



The Effectiveness of Supervision of Specialist Teachers in Special Schools and Resource Units in Mashonaland East and Harare Provinces (Zimbabwe)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 032713549

Type: Research

DOI: 10.15580/GJER.2013.3.032713549

Submitted: 27/03/2013

Accepted: 15/05/2013

Published: 22/05/2013

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Keywords:

Specialist teachers, Special education, Supervision, Special school and resource unit

ABSTRACT

In the Zimbabwe education system, there are comprehensive programmes in the area of supervision. These programmes are offered by different institutions. Regrettably, none of these programmes has been extended to cover supervision of specialist teachers teaching in special schools, resource units and special classes. Determining the effectiveness of supervision of these teachers was the thrust of this research study. The study was carried out in two provinces of Mashonaland East and Harare. A qualitative descriptive survey was used to collect data from a sample of fifty teachers. Results indicated that supervision of specialist teachers left a lot to be desired. It was revealed that supervision by supervisors who were not trained in the area of special education was not benefiting the teachers. The study also found out that supervision was regarded as a way of finding faults and destroying the confidence of supervisees. On the whole, it was established that supervision of specialist teachers was not being carried out effectively. Recommendations made included the following: that teacher education colleges should offer a supervisory component in special needs education, that school heads needed staff development in supervision of specialist teachers and that there was urgent need to invest in financial and material resources to realize effective supervision. Attitudes of mainstream teachers and supervisors towards special needs education also needed to change for the better, since these were found to be a major factor in impeding effective supervision. The appointment of Education Officers and District Education Officers who are trained in special needs education also needed to be attended to as a matter of urgency.

Background to the study

Special needs education is a relatively new innovation in Zimbabwe. Pertinent issues relating to this area have received considerable publicity from the media and other fora. These issues include increased enrolment of students, recruitment of specialist teachers for training and resource allocation. Attitudes of society towards special education have also been widely covered. However not much has been said concerning the supervision of specialist teachers in this area.

The research sought to provide the missing link between what is on the ground and what has to be done. The research study therefore set out to determine the effectiveness of the supervision of specialist teachers working in special schools, special classes and resource units in Mashonaland East and Harare Provinces. Data collection can be used to assist the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture on what can be done to ensure effective planning and implementation of supervision strategies that will benefit specialist teachers.

In 1983 the Ministry of Education pioneered a training programme for specialist teachers at the United College of Education (U.C.E) in Bulawayo. Specialist teachers are teachers who in addition to their initial teacher education embark on another course in special education. This second course is meant to equip them with skills to teach learners with special educational needs. The course at U.C.E started at certificate level. In the early 1990s, this course was upgraded to diploma level.

In 1994, the University of Zimbabwe (U.Z) also pioneered a programme of training high level manpower in special education at degree level. This phenomenal growth in training strategies in special education was followed by the Zimbabwe Open University which also embarked on a similar programme on a wider scale through distance education in 2000. The Masvingo University College and Great Zimbabwe University also followed suit in 2001. These very noble developments seem not to have been matched with similar interest and zeal when it came to the supervision of personnel that will have gone through these courses.

Considering the large numbers of trained personnel from the institutions above and those still undergoing training, it was necessary to put the issue of supervision of such personnel into its proper perspective. This position prompted the researcher to find out more regarding the vital issue of supervision.

A number of trained specialist teachers are also operating in schools where their supervisors do not have any formal or informal training in special education. Some of the so-called supervisors do not have the slightest notion of special education, and yet they are expected to supervise specialist teachers who are trained. Such opposing positions also necessitated the researcher's interest in this regard. According to Harris (1998), the goal of supervision is to discover the

strengths and then build on them and if there are weaknesses, to help the teacher overcome them. The researcher therefore set out to ascertain whether the goals of supervision can be realized with supervisors who are not even specialists in the area they supervise.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study proposed to determine the effectiveness of current supervision strategies used for specialist teachers teaching in special schools, special classes and resource units. Supervision is intended to enhance professional growth of teachers. It however appears that there were glaring inconsistencies by way of failure to ensure that this gap in supervision is filled.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- a) To determine the problems that interferes with the effective supervision of specialist teachers.
- b) To determine the nature of professional and social relationships between supervisors and specialist teachers.
- c) To identify the strengths and weaknesses of supervision strategies used on specialist teachers.
- d) To determine the nature of supervision feedback from supervisors to specialist teachers and see whether it benefits the supervisees.
- e) To find out to what extent the current supervision strategies have helped in correcting the notion that supervision is aimed at fault finding and destroying teachers' confidence.

1.3 Research Questions

- a. Are specialist teachers being supervised adequately and effectively?
- b. How often are the specialist teachers being supervised in various areas?
- c. Who supervises specialist teachers?
- d. To what extent have specialist teachers benefited from supervision?

- e. How qualified and efficient are those who supervise specialist teachers?
- f. Is the supervision of specialist teachers promoting professional understanding and growth between supervisors and supervisees?

1.4 Significance of Study

The research will provide the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture with invaluable data on ways of improving supervision strategies and procedures for supervisors involved in the supervision of specialist teachers in Zimbabwe. The study will also assist institutions involved in the training of supervisors to revisit their training programmes with a view to including a special education supervision component in their programme.

