Instructional Supervision a Tool for Improvement or Weapon for Punishment

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature of instructional supervision carried out in schools in Malaysia. This study followed the qualitative method involving questionnaire and interview. About hundred teachers and twenty five principals and other heads participated in this study. The discussion was focused on five themes that are related to the research questions namely supervision as a corporate process involving teachers; supervision by specialists supervisors, the role of principals and teachers in instructional supervision, benefits to teachers and ways to improve the process. The finding of the study reflected that supervision serves as a weapon for punishment rather than a tool for improvement. The findings also advocated for need of instructional supervision to be conducted in more systematic manner by involving teachers, principals, subject teachers and subject specialists. So as to make practices more meaningful, the supervision processes need to be mundane and, the principals need to upgrade themselves with skills of supervision.

Key Words: Instructional Supervision, Clinical Supervision, Supervision, Instructional leadership

Introduction

The issues surrounding supervision have been debated by K-12 teachers, administrators, higher education scholars, and legislators (Glanz & Neville, 1997; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). Supervision can be defined as “the glue of a successful school” (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 6). Supervision has become an integral component and process in the operation of schools (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). Supervision can be seen as analogous to teaching in that teachers wish to improve students’ behavior, achievement, and attitudes while supervisors wish to improve teachers’ behavior, achievement, and attitudes (Glickman et al. 1998).

Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) conducted a study to determine what teachers “need, want, and get from supervision” (p. 71). Their findings supported the positional power of the supervisor dominating over the inferior teacher. Moswela B (2010) also has reported that instructional supervision in Botswana secondary schools is conducted for wrong reasons (p.80)

Interpretations on Instructional Supervision

Various authors have defined instructional supervision in different different ways. Glickman (1992) views instructional supervision as the actions that enables teachers the quality to improve instructions for students and as an act that improves relationships and meets both personal and organizational needs. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002:6) describe instructional supervision as opportunities provided to teachers in developing their capacities towards contributing for student’s academic success. In view to provide real meaning to instructional supervision Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002:95) advocates for teachers involvement in instructional supervision, while Hoy and Miskel (1991) considered it as an opportunity for competent teachers to explore the ways for professional developments. It is well indicated in the clinical supervision models by Goldhammer (1969), Cogan (1973), to involve teachers in planning phase which is referred to Pre conference with teachers, followed by conference and post conference Beach and Reinhartz (2000:144) have emphasized supervisors as mentors and friends to support teachers and provide a supportive and relaxed atmosphere for providing learning environment.
in the classroom. Hoy and Miskel (1991) have advised supervisors to be confident person without having any fear in empowering teachers for instructional supervision.

The Problem


“Duties and functions of the Principal / Headmaster as professional leaders, managers and administrators today are diverse, as the leader of professionals in the school, the primary responsibility of a Principal / Headmaster is to ensure the successful implementation of the curriculum at the school. The implementation of curriculum through the teaching-learning activities carried out by the teachers and the effectiveness of the curriculum in schools needs close systematic supervision from the Principal / Headmaster of the school. The supervision of teaching and learning for teachers in the classroom should be a priority in the list of duties and responsibilities of the Principal / Headmaster. The Principal / Headmaster should understand that supervision duty is of utmost important.”

It clearly indicates that supervision of instruction is mandatory for school leaders. Instructional supervision requires monitoring of classroom activities of teachers and providing professional assistance to them. However there is no clear cut policy to guide the responsibility. In absence of literature of work done in instructional supervision in Malaysian schools it’s necessary to study the nature of instructional supervision concept practiced in schools based on literature available from USA, UK and ANZ. Furthermore the school leaders who are custodians and accountable for instructional supervision, really understand this mandate by Ministry of Education in true sense or not.

Purpose of the Study

The study explored the understanding of instructional supervision, its process, benefits and need for improvement by the role players in the school system. The research was intended to guide the key role players in school based instructional supervision process .Such purpose can be achieved by addressing the following research questions.

