

Instructional Supervision in Primary Schools in Phu Ly city: Headteachers' and Teachers' Perspectives

Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương*

*Tien Tan Primary School, Phu Ly City, Ha Nam Province

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Abstract: Supervision of schools is concerned with the direct improvement of the work process which is viewed as a collaborative professional one among colleagues. Improving supervision of instruction in school is of great concern to educational authorities worldwide in general and particularly in Vietnam. This study investigates the understanding of supervision of instruction in twenty four primary schools in Phu Ly city, Ha Nam province from the perspectives of headteachers and teachers. Using mixed methods, data were collected by means of a questionnaire, semi-structured interview. The research revealed that the majority of headteachers and teachers shared similar concepts about instructional supervision. Evidence from the study showed that the majority of headteachers spent too much time performing their administrative and managerial duties to have enough time to effectively supervise instruction. The study also showed that teachers wanted to experience a more trusting relationship with headteachers, based on mutual respect, than they currently experienced in their schools. Recommendations about possible changes in supervisory practices will be positioned, which might in time contribute to the improvement of policy, planning and implementation of school supervision.

Keywords: Supervision, instructional supervision, primary schools, teachers, headteachers

1. Introduction

The priority of all countries, especially the developing ones, is to improve the quality of schools and the achievement of students, national authorities rely strongly on the school supervision system to monitor both the quality of schools and key measures of its success, such as student achievement (De Grauwe, 2001). Similarly, there is an opinion that quality of education partly depends on how well teachers are trained and supervised since they are one of the key inputs to education delivery (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). Improving the quality of teaching and learning and management efficiency relate directly to the practice of supervision of instruction. Many researchers believe that instructional supervision has the potential to improve class practices, and contribute to student success through the professional growth and improvement of teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Musaaazi, 1985; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; and Sullivan & Glanz, 1999).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Personnel responsible for supervision

In many countries officers responsible for inspection and supervision are classified as external and internal (school-site). Officers operating from outside the school are termed external supervisors or

school inspectors. Typically, supervisors of instruction include heads of department, heads of division, master teachers, subject coaches, lead teachers, programme directors, associate and assistant superintendents. Supervision of instruction is the responsibility of the school administrator (a title usually used for a head of a school district in New York City public schools), although literacy and math coaches are often called upon to facilitate the observation and supervision process (Glanz, Shulman, & Sullivan, 2007). Other teachers complement supervisory activities in their respective schools; lead teachers in Ghana, senior subject teachers in Namibia and Botswana, teachers-in-charge in Zimbabwe (De Grauwe, 2001), and coaches in New York (Glanz, et al., 2007). In Viet Nam, headteachers (or 'principals'), deputy heads and group leaders in primary schools are responsible for school-site supervision. External supervisors are

2.2. Concepts of Supervision of Instruction

The concept and practice of supervision of instruction has evolved over the years (Wiles & Bondi, 1996; Glickman, Gordon, & Gordon, 1998; Nolan, 1997; Nolan & Francis, 1992; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2004). Some researchers have also theorised that supervision is an act of encouraging human relations (Wiles & Bondi,

1996) and teacher motivation (Glickman, Gordon, & Gordon, 1998) and enabling teachers to try out new instructional techniques in a safe, supportive environment (Nolan, 1997). Supervision is believed to provide a mechanism for teachers and supervisors to increase their understanding of the teaching-learning process through collective inquiry with other professionals (Nolan & Francis, 1992). The purposes of supervision provided by these researchers can be grouped under the following themes: improving instruction; fostering curriculum and staff development; encouraging human relations and motivation; and encouraging action research and supporting collaboration.

Supervision as inspection (also termed the traditional form of supervision) was the dominant method for administering schools in the 19th century (Sullivan & Glanz, 2000). Teachers were viewed as deficient and supervisors inspected their practices for errors (Glanz, 1998). In this form of supervision, supervisors employed the tools of directing, controlling and overseeing the activities of teachers to ensure that teachers performed their duties as expected.

Leeper (1969, cited in Sullivan and Glanz (2000)) argued that supervision as inspection which found justification in the production-oriented, social efficiency era and bureaucratic supervision was no longer viable. The basis of supervision as leadership model was to remove itself from supervisory practices of the past. The model of supervision they proposed then focused on democracy and human relations. According to Sullivan and Glanz (2000), Leeper (1969) and other authors of this model propose that supervision should provide leadership in five ways: developing mutually acceptable goals, extending co-operative and democratic methods of supervision, improving classroom instruction, promoting research into educational problems, and promoting professional leadership.

