

Supervision of Teachers in Mbire District Primary Schools in Zimbabwe: Working With Teachers for Effective Schools

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Received: 07.07.2019

Accepted: 15.07.2019

Published: 26.07.2019

Abstract: Supervision is the process of working with teachers to improve their performance in their professional chores. This study sought to assess the impact of supervision of teachers by heads of schools in Mbire District in Central Zimbabwe. The study was quantitative and utilised a descriptive survey design. The population comprised of all primary school heads and teachers in Mbire District. The sample consisted of 200 teachers and 20 heads of schools. Of the sample respondents, 120 were males and 100 females. All the information was collected through a questionnaire which had both close-ended and open-ended questions. The study revealed that both teachers and heads concurred that supervision as it obtained in their schools needed more time and resources. It also revealed that heads were using models of supervision that did not promote teacher growth and motivation. The study recommends that heads of schools should not be allocated a class to teach if they are to effectively carry out their supervisory roles. The study also recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should organise workshops and in-service training sessions to help heads acquire better skills for supervising teachers.

Keywords: Supervision, Effectiveness, Primary school, District, Teachers and Heads.

INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe, as Madziyire [1] posits, there are many officials who are expected to supervise the teaching / learning process. These include the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, The Permanent Secretary of Education, Provincial Education Directors, Civil Service Commission Inspectors, Education Inspectors and Heads schools. Out of all these supervisors, the head of school is the only one who resides in the school and is in constant touch with the teachers [2]. The school head in Zimbabwe according to Sibanda, Mutopa and Maphosa [3], oversees teaching and learning in the school to ensure that quality instruction takes place. In other words, effective supervision affects the quality of teaching by teachers. In Zimbabwe therefore, the head is at the epicentre of supervision of teachers with other officers merely complementing their efforts [4]. Given this important role that heads of schools play during the supervision process it becomes necessary to assess the effectiveness of their supervisory practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sergiovanni and Starratt [5] contend that the concept “effective supervision is elusive. Stones [6] argues that many teacher supervisors still use methods of supervision characterised as theoretical, idiosyncratic and harmful. On the other hand, Stoops [7] states that since the nineteenth century, supervision has remained to be understood and practiced as inspection and control. Musaazi [8] concurs, when he observes that the word inspection has just been replaced by supervision, yet in practice, what is referred to as supervision is carried out as inspection.

Glatthorn [9] defines supervision as a process of facilitating the professional growth of a teacher, primarily by giving the teacher the feedback about classroom interactions and helping the teacher make use of that feedback in order to make teaching more effective. On the other hand, Harris [10] spells out clearly the purpose of supervision as the art and science

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DOI : 10.36344/ccjihss.2019.v05i07.006

of maintaining and improving the teaching and learning process of the school. Firth [11] postulates that supervision should provide both capable and less capable teachers with information about their teaching behaviour so that they can continue to develop teaching skills and improve the quality of their performance. Marks, Stoops and Stoops [12] state that the main purpose of supervision is to achieve self-directed growth.

Hoerr [13] asserts that inspection practices of the early 1900s still linger on in many schools. Most heads of schools are not aware that supervision has progressed at the theoretical level. What still reigns in our school system is inspection as observed by Cogan [14] and Goldhammer *et al.*, [15]. As Gaziel [16] posits, in the school system it is difficult, if not impossible to draw fine lines between the administrative, supervisory and leadership foundations of heads as many activities overlap within these roles. Nyanga and Reece [17] state that heads of schools perceive supervision as spelt out in their main functions and duties by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's Standard Control Unit in the "Job description for a Head". Heads perceive supervision as an administrative role and administration and supervision are confusing roles to be played by one individual without problems arising [17].

Holland and Adams [18] contend that when administrators and supervisors work with things and ideas rather than with people in pursuing school goals, they tend to be operating in an administrative way rather than a supervisory way. Heads tend to find themselves in between. Maphosa and Mubika [19] state that it is at times usually difficult for the heads to adjust their behaviours from administrator to that of supervisor. Heads themselves according to Gaziel [16] are products of inspection and find it difficult to realise the difference between inspection and supervision and from their day to day operations, they associate themselves with administration which is usually assessment and evaluation.

