

Instructional Supervision and Its Benefits: A Study of Junior High Schools Social Studies Teachers in the Aowin Municipality

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Abstract

The study was conducted to examine the state of instructional supervision of social studies teachers in the Aowin Municipality in the Western North Region of Ghana. Two research questions were formulated in this study using descriptive survey research design methods. The study employed the multi-stage sampling strategy using stratified, simple random and quota sampling techniques to sample 120 respondents. A questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The study revealed that instructional supervision assists in broadening the knowledge and experience of supervisees. It also provides teachers with the required professional support for teaching social studies. The study concluded that there was some level of insufficiency on the part of some headteachers and circuit supervisors and inadequate resources for supervision leading to poor supervision. The study further revealed that the municipal directorate does not provide adequate support on instructional supervision activities in the Municipality. In instructional supervision, supervisors fail to employ relevant knowledge and skills in their instructional supervision at all times. The study, therefore, recommended that the Municipal Education Directorate should try as much as possible to appoint competent and experienced teachers as circuit supervisors. Also, intensive training and workshops should be organized to supervisors to build their competencies in the supervision of teachers. Again, funds should be provided to supervisors to meet all financial needs related to the supervision of teachers.

Keywords: Supervision, Instructional Supervision, Social Studies, Teachers

1. Introduction

Over the years, quality education for the Ghanaian child has been and continues to be a key issue of great concern to governments and the people of Ghana. Governments have demonstrated their desire for quality education for Ghanaian children by allocating a high percentage of their budgets to the education sector. Between the periods of 2015 – 2019, the total expenditure on education grew slightly higher than the total expenditure for the government (UNICEF MICS, 2017). Education is the number one social sector priority for the government with a budget allocation of GH¢12.9 billion in 2019, against GH¢9.3 billion in 2018 (2019 Budget Highlights). According to Oxford Business Group, the budget on education for 2019 is the highest over the past 50 years. This shows the significance of education to the government of Ghana. A lot of reforms have taken place over the years. Attempts have been made by the Ministry of Education to mobilize actors and partners in the process of educational management to achieve quality education. All these numerous reforms that have taken place over the years bear testimony to the premium governments have placed on quality education.

A dynamic system of supervision and inspection has been recognised as the cornerstone of a sound system of education. An educational system would not be able to rise above the level of its inspectorate in the absence of effective supervision of teachers. That is why supervision and the inspectorate are considered as the backbone of educational improvement. The system of school supervision and inspection is not a new phenomenon in Ghana's educational system, especially in basic schools. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES) have re-organised the critical leadership role that circuit supervisors and head teachers play in ensuring that learning takes place in schools since 1987, with the emergence of the new educational reform. This leadership role involves providing support to the head teacher and teachers as curriculum advisors and in helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom (Circuit Supervisor's Handbook, 2002).

1.1 Problem Statement

Improving the quality of education in Ghana, partly through the improvement of supervision has been a priority of the MoE and the GES. Instructional supervision is mainly concerned with improving schools by helping teachers to reflect on their practices, to learn more about what they do, why they do, and to develop professionally (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Studies have indicated that instructional supervision has a clear connection with professional development (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Zepeda, 2007). Instructional supervision is a way to support professional growth and competency and has been identified as an integral component of staff development, not a separate activity (Nolan & Hoover, 2004).

It is revealed that circuit supervisors and headteachers do not visit schools they supervise to regularly monitor teaching and learning (Oduro, 2008). Mankoe (2007) argues that problems militating against effective supervision are: supervisors not being mobile, economic constraints make supervisors and teachers face the problem of making ends meet, lack of confidence, low academic qualification, and non-frequent continuous professional development training for supervisors, headmasters, teachers; and some supervisors not able to demonstrate in teaching, but always admonishing teachers towards effective teaching. Although the government of Ghana is focused on improving the supervision of instruction in schools, much still needs to be done. Informal discussion among people in society, and related research findings suggest that poor pupil performance in public schools, to some extent, is the result of ineffective supervision of teachers. These, therefore, warranted the conduct of this study to assess the state of instructional supervision of social studies teachers in the Aowin Municipality.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the state of instructional supervision of social studies teachers?
2. What are the benefits associated with instructional supervision of social studies teachers?

1.3 Justification of the Study

This study is expected to help teachers, supervisors and other responsible officers to be aware of the extent to which instructional supervision is being implemented. It will provide important information to the national and local policymakers and programme designers so that they will further revise and develop appropriate programs. It is also hoped that the study will contribute to the school communities by initiating responsible parties in the school improvement programme which ultimately will end with the highest learners' achievement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Meaning of Social Studies

Over the years there has not been a consensus among Social Studies scholars as to what the term Social Studies means. Many writers have therefore sought to define Social Studies based on their cultural background. According to Longstreet and Shane (1993), "the question of the definition has plagued the field of Social Studies since its inception in 1916" (p.262). Similarly, Barr, Barth and Shermis (1977) are of the view that the field of Social Studies is caught up with ambiguity, inconsistency and contradiction that represents a complex educational enigma that defies any final definition acceptable to all. Tamakloe (1994) looks at Social Studies as a subject that deals with the individual and the relationship with the environment. This goes to explain the fact that teaching of Social Studies should aim at exposing learners to the way of life of the society and the realization that humans, plants and all the other animals are dependent upon each other.

Linguist (1995) defines Social Studies as "an integration of knowledge, skill and processes and goes on to say that "the subject provides powerful learning in the humanities and social science to help children learn to be good problem solvers and wise decision-makers" (p. 1). To Martorella (1994) "Social Studies are selected information and modes of investigation from the social sciences, selected information from any area that relates directly to an understanding of individuals, groups and societies, and application of the selected information to citizenship education" (p. 7). To these writers, Social Studies is taught to promote citizenship by using social science concepts.

2.2 Instructional Supervision

During the past several decades, instructional supervision has been identified as a means to enhance the performance of teachers in professional roles, since being a true "professional" requires that a teacher has to be fully capable of making appropriate decisions and providing high-quality services. It also requires the teacher to be in constant pursuit of better understanding and more efficacious methodologies. Thus, supervision of instruction is closely connected with professional development.

This connection has been the theme of a thorough study in recent decades (Beach & Reinhartz, 2000; Glickman et al., 1998; Wanzare & Da Costa, 2000). Alfonso, Firth and Neville (1981) define instructional supervision as behaviours designated by the organisation that affects teacher behaviour to facilitate pupil learning and achieve the goals of an organization. Departments of Education in each state mandate the supervision of teacher performance in local school Municipality's for accountability and the improvement of schools (Glickman et al., 2001; Firth & Pajak, 1998).

Supervision is the cycle of activities between a supervisor and a teacher to improve classroom performance (Patrick & Dawson, 1985). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1971) believe the purpose of instructional supervision is to achieve those specified goals. Supervision requires the leader to oversee, assess, evaluate, and direct employees to ensure an organisation is meeting its goals (Glickman et al., 2001). Successful supervision promotes a vision to implement change in organizations that facilitate improvement (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). This standard-based approach structures teaching and learning based on school Municipality's performance on high stakes testing and a variety of other administrative criteria. Other criteria include attendance, teacher quality, technology, and adequate yearly progress toward achievement percentages (US Department of Education, 2001).

2.3 Importance of Instructional Supervision

According to Ogunsanya (2006), the ultimate purpose of supervision of schools is the improvement of pupils' learning, but its immediate focus is on the teacher and the educational setting. It, therefore, seeks to improve the total educational environment to enhance pupils' learning. Researchers believe that it has the potential to improve instruction in schools (Blasé & Blase, 2004; Dufour, 2004; Glanz, Shulman & Sullivan, 2007; Pansiri, 2008; Rous, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2009; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Tyagi, 2009). Empirical research studies have shown that contemporary instructional supervision practices have the potential to improve instruction and the entire school environment (Blasé & Blase, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Glanz, Shulman & Sullivan, 2007; Pansiri, 2008; Rous, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2009; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Tyagi, 2009). However, while a direct relationship between contemporary supervision and improved teaching has been established, the further link to improve student outcomes is much more tenuous (Glanz, Shulman & Sullivan, 2007). Nevertheless, most researchers and practitioners believe that improved instructional supervision can improve student learning via improved teaching.

Researchers have suggested various supervisory practices and behaviour which are likely to guide and equip teachers with the skills and competencies capable of improving their instructional practices and, which ultimately are likely to improve student outcomes (Blasé & Blase, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Glanz, Shulman & Sullivan, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2009; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000). One important aspect of supervision which researchers have theorised and shown empirically can improve instructional practices is informal visits to classrooms, also called "walkthroughs" (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Rous, 2004). Researchers have found that such visits provide supervisors with the opportunity to identify areas where teachers have difficulties and/or need improvement. Such knowledge helps supervisors provide assistance and support to teachers individually and in groups. Similarly, supervisors' physical presence in the classrooms allows teachers to seek assistance from supervisors, boost their morale and confidence and encourages them to strive to improve student achievement.

2.4 Previous Studies

Sule, Ameh and Egbai (2015) revealed that instructional supervision has a positive and significant relationship with assessing of teachers' lesson plan and teachers' role effectiveness. The researchers further asserted that continuous implementation of instructional supervision is what is needed to meet up with the new changes in the curriculum. Also, Mwaniki and Guantai (2018) assessed how instructional supervision influences teachers' competences in Kenya. The study found that supervision of teachers in schools is necessary for the improvement of teachers' instructional knowledge in assessment of students. They added that instructional supervision assists teachers in gaining skills and knowledge in lesson preparation and the use of instructional resources for teaching and learning

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Design

The study employed the quantitative approach to address the problem of the study. Under the quantitative approach, the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design was adopted by the researchers. Descriptive cross-sectional was used because none of the study's variables was manipulated and the data was collected at a particular point in time and no data was collected thereafter.

3.2 Sample

The study sampled 120 social studies teachers from a population of 400 social studies teachers from the Aowin Municipality. The respondents were selected through the use of a simple random sampling technique. Simple random was employed because it gave all the social studies teachers equal opportunity to take part in the study and they all possess similar characteristics.

3.3 Instrument

Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was developed by consulting existing literature related to the current study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: section one dealt with the demographic characteristics of the respondents, section two collected data related to the first research question and the last section elicited data related to the second research question.

3.4 Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the reliability of the research instruments, the instrument was pre-tested using 20 Social Studies teachers from the Suaman District. The data were subjected to Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis using Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 27.0 to determine the reliability coefficient (r) to establish the reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient (r) of 0.81 was obtained and this is deemed as an acceptable measure of reliability because more than 0.70 the threshold value of acceptability is achieved as a measure of reliability (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

To collect the data, the researchers first sought permission from the school heads and social studies teachers. The researchers arranged with the social studies teacher on a favourable day for the actual data collection. On the agreed day, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and the procedure for responding to the questionnaire to the study respondents. The respondents were assured of the necessary confidentiality. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers with the support from the circuit supervisors to the respondents and retrieved the same day of administration. This was done to ensure high coverage, completion, and retrieval rate.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were first processed using SPSS version 27.0 software. After the data have been processed, they were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The mean values were used to determine respondent's level of agreement to each of the statements given to them while the standard deviation was used to assess how related the respondent's responses are. The results from the data analysis were then presented using tables.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the state of instructional supervision of social studies teachers in the Aowin Municipality in the Western North Region of Ghana by considering the states used by supervisors and the benefits of instructional supervision to social studies teachers. This section of the paper presents and discusses the results of the study to tackle the research questions formulated to guide the study.

4.1 Background Characteristics of the Respondents

This section dealt with the distribution of the respondents by sex, highest professional level and the number of years in teaching. The data on the background characteristics of the respondents were analysed using frequency and percentage. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Teachers

| Variables | Sub-Scale | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 77 | 64.2 |
| | Female | 43 | 35.8 |
| Highest professional level | Diploma | 82 | 68.3 |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 38 | 31.7 |
| Number of years in teaching profession | 0 – 9 | 25 | 20.8 |
| | 10 – 20 | 70 | 58.3 |
| | 21 – 29 | 10 | 8.3 |

30 and above

15

18.8

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

The result from Table 1 reveals the demographic characteristics of teachers in the study. According to the results presented in Table 1, the statistics show that out of 120 respondents, 77 (64.2%) of the respondents were males while 43 (35.8%) of them were females. This implies that the majority of the respondents selected for the study were male teachers. Also, as depicted in Table 1, the majority 82 of the respondents selected for the study hold a diploma qualification representing 68.3% while 38 (31.7%) of the respondents hold a bachelor degree. This indicates that the teachers involved in the study hold the requisite qualification recognized by the Ghana Education Service for teaching social studies at the Junior High School level. Again, looking at the teaching experience of the respondents involved in the study, it was found that the majority 70 (58.3%) of the teachers have 10 – 20 years of teaching experience, 25 (20.8%) of them have 0 – 9 years of teaching experience, 10 (8.3%) have 21 – 29 years of teaching experience and 15 (18.8%) of the respondents have 30 years and above teaching experience. This shows that the teachers sampled for the study possessed the needed level of experience for teaching social studies.

Table 2: State of Instructional Supervision of Social Studies Teachers

| Statements | M | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Possess adequate knowledge on the approaches to the supervision of Social Studies. | 2.10 | 0.99 |
| Implement adequate and appropriate materials for instructional supervision. | 1.90 | 0.57 |
| Possess the necessary skills and knowledge for instructional supervision. | 2.40 | 0.52 |
| The municipal directorate supports instructional supervisory activities in the Municipality. | 2.70 | 0.68 |
| Sufficient funds are provided for organizing instructional supervision. | 1.10 | 0.32 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 2 reveals the responses of respondents about the state of instructional supervision of Social Studies. On the statements seeking responses from teacher respondents regarding whether circuit supervisors have adequate knowledge of the approaches for supervision of Social Studies, the respondents disagree to the statement ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.99$). This means that circuit supervisors do not show adequate knowledge of the approaches for supervising Social Studies teachers. This finding is in line with Druckner (2005), who says supervision involves the use of skills and these must be taught or learnt. Druckner continued that supervision should best be understood as a process that requires knowledge and experience. Druckner maintained that for the supervisor to develop the knowledge and skills to become an effective supervisor of others, the supervisor must first go through the process of effective supervision him/herself, particularly in terms of being supervised and mentored in the role of supervision. To Druckner, for supervision to be effective, prior experience and training of the supervisor must be considered and given greater emphasis. Supervisors who lack credibility may resort to coercive strategies to accomplish their goals. They may find it particularly difficult to undertake supervision activities constructively and effectively. A credible supervisor must be able to recognise good teaching when he sees it and be able to explain to teachers what he observes. The more the supervisor can relate his or her observations and suggestions to the needs of the teachers, the more credible his or her advice is likely to be. Supervision has now become technical and therefore those in supervisory positions must be proficient in conferencing, goal-setting, diagnosing instructional needs and observing classroom teaching.

Also, the respondents affirmed the fact that supervisors do not have adequate and appropriate materials for instructional supervision ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.57$). This indicates that during instructional supervision of social studies, supervisors appear not to implement the required materials and resources for their supervision.

Again, the respondents agreed that the municipal directorate supports instructional supervisory activities in the Municipality ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.68$). this differs from the views of Musaazi (1985) that if supervision is to achieve its goal by improving the process of instruction in the school, then the supervisor must take the lead in providing a pleasant, stimulating and wholesome environment in which teachers will want to work. According to Musaazi, supervisors must arrange courses or workshops, for teachers and headteachers to infuse in them new techniques in teaching. With regards to statements concerning circuit supervisors receiving sufficient funds for organizing instructional supervision, the respondents vehemently disagreed with the statement that supervisors receive financial support to organize instructional supervision ($M = 1.10$, $SD = 0.32$). it implies that circuit supervision task with the responsibility of supervising social studies teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning do not received the needed support financial to deliver their mandate.

Table 3: Benefits of Instructional Supervision of Social Studies

| Statements | M | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Instructional supervision results in increasing the knowledge and experience of the Teachers in the subject area. | 3.60 | 0.52 |
| Teachers receive professional support for the teaching of the subject when there is effective instructional supervision. | 3.10 | 0.32 |
| Instructional supervision results in instilling confidence and independence in the teachers teaching the subject. | 3.40 | 0.52 |
| There is a reinforcement of the relationship between the headteacher, circuit supervisor and the teacher during instructional supervision. | 3.70 | 0.48 |
| Instructional supervision results ineffective training of teaching on the job. | 3.70 | 0.48 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

The results from Table 3 indicate that respondents agreed with the statement that instructional supervision results in increasing the knowledge and experience of the teachers in the subject area ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.52$) and provision of adequate materials for instructional supervision ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.32$). According Beach and Reinhartz (2000), instructional supervision encourages teachers to examine and practice the art of teaching that involves observation on teachers while they are interacting with their students.

Similarly, the respondents declared to the fact that teachers receive professional support for teaching social studies when there is effective instructional supervision ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.52$) and there is a reinforcement of relationship between the headteacher, circuit supervisor and the teacher during instructional supervision ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.48$). This supports the view of Mankoe (2002), the heart of supervision is interaction and interaction call for effective communication. A key goal of communication is understanding and therefore listening becomes the central part of communication. For effective supervision to be realised those in supervisory roles should therefore learn how to listen well and how to communicate ideas for the understanding of their listeners.

Table 3 displays that the respondents sampled for the study agreed that ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.48$) instructional supervision leads to effective training of teaching on the job. It indicates that teachers can improve their teaching skills and strategies when they are being supervised. The finding supports Holland and Adams (2002), who stressed that instructional supervision administered in schools does help in increasing the teaching development of teachers while at the same time enable teachers to make improvements on their teaching practice to be more effective. Furthermore, they also describe instructional supervision as one size fits all practice. Through effective instructional supervision, teachers can improve on their teaching performance in terms of their teaching practice and the level of teaching knowledge in and out of classrooms. Since instructional supervision is focused on teaching quality, the evaluation towards teachers can be the catalyst in improving teachers' teaching and school performance. Instructional supervision needs a great deal of time to be enforced effectively but this practice proves to be worthwhile to increase teachers' teaching performance (Thomas, 2008). Thus, instructional supervision is a way for teachers to improve their teaching performance which indirectly will benefit the pupils.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study appear to suggest that supervisors who engaged in the supervision of social studies teachers are not abreast with the skills and competencies needed for the task. Also, the findings suggest that resources that are needed for effective and efficient supervision of social studies teachers are inadequate this is a result of a lack of financial support to these supervisors to perform their role. Further, instructional supervision appears to provide significant support to social studies teachers to improve their competence and experience in teaching social studies. The study, therefore recommended that the Municipal Education Directorate should try as much as possible to appoint competent and experienced teachers as circuit supervisors. Also, intensive training and workshops should be organized for supervisors to build their skills and competencies in the supervision of teachers. Again, funds should be provided to supervisors to acquire all necessary resources needed for the supervision of teachers and to meet other financial needs related to the supervision of teachers.

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