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VIEWS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION

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ABSTRACT

Instructional supervision is one of the school head's core functions in the school. Its benefits are widely documented in educational management literature. However, there is a section of teachers that has a negative disposition towards instructional supervision. This section views it with disdain, as a tool which school heads use to settle scores with teachers. With this perspective in mind, I interrogated the views of primary school teachers towards instructional supervision. The study adopted a qualitative methodology and was informed by the case study design. A sample of twenty teachers was sampled purposively from Hwange urban primary schools. Data were generated through face-to-face interviews. Conclusions were that teachers had mixed feelings towards the contribution of instructional supervision to the development of their teaching and class management skills; teachers were aware of the positive contribution of instructional supervision to overall school improvement if done in the correct spirit; and that intervention measures should be put in place to train school heads so that they discharge their instructional supervisory functions professionally and effectively. The study recommended training and reading programmes for school heads so that they are equipped with requisite supervisory skills and that they also keep abreast with developments in the field of education.

Key words: Instructional supervision, teachers and school heads.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Instructional supervision constitutes one of the major roles of any school head. On the other hand, some teachers detaste being observed teaching. Teachers normally go out of their way when preparing to be visited by the instructional supervisor (the school head). This study explores the disposition of teachers towards instructional supervision. It attempts to establish whether teachers view instructional supervision as a tool for improved teacher and pupil performance or just another routine activity performed by school heads. The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions: First, how instructional supervision contributes to the development of teachers' of teaching methods; classroom management skills, teachers' abilities in addressing the needs of pupils



with special learning needs; and necessary skills for assessing pupils' written school work. Second, the study explores the limitations of instructional supervision. Third, the study interrogates strategies for ensuring effective and useful instructional supervision.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 THE MEANING OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION

One of the core businesses of the school head is to execute the function of instructional supervision. According to Tunison (1998) instructional supervision is a continuous issue. However, many educators are critical of current supervisory practices and, especially, of the individuals who perform the task – school heads and their senior management teams. Glickman (1990) in Tunison (1998) defines instructional supervision as the process by which some person or group of people is responsible for providing a link between individual teacher needs and organisational goals so that individuals within the school can work in harmony towards their vision of what the school should do.

2.2 BENEFITS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION

Despite that there are misgivings about instructional supervisions by some teachers, if well conducted in the correct spirit instructional supervision has the potential to benefit education stakeholders in a numerous ways. Glickman (1990) in Tunison (1998) states that instructional supervision can achieve the following: enhances teacher belief in a cause beyond oneself; promotes teachers' sense of efficacy; make teachers aware of how they complement each other in striving for common goals; stimulate teachers to plan common purpose and actions; and challenges teachers to think abstractly about their work. Tunison (1998) puts it that instructional supervision improves instruction in a school, all other things being equal.

Baker et al., (2010) in National Association of Secondary School Principals (2011) are of the opinion instructional supervision is necessary to help teachers fulfil their role in improving pupils' performance. Mackenzie (1983:8) in Sharma, Yousoff, Kanna and Baba (2011) state that: "...schools that link their instruction and classroom management with professional development, direct assistance to teachers, curriculum development, group development, and action research under a common purpose achieve their objectives". There is convergence among views of different writers on what instructional supervision can achieve in a school.



2.3 ***LIMITATIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION***

As far back as 1977, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1977:589) observed that:

The dilemma of instructional supervision is a self-created crisis caused by lack of definition, lack of exercise, and lack of a legitimate comprehension of the current social dissatisfaction with the schools and schooling...it has been narrowly considered as the observation of a performer (teacher) by a generally-agreed-to-be excellent performer.”

Sharma (2012) identifies three challenges dogging instructional supervision. First, teachers feel that supervision is carried for wrong reasons. They complain that there is fault finding and use of inappropriate language. Second, instructional supervisors lack subject knowledge. Third, instructional supervisors lack supervisory skills.

2.4 ***STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION***

Cognisant of the challenges bedevilling instructional supervision, writers such as Tunison (1998) and Sharma (2012), suggested the following mitigatory factors:

- Instructional supervisors should work together with teachers being supervised to identify areas of professional growth opportunities and assisting the implementation of those opportunities by tailoring in-service to address them and providing support for their use.
- Effective supervisory policies should be in place to inform and guide instructional supervision.
- There is need for a training programme for instructional supervisors which would cover the practices, competencies, and attitudes described by supervision literature as necessary for effective supervision such as – the purpose of supervision; specific supervisory techniques; appropriate links between supervision and staff development; appropriate methods to develop those links; practise with non-directive language; and implementation of a professional reading programme to help school heads keep abreast of current and emerging practices in education in general and instructional supervision in particular.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

I used a qualitative research methodology, informed by the constructivist worldview. In this I adopted a case study research design, since my focus was the lived experience of teachers as they are observed teaching by their school heads, deputy heads and senior teachers. The study was purposively sampled to satisfy the need for identifying data-rich sources. The sample consisted of twenty teachers who were teaching in Hwange urban during the duration of the study. I generated data from teachers through face-to-face interviews. After getting permission from teachers concerned, I recorded the interview proceedings verbatim, to increase the accuracy of recording. Data analysis was accomplished through thematic content analysis. The analysis was preceded by transcribing, verification of data by the participants who were interviewed, segmenting, coding, enumeration, and arranging of data into themes and sub-themes.