These institutions include teacher education colleges as well as universities. Specialist teachers will also benefit through improved supervision, instruction and professional growth. Sergiovanni and Starrat (1979) concur that supervision must have a double-barreled intent of professional development and improvement of instruction.

Some of the weaknesses of current supervision will be exposed, making it possible to put in place measures to limit the negative impact of such problems. School clusters will also benefit from the results as they can implement some of the recommendations. Furthermore, this being the first known attempt at studying supervision of specialist teachers, the findings can be used by other researchers as a launch pad to other more comprehensive studies in the area.

1.5 Review of Related Literature

Current Position on Supervision of Specialist Teachers in Zimbabwe

A major document that is heavily relied on for supervisory purposes regarding specialist teachers is Chief Education Officer's (C.E.O). Circular Minute No. 14 of 1988 dated 19 January 1988. This is a 35-page document that summaries supervision of specialist teachers in schools C.E.O circular No. 14 of 1988 indicates that supervision in the Ministry of Education is the prerogative of the Standards Control Unit (S.C.U.) i.e. a division of the Ministry. Specialist teachers are teachers who in addition to their conventional training as teachers, further trained in special education for periods ranging from one year to sixteen months on a full time basis. Some of these teachers have studied special

education up to graduate and postgraduate levels. Some of these highly trained teachers have supervisors who are not even trained in special education. Personnel in the SCU include Heads and Deputy Heads of schools, Education Officers and District Education Officers (D.E.Os). According to C.E.O circular No. 14 of 1988, the argument for taking such a stance is based on the erroneous view that once a driver, always a driver. In a paper presented at a workshop of specialist teachers Ref. D/103/2 entitled Supervision of Schools Psychological Services and Special Education Programmes in Schools, Hadebe acknowledges cases of Education Officers, District Education Officers and Heads of schools who indicated that they could not supervise specialist teachers on the grounds that this area was a specialist area which calls for those trained in the area to carry out meaningful supervision. In all earnest, these officers had a valid point, but the Ministry ignored these genuine concerns.

Specialist Supervision

A review of literature related to effectiveness in supervision shows that a good number of authorities do not agree with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture's position on this issue. Stones (1984), for example, argues that:

"There is no denying that in many institutions concerned with teacher preparation, there is no awareness that problems exist in the field of supervision. This lack of awareness is manifest in the fact that supervisors of practical teaching are frequently recruited from staff that have not made a study of any of the foundation disciplines of education ...and practice of supervision."

This observation by Stones (1984) also applies to the supervision of specialist teachers in Zimbabwe. A number of those charged with the responsibility of supervising specialist teachers have no formal professional training in special education. A case in point is that of Resource Rooms. Most Resource Rooms operate in ordinary schools where supervisors may not have the slightest notion of this specialized area beginning from the Head, the Deputy Head, the senior teacher, the E.Os and D.E.Os.

The current supervisory arrangements in the Ministry of Education go against reason. Glathorn (1984:3), defines supervision as "a process of facilitating the professional growth of a teacher, interaction and helping the teacher to make use of the feedback in order to make teaching more effective." Honestly, how can somebody without the requisite professional training and expertise in a specialized field be expected to positively

influence the supervisee's professional growth. What feedback does he/she offer that benefits the specialist teacher. Supposing a specialist teacher does not pay adequate attention to students work when it comes to transcribing specific contractions in Braille. This teacher will be supervised by a supervisor who can neither read nor write Braille. This is shortchanging of learners since there will be no feedback or professional growth.

Curriculum in special education centres on areas like teaching severely mentally retarded learners toileting skills. It takes somebody trained in special education to appreciate that toileting skills are an integral part of the curriculum of learners with exceptional learning needs; since in general, education pupils do not need formal teaching to enable them to carry out such activities. Stones (1984), Nhenga (1995) and Shumbayawonda (1997) also contend that supervisors very often have little knowledge of those aspects of learning theory that would be of value to teachers. This compromises the quality of supervision to a very large extent. Stones (1984), indicates that effective supervision is dependent on the possession of subject content and pedagogical knowledge and skills.

A supervisor with the attributes cited above is in a better position to influence the development of concepts in lesson preparation and presentation as well as sharpening problem-solving techniques in supervisees. Stones (1984), further argued that specialist knowledge backed by pedagogical skills in a supervisor enables to maximize the learning process in pupils taught by a teacher who is well supervised. Specialist knowledge of an area such as special education is therefore critical for effective supervision to take place.

According to Brown and Brown (1990:17), "some colleges insist that only lecturers trained and belonging to that department are allowed to supervise their students, thus ensuring that at least specialists in a specific subject area supervise all teaching in that area." Nhenga (1995), concurred with Brown and Brown (1990) by indicating that the rationale behind this approach is that the specialist has the in-depth knowledge of the content and expertise in handling various issues in the area. Sadly, these noble findings have been elusive to officials in special education in the Ministry of Education. These findings have direct relevance to the supervision of specialist teachers in schools. To back up his study Nhenga (1995), established that 88.2% of class teachers rated area or subject specialist supervisors as the most effective.

Supervisors who are also specialists in special education can easily identify mistakes in content and methodology and are therefore in a position to provide alternative ways and techniques of solving problems. In another study, Nhenga (1997) also shows that specialists can guide teachers in the selection, management and sequencing of content and that above all, specialists have the expertise to determine the level of difficulty of the content taught by a teacher. These

attributes therefore put specialists in a better position to supervise effectively.

