

# From Control to Empowerment: A Paradigm Shift in the Discourse of Educational Supervision

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**Abstract:** As educational reforms intensify and societal emphasis shifts towards empowerment, the traditional discourse paradigm of management and control in educational supervision faces growing challenges. This paper explores the transformation of this discourse paradigm through the lens of empowerment, analyzing its distinct characteristics, potential pathways, and effective strategies. This paper begins by reviewing the concept of empowerment and examining the current research landscape surrounding the discourse paradigm in educational supervision. Subsequently, we conduct a comparative analysis of the “control” and “empowerment” paradigms, highlighting their essential differences. This analysis illuminates the key characteristics of an empowerment-oriented approach to educational supervision, particularly its emphasis on dialogue, collaboration, participation, and, crucially, empowerment itself. Ultimately, this research advocates for a shift in educational supervision towards an empowerment-oriented discourse system. This entails a multi-pronged approach: transforming ingrained beliefs, embracing renewed pedagogical concepts, fostering methodological innovation, and optimizing existing mechanisms and strategies within educational supervision. These changes are proposed to facilitate the more effective alignment of educational supervision with the pursuit of high-quality education.

**Keywords:** Educational supervision; Paradigm shift; Control; Empowerment

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the deepening of the new curriculum reform and the introduction of the double reduction policy, China’s education field has experienced profound changes <sup>[1]</sup>. As an important means to ensure the smooth advancement of education reform, the role orientation, function, and discourse expression of educational supervision are undergoing corresponding changes. Traditional educational supervision is control-oriented and emphasizes top-down supervision, inspection, and evaluation <sup>[2]</sup>. However, this discourse paradigm of control has increasingly prominent limitations when it emphasizes the independent development of schools, the professional improvement of teachers, and the personalized development of students, and it is difficult to meet the needs of educational development in the new era.

The importance of empowerment for educational development arises naturally. The concept is not entirely

new, and its roots can be traced back to the field of social work and community development in the early twentieth century. It was first proposed by Solomon to describe the process in which community residents improve their sense of self-efficacy and mastery by participating in community affairs <sup>[3]</sup>. Later, the concept of empowerment was gradually introduced into education, management, psychology, and other fields, and was given more abundant connotations and practical value.

In the field of education, the concept of empowerment emphasizes education as a liberating and developing force, valuing the autonomy, initiative, and creativity of students, teachers, and schools as members of the learning community <sup>[4]</sup>. Empowerment educational reform aims to develop students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, cooperative spirit, and innovative consciousness, so they can become independent, confident, and responsible lifelong learners. Teachers are encouraged to actively participate in curriculum development, teaching, research, and school management, enhance their professional ability and leadership, and develop into reflective, research-oriented, and expert professionals. Schools are given greater autonomy in running schools, stimulate school vitality and innovation ability, and form their own school-running characteristics and advantages.

The idea of empowerment highlights the change from external control to ignite the internal drive to support autonomous development, in contrast to the conventional management and control paradigm <sup>[5]</sup>. It is necessary to change the emphasis from one-way indoctrination to two-way interaction, valuing learning and growth; change the emphasis from the final product to the development process, valuing communication and teamwork. The concept of empowerment was introduced into the field of educational supervision as a reflection and transcendence of the traditional mode of supervision. Its goals are to foster the development of a more open, democratic, and equitable culture of supervision and to shift the focus of supervision work from compliance to development and from supervision to support.

Based on this, this study, through a comparative analysis of educational supervision in the context of two different concepts of control and empowerment, deeply discusses the characteristics, transformation paths, and practical strategies of the discourse paradigm of educational supervision from the perspective of empowerment. On the one hand, through comparative analysis, it reveals the differences in educational views, power views, and values behind it, and probes deeply into the nature and function of educational supervision, to promote the renewal and development of educational supervision theory. On the other hand, through the analysis of paradigm characteristics, transformation paths, and strategies, new discourse strategies and methods are provided to guide the practice of educational supervision, and the work of educational supervision is promoted from inspection to reform to evaluation to construction, from supervision and accountability to service support.

## **2. Comparative analysis of discourse paradigms of educational supervision**

As two different concepts of educational supervision, the difference between control and empowerment is not only reflected in practice but also rooted in the different modes of discourse expression.

First, from the perspective of discourse subjects, the paradigm of discourse control shows obvious characteristics of normalization and authoritativeness. Its leaders are mainly supervisory departments and experts who have the right to speak, while schools and teachers are more likely to be evaluated and guided. On the other hand, the enabling discourse paradigm advocates the participation of multiple subjects, emphasizing equal dialogue and consultation among stakeholders such as supervisory departments, schools, teachers, students, parents, and communities, and building partnerships to jointly participate in the educational supervision process.

Second, in terms of discourse content, the management discourse paradigm pays more attention to the problems and deficiencies in school work, focusing on the inspection, evaluation, and accountability of school work, and its discourse content tends to focus on standards and norms, lacking the advantages and potential of schools and teachers. On the contrary, the enabling discourse paradigm is oriented towards development and improvement, focusing on the advantages and potential of schools, exploring the successful experience of schools and teachers, and providing targeted guidance and support. Its discourse content is more focused on development and improvement.

Third, from the perspective of discourse mode, the discourse paradigm of control focuses on one-way information transmission, mainly using instructions, criticism, error correction, etc., lacking equal dialogue and communication; schools and teachers are often in a passive state of acceptance, and it is difficult to express their true ideas and needs. On the other hand, the enabling discourse paradigm emphasizes two-way interaction and negotiation, advocates listening, understanding, and respect, and encourages schools and teachers to express opinions and solve problems through consultation; its discourse mode pays more attention to equality, respect, and understanding.

