



The Role of the Instructional Supervisor in the Promotion of Performance of Pupils: A Case for Performance Lag Address Programme

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Abstract: *The overall purpose of instructional supervision is to help teachers improve, and this could be on what teachers know, the improvement of teaching skills, as well as teachers' ability to make more informed professional decisions. Instructional supervision is a crucial tool used in building effective teacher professional development. It is also seen as an organisational function that seeks the growth of teachers and improvement in teaching performance and greater student learning. This proves the point that every profession requires continuous improvement in methods and skills that are necessary for employee performance. This means that teacher instructional supervision is vital for the success of every pupil in a school. Where instructional supervisors spend their time helping to develop their teachers, the chances of those teachers performing better for the benefit of the students are very high. Thus, the need for effective instructional supervisors in the schools. Zimbabwe has introduced a new programme called Performance Lag Address Programme as one of the new learning areas to be taught to learners in primary schools. This programme like any new curriculum requires maximum support from those who are in charge of guiding instruction at school level, the instructional supervisors.*

Key Terms: Role, promotion, instructional, learners, supervisor, performance

1. INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe, the head of school is the main instructional supervisor at school level. Olivia (2006:120) (in Beach and Reinhartz, 2009:8) asserts that “the term instructional supervisor is used to refer to any individual regardless of title who functions in a supervisory position in the education system”. Wiles and Bondi (1999:100) (in Beach and Reinhartz, 2009:98) echo similar sentiments when they assert that “an instructional supervisor is someone who is formally designated by the education system who has the responsibility for working with teachers to improve the quality of pupil learning through improved instruction”. While there may be other supervisors of instruction in the Zimbabwean education who include education officers, provincial education directors and others, this study concentrates on school heads or principals as they are at the supervisory centre of the learning / teaching process at the school level. The success of PLAP in the schools hinges upon the way how instructional supervisors provide the necessary support to teachers implementing this programme. Beach and Reinhartz (2009) have summarised the role of the supervisor as planner, organizer, leader, helper, appraiser, communicator and decision maker. Planning involves the ability to determine in advance what should be done and how it is to be accomplished. A good example would be helping teachers with time management strategies as they plan their lessons. The ability to organise is also a pre-requisite for the supervisor. Olivia (2006:120) says that “Linking people with the necessary resources is vital to the effective operation of the school”.

In order to be successful, an instructional supervisor must be able to influence the behaviour of others. For example, the supervisor must be able to persuade teachers to modify their lesson plans or change their teaching behaviour to accommodate individual students. The primary objective of supervision according to Beach and Reinhartz (2009:11) “is to help to improve and develop teachers' instructional skills”.

Supervisors, as they work with teachers, should keep in mind the climate of the school, the need for collective dialogue and the teachers' involvement in determining the goals and types of supervision they would like to have. In this regard Beach and Reinhartz (2009:154) argue that “...school

improvement begins with supervisors using the pre-requisite skills in human relations, organisational behaviour and management as they talk openly with teachers about problem areas”.

2. EFFECTIVE TEACHING BEHAVIOURS

Instructional supervisors must be aware of the complexities associated with effective teaching. Joyce and Showers (2002:41) state that “...supervisors knowledgeable about teaching and effective teaching behaviours can establish an instructional mind, or frame of reference as they help teachers increase their ability to reach more students by providing a rich and diverse environment”. Greenblatt, Cooper and Muth (2004: 58) provide a list of what they think is effective teaching behaviours:

1. *Daily review of previous work:* Teacher provides an appropriate review and relates prior content to new learning.
2. *Direct instruction:* Teacher presents information clearly and stresses important points and dimensions of the content.
3. *Being actively engaged in learning:* Teacher maximises amount of time available for instruction and keeps students engaged in learning activities.
4. *Corrective feedback:* Teacher monitors students’ performances and provides corrective feedback, clarifies or reteaches.
5. *Guided and independent practice:* Teacher presents information in an appropriate sequence, guided practice precedes independent practice and practice activity follows explanation, demonstration or modeling.
6. *Instructional clarity:* Teacher clearly states objectives and tasks, and presentation is well organised.
7. *Time on task:* Teacher keeps students engaged during instruction.
8. *Questioning:* Teacher asks questions that would produce high success rates as well as questions that promote higher order thinking.
9. *States expectations:* Teacher communicates to students what they are to accomplish.
10. *Classroom management and organisation:* Teacher specifies expectations for class behaviour and uses techniques to prevent, redirect, or stop inappropriate behaviour.
11. *Varies instruction:* Teacher uses learning opportunities other than listening by pupils.

