

Re-Defining Quality Assurance Benefits Of E-Supervision In School Administration

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Abstract: Information and communication technology (ICT) has contributed a lot of improvements in every aspect of the school system worldwide. The application of ICT in the supervision of instruction is termed e-supervision and is one of the ways through which electronic technology is enhancing school system. E-supervision refers to the use of videoconferencing technology to provide real-time supervision. Although the supervisor is physically housed in a location that is different than the supervisee, the videoconferencing technology allows the e-supervisor to observe a variety of professional activities. During these observations, the e-supervisor has the ability to see, hear, and evaluate the supervisee's performance during the delivery of interventions, assessment, and other professional activities. Quality assurance in the other hand is a philosophy and a process in which all the functions and activities of an institution are treated equally, planned, controlled and implemented in a systematic and scientific manner. This paper begins with the concept of quality assurance, supervision and e-supervision and proceed to process of e-supervision methods and the programmes of supervision in school systems. It also takes a look at quality assurance benefits of e-supervision in the school system.

Keywords: Quality assurance, e-supervision, Implication, Information Communication, Technology

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology has contributed a lot of improvements in every aspect of the school system worldwide. It is transforming how education is being delivered in every parts of the world, including Nigeria. For this reason many educators are of the opinion that this type of technology will in future control the entire activities within the educational system. The school system in Nigeria is often influenced by constant electronic technological changes. The ability of the stakeholders and actors within the school system to adapt to these changes has attracted attention in the last few decades (Nakpodia and Urien, 2011). One of the various ways through which electronic technology is currently enhancing the school system is e-supervision. The application of ICT in supervision is what is known as e-supervision. E-supervision is one of the means through which technology is enhancing the school system. There are several ways through which the school system could be supervised using traditional means; however information and communication technology has introduced other forms of supervision. These new forms of supervisory methods are currently practiced informally by different supervisors.

E-supervision, according to Carlin, Milam, Carlin and Owen (2012) refers to the use of videoconferencing technology to provide real-time supervision. Although the e-supervisor is physically housed in a location that is different than the supervisee, the videoconferencing technology allows the e-supervisor to observe a variety of professional activities. During these observations, the e-supervisor has the ability to see, hear, and evaluate the supervisees' performance during the delivery of interventions, assessments, and other professional activities (Carlin, Milam, Carlin & Owen, 2012). Research has indicated that supervision within the school system is one of the major influences on the student outcomes (Browne, 2001). Many times the supervisors are assumed to be knowledgeable in specific areas hence being used as reference points by the students, the government and the society at large. For this reason, the quality of school system is greatly attributed to supervisors' efforts to perform all activities that are offered in those specific areas which will affect the overall performance of the students (Ayeni, 2012). Following from the above, quality assurance in education is the efficient management, monitoring, evaluation and reviews of the resource inputs and transformation process (teaching and learning) to produce quality outputs (students) that meet set standards and expectations of the society. It is the set of activities that an organization undertakes to ensure that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality. A critical look at the definition shows that quality assurance in education encompasses systematic management, monitoring and evaluation procedures adopted to measure the performance of school administrators and students against educational objectives to ensure best practices in resource inputs, utilization and curriculum management by the supervisors to produce students that achieve the set educational goals in secondary schools. Thus, the concern has been: what quality assurance benefits does e-supervision hold for the school system? and what is the implication of such benefits for the Nigeria school administrators?

Conceptual Review:

Some concepts are central to this topic. These important concepts must be discussed for proper understanding:

Quality Assurance:

Quality assurance is a philosophy and a process in which all the functions and activities of an institution are treated equally, planned, controlled and implemented in a systematic and scientific manner. It has to do with the process of ensuring effective resource input, control, refining the process and raising the standards of output in order to meet the set goals and satisfy public accountability (Ayeni, 2012). 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. This was corroborated by Deming's cycle of continuous improvement which is normally based upon Plan, Do, Check and Act cycle (PDCA). This process enables the school supervisors to regularly monitor, assess and evaluate the resource inputs, instructional process and outputs by identifying the key elements/aspects that need improvement and ways of addressing these, implementing the plan, analyzing the result to ensure that significant agreement exists between the original goals and what is actually achieved, and acting on the plan full scale by conducting further work through feedback and reviews with those concerned (Temponi, 2005). The goals of quality assurance are the anticipation and avoidance of faults or mistakes by setting attainable standards for a process, organizing work so that they are achieved, documenting the procedures required, communicating them to all concerned, and monitoring and reviewing the attainment of standards.