Specialist supervision has its opposition as well. Nhenga (1997) for example, established that a small percentage of respondents in his study rejected the significance of specialist supervision. Some of these respondents felt very strongly that knowing the subject or area well, disadvantaged supervisees because the specialists became too critical, thus compromising creativity and flexibility. They therefore advocated for a fusion of different ideas from a variety of supervisors. Maybe the Ministry of Education takes its argument from this position so as to neutralize supervision of specialist teachers from being unnecessarily too special.

Importance of training in Supervision

The critical role played by training in supervision cannot be overemphasized. Very few institutions of higher learning offer courses in supervision. In Britain for example, Stones (1984 & 1989) found out that most supervisors were not formerly trained in supervision. This meant that supervisors had to learn supervision skills on the job. One cannot therefore rule out trial and error and this compromise the quality of supervision. Stones (1984), Nhenga (1995) and Shumbayaonda (1997) all concur that this is not healthy for the development of supervision.

Evidence is abound on the importance of training for supervisors. Studies have confirmed improved and effective supervision soon after training. One such study was by Dart and Drake (1993), who indicated that after training, mentors (supervisors) were reported to have used effective strategies to guide supervisees. Moon (1994), also described the marked improvement in the development of interpersonal and mentor skills through training. These findings are very relevant to supervisors in special education because first and foremost, mentors are supervisors. The principles of supervision are basically the same be it in industry, commerce, education and other fields. Staff development can effectively be used to assist personnel involved in supervision in the standards Control Unit (S.C.U.) of the Ministry of Education.

In another study, Yeomans and Sampson (1994) also found out that training of supervisors enabled them to competently handle complex situations in their supervisory roles. Supervisors became more open-minded, flexible and democratic when dealing with supervisees. This positively influences and facilitates professional growth in real terms. Real professional growth is about nurturing what Stones (1984) calls the "deep structures of teaching and learning" such as problem-solving, motivation, reinforcement and concept development. Stones (1984) therefore cautions against the risk of supervisors concentrating on what he terms "surface features of teaching and learning" such as

documentation and personal attributes like dressing, voice projection and others.

Crawley (1990), also reported that trained supervisors became more pro-active and demonstrated reflective qualities needed in effective supervision. Errant (1985) in Kerry and Mayes (1995) also advocated for training arguing that it provided supervisors with new roles that enabled them to carryout supervision with a new lease of life and esteem.

Stephen (1996) also observed that trained supervisors became effective after training. According to Morgan and Dallat (1996), there is need for quality assurance and mentor training on children's learning and acquisition of technical skills on the part of supervisors to enable them to supervise effectively.

In Zimbabwe, there is not much difference with other countries in the failure to address training needs in supervision. According to Ndawi (1986), supervisors were not trained in supervision and this made them less effective as supervisors. Shumbayaonda (1997) also established that most supervisors lacked the requisite training. Gatawa (1983), Chivore (1990) and (1994) also came out with the similar findings. This is exactly the same scenario that also applies to the area of special education. Supervisors are not formally trained in what they are supposed to supervise. Neither are they staff-developed in supervision.

Induction for supervisors is also vital. Shumbayaonda (1997) argues that new supervisors lacking induction in supervisory techniques are forced to focus on a few aspects that are not controversial and this had the effect of compromising effectiveness in supervision. Brown and Brown (1990) also pointed out that inadequate induction resulted in supervisors concentrating on very few competencies or covering too much ground per given time. Quality is therefore compromised in both cases.

Training is therefore very important for any supervisor. Muwandi (1985) found out that headmasters who had attended local seminars on supervision had developed better supervisory skills than those who had not. Professional staff development in supervision at colleges and universities is a good source of training. Such training should also cover the content and methodology of special education. Some trained supervisors in special education acquired their supervisory skills through informal induction or trial and error. Stones (1984) argues that such supervisors often have little know how of what is important to teachers.

Effective Supervision

The question of what effective supervision is, is not absolute but a relative one. To fully understand, it requires a deeper understanding of what supervision itself entails. In this regard there are various definitions to the process of supervision. Sergiovanni and Starrant (1979:15) indicate that supervision is "a process used by

those in schools who have responsibility for one or another aspect of the school goals and who depend upon others to help them achieve those goals." According to Acheson and Gall (1992), supervision is "The improvement of instruction by means of systematic cycles of planning, observation and intensive intellectual analysis of actual teaching performances in the interest of rational modification. Makawa (1991) and Shumba (1992) shows that supervision is the function of leading, coordinating and directing the work of others to accomplish designated objectives. Makawa (1991) further goes on to indicate that a supervisor guides subordinates so that they produce the desired quantity and quality of work within the desired time. Finally Shumba (1992) shows that supervision provides support services to teachers, student teachers, support staff to maintain or change the school operations in ways that directly influence the teaching processes employed to promote learning.

A closer look at the definitions of supervision cited above shows the following salient issues being emphasized i.e. directing, advising, guiding facilitation of professional growth, promotion of learning, systematic assistance, achievement of goals, support services to subordinates, monitoring and others. Indeed effectiveness in supervision hinges on these issues. The essence of supervision is on professional growth. Professional growth can be used to summarise all the issues cited above.