3.1 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data, we took the following measures as suggested by Cresswell (2007; 2014). First, careful sampling decisions were done during the identification of study participants. Second, we homogenized the samples by ensuring that only those individuals who were at the teacher grade were part of the sample. This created an environment where teachers discussed issues around openly and honestly without being afraid of being victimised by school administration. Third, we recorded the focus group discussions verbatim, transcribed them and sent them for member checking before data analysis. Fourth, we addressed our own biases by engaging in a process called reflexivity (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). I also remained in the field generating data until the time when I reached data saturation.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were mixed feelings on how instructional supervision contributes to the development of the teachers' teaching skills. However, teachers were in unison regarding how instructional supervision contributes to the development of classroom management skills, skills in dealing with pupils having special educational needs, limitations of instructional supervision as well as strategies to improve the effectiveness of instructional supervision. Presentation and discussion of the teachers' views follows.

4.1 **INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF APPROPRIATE TEACHING METHODS.**

Notwithstanding the few dissenting voices, most teachers who participated in the study concurred that instructional supervision contributed positively to the development of their appropriate teaching methods as indicated by these direct quotes from teachers:

I have developed a lot. I have realised where I was going astray, and have corrected my mistakes. Have learnt how to lay my daily planning work.

It helps me to improve and vary my teaching methods.

It encourages teachers to be self reliable on their daily duties.

The teachers' recognition of the role played by instructional supervision function in the development of their own teaching may lead to the development of a good working relationship between the teachers and their instructional supervisors. Teachers will not dread being supervised – instead they will look forward to the sharpening of their teaching methods and development of more teaching skills.

However, a few number of teachers vehemently said that basing on their experiences, instructional supervision does not contribute to the development of their teaching methods. Of the dissenting voices, the following two stand out:

It may disturb the teaching and learning process. The teacher may do his/her job to impress the supervisor, and not much is benefited. I believe the teacher is an architect in his/her own right.

I don't think it help much in anyway. We are busy preparing for it, instead of preparing for the daily lessons.

The teachers' negative disposition on the benefits of instructional supervision could be due to factors inherent in the instructional supervisor, such as executing instructional supervisor as fault finding. Some of the instructional supervisors may treat their supervisees with very little respect, while others could be out of touch with modern trends in teaching and learning. The other reason could be how stakeholders perceive instructional supervision – with those who view it evaluation, likely to find less cooperation as compared to those who see it as a vital cog in the development of teacher competences. Most of the

teachers' views against instructional supervision are in tandem with Acheson and Gall's (1987:6-8) observation that:

Most teachers do not like to be supervised, even though it is a required part of their training and professional work. They react defensively to supervision, and they do not find it hopeful....A more helpful conclusion is that teachers are hostile, not to supervision, but to the style of supervision they typically receive....In traditional in-service supervision, the supervisor – usually the school principal–initiates the supervisory process to evaluate the teacher's performance.... This situation creates two problems at the start. First, supervision becomes equated with evaluation. People tend to be anxious when they know they are being evaluated, especially if negative evaluations threaten their jobs....The second problem is that supervision arises from a need of the supervisor, rather than from a need felt by the teacher.

4.2 CONTRIBUTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHER'S CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Most of the teachers pointed out that they benefit a lot from instructional supervision in the area of classroom management. They say after visits by supervisors, they are given tips and suggestions on how best to manage their classes. Below are some of the teachers' contributions on how instructional supervision helps them develop classroom management skills.

Suggestions are given to the teacher on how for example to control children in class using teaching methods.

Instructional supervision assists me to manage and control my class as required by the ECD management.

It helps me to constantly check my class management skills and improve on my weaknesses as well as try new and suggested ways.

4.3 INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS.

In each of the three schools, some teachers highlighted that instructional supervision has assisted them to cope with demands of teaching pupils with special educational needs in regular classes. They said that instructional supervision unmasks their limitations in handling special needs cases. As a result a good instructional supervisor normally sits down with the teacher after the lesson and suggest the way forward.



A comment from a teacher in one school was that: 'It helps me to constantly make sure that children with special needs are not left out and are being attended to. In the other two FGDs, teachers referred to a teaching method called PLAP that they use in inclusive classes. They reiterated that the method was suggested to them by their instructional supervisors.

4.4 INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION AND ASSESSMENT OF PUPILS' WORK

An appreciable number of teachers stated that through instructional supervision, they have developed good assessment skills. They pointed out some of the weaknesses they had in assessing pupils' work and said that after visits by their instructional supervisors, they effected improvements. For example in one school, one teacher said: "Some grey areas which the teacher may not be aware of could be identified. Suggestions are given on how the teacher can improve on those grey areas". In another school, a teacher had this to say: "As a teacher I was not putting required effort on corrections when marking. After supervision, I have since put more weight on corrections and marking". In yet another school, I came across this: "It helps me have updated assessment of children's work". From these submissions by teachers, it is indicative that taken in good spirit, instructional supervision can go a long way in developing teachers in all aspects of their teaching which are central to the performance of pupils. Teachers' views on how instructional supervision improves school in general and pupil achievement in particular rhyme with views from a number of authors among them Mackenzie (1983), Tunison (1998) and Baker et al., (2010).