Musungu and Nasongo [20] argue that teachers generally dislike being the object of supervision, they tend to perceive supervision as inherent in the administrative hierarchy and to see the head as the supervisor as being somewhat a threat. Kruger [21] says that teachers usually associate instructional supervision with rating of teachers. Chung [22] state that teachers still perceive supervision as a form of inspection and evaluation and it is characterised by strain and tension. Supervisors are seen by teachers as distant and much of what goes on in supervision is artificial and ritualized and both heads and teachers do not know what is expected of them in supervision [6].

Madziyire [1] posits that most teachers are apprehensive about being supervised by their heads. They find it and describe the supervision by their heads

as a "watchdog" type of supervision. Kapfunde [23] points out that teachers' anxieties are almost universally aroused when a supervisor carries out their supervision and some teachers put it strongly by indicating that some heads behave as if they were investigating genocide in Rwanda when they supervise teachers. As a result, teachers do not perceive supervision as a worthwhile activity [24]. Cogan in says that one of the most important factors which affect the effectiveness of supervision is the unclassified, ambivalent relationship of teachers and supervisors [14, 25]. Teachers saw that head's job as a "bar" to their creativeness and imagination. Both the teachers and heads perceive supervision as inspection [25]. As Knezevich [26] advises, teachers want their head as supervisor to be "a colleague not a boss". The head as a supervisor must be approachable, supportive, and less relying on bureaucratic power [26].

Statement of the Problem

In the process of improving teacher instructional competencies, many educators have come to realize that the quality of instruction depends not only on teachers but on heads of schools as well. Heads of schools have the responsibility of assisting teachers in making decisions regarding the quality of their teaching competencies. Principals require conceptual skills in supervision in its broadest sense in order to ensure that they fully understand what their roles and tasks as supervisors of schools are.

Research Questions

1. What Models of supervision do heads commonly use?
2. Can heads distinguish between supervision and inspection?
3. What are teachers' perceptions towards supervision by their heads?
4. How can heads improve the process of supervision in the schools?

Purpose of the study

The study sought to assess the effectiveness of supervisory practices by primary school heads in order to reveal what the status-quo looks like to either consolidate on the positive aspects and improve on areas where there are weaknesses.

Significance of the study

It is hoped that the findings from this study would help heads of schools to supervise their teachers more effectively for the benefit of teachers and ultimately learners. Findings would also go a long way in changing heads and teachers' attitudes towards supervision.

Limitations

In view of the small size of the sample and sub-samples, the findings of the study are likely to have

limited generalisability. The descriptive survey design used has its limitations as well.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to an assessment of the effectiveness of supervision of primary school teachers in Mbire District using a sample of 200 teachers and 20 heads of schools. The head of school was the only supervisor focused by the study. Other supervisors within the structure of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education as well as the Civil Service Commission were outside the purview of this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. According to Cohen and Manion [27], the descriptive survey design looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data. Random sampling was used to come up with the twenty (20) schools from where the twenty (20) heads of schools and the two hundred (200) teachers came from. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaire to the schools under study. The same method was used to collect the completed questionnaires in order to maximize on the rate of return. Non-returns, as Phillips and Pugh [28] observe, introduce a bias in as much as they are likely to differ in many ways from respondents thereby adversely affecting reliability and validity of the findings. Data gathered through the questionnaire produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and

inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to investigate the supervisory practices of heads of schools in Zimbabwean primary schools. This section is presented in two parts, namely, presentation and discussion of the data.

Presentation of the Data

Table-1: Category of respondents (N=220)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Heads	20	9
Teachers	200	91
Totals	220	100

Table-1 above shows that of the sample respondents, the vast majority were teachers (91%) and only 9% heads. This is to be expected since in each school there is only one head and many teachers. The sample therefore, fully represents both categories of respondents in the school set-up.

Table-2: Distribution of respondents by sex (N=220)

Category	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	18	90	102	51	120	55
Female	2	10	98	49	100	45
Totals	20	100	200	100	220	100

Table-2 shows that male heads constituted 90% of the heads and females were a mere 10%. On the teachers side, males were 51% of the respondents and females 49%. Altogether males were 55% of the sample against 45% of the females.