Supervisees value a number of issues that really matter to them in order for supervision to be effective. According to a study by Hagger et al (1993) and Stephens (1996), supervisees considered assistance in the following areas from those who supervised them i.e. classroom control, different ways of dealing with disruption, tried and tested strategies for handling different situations, knowing how to turn academic knowledge into lesson content that makes sense to pupils, timing of a lesson, marking, assessing and pitching work appropriately for different abilities. In another study, Rothwell et al 1994 and Stephens (1996) established that teachers considered the following areas as important i.e. being provided with relevant feed-back (95%), discussing teaching methods (89%), planning individual learners' programmes for teaching and learning and discussing their progress (82%).

Black and Booth (1992) and Stephens (1996) found out that supervisees expressed the view that they benefited most from supervisors in areas such as constructive criticism in the form of non-threatening evaluative feed-back and structured opportunities for learning. Furlong and Maynard (1995) in Stephens (1996) also suggested that supervisors, when supervising their subordinates should provide solution-focused routines that can be copied in the classroom. They also suggested that for effective supervision to take place supervisors should give supervisees space to become independent professionals who take more responsibility for their work.

Supervisors who focus on the areas isolated above can influence effective supervision thereby promoting professional growth of the beneficiaries of their supervision.

There have been quite some marked differences on what needs to be emphasized more than the other. As alluded to earlier on, supervision cannot be looked at from an absolutist point of view. Different authorities have put emphasis on different areas. Stones (1984) indicated that most supervisors tend to rely on surface features of teaching such as logical sequence, pacing and teacher appearance at the expense of salient issues such as concept development, problem-solving, motivation and promotion of the learning process.

A study by Shumbayaonda (1997), revealed that students who took part in a pilot study were not satisfied with the effectiveness of supervision they received from their supervisors in class management. Ndawi (1986) also found out that supervisors differed significantly on the importance they attached to classroom management and appearance. While other supervisors thought class management was important, others considered it very important. Ndawi (1986) also found out that some supervisors considered discipline and classroom climate very important while others did not view it in the same light.

Seymore (1972) in Muwandi (1985) found out that headmasters tended to lay more stress upon organizational matters than the learning process when it came to supervision. Seymore (1972)'s findings concur with Stones (1984)'s observations that supervisors had a tendency to pre-occupy themselves with trivial issues of routine, instead of promoting the learning process.

Threats to effective Supervision

The greatest challenge of effective supervision is the lack of formal training in the areas of supervision. Stones (1984), Nhenga (1995) and Shumbayaonda (1997) agree that lack of training adversely affects effectiveness in supervision. Another threat is the unwillingness of most teachers or supervisees to be supervised. It was against this background that Acheson and Gall (1992) indicated that most teachers do not like to be supervised even though they know that it is part of their job. They react defensively and say they do not find supervision helpful in any way.

According to Chidyamazana (1998), psychologically, supervision is viewed by teachers as an active threat possibly endangering their professional standing and undermining their confidence. Chidyamazana (1998) further argues that this view is not entirely surprising, since traditionally supervision is said not to have stemmed from teacher's need for help, but from supervisors' i.e. E.Os and Heads' of schools need to fulfill their roles as supervisors. This attitude makes teachers take supervision as an irrelevant part of a system that exists, that does not play any meaningful

role in their professional development. Supervision is therefore regarded more as a routine ritual that a supervisor has to fulfill. Teachers therefore deliberately ignore any recommendations made by their supervisors and only put these into practice on the supervisor's next visit.

Some authorities have given credence to the view that supervision has more to do with fault finding and apportioning blame. Kwabena (1991) in Chidyamazana (1998) shows that E.Os always tried to find fault, and often give unfair criticism on the teacher's work while at the same time failing to provide practical ideas and demonstrations that help the teacher. Kwabena (1991) also indicates that during supervision relations between the teacher and the supervisors are too formal, artificial and tension ridden.

Experiences shown above are very true of the Zimbabwean experience. This could be due to the inadequacies with the current crop of Education Officers and Heads of schools who belong to the old era of supervisors who emphasized and were obsessed with obedience, loyalty and conformity. There is no room for open discussion. Outdated supervisory roles and values are still embraced by this type of supervisor and this is regrettable. There is therefore need for a paradigm shift to a more open and democratic approach for a new partnership enriched with intellectual honesty and interchange of ideas in which each participant is respected and treated as a person.

METHODOLOGY

The Research Design

The research employed the descriptive survey design. Babbie 1997, describes the descriptive survey method as a method of research that describes what people see over and beyond. This method was chosen because it allowed for specialist teachers to indicate their experiences with a view to find an approach that was mutually beneficial to both parties. The study was therefore mainly qualitative in nature. The survey method mainly makes use of questionnaires, interviews and rating scales in the collection of data (Best and Khan 1993). Bell (1987) also show that surveys are targeted at obtaining information on a representative sample of the population from which the findings would be taken as representative of the whole population. Questionnaires were mainly used to collect data for this study. Informal discussions were also used to solicit data.

According to Leedy (1980) and Charles (1986), the survey method is the best when carrying out on educational survey. Its advantages are that:

- a) It gathers data from a relatively large number of respondents at a particular time.
- b) It reflects a general idea of the problem.
- c) Respondents have time to think about their responses.
- d) It is cost effective.

