

Experiences of Public Schools District Supervisors in Supervising School Heads: A Phenomenological Study



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ABSTRACT: Supervision of schools requires commitment and a heightened sense of professionalism to achieve educational goals. This study explored the experiences of public schools district supervisors in supervising school heads. It was conducted in selected school in Cluster 5 in the District of Labason, Division of Zamboanga del Norte. The phenomenological research design was used in the study. Five supervisors served as participants, and they were selected through purposive sampling. An Interview Guide was used to gather the data. The responses of the participants were analyzed using Moustakas' method of data analysis. The following were the themes formulated in the study: handling leadership and managerial challenges in schools; managing school heads' attitudes and behaviors; and, supporting and empowering school constituents. Effective school supervision demands a nuanced approach to leadership, particularly in managing the diverse attitudes and behaviors of school heads while fostering an environment of support and empowerment. It is recommended that educational leaders implement comprehensive professional development programs that emphasize both leadership skills and emotional intelligence, ensuring school heads are well-equipped to navigate their roles successfully.

KEYWORDS: Attitudes, behavior, challenges, leadership skills, supervision

INTRODUCTION

Academic supervision is essential to supporting processes of improvement and raising the caliber of teachers in educational institutions. Careful preparation and suitable execution of strategies are hallmarks of effective academic supervision, leading to improved teacher competency (Saihu, 2020). A study claimed that the principal's leadership influences teacher performance (Kaso et al., 2019). Principals possess the ability to lead and effectively oversee schools to foster efficiency and success (Naidoo, 2019). However, the task of supervising teachers is not solely the responsibility of the school principal; it is also a shared responsibility among school supervisors and experienced teachers who possess strong teaching skills (Wardani et al., 2020).

One of the most important levers for bolstering and improving principals' efficacy is their supervisor. Principal effectiveness could be greatly increased and overall educational outcomes could be improved by changing their function from operational control to concentrating on building principals' instructional leadership skills (Goldring et al., 2020). While school supervisors share common objectives with school principals and teachers, each plays distinct roles within the educational ecosystem: principals are primarily planners, teachers are the primary actors, and supervisors assess the feasibility and achievement of objectives during the implementation process (Haris & Ancho, 2020).

Principal supervisors are enjoined to shift their focus from operational tasks and compliance to providing more support to principals in developing their instructional leadership abilities (Honig & Rainey, 2019). Both supervisors and principals play essential roles in forming an effective partnership that contributes to instructional leadership effectiveness. To build trust, principal supervisors should concentrate on offering assistance and encouraging camaraderie. Along with elements like principal supervisors' skill and reputation and principals' capacity for self-control, trust is essential. Together, these components help to create an atmosphere that is favorable for the growth of instructional leadership (Sumintono et al., 2019).

The school operates under a set of rules, policies, and priorities (Caldwell & Spinks, 2021). School effectiveness would greatly improve if principals possessed strong managerial skills to oversee learning, foster a positive school culture, and effectively enhance teacher performance (Mutohar & Trisnantari, 2020). A study conducted in Indonesia revealed that school principals frequently leave school for official matters, which allegedly makes teachers feel unsupported by their superiors, resulting in suboptimal performance. Not all school principals consistently carry out academic supervision as planned and according to the prescribed steps (Kartini et al., 2020). Professional development entails establishment of a culture of collaboration and instructional coaching among teachers, principals, and district supervisors (Pratt et al., 2021).

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Effective leaders need to possess strong attributes that can have a direct impact on student outcomes (Marasan, 2021). Educational supervisors should engage in theoretical discussions with teachers to improve teaching methods and class management (Jahanian & Ebrahimi, 2013). In practice, the effectiveness of leadership management greatly depends on the personality and background of each principal. Some principals excel in planning, while others are average in terms of organizing, executing tasks, and maintaining control (Nindie, 2022). However, research disclosed claims of the principals receiving feedback in absentia, superficial or irrelevant feedback, negative or judgmental feedback, and constructive and individualized feedback though aimed at enhancing principals' leadership practices which can be limited (Alkaabi & Almaamari, 2020).

In the Division of Zamboanga del Norte, a few schools were found to have a considerable number of learners in the elementary and secondary levels found with very low academic performances across the different subjects or low competencies in their achievements in the national assessments given by the Department of Education. Many learners exhibited poor literacy and numeracy skills. Hence, school supervisors have been mandated to intensify the supervision of the school heads at the forefront in supervising and monitoring school and classroom-related activities toward addressing the pressing needs of several learners. This study was conducted in selected schools in Cluster 5 in the District of Labason, Division of Zamboanga del Norte. It sought to explore the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of the public schools district supervisors in supervising school heads in the district.

