Research Article

Accessibility Issues Facing School Supervision: A Study of Island Schools in the Krachi-East and Krachi-West Education Directorates, Ghana

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Abstract: Supervision is at the core of every successful organization or institution. The fundamental thrust of this study is to examine the challenges external supervisors encounter and the mitigating measures they employ to ensure supervision of schools in island communities within the Krachi-East and Krachi-West Education Directorates in the Oti Region, Ghana. The study employed the mixed method approach to studying phenomena, precisely the sequential explanatory mixed method. The quantitative data was gathered from seventeen (17) participants and analysed descriptively using mean and standard deviation with the help of the SPSS software package and presented in tables. The qualitative data from three (3) interviewees was analysed based on themes that are related to the research questions. The study established that the accessibility of island schools by external supervisors was a major challenge. This was due to a lack of readily available canoes and the required accessories for safe travelling by water. The study recommends that schools in such enclaves be provided with outboard motors, canoes, and life jackets as well as operators.

Keywords: Accessibility, challenges, island schools, quality education, supervision

1. Introduction

Quality education is a pre-requisite for the development of every society or nation. This reflects the high literacy rate of developed nations as compared to developing nations. The national policy of education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria acknowledges that education is an instrument par excellence for effecting national development [1]. This therefore, provides sound justification for the huge budgetary allocations by countries to their education sector in their bid to increase access and quality of education for the citizenry. Education absorbs a significant portion of national resources and attention of the public in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [1]. Ghana is no exception of this; allocation of funds to the Education Ministry by successive governments of Ghana over the years has been huge and on the ascendancy. For instance, the budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Education was GH¢12,878 million in 2019 and GH¢ 13,430 million in 2020, which showed an increase of 4% on the previous year (2019) [2]. This according the government is justified by the fact that the nation needed to increases access and quality of education for the people.

There has been a growing concern about the continuous falling standards of academic performance, of which the discourse largely points to teachers not willing to provide effective teaching and learning [3]. Effective supervision necessary to promote teaching and learning then becomes a significant factor to be contended with in this discourse.

Some studies have been done in the area of school supervision and how it reflects in the perceived falling standards in learners' academic performance. For example, Integrated Social Development Center (ISDEC) a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) resident in Ghana, in their study observed that one of the significant causes of the fallen standards in learners' academic performance in northern sector of Ghana could be attributed to ineffective supervision of teachers in public schools. ISDEC further noted that due to lack of effective supervision, majority of teachers in public schools in northern Ghana do not attach importance to regularity and punctuality to their teaching job, and also deliver poor teaching in schools which affects learners' performance [3]. Poor supervision of schools has not been characteristic of only schools in a particular region or enclave in Ghana. It is a phenomenon that seems to cut across all parts of the country. Perhaps this motivated the Minister of Education, Ghana, with the statement that the Ministry is putting measures in place to improve supervision of teaching and learning in public schools in the nation [4]. This implies that the scope of curriculum supervision should not only be limited to the classroom but to the activities outside the classroom which have influence on the teaching and learning interaction [5].

As a way of enhancing the quality of their education, countries have had their school supervision re-organized over the years through educational reforms [6]. Built in the educational reforms of Ghana is the need for effective supervision of schools as means of enhancing learners' achievements, Appiah, [3]. These restructuring is an indication of how Ghana is bent on achieving high quality of education for its citizenry. Quality education, which has received clarion call over the years worldwide has school supervision, precisely, supervision of teaching and learning as a critical factor. School supervision is an important factor for the feasibility of educational goals towards the realization of national development [1]. School supervision is a necessary requirement for effective teaching and learning in the life of every successful education system. Research proves that effective supervision in schools is critical for improved classroom practices, and contributes to learners' achievements [7]. This posit that effective curriculum supervision thrives on both supervisors and supervisees keeping records of all formal, as well as informal supervision sessions and providing immediate feedback [8].

School management, staff and students ought to be monitored to undertake the teaching and learning very effectively. School supervision is a complex process that entails working with teachers and other educators in a collegial, collaborative manner to improve the quality of teaching and learning within the schools and to promote the career long enhancement of the teacher [9]. Supervision involves a planned and organized programme executed for the enhancement of instruction in a school [1]. This suggest that school supervision has to do with a range of activities which are planned and executed with the intention of improving the teaching and learning process improved for the learner [1]. Succinctly put, the ultimate goal of school supervision is to provide professional assistance to teachers and other educational workers for enhancement of instruction and betterment of learners' performance [9].

The recent education reform of Ghana's education system under the education Act 778 of 2008 recognizes the work of School Improvement Support Officers (SISO's) formerly known as the Circuit Supervisors (CS) at the district levels of Ghana's education structure who are responsible for school supervision. Aside head teachers who ensure daily supervision of the teaching and learning processes in the various schools at the pre-tertiary level in Ghana; the SISO's are the next immediate supervisory agents of the teaching and learning process at the school level in the Ghanaian context. Unlike head teachers whose supervisory roles are limited to individual schools or are school-based, the SISO's are assigned to clusters of schools. They supervise classroom teachers as well as the head teachers themselves by moving from school to school at different settings and sometimes in different geographical areas. The SISO's are supposed to have a minimum of two visits to each school within a term, and sometimes as and when they are needed in a particular

school should the need arise. In addition to their major role of supervision of teaching and learning, the SISO's also, visit schools to find out how the schools are doing as against how they should perform. Thus, they report on state of classrooms, enrolment, staffing and the general environment of schools to the FAD's. In each of their visits they are expected to identify factors retarding effective teaching and learning on to provide on-the-spot solutions to challenges found if possible. The visits they undertake comprise of comprehensive, brief, familiarization and follow-up visits all meant for supervision for effective teaching and learning A research on Functions and Practices of Curriculum Supervision in Senior High Schools in the Assin North Municipality of Ghana revealed that curriculum supervision include monitoring performance, sharing information and solving problems [10].

1.1. The Concepts of Supervision and School Supervision

The concept school supervision has received attention by several experts and institutions over the years perhaps due to it critical nature in helping to achieve educational goals. School supervision comprise all actions taken to improve or ensure the achievement of instructional objectives when teaching and learning are in progress [5, 11]. This makes supervision of teaching and learning environment (largely a classroom activity) dominated or oriented activity that is meant to improve the activities of teachers and learners. School supervision is an activity built on the principles of democratic relationship between educational supervisors and workers [1]. Researchers supported this assertion with the lens that school supervision entails all activities that are meant to improve instructions, activities that are related to moral, enhancing human relations, in-service education and curriculum development. This implies that school supervision should lead to the building of a friendly rapport between supervisors and teachers, for discussion on strength and weaknesses of the teacher during the teaching and learning process [8, 10-11]. Alternatively, supervision is a leadership responsibility that is geared towards ensuring teachers, and other educational workers are facilitated for improvement in learners' achievements [1]. Thus, school leadership and supervision uphold collegiality, support, friendliness and democratic relationships but not intimidation, frustration, fear and fault finding and possible rebukes interactions between leadership and subordinates for the enhancement of learners' achievements. Supervision is a complex process that entails working together with teachers and other educational workers in a collaborative and collegial manner to improve upon the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and to ensure continuous professional development of teachers and the other educational workers, [9]. On the same wave length, supervision signifies a shared vision of how teaching and learning ought to be, developed together by formerly recognized supervisors, teachers, and other stakeholders of the school community [9]. This pre-supposes that supervision ought to create a positive rapport for sharing weaknesses and strengths in a manner between actors of the process. The process must eventually culminate into improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and enhanced professional status for the teacher. Studies strongly supported this view with their assertion that any service for the teacher with the intention to finally enhance instruction, learning and curriculum, that comprise positive, dynamic, democratic actions which are crafted to ensure improvement through the continued growth of all concerned individuals of the school community comes under the umbrella concept of supervision [9, 12].

1.2. The Rationale for School Supervision

Society supervision is crucial for ensuring effective planning, coordination and assessment of learning programmes and activities for the realization of educational goals [1]. Supervision entails all activities related to a school setting that are meant to improve practice to enhance learners' achievements. Supervision has to do with planned programmes meant for the improvement of instruction, [1, 13]. Built in every programme are

projects and activities, this implies that school supervision has different facets but all are to be coordinated towards the quality of instructional delivery and eventually for improved achievement in learners. Supervision fundamentally occurs for improvement in the quality of instructional programme of the school, and for promoting the potentials of individuals' who are directly linked to the proper functioning of the school as an institution. Studies reiterated further that supervision in school is required for individual teachers to perform their duties with effectiveness towards the feasibility of the goal of the institution, [14, 15]. The individual teacher ought to ensure effective usage of instructional time, classroom management, improve upon his/her teaching strategies and have a conducive atmosphere created to enhance learning among others. All these are made possible through effective supervision. In other words, supervision is required to make the teacher and other educational workers effective on their job, and to have a conducive school setting to support the teaching and learning process. A significant motive for school supervision is to achieve teacher effectiveness in the teaching and learning process [14, 15].

Teachers ought not to be only professionally responsible as directed by supervision, but also must be in a position to be analytic of their own performance, and ready to accept assistance from others, and again be self-directing, all of which are built in the goal for supervision, Cogan, [14]. Supervision must build in teachers the capacity for self-appraisal and initiative taking for becoming innovative on their work, supervision as a social process is meant to stimulate, nurture, and appraise the professional progress of teachers. When teachers reflect on their own practices with the help of supervisors or peers, they become more competent on their job. Supervision updates teachers on new development on policies and teaