

Instructional Supervision Practices in Tanzanian Public Pre-primary Classes: Head Teachers and Pre-primary Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

The study aimed to find out teachers' perspectives about school-based instructional supervision practices for improving teaching skills among pre-primary teachers. Qualitative approach was used with a case study design. Data were obtained from sixteen participants using interview and documentary review. Thematic data analysis process was used. The study unveiled that head teachers' instructional supervision practices were not effectively done. Head teachers were lacking appropriate supervision skills for pre-primary classes. Conversely, pre-primary teachers wanted supervisors to conduct pre and post instructional supervision discussion. Besides, there were no formal arrangements for teachers to learn new teaching strategies. The study suggests that instructional supervision process should be in a collaborative way on a regular basis. This could be achieved through mentoring, coaching, teaming, clinical supervision and professional growth plans. It is recommended that head teachers should be trained regularly for effective supervision of pre-primary curriculum.

Keywords: *collaborative practices, instructional supervision, pre-primary education, teaching skills*

Introduction

The urge for education quality improvement in the 21st century makes it imperative for countries, Tanzania among them, to constantly strive for education reforms and innovations across various education levels including pre-primary education. Decentralizing education is one of the major reforms that place school leadership into the limelight of being responsible for improving quality of education by empowering teachers through school-based instructional supervision practices. Although studies have shown that instructional supervision has a positive influence in enhancing teaching skills (Comighud, Fotalan & Cordevilla, 2020; Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017; Dewodo, Dzakpasu & Agbetorwoka, 2020; Glanz, 2018; Zepeda & Ponticell, 2018), lack of time and relevant skills to implement instructional supervision practices hinders head teachers from conducting their instructional roles (Marishane, 2011).

In this regard, pre-primary teachers, apart from being trained to acquire relevant skills; they should also be given relatable instructional support to ensure that they improve their teaching skills and knowledge. To support this, the study done by Gezahegn and Mandefro (2019) proves that improving the pedagogical competences of supervisors has immense contribution to teachers' performance. Therefore, the capability of pre-primary teachers to improve their teaching skills and knowledge is for the most part influenced by quality of instructional leadership set by head teachers as instructional supervisors.

The Context of Pre-primary Education and Instructional Supervision

Investing in early childhood education in the recent years results from different studies that substantiate that educating young children leads to a multiplier benefits for individuals and societies at large (Hayden & Lee, 2009; Neuman & Devercelli, 2012; Neuman, Josephson & Chua, 2015; OECD, 2015; Soudée, 2009). The demand for quality of pre-primary education has come with growing attention to pre-primary teachers and their teaching skills (Shaeffer, 2015; Thomas & Thomas, 2009). This is because; teacher quality is the most significant school-based factor in determining pupils' learning outcomes (Logeswari, Kenny & Zuraidah, 2020). Owing to this importance, pre-primary teachers need to be persistently pedagogically supported for effective teaching. They should respond to continuous training and supervision with deepening pedagogical skills and knowledge needed for supervisory functions in schools (Coimbra, Pereira, Martins & Baptista, 2020).

The field of education supervision has a long history worldwide and attracted attention of both parents and teachers. Studies affirmed that supervision was about eye wash, a paper completion and punitive process (Sharma, Yusoff & Kannan, 2011). Correspondingly, Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2017) added that it was to "watch over", "direct", "oversee", and "superintend" the workers. Consequently, supervision was regarded as a management's tool to manipulate subordinates. Contrarily, Vencia, Michael, Peter and Onesmo (2018) viewed instructional supervision as a process of helping, guiding and mentoring teachers with the aim of improving their delivery of classroom instruction that results to effective learning. Acknowledging the fact that, instructional supervision at school level demands a greater interaction between the supervisors and the supervisee, numerous aspects need to be aligned in articulating the focus, purpose and implementation of the component. In developed countries such as United Kingdom and United States of America consideration was on school inspection rather than school supervision (Lee, Ding & Song, 2008).