MATERIAL, METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Materials of the Study

This study was conducted in Cluster 5, Labason District, Division of Zamboanga del Norte. The participants of the study were five public schools district supervisors. They were selected through the purposive sampling. The number of actual participants was based on data saturation. The researcher used an Interview Guide during the interviews with the district supervisors. The instrument included opening, core, and exit questions. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, it underwent a validation process with experts in the field. Pilot interviews were also conducted with district supervisors who were not included as actual study participants. Questions that appeared confusing or unclear were modified or revised before the interviews with the target participants took place.

Methodology

The research was submitted to the Research Ethics Board of the institution for review and approval. Only after the Board approved the paper that the study commenced. The researcher ensured that the rights of the participants were protected. Before the conduct of the interviews, the supervisors were informed about the nature and purpose of the research, the potential benefits, and minimal risks that the research could offer. Voluntary participation of the participants was ensured that they signed the Informed Consent form as an indication of their willingness to participate in the research. The participants were informed that they might withdraw their participation at any point in the research. Each interview lasted forty-five minutes to one hour, wherein the participants could exercise the right to refuse to answer any of the research questions or stop participating in the research. To ensure the confidentiality of the research data, only the researcher had access to the data which were discarded six months after the completion of the research. The anonymity of the participants would be kept in the research manuscript or the publication. This study utilized the Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology of data analysis using the following steps in the phenomenological reduction: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizontalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To ensure that principals have the abilities and capacity to properly lead instructional improvement, principal supervisors today place a high priority on assisting and training them (Rubin et al., 2020). In Indonesia, monitoring and enhancing educational results depend heavily on the supervisory process's evaluation. Data is gathered following supervision in order to evaluate the attainment of predetermined goals. Based on their observations of the learning process, supervisors offer written and verbal feedback (Rusdiana et al., 2020). Considering the critical function of the principals and their engagement in resolving teachers' concerns and challenges, it is also essential for them to conduct supervision to monitor the assessment outcomes of each teacher. Supervision is a well-planned coaching activity aimed at supporting teachers and other school staff in effectively fulfilling their responsibilities (Karim et al., 2021).

Instructional leaders play a vital role in enhancing the quality of instruction. Supervisors have to be flexible to handle effectively situations that may arise while also maintaining positive relationships with their staff. Furthermore, supervisors should ensure that teachers are utilizing information from a diverse range of valid and appropriate sources prior to commencing lesson planning or teaching (Haris & Ancho, 2020). School supervisors and headmasters must carefully select supervisory practices that can contribute to improved teaching performance (Hoque et al., 2020).

If the goal of supervision is to assist in improving teaching and learning, then it has been and continues to be unwise to focus solely on one method for providing that assistance. Throughout history, supervision has involved a range of different processes

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(Gordon, 2019). Supervisors are responsible for teaching and assessing professionalism in various areas, including time management. Assessing social skills such as posture, audience adaption, and appropriate clothing is crucial. Finally, supervisors need to evaluate social skills including social interactions and flexibility (Andzik & Kranak, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study yielded the following themes and sub-themes:

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Handling leadership and managerial challenges in schools	-Complex dynamics and perspectives - Lack of managerial skills by school heads
Managing school heads' attitudes and behaviors	- Unwillingness to accept professional input - Display of apathy in work
Supporting and empowering school constituents	-Provision of support to school heads. - Display of proactive coping mechanism.

Handling Leadership and Managerial Challenges in Schools

The theme of handling leadership challenges in schools encompasses the multifaceted experiences encountered by public school district supervisors in overseeing the performance of school heads and ensuring the effective functioning of educational institutions. As academic leaders, they are expected to discharge their duties with dedication and a high degree of professionalism to help ensure that schools perform. However, doing so entails dealing with the challenges associated with work responsibilities to give service to academic communities.

The significant statements given by the study participants highlight various aspects of this theme. School heads exhibit diverse initiatives in developing their schools and enhancing student outcomes, particularly through curriculum supervision. It indicates the autonomy and innovation present among school leaders, which can significantly impact the educational landscape. Thus, district supervisors play a pivotal role in providing guidance and instructional mentorship to enhance school heads' leadership practices. It underscores the importance of mentorship and support in fostering professional growth among educational leaders. However, the role of district supervisor is not without its challenges.

Complex dynamics and perspectives. This sub-theme encompasses diverse personalities of school heads, conflicting priorities, and varying levels of compliance with educational standards. Addressing leadership challenges requires adeptness in influencing stakeholders, aligning actions with academic standards, and fostering a conducive environment for growth and development. District supervisors must navigate challenges with resilience and creativity while leveraging opportunities to enhance the quality of education and promote positive outcomes for students and educators alike.

