision-making process at the district level in the country. Documents also helped to understand the administrative structure of school education in Haryana. The data collected from the DEO and DEEO was analysed by adopting qualitative techniques. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. After analysing the qualitative data obtained through DEO and DEEO, the following results were obtained:

Recruitment and selection of teachers

The DEEO looks into the process of recruitment of teachers in elementary education. She/he ensures that all the candidates are Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) qualified. Along with the scores of the National Test Agency (NTA) and Teacher Eligibility Test (TET), the interviews of all aspiring candidates were conducted. In the recruitment of teachers, the DEO and DEEO play an important role in their respective departments to ensure that the recruitment protocols are strictly adhered to as laid down by the Directorate of Education. The direction/chain of movement of files occurred in compliance with the directions issued by the Competent Authority and forwarded to the Directorate of School Education, Haryana. The following procedures are followed for Online Files - Head Quarter/ Haryana Staff Selection Commission (HSSC) issues orders, which are sent to the Directorate of Education and then the Directorate of Secondary Education/Directorate of Elementary Education forwards the same to the DEO/DEEO. Files are processed in compliance with the directions issued by the Competent Authority, and the time taken depends on the nature of the issue. Occasionally, it could take a longer time, especially pertaining to issues like court cases. In the selection of teachers, the documents of selected teachers are verified, and their personal files are maintained at the district level and the schools concerned under the guidance of the DEO.

Posting and transfers of teachers

The role of DEO/DEEO is to comply with the orders/ directions/ guidelines of the directorate in letter and spirit, and complete the process within the time limit as prescribed by the Competent Authority. The role of DEO/DEEO is to ensure that transfer orders are implemented effectively within the time limit as prescribed by the Competent Authority, and the compliance report is forwarded to the Headquarters.

Service conditions of teachers

Service conditions of teachers are prescribed by the Directorate of School Education, Haryana, which are adhered to by DEO/DEEO in view of the Haryana Civil Services (Recruitment) 2016. In the service conditions of teachers, the DEO/DEEO complies with the directions issued by the Competent Authority from time to time.

Time taken and the criteria of decision-making

It is observed that DEO makes the decision after proper verification of facts from the field and written documents. After receiving appropriate information, corrective measures and actions are taken based on the information received from Monitoring Committees such as DIET, and the subject specialist Committee. Within the time limit as prescribed by the Competent Authority, prompt decisions are taken for the improvement of the education system, as it becomes critical to make decisions timely.

Level of participation and autonomy in decision-making

The DEO and DEEO take important decisions to maintain transparency and ensure justice and fairness concerning all issues. Pending cases, completion of service and other related issues are collated, and final decisions are taken by the Directorate of School Education, Haryana. Upon enquiring whether any external forces hinder decision-making such as political interference, it was observed that all the decisions pertaining to education in the districts concerned are taken in view of the directions issued by the Competent Authority, and no political pressure was entertained as guidelines issued by the Headquarters.

Suggestions by the DEO

The DEEO made several suggestions which may not be directly related to the decision-making process; however, it was for overall educational administration in the state, which included:

- Annual health check-up for all students.
- Reduced weight of school bags and textbooks through suitable changes in curriculum and pedagogy.
- Mandatory class and awareness programme on skills to all students on health, nutrition, physical education, fitness, wellness, and sports.
- Hiring school counsellors.
- Focus on children with disability: Differentiated interventions and suitable infrastructure development at schools to make access easier for children with disability.
- Inclusive and caring culture at school where the role of the principal and teachers is emphasised.

Discussion and conclusions

As per the School Education Policy, the DEO and DEEO are responsible for the functions of school education at the district level. The school administration leadership varies across states. In some states, the DEO exclusively looks after both elementary and secondary education in the district; however, in a few states, the role of school education at the secondary and elementary levels is assigned separately to the

DEO and DEEO, respectively. Decision-making is one of the most important activities in which school education administrators engage on a daily basis. The success of the school students is critically linked to effective decisions taken by the administrators.

From the present study, it was found that both the DEO and DEEO perform all responsibilities assigned to them in their respective departments. The DEO and DEEO face a range of decision-making opportunities; ranging from student-related issues to policy implementation at the district level. Activities such as office administration, school inspection and supervision, implementation of government policies and programmes, various departmental activities and organisational development and welfare activities for the stakeholders are performed by them. In addition, several issues such as attending to students' concerns related to academic aspects and those which have both direct and indirect impact on academics such as the students' social background, were being taken into consideration in every decision pertaining to the students' welfare activities. Empowering the students with the necessary life skills to cope with day-to-day challenges positively is also another responsibility taken by the DEO. In addition, the role of a mediator to improve the relationship between students, teachers, and parents is also an important task taken by the DEO. The DEO also initiates a career counselling and guidance programme to enable the students to decide their own career choice based on their strength, weaknesses, interests and aptitudes.

Decision-making is an important component in the policy implementation process. From the above discussions, it is evident that the DEO and DEEO at the district level play a key role in the implementation of numerous policies and programmes relating to school education at the district level, ranging from the selection of teachers, recruitment of teachers, postings and transfers of teachers, service conditions to professional growth and various welfare activities of the teachers and students. Several critical decisions ensuring the quality of education and other factors which may directly or indirectly impact the education system in the districts were taken care of by the district authorities.

All policy decisions were finalised after proper consultation and taking into consideration the directions issued by the Competent Authority. Moreover, the present study shows that autonomy in decision-making is almost absent, with strict adherence to the policy guidelines laid down by the higher authorities. The DEO and DEEO faced challenges in the implementation of decisions made at the district level, with reported instances of non-compliance with the decisions. There is a lack of coordination among various stakeholders, both at the district level and at the grassroots level. The findings of the present study are in congruence with the findings of the studies by Ingersoll (1996), Androniceanu and Ristea (2014), Mangla (2014), Aiyar, Davis, and Dongre (2015), which indicate a hierarchical and centralised nature of decision-making at the district level. The present study found decision-making to be mostly centralised with strict adherence to protocols laid down by the competent authority concerned. It would be inappropriate to make an inference that only administrators made decisions. Increasingly, important decisions of relevance are being made by non-administrative personnel such as principals, teachers, and community leaders. Thus, while decision-making at the district level is primarily centralised, the stakeholders do participate in the administrative process; it is fundamentally a people's process. As rightly pointed out by Mast (2012), decision-making should essentially match the contextual environment, considering the political and social dynamics of any given situation to ensure all viewpoints and possible evidence are synthesised to provide a context for the final decision.

Thus, the decision-making process can pose challenging situations to the authority concerned. The pros and cons of each choice need to be evaluated so as to safeguard the interests of the students and the teacher community, and towards the desired goal of the organisation. It is a fact that not all decisions will be readily acceptable to the stakeholders. However, it is the responsibility of the educational administrator to understand the concerns of the stakeholders, ensure minimum uncertainty and effective policy implementation.

Both the District Education Officer and District Elementary Education Officer perform routine activities like office administration, delegating and facilitating office staff in the implementation of the programme and policies. Other activities include school inspection, performing other departmental activities, implementation of government programmes and policies, and working in close collaboration with all the stakeholders.

As per the guidelines provided by the Central Government and the State Education Department, the DEO and DEEO take an active part in the selection of teachers, recruitment of teachers, posting and transfer of teachers, service conditions, welfare and development of the teachers. All activities are conducted as per the guidelines provided by the Competent Authority.

The DEO and DEEO have taken critical decisions in the supervision of educational institutions by giving proper direction to the Principal/Headmaster/BEOs. Moreover, it took initiatives in the renovation of office buildings and schools, thereby improving infrastructure in schools like toilets, drinking water facilities and other teaching aids. Whenever situation arises, the DEO and DEEO take disciplinary actions against staff and teachers. As informed by the DEO and DEEO, all stakeholders took part in the decision-making depending on the cases and situations. The file movement follows a top-down procedure, and all policy-related decisions were taken by the Directorate of Education, Haryana.

The time taken in the decision-making and implementation depends on the nature of the cases. No political interference in the educational administration in the district was reported. The lack of coordination between the DEO/DEEO with the District Project Coordinator (DPC) and the BEO was reported. Moreover, due to jurisdiction limitations, certain cases cannot be pursued. All decisions were taken looking at the pros and cons, and for the larger interest of the student community. The decision-making power of the DEO and DEEO is the same except for their exclusive responsibilities for secondary education and elementary education, respectively. They make decisions on a variety of issues that come from various quarters of education. Likewise, they also delegate and direct the block-level officers in the implementation of programmes and take up various responsibilities to ensure the smooth functioning of educational institutions, making efforts to improve the quality of education.

The present study, in line with the previous studies, argues for a decentralised system of educational administration at the district level. Giving more autonomy to the district-level administrators would facilitate the process of making decisions more effectively. The district level officers also suggested for construction of change indicators to monitor the performance of the individual teachers. The district administrators expressed the need to empower local leaders.



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