These behaviours are concrete images of what successful teachers do and should be considered within the overall context of the classroom. However, Griffin (2005:20) says that “...caution should be sounded against over-generalisation about these behaviours, because the research studies are often situation, and student specific. Nevertheless, as Beach and Reinhartz (2009:125) conclude: “...there are representative correlational studies from state-of-the-art data that have consistently identified the same qualitative skills that effective practitioners use to increase student achievement”. Other authorities do concur with Greenblatt, Cooper and Muth (2004) on the general skills of practitioners. A twelfth skill is added to the list, which is “enthusiasm and interest” [the amount of the teachers’ vigor and power] (Barker, 2009:23).

3. PROBLEMS FACED BY SUPERVISORS DURING THE SUPERVISION OF INSTRUCTION

In order to fully understand the work of school principals, it is necessary to discuss the problems they face as they carry out their instructional tasks. Nyagura and Reece (2009) state that:

Besides the administration of the whole school the principal of a primary school is expected to supervise all his / her teachers including the deputy principal. In addition, the principal is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people. As in most human triangles, this also brings about constant conflicts and dilemmas.

However, how principals actually spend their time is obviously a better indicator of the impact of these myriad roles on the quality of instructional supervision provided at the schools. If principals were to be followed around on a typical; day what would be found out? The anthropologist Harry

(2003) did just that for an entire school year with one elementary school principal. He found that virtually all the principal's time was taken up in one-to-one personal encounters which did not deal directly with matters concerning actual teaching. Martin's and Willower's (2011) and Peterson's (2011) observation of principals found that principals' work days were sporadic characterised simultaneously by brevity, variety and fragmentation. For example, Martin and Willower (2011) report that primary school principals perform an average of 148 tasks a day with constant interruptions. Over 39 percent of their observed activities were interrupted. Most (84%) of the activities were brief (one to four minutes). According to these authors "instructional supervisors demonstrated a tendency to engage themselves in the most current and pressing situation. They invested very little of their time in reflective planning. Instruction related activities took up only 17 percent of their time" (Martin and Willower 2011:30).

Sarason (2002:129) contends that "most of the principal's time is spent on administrative housekeeping matters and maintaining order since many principals expect or feel that they are expected to keep everyone happy by running an orderly school. This then becomes the major criteria of the principal's ability to manage". House and Lapan (2008:145), summarise the problem related to keeping everyone happy when they observe that:

Another fact of trying to please everyone and to avoid any trouble that might reach central office is to deal with any problem that arises. The principal has no set of priorities except to keep small problems from becoming big ones. His / hers is a continuous task of crisis management. He / she is always on call. All problems are seen as important. This global response to any and all concerns means he/she never has the time, energy and inclination to effectively supervise teachers. Containment of all problems is his/her theme.

A study by Educon (2004:115) of 137 principals in Toronto reveals some of the overload principals feel: Ninety percent reported an increase over the previous five years in the demands made on their time and responsibilities, including new program demands, the increased number of board priorities and directives, the number of directives from the Ministry of Education, etc. Time demands were listed as having increased in dealing with parent and community groups (92% said there was an increase), administration activities (88%), staff involvement and student services (81%), social services (81%) and board initiatives (69%).

In the same study principals were asked about their perceptions of effectiveness: 61% reported a decrease in the effectiveness of assistance from immediate superiors and from administration (Educon, 2004:115). Educon (2004:116) also found that 84% of the principals reported a decrease in the authority of the principal's involvement in decision making at the system level. Ninety-one percent responded "no" to the following question: "Do you think the principal can effectively fulfill all the responsibility assigned to him/her?" House and Lapan (2008:116) purport that "the amount and number of areas of expertise expected of the principal, which are school law, curriculum planning, supervision of instruction, community relations, human resource development, are ever increasing".

The discouragement felt by principals in attempting to cover all the basics is aptly described in the following two responses taken from interviews conducted by Duke (1988) in Vermont as quoted by Fullan (2008:149) with two principals:

Principal 1: *The conflict for me comes from going home every night actually aware of what didn't get done and feeling after six years that I ought to have a better battling than I has.*

Principal 2: *The principal ship is the kind of job where you're expected to be all things to all people. Early on, if you are successful, you had gotten feedback that you are able to be all things to all people. And then you feel an obligation to continue to do that which in your own mind you're not capable of doing. And that causes me guilt.*

Duke (1988) in Fullan, 2008:150 was intrigued by the "dropout rate" of principals after encountering an article by Lorties (2007:81) which stated that 22 percent of Vermont principals employed in the fall of 1984 had left the state's school system by the fall of 1995. In interviewing principals about why they considered quitting, he found that sources of dissatisfaction included policy and administration, lack of achievement, sacrifices in personal life, lack of growth opportunities, lack of

recognition and too little responsibility, relations with subordinates, and a lack of support from superiors. They expressed a number of concerns about job itself: the challenge of doing all the things that principals are expected to do, the mundane or boring nature of much of the work, the debilitating array of personal interactions, the policies of dealing with various constituencies, and the tendency for managerial concerns to supersede leadership functions.

