

Teachers' Perceptions towards Classroom Instructional Supervision: A Case Study of Nkayi District in Zimbabwe

By

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Abstract

Learning is central to the functions of a school and it is important that instruction which is used as a basic tool to promote learning is perfected. It is generally believed that if teachers are left to themselves they may not try to develop their teaching skills. This then, underlines the significance of instructional supervision to help teachers improve their teaching skills. However, as Harris (1985) observes there is a general belief that teachers tend to associate instructional supervision with fault-finding. As a result, it is argued that most teachers tend to become anxious and resentful of the process of instructional supervision. Against the background of literature review which projects instructional supervision as a useful activity, this article draws on a qualitative inquiry of teachers' perceptions towards instructional supervision. The study purposively sampled 48 qualified teachers from Nkayi District in Matabeleland North in Zimbabwe. The sample had 31 males and 17 females. The findings indicate that school teachers in the sample perceived classroom instructional supervision in a positive way. The preferences for the frequency of supervision of instruction, types of supervisors and purposes of supervision all point to the fact that teachers perceive supervision in a positive way. However, findings revealed that in spite of their positive attitudes towards supervision, teachers felt that the way it was carried out in their schools left a lot to be desired. The study recommends that there must be well planned programmes of instructional supervision which can promote the quality of teaching in the schools.

Keywords: *Supervision, instruction, perceptions, teachers, classroom*

1. Introduction

The supervision of instruction is an important activity in promoting effective teaching in schools. The primary purpose of supervision is the improvement of instruction by fostering the continued professional development of all teachers. Such improvement and development rely on a supervisory system that is dedicated to helping teachers to be successful in their lesson deliveries. Supervision of teachers by heads, deputy heads and education officers is a common practice in Zimbabwean schools. Instructional supervision is as old as formal education itself. Until recently, the concept of instructional supervision was known as inspection which referred to the specific occasion when the whole school was examined and evaluated as a place of learning (Acheson, 1987). Frazer (2001) states that many teachers especially student teachers, newly qualified and the under-qualified teachers may not have mastered sufficient skills for effective teaching. Hence, the need for instructional supervision. According to Beach and Reinhartz (1989) instruction involves tasks such as telling, explaining, defining, providing examples, stressing critical attributes, modelling and demonstrating. What is important to the instructional supervisor is the extent to which the instructor successfully accomplishes the instructional tasks. The instructional supervisor should be able to guide the staff to achieve these tasks in order to ensure learning goes on. More than that, the instructional supervisor should be conversant with what constitutes effective teaching/instruction. The supervisor should also be able to detect the absence of such effective instruction/teaching behaviours.

Statement of the Problem

The study sought to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards the process of instructional supervision.

Purpose of the Study

The study attempted to identify and establish the views that teachers have about instructional supervision. Thus, it sought to expose teachers feelings towards current supervision practices in their schools so as to come up with suggestions that might help bring about positive attitudes towards instructional supervision.

Research Objectives

The study has a two-fold objective. It intends:

- To identify teachers' views regarding instructional supervision.
- To discover the models of supervision preferred by teachers.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is instructional supervision seen as a helpful exercise by teachers or they see it as one of those routines that interfere with their teaching?
2. Do heads of schools (principals) effectively help their teachers to improve their teaching skills?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study stemmed from the fact that it attempted to identify and establish the views of teachers which are prevailing in our schools about instructional supervision. Supervision is very important in the development of our educational system and how teachers perceived it is equally important. It was also hoped that the findings of the study would help heads of schools realise the feelings of teachers towards instructional supervision so that they properly guide them in their lesson delivery. This study also hoped to enable teachers to realise the positive role played by instructional supervision towards their professional development.

Limitations of the Study

In view of the small size of the sample and sub-samples, the findings of the study, therefore, will have limited generalisability. It has to be pointed also that feelings about an issue are essentially subjective, and cannot be measured accurately. More-over, since feelings may vary in intensity, what may be interpreted positively by one individual may be interpreted differently by another. In other words, feelings have no universally recognised and accepted scales of measurement and measures that were used in this study cannot be considered to be very accurate.

Delimitations of the Study

The study delimited the investigation to establishing the views of teachers towards instructional supervision. Views of forty eight (48) teachers were used in the research. Perceptions from other stakeholders like heads or principals and pupils were not sought by the study.

