

Use Of E-Supervision As Tool For Quality Assurance In School Administration

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Abstract: The world is currently becoming information and communication technology (ICT) driven; thereby compressing the globe into a village. The ICT facilities have become affordable for almost every organization, education system inclusive. The introduction of technologies into the school system is creating complex issues for non-ICT administrators/supervisors. To make these resources useable and accessible require a thorough training for the administrators/supervisors. As professionals who are responsible to guide and support the new generation of learners/ students as well as teachers, administrators/supervisors need to match-up with the trend. Traditional supervisory tool is fast giving way to ICT enabled supervision. This paper deals with quality assurance benefits for e-supervision in the school system, with specific focus on its implications for Nigeria school administrators/supervisors. The paper acknowledged that the main policy objective in education in Nigeria is to raise the quality of education at all levels in order to make the products of the system (students) more useful to themselves and the society at large. Quality assurance in Nigeria school system is a goal which learners, teachers, staff and school administrators aspire to attain. The current school system characterized by unqualified personnel, dilapidated facilities, poor funding, etc cannot allow for effective implementation of e-supervision. The paper concludes that there is need for qualified and ICT compliant administrators (supervisors) and teachers (supervisees), improved funding of education, political will, etc to drive e-supervision and achieve quality assurance in the school system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Quality assurance, e-supervision, school supervision, school administration

INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as a veritable tool for answering so many questions and solving myriad of problems confronting Nigeria. There is therefore a greater demand for probity and accountability so as to ensure functional education. The maintenance of standards and assurance of adequate measures of quality control are now the concern of all enlightened citizens. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) opined that quality assurance is a proactive means of ensuring quality in any organization. Quality assurance in education aims at preventing quality problems and ensures that the products of the system conform to expected standards. Ebong and Efue (2005) stated that quality assurance is a holistic term that is directed towards education as an entity. According to the authors, it entails the suppliers and consumers and all the various activities put in place to produce quality products and services. Enaohwo (2008) revealed that the concept of quality assurance in the education system can be looked at from two angles, viz: the internal perspective (within the system) and the external measures (checks and balances by the regulatory agencies).

The significance of school supervision has now come into the limelight. Eregie and Ogiamen (2007) define school supervision as a whole mechanism systematically designed to accomplish the end of public education so that internal structure of the school is determined by the functions which are carried on towards those ends. To be able to effectively provide education, there is need to ensure that the educational system is reliable. Reliability in terms of educational system can only be enhanced through supervision (Peretomode, 2004). It should be noted that educational supervision focuses on changing the behaviour of staff for an improved performance. In most cases, it is internally arranged by the school head and at times assisted by other agencies and stakeholders.

The essence of supervision is to monitor the performance of school staff, noting the merits and demerits and using befitting and amicable techniques to ameliorate the flaws while still improving on the merits, thereby increasing the standard of schools and achieving educational goals. Thus, the concern of school supervision is the improvement in teaching and learning environment in order to promote effective teacher performance and learning in the school. Supervision is thus a combination or integration of a number of processes, procedures and conditions that are consciously designed with the sole aim of advancing the work effectiveness of teachers and other personnel involved in the schooling process. In order to enhance instruction, the role of the supervisors should be supportive, assisting, explanative, encouraging, guiding, advisory, improving and sharing rather than directing.

Electronic supervision (e-supervision) is a web-based tool for addressing issues associated with field experience in supervision. According to Alger and Kopcha (2009), e-supervision is the process of using online technology to support the teacher trainees in the field. A well developed electronic supervision (e-supervision) is

an efficient and convenient method of building a standard and balanced educational system. In line with these observations, e-supervision provides complete and open access to the supervisors (administrators) to guide and support the working of their employees (teachers) by using various information and communication technologies (ICT) interface. It is easier to communicate with each other which reduces the workload and offer the needed assistance in their tasks by discussing more possible strategies. This paper discusses the quality assurance benefit for e-supervision in the school system and highlights the significant role it plays for building professional and learning environment. This technology helps to link supervisor and supervisee together, to perform their works and create learning environment in-between them. The paper further seeks to underscore the quality assurance benefits of e-supervision in the school system and its implications for Nigeria schools administrators/supervisors.

Concept of Quality Assurance in Education:

The Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary (1995) defines quality as a peculiar and essential character; an inherent feature; a degree of excellence; it is a general term applying to any trait, mark, or character of an individual. According to Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2005), quality is synonymous with standard, efficiency, excellence, relevance and worthiness. It is the success with which an institution provides educational environment which enables students to effectively achieve worthwhile learning goals including appropriate academic standard. Still linking quality to education, Aigboje (2007) refers quality to excellence or more of societal values embodied in the school curricula. This involves stages and activities that take place until certificates are issued. For Afemikhe (2007), quality assurance involves all actions that are necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality. He added that the mission of quality assurance activities is to improve quality through guidelines, promote wide deployment and proper implementation of specifications, communicate and design effective processes to achieve goals. Accordingly to Ajayi and Akindutire (2007), quality assurance is about consistently meeting product specifications or getting things right the first time, and every time. Quality, therefore, is about the standard of something when compared with other things. It presupposes that there is a set standard against which the outcome is compared. Quality assurance refers to efforts and activities put in place to attain a level of acceptable and consistent standards or targets in an organization. Quality assurance in Nigeria education system therefore, implies the ability of the various arms of the school system to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills required by their outputs. This definition raises the issue of promoting good value in the institutional management and supervision of teaching – learning process to produce quality learners from the school system. Raouf (2008) opines that quality assurance in education is the process of ensuring continuous improvement in all aspects of education business in an institution of learning to satisfy the needs and expectations of the institution's customers (society). This approach is built around the premise that every step of the process of a service and of an operation has room for improvement. Quality assurance could be classified either as internal or external.

Internal quality assurance, according to Okojie (2008) refers to the processes, maintenance and promotion of quality within the system to ensure delivery of quality education. According to him, the internal mechanisms start from the point of admission to ensure that candidates who do not meet the minimum requirements are not admitted. The tasks of maintaining quality assurance in secondary schools are entrusted on the principal and vice-principal and other principal officers in the school system including the Ministry of Education. Internal quality assurance, therefore, encompasses all the processes and mechanisms put in place by an educational institution to ensure compliance with standards and attainment of set quality targets. External quality assurance refers to monitoring and evaluation exercise carried out by statutory bodies outside the school system. To complement the efforts of the Ministry of Education, other regulatory bodies such as Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), Mathematical Association of Nigeria (MAN), etc ensure that only members who have attained some level of professional standards are allowed to operate in the school system. It is the duty of these administrators and regulators to ensure that quality is maintained at all times in the school system.

A critical look at the definitions show that quality assurance in education encompasses systematic management, monitoring and evaluation procedures adopted to measure the performance of school administrators and teachers against educational objectives to ensure best practices in resource inputs, utilization and curriculum management so as to produce students that achieve the set educational goals in schools. It also serves as the process of ensuring that the educational outputs (graduating students) are equipped with all required personnel and quality programmes, facilities and materials to meet global acceptance. It is a guarantee of confidence and certainty that programmes of study offered in the school system do not only meet acceptable standards but that they are continuously improved upon.

Concept of Electronic Supervision (E-Supervision):

Supervision is defined by Bernard and Goodyear (2004) as an intervention that is provided by a senior member of a profession to a junior member or members of that same profession. This relationship is evaluative,

extends over time, and has the simultaneous purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the junior member(s), monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients she, he, or they see(s), and serving as a gatekeeper of those who are to enter the particular profession.”According to Nwankwo (1984) as cited by Peretomode (2004:184), supervision can be divided into two categories: instructional and personnel supervision. Instructional supervision has been defined as a set of activities which are carried out with the purpose of making the teaching and learning purpose better for the learner, while personnel supervision deals with the set of activities which are carried out by the supervisor with the basic aim of sensitizing, mobilizing and motivating staff in the school towards performing their duties optimally in terms of the achievement of the stated aims and objectives of the educational system.

Electronic supervision (e-supervision) is a web-based tool for addressing issues associated with field experience in supervision. According to Alger and Kopcha (2009), e-supervision is the process of using online technology to support the student teachers in the field. E-Supervision in education helps to build an educational collaborative environment between administrators/supervisors and teachers/supervisees with several kinds of tasks to perform, such as skill development, experience sharing, group meeting and discussing about teaching and administrative strategies.

Approaches to E-Supervision:

Electronic supervision (e-supervision) is a two-way process involving the supervisor(s) on the one hand and the supervisee(s) on the other. According to Lubega and Niyitegeka (2008), there are several methods of e-supervision process which can be categorized under two sub-headings: synchronous and asynchronous.

Synchronous e-supervision includes all methods where both the supervisor and supervisee interact in real-time during the e-supervision exercise. There is immediate contact and response between the supervisor and supervisee. This category has method such as chat room and online telephone. According to Lubega, et al.(2008), chat rooms are electronic tools for real-time communication whereby two or more people interactively write to each other and receive immediate response. The content editors allow a specific number of lines to be typed and sent at a time and does not allow for the contents of the chat to be stored or saved. Online telephone is a communication process that allows two participating members to talk to each other through online tools such as skype. It is a cheap form of communication through the internet and requires participating members to share user identification.

Asynchronous e-supervision is the category that involves both the supervisor and supervisee communicating to each other without receiving immediate reply. According to Lubega, et al. (2008), this category includes methods such as e-mails, wikis/blogs, discussion boards, forums and e-research. This method is very common today and is thought to be effective especially when both supervisor and supervisee are distant apart. However, some challenges of this method of communication include delay or slowness to respond, ignoring of communication as well as impatience.

Quality Assurance Benefits of E-Supervision in the School System:

The main objective of the school system is to provide quality education through teaching and learning for the students. Consequently, it is the responsibility of school administrators to ensure that all the actors in the school system live up to this expectation. The purpose of school supervision is to promote and develop a favorable situation for teaching and learning which eventually lead to the improvement of the society. It will ensure efficiency in the school system. For example, if teachers are aware that their activities are monitored by the supervisors from a distance, they will strive to live up to expectation. E-supervision speeds up supervision cycle and increases the processes and turn-around time.

Students’ performance would improve through e-supervision as a result of constant interaction between the supervisors and supervisees. Instead of the traditional supervision that requires the presence of the supervisor; academic performance could be monitored electronically from the comfort of the supervisor’s office. Consequently, enhanced supervisory activities will ultimately result to improved input on the part of the teachers and performance on the part of students. Through e-supervision information would be transmitted and stored through emails and other resource sharing facilities such as electronic data management system (EDMS). This will make preservation and retrieval of data easier for assessment purposes. E-supervision will reduce the cost associated with travelling in terms of time and travel expenses. According to Dudding and Justice (2004), the use of two-way video-conferencing is a viable, practical, and cost-effective method to supervise graduate students in hard-to-fill remote, rural and underserved public school districts. The cost of the e-supervision technology is offset by increase in clinical supervision, decrease in travel time and related costs, and flexible in scheduling. This method can also be applicable to the supervision of teachers. A supervisor can schedule multiple teacher supervisory sessions per day, thus minimizing the cost and other associated risks involved in traveling. In the same vein, the substantial time saved from travels could be utilized in attending to other administrative matters. The supervisor and supervisee can schedule an appropriate time that is convenient for both of them to interact. E-supervision meets the needs of teachers who do not have the ability or time to

provide in-person supervision. For example, if it is information that is required via emails, the supervisor or supervisee may send or access such information at his or her convenient time.

Although the e-supervisor is physically housed in a location that is different than the supervisee, he/she is enabled to observe a variety of professional activities. The e-supervisor has the ability to see, hear, and evaluate the performance of supervisees during interventions, assessments, and other professional that occur in classroom or other school settings. Additionally, this model allows verbal communication or instant messaging between the supervisor and supervisee. This two-way communication system can enhance both interpersonal and professional relationship between the supervisors and supervisees. E-supervision is a straightforward process for those who are familiar with internet tools and online interaction. However, all the parties must possess excellent communication skills, typing proficiency and expression of self in verbal and non-verbal exchange of ideas.

