

Perception of Curriculum Leaders and Teachers on Feedback and Conditions Essential for Effective Supervision in Senior High Schools

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine the perception of curriculum leaders and teachers on feedback and conditions essential for effective supervision in Senior High Schools in the Assin North Municipality of Ghana. Descriptive survey was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling procedure was employed to select 44 curriculum leaders and convenient sampling procedure was employed to select 120 teachers for the study. Questionnaire was used to elicit responses from both curriculum leaders and teachers. Mainly, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected. Frequency and percentages in tables were adopted to present various perceptions held by curriculum leaders and teachers on curriculum supervision. The research revealed that effective curriculum supervision thrives on both supervisors and supervisees keeping records of all formal, as well as informal supervision sessions and providing immediate feedback. It was recommended that since feedback is necessary in curriculum supervision it should always be at the personal level so that individual teachers can attach maximum attention to them.

Keywords

Perception, Curriculum, Supervision, Curriculum Leaders, Teachers, Feedback, Effective Supervision

1. Introduction

The article has the following arrangement: firstly, an introduction shows the background of themes important to the study; secondly, it presents a review of literature on feedback and supervision as a leadership function; thirdly, a methodology of the research is presented; results and its discussion are presented in the fourth part and finally the conclusions with recommendations of the work are shown in the last chapter.

Supervision may be explained to mean an expert technical service which is primarily aimed at studying and improving cooperatively, all factors which affect institutional growth and development. Though McNamara (2008) agrees that there are several interpretations of the term supervision, he maintains that typically it is the activity carried out by supervisors to oversee the productivity and progress of

employees who report directly to the supervisors.

Located at the heart of educational administration and management are, generally, school supervision, and more specifically, curriculum supervision. School supervision might be broader in scope than curriculum supervision. It generally seeks to monitor, inspect and attempt to improve upon the quality of academic and non-academic aspects of education delivery. Its tasks may include general appraisal of staff and students' academic and non-academic facilities, logistics, procurements and supplies to schools, among others. School supervision is therefore aimed at improving conditions within the school climate, as well as teaching and learning in the school.

On the other hand, curriculum supervision is intended to embrace those activities in the school which directly involve the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and appraisal of the school curriculum. Curriculum supervision therefore involves observation of teaching and learning, assisting

teachers in their professional development, both in individual and group context, evaluation of teachers, research and revision of the curriculum (Education Encyclopaedia, 2009).

In our specific circumstances in Ghana, Incidental supervision of the schools is undertaken by School Management Committees (S. M. Cs), Parent-Staff Associations (P. S. As), Local managers of Religious Educational Unit Schools, Boards of Governors and Councils of Institutions. Partial supervision of the curriculum is undertaken mainly by heads of schools and heads of Subject Departments. Professional supervision is undertaken by personnel from Inspectorate/supervisory departments within the school-district, regional and national offices of the Ghana Education Service for pre-tertiary institutions while the National Accreditation Board, National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), and others supervise tertiary institutions/programmes alongside internal Quality Control and Assurance outfits.

Various issues relating to curriculum supervision have proved quite controversial. The controversy stems from different conceptions about the nature, approaches, importance, and practice of curriculum supervision within different educational delivery settings. As stated by Glanz (2000), there are those who have criticized modern concepts of supervision as being bureaucratic, hierarchical, and oppressive. To post-modernists, rational-technical conceptions of supervision reduce effective supervision to routines which turn supervisors into autocratic lords with the authority to diagnose teachers' pedagogical lapses and impose solutions. On the other hand, Ovando (2000:108-109) compliments effective supervision, and maintains that it "implies that educators, including teachers, curriculum specialists, and supervisors would cooperate in order to improve instruction". This calls for the need of sharing success criteria and flaws of curriculum implementers through feedback.

The problem arises as most Ghanaians apparently hold the view that effective supervision is a key explanatory factor for the high academic performances. In many school settings, observations tend to show that the issues involving curriculum supervision have proved quite contentious and even acrimonious, sometimes leading to feuds between leadership and the rest of the staff and students. Quite often, teachers and students whose tasks and functions are mostly supervised by school and subject heads tend to complain about how such leaders have become so interested in inspecting and criticizing their work instead of concentrating on sourcing logistics to make work easier or more manageable. This and other red lights in the Ghanaian Senior High Schools provide the trigger for the present study.

