

# Panchayat Elementary Education Officer Educational Administrative Decentralisation in Rajasthan

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## Abstract

*In the context of developments in the administration and management of the Education Department in Rajasthan, the addition of Panchayat Elementary Education Officers (PEEO) can be a game changer. This article explores the roles, duties, challenges, and enormous potential of the PEEOs, who are a product of the educational decentralisation drive. It was introduced to increase the efficiency of schools in rural areas, but these new administrators are facing many challenges that are not studied until now. The former part of the study includes the policy provisions regarding PEEO's, methodology with the semi-structured interview as tool of relevant officers in three Panchayats of Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan, objectives of the study and questions. The latter part includes grassroot observations, ground realities, challenges and suggestions for further reforms by the policy planners. The lessons learned in this context will have broad implications for the theory and practice of decentralisation in education. .*

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## INTRODUCTION

The administration of the educational department in Rajasthan is highly decentralised. There are administrators at the state, district,

block, and panchayat levels, as shown in Figure 1 below. The Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO) is the last link in the hierarchy of the administrative chain.

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It is a state-specific post. PEEOs are the principals of *Adarsh* (Ideal) schools and are mostly concerned with monitoring, and supervision of the elementary schools within a gram panchayat.

It is from here the transition starts from the administrator to the easily accessible principal that works every day in the school, consults with the Panchayat members of

the area, supervises all the schools under it, coordinates with the higher authorities, etc., They are responsible for the schools' efficiency, outputs, and annual results, manage school records and have the authority to inspect the schools that fall within the Panchayat, and exercise decisive autonomy in teachers' salary and leave-related matters. They report to the Block Elementary Education Officers (BEEOs).

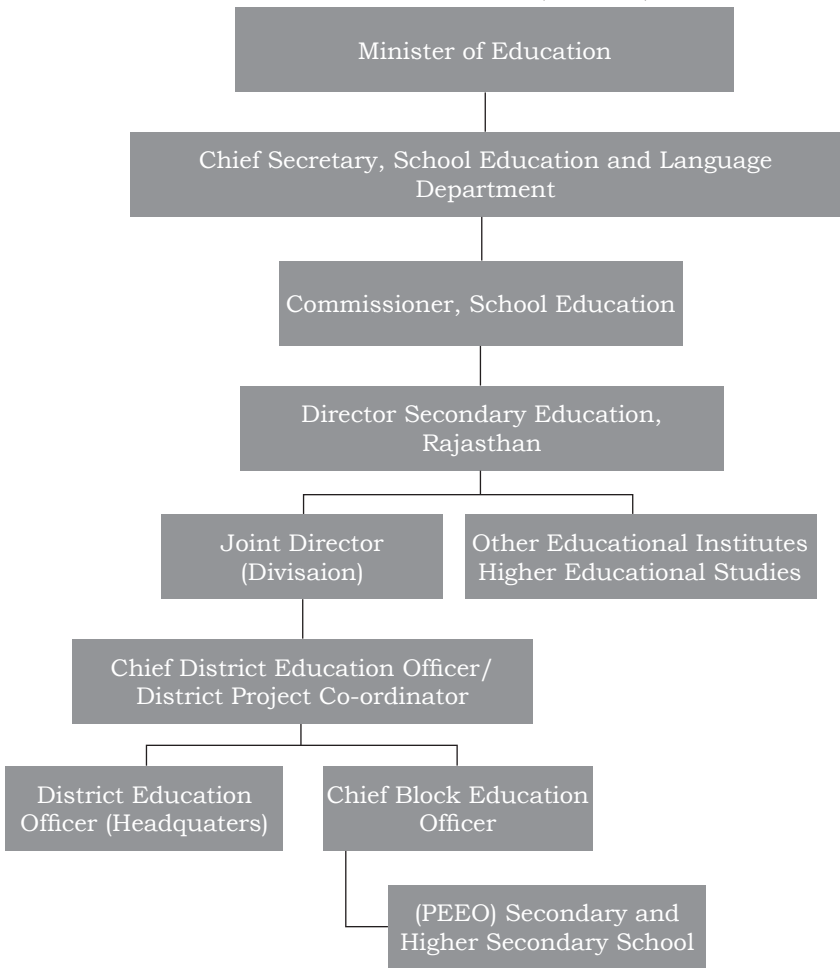


Fig.1: Administrative hierarchy of educational officers in Rajasthan

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will try to answer the initiatives taken by the Rajasthan government through decentralisation in the education department to provide quality education to the students in the rural areas of government schools. The most prominent and unique introduction of PEEOs remains unexplored, and the challenges that these newly appointed PEEOs face need to reach the policy makers through proper research. This paper tries to find the ground situation and provide a base for further research.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the factors that govern the effectiveness of the education department in the rural spaces of Rajasthan after administrative restructuring as a part of decentralisation?
2. What is the level of administrative freedom given to those at the lowest level of decentralisation, i.e., PEEO?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out keeping in view the following listed objectives:

1. To examine the roles and responsibilities performed by the sub-district level functionalities (PEEO) in the management of schools in Rajasthan.
2. To examine the processes carried out in the rural schools of Rajasthan related to quality improvement, performance

indicators, and supervision in the schools through PEEOs.

## METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with the PEEOs and observations were made through a field survey of their respective schools. This personal interview was conducted with one PEEO at a time, following a purely conversational method. This helped to gather precise data about what different roles the officers, as the end part of the chain of education managers and providers, find themselves playing in the rural areas, how they are the change bearers, and what is the uniqueness of their place in the management. The interview was semi-structured; a basic questionnaire was prepared, and the rest depended on the answers and the school context.

The data gathered was in the form of notes, PDFs, images and documents, and observations. It was then analysed as per the themes that were categories to conduct the study, keeping in mind the objectives of the research.

## DATABASE

The study depended on both primary as well as secondary data.

**Secondary Data:** It is the data that has already been collected and is readily available from other resources. It is more quickly obtainable, and inexpensive.

**Documents:** The documents used in the study are The National

Education Policy 1986 (Ministry of Human Resource and Development), draft NEP 2019 (Ministry of Human Resource and Development), 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (Constitution), IIEP reports on Rural Education (UNESCO), modules given to the PEEOs, etc. and existing literature related to the context.

**Primary Data:** The original first-hand data has been collected specifically for the study. It is more reliable, authentic, and objective. The targeted issues were addressed, with efficient spending for information.

A field survey was conducted in the three sample schools mentioned below; the main purpose of the field survey was to get an understating of the functioning of these schools in a rural setting.

The PEEOs were interviewed for the selected villages, as they were responsible for managing the schools and ensuring that the whole process of decentralisation is executed in the desired manner at the school level.

### **SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

The sampling procedure used for the study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used in order to collect more information within the limited time and situations. The schools selected were under different Panchayats, Blocks, and officers. This helped in understanding the various working styles of management, the status of schools and their impacts on education, and other information.

**Table 1**  
**Details about the Sampling of the Research Conducted**

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Selection Criteria</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>
1.	State	Less explored, low literacy, and highly rural.	1 State- Rajasthan
2.	District	This district made fast progress in terms of literacy rate, but still there are extremes of educationally underdeveloped and highly developed areas co-existing in the area. Studying this district helps in knowing how giving autonomy to the sub-block levels through decentralisation would help tackle the challenges that the education system is facing.	1 District-Jhunjhunu
3.	Block	To study the difference in the functioning of the different Panchayats under different blocks as different levels of political interference affect the autonomy of Panchayats and schools.	3 Blocks (under which the schools fall) 3. Buhana 4. Surajgarh 5. Chirawa

4.	Panchayats	Panchayat Elementary Education Officer is the primary administrator at the school level.	3 Panchayats, Budania, Buhana, and Surajgarh, in which the schools are present. 3 Panchayat Elementary Education Officers of the respective schools were selected.
5.	Schools	School is the central functional unit of the study. This is the place from where every change gets an actual shape. These were the schools where the PEEOs were in-charge in particular areas.	3 Schools were selected. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shahid Devkaran Uchha Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Budaniya, Jhunjhunu.</li> <li>• Rajkiya Uchha Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Lambi Sehad, Buhana Jhunjhunu.</li> <li>• Rajkiya Uccha Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Surajgarh, Jhunjhunu.</li> </ul>

It helped recognise how the contestants' backgrounds shape their interpretation, how the officers of the same post, designation with the same functions are working differently, using different techniques and powers to achieve the same goals. This also helped in realising how they 'position themselves' in the school context to achieve what is expected of them and how their interpretation of themselves flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences.

### **PEEO: AN EVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT**

The post of PEEO is specific to Rajasthan and was created in three phases between 2015–16 and 2017–18, as a part of the state's efforts to

improve the quality of education and decentralise the governance for better outcomes and ensure the penetration of quality education to the most disadvantaged and marginalised ones.

Under the *Adarsh Vidyalaya* Scheme of the state government, one State Higher Secondary, Secondary (usually in Classes I to XII/X (schools) is being developed as an *Adarsh Vidyalaya* in each Gram Panchayat. PEEOs are the principals of these Adarsh schools. Usually one school each in 9894 Gram Panchayats of the state was being developed as a model school in three phases in the year 2017–18.

These model schools will act as mentors and resource centers for other schools of the Gram Panchayat.

This reform is a different version of cluster resource schools that existed in the past. The New Education Policy 2020 discusses school complexes—a similar concept.