In other countries, studies demonstrate that education supervision within the school helps teachers to acquire new skills and teaching methods (Oke, 2016). It means

that teacher collaboration and learning within the school context are regarded as influential ways for improving teaching skills and result in effective teaching. In this context, Blase' and Blase (1999) assert that effective principals value dialogue that encourages teachers to critically reflect on their professional practices using collaborative strategies such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modelling, using inquiry, soliciting advice and opinions, and praising where appropriate. Based on different collaborative supervisory practices, the joint work of class observation, with supervisor and teacher working together, generally presents cycles of observation action-reflection that are specific to action research (Zepeda, 2017). Hence, instructional supervision practices as part of continuous professional development within the school is a means by which teachers can take part in life-long learning to enhance their teaching and develop into skilled and effective practitioners. Sharma, Yusoff and Kannan (2011) advocate that for supervision to be a continuous development and corporate process, teachers' roles should be viewed with utmost care and concern throughout the process. According to Zepeda (2017), effective instructional supervision has the potential to allow teachers to examine their own classroom practices through the assistance of the supervisors to promote growth and free interaction that aim at problem solving and capacity building. Ogundele, Sambo and Bwoi (2014) asserted that collaboration supervision models have a significant influence on early childhood education programmes as they improve teaching skills and knowledge among teachers.

School-based Instructional Supervision in Tanzania

In Tanzania, school-based instructional supervision is deemed to be head teachers' duty. In this context, it is regarded as a process of overseeing pedagogical implementation at the school level done by head teachers in collaboration with School Quality Assurance Team (SQAT) (MoEST, 2017). Despite head teachers instructional supervision responsibilities, studies have shown that, there is ineffective teaching at pre-primary classes. Pre-primary teachers fail to effectively realize their teaching roles (Mghasse & William, 2016; MoEVT, 2010; MoEVT, 2008; Shukia, 2014; Wilinski, Nguyen & Landgraf, 2016). Poor teaching skills and knowledge among public pre-primary teachers have been revealed as one among the contributing factors. A study by Kweku and Stelah (2018) discloses that supervisory practices that were mostly practised by head teachers including checking teacher's records of work and monitoring punctuality and regularity were found not to improve teaching skills. According to McGhee and Jimerson (2017) regular collaborative strength-based supervision approach promotes teacher growth as it allows teachers to be both proactive and innovative problem-solvers to meet the teaching challenges. Hence, in order to improve pre-primary teachers' pedagogical skills, head teachers should ensure regular collaborative instructional supervision practices.

Despite this fact, teaching in Tanzanian public pre-primary classes is reported to be of poor quality. Studies conducted on pre-primary education generally discovered that poor quality of pre-primary education results from various factors including inadequate qualified, committed and loving teachers, poor teaching skills, inadequate classrooms, shortage of teaching and learning resources as well as ineffective instructional supervision skills (Anderson & Sayre, 2016; Komba, 2016; Mghasse & William, 2016; Tandika, 2015; Shukia, 2014; USAID, 2014; UWEZO, 2015). These studies ignored the prominence of head teachers' instructional supervision practices on improving teaching skills among public pre-primary teachers. Therefore, the current study found out head teachers' and pre-primary teachers' perspectives on instructional supervision practices and how these practices improve teaching skills among pre-primary teachers.

Theoretical Basis

This study is informed by the Student-Centred Accountability and Connection Theory propounded by Marzano in 2003 and then improved by Reeves and Douglas in 2004. The theory believes that school supervisors are generally responsible for teachers and students' academic success. They should coach and mentor teachers using discussions and practices related to effective teaching. In this context, they are supposed to support teachers with appropriate instructional skills required to cope with curriculum intentions. Based on this theory, the fundamental guides for understanding instructional supervisors' roles are instructional supervisors' effectiveness, teachers' level in mastering subject content, the quality of teaching/learning strategies, as well as the frequency of supervision. The theory informs the theoretical basis of this study because the school-based instructional supervision is a leadership role practised in the school context. As an organization, school entails the collection of different interests and needs. The theory corresponds with the current study objectives given that it (i) insists on the instructional supervision roles that can improve teaching and (ii) ensures that teacher needs and views can be effectively articulated and coordinated for effective teaching and learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out head teachers' and pre-primary teachers' perspectives concerning the instructional supervision practices in public pre-primary classes in Tanzania.

Research Questions

The study intended to address the following research questions.

- i. What are the head teacher's roles on school-based instructional supervision as related to the improvement of pre-primary teachers' skills?
- ii. How can head teachers' school-based instructional supervision process for pre-primary classes be improved?

Methodology

The study employed qualitative research approach using a case study design. A case study design was employed in order to shed light on the school-based instructional supervision process in pre-primary classes. In this context, a case was school-based instructional supervision practices and the units of analysis were the head teachers and pre-primary teachers from eight selected public primary schools in Musoma Municipality and Butiama District in Mara Region, Tanzania. The two districts were purposively selected due to their academic performance based on PSLE for 2018 and 2019 respectively. While Musoma Municipality appeared in the top for two years respectively, Butiama trailed in the bottom for the same two years. In both districts schools were heterogeneous. Therefore, they were ranked from top to bottom using Grade Point Average (GPA) regarding the 2020 standard seven National Examination performance and then they were categorized into top and bottom level performers. The top two and bottom two primary schools with pre-primary classes were purposively selected from the two districts to make a total of eight primary schools with pre-primary classes.