Table-3: Composition of respondents by professional qualifications

Professional Qualifications	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Untrained	0	0	55	27	55	25
Certificate in Education	6	30	38	19	44	20
Diploma in Education	0	0	100	50	100	45
Bachelors Degree	12	60	7	4	19	9
Masters Degree	2	10	0	0	2	1
Totals	20	100	200	100	220	100

The information on Table-3 above shows that as expected, all heads are in possession of one form of professional qualification or the other. 30% of the heads are Certificate in Education holders, 60% first degree holders and 10% Masters degree holders. On the other hand, 27% of the teachers were untrained, 19%

were holders of the Certificate in Education, 50% were Diploma holders and 4% had a Bachelor's Degree. Overall, 45% of the respondents were Diploma in Education holders, 25% were untrained, 20% Certificate in Education holders, 9% first degree holders and 1% were in possession of a Master's Degree.

Table-4: Composition of respondents by teaching experience (N=220)

Experience in years	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
0 – 5	0	0	76	38	76	35
6 – 10	1	5	100	50	101	46
11 – 15	2	10	18	9	20	9
16 – 20	4	20	4	2	8	4
21 and above	13	65	2	1	15	6

Totals	20	100	200	100	220	100
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Table-4 above reveals that the majority of heads were experienced and having served the education system for more than 21 years (65%). 20% had served the system for between 16 and 20 years and only 10% and 5% had served the system for between 11 to 15 years and 6 to 10 years respectively. 50% of the teachers had served for 6 to 10 years, 38% had 0 to 5

years of experience, 9% had 11 to 15 years of experience and 2% and 1% had 16 to 20 years and 21 and above years of experience respectively. Overall, the majority of the respondents had served the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for 10 years and below (81%).

Table-5: Responses to the question: “What is the frequency of supervision of teaching at your school?” (N=220)

Frequency of supervision	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Once per week	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once per month	18	90	25	12	43	20
Fortnightly	2	10	10	5	12	5
Once per term	0	0	56	28	56	25
Annually	0	0	4	2	4	2
Never at all	0	0	105	53	105	48
Totals	20	100	200	100	220	100

As Table-5 above shows, 90% of the heads indicated that supervision of teaching was conducted once per month and 10% said it was conducted once after every two weeks. Teachers on the other hand indicated that supervision of teaching was never conducted (53%), 28% said it was done once per term, 12% indicated it was done once per month, 5% and 2%

stated that it was conducted fortnightly and once per year respectively. Overall, 48% of the respondents stated that supervision of teaching was not carried out at their schools, 25% stated that it was conducted once per term and 20% indicated that it was done once per month.

Table-6: Responses to the question: “What do you consider to be the main purpose of teacher supervision?” (N=220)

Purpose of Supervision	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Helping the teacher to grow professionally	15	75	15	7	30	14
Looking for faults	0	0	160	80	160	73
Evaluating the teacher for promotion	5	25	5	3	10	4
In order for head to prove to seniors that he/she conducts it	0	0	20	10	20	9
Totals	20	100	200	100	220	100

The information on Table-6 above shows that there is a discrepancy in the responses of heads and teachers about what they perceive to be the main purpose of supervision. Whereas 75% of the heads

indicated that supervision was used to help the teachers grow professionally, the majority of teachers (80%) thought that it was used for fault-finding.

Table-7: Responses to the question: “Does the head make follow up visits to help teachers who did not perform well?”

Response Category	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Never	0	0	150	75	150	68
Sometimes	0	0	40	20	40	18
Often	0	0	0	0	0	0
Always	20	100	10	5	30	14
Totals	20	100	200	100	220	100

The information on Table-7 shows that all the heads (100%) indicated that they always made follow-up visits to assist those teachers who had displayed challenges during the supervision of teaching and yet 75% of the teachers stated that heads did not make follow-up visits to assist teachers who did not perform well.

The questionnaire had two open-ended questions that bolstered data from the close-ended questions. The first question wanted to find out from both heads and teachers on what they perceived to be the role of the head in teacher supervision. Most responses from heads revealed that heads perceived the head as an advisor and a professional mentor to the teachers. Most teachers stated that they saw the head as

an inspector, fault finder, and intruder in their classrooms. The second question wanted to find out from all the respondents how they thought heads of schools should conduct supervision of teaching. The most common responses from both heads and teachers were; heads should provide genuine professional guidance to teachers; heads should assist teachers with planning of lessons before delivery; heads should organise staff development sessions so that teachers share teaching skills; heads should devote more of their time to supervision of the teaching process and that the education inspectors should complement the work of heads as far as supervision is concerned.

