SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION AND DISPARITIES IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN NIGERIAN POST - BASIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

MUHAMMAD KABIR IDRIS
Department of Education, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State, Nigeria
E-Mail: kabiridris1973@gmail.com

HAMIDU MOHAMMED JADA
Department of Education, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State, Nigeria
E-Mail: hamid.jada@gmail.com, 07038417827

UMAR GARBA
Department of Education, Yobe State University, Damaturu
E-Mail: alhumar14@gmail.com

Abstract

Effective educational outcomes hinge on robust mechanisms, among which instructional supervision stands as a cornerstone. When properly organized and executed, instructional supervision can significantly enhance the teaching-learning process, ultimately elevating the standards of the educational system. This paper explores the concept of instructional supervision, its various types, their respective impacts, and the disparities in achieving effective teaching and learning in Nigerian post-basic schools. It concludes that consistent, thorough, and ongoing supervision of instruction is critically needed, especially given the recent changes introduced to the secondary school curriculum.

Introduction

Instructional supervision is a vital function for the effective operation of any sound school system. Its primary aims include supporting and assisting teachers in improving instructional delivery by fostering positive behavioral changes, and serving as a crucial quality control mechanism within the educational enterprise. As Alkrdem (2011, p. 38) notes, instructional supervision has the potential to "improve classroom practices and contribute to students' academic success through the professional growth and improvement of teachers." Similarly, Ogbo (2015) views instructional supervision as facilitating the maximum professional development of teachers, recognizing their potential for growth with appropriate help, guidance, and direction.

Alimi and Akinfolarin (2015) define instructional supervision as "the process of making progress in instructional delivery for better academic achievement." This process involves leveraging expert knowledge and experience to evaluate and collaboratively enhance the conditions and methods of teaching and learning in schools. Broadly, instructional supervision encompasses monitoring the performance of school staff, acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, and employing fitting and amicable

techniques to address flaws while building upon merits. This ultimately raises school standards and helps achieve educational goals. Consequently, instructional supervision is often described as a service designed to help teachers improve instruction, or "a process of giving and receiving help to improve performance and resolve the problems that occur between teachers and students" (Wanzare, 2012).

The imperative for instructional supervision in schools has been widely acknowledged. Schain, as cited in Idris (2023, p. 3), observed that while colleges provide foundational training, the true professional development of teachers occurs within schools, where they spend most of their working lives. This raises the critical question: "Who will train our teachers in their schools?" The answer is unequivocally the school supervisor. Recent studies by Ofojebe, Chukwuma & Onyekwe (2016) and Idris (2023) consistently link the prevalent low learning achievement in Nigerian post-basic schools to poor teacher effectiveness, characterized by inadequate teaching task accomplishment, negative work attitudes, and suboptimal teaching habits. However, teachers cannot effectively execute their responsibilities without proper and adequate monitoring and supervision. This is because teacher effectiveness largely depends on the supervisor's ability to judiciously apply supervisory techniques to clarify instructional goals and collaborate to improve teaching and learning within the school. According to Oyedeji (2012), the functions of an effective school instructional supervisor include routine classroom visitations, supervising heads of departments and teachers by checking schemes of work and lesson notes, monitoring teacher classroom attendance and absenteeism, and recognizing hardworking teachers while addressing indolence to encourage adherence to best practices.

Objective of the Study

This study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

i.   Identify the types of instructional supervision prevalent in Nigerian Post-Basic Secondary Schools.
ii. Examine the impacts of each type of instructional supervision on teaching and learning in Nigerian Post-Basic secondary schools.
iii. Discuss the constraints to instructional supervision in Nigerian Post-Basic secondary schools.

Types of Instructional Supervision in Nigerian Post-Basic Secondary Schools

Various types of instructional supervision have been identified. Okobia (2015) and Walker (2016) categorize instructional supervision into two main types: external supervision (macro supervision) and school-based supervision (micro supervision). Olagboye, in Idris (2012), refers to these as extra-mural (external) and intra-mural (school-based) supervision.