The study employed sixteen participants who included eight head teachers and eight pre-primary teachers. These were purposively selected by virtue of their supervision and teaching roles in their respective schools. Five out of eight pre-primary teachers were females and the remaining three were males. Regarding their professional qualifications, five out of them had pre-primary education skills and three of them had not any training. On the other hand, among the eight selected head teachers, two were females and the remaining six were males. With exception of two head teachers, the remaining were not trained in pre-primary education.

Data to address the research questions of this study were collected using interview. The interview guide comprised open-ended questions which according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) enabled the researcher to gather in-depth data and clarify, add to or ask for more elaborations during the interview session. Interview was administered to head teachers and pre-primary teachers. The assumption was that both categories of respondents were having different perspectives on the status of school-based instructional supervision practices in pre-primary classes. The collected data were subjected to thematic analysis guided by the six stages of data analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). The stages include data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report.

Practically, the audiotapes and the field notes that contained interview data were carefully listened to and read several times respectively then transcribed. All sixteen transcripts and audio recordings were organised and coded to fit the purpose of

the study. The coded nodes were read and re-read to identify significant meaning patterns (themes). Data were analyzed into common patterns and themes. This data analysis technique enabled the researcher to sort out similarities and differences in participants' perspectives. Analysis to identify the story was based on each theme in relation to the study objectives and research questions to ensure no much overlapping between themes. The researcher recognized the main ideas emerging from the information obtained for theme generation.

Findings and Discussion

In addressing the study objective, two key research questions were formulated as follows: –

a. What were the head teacher's roles on school-based instructional supervision as related to the improvement of pre-primary teachers' skills? b. How can head teachers' school-based instructional supervision for pre-primary classes be improved? The findings are presented into the following themes: –

Monitoring Pre-primary Curriculum

The findings demonstrated that there was poor monitoring of pre-primary curriculum in the selected primary schools. Head teachers' function of monitoring pre-primary curriculum was found to be not effective. Pre-primary teachers were not effectively monitored by head teachers as many of them were doing what pleased them. This was because; head teachers were lacking relevant skills on pre-primary education. Besides, most of them had inadequate time for monitoring pre-primary classes. On the other hand, some pre-primary teachers had inadequate teaching skills for teaching pre-primary classes. One pre-primary teacher from school B remarked:

One among the factors for poor teaching in public pre-primary classes is ineffective monitoring of pre-primary classes. Pre-primary teachers are not effectively monitored by head teachers since many of them do what please them. This is due to the fact that, most of head teachers lack relevant skills on pre-primary education. However, some of teachers also have inadequate apposite teaching skills for pre-primary classes. I think these teachers need effective monitoring and supervision to improve their teaching skills. Hence, without regular close monitoring of pre-primary curriculum, many pupils will not achieve the intended learning outcomes.

From the illustration above, pre-primary teachers need effective monitoring to get quality teaching in public pre-primary classes. This can mostly be achieved if head teachers are effective in monitoring pre-primary curriculum. Pre-primary teachers demonstrated that for effective monitoring of pre-primary curriculum, head teachers require appropriate skills for instructional monitoring and pre-primary education. These findings relate to those reported by Neuman and Devercelli

(2012) who observed that, currently, many countries give priorities in developing early childhood development policies, but they are not effective due to improper implementation and monitoring plans. Similarly, the findings corroborate with those of Marishane (2011) which established that lack of in-depth training among head teachers for their instructional roles creates a barrier for effective curriculum monitoring and supervision. Gezahegn and Mandefro (2019) suggested that improving supervisors' pedagogical competences has a significant contribution to improving teachers' performance.

Ensuring Effective Instructional Supervision Practices

The findings demonstrated that there were poor instructional supervision practices for improvement of teaching skills among pre-primary teachers. Additionally, it was reported that, most head teachers were missing the apposite instructional supervision skills and knowledge for pre-primary classes. One head teacher from School E remarked:

When you talk about head teachers' instructional practices I think you mean the required skills that head teachers are supposed to have for effective supervision of pre-primary classes. If this is true, I am missing those skills. Although I have not been trained on pre-primary education as a head teacher, I'm supposed to see how teaching is going on there. Just imagine how someone can supervise something which she/he is not skilled in.