Implications of E-Supervision for School Administration in Nigeria:

The concept of e-supervision is a laudable innovation that can enhance supervisory roles in the school system in Nigeria. However, introduction of e-supervision in the school system in Nigeria will have some consequences for school administrators/supervisors. The implications are presented in form of challenges as follows:

(a) Lack of Qualified Administrators/Supervisors:

For e-supervision to be effective there has to be qualified personnel in the school system to drive the process. The administrators/supervisors have to be competent in their own sense. However, the situation on ground in Nigeria is far from ideal. As observed by Ifedili and Egenti (2010), out of 62% male and 38% female principals in Nigerian secondary schools, only six states had 50-64% of graduate teachers with teaching qualification; five states had less than 24% graduate teachers with teaching qualification and 31 states had less than 50% graduate teachers with teaching qualification. These statistics are very worrisome. Teaching became professionalized in Nigeria in 1993. To date, non-professionals are still in the teaching profession and many teachers are not qualified to be in the school system. The dignity of the profession should be maintained at all times by insisting on employment of principals and teachers based on merit. The situation is not different in the supervising ministries (Ministry of Education) where the external supervisors (or inspectors) come from.

(b) Poor Funding of the Educational Sectors by Government:

Another major challenge that confronts implementation of e-supervision is inadequate funding of the school system by various governments. According to Odia and Omofonmwan (2007), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization recommended 26% of the total budget of a nation as the standard budget allocation to the educational sector. However, over the years, no government in Nigeria has met the allocation requirement for the educational sector. Longe Commission of 1991 observed that the percentage of recurrent budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has never exceeded 10%. Also some parts of the budgeted sum for some years were never fully released. This means that the meager annual budgets for education were partially withheld on regular basis. According to Okoroma (2006) only 8% of the national budget was allocated to the education sector in 2001; and in 2004 the figure dropped to a dismal 5.6% of the federal government budget. According to Ifedili and Ochuba (2009), the poor funding of schools has led to many difficulties in having an ideal instructional supervision by the school administrators. This inadequate fund for the implementation of formulated policies has been the major hindrance to the achievement of standard in education. It has led to the provision of inadequate facilities, instructional materials, equipments etc. The situation is even worse at the moment where most states are not able to pay workers salaries (including those of teachers) on regularly basis. Many states now depend on bail out funds (loans from Federal Government) to meet up with their recurrent expenditure. Given this scenario, funding of e-supervision in the school system will be a herculean task.

(c) Inadequate Teaching and Learning Facilities:

Another hindrance to implementation of e-supervision is the near absence and lack of maintenance of existing facilities in the schools. According to Odia, *et al.* (2007), the gross under funding of the education sector in the country and the neglect of instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many of these schools, classrooms, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to decline in academic standards. These facilities are part of what the e-supervisors are supposed to inspect, but a situation where they are nonexistent or dilapidated, the supervisees would not be held responsible for not meeting the educational standards.

(d) Policy Issues:

A successful implementation of e-supervision requires new policies, rules and legislative changes to tackle electronic activities. According to Okoroma (2006), the gap between educational policies and goal attainment due to inadequate implementation of these policies has become of great concern to observers. According to him,

the implementation of the primary and secondary aspects of the National Policy on Education (NPE) did not achieve its goals since the Federal Government was inconsistent in implementing this aspect of the national education policy. In Nigeria, policy inconsistency has been the bane militating against implementation of national education policies in particular and other economic policies in general. As Okoroma (2006) observed, educational policies were formulated by various governments but political instability stalled or discouraged the political will to implement such policies. As new governments came in quick succession and with relative uncertainty, continuity in policies could not be guaranteed. As a result, principals of secondary schools are often caught in this web when government changes existing education policy. A policy such as e-supervision in the school system requires strong political will and adequate legislation to back it up.

(e) Infrastructural and Technical Constraints:

A major challenge to implementation of e-supervision in Nigeria is lack of infrastructural facilities. In the first place, electricity generation will pose an impediment to proper e-supervision in the country. According to Izueke (2007), it is through power generated that the functioning of the computers and internet can be meaningful. At present, generation of power at the national grid has dropped to the level that power supply is now done on rotation basis (rationing). E-supervision which requires access to the internet will not succeed especially in the rural areas where power supply is either erratic or nonexistent. Secondly, e-supervision is a web-based system that requires computers and technologies to drive. Linking the entire school system online requires huge capital outlay, trained manpower to operate the system as well as training the supervisors and supervisees on how to use the process to achieve set objectives. Information and Technology professionals are in short supply and the level of literacy and awareness necessary for people to appreciate the benefits of such a process is relatively low.