External instructional supervision falls under the purview of the Ministry of Education (Federal, State, or Local Education Authorities). Supervisors in this capacity are typically resource persons, subject specialists, curriculum consultants, or designated zonal education officers mandated to provide expert services or assistance by the Ministry of Education. Oyedeji (2012) notes that ministry supervisors conduct various visits—take-off, punctuality, routine, or follow-up—to identify school-specific

problems. For newly established schools, advisory visits are made to provide necessary guidance. In essence, these supervisors primarily focus on personnel activities such as stimulating, motivating, correcting, and evaluating teachers and teaching activities to improve instruction and serve the learners' purpose.

Similarly, Idris (2023) states that supervisors from the Ministry of Education (MOE), Secondary Schools Management Board (SSMB), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Teaching Service Commission (TSC), and Local Education Office (L.G.E.A) periodically visit schools to observe teachers in their classrooms and act as intermediaries between the school and the education ministry to enhance teaching and learning. Akubue, in Idris (2012), highlights the roles of external school supervision, including checking teacher neatness, lesson notes, classroom teaching and control, staff and student attendance, principal supervision, employing appropriate personnel, organizing staff development activities, determining textbooks, and coordinating reports from various publications.

Consequently, the work of external school supervisors from the Ministry of Education revolves around professional guidance for teachers, identifying problems in schools, proposing solutions, and assisting professional colleagues in performing their teaching duties effectively and efficiently.

On the other hand, school-based instructional supervision is undertaken by the head teacher, or those delegated to do so on their behalf. According to Tyagi (2010), this form of supervision, carried out by school staff (Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher, senior masters/teachers, department heads/chairs, and other assigned supervisors), aims to provide guidance, support, and continuous assessment to teachers for their professional development and improvement in the teaching-learning process.

At the post-basic school level, school-based supervision is conducted daily by the principal and other recognized school supervisors who are responsible for coordinating, monitoring, and directing activities within their jurisdiction. Essentially, school-based instructional supervision encompasses the activities of those in authority within the school to ensure the betterment and improvement of instructional activities, thereby effectively and efficiently realizing educational objectives.

A Critique of External and School-Based Supervision in Nigerian Post-Basic Secondary Schools

The two types of instructional supervision (external and school-based) in post-basic schools often generate debate regarding their effectiveness in assessing teacher performance. Research studies on the optimal mode of instructional supervision in Nigerian post-basic secondary schools have shown inconsistencies. Modebulu (2008) and Walker (2016) contend that external instructional supervision is more effective in promoting teacher effectiveness, arguing that teachers tend to accord more respect to external supervisors than to their school principals and colleagues performing school-based supervision duties. Conversely, Eya & Leonard (2012) and Okobia (2015) postulate that school-based instructional supervision is more attuned to the individual needs and problems of teachers, thus better influencing effective performance in the teaching-learning process and helping less effective and inexperienced teachers improve their teaching capabilities.

Ideally, external instructional supervision, through its role in controlling school functioning, supporting teachers, and facilitating regular exchange between schools, could be a vital instrument for quality improvement in the teaching-learning process. However, this is rarely the case in Nigeria. Research by Ogunode & Ajape (2021) and Idris (2023) confirms a lack of satisfaction among teachers, principals, and supervisors regarding the impact of external supervision on classroom instructional activities. Systematically, when teachers compare the impact of external instructional supervision on their performance with that of their principal or professional colleagues, external supervision consistently scores significantly lower. This lack of impact stems from a series of complex factors, primarily revolving around three key issues.

Firstly, there is a profound conflict between the available resources and the mandate of the service. The mandate is highly demanding, requiring control and support for all schools and teachers, while also disseminating ministry policies and strategies and bringing school realities to decision-makers' attention. The unprecedented expansion in the number of schools and teachers has not been matched by a proportional increase in the number of supervisors. The evident result is that each supervisor is responsible for an overwhelming number of schools and teachers, making it impossible to visit more than once or twice in three to four years. Secondly, precisely because external supervisors have numerous tasks and schools, yet are expected to cover all institutions (and the number of schools supervised may influence their performance evaluation), they tend to spend very little time in each school visited. On average, external supervisors in Nigeria spend only 1/5 or 20% of their time on school visits (Idris, 2023). Consequently, their visits almost invariably lead to superficial reports with little credibility in the eyes of principals and teachers. Thirdly, the lack of impact is directly related to the insufficient attention given to follow-up supervision.