1) What is the nature of supervision in the schools in Malaysia?
2) What are the perceptions of the teachers regarding the instructional supervision practiced by the supervisors?
3) Are the teachers really benefited by the process of supervision?
4) What supervisors need to do in making supervision meaningful process?

Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to data collection. Its qualitative approach involved open ended questions and interview.

Open Ended Questionnaire

A five item questionnaire was developed to study perception of experienced teachers and school leaders about supervision. The questionnaire was tested in two different schools to determine the appropriateness and level of difficulty to the respondents. The findings of the open ended questionnaire are to provide an overview of the teachers as well as to serve to formulate guidance/prompts for qualitative interviews.
Interview

The interview questions were framed from the questionnaire used for studying perception of teachers and school leaders on supervision. Keeping in mind the responses obtained from pilot testing of questionnaire, the interview questions were developed and tested on the same teachers and school leaders from the two schools to probe clarity of responses on how teachers perceive about supervision.

Both of the data collection techniques provokes thoughts and allows respondents the opportunity to express their opinion in greater detail, thereby revealing more information that the researcher may not be aware of.

Participants

The participants of the study comprised 100 teachers and 25 principals or other heads from fifteen different secondary schools in Malaysia. All these participants were provided with questionnaire through email or hard copy with self addressed envelope to send back the responses. All the subjects were kind enough to return the responses on time, keeping hundred percent rate of response. The interview was restricted to a total of twenty participants (twelve teachers and eight heads) because of the longer time needed for interview prolonged engagement.

Data Analysis

The analysis focused on the selection of items from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview schedule that related to issues on instructional supervision. The discussion was focused on five themes that are related to the research questions namely: (1) Supervision as a corporate process involving teachers; (2) supervision by specialists’ supervisors (3) the role of principals and teachers in instructional supervision (4) benefits to teachers and (5) ways to improve process.

Findings

Supervision as a Corporate Process involving Teachers

According to Pajak (1993) instructional supervision is a corporate process between supervisor and supervisee. The majority of teachers from Malaysia showed their concerns on the fact that supervisors didn’t involve them in instructional supervision process. There comments were

Teachers should be involved from planning to post observation issues sincerely for their professional development.

Supervising teachers without their involvement is merely inspection, where teachers are unaware of the reasons for such inspections.

When I see my principal or head of department suddenly in ongoing class with files in hands, I feel that the time to complete the paper work has begun.

Dean (1993:33) suggests that instructional supervision be made an integral part of curriculum so that it’s a continuous and developmental process to support the teachers demand for a collegial instructional system as reported by Moswela B (2010). It’s clear from the reflective comments by the teachers that supervisory approach is summative, administrative and purposive, the purpose being completion of paper work. It’s just reflecting the physical visibility of the principal in school. Here the teacher’s feelings of ownership of supervision are not seen. In view of the researcher to make instructional supervision more meaningful the blend of various models like Carl Glickman (1981) ‘Developmental Model’; and Acheson and Gall (1992) ‘Clinical Supervision Model’ and Collegial Supervision Model would inculcate the feeling of ownership of instructional supervision process and change their attitude about supervision. These comments also suggest that instructional supervision in subject schools is not continuous, developmental and corporate process and in accordance with study by Moswela B (2010). Its reflective of the fact that instructional supervision lacks elements of empowerment for the teachers by involving them in the process which is totally in opposition of suggestions of Pajak (1993:2-9), Hart and Breadson (1996:32).Though all the supervisors do agree with the belief of involving teachers and
claimed for its fulfillment by them but a majority of teachers totally disagree with this claim. It reflects that principals and other heads differ in preaching and practices.

**Supervision for Wrong Reasons**

Majority of teachers believe that purpose of supervision by principals or other heads is for the wrong reasons. It’s not leadership by principals or supervisors but bullying. This claim is made in light of comments such as

- Supervisors only try to find fault in classroom teachings and never tell us our strengths.
- We feel insulting when our principal claims to find our shortcomings before students and tell us to improve upon those shortcomings without involving himself towards improvement.
- On the name of supervision, I always hear our principal screaming on one or other teacher. It has just become a routine for him to scream and for us to hear.