The research was guided by the following questions: How do school heads, heads of subject departments and teachers think debriefing/feedback should be treated?; and What factors/conditions do school heads, heads of subject departments and teachers think are essential for effective supervision? The study was aimed at creating awareness about the perception of curriculum leaders and teachers on

feedback and conditions essential for effective supervision in the education delivery system. The scope of the study covered the curriculum supervision at the Senior High School level. It is confined to the perceptions and viewpoints of heads of senior high schools, subject departments and teachers.

2. Review of Literature on Feedback and Supervision as a Leadership Function

Several interpretations are credited to the term supervision, just as it also assumes different practical realities in different organizations or institutions. However, in a more generic sense, the word is used to typify those activities carried out by supervisors to oversee the productivity and process of employees who report directly to the supervisor. To McNamara (2008), supervision is a management activity and supervisors have a management role in the organization. It is therefore not surprising that occasionally, writers interchange 'leadership' and 'supervision'. It follows that both activities are closely related, and supervision requires leadership, though leadership may not necessarily have to involve supervision. In order to attempt a definition which may cover its general elements, supervision can be looked at as a process of planned interactions with staff for the purpose of monitoring performance, sharing information, solving problems, professional development and goal attainment.

Waite and Fernandes (cited in Glanz & Behar-Horenstein, 2000) consider supervision as an interactive, rational process involving people; otherwise, to them, supervision becomes wholly an abstraction or a cliché. They emphasize that supervision, as an interactive process, is carried out by real human actors. However, though supervision is an interactive process involving a number of actors, leadership has often been the most critical element to developing a successful, effective and productive supervision programme. Generally, supervision has always required experience, direction, superior knowledge and skill, as well as cherished attitudes and values, which are most characteristic of leadership. Supervision then becomes a core function of leadership. Raggio, Murphy and Pirozzolo (2002) describe leadership as the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. This relates leadership with the art of supervising by 'cognitive coaching' which will be explained later in detail within this chapter. They state that a leader is likely to be effective and successful provided s/he can exert positive influence on followers to elicit favourable, collaborative response to get a job done or objective achieved.

Keith (as cited in Kouzes & Posner 2007) defines leadership to be ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen. This definition seems to feature the inclusiveness of followers. It is our opinion that the kind of style a leader adopts is

influenced by what and how s/he perceives leadership and leadership tasks, including supervision. In the same vein, s/he will form attitudes and approaches which are underpinned by his/her perceptions of supervision. A leader who perceives supervision to be showmanship of power is likely to be autocratic in attitude. Similarly, followers with like expectations will expect their leader to exhibit an 'iron man' attitude before they follow him. Also, a leader who perceives his leadership status to be of low estate is likely to pose a laissez-faire attitude towards supervision, which leaves followers alone to act as they please. A leader whose perceptions of leadership are underpinned by equal participation, group think and liberal ideals is likely to pose a democratic attitude to goal achievement and supervision as well. However, an autocratic minded leader is likely to pursue supervision with an attitude of self-centeredness and fault finding without giving concrete feedbacks.

The essence of feedback which tries to close the yawning gap between the supervisor and the supervisee seems to be missing in institutions. Feedback can simply be regarded as information a teacher/learner receives on how he/she is doing in his/her efforts to reach the desired goal. Both teaching and learning aim at achieving targeted goals. While the teachers/learners strive to reach these goals, they constantly need information on how well or otherwise they are on course. Such information must be descriptive enough to direct the teachers/learners and point them on the way to achieve their goals. Thus, feedback is not advice, evaluation or judgments, neither is it grade as these cannot possibly tell the learners what to do next time to improve their performance. According to Wiggins (2012) "information becomes feedback if, and only if, I am trying to cause something and the information tells me whether I am on track or need to change course". Thus, the purpose of feedback is to help teachers/students to develop their understanding and improve their performance in relation to the expected standard. Feedback should identify the gap between expected outcome and teachers/students' current achievement and give assistance on how to close the gap in future. When feedback functions this way, scholars prefer to regard it as feed forward because it is future work that would be improved (Walter, 2013). It therefore means that learners must be engaged in activities that are goal-oriented and somebody assesses the work and gives feedback that informs them the extent to which they are succeeding or not and what needs to be done to reach the goal (Udosen & Jude, 2014). The quality of feedback is judged by its characteristics and attributes towards its purpose. As pointed out by Wiggins (2012), helpful feedback is goal referenced; tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly; timely; on-going; and consistent. Among the strategies suggested to achieve high quality feedback by Brookhart (2008), include: timing, amount of feedback, mode, and the audience meant for. This suggests that feedback about the specifics of individual work is best addressed to the individual in a way he/she can understand. This has a dual advantage of proving information as well as communicating to the student that the teacher cares about