Some of the disadvantages of the survey method were that

- a) The researcher was limited to testing the theories he postulated on.
- b) The researcher assumed that he knew what was important and respondents could not therefore provide answers to questions that were not asked.

Disadvantages of the survey method could be overcome by carrying out a pilot study first in order to determine suitability of questionnaires. A pilot study was carried out before the actual study. Open-ended questions were also provided for respondents to express their views freely.

Population

The population was comprised of specialist teachers in two provinces namely Harare and Mashonaland East. Specialist teachers were chosen because they were the ones who were supposed to benefit from supervision.

Sample

The research was based on a convenient sample of fifty practicing specialist teachers from schools in Harare and Mashonaland East Provinces. Convenient sampling was opted for because the researcher found it easy to make use of respondents who were easily available. (Siegle, 2002). The researcher therefore took advantage of the teachers who were available and were conversant with what was involved in the area of supervision of specialist teachers. It is not possible to study the whole population of specialist teachers hence the need to sample.

Instruments

Questionnaires were the major instrument used for this study. The questionnaires contained both structured questions and open ended questions. All the questions

solicited for information on the effectiveness of supervision of this sector of education in Zimbabwe.

The questionnaire was chosen because it gave respondents enough time to think and reflect on their responses. In addition, responses were also most likely to be genuine because of the anonymity involved since no names were indicated. Questionnaires were also used because they save time. Data Analysis Data from both the structured and open ended questions firstly recorded and then coded in accordance with specific themes or categories. Findings and conclusions were then extracted on the basis of these themes.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussions were also held with the Deputy Director responsible for Schools Psychological Services and Special Education in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. Other discussions on supervisory issues were also held with two Education Officers in Special Education i.e. EO. Hearing Impairment and E.O Mental Retardation. Discussions were also held with specialist teachers and Heads of schools from where respondents were selected. These discussions were helpful since they allowed for respondents to provide important feedback which could not be accommodated in the questionnaires. Most respondents indicated their opinions quite freely. Proposals on what could be done to address some issues were also given. Some of the respondents used this opportunity to justify some of their responses given earlier on in the questionnaires. Notes on discussions were recorded in point form.

Procedure

Permission to carry out the study in special and ordinary schools was sought from the Head Office of The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. This was granted and the researcher was advised to seek permission from the respective regional Directors of Harare and Mashonaland East. School Heads were also contacted for their approval to carry out the research in their schools. Specialist teachers were also consulted for their involvement in the study. The researcher personally administered most of the questionnaires to ensure a maximum return rate. Only a few questionnaires were posted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Specialist Teachers' Attitudes towards Heads Training Background

It appears that the majority of specialist teachers whose supervisors were not trained in special education do not feel comfortable being supervised by these Heads. They probably felt that this did not augur well for their professional development as well as pupils' learning. This could also be because supervisees realise the critical role-played by supervision in their profession. They were therefore not prepared to see their professional integrity being ruined by being supervised by someone without the slightest notion of what their job entails. Supervision reports are so important that they can be used to determine one's promotion or not. The advent of performance appraisal intended to determine whether an employee will be entitled to a performance bonus or an annual increment also influences this position. In the event of a poor rating or an adverse report, supervisees were worried that a non-specialist supervisor can be a potential threat who could either make or break their survival. This position also concurs with Stones (1984), when he argued that specialist knowledge supported by pedagogical skills in a supervisor enables the maximization of the learning process.

Gatawa (1983) also doubted the capacity of lecturers lacking relevant professional qualifications to supervise teachers effectively. This finding also coincides with Horst (1984) who indicated that "unknowledgeable educators confuse misdirect, demotivate and are dangerous to learners brains." Specialist subject knowledge is therefore a vital ingredient to effective supervision. Some of the respondents' remarks on this issue also confirmed the above fears. This finding contradicts the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture's position as spelt out in Chief Education Officer (CEO) Circular No. 14 of 1988 which says that any supervisor can supervise specialist teachers effectively.

Supervision of Schemes of Work

The study established that schemes of work which form an integral part of documents for supervision purposes were always seen by supervisors to ensure specialist teachers were prepared for their work. This implies that this area is being effectively handled. However, the study did not focus on whether the scheme book really dwelt on the salient issues that make it a meaningful document for effective use by the teacher. Supervisors probably found it imperative to always see this document with relative ease and frequency because under normal circumstances one can go through the scheme book

once a term. This does not pose any serious problems. Being a vital starting point for every teacher when the term begins, supervisors also find themselves with little or no option but to ensure the schemes are physically there.

Frequency of Supervision Visits

Contrary to what is generally believed to be the norm, for supervisors to see teachers' plans of work at least once at the beginning of every week, the study established the majority of supervision i.e. 30%, have time to see plans of work once a month. Another 27.5% manage to do so once a week. If supervisors are able to check on teachers' plans once a month, this does not augur well for effective supervision. This is worrying considering that there are those teachers who are not endowed with doing or updating their work on their own and therefore need constant supervision. Such teachers can easily relax and rest on their laurels once they establish the supervision pattern. The researcher has firsthand experience of such teachers, who unless you are always checking on their documentation and accuracy, they are always not prepared or inadequately prepared for their co-business. Erratic supervision has a negative impact on such type of teachers. Sergiovanni and Sarrant (1993), confirm that supervisors should be actively involved from the start. They further propose the clinical type of supervision to be adopted for planning purposes. The finding does not therefore concur with available literature.