(f) Security:

The present high rate of insecurity in the country will affect the level of implementation of e-supervision in the school system. According to Nwagwu (2000), the attainment of the lofty aims and objectives of education cannot be realized unless there is in our schools necessary peaceful and orderly environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning. In addition to security of lives, there is need to protect the infrastructural facilities such as computers from theft and damage. This will only be possible if the facilities are housed in secure and conducive environments.

(g) Corruption:

It is almost impossible to talk of effective implementation of e-supervision without addressing the issue of corruption that has become a national problem. As noted by Adesina cited in Okoroma (2006:16), the 2004 Corruption Perceptions Index, released by Transparency International (TI), the watchdog on global corruption, ranks Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world. In 2003, the organization ranked Nigeria second, a one-step improvement from the previous position as the most corrupt country in the world. Furthermore, some of the objectives of most policies in education are often derailed at the implementation stage due to a number of reasons such as passing of budgets by lawmakers with strings attached; reluctance on the part of the executive arm of government to release funds; and inadequate funds released to the operators of the education system (primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions) are not honestly and fully utilized to promote the cause of education (Okoroma, 2006:255). If these impediments are not adequately addressed, the implementation of e-supervision will be a mirage in the school system in Nigeria.

Recommendation:

Implementation of e-supervision in the school system in Nigeria will be of immense benefit and improve quality assurance in the school system. To this end, we make the following recommendations:

- There is need to dissociate the school system from politics such that only qualified personnel (inspectors, principals and teachers) should be employed. The various ministries of education are to ensure that non-professionals are not allowed into the system, while those who are already in the school system without adequate qualification should be shown the way out.
- Government at all levels should increase the funding of education in order to meet and/or surpass the 26% minimum level set by UNESCO. To achieve this, there is need to put the issue of funding of education in the constitution so that it shall be binding on all the tiers of government.
- There is need to comprehensively review the national policy on education since its implementation is already derailed. In its place, a workable policy that is fashioned to take care of our economic, political and socio-cultural needs be put in place. The Federal Ministry of Education is in a better position to harmonize the recommendations of various committees and commissions that looked into the education policies at various dispensations and come up with a blueprint that will put education on the path of growth.

- The policy of e-supervision should be backed up with legislation and the government should show the political will to see to its implementation. It should no longer be business as usual in the education system. The executive arm of government should send the necessary bills to back up e-supervision to the National Assembly for consideration and passage into law.

- Since electricity is germane to meaningful implementation of the e-supervision in the school system, the federal government should address the issue of power generation in the country. The activities of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), generation companies (GENCOs) as well as the distribution companies (DISCOs) should be reviewed critically to ensure that non-performing companies in the system are removed. It is not enough to increase tariff on electricity consumption without the commensurate increase in quality of services delivery by the operators in the power system.

- The issue of security needs to be addressed in the country to guarantee safety of lives and properties such as the e-supervision facilities during implementation of the policy. Security affects everyone and therefore all stakeholders (governments, religious bodies, traditional institutions) should come together to proffer solutions to the dreaded issue of insecurity in the country. A situation where over 200 school girls abducted from their hostels are still missing after two years does not guarantee security of lives and facilities in the school system.

- Lastly, mismanagement of resources allocated to education should attract severe punishments ranging from imprisonment, dismissals from service and other punitive measures to discourage corrupt practices in the school system.

Conclusion:

A cursory look at the education system as supported by the literatures reviewed above shows a steady decline of quality in the school system and something needs to be done to restore quality to the school system in Nigeria. The introduction and implementation of electronic supervision (e-supervision) will assist in addressing and maintaining quality assurance in the school system. The gains of e-supervision will outweigh those of the traditional on-site supervision in terms of cost-benefit in the long run. As an online and internet enabled process, schools would be interconnected and this will enable the administrators to access schools even in rural areas without in-person visitation. Administrators would cover a wide range of schools within a given period that on-site supervision cannot accomplish. Through constant interaction between the supervisors (administrators) and supervisees (teachers) assessments necessary to improve quality of services would be maintained. Ultimately, e-supervision will be helpful for the Ministry of Education and other relevant agencies to cover all the educational institutions by introducing and implementing e-supervision interface in Nigeria school system. Therefore, with efficient application of e-supervision in Nigeria school system, quality assurance in the school system is a goal or target that is possible, and therefore, learners, teachers, school management and government should adopt it.

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