These comments support the statements from Blumberg (1980), supervision is done to control and exert power.

**Supervision by Specialist Supervisors**

A majority of teachers view instructional supervision as an area where only skilled and subject experts can understand the dynamics of subject and pedagogical techniques used. They expect their meaningful involvement as they have specialized knowledge in field of teaching and command over subject along with their supervisors who need to have such understanding and competencies on subject and teaching methods. This can be observed from the following comments

- How can a language graduate supervisor help me to improve in science subjects?
- What can be difficulties in teaching particular subject, only supervisor with experience in teaching that subject can understand? Methods of teaching languages differ from teaching accountancy that a supervisor needs to realize.

This view comes in line with that of Hart and Breadson (1996; 32) and Moswela B (2010), that teachers do not support the principal’s presence in the class without knowing the subject contents. This feeling is supported by the following comments

- Being out of touch to the classroom teaching and lack of latest knowledge with subject contents and teaching methodologies, it’s immature to expect supervision out of such school heads or principals.
- To be a supervisor means one has to be an experienced teacher first.

However a good number of teachers advocated for the collective instructional supervision by the principal, subject heads and heads from other subjects. The indicative comment was

- A teacher should undergo several phases of supervision, by different supervisors.
- Certainly the head of department, subject experts from outside and our school leaders should supervise us for various aspects.

Some of the principals advocated for involving the subject experts to carry out the process of supervision. Most of the principals and other heads also want instructional supervision to be carried out by different persons throughout ongoing academic year. One principal said, “I think instructional supervision should be spread among the different subject heads as it’s not one person’s cup of tea”.

About twelve principals and other heads advocated for interdisciplinary supervision. Based on these views it can be inferred that instructional supervision is a specialist area and to be performed not only by a single individual but by a group continuously throughout the ongoing academic session. This group should comprise of principal or functional head of school, head of subject or subject specialist and specialist from other subject. It is also commended that supervisor should have strong knowledgebase on subject and pedagogical skills.
Role of Teachers and Principals in Instructional Supervision

As indicated many times, teachers expect their involvement in planning of supervision prior to actual visit of principal or other designated head. It is well indicated in the clinical supervision models by Acheson and Gall (1992), to involve teachers in planning phase which is referred to Pre conference with teachers. Most of the teacher respondents hold the instructional supervision is a professional activity that should be left to professionals themselves. Principals have official role in overseeing the implementation of the broad curriculum in schools. Glickman et al’s (2001) and Sergiovanni and Starratt’s (2002) definitions of instructional supervision is to assess teachers in order to help them to perform better leads to an argument that principals being designated supervisors of all the activities in a school, have to look the assessment of teachers too, i.e. they have to be instructional supervisors too. This can be supported by the ten tasks of supervision by Ben Harris (1995). Although the principals are curriculum overseers, they can’t be practically excluded from instructional supervision. Since they are accountable for curriculum their role as instructional leader can’t be neglected as curriculum is supported by instructions hence curriculum supervision is supported by instructional supervision. This view is supported by Everard and Morris (1990:167); Hoy and Miskel (1991:83-4). Moreover some of the participants have questioned on the willingness and supervisory skills of principals. They want their principals to learn and develop supervisory skills. Their comments are Principals need to lead supervision through various supervisory skills. For that they need to equip themselves with techniques and skills of clinical and developmental supervision. I feel principals hesitate to supervise because they lack knowledge and skills of supervision. Principals need to equip themselves with supervisory and instructional leadership skills. At least one hour if they spend on internet everyday they can learn a lot from online resources. These comments clearly reflect that principals lack knowledge and skills of supervision. Ironically teachers know about such skills. Quoting the use of online resources, teachers put back ball in principal’s corner with the way to upgrade their knowledge and skills of supervision.