Supervision of other Teaching Documents

The study also established a general trend on the frequency of seeing other vital teaching or professional documents such as the progress record, the remedial record, the reading record and social record. The majority of respondent's i.e. 45% had their documents seen once a term and was satisfied that this was adequate and effective. The researcher feels this is inadequate and ineffective. A supervisor can discern a meaningful pattern of effectiveness from a number of records as opposed to a single record. Given this background the supervisor may not get meaningful feedback from merely looking at such records once a term. Three times a term could possibly facilitate bringing out a clear picture of whether there was progress or not. No supporting literature or opposing literature could be found on this subject.

Supervision of Actual Teaching

It appears supervision of actual classroom teaching is not being effectively done. The majority of respondents indicated that they were supervised once a term. While it is difficult to establish an absolute relationship between the frequencies of supervision at any given time and effectiveness, once a term appears rather too limited. The number of times a supervisor sees his teachers has a direct bearing on establishing a pattern to gauge whether strategies being used are helping or not. Three or four times would probably assist in realizing the goals of supervision. This could be because Headmasters find themselves too tied up with administrative duties such as attending meetings and workshops. Limited frequency of supervision in a term results in the supervisor and supervisee concentrating only on what Stones (1984) refers to as the surface features of teaching such as documentation and personal attributes at the expense of deep structures such as problem solving, concept development and reinforcement.

Frequency of Supervision Visits by Education Officers and District Education Officers

Supervision by Education Officers and District Education Officers was found to be the least effective, since it was established that there was not even a specific routine used for supervision purposes. More than half of the respondents confirmed this position i.e. 55%. Another 35% indicated that they had never been supervised by an E.O. or a D.E.O. E.Os and D.E.Os form a vital cog in the supervision process, as well as in the Standards Control Unit (S.C.U) of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and yet they rarely fulfill their mandate. They provide a vital link between the Ministry and the school system, but the study found out that there is no input from them. This could be because of a lack of resources such as transport or fuel. Another factor could be that the indifference is due to lack of the requisite skills to supervise special education teachers, since most of the personnel in the SCU are not well versed in special education. The Ministry has only three Education Officers qualified in special education and all of them are based at Head Office. They cannot therefore visit the whole nation unless we had other E.O.s at Provincial Offices. This laxity in supervision by E.Os and D.E.Os is in sharp contrast with the provisions of Chief Education Officer (C.E.O) circular minute No. 14 of 1988 which strongly outlines that only its own S.C.U personnel has the mandate to supervise specialist teachers. Another dimension could be that with most supervisors gaining high qualifications in supervision, there might not be a serious need for the S.C.U to complement the efforts of Headmasters.

Professional Growth / Development

The study found out that most of the respondents disagreed that current supervision strategies offer opportunities for professional growth. This could be attributed to the fact that since eighty percent of respondents expressed their reservations on being supervised by untrained supervisors, they therefore did not see or realize how such a supervisor could make an impact on their professional growth. This could also be blamed on unjustified prejudice of respondents merely because they are aware that their supervisor is not trained. Glatthorn (1984) also alluded to the role of professional growth in a teacher in order to make teaching more effective.

Updating knowledge

It appears the majority of respondents did not subscribe to the idea that current supervision strategies offered opportunities for updating their own knowledge. Respondents did not probably see any justification in this as they are directly involved or affected. Some of them had long periods of experience and were therefore better placed to say how they felt on such an important issue.

Increasing skills

The respondents did not see any merit in the idea that supervision had a bearing in increasing their skills. However there could have been some difficulties in the interpretation of what skills one was referring to. This is because "increasing skills is relative and not absolute." Respondents could have responded to this question differently therefore. It could also be because teachers, being practitioners in their own right could confirm what was best for them.

Increased Teacher Performance

It appears increased teacher performance was not preferred as one of the advantages of supervision, since most of them disagreed with the assertion. From some of the reasons they gave to justify this position, quite a good number of them indicated that untrained supervisors for example did not really know how to assist and were at the same time not prepared to seek help from either the teachers or trained colleagues. Glatthorn (1984) confirms the role of feedback in making teaching more effective.

Supervisor -Supervisee Professional Relations

Fifty percent of the respondents did not agree that supervision facilities improved professional relations. This could be because, depending on individual supervisors, supervision has probably succeeded in bringing about the opposite and that it has strained relations instead; Kwabena (1991) found out that supervisory relations between Heads and teachers were often too formal, artificial, and tension ridden.

Sharing Expertise between Heads and Teachers

Half of the respondents did not feel that there was any sharing of expertise. This could be because if supervisees resent being supervised, they end up seeing nothing positive about it all even without giving it a try. Another explanation could be that some supervisors use unorthodox methods of supervision or want to impose their feelings all the time. In such cases teachers may not take supervision seriously. Acheson and Gall (1992), also indicated that generally, teachers resent being supervised.

Sharing professional matters between teachers and Education Officers

The highest percentage of teachers i.e. 87.5% registered their disapproval at the suggestion that supervision resulted in the sharing of professional matters between them and their E.Os. This could be partly explained by the fact that nowadays, rarely do E.Os visit schools for supervision purposes: E.Os have blamed limited resources for this scenario. Some E.Os have said Headmasters being the people on the spot are better placed to do supervision assisted by school based supervision teams comprising Deputy Heads, Senior Teachers, Teachers in Charge and Heads of Departments.