Studies in Nigeria have concluded that the astronomical expansion in secondary schools and enrollment figures in the late 1970s and early 1980s, coupled with a steady decline in educational funding, has resulted in irregular instructional activity supervision. Ikegbusi (2014) observed that schools are not regularly visited by Ministry of Education supervisors, and when supervision does occur, it is far from thorough. Supervision reports are rarely made available, and there are no follow-ups to ensure identified weaknesses have been corrected. For instance, in Kano State, Idris (2012) revealed that only 56 external supervisors from KERD (the schools' supervision department of the state's Ministry of Education) are responsible for visiting 780 public secondary schools, assisting and supporting over 8,631 teachers under the Kano State Secondary Schools Management Board (KSSSMB), and overseeing the activities of more than 3,799 teachers from private secondary schools. This implies that, on average, an external supervisor in Kano State is responsible for over 200 teachers and more than 17 schools. Furthermore, Paul's (2015) study, cited in Ogunode and Ajape (2021), identified an inadequate number of supervisors, insufficient motivation, lack of executive power to enforce supervision recommendations, inadequate resources, and the unprecedented expansion of schools and teacher population as major factors contributing to this ineffectiveness.

The service continues to face an acute shortage of funds and personnel, both in terms of quantity and quality, despite the enormous expansion in the number of schools and the growth in teacher population. A recent investigation in the North-West zone indicated that only 767 external instructional supervisors are available to cater to 51,577

teachers in 3,025 senior secondary schools, with a population and school size that are twice as large from junior secondary schools in the zone (Idris, 2023). Consequently, even the schools that receive these rare visits are seldom selected based on their need for supervision and support, but rather for practical or administrative reasons. This results in more remote schools receiving less instructional supervision.

To exacerbate matters for external instructional supervision, there is the issue of 'personal integrity' among supervisors, influenced by societal peculiarities such as corruption and bribery. External supervisors are part and parcel of a society where bribery, though illegal and immoral, is frequently offered and accepted. This can influence supervisors' decisions. Ijaiya and Fasasi, cited in Idris (2012), argue that poor funding can lead to external instructional supervisors accepting 'brown envelopes' (cash) or gifts from principals, which could severely impact their decision-making. They state that "a school can be unfairly treated for not offering a brown envelop or over praised because of its largesse."

Alternatively, school-based instructional supervision, according to Beach and Reinhartz (2010), is expected to address the following major challenges:

Assisting teachers across various categories (beginning, qualified, unqualified, under-qualified) to improve their teaching behavior.
Helping school administration plan individual teacher participation in staff development, thereby preparing them for different or increased responsibilities.
Assisting schools in selecting relevant instructional materials and equipment.
Helping schools implement government educational curricula.
Improving the relationship between teachers and principals.
Leading in curriculum development.

The trend in school-based instructional supervision increasingly involves schools initiating processes of self-analysis and self-evaluation in the teaching-learning process to ensure total quality delivery through the preparation of school improvement (development) plans (De-Grauwe, 2009). The philosophy behind school-based instructional supervision is to foster a culture of continuous improvement in the instructional process through teachers' collaborative efforts, thereby satisfying the needs of education customers. Burton, Carper, and William (2011) summarize school-based instructional supervision as an "effort made by the school principal to support teachers to become more effective in their jobs and equally access professional development on the job which enhance the learning achievement of the students."

This approach is built on the premise that every step of a service or operation has room for improvement. This aligns with Deming's cycle of continuous improvement, typically based on the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle. According to Raouf (2018), quality assurance in education through school-based instructional supervision is the process of ensuring continuous improvement in all aspects of an institution's educational operations to satisfy the needs and expectations of its customers (society). Thus, school-based supervision in secondary schools is an internal mechanism adopted by principals for school self-evaluation, aimed at helping teachers and students improve their teaching and learning activities to achieve educational objectives. The primary goal is to effectively monitor curriculum implementation and ensure a desirable increase in teacher capabilities, upgrade their conceptual knowledge and teaching skills,

and provide support to facilitate better performance in teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning outcomes in the school settings.

Three vital issues from school-based supervision are particularly relevant to instructional process improvement: emphasis on wastage prevention, involvement of all stakeholders (students, teachers, head teachers, supervisors, and parents) in the quality assurance process, and securing the right attitude and commitment from all involved to effective teaching and learning, making quality delivery a universal concern. According to Ezedi (2012), a school-based instructional supervision strategies framework should analytically and frequently examine the following variables:

1. *Teacher Service*: Regularity and punctuality, weekly lesson preparation, coverage of work schedules, and documentation of students' work.
2. *Students' Learning Effort*: Regularity and punctuality to classes, completion of assignments, achievements, and conduct scores.
3. *Curriculum Benefits*: Adequacy of textbooks and their uses, relevance of continuous assessment, and guidance and counseling within the school system.
4. *School Facilities*: Adequate sanitation and maintenance of accommodation facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, halls, offices, etc.), equipment, and supplies.

The involvement of principals in instructional supervision offers several operational advantages. Firstly, principals are most likely to have more time for supervision because they deal with teachers within their own schools, eliminating the need to travel to different schools, unlike external supervisors (Tsabalala, 2017). As such, they may be better positioned to observe both teachers' instructional activities and students' learning efforts, and determine whether intended objectives are being realized. Secondly, according to Hunter, cited in Idris (2023), the principal controls the school's "reward" system, which can be a powerful strategy for improving instructional delivery. Thirdly, as the principal employs a variety of supervision techniques tailored to the diverse needs of individual teachers, there is a greater likelihood of public satisfaction with the instructional process (Burton, Carper & William, 2011). Accordingly, the World Bank (2011) reported a growing conviction that the empowerment of school-based instructional supervision has led to high performance from PTA or casual teachers (regardless of professional qualification) due to their regular subjection to principal's supervision. These findings suggest that school-based instructional supervision has become a cross-cutting tool and a pivot around which teacher effectiveness and student performance in schools revolve.

Conclusion

The role of the principal, vice-principals, senior masters/mistresses, and heads of departments as school-based supervisors is more crucial than ever for improving instructional effectiveness in Nigerian post-basic secondary schools, especially given the infrequent and inadequate involvement of external school supervisors in matters related to instructional improvement. Therefore, closer, regular, and continuous instructional supervision, rather than fleeting, partial, and unscheduled visits, is urgently needed to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness in Nigerian post-basic secondary schools, particularly with the recent changes introduced to the school curriculum.

Recommendations

In light of the significance of instructional supervision in achieving effective teaching and learning in Nigerian post-basic secondary schools, the following recommendations are made:

1.   Prioritize School-Based Supervision: A closer, regular, and continuous school-based instructional supervision should be encouraged over snappy and unscheduled external visits.
2.   Optimize Supervisory Techniques: School supervisors should fully utilize instructional supervision techniques such as demonstration teaching, classroom observation, workshops, seminars, orientation programs, and conferences with teachers to foster teachers' professional growth and improve the teaching and learning process.
3.   Strengthen External Monitoring: Instructional supervisors from the Ministry of Education should be encouraged to regularly visit secondary schools to closely monitor principals' attitudes toward instructional supervision of teachers and the supervisory strategies they employ to enhance teacher effectiveness. This will incentivize principals to improve their supervisory responsibilities.
4.   Increase Educational Funding: The annual budget allocated to the educational sector should be increased to meet UNESCO's recommended benchmark of 26% of the country's GDP.
5.   Encourage Community Engagement: Local communities should be encouraged to enhance effective teaching and learning by improving their attendance at school functions, serving on school committees, and providing a conducive atmosphere for effective teaching and learning.

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