"They have their initiatives on how to develop the school, the performance, and outcomes of students, particularly in curriculum supervision." (P1)

"The district supervisor provides guidance and instructional supervision to school heads by observing and gathering data on their strengths and development needs and then Coaching them towards improving leadership practices." (P2)

"People have different personalities, priorities and values which make them behave in different ways that are in some occasion contradictory to the standards of DepEd." (P4)

Participant 1 cited that school heads must take the initiative to improve the schools assigned to them. Many things can be done to ensure that schools conform with what the Department of Education aims to offer to the learners and the communities being served. However, Participant 4 claimed that there can be school heads demonstrate actions or prerogatives that are contrary to what the DepEd expects them to exhibit. Thus, supervisors have to monitor what transpires in school, as the classroom activities for learners and the teachers' engagement inside and outside the classroom are in compliance with the curriculum and are attuned with the standards and competencies prescribed by the Department. Participant 2 claimed that the main mandate of supervisors is to supervise the school heads who are in direct contact with teachers and other school constituents.

Lack of managerial skills by school heads. School supervisors carry the mandate of ensuring that schools operate according to the standards and guidelines prescribed by the Department of Education. Supervisors take on the challenge of improving learners' academic performance, teachers' professional engagements, and, most importantly, enabling school heads to take on leadership and management roles effectively. Thus, coaching may be given to school heads who may demonstrate a deficiency in managing schools.

"One of the difficulties in supervising the school head is the deficiency in the managerial skills of the school heads." (P2).

"Some school heads have no ambition in life. They are only satisfied of what they have and what they want." (P5)

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Participants 2 and 5 cited that the difficulty of supervising school heads extends to issues with managerial skills. School heads are expected to possess strong leadership and managerial abilities to effectively oversee school operations and achieve educational goals. However, deficiencies in these skills can lead to inefficiencies and organizational challenges within the school setting. Thus, school supervisors may find it difficult to make schools perform according to what these academic institutions are expected to deliver.

Educational leadership is the capacity and process of guiding, coordinating, and mobilizing individuals or groups engaged in the advancement of knowledge and the practice of education. It aims to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of these endeavors in attaining educational objectives (Bafadal et al., 2019). Given the significance of the principal teacher's role in addressing teachers' problems and obstacles, as well as their responsibility for monitoring and evaluating teachers' performance, supervision is a crucial coaching activity (Karim et al., 2021). However, supervisors encountered various challenges that hindered their ability to effectively carry out their supervisory responsibilities (Terra & Berhanu, 2019).

School supervisors monitor and mentor school administrators to ensure that everything takes place as planned. However, not everything goes smoothly in the supervisors' discharge of their duties and responsibilities. They deal with the different perspectives and skills of the people they supervise.

Managing School Heads' Attitudes and Behaviors

The theme that emerged from the significant statements is the challenges faced by district supervisors in effectively supervising school heads. The latter can have attitudes and behaviors that make a supervisor's work difficult. School heads may show resistance to authority giving feedback on managerial deficiencies and lack motivation.

Unwillingness to accept professional input. Two participants who are school supervisors recognized that there can be school heads who are open to the feedback and guidance provided by the supervisors. However, others view academic supervision negatively, making them not willing to consider the professional input of the supervisors. This resistance can impede collaborative efforts and hinder the implementation of effective strategies for school improvement.

"There are some school heads who do not want to be dictated to, nor do they accept pieces of advice from their subordinates and teachers." (P1)

"The difficulties that I experienced in supervising schools include having school heads who have a negative attitude." (P3)

"I also encountered stubborn, or hard-headed school heads, I would say with negative attitude." (P5)

Participants 1 and 5 highlighted a common challenge where some school heads may exhibit resistance to input or guidance from their colleagues and subordinates. Participant 3 claimed that school heads' negative attitudes compounded the difficulty experienced by supervisors in school supervision. In this vein, there were school heads who exhibited unfavorable attitudes to the supervision given to them. They refused to consider the mentoring or coaching given and had to insist on doing things based on their preferences. Hence, the supervisors had to exert effort to change the negative mindset of some school heads. They had to make the latter understand the importance of attuning their decisions and actions according to the requirements and guidelines given by DepEd.

Display of apathy in work by school heads. Supervisors may encounter school heads who lack the drive to excel or innovate, which can stagnate school improvement efforts and impede the realization of educational goals. However, having school heads with evident motivation and ambition is vital for educational leadership. The following were statements given by two participants:

"The difficulties I experienced in supervising school heads are behavioral issues of school heads whose values and actions were not helping in the attainment of the program/activity goals." (P4)

"Some school heads are also lazy and have no ambition in life." (P5)

Participants 4 and 5 expressed frustrations with school heads who lacked determination and effort to serve the schools they were supposed to serve well. The supervisors found a few school heads who did not aim to advance the schools in terms of infrastructure and learners' performance in the different assessments given. In this regard, other school heads were also found to be ineffective in managing schools. Thus, the supervisors take the burden of making the school heads more responsive and proactive in fulfilling their work responsibilities.