Collaborative Planning and Teaching

It appears teachers were not beneficiaries of collaborative planning and teaching. This could be because this practice is rare in schools. Because of this, respondents may not have understood collaborative planning and teaching in its proper context. Collaborative planning and teaching is mainly associated with clinical supervision which is a fairly recent paradigm shift. This finding was in contrast with Goldhammer et al (1980) who strongly advocated for its implementation due to its openness by virtue of inducting the teacher as a co-supervisor.

Correction of the Idea that Supervision was about Fault Finding

Many teachers, 70% i.e. associated supervision more with fault-finding than anything else. Traditional approaches of supervision that are commonly used could be to blame for this very unfortunate position, since they are too judgmental making it appear that indeed the major purpose is looking for faults as opposed to professional development. Chidyamazana (1998) also indicated that teachers see supervision as undermining their confidence and professional standing.

The teacher was merely asked to rubberstamp the Head's observations by signing to acknowledge what is written. This finding is at variance with Goldhammer (1980) who indicated that there must be a relationship that binds the supervisor and supervisee to the extent that a teacher seeks help without fear of assessment, grading or any other prejudice. The finding also confirms Schultz and Schultz (1982) who asserts that often supervisors look on supervision as playing god. Kwabena (1991) in Chidyamazana (1998), confirms that E.Os always tried to find fault. This confirmed the teachers' worries.

Improved Teaching

It appears specialist teachers feel that current supervision strategies have not helped them in improving their teaching. This could be because supervision is being carried out more as a routine activity that must be done to fulfill laid down requirements as opposed to aiding improvements in teaching. It may be done to impress an E.O or D.E.O or fulfilling the number of reports that the employer expected in any given term. The principles of supervision were not being adhered to. Stones (1984) also argued that specialist knowledge backed by pedagogical skills in a supervisor enabled maximization of the learning process.

Professional understanding between Heads and Teachers

Many of the respondents felt supervision, if properly adhered to had the potential for bringing about better professional understanding between Heads and Teachers. From discussions held to justify some responses, some respondents indicated that this was conditional on issues such as whether the supervisor was trained in supervision, accommodates teachers' feelings, is not autocratic and does not expect too much from both students and specialist teachers.

Benefits accruing from Untrained Supervisors

Respondents did not feel that they benefited from untrained supervisors. Teachers expect the best from trained supervisors. Teachers blamed this on trial and error approaches that untrained supervisors may be tempted to use. Supervisees have confidence in supervisors with first hand experience and not 'chancers'. This finding concurs with Schott (1989:50) who stressed that "The best approach would be to place the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the trained and experienced supervisors or teachers." Nhengu (1997), also found out that trained specialists could guide teachers in selection, management and sequencing of content.

Teaching Skills

It appears that the majority of respondents felt that they had not benefited from feedback from their supervisors in terms of teaching skills. This could be because quite a good number of supervisors were from the old era and had not bothered to update themselves with new paradigm shifts in supervision. They therefore still stick to old methods like the scientific method where there is no provision for feedback. Once a report has been written, it's final.

Shumbayaonda (1997) also indicated that effective teaching skills could be compromised in favour of quantitative aspects such as meeting targets in documentation, planning and personal attributes.

Scheming and Planning

This area was being effectively handled by supervisors. This could be explained by the fact that scheming and planning appear relatively easy to do, but the question of the quality and usefulness of the schemes and plans may not be effectively addressed. Presenting a completed scheme or plan is one thing but applying or implementing this may leave a lot to be desired. Wrong signals or feedback can also be given and be misconstrued as effective feedback.

Lesson Delivery

Feedback on this area was being effectively carried out. This could be because supervisors found time to talk to teachers on what will have transpired. If this results in the two sharing a common position, then it is a justified position.

Class Management / Discipline

This was being done effectively as evidenced by the response of teachers. This could be because disciplinary issues were generally the same and any good supervisor could give good feedback regardless of whether he / she was trained or not in a specific area. Disciplinary issues were basically similar and may therefore not need any specialized training for feedback to be effective.

Curriculum Sequencing

This was not being handled effectively. This could be due to the fact that either supervisors have not time to discuss such issues or were not conversant with curriculum sequencing themselves. Another reason could be that they probably assumed that since teachers were trained, they received training in curriculum sequencing and could handle it on their own. Nhenga (1997) also indicated that trained specialists could guide teachers in selection, management and sequencing of content.

Compiling and Updating Class Records

Teachers were receiving adequate feedback in this area. This could be because the compilation and updating of records was a relatively simple task for as long as it was done in time. It was also easy to discern the general pattern of class records if there were marks for example. Some records were made once at the beginning of the year only e.g. the social record. These factors made it easy for supervisors to give feedback that was meaningful regardless of their being trained or not.

Supervisee Input

It appeared this was not being effectively handled. This could be due to the fact that some supervisors were 'die hards' from the colonial era of the scientific or traditional models of supervision. They therefore believed in taking the line of formality, rules and regulations. They were obsessed with autocratic control where worker input is not important. Another dimension could be that some supervisors disliked providing feedback to their employees especially when it involved criticism. Ilgen and Knowlton (1980) in Shultz and Schultz (1982) confirmed that some supervisors were deliberately lenient to their supervisees to evade having to be criticized at any cost.