Benefits to Teacher

From the evidences it can be observed that instructional supervision in Malaysian schools is not conducted effectively. Even though principals and other heads are responsible for the instructional supervision, the benefit out of the process is not at all observed. Almost all the teachers commented that they are not at all benefited by the instructional supervision. The indicative comments are For the last two years, I have been supervised only three times and the same type of complaints I receive from the principal on my teaching methodologies. I don’t understand the purpose of supervision. Principal comes to class, observes, comments verbally and leaves. There is no follow up of that observation. If process of supervision is taken seriously by principals, there won’t be any doubt for benefits to teachers, students and principal as instructional leader himself / herself. How to behave as a supervisor is need of hour for supervisors? If they behave as bosses they would end with failures.

Implications & Recommendations

The research findings of this study reveal the nature of instructional supervision in secondary schools in Malaysia, the shortcomings in the process of instructional supervision and the suggestions for the improvement of process of instructional supervision. In spite of professional circular No. 3/1987 by Ministry of Education, Government of Malaysia which mandates for instructional supervision, still the process of instructional supervision is non corporative, non continual and non beneficial. As advocated by earlier researchers Pajak (1993), Dean (1993), Hart and Braedson (1996), Hoy and Miskel (1991); Everard and Morris (1990) and pioneers of Clinical supervision Acheson and Gall (1992) instructional supervision is meant to benefit schools, hence teachers who are the directly involved in curriculum
It is therefore desirable for the Ministry of Education to develop ways to monitor and supervise the process of planning to outcome of instructional supervision by the designated heads of school and make it mandatory to put teachers’ reflections regarding process of supervision. Such type of involvement of teachers in the entire process of instructional supervision and their reflections on being supervised would develop ownership towards school activities and develop trust with the supervisor and process.

Since the principals feel that they are more occupied with administrative duties, they need to seek help from their deputy heads, head of departments, subject coordinators to make the process continuous. It can be value added by involving teachers who have established themselves as a competent teacher and have sound experience of teaching particular subject. This is in line with Sergiovanni and Starratt’s (2002) findings indicating correlation between teachers’ involvement in instructional supervision and school improvement. Such arrangement would not only make instructional supervision as a continuous process but also involve teachers in the process. Besides it would certainly remove the feelings of teachers that they are not supervised by subject experts.

One of the major problems of instructional supervision in Malaysian schools hangs around teachers’ feelings on supervision which is carried for wrong reasons. They have blamed supervisors as fault finding persons and many times using inappropriate language. As per researchers’ point of view it can be viewed in two perspectives. One the supervisor lacks subject knowledge, which can be covered up by joint supervision by involving subject experts. Secondly the supervisors do not have skills to supervise. As suggested by the teachers it’s necessary for supervisors to develop these skills. It’s highly recommended that supervisors should undergo training programs on clinical supervision skills and developmental supervision skills. These skills not only would help supervisors to analyze and interpret the instructional observations but also help supervisors to use the appropriate language while discussing the major issues with teachers. Besides would help supervisors to win trust of teachers who in turn would put their sincere efforts towards process of instructional supervision.

**Conclusion**

The role of instructional supervision as envisaged throughout the findings in this study simply seems to display the completion of paper work and fault finding process. The teachers in this study argue that supervisors do not consider instructional supervision as a platform to develop a sense of ownership for teachers and their professional growth. Instead it is done to punish, demoralize and insult teachers (as evidenced by the use of sentences; supervisors only try to find fault, we feel insulting etc) rather than to improve their performances. Since the teachers do not agree with the way supervision is conducted, and which makes it far from corporate issue, they support the supervision to be conducted by a group of people involving teachers too. The main issues that have emerged from this study are, first the process of supervision should be carried out continuously; secondly teachers need to be involved in the process of supervision and thirdly the principals have to take support of subject specialist and other heads for supervision. However principals also advocated for their involvement as instructional supervisors along with subject specialists and considering supervision as an interdisciplinary issue. Though many principals have escaped with reasons of having high administrative work load, teachers have charged them with lack of willingness, knowledge and supervisory skills. However teachers have suggested that their principals should upgrade themselves with the skills of supervision through various resources on internet. Though teachers have rejected any benefits out of current processes of supervision, they hope to be having its benefit in future if it is conducted in a proper way.

**References**