

Concerns of Teachers and Principals on Instructional Supervision in Three Asian Countries

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Abstract—This study discusses on the nature of instructional supervision carried out in schools in three Asian countries India, Malaysia and Thailand. This study followed the qualitative method involving questionnaire and interview. About hundred teachers and twenty five principals and other heads from three countries participated in this study. The questionnaire was sent through post or email while interview was conducted either face to face or online using msn or Skype. The responding rate of participants was hundred percent. The discussion was focused on four themes that are related to the research questions namely supervision as a continuous, developmental and corporate process; supervision as a specialists' area, the role of principals and teachers in instructional supervision and benefits to the teachers through instructional supervision. Evidences of findings accounted for instructional supervision being just eye wash, a paper completion and punitive process and non beneficial to the teachers. The participants stressed for involving teachers, principals, subject teachers and subject specialist to make instructional supervision practices more meaningful. The findings advocated for supervision to be continuous development and corporate process.

Index Terms—Instructional supervision, instructional leadership, clinical supervision

I. INTRODUCTION

The process and purpose of instructional supervision have been debated by K-12 teachers, administrators, higher education scholars, and legislators (Gland & Neville, 1997; Glickman, 1992; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). According to Glickman (1992), "without a strong, effective, and adequately staffed program of supervision, an effective school is unlikely to result". Supervision can be defined as "the glue of a successful school" (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007).

"The glue is the process by which some person or group of people is responsible for providing a link between individual teacher needs and organizational goals so that individuals within the school can work in harmony toward their vision of what the school should be ... Unfortunately, there are more 'glueless' than glued schools. Research findings on the effectiveness of schools paint a dismal picture. Most schools simply do not make much difference in their students' lives ... Thus, the primary function of effective supervision is to take responsibility for putting more glue into the school".(p. 6)

Supervision has become an integral component and

process in the operation of schools (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

II. SUPERVISION AS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Goldhammer (1969) advocated for self supervision and suggested that supervision should increase teachers' willingness and ability to supervise themselves and their colleagues. Zepeda, Wood, and O'Hair (1996) coined the term, "auto supervision," to describe the ability of teachers to supervise themselves, and Joyce and Showers' (1982) research has provided the rationale for collegial, peer coaching. 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). MacKenzie (1983) stated, "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" (p. 8).

III. SUPERVISION FOR SUPPRESSING TEACHERS

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. Five categories of supervision at its worst were identified by the participants, 114 teachers across two states, in this study. Categories included:

- (1) supervision as a dog and pony show;
- (2) supervision as a weapon;
- (3) supervision as a meaningless/invisible routine;
- (4) supervision as a fix- it list; and,
- (5) supervision as an unwelcome intervention. (p. 73)

Blumberg (1980), in *Supervision and Teachers: A Private Cold War*, described the negative relationship between supervisors and teachers, describing the resentment teachers felt toward supervisors, and this resentment continues to be a major barrier in achieving benefit from the practice of supervision. Teachers' perceptions of supervisors were negative, and the teachers believed that supervisors were not of any valuable assistance. Blumberg asserted that supervision was used as a means to control and to exert power. He concluded that supervision in schools had two main components:

The first is that much of what occurs in the name of supervision in the schools (the transactions that take place between supervisor and teacher) constitutes a waste of time,

as teachers see it. In many instances, the best evaluation that teachers give of their supervision is that it is not harmful. The second is that the character of relationships between teachers as a group and supervisors as a group can be described as a private cold war. Neither side trusts the other, nor is each side convinced of the correctness of the process. (p. 5). For many teachers, supervision is a meaningless exercise that has little value other than completion of the required evaluation form. Sullivan and Glanz (2000) stated, "Historically, the evaluation function of supervision is rooted in bureaucratic inspectional-type supervision. In other words, the evaluative aspect of the supervisory function emanates from organizational requirements to measure and assess teaching effectiveness" (p. 22). Moswela B(2010) also has reported that instructional supervision in Botswana secondary schools is conducted for wrong reasons (p.80)

IV. EXPECTATIONS FROM 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. In some schools supervisors are known to be experts, passing along judgments and advice to teacher technicians. Fullan (1998) has suggested that the supervisors will need to develop a new mind-set, breaking the bond of dependency created by overload and "packaged solutions" and thinking outside the box. This is the area more research has to be done to determine to what extent the model is being practiced by the supervisors. In view of the above facts it's necessary to study the nature of instructional supervision vision practiced in schools Asian countries India, Malaysian and Thailand.

A. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to answer the following questions

- 1) What is the nature of supervision in the schools?
- 2) What are the perceptions of the teachers regarding the instructional supervision practiced by the supervisors?
- 3) Is instructional supervision practiced in these countries really beneficial for teachers'?

B. Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to data collection. Its qualitative nature arises from the use of open ended questions and interview. The research was carried out in

three Asian countries Malaysia, Thailand and India at different times in three years.

Open Ended Questionnaire

A seven item questionnaire was developed to study perception of experienced and in experienced teachers about supervision. The questionnaire was tried out in two different schools to explore the level of experience that the participants have pertaining to the topic of instructional supervision and 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 on supervision. Keeping in mind the responses obtained from the preliminary study of the questionnaire, the interview questions were developed and given to the same teachers from the two schools to ensure 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 three Asian countries, Thailand, Malaysia and India. 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. The interviews were either conducted face to face or using msn or Skype.

C. 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 four themes that are related to the research questions namely: (1) Supervision as a continuous, developmental and corporate process; (2) Supervision as a specialists' area, the role of principals in instructional supervision and benefits to the teachers through instructional supervision.

D. Findings

Responses from interview and open ended questions are reported together because the same questions applied to both. The response rate and participation rate for questionnaire and interview was hundred percent. The following are the findings of the study.

V. SUPERVISION AS A CONTINUOUS, DEVELOPMENTAL AND CORPORATE PROCESS

According to Pajak(1993) instructional supervision is a

corporate process between supervisor and supervisee. As such teaching as group effort towards a group goal should not be prescriptive for teacher. Goldhammer (1969), Cogan (1973), suggest within a positive general supervisory climate, a strong and dynamic relationship exists between the teacher and the supervisor. The majority of teachers (n=92) from three Asian countries 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 since they are the people directly affected by it"

"Teachers are the major players in the instructional supervision; hence their role must be viewed with utmost care and concern throughout the process".

"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"

"If instructional supervision is to help the teachers in improving their teachings, then their role should not be neglected from beginning to end. Sudden appearance of principal in ongoing class with papers and continuously writing comments are indicative of paper work not improving instructions".

Dean (1993) 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. 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. 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 (1985) 'Developmental Model'; Goldhammer (1969), Cogan (1973) 'Clinical Supervision Model' and Collegial Supervision Model would inculcate the feeling of ownership of instructional supervision process and change their attitude about supervision.

Majority of teachers (n=89) from three Asian countries believe that purpose of supervision by principals or other heads is punitive. 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".

"Me and my supervisor are teaching same year and same subject but different division. Every time he complains me of my teaching throughout the year. But always during external examination results my students score better than his. Even for the last five successive years none of my student has failed in my subject, but his ten students have failed. I want to know who needs supervision and by whom".

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION AS A SPECIALIST AREA

Teachers (n=96) view instructional supervision as an area

where they can play vital role right from planning. They expect their meaningful involvement as they have specialized knowledge in field of teaching and command over subject. This can be observed from the following comments

"Instructional supervision should be left to the subject specialist".

"Only English language specialist can supervise English teacher and same with the other subjects".

"I was surprised with my supervisor's comments on my pronunciation as I am English teacher while supervisor can't pronounce most of the English words properly as he is Mathematics graduate".

This view comes in line with that of Hart and Bredeson (1996). It clearly reflects that teachers do not support the principal's presence in the class without knowing the subject contents. This is because most of the principals or heads spend most of their time in office and have no touch to classroom teaching. This feeling is supported by the following comments

"Our heads can't help us with our teaching problems as they are very busy with the administrative work".

"Being out of touch to the classroom teaching and lack of latest knowledge with subject contents and teaching methodologies, its immature to expect supervision out of such school heads or principals".

VII. 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 Goldhammer (1969), Cogan (1973), 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. Some of the principals advocated for involving the subject experts to carry out the process of supervision. Most of the principals and other heads (n=21) 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. However seven principals argued that it is their responsibility to supervise classroom teaching otherwise they won't know about proceedings in ongoing classrooms.

Principals have official role in overseeing the implementation of the broad curriculum in schools. Glickman (1995) 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. The task of instructional supervision as envisaged by the majority of respondents can be delegated to subject supervisors and subject specialists too. This doesn't keep aside a principal

from the role of instructional leader. As mentioned by Zepeda Sally (2003), building strong team of teacher leaders is one of the important roles of school principals. The principals who support teacher leadership opportunities cultivate capacity for leadership who in turn promote leadership among more teachers. This helps people working with common goal, yield more positive results-reduce isolation, generation and refinement of ideas and approaches. This is in accordance with suggestions by Hart and Bredeson (1996), Hoy and Miskel (1991), Everard and Morris (1990), instructional leadership should be a corporate responsibility that empowers others. If a principal tries to do everything including supervision, he would leave with nothing to show as achievement.

VIII. BENEFITS TO TEACHER

From the evidences it can be observed that instructional supervision in these three Asian countries 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. Almost all the teachers (n=97) 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 .We can’t even predict if principal is pleased with our teaching or not”.

IX. 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 and they are not at all benefited by the process. 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.

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