While Duke's (2008) findings above are from a small sample (four principals) they are by no means a typical. Duke (2008) in Fullan 2008:156 suggests that the reasons principals were considering quitting were related to fatigue and awareness of the limitation of career choices. All four principals experienced reality shock: "[t]he shock-like reactions of new workers when they find themselves in a work situation for which they have spent several years preparing and for which they thought they were going to be prepared, and then suddenly find they are not". Duke (2008:312) concludes:

A number of frustrations expressed by those principals derived from the context in which they worked. Their comments send a clear message to those who supervised them. Principals need autonomy and support. The need for autonomy may require supervisors to treat each principal differently; the need for support may require supervisors to be sensitive to each principal's view of what he/she finds meaningful or trivial about the work.

Other studies also confirm conditions of overload and fragmentation in the principal's role. According to Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (2010:205), who carried out a detailed observation study over a period of time in 26 urban school principals in the Chicago area, the overwhelming emphasis in their daily work was oriented toward maintenance, specifically:

...student disciplinary control, keeping outside influences [central office, parents etc.] under control and satisfied, keeping staff conflicts at bay, and keeping the school supplied with adequate materials, staffing and so forth. It is noteworthy that this "natural" description of what principals do rarely mentions attention to supervision of instruction.

Another problem that principals experience is lack of the necessary skills to provide teachers with the help they need to develop instructionally. Madziyire (2013:136) quotes Nyagura and Reece (2009) who contend that "...in quite a number of schools [in Zimbabwe] due to shortage of experienced trained teachers, inexperienced teachers have been placed in supervisory roles". Nyagura and Reece (2009) are supported by Chivore (2005:14) who carried out a baseline survey on managerial skills of Zimbabwean principals and revealed that "...several issues need to be addressed in order to improve the supervisory skills of school principals; one aspect is the lack of skills and knowledge in the area of supervision". Ozigi (2007:59) advises that "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 instruction are".

Lack of supervisory skills may result in conflict between teachers and supervisors when teachers feel unfairly treated. One way of improving the teacher supervisor relationship therefore is through supervisor training. In this regard, Harber and Davis (2010) note that in developing countries, principals of schools emerge from the teaching population and have had little or no training for the job". They argue that "a major concern of school management debates in recent years has been the need to train principals. Principals are chosen because they are good at one thing [teaching] and put into managerial roles, which can demand quite different skills" (Harber and Davies, 2010: 62).

It is perhaps in this context that most teachers are apprehensive about being supervised. They appear to be dissatisfied with the supervisor's classroom observations; hence the negative views towards supervision. McLaughlin (2004) (in Madziyire, 2003:89) has commented that classroom teachers place several charges against classroom observation supervisors. They criticise it for being infrequent and unreliable. Teachers see this as reflecting the preferences of supervisors. This is corroborated by Marks (2005:225) who writes that "[m]any teachers fear a visit by the supervisor often with good reason. They dislike having to defend methods and techniques which they have found successful. Teachers object to being told what to do". Similar views are echoed by Mlilo (2007:40) on a study he conducted on the effectiveness of primary school principals in Hwange District of Western Zimbabwe. He is of the opinion that teachers would not look forward to supervision as they feel supervision is an unpleasant experience.

Musaazi (2002: 223) asserts that “if instruction in schools is to be improved, the supervisor must take the lead in providing a pleasant, stimulating and wholesome environment in which teachers will want to work and feel secure”. The school climate or feel and atmosphere must be such that the supervisor is not viewed as a threat by the teachers. Another reason why teachers resent supervision as shown by Madziyire (2003) could be because of the role conflict in the principal’s supervisory and administrative obligations. Murimba (2013:42) says that “when supervision of instruction is undertaken by an administrator, as is the case in Zimbabwe, there is potential for role conflict. This conflict is based on the fact that expectations of supervisory activity are not in keeping with those of administrative behaviour”.

Madziyire (2003) argues that the principals as administrator’s behaviour are based on bureaucratic authority. Bureaucratic authority requires the supervisor to be impersonal, stick to rules and regulations. When the same administrator takes on the role of supervisor, he / she is expected to be a colleague helping the teacher develop and grow professionally. Supervision of instruction calls for personal relationships and a non-threatening and trusting atmosphere, yet the administrator’s perceived authority in the school does not allow for collegiality.

4. CONCLUSION

Schools are the central places where children and youth get access to formal education. The fundamental purpose of a school is improvement of student learning. The Zimbabwean government has introduced a new programme called PLAP to improve the performance of learners especially in public examinations. The role of supervision in the success of this programme cannot be emphasised. When a school’s instructional capacity improves, teaching improves, leading to improvements in student performance. The role of the instructional supervisor in the process of promoting such process of improvement cannot be underestimated. In order to attain the optimum level of this improvement, instructional supervisors need to be well educated and part of the learning community. Supervision is one of the functions of education that offers opportunities for schools to improve teaching and learning and the professional development of teachers which ultimately leads to better performance of the pupils.

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