As per the *Utkrisht Vidyalaya* scheme of the state, under the guidance of the Adarsh school of each Gram Panchayat, an Elementary school of education (usually a school having Class I to VIII) is being developed as an *Utkrisht* school. This school will grow as the Center of Excellence for Elementary Education.

To enrich the quality and standards of Primary School Education in rural areas, strengthen the basic infrastructure in schools, and for the better monitoring and management of the schools located in Gram Panchayats, the state government under the powers conferred from Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1996, provided for all the 9894 Panchayats (usually the *Adarsh* schools of the Panchayats) Panchayat Resource Centres and the head was designated as PEEOs in 2017.

Under the framework of implementing mechanism issued by SSA, the PEEO was declared the CRCF, and their affiliated schools were declared the Cluster Reference Center. The detailed guidelines regarding the duties and responsibilities of the PEEO were issued by Order No. 15 (1) Entry/2017 on 11.04.2017 by the School Education Department, Government of Rajasthan. This declared that the PEEO is entrusted with the responsibility of supervision,

management, execution of works, strengthening of infrastructure and other facilities, and supervision of all the Primary and upper primary schools in their Panchayat area.

Instructions have been issued for the initial activities of all PEEOs (Order-3) by order No. 15211 dated 2017 of Rajasthan Elementary Education Council, Jaipur, for upgrading the quality of elementary education. Under the framework of *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*, their school will be declared as CLC, and they will execute the work duty of CRCF.

### **FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PANCHAYAT ELEMENTARY EDUCATION OFFICER**

There is a proper division of the roles and responsibilities of the officers involved at the various levels of the education department of the state. This decentralised assigning of duties has brought a lot of efficiency in the system's functioning compared to its output a few years back. The primary responsibility of the ex-officio PEEO of the Gram Panchayat are:

- To provide administrative and academic leadership and support to the primary/upper primary schools of elementary education located in the Gram Panchayat area. The school affiliated with them has to act as a resource center and mentor school for the primary/upgradation of Gram Panchayat.

- According to the guide of the *Utkrisht Vidyalaya* Scheme, the PEEO should visit the *Utkrisht Vidyalaya* at least once a month and other Primary and Upper-Primary Schools once in two months and During the visit based on the observation, academic support will be provided by checking the academic level and quality of the classroom.
- Under the chairmanship of the ex-officio PEEO, a meeting of the institution heads of all the state Primary/Upper Primary schools of the Gram Panchayat area will be organised on the last working day of every month in the school affiliated with them.
- In the monthly meeting, the PEEO will review the school-wise development plan, SIDE programme, and implementation of various schemes/programmes of the state government. Apart from this, the difficulties faced by the institution heads in the operation of the school will also be resolved.
- The ex-officio PEEOs will act as a reference center for all state Primary/Upper Primary affiliated schools of the Gram Panchayat for implementing the program SIQE that is operated for upgrading the quality of education in Class I to V. They will ensure its implementation as per the guidelines.
- Ensure the marking of the children of the age group of 6–14 years who are eligible to enter the school of Gram Panchayat area through Primary/Upper Primary schools of the Panchayat area and ensure their enrolment in the school.
- Assess the lack of infrastructure/ facilities in the Government Primary/Upper Primary schools located in the Gram Panchayat area and submit the proposal for their fulfillment to the *panchayat*.
- Will try to get support from *Bhamashahs/Donors/People's Representatives* for the development of government schools.
- Appear in monthly meetings of Gram Panchayat and apprise/ make them aware of the progress of the teaching system and other activities of all state primary/ Upper Primary schools run under Panchayati Raj located in *Gram Panchayat* and ask for their support.
- Efforts will be made to get the funds sanctioned from various schemes run by the Gram Panchayat, viz. State Finance Commission (SFC), the respective Finance Commission and MNREGA, etc., for developing government Primary and Upper Primary schools of the Gram panchayat area.
- Ensure regular meetings are held and maintain constant contact with the Chairman and members of the School Management Committee (SMC), and redressal of grievances and parent-teacher



Council of Government Primary/Upper Primary schools located in Gram Panchayat area.