DISCUSSION

Results from the study reveal that in Makoni District and probably in most rural districts in Zimbabwe, the majority of heads are male. The majority of respondents were also male. The significance of this statistic is that it tallies with the observation by Madziyire [1] who argues that in most remote rural schools the majority of teachers and administrators are male as most female teachers shun those areas due to difficult working conditions. The implications of this result is that, it would not come as a surprise if the heads are viewed as autocratic supervisors as evidence from many studies indicate that most male supervisors are dictatorial, autocratic and intolerant [22, 3, 4].

The information from the study reveal that there is still a significant number of teachers who are not in possession of professional qualifications. This, therefore, demands that heads of schools intensify their supervision activities. According to Maphosa and Mubika [19], teachers with inadequate qualifications rely on the school based supervision structure to develop their capacities. This situation also applies to teachers with fewer years of experience in the school system. It is through a sustained supervision regime that they develop the skills and capabilities that are required to guide the learning process [1].

Results from the study indicate that there is a discrepancy between views of teachers and those of heads regarding the frequency of supervision of teaching in the schools. Whereas the majority of heads indicated that they conducted it once per month, the majority of teachers stated that it was never conducted at all. Of the two groups of respondents it is most likely that teachers are giving more accurate information since this supervision is done for them and naturally heads have to give a picture that is not likely to compromise their positions. As Mlilo [4] posits, most heads engage in administrative chores most of the time at the expense of teacher supervision.

Data reveal that heads believe that the main purpose of teacher supervision is to help the teacher to grow professionally. However, teachers have a

different view altogether. They believe that the purpose of teacher supervision is looking for faults. This tallies with findings by Musungu and Nasongo [20] who argue that teachers generally dislike being the object of supervision, they tend to perceive supervision as inherent in the administrative hierarchy and to see the head as the supervisor as being somewhat a threat. Madziyire [1] adds that most teachers are apprehensive about being supervised by their heads as a “watchdog” type of supervision and as a result teachers do not perceive supervision as a worthwhile activity.

Most teachers stated that their heads did not make follow up visits to help teachers who had challenges with their teaching activities. This defeats the whole purpose of teacher supervision. Supervision should be done to promote the professional growth of teachers and if the weaknesses identified from their work are not highlighted, it does not help them. As Kruger [21] observes, the head is expected to supervise all his / her teachers to ensure high standards of learning and teaching and should therefore provide both formative and summative education of teachers through supervision.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the background of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- Most heads in rural primary schools in Mbire District of Zimbabwe are male with very few female ones.
- The shortage of qualified teachers in some rural districts of Zimbabwe is still a major challenge for most schools.
- Supervision of teaching is not properly done in most rural schools.
- Heads and teachers perceive the purpose of supervision differently. Heads believe that the main purpose of teacher supervision is to help the teacher grow professionally, teachers see it as a fault finding exercise.
- Heads did not conduct follow-up visits to help teachers who were facing challenges in their activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations:

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should deliberately encourage more qualified women teachers to apply for headship posts in remote districts so as to provide the girl children with role models and also to have gender balance in the posts of heads. This could be done through some incentive for all female teachers who apply to head schools in remote schools.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in liason with the Ministry of

Higher and Tertiary Education should look for places for teacher training in teacher training colleges for prospective teachers who are indigenous residents of remote districts so that after training, they are deployed in their home areas where they are likely to stay longer and reduce the shortage of qualified teachers.

- Heads of schools need adequate induction courses, staff development and in-service training as well as peer review sessions by fellow heads to equip them with the wherewithals to carryout proper supervision of the teaching process.
- The policy of engaging heads as instructional supervisors as well as administrators leaves heads with heavy work loads and create role conflict and confusion in the execution of their duties. This policy needs to be revised so that heads devote most of their time supervising the teaching process. For such things as the supervision of construction of structures in the school, these can be left in the hands of members of the School Development Committees.

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