2. Literature Review

In a study of supervisory behaviour and teacher satisfaction Glatthorn (2007) found that the improvement of the teacher-learning process was dependent upon teacher attitudes towards supervision. According to Glatthorn (2001), unless teachers view supervision as a process of promoting professional growth and student learning the supervisory exercise would not have the desired effect. Glatthorn's study came up with several findings about teachers' preferences regarding supervisory activities. Many teachers indicated that they preferred to be supervised by people with more than fifteen years of teaching

experience. Most teachers also preferred immediate discussions with their supervisors about the lessons observed. They also expected the supervisor to be caring, understanding and helpful. The relationship between the teacher and the supervisor was expected to be collegial rather than authoritarian. Teachers usually associated instructional supervision with the rating of teachers (Kapfunde). According to Kapfunde (1990) supervision is used to measure the performance of teachers.

According to Cogan (1973) it is important to create conditions that will make the teacher comfortable during the supervision process. For example, where the supervisor and the supervisee have cordial relations, there are high chances of the teacher feeling comfortable during the supervision process. It is also argued that where teachers are aware of the roles of supervision for their professional development, they are likely to view the classroom observations positively; but where the teachers' views on supervision are negative, it is most likely that teachers may view observations as the perfect platforms for the supervisor to attack them (Reepen and Barr, 2010).

After the classroom visit and observation, the supervisory conference is the most direct procedure to assist the teacher (Cogan 1973). The reason for having such a conference is that the teacher could be anxious to know the outcome and how the supervisor felt about what have been observed. Teachers frequently worry about this conference and some may be fearful that the supervisor was not pleased. On the other hand, some teachers who may be confident that the lesson was good will be eager for words of praise.

Reepen and Barr (2011) suggest that most teachers prefer a few words of a lesson- observed immediately after that particular lesson. This underlines the importance of informing a teacher about his/her performance as quickly as possible to ease any fears that the teacher may have about the lesson (MacNally and Isbro 2001). At some schools, supervisors take a long time before they discuss findings of observed lessons. Kapfunde (1990) observes that in Zimbabwean schools at times, the conference never takes place. If the supervisor is the head of the school, he/she may not have time to discuss with the teacher. According to Cramer (1999) some supervisors lacked planning and dealt with abstract and theoretical problems. Teachers need more straight forward help from supervisors. Experienced teachers wanted help related to teaching methods. All teachers want supervisory practice which promises real assistance.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative methodology and made use of a case study research strategy. The methodology and the designs were selected because they afforded the teachers the opportunity to relive their experiences in their interactions with instructional supervisors. The population consisted of forty-eight teachers from one circuit in Nkayi District in Matabeleland North province of Zimbabwe. The study explored the perceptions of both primary school and secondary school teachers towards classroom instructional supervision. As Fraser (2000) argues, "many teachers especially student teachers newly qualified and the under qualified teachers may not have mastered sufficient skills for effective teaching". Hence, the need for supervision. He concluded that instructional supervision therefore, may be seen as the process of working with teachers in order to improve classroom instruction (Fraser 2000). Moreover Glatthorn (2007) argues that supervision is a process of facilitating the professional growth of a teacher, primarily by giving the teacher feed-back about classroom instructional supervision.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews lasting forty-five minutes using an interview guide. All intentions were audio-taped transcribed and became the primary data source for analysis conducted by the researcher. The main aim was to comprehend experiences from the participants' point of view. No attempt was made to generalise the findings as prove hypotheses. A transparent disclosure of the role of the researcher and his or her relationship with the participants, the volunteering of

participants and description of school setting was done to contextualise the research and allow for the impact of the researcher role and participant selection on findings. The use of a small sample is common in qualitative research, where the aim is depth and not breadth.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study sought to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards, classroom instructional supervision in Zimbabwean schools. This section is presented in two parts, namely demographic data and actual findings.

Demographic Data

Table 1: Distribution of Research participants by sex (N=48)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	31	64.58
Female	17	35.42
Total	48	100

Table 1 shows that 64.58 per cent of the respondents were male and 35.42 per cent female. During the interview exercise, teachers explained that this gender imbalance came about because qualified lady teachers did not like to work in remote rural districts of the country. For example, a study conducted by Ndebele (2000) in Tsholotsho district of Zimbabwe revealed that there were very few qualified lady teachers in the schools. He found that those who were found in this circuit were mainly the untrained who had no choice.