his/her progress and to the teacher that the supervisor or the curriculum leader is fair in dealing with him/her. Feedback has the potential to influence teaching and learning positively. This happens when feedback information is used by the teachers and learners to shape their actions.

This indicate that, curriculum supervision takes the form of in-classroom observations, assisting teachers' professional and group development, evaluation of teachers and students' academic performance, research and revision of curriculum. It identifies, mainly, academic problems and works towards promoting academic achievement (Education Encyclopaedia, 2009). This seeks to describe the whole concept of curriculum supervision as a multi-task concept geared towards improvement in educational delivery.

From this background comes a description of curriculum supervision as services which may be both technical and flexible towards the achievement of enabling conditions for effective and efficient curriculum delivery. It therefore stands to reason that rather than the usual narrow and limited aim of improving teachers in service, curriculum supervision should aim at improving the total teaching and learning process.

Also, the International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO, 2007) explains curriculum supervision to mean a part of an overall quality monitoring and improvement system, which includes other devices such as examinations and achievement test, and self-assessment practices by schools and teachers. It was further stated that the concept supervision services should be viewed by, and understood as covering all the services whose main functions include: to inspect, control, evaluate and/or advise, assist and support school leaders and teachers. This plethora of services and tasks will definitely require skills, knowledge and other competencies of the supervisor who tries to work with the entire staff, specialists and administrators alike.

In a breath, there seems to be emerging what may be termed the reformists approach to curriculum supervision. This is in sync with the vision of UNESCO to reform school supervision for quality improvement. Many times, countries have attempted to reform their curriculum supervision services to improve educational quality. This desire for reform is inspired by disappointment with the effectiveness of supervision and by the recent trends towards more school autonomy (UNESCO, 2009).

These shades of opinions expressed in the literature seem to corroborate the conviction that curriculum supervision is primarily services provided through a number of tasks with the aim of improving all factors that go into facilitating growth and development in the teaching and learning process.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey to determine the nature of perceptions held by both school leaders and teachers concerning curriculum supervision. The population for the study was the membership of the academic staff of Senior High Schools in the Assin North Municipality. These

included heads of institutions, heads of subject departments and teachers within the departments. The accessible population, which also happened to be the same as the target population, includes all heads, their assistants, heads of subject departments and all teachers in the five Senior High Schools within the Municipality.

A sample size of 51 curriculum leaders, comprising headmasters, assistant headmasters/mistresses, and heads of subject departments was selected. This first category of sample was selected through purposive sampling technique. The second category of sample constituted 168 teachers from the selected schools. This is the total number of teachers in the five schools. Since this number can be conveniently handled in a survey, the census technique was adopted.

In consonance with the purpose of the study and issues raised in the research questions, two categories of questionnaires were used. One set for curriculum leaders and the other for teachers were prepared to collect data for the study. Each of the two sets of questionnaires had three sections (A - C). Items under section 'A' sought to obtain information on the personal profile and experience of respondents within the Ghana Education Service (GES). Section 'B' sought to elicit information on respondents' perception of debriefing/feedback in curriculum supervision. Section C was designed to obtain data on conditions essential to promote effective curriculum supervision. The substantive

items on curriculum supervision within sections B to C were the same for both leaders and teachers which were all close-ended, likert-type scale items. In all questionnaires were administered to 51 school leaders and 168 teachers from the five Senior High Schools in the Municipality.