The voice shows that head teachers' were lacking pedagogical supervision skills for pre-primary classes. Most of the head teachers admitted that they lacked proper supervision skills for them to render pedagogical support for improving teaching skills among pre-primary teachers. This was also supported by Phillips (2012) who found that although educational supervision is critical in realisation of the effective schools, supervisors had inadequate appropriate skills for its effectiveness. Further, among various tasks performed by head teachers, seldom were they devoted to instructional leadership and monitoring. These findings are similar to those reported by Madziyire (2013) on educational leadership and supervision in Zimbabwe which found that when instructional supervision is done by administrators, there is a possible role conflict due to the fact that prospects of the supervisory practices are not in line with those of administration. In this perspective, instructional supervision process should be a liaison developing process between a head teacher and a teacher that is made on mutual trust, harmonious interaction and professional autonomy as concerned.

Ensuring Regularity of Instructional Supervision in Pre-primary Classes

The findings from almost all respondents unveiled that head teachers were not frequently supervising pre-primary classes. Pre-primary teachers preferred to have regular instructional supervision to improve their teaching skills. They wanted to see more instructional support regarding teaching techniques and strategies for their professional development. They insisted that instructional supervision process among pre-primary teachers should be conducted in a collaborative way on a regular basis which would help them improve their teaching skills. This was noted by one pre-primary teacher from school H who said:

Collaborative instructional supervision practices done on a regular basis can improve teaching skills among pre-primary teachers for effectiveness of pre-primary curriculum. In my school this is not done effectively. Normally, I struggle for myself to acquire new teaching techniques to improve my classroom teaching.

The above quotation demonstrates that head teachers' instructional supervision practices were not collaborative and regularly done to enable pre-primary teachers improve their teaching skills. This finding concurs with that of Vencia et al (2018) who unveiled that school-based instructional supervision requires principals to do closer, periodic and continual internal supervision practices to ensure that teachers grow professionally and improve classroom teaching. The findings are also supported by those reported in a study by Kweku and Stelah (2018) which revealed that most supervisory practices that were rarely practised by head teachers were mostly based on the review of teacher's work records and classroom monitoring. The study done by Stark, McGhee and Jimerson (2017) discovered that regular collaborative strength-based supervision approach promotes teachers' growth as it enables teachers to be proactive and innovative problem-solvers to meet the teaching challenges.

Encouraging Learning new Teaching Strategies from Other Colleagues

Pre-primary teachers were asked whether they had opportunities to meet and share ideas about instructional improvement with their colleagues. The findings disclosed that most of them did not have formal teams to meet with and share new teaching strategies. Only a few of them demonstrated that, they learned from their colleagues predominantly those with experience in lower primary classes but they did not have formal arrangements to meet and share ideas as remarked by one pre-primary teacher from school F:

There is nothing like formal team of teachers meeting for sharing new teaching strategies. However, when I meet any challenge

regarding my classroom teaching and need assistance I tend to invite class I or II teachers who know better and ask them for help. In this way, we share ideas but not formally as you know that even those teachers have no appropriate skills for teaching pre-primary classes.

The above quotation shows that pre-primary teachers were not having formal meetings to share ideas regarding new teaching strategies for instructional improvement. Most of them stated that they were using their own initiatives to seek assistance from their fellow teachers particularly those who teach in lower primary classes. Moreover, teachers insisted that there were no dedicated school-based plans and strategies geared towards teaming among them. This made them not to learn from each other regarding new teaching strategies. Ogundele, Sambo and Bwoi (2014) in their study recommended that pre-primary teachers should learn new teaching strategies from their colleagues. This is because; team learning among teachers tends to improve teaching skills. Supporting this, Aurthor and Zepeda (2016) adds that head teachers should ensure that teachers are often engaged in team learning for them to acquire new teaching strategies and methods for improvement of their classroom teaching. This can be done through workshops, conference and seminars conducted within the school for the teaching improvement of early childhood education.

Conducting Dialogue Regarding Pre and Post Instructional Supervision

The findings revealed that pre-primary teachers wanted their supervisors to conduct both pre and post instructional supervision discussion and listen to them. They insisted that this would help them learn more on how teaching and learning process take place. They certainly admitted that during discussion weak points on teaching are highlighted and rectified. One pre-primary teacher from school C claimed:

I think that after the supervision process, head teachers should discuss with us the weakness observed during teaching process and not to judge us wrongly. This makes us lose interest in teaching this class. They should not only focus on reviewing the teaching documents and signing them. Instead, they have to give feedback after the supervision process and allow free discussion on how to improve the weakness observed. This would build up our efforts on improving classroom teaching.