Table 2: Respondents' academic qualifications (N=48)

Academic qualification	Number	Percentage
Standard six	4	8.33
Zimbabwe Junior Certificate	2	4.17
Ordinary Level	38	79.19
Advanced Level	4	8.33
University Degree	0	0
Total degree	48	100

The above table shows that 8.33% of the respondents had the standard six academic qualifications. Those who had the junior certificate constituted 4.17% of the sample, while 79.17 had the ordinary level qualification and four teachers had advanced level representing 8.33% of the sample teachers. None of the sample teachers had a university degree. This distribution has very important implications. It shows that the majority of teachers in the district now hold the required standard academic qualifications for one to be a primary school teacher in Zimbabwe. For one to be employed as a teacher without training, he/she must hold an ordinary level certificate. Similarly, college entry qualifications for primary teachers training is five ordinary level subjects.

Interactions and helping the teacher make use of that feedback in order to make teaching more effective.

Table 3: Professional qualifications of respondents (N=48)

Professional qualifications	Number	Percentage
Bachelor of Education	0	0
Diploma in education	15	31.25
Certificate in education	8	16.67
Primary Teachers' Higher	1	2.08
Primary teachers Level	4	8.33
Untrained	20	41.67
Totals	48	100

Table 3 above shows that none of the respondents had the Bachelor of Education qualification. It also shows that 31.25% of the respondents had the Diploma in Education 16.67% passed the certificate in education while 2% were holders of the Primary teachers' higher certificate and 8.33% held the primary teachers lower certificate. Finally 41.67% of the teachers had no professional qualification. This information reveals that in this district, the number of teachers who had no professional qualification was quite significant. This has serious implications for the process of supervision as the untrained personnel require a lot of attention from the supervisor to guide them on teaching skills that trained teachers obtained from college. However, there is a positive observation in that 47.92% of the respondents were in possession of the latest professional certificates that is the diploma in education and certificate in education. The other 10.41% of the respondents hold the earlier qualifications of primary teachers higher and primary teachers lower. These are gradually disappearing through retirement and up-grading. After passing five ordinary level subjects including English language and Mathematics, their holders can do in-service training at colleges and obtain diploma certificates.

Table 4: Working experience of respondents (N=48)

Experience	Number	Percentage
0-5 years	20	41.67
6-10 Years	17	35.41
11-15 Years	6	12.50
16-20 Years	0	0
20 plus years	5	10.42
Total	48	100

Table 4 above shows that 41.47% of the respondents fell within the 0-5 years of experience group; 35.41% fell within the 6-10 years experience group, 12.50% fell within the 11-15 years experience group 0% fell within the 16-20 years experience group and 10.42% had twenty years and above of experience as teachers. The implication of this information is that the majority of teachers investigated were less experienced. Altogether, thirty seven teachers, constituting 77.09% of the respondents had less than ten years of working experience. Teachers with less experience like this group require more attention from the supervisors than the more experienced. This underlines the importance of thorough supervision in this district.

Table 5: Composition of respondents by type of school (N=48)

Type of School	Number	Percentage
Rural council	40	83.33
Church School	8	16.67
Government School	0	0
Private School	0	0
Total	48	100

The table above shows that 83.33% of the respondents work under rural council schools and that 16.67% belong to church schools. None of the respondents work in government and private schools. This suggests that the majority of the respondents work under the least developed schools in terms of infrastructure. As Dube (1990) found out in a study of infrastructure development in Matabeleland North Rural District Councils, 95% had very poor classrooms, toilets and grounds.

Actual Research Findings

According to international literature, many teachers especially student teachers, newly qualified and the under-qualified teachers may not have mastered sufficient skills for effective teaching. Hence, the need for instructional supervision (Beach et.al 1989). This inquiry suggests a strong relationship between instructional supervision and the quality of lesson delivery by teachers

Evidence gathered from the study points to the fact that most of the teachers were aware of the basic aims of instructional supervision. They also appreciated the supervision process if it was done in the right manner and with the objective of improving the learning process and the promotion of teacher growth. Teachers preferred having supervision of instruction at least once or twice per term and most teachers regard instructional supervision as a necessary activity in the learning process.