4. Results and Discussion

This study was conducted purposely to find out the perception of curriculum leaders and teachers on feedback and conditions essential for effective supervision in Senior High Schools. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, data was collected on some key issues. This section, therefore, presents the results and discusses the following: debriefing/feedback in curriculum supervision; and factors/conditions essential for effective curriculum supervision.

4.1. How Curriculum Leaders and Teachers Think Debriefing/Feedback Should Be Treated

Research question one was formulated to seek from the respondents how they thought debriefing or feedback from curriculum supervision should be treated. The outcome of their responses has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Debriefing/feedback in curriculum supervision.

	Curriculum Leaders										Teachers									
	SA		A		U		D		SD		SA		A		U		D		SD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1) Immediate feedback is most important for effective curriculum supervision.	23	52	18	41	1	2	2	5	_	_	55	46	53	44	5	4	5	4	2	2
2) Feedback should always be at the personal level.	9	23	21	52	2	5	8	20	_	_	25	21	57	47	14	12	20	17	4	3
3) Occasionally, feedback should be through supervision conferencing.	12	27	25	57	5	11	2	5	_	_	29	24	63	52	12	10	13	11	3	3
4) All feedback on curriculum supervision should be a dialogic interaction between the supervisor(s) and the supervisee(s).	20	45	23	52	_	_	1	3	_	_	45	38	58	48	5	4	12	10	_	_
5) Both supervisors and supervisees should keep records of all formal, as well as informal supervision sessions.	20	45	22	50	2	5	-	-	-	-	58	48	53	44	5	4	2	2	2	2

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 reveals the extent to which curriculum leaders agree or otherwise on the issues of feedback in curriculum supervision. Significantly, 41 (93%) agree that immediate feedback is most important for effective curriculum supervision while two, representing five per cent disagree. In a similar vein, 108 (90%) of the teachers supported the view while seven representing six per cent disagreed. This implies that the view of the majority is in line with that of Glatthorn et al. (2006), that when feedback is immediate, then the observer's smile, as a gesture of approval may be motivating enough to spur the observed on. It also follows that where there are concerns, clarifications are sought to inform and guide future actions.

Again, Table 1 indicates that 30, representing 75 per cent of curriculum leaders agreed that feedback should always be at personal level. This was against the views of eight (8%)

who disagreed. On the part of the teachers, 82 (68%) indicated their support, while 24 (20%) disagreed.

It is further revealed in Table 1 that while 37 (84%) of curriculum leaders agreed that, occasionally, feedback should be through supervision conferencing, two (5%) disagreed. This was not contrary to the views of the teachers. While 92 (76%) were in support of the view that occasionally, feedback should be through supervision conferencing, 16 (14%) disagreed.

Also, the curriculum leaders are almost unanimous on the issue that all feedback should be by a dialogue between supervisors and supervisees. On that, 43 (97%) agreed, with only one (3%) who disagreed. This was not different from the views of the teachers. While 103 (86%) agreed, 12 (10%) disagreed.

Both curriculum leaders and teachers shared similar views

on the issue of record keeping of supervisors and supervisees on both formal and informal supervision sessions. This represents 42 (95%) of curriculum leaders and 111 (92%) of teachers. However, none of the curriculum leaders disagreed but four (4%) teachers disagreed.

4.2. What Curriculum Leaders and Teachers Think are Essential for Effective Supervision

The respondents were required to indicate the conditions that promoted effective curriculum supervision. Research question two was formulated to solicit responses in this direction. Table 2 presents the outcome of responses.

The results in Table 2 show the extent of agreement on conditions which promote effective curriculum supervision among curriculum leaders. The result indicates that 20 (45%) of curriculum leaders agreed that when subordinates are granted autonomy, it leads to responsible conduct, having

need for little supervision. However, 19 (44%) disagreed on the same condition. In a similar milieu, 62 (51%) of teachers agreed while 39 (32%) disagreed that autonomy of subordinates leads to responsible conduct, needing less supervision.