The theme emphasizes the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by district supervisors in supervising school heads, particularly in addressing attitudes and behaviors that impact school performance and organizational dynamics. Effective strategies for addressing these challenges involve targeted professional development, mentorship programs, and fostering a supportive and collaborative school culture.

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Supporting and Empowering School Constituents

The theme that emerged from the significant statements is centered around the idea of providing support and empowerment to school heads, teachers, and students in overcoming challenges within the educational system. School heads are at the frontline of ensuring that the school community implements school programs as mandated by DepEd. They are required to comply with the various activities and documentation of school undertakings and processes. Thus, school supervisors have to be adept at providing what school heads and other school constituents need.

Support for school heads. Given the complexity and extent of their work, school heads need support from other school leaders, such as public school district supervisors. The following statements reflect a commitment to helping, guidance, and encouragement to navigate difficult situations effectively.

"If the school heads face more challenges and they do not know how to overcome those challenges, that would be the right time to give support or assistance to solve those challenges or problems met by school heads." (P1)

"We have to be supportive in many ways. We have to give mechanisms for coping with a problem to avoid stressful situations, in which engaging the community or stakeholders for strong support leads to positive outcomes." (P2)

"With the scenario that I had encountered, I challenged myself to help and give support to the school heads, teachers, and even the students or learners to give assistance to support their needs." (P3)

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of recognizing when school heads face challenges and providing them with timely support. Offering assistance when difficulties arise can prevent further complications and foster positive outcomes. Participant 2 highlighted the necessity of offering support in various ways. It suggests implementing mechanisms to cope with problems and avoid stress-inducing situations. Moreover, it underscores the importance of engaging with the community and stakeholders to provide robust support systems. Participant 3 conveyed a personal commitment to providing support.

Display of proactive coping mechanism. Individuals may take the challenge of offering assistance to school heads, teachers, and students, acknowledging their role in facilitating support for those in need. Whether through timely intervention, multifaceted support systems, personal commitment, spiritual coping mechanisms, or gratitude for positive change, the theme highlights the importance of fostering an environment conducive to overcoming obstacles and achieving positive outcomes.

"My coping style and mechanism in dealing with difficult experiences include praying to God, not to make the difficulties vanish but to give more energy to rise above situations." (P4)

"I am so grateful and thanking the Lord that despite all, he was able to change and become a better person through my advice and constant communication and monitoring. He is now a full-fledged school principal." (P5)

Participant 4's statement showcases a coping mechanism involving spirituality. It reflects the use of prayer to gain energy and resilience in facing challenges, highlighting the role of faith in navigating difficult experiences. Participant 5 expressed gratitude for witnessing a positive transformation in an individual through continuous support and communication. It emphasizes the impact of guidance and mentorship in facilitating personal growth and professional development. The statements underscore the significance of providing support and empowerment to address challenges within the educational context.

Enhancing school resources entails increasing the number of human resources, particularly teachers and students, as well as improving school facilities and infrastructure to enhance the quality of education (Thessin, 2019). Providing guidance and support to teachers and other educational staff is essential to enhancing instruction (Ngole & Mkulu, 2021). Pedagogical leadership is centered around the crucial tasks of establishing clear educational goals, designing a well-rounded curriculum, and evaluating teachers and their instructional strategies (Day et al., 2020).

School supervisors need to be proactive in the face of the challenges experienced related to their work as academic leaders. They have to exhibit a disposition that can make school heads effective in their functions as school administrators. Supervision given to school heads enables them to deliver quality services that benefit the schools and the Department of Education as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Supervision by public school district supervisors entails hard work and determination to become effective in guiding school heads in leading schools. Addressing the challenges in supervising school heads, particularly in managing attitudes and behaviors, requires a multifaceted approach involving clear communication, mutual respect, and ongoing professional development. Effective supervision requires district supervisors to do what needs to be done amid differences in points of view on school-related matters so that the latter can be ushered toward using their abilities as school administrators.

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Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that public school district supervisors sustain effective practices in supervising school heads in leading schools and gaining the desired educational outcomes. The supervision may aid the school heads in the various programs prescribed by the Department of Education. Public school district supervisors demonstrate an exemplary sense of commitment to the tasks assigned amid concerns or issues and challenges encountered. They have to coach and mentor the school heads in the various tasks that need to be accomplished. Future researchers may explore in depth how public school district supervisors influence the instructional leadership that school heads may be able to demonstrate.

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