It was also evident that most teachers preferred to be supervised by the head/principal. This confirms the observation by Cramer (1999) that teachers associate the head with authority and legitimacy. They also view the head/principal as their experienced colleague who should supervise them in order to guide and advise them (Marks, 1985). A significant number of teachers also preferred to be supervised by the teacher – in-charge of the infants classes. These were largely teachers taking infant classes. They saw the teacher – in charge as a specialist in the infant department.

The majority of teachers preferred to be notified about the classroom visits as a formality so that the teacher would be aware that the supervisor would be coming in period 2 or 3 to observe the lesson. This finding tallies with Cogan (1973) who observed that it is important to create conditions that will make the teacher comfortable during the supervision process. For example, where the supervisor and the supervisee have cordial relations, there are high chances of the teacher feeling comfortable during the supervision process. It is also argued that where the teachers are aware of the roles of supervision for their professional development, they are likely to view the classroom observations positively, but where the teachers' views on supervision are negative, it is most likely that the teacher may view observations as the platform for the supervisor to attack him/her (Beach and Reinhartz, 1989).

Clinical supervision involves several phases which range from the initial planning through to the conference phase. According to Cogan cited in Reepen and Barr (2010) clinical supervision will require the supervisor to sit down with the teacher and help him/her plan the lesson to be supervised. However, findings from this study revealed that the majority of the respondents did not want the supervisors' inputs in lesson planning as happened in clinical supervision. This was more evident with the experienced teachers who felt that they must be left to do what they knew. These teachers indicated that there was no need for the supervisor to help them plan the lesson to be observed. Only a few untrained teachers indicated that they would welcome the help from the supervisor in planning the lesson.

Most teachers also indicated that they were not inhibited by the supervisors' presence in the classroom. Teachers indicated that they regarded their supervisors as colleagues who wanted to help and guide them. They also indicated that since supervision of instruction was done for rating purposes, it was important for them not to show any signs of panic during the supervision process so that they would score high points.

In a study of supervisory behaviour and teacher satisfaction Fraser (2000) found that most teachers preferred immediate discussions with their supervisors about the lessons observed. They also expected the supervisor to be caring, understanding and helpful. The relationship between the teacher and the supervisor was expected to be collegial rather than authoritarian. Teachers in this study confirmed Fraser's (2000) assertion. Most of them indicated that they preferred immediate post instructional discussion. They revealed that this helped them to have a rough idea of what the supervision report would look like. They also added that during this discussion session, weak and strong points of the lesson were highlighted. Teachers also said they welcomed constructive criticism from the supervisor as it helped them to improve on their teaching methods.

4. Conclusions

Instructional supervision is as old as formal education itself. The purpose of instructional supervision is the improvement of instruction by fostering the continued professional development of all teachers.

- Most of the teachers preferred to be supervised by school based supervisors particularly school heads/principals.
- The majority of teachers wanted to be notified about the classroom visits by supervisors well in advance
- Teachers did not want the supervisor's input in lesson planning as happened in clinical supervision.
- Most teachers were not inhibited in their lesson – delivery by the presence of the supervisor in the classroom.
- Teachers indicated that they preferred immediate post supervision discussion.
- Teachers generally perceive classroom instructional supervision in a positive way. They are aware of what it is and appreciated its purpose.

5. Recommendations

Having the above findings and conclusions, the research puts forth the following recommendations.

- There must be well planned programmes of supervision of instruction – which can help teachers become better in lesson delivery.
- Observations of lessons alone, without providing immediate feedback to the supervisee are not enough. There should be more discussions between supervisors and supervisees immediately after lesson observation so that even before the teacher receives the comprehensive report, he/she will improve on his/her weaknesses.
- In carrying out their supervisory activities, supervisors must try to avoid interference with the teachers' planning for the lesson to be observed.
- The indication by teachers that the presence of supervisors did not inhibit them should motivate supervisors to feel free to visit teachers since their presence in the classroom does not disturb the teachers.
- It is also important that supervisors should use supervision for professional reason and not to victimise teachers or to settle old grudges that have nothing to do with the education of the child.
- It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education Sports, Arts and Cultural and other stakeholders should increase the number of workshops for instructional supervisors. These workshops could help supervisors keep abreast with current supervisory trends.

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