Finally, in terms of discourse objectives, the management discourse paradigm aims at controlling and standardizing school behaviors, focusing on schools' ability to implement policies and instructions from superiors, pursuing the unity and standardization of education, and limiting the autonomy and creativity of schools and teachers. The enabling discourse paradigm aims to stimulate the autonomy and creativity of schools and teachers, encourage schools to form school-running characteristics, support teachers to carry out teaching innovation, pursue diversity and individuation of education, and promote the independent development of schools and teachers.

### **3. Main characteristics of the paradigm of educational supervision from the perspective of empowerment**

In sharp contrast to the discourse paradigm of management and control, the discourse paradigm of educational supervision from the perspective of empowerment presents a more open, inclusive, and developing trend, and its main characteristics are reflected in the following aspects:

- (1) Conversational: The enabling discourse paradigm places a strong emphasis on the idea that equal discussion and two-way communication characterize educational supervision. It also highlights the value of listening to the views and opinions of various stakeholders, including communities, parents, instructors, students, and schools. In addition to actively encouraging supervisors to voice their genuine opinions and actively attending to their needs and concerns, supervisors should also actively create a forum for open and inclusive discourse.
- (2) Collaborative: To collaboratively solve issues and advance development, the enabling discourse paradigm supports the creation of equal and mutual trusting cooperation between the supervisory department, schools, and teachers. Supervisors are no longer superior evaluators; rather, they are partners who develop with teachers and schools, supporting their professional growth through resource sharing, cooperative innovation, and other means.
- (3) Participatory: Schools, teachers, and students are encouraged by enabling discourse paradigm to actively engage in the entire process of educational supervision, collaborate to create supervision plans, take part in the supervising process, and communicate the supervision's outcomes. The modern supervision method involves the engagement of various subjects in an open and cooperative inquiry aimed at improving the effectiveness and pertinence of supervision, rather than a closed expert diagnosis.

- (4) **Autonomous:** The goal of the enabling discourse paradigm is to enable educators and schools to find their own advantages, develop their own skills, and accomplish autonomous growth by igniting their inner motivation. Supervisors can boost the confidence and drive of schools and teachers by encouraging them to take the initiative to seek development and improvement by using more positive language, such as encouragement, affirmation, and guidance, rather than negative language, such as commands and accusations.

## **4. Construction paths of the enabling paradigm of educational supervision**

The transformation of the discourse paradigm of educational supervision from the perspective of empowerment is not achieved overnight, and it needs multi-faceted and multi-level coordination. This study discusses the paths to constructing an empowerment-oriented educational supervision discourse system from four aspects: concept change, concept renewal, method innovation, and mechanism optimization.

### **4.1. Changing the concept and establishing the empowerment consciousness**

Supervisory departments and supervisors must first get rid of the traditional official ideology and supervision orientation, change their role orientation, and establish a people- and development-oriented empowerment consciousness. Serving schools, teachers, and students should always be the foundation of supervision work, with the goal of empowering these groups of people as the beginning and conclusion of the process. Regarding schools as the topic of educational supervision, it is important to fully respect their autonomy in conducting their operations, and encourage them to take the lead and actively participate in the monitoring process.

### **4.2. Updating the concept and building the empowerment discourse system**

The enabling approach takes the promotion of development as the fundamental purpose of evaluation, attaches importance to the diagnosis, feedback, and improvement functions of evaluation, and helps schools and teachers to identify problems, analyze causes, and find solutions. In the process of supervision, we should be good at finding the bright spots and advantages of the school and teachers, and use more encouraging, positive, and suggestive language to stimulate their internal motivation and development potential. An equal, open, and transparent communication mechanism is established to encourage schools and teachers to actively express their opinions, and supervision departments should listen carefully and respond positively to jointly explore solutions to problems.

### **4.3. Innovating methods and enriching empowerment discourse strategies**

Flexible and diverse supervision methods are explored, such as immersive supervision, companion service, project management, etc., to enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of supervision. The supervision and evaluation index system and evaluation tools are improved to emphasize the developmental evaluation orientation, focusing on the efforts and progress of schools and teachers and weakening the quantitative ranking and results orientation. The Internet, big data, and other information technologies are utilized to innovate supervision methods and improve supervision efficiency. Some examples are establishing a network supervision platform, carrying out online and offline supervision exchanges, and using data analysis to accurately guide schools.

### **4.4. Optimizing the mechanism and perfecting the enabling discourse environment**

A scientific, standardized, and perfect educational supervision system is established to provide an institutional

guarantee for the generation and application of empowering discourse. It is also necessary to build a professional and professional supervision team, improve supervisor empowerment awareness and ability, and provide talent support for the effective implementation of empowerment discourse. A positive atmosphere of respect, trust, and support is created for educational supervision in society, leading to a good social environment.

## 5. Conclusion

The concept of empowerment provides an important direction for the transformation of the discourse paradigm of educational supervision in the new era. This study has conducted a preliminary theoretical discussion on the transformation path of the discourse paradigm of educational supervision from the perspective of empowerment. In the future, more practical cases should be combined to deepen the research to better promote the empowerment and implementation of the concept in the field of educational supervision, and ultimately promote the transformation and improvement of educational supervision and the high-quality development of educational cause.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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