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Research questions

The study was carried to answer the following research questions:

1. How do participants conceptualize and experience supervision of instruction in primary schools?
2. What should be done to improve the effectiveness of instructional supervision in primary schools?

2.3.2. Population and Sampling

The participants of this study were 100 teachers and 20 heads chosen randomly from 24 primary schools in Phu Ly city, Ha Nam province. I conducted 15 interviews, comprising 10 teachers and 5 heads. There are two parts in the questionnaires. The first part included participants' general information such as gender, age, number of years they have served in their current position. In the second part, participants chose whichever was appropriate for their circumstances and matched their understanding. In the semi-structure interviews, the participants answered questions about concepts of supervision of instruction and the ways to improve it in their schools.

2.3.3. Instruments

Data was collected through the use of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the participants.

2.4. Results and discussion

2.4.1. Results

Findings from Questionnaires

Traditional supervision practices group three following items: Suggesting to teachers how they should teach; Using control to affect teachers' instructional practices; Inspecting teachers' instructional practices for errors. Both teachers and headteachers almost agreed about what they expected, as well as experienced for the aspects of traditional supervisory practices selected in this study. The respondents most often experienced an aspect of supervision where supervisors suggest to teachers how they should teach, but slightly less those respondents wanted this practice. Respondents also experienced the aspect of supervision where supervisors inspect teachers' instructional practices for errors quite often as they wanted it. The teachers less often experienced a practice where supervisors used control to affect teachers' instructional practices which they did not like. But a larger percentage of heads (62%) experienced this practice more often than they wanted (46%).

Leadership skills in supervision includes three items: Praising teachers for specific teaching behaviour; Establishing open and trusting relationship with teachers; Treating teachers professionally with sense of caring and respect. The comparison between responses on both sides of the items under leadership skills showed that both the teachers and headteachers responded in the same direction on both sides of

each item in this category. The larger proportions of teacher and headteacher respondents (around 61% to 67%) provided the same responses to each item in this category. A plurality of teachers and heads agreed with the first item, and a majority of both groups of respondents strongly agreed with the other two items.

Collaboration in supervision consists of four items: Engaging teachers in mutual dialogue to improve instruction; Conferencing with teacher to plan for lesson observation; Providing opportunities for teachers to meet and share ideas about instruction; Encouraging teachers to observe other teachers' classrooms and programmes. The results showed more respondents strongly agreed or agreed with all the four items than they experienced them. A comparison on both sides indicated that both groups of participants would like supervisors to engage teachers in mutual dialogue to improve instruction more often than they currently experienced.

Interview Responses from Headteachers and teachers

Headteachers' conceptualisations of supervision of instruction: The concepts of supervision the five headteachers held were similar to those of teachers. Heads were of the view that supervision is about providing teachers with resources, offering suggestions, and ensuring that teachers do effective work.

How headteachers thought supervision could be improved: Headteachers suggested that they should arrange their administrative duties more appropriately to enable them have enough time to oversee and assist their fellow teachers.

2.4.2. Discussion

All the participants provided general and specific conceptions of supervision of instruction. The research revealed that the majority of headteachers and teachers shared similar concepts about instructional supervision. Teachers and heads thought supervision of instruction is about assisting teachers and ensuring that they do effective work in their classrooms.

Headteachers and teachers also agreed that supervisors did not have enough time to supervise instruction because of their heavy workload. All of the heads in public primary schools in Phu Ly city are full-time teachers and, in addition, perform administrative and management duties. As a result, they are left with little time to supervise instruction.

Besides, headteachers were not given pre-service training about instructional supervision upon assumption of office. Lastly, despite the finding in Research Question One that headteachers and teachers related well, it was also the case that some teachers also remarked that their headteachers were harsh towards them and always found faults with their instructional practices.

Recommendations about possible changes in supervisory practices can be considered. Firstly, the supervisors should praise teachers for demonstrating desired instructional behaviour. In addition, it suggested that supervisors promote peer observation and collaboration among teachers in their schools, both teachers and headteachers wanted to experience a more trusting relationship, based on mutual respect, than they currently experienced in their schools. Finally, the appointment of heads had better base on primarily with managerial experience and considering their professional qualifications and experience in instructional supervision.

3. Conclusion

The immediate purpose of this study is to better understand the practice of instructional supervision in Phu Ly public primary schools. This purpose, however, is fortified by a larger purpose: that of improving student learning through improvements in supervising teachers' instructional practices. Effective instructional supervision has a direct impact on performance of teachers and students. In the school this efficiency can be achieved through providing teachers with clear performance expectations, fair and consistent feedback and career development. This should be within a context of an environment or culture where communication, innovation and professionalism are encouraged and natured.

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