Supervision by Specialists

This was found to be effectively done. Specialist supervisors were rated highly in giving meaningful supervision. This was not surprising. Naturally supervisees expected meaningful supervision from those who were trained in the area. This was because teachers found it easy to discuss issues pertaining to their work with someone well versed in the area unlike someone who is not. Nhenga (1995) found out that specialist supervisors were the best for effective supervision. Nhenga (1997) also indicated that specialist supervisors can guide teachers in the selection, management and sequencing of content and can determine the level of difficulty of content taught by teacher.

Supervision by Non-Specialists

The study established that supervision by non-specialists was not effective. This could have been influenced by the fact that a non-specialist may have little or nothing to offer in an area that is not his domain. This view was supported by Brown and Brown (1990) when they said the rational behind was that a specialist has in-depth knowledge of the content and expertise in handling the subject level. Nhenga (1995) in another study also found out that student teachers rated area specialist supervisors as most effective compared to others who were not specialists.

In the open ended questions respondents also alluded to the following difficulties which they were facing. One of these problems was that attitudes towards both the specialist teachers and students with special educational needs, needed to be improved. Mainstream colleagues did not regard learners with disability as well as the teachers seriously. This could be because special education is not taken seriously by some teachers and communities. The Ministry is also not serious since it has not even bothered to appoint E.Os at Provincial level or District level. Due to this background, special education has not been properly marketed by the experts in the area.

It was also indicated that Heads of ordinary schools expected too much from the specialist teachers and pupils as well. This was probably because these Heads were not trained in special education and their attitudes were not surprising at all. In special education learners learn at a pace that they were most comfortable with and there was no need to rush to beat the syllabus or examination deadlines. In fact, for some of them, examinations were not even necessary since they may require only the functional skills such as dressing, toileting, communication and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study helped bring to the fore valuable information pertaining to supervision. Respondents indicated both the weaknesses and strengths of the current strategies in supervision.

Weaknesses

Some of the weaknesses that were brought up include the following; specialist teachers were not comfortable to be supervised by supervisors who have not trained in special education and have not been staff developed in the area.

Relations between supervisors and teachers were actually going down instead of improving. This made it difficult to share any expertise in the area of concern. Collaborative planning and teaching was also found to be not in existence and yet it had the potential to improve relations and make a powerful impact on professional development. The idea of viewing supervision as synonymous with fault-finding is still very rife and needs to be attended to. Supervisors also need to improve on feedback to teachers on different issues such as teaching skills, teaching documents, lesson delivery, curriculum sequencing and others.

Strengths

Some of the strengths that came out of the study were that professional documents were being scrutinized effectively. It was also felt that if the proper principles of supervision were followed, supervision had the potential to improve professional understanding between supervisors and Heads. The current position where supervision is erratic and fragmented was only helping to destroy the system. Another area that received full backing was that of feedback teachers were getting in compiling and updating class records. The need for supervision by specialists was a grey area that needed to be addressed. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture had an obligation to ensure that the grey areas were attended to expeditiously. This called for a multi-sectoral consultative approach involving all stakeholders such as teachers, colleges, pressure groups, universities and the specialist educators themselves. Only then can the problems bedeviling the system be effectively dealt with.

The study was able to expose the shortcomings in the current supervision strategies being used in special education. Specialist teachers were not effectively supervised. Most critical areas were not receiving adequate attention from supervisors. Instead of promoting professional understanding, supervision of specialist teachers had achieved the opposite i.e. destroying what is in place. The frequency of supervision of specialist teachers needed to be increased and

improved. Education officers had to come in to complement what Heads of schools were doing.

Recommendations

This study yielded important findings on the effectiveness of supervision of specialist teachers. It is in this spirit that the following recommendations would go a long way in addressing the concerns raised.

For teachers

Only personnel trained in special education should be allowed to supervise specialist teachers. Those already in the system and were not trained should either be trained through in-service courses or go for training at the United College of Education. On the job staff development could also assist on this regard.

Trained supervisors should be staff developed to update them on contemporary supervision trends and procedures.

All schools with special classes or resource rooms should have their Heads trained in special education as a matter of urgency.

For Administrators

Financial and material resources should be availed to facilitate effective teaching and supervision. There is need for a programme with a national outlook to be put in place to change both mainstream supervisors and teachers' attitudes, so that they accept pupils and students with special educational needs. Most respondents complained of negative attitudes from supervisors, mainstream teachers as well as students.

Provincial Education Offices should be staffed with at least an Education Officer who is trained in special education. If resources were available, this could be extended to District Education Offices.

Teacher education in Zimbabwe should seriously consider offering a component of special education which is compulsory.

Future Research

Other scholars were strongly urged to pursue further research in this area. A number of grey areas still exist and research could help clarify some of the issues and controversies involved.

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Cite this Article: Munemo E, Tom T (2013). The Effectiveness of Supervision of Specialist Teachers in Special Schools and Resource Units in Mashonaland East and Harare Provinces (Zimbabwe). *Greener Journal of Educational Research*, 3(3): 94-107, <http://doi.org/10.15580/GJER.2013.3.032713549>.