The statement above proves that pre-primary teachers prefer both pre and post instructional supervision discussion. They maintained that free discussion with their supervisors enables teachers to identify their teaching weakness and find out the means of improvement. This is because supervision process is a liaison between a head teacher and a teacher conducted on mutual trust, harmonious interaction

and professional autonomy. The findings correspond with the study carried out by Blase' and Blase' (1999) which demonstrated that talking with teachers to promote reflection and professional growth by school principals have vital effects on the improvement of teachers' professional skills. It enables principals to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses and give strategies for professional improvement. Sharma, Yusoff, and Kannan (2011) substantiate that teachers need to be engaged in instructional supervision from the planning stage to the post observation. This is also supported by Zepeda (2017) who demonstrated that instructional supervision is a continuous classroom teaching monitoring aiming at promoting professional practices in a collegial and collaborative style.

Mentoring and Coaching

The findings showed that there was informal schedule specifically for teachers' mentorship and coaching. Arguing on this, some pre-primary teachers disclosed that mentorship is a supervisory approach whereby instructional supervisor or school head teacher who is more skilled helps or guides another teacher for professional growth. One head teacher admitted that, 'Head teachers should mentor and coach pre-primary teachers for their professional growth and teaching improvement' These findings correspond with Reeve's theory (2004) which insisted that teachers improve their teaching abilities when they are involved in the process of professional development activities such as peer-coaching, mentorship, and post-supervision dialogue. Supporting this, Baffour-Awuah (2011) asserted that mentoring procedure include the followings (i) pre-lesson discussion (ii) observation (iii) collecting information and, (iv) post-conference.

Implication of the Study

The study proposes a school-based instructional supervision model for public pre-primary classes. The Model demands that head teacher's school-based instructional supervision practices for improving teaching skills and knowledge among pre-primary teachers' stems from an assortment of enabling factors. These factors, however, require the accessibility of a supervision policy guideline that stipulates head teachers' supervisory roles and skills necessary for pre-primary education. Indeed, it necessitates regular head teachers' school-based instructional supervision and collaborative supervisory practices. It also requires pre-primary teachers to be effectively trained and provided with in-service training to come up with curriculum reforms. Besides, head teachers should set up School-based Continuous Professional Development (SB-CPD) programmes and support pre-primary teachers to engage in for the improvement of their teaching skills and knowledge. Accordingly, the model insists that instructional supervision process should be a liaison developing process between a head teacher and a teacher that is made on mutual trust, harmonious interaction and professional autonomy as concerned.

Conclusion

This study concludes that head teacher's roles for pre-primary teachers were found to have little, if any, influence on improving teaching skills among pre-primary teachers. The roles were more administrative than pedagogical. This was due to the fact that, most of head teachers had inadequate skills on pre-primary curriculum supervision, evaluating teaching process in pre-primary classes and monitoring teachers' performance as well. The study noted that, instructional supervision of pre-primary classes requires proper skills because; it is a leadership role for improving teaching among pre-primary teachers. It requires head teachers to determine School-Based Continuous Professional Development (SB-CPD) programmes to allow pre-primary teachers to engage in for the improvement of their teaching skills and knowledge. Teachers find the collaborative model of school-based instructional supervision a means for improving their teaching skills. The approach bequeaths a room for symposium and allows feedback on supervision process among them.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that it is essential to ensure availability of pre-primary supervision guidelines for various head teachers' collaborative strength-based supervision practices such as mentoring, coaching, teaming, clinical supervision, discussion and professional growth plans within the school-context. This would serve to ensure school-based continuous professional development (SB-CPD) among pre-primary teachers. Besides, for the effective implementation of instructional supervision roles, head teachers should delegate their managerial tasks and focus on improving teaching skills among teachers.

It is further recommended that Head teachers should frequently observe classroom teaching practices, understand teaching strategies, and have curriculum competence for them to give constructive feedback for pre-primary teachers to improve their teaching skills. For this reason, they have to mentor, coach, and allow teaming among pre-primary teachers for improvement of teaching skills and effective execution of pre-primary curriculum. Similarly, it is also recommended that novice head teachers should be given pre-service training in instructional supervision of pre-primary education as part of their induction process. Finally, this study further study is recommends for a similar study on the influence of pre and post-supervision discussion on the improvement of teaching skills among pre-primary teachers.

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