- Will ensure the disposal of complaints received from the members of the chairman of the School Management Committee (SMC) and parents by noting them in the register.
- Will act as the link between the parents, teachers, students, schools and the block level officer. They will ensure passing the required information on both sides.
- Will ensure compliance with the guidelines issued by the Commissioner, Rajasthan Early Education Council in relation to the work, as the in-charge of cluster reference centre.
- Will sanction the emergency and casual leaves of all the teachers of Primary schools and other academic personnel working on consolidated honorarium.
- The primary investigation of complaints of government, Primary/Upper Primary teachers, heads of institutions of Gram Panchayat area will be done by the concerned ex-officio PEEO.
- Separate orders are circulated regarding the right to disciplinary action by the officer under 17 CCA against teachers working in the Gram Panchayat area government Primary/Upper Primary schools.
- Ensure compliance with the guidelines issued from time to time by the State Government, Commissioner, Rajasthan Elementary Education Council, Director of Elementary Education, Deputy Director, District Education Officer, Elementary and District Project Coordinator, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
- The ex-officio PEEO will ensure that monthly reports will be uploaded on the *Shala Darshan* portal by the 10th of every month.
- Given the responsibility of inspection and administrative and academic supervision of all Primary/Upper Primary schools under Panchayati Raj in Gram Panchayat. And to coordinate with the concerned Block Elementary Education Officer and District Education Officer for effective supervision of elementary education activities in all Primary/Upper Primary schools under Panchayati Raj operated in the Gram Panchayat area.
- Preparation of an action plan for the development of all Primary/Upper Primary schools under the Panchayati Raj located in the village panchayat, etc.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Observations**

The main finding was that the PEEOs were not informed of their roles and responsibilities clearly. Some modules were shared with them during the training sessions, where



the BEEO informed them about the orders they are supposed to follow. However, the interpretation of the roles and responsibilities is totally up to their own selves, with no incentives or punishments on their performances.

During the interviews and school visits, it was found that as far as supervision is considered, the schools were visited regularly by the PEEOs, that fall under their panchayat areas, however there was no fixed number of visits scheduled. The *Utkrisht Vidyalayas* were at least inspected twice a month, and other Primary and Upper Primary schools were inspected once by the PEEOs.

During their inspection, the attendance registers of the teachers and the students, the diaries maintained by the teachers on students' performances under the SMILE 2 program, students' notebooks, attending random classes, comparing the developments of the schools' previous records and analysing their progress, etc., are considered. All the reports of these inspections are then passed on to the BEEO.

They are the propagators of the nudge theory. The PEEOs are mainly to bring the positive change, and assist in the functioning of schools, rather than punishing, creating a deterrence, or complaining about inefficiencies. They work on the grassroot level, and deal with the

school staff, students, parents, Panchayat members, officials like BEEO, etc. They are the coordinators and try to make this coordination smooth among all the participants. They are positioned to inspect the loopholes and motivate all the participants to what better roles each one can play, informing them about the government's policies and programmes. In short, they are the guide and mentors in all the local rural areas in matters of education.

But they are not ministers without portfolios. If there is any act of disobedience, they can, through their discretion, punish under the powers vested in them through 16CC Notice and 17CC Notice.

### CHALLENGES

There are a lot of challenges that they face. Starting from the distribution of powers and duties, which remains a grey area as most of their duties are repetitive and overlap with the authorities above them. This negatively impacts the performance of the officers. They are over-burdened with these diversified duties, and not only these, but most of the PEEOs also complain that they are assigned even more duties during the elections, Polio drive, Census, and other occasions. They are left with no time for their personal life and for leading a healthy lifestyle. That negatively impacts their work and health.

The state has drawn a basic broad line for the activities they are supposed to perform, but there are no particulars given. So, they are told what to do, not how to do it. The method of execution of their duties is up to them. Although sounds liberating, it has equal chances of mishandling and irresponsiveness, as there is no pre-service training to guide them. For instance they are in charge of school supervision, but there are no specific detailed criteria for how the supervision will be done.

A major part of the performance of their responsibilities depends on their inner character, thoughts and goodwill. There is no reward or punishment policy to motivate the motivators—no pre-service or in-service training for PEEOs. So, the only way for them to learn is through their own experiences or with the help of their peers.

Another challenge is that, rather than pure decision-making autonomy, it can be said that they instead have situational autonomy. They work within the broad frameworks, the governmental orders and in the direction of required outcomes. But the decisions at the micro level are left to their discretion. In fiscal matters, they are given the autonomy to prioritise the spending, raise funds from *Bhamashas* (local representatives who support on their own for the cause of education

through monetary help or any other form), etc.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The execution of all the programmes related to school development, management and inspection at the ground level is done by the PEEOs. So, they are the potential change-makers in the rural schools of Rajasthan.

The lack of any provision for pre-service training is a huge loophole that needs to be addressed timely. They should be clear about their roles and responsibilities before entering the ground. So, there should be pre-service training for PEEOs to develop their personalities according to their job.

There should be timely personality and skill development training to update them with their job requirements, as they act as administrators, managers, heads of institutes, teachers, panchayat members, etc. Then only their existence in the administrative chain will be justified.

To keep the decentralisation drive effective, the over-burdening of PEEOs should be addressed. The clerical part of their job can be shared with other members of the staff, a separate team for supervision can be prepared, and they can be involved in the development of more innovative approaches and societal interaction to promote enrolment in schools and quality management of education.

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