Supervisor:

A supervisor is the job title of a low level management position that is primarily based on authority over a worker or charge of a workplace. The term itself can be used to refer to any personnel who has this task as part of their job description. Supervision, on the other hand, can be performed by people without this formal title, for example by parents. A supervisor is responsible for the productivity and actions of a small group of employees. The supervisor has several manager-like roles, responsibilities, and powers. Two of the key differences between a supervisor and a manager are: the supervisor does not typically have "hire and fire" authority, and the supervisor does not have budget authority. Effective school supervision provides relevant and continuous supports and encouragement in order to improve teachers' instructional practices. This could be achieved through the use of a differentiated supervision model. And the differentiated supervision model is based on individual teacher characteristics such as age, teaching experience, working conditions, educational qualification and individual teacher needs as well as available time, resources and related learning opportunities. That is why Bernard and Goodyear (2008: 1) argued that "supervision is 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".

Instructional supervision does not only improve decision-making skills but ultimately student learning outcomes. Teacher professional development through regular supervision implies that they not only learn but also learn what to be learnt and transform their knowledge into practice for the betterment of their student learning outcomes. Continuous teacher professional development through supervision generally portrays teacher quality and this is germane and key component of major reform programmes in education. Supervision, according to Olagbeye (2004) is a process whereby an individual by means of advising and stimulating interest in teachers and students, helps to improve teaching and learning situations in educational institutions. The definition goes further to describe the term supervision as "involving advice, direction and discussion which help to see the available resources-manpower, finance and capital equipment utilized for the achievement of the set educational objectives. This cuts across supervision of personnel, structures, equipment, laboratories, library, records and other school facilities to ascertain problems and defects and then recommend a satisfactory result for the school system. Based on the importance attached to school supervision and improvement in teaching learning activities, the Federal Government of Nigeria in the new National Policy on Education (2004) states that government will continue to run good and well staffed inspectorate services for all levels of education; state ministries of education in collaboration with the federal inspectorate will be responsible for the inspection of all secondary schools under their jurisdiction; regular courses will continue to be run to acquaint inspectors with their new roles as advisers, guides, catalysts and sources of new ideas; introduction and orientation courses will continue to be organized for newly appointed inspectors of secondary schools; government will expand and strengthen the federal inspectorate service to supplement state inspectorate services.

E-Supervision:

E-supervision, according to Carlin, Milam, Carlin and Owen (2012) refers to the use of videoconferencing technology to provide real-time supervision. Although the e-supervisor is physically housed in a location that is different than the supervisee, the videoconferencing technology allows the e-supervisor to observe a variety of professional activities. During these observations, the e-supervisor has the ability to see, hear, and evaluate the supervisees' performance during the delivery of interventions, assessments, and other professional activities. Research has indicated that supervision within the school system is one of the major influences on the student outcomes (Latona & Browne, 2001). E-supervision gives higher education institutions and employers the opportunity to minimize supervisors' travel time and reduce associated transportation costs (e.g., mileage reimbursement) while providing a valuable and necessary service to graduate students and partnering stakeholders (Dudding & Justice, 2004). For the busy supervisor, e-supervision allows graduate students to be supervised without sacrificing time for travel (Olson, Russell, & White, 2001) and maximizes the focus on students' practice. All in all, the cost of the videoconferencing technology and equipment is often offset by the increase in the e-supervisor's productivity, expanded access to a broader spectrum of employment and externship sites, and reduction in travel time and associated costs (Dudding & Justice, 2004).

Processes In E-Supervision For Quality Assurance:

There are several methods that have been identified to help in the e-supervision process and can be categorised under synchronous and asynchronous. *Synchronous* method involves the supervisor and supervisee interacting in real-time during the e-supervision. There is immediate contact and response between the supervisor and supervisee. This category has methods such as chat room and online telephone (e.g. sky pee). *Chartroom* are electronic tools for real-time communication where by two or more people interactively write to each other and receive immediate response. These tools have restrictive content editors that allow a specific number of lines to be typed at a time and never store the content after the chat. *Online Telephone* is an online communication that involves two participating members talking to each other through online tools such as sky pee. This is a cheap form of communication through the internet and requires participating members to share user ids for identification. *Asynchronous* method is one that involves the supervisor and supervisee communicating to each other and do not receive immediate reply. Such communication faces challenges of slowness to respond, ignoring of communication as well as members being impatient. This method has categories such as e-mails, wikis/blogs, discussion boards, forums and e-research groups. The aim of this method is for the members to contribute to the e-supervision and receive a reply at a later stage. This method is very common today and is thought to be effective especially when both supervisor and supervisee are distant apart. A blend of the components within the model contributes to a successful supervision process and can effectively influence research performance. With many students today undertaking ICT related modules, it is quite easy to utilize the form of e-supervision.

Techniques that can be employed in of E-supervision:

Opinmi (2011) identified the following techniques of e-supervision as:

i. Compilation of Information:

Information about the members of staff such as academic qualifications, habits, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, social life, family backgrounds etc. are to be compiled. Other information could be obtained through discussion with them. Staff members are likely to cooperate and make necessary sacrifice if they are treated with courtesy and respect.

ii. Conflict Management:

Conflict is bound to occur in an organization and could emanate from individuals or groups. Supervisor should learn to listen to both sides involved so as to gather relevant information that can help to settle the conflict. In case, the supervisor cannot competently handle the conflict, it should be referred to the immediate boss or to the management for necessary or immediate action. Whatever decision that is taken to resolve a conflict must be seen by all as being fair and impartial.

iii. Communication with Staff:

It is important for the supervisor to master ways of communicating effectively with the supervisees in a way that will readily secure subordinate compliance. This is better achieved by reasoning together rather than by giving order. Certainly, there are occasional situations when authority is maintained with a clear directive in which directive actions are necessary.

iv. Concise Decision - Making Process:

The supervisor has a key role to shape the decision as his/her position is the primary position for the management of decision. He/she operates between the staff and the management. When he/ she are expected to make decision, it should be done promptly and judiciously as soon as he or she affirms his authority to make such decision.

v. Constructive Criticism of Staff:

Unfair criticism or aggressive tone by supervisor tends to generate resentment in workers. It is better to have a viable option recommended to the workers to correct his mistakes than to have unhealthy and unpalatable criticism.

The Purpose of Supervision of Schools:

The purpose of school supervision is the promotion and development of favourable setting for teaching and learning which eventually lead to the improvement of the society. However, the primary responsibility of school inspectors is to see that high standards are maintained and that schools are run in accordance with laid down rules and regulations. The ultimate aim is to improve the overall efficiency and raise the academic standards of the institutions. Specifically, the purpose of classroom instruction supervision is to help teachers to learn what their problems are and to seek the best methods of solving them be they individual or group problems. Chike-Okoli (2004) cited in Chike-Okoli (2006) suggested that teachers should be guided to improve teaching methods and techniques, utilize newly discovered principles of group dynamics, provide for individual differences, locate and utilize community resources and evaluate their teaching competence. The purpose of supervision according to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes manual (2002) cited in Chike-Okoli (2006) can be classified into teacher improvement purposes which are geared towards: ensuring that teachers do their work affectively; ensuring that new teachers receive training to enable them function effectively on the job; providing professional information to teachers; guiding teachers to the sources of instructional materials; providing technical assistance to teachers when required; ensuring that discipline is maintained; maintaining high morale among the teachers; suggesting ways of improving teacher performance; providing opportunities to discover teachers with special abilities or qualities.

The non-teachers improvement purpose are not directly concerned with the teachers but also guide the supervisors in ensuring the supply of teaching materials to the school, ensuring that the quality of instruction is maintained in the school, providing an opportunity to assess the moral tone of the school and providing feedback to education planners on the need for curriculum improvements. Bello (2001) identified the following purposes of school supervision: to ensure that public or even private funds are spent efficiently on the school system; to approve schools for recognized public examinations such as the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) and National Examination council (NECO); for approval and sometimes for the payment of Grants - in Aid to private and voluntary Agency schools; to carry out special investigations on disciplinary, financial or educational problems; to serve as a link between the teachers on the field and the ministry of education in the center; for better school administration and organization; for the approval of opening of new schools; cost-Benefit Analysis: Education is a big business, which cost government and even individuals a lot of money. The other purpose of school supervision according to Obadara (2006) includes administrative role, educational or formative role and supportive role.

Quality Assurance Benefits Of E-Supervision In The School System:

Today technology has encouraged both the supervisor and supervisee to keep in touch, manage their activities, operate effectively and share experience despite the great barriers that may exist. However before the experience can take place and be shared, both the supervisor and supervisee have to establish a personal relationship which forms the foundation for the experience (Nelson, et. al., 2001; Pearson, 2000). With the founded relationship a teaching-learning alliance is easily created between the stakeholders and it is this relationship that contracts them to do their respective roles. It is the role of the supervisor to make sure that the supervision bond is created irrespective of the existing circumstances. This bond can be further facilitated by the constant open communication between the supervisor and supervisee. For an effective supervision process, supervisor and supervisee need to agree on the activities schedule and goals. When such an important step has been taken, there is less ambiguity surrounding the supervision process (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). For any effective supervision process, key factors have to be considered. A multi model for pedagogical supervision is proposed for effective supervision through technology. E-supervision extends clinical and employment opportunities into remote, rural, and hard-to-fill locations where an onsite profession supervisor might not be available (Wood, Hargrove, & Miller, 2005). Below are quality assurance benefits of e-supervision:

Flexibility:

The e-supervision initiative is flexible and versatile. It links trainees and supervisors across the country, bridges the urban-rural divide, and matches trainee needs to supervisor expertise. It is also capable of a host of other options in that it provides multiple consultations and opinions on a sample case, enables the trainee to enjoy the benefits of multiple supervisors during a single placement, and enables supervisors to consult peers who have specialist expertise.

Portability and convenience:

The primary modality of e-Supervision is meeting through an electronic platform. Unlike video-conferencing that is severely limited by the constraint that the two or more interacting parties (in this case supervisor and trainee) must be located in "studios" simultaneously, E-Supervision meetings will occur through regular broadband connections, in a similar way as Skype technology. Unlike Skype, E-Supervision will provide a more reliable service through dedicated phone lines and a more secure space, an essential feature for confidential psychology interactions.

Cost efficiency:

E-Supervision provides a very useful complement to expensive video-conferencing facilities. Because of its portability and the fact that supervisors can provide supervision from the convenience of their own homes or offices, it greatly reduces supervision costs. Further, IT establishment costs are considerably reduced because the project will benefit from a considerable investment in IT infrastructure in an allied project.

Sustainability and growth:

A major value-point of the project is its immense potential for growth and wide-ranging applicability. It is anticipated that once the e-supervision program is operational, it will provide in the short-term, hundreds of placements and hundreds of supervisors. The e-supervision Program can accommodate changing priorities, and be applied to the different specializations within school system. With modifications, it is likely to have valuable applications to post development, the costs to maintain the electronic platform and resource is envisaged to be low and recoverable from the users.

Commitment to quality:

Finally, in addition to the merits outlined above, the e-Supervision team is committed to quality and excellence in supervision practice. This is evidenced in processes to be adopted in the recruitment of supervisors, the employment of best-practice guidelines, the systematic and structured monitoring and evaluation of all components of training and supervision, and meta-supervision (supervision of supervision).

Implication Of Quality Assurance Benefits Of E-Supervision Of School System For Nigerian Supervisors:

Adetula (2005) identified the main goals of a school supervisor to include: to seek insight into leadership process, motivational forces, decision-making processes, goal-setting processes, team work and group interaction which in turn lead to effective and functional schools. Quality is assured in school systems that have strong supervisors. A supervisor is a well established position of the chief executive who provides instructional leadership by coordinating curricula, co-curricular programmes and is responsible for the general administration of the secondary school. For instance, the principals of secondary schools, rectors of polytechnics/colleges of education or vice-chancellors of universities being instructional leaders are at the vantage positions to supervise, monitor, assess, evaluate and disseminate current information on educational issues and modern teaching techniques to teachers in order to stimulate them for scholarship and best practices in curriculum delivery.

With the use of right technology in supervision in the school system, these supervisors devote considerable time to coordinating and managing instruction; through this medium the impact of such supervisors will be highly visible in the school. With the adoption of e-supervision, continuous and consistent classroom visitation to ensure adequate teaching and learning processes with the attendant health implication for the administrator is minimized. At the same time, instructional leadership is in many ways a shared responsibility. This will engender a common sense of commitment and collegiality among the staff. The use of electronic supervision in the Nigerian school system will enable effective school supervisors to establish clearly defined goals for academic achievement, concentrate their available resources and their operations on attaining them, provide adequate time-table for teaching, routine check of lesson notes and subject dairies, observation of classroom instruction, continuously monitor students progress to determine whether their instructional goals are being met, provide feed-back on student performance, motivation of teachers for improved performance, reinforcement of students for excellent performance, maintenance and appropriate usage of physical facilities, enforcement of discipline to ensure peaceful atmosphere, capacity building of teachers for effective service delivery and provision of instructional facilities and materials to enhance quality teaching-learning processes.

Another implication of quality assurance benefit of e-supervision is that it will help school supervisors to set reasonable expectations for work and achievement. The concept of the school as a place of learning is communicated clearly to the students, and a commitment to learning is expected in every classroom. Expectations of the society are manifested in the performance standards set by the school. High standards reflect high expectations; low standards reflect low expectations. It is therefore crystal clear that the complex task of the supervisor is how to organize the school to meet the various challenges facing school administration so that the education aims and objectives can be achieved. As the chief executive of the school, the internal supervisor such as the principals of secondary schools, rectors of polytechnics/colleges of education or vice-chancellors of universities must make it possible for staff to have access to suitable technological facilities of all kinds in order to discharge fully their responsibilities in achieving the educational objectives. Through this, the teachers are well supervised and motivated in order to sustain their interest and make them dedicated, committed, willing, enthusiastic and inspiring teachers. The quality of the supervision of teachers' instructional tasks by the school supervisors is an index of effective school management. Of all the major tasks of school managers, none is as sensitive and as challenging as the one relating to the supervisory role and it is expected to be given the deserved attention in the scheme of things.

Instructional supervision is an internal mechanism adopted by internal school supervisors such as the principals of secondary schools, rectors of polytechnics/colleges of education or vice-chancellors of universities for school self – evaluation, geared towards helping teachers and students to improve on their teaching and learning activities for the purpose of achieving educational objectives. With the right technology the supervisor such as the principal can ensure effective supervision by interacting academically and socially at a regular basis with teachers and students outside the classrooms. The primary aim is to monitor the implementation of curricular and ensure desirable increase in teachers 'capabilities, upgrade their conceptual knowledge and teaching skills, give them support in their work to facilitate better performance in teachers 'pedagogical practices and students 'learning outcomes in the school settings (Olagbeye, 2004; Adetula, 2005).

E-supervision provides a vehicle and structure which allows schools, departments, as well as individuals (teachers and students) within them, to respond effectively to curriculum and instruction in order to achieve the stated educational objectives. E-supervision, if handled with utmost attention, has the potential to strengthen the supervisors' capacities for managing human and materials resources. Technology will enable the supervisor who is the driving force behind the school programme needs to proactively mobilize all members of staff, teaching and non-teaching, the governing board, parents and the community towards identifying the schools strengths and weaknesses and take appropriate decisions on type of follow-up action required to improve teachers 'inputs and students' learning outcomes in the school.

The appraisal of teachers 'pedagogical practices is necessary in order to safeguard quality standards in schools. In order to accomplish this task, the supervisor must have an intimate knowledge of the psychology of human learning, have a command of the various theories of instruction, be acquainted with the sources and uses of instructional media/materials, be familiar with evaluation techniques, be skilled in individual and group counselling, and have a good knowledge of Nigerian education system and goals (Adetula, 2005). In pursuit of these goals, the school administrators make use of supervisory techniques: clinical supervision/classroom observation, micro-teaching, seminar/workshop and research to improve the conceptual knowledge, skills and competence of teachers, and students' learning. In e-supervision, during observation, the supervisor can take note of the teacher's knowledge of the subject being taught, evidence of adequate planning and preparation for the lesson, lesson presentation, teacher's personality and the extent of students' participation or interaction with the teacher. These form the bases for providing constructive advice on how to improve the quality of classroom instruction. The e-supervision may be repeated until the required improvement is achieved. E-supervision is beneficial because, despite the obvious advantages of clinical supervision in its various forms, it has been criticized by researchers such because it is time consuming and labour-intensive, rendering it impossible to use on any regular basis given the large number of teachers that supervisors are expected to supervise in addition to their other administrative responsibilities.

Conclusion:

The supervisor acts as a change agent for the professional growth of teachers and the improvement of curriculum delivery which is the central focus of instructional supervision. The areas that usually attract the attention of school supervisor include the planning of lesson notes, effective delivery of lessons, assessment and quality of tests/assignments given to students, improvisation and utilization of instructional materials, providing regular feed-back on students' performance, adequate keeping of records and appropriate discipline of students to ensure quality assurance in secondary schools. A well-planned and adequate instructional supervision enhances teaching and learning effectiveness in schools.

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