4.5 LIMITATIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION.

From the three FGDs, the following limitations were repeatedly brought to the fore. First, teachers noted that instructional supervision may disturb the teaching and learning process. The teacher may do his/her job to impress the supervisor and not much is benefited. When the supervisor has left, the teacher will revert to his/her casual approach to teaching. Second, the most of those doing this supervision have twenty or more years as classroom practitioners hence they theorise a lot and are more concerned with records which may reflect very little. Third, if done as a threat or way of harassing teachers it demotivates teachers. It should not be a fault-finding exercise but that of equipping, reminding and encouraging teachers. Fourth, teachers normally go out of their way preparing for instructional thereby increasing their workload and disrupting children's normal lessons. The limitations that were mentioned by most teachers echo views that were raised by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum (1977) and Sharma (2012).

The first and fourth challenges have serious implications on the teachers' professionalism. If teachers only do their best during supervision and only make thorough lesson preparations prior to being supervised, one is left wondering the state of the teaching and learning process under normal circumstances when teachers are not worrying about being visited by their instructional supervisors. The second and third limitations raise concern on the quality of instructional supervision in our schools and the ability of the supervision to raise the teaching standards which result in improved pupil performance. If the teachers' claims are anything to go by, there is urgent need to staff development instructional supervisors on how to perform this important task – instructional supervision. Due to changes being ushered into the classroom by social, economic and political forces, instructional supervisors need to constantly keep abreast with changes and developments in their field of operation. While these could be isolated cases, there is need to urgent need to nip this behaviour in the bud. If left unrectified, the consequences may be too ghastly to contemplate - as rightly put by Gaarder, down the river a drop of rain becomes part of the ocean.

4.6 *STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION*

Teachers suggested that instructional supervision could be made more effective by adopting the following three strategies. First, instructional supervisors should acquaint themselves with the latest information and changes in education as well as more appropriate teaching methods. Second, teachers should be given time and told when they will be observed teaching instead of just being visited unexpectedly or at short notice. Third, it should be done objectively, not fault-finding. It should be encouraging, advising, nonthreatening and non-military. The strategies suggested by teachers point towards a paradigm shift in instructional supervision – from the traditional supervision to what clinical supervision. Richard Weller in Acheson and Gall (1987:13) define clinical supervision as: “Clinical supervision may be defined as supervision focused upon the improvement of instruction by means of systematic cycles of planning, observation, and intensive intellectual analysis of actual teaching performances in the interest of rational modification”. The strategies that were suggested by teachers in this study dovetail into Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon's (2006:6) argument in Glanc, Shullman and Sullivan (2007) that there should be a link between leadership, supervision, and teacher growth that can impact on pupil achievement. They advocate for a model of supervision which emphasises:

- A collegial rather than a hierarchical relationship between teachers and formally designated supervisors.
- Supervision as the province of teachers as well as formally designated supervisors.

- A focus on teacher growth rather than teacher compliance.
- Facilitation of collaborating of teachers with each other in instructional improvement efforts.
- Teacher involvement in ongoing reflective inquiry.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Basing on the above, I arrived at the following conclusions:

- There are mixed feelings regarding teachers' views towards the contribution to the development of teachers' teaching methods, classroom management skills, teachers' abilities to meet the needs of learners with special learning needs, as well as teachers' abilities to assess pupils' work.
- While instructional supervision is very useful in improving pupil performance if done in the correct spirit by knowledgeable instructional supervisors, it is dogged by some teething challenges. These limitations are grounded in the instructional supervisors' limited instructional supervisory skills; instructional supervisors' lack of knowledge regarding latest developments in the field of Education and the teachers' general hatred of being supervisors.
- There are a number of mitigatory strategies that can be put in place to improve instructional supervision. Hopefully, the strategies will ensure that instructional supervision will be done in the correct spirit, by qualified and knowledgeable instructional supervisors, culminating in teachers developing a positive attitude towards instructional supervision.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that teachers be staff developed on instructional supervision – what it is as well as why it should be done.
- Secondly, instructional supervisors should be trained on how instructional supervision should be done and the type of language to use in the reporting of their observations.
- Instructional supervisors should also be encouraged to keep abreast of the educational developments and recent research findings in the field of education. If supervisees (teachers) are aware that the instructional supervisor is well read, skilled and knowledgeable, they are likely to respect the instructional supervisor and accept the lesson critiques, advice and suggestions.
- There is need for a paradigm shift in the way in which instructional supervision is currently done – from a supervisor/supervisee relationship which invokes animosity to a collegial approach, where the focus should be on teacher growth.

- There is also need to interrogate the experiences of school heads in their supervisory roles – their challenges and suggestions on how instructional supervision can be effectively done so that the instructional supervisors and the supervisees have the same disposition towards instructional supervision so that our schools can attain their goals as efficiently as possible.

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