As to whether, persuasion and dialogue normally elicits cooperation in curriculum supervision, 38 (86%) of curriculum leaders and 106 (88%) of teachers agreed to the assertion. This was different from the views of six (14%) of curriculum leaders and five (4%) of teachers who disagreed. The majority view stands in line with that of Garubo and Rothstein (1998) who think that if a supervisor and teacher work well together in conferences, some evidence of improved relations between them, and between teachers and students should be apparent to observers. For instance, the fears of teachers, or the suspiciousness between them and supervisors, may diminish considerably.

Table 2. Conditions which promote effective curriculum supervision.

	Curriculum Leaders					Teachers														
	SA	A	U	D	SD	SA	A	U	D	SD										
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %										
1) Autonomy of sub-ordinates leads to responsible conduct, needing little supervision.	8	18	12	27	5	11	17	39	2	5	18	15	44	36	19	16	38	31	1	1
2) Persuasion and dialogue normally elicit cooperation in curriculum supervision.	14	32	24	54	-	-	3	7	37	7	41	34	65	54	9	8	5	4	-	-
3) Sanctions ensure compliance in curriculum supervision.	10	22	15	34	6	14	11	25	2	5	23	19	44	37	14	12	33	27	6	5
4) Motivated staff requires less supervision and are willing to accomplish tasks.	27	57	13	30	-	-	5	11	1	2	53	44	36	30	7	6	21	17	3	3
5) Mutual trust creates conditions for self-direction and self-confidence in supervisees.	21	48	19	43	-	-	4	9	-	-	53	44	57	48	4	3	6	5	-	-
6) Staff supervision as a means of developing and controlling the quality of service, should consider the needs and rights of supervisees.	17	38	23	52	2	5	2	5	-	-	51	42	53	44	12	10	2	2	2	2

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

The outcome of Table 2 further shows that 25 (56%) of curriculum leaders agreed that sanctions ensure compliance in curriculum supervision. On the same issue, 13 (30%) however disagree. On the part of the teachers, whereas 67 (56%) agreed, 39 (32%) disagreed to the view that sanctions ensure compliance in curriculum supervision.

Also, Table 2 indicates that while 40 (87%) of the curriculum leaders agreed that motivated staff require less supervision and are willing to accomplish tasks, 6 (13%) disagreed. The teachers on the other hand had similar views. While 89 (74%) were in support, 24 (20%) disagreed. This is supported by the view of Glatthorn et al. (2006), that not only do motivated staff requires less supervision, but also they accept teaching goals as personal goals, work with a sense of confidence and loyalty to education delivery as a whole.

Significantly, 40 (91%) of curriculum leaders agreed that mutual trust creates conditions for self-direction and self-confidence in supervisees. This was against the views of four (9%) who disagreed. In a similar milieu, 110 (92%) of teachers agreed that mutual trust creates conditions for self-direction and self-confidence in supervisees. On the same

issue six representing five per cent disagreed. In support of this, Garubo and Rothstein (1998) posit that supervisors have to learn to trust the eyes and ears of teachers, while teachers have to trust that supervisors will use the information gathered to help teachers help themselves. The results will often be seen in more friendly, collegial relations between supervisors and teachers and a better understanding of classroom behaviour.

With regard to staff supervision as a means of developing and controlling the quality of service, which considers the needs and rights of supervisees, 103 (87%) were in support while four representing four per cent disagreed. This means that the view of majority of the respondents is in line with the convictions of Holloway (1995), that supporting and sharing functions of the supervisor require empathic attention, encouragement and constructive confrontation with the supervisee(s), and also, often supporting trainees at a deep interpersonal level by sharing their own perceptions, actions, emotions and attitudes.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be concluded that effective curriculum supervision thrives on both supervisors and supervisees keeping records of all formal, as well as informal supervision sessions and providing immediate feedback.

It can be concluded further that motivated staff requires less supervision and are willing to accomplish tasks. Also, mutual trust creates conditions for self-direction and self-confidence in supervisees. These are favourable conditions for curriculum supervision.

From the conclusions it is recommended that since feedback is necessary in curriculum supervision it should always be at the personal level so that individual teachers can attach maximum attention to them. Also in order to ensure effective curriculum supervision, it is suggested that persuasion and dialogue which normally elicits cooperation in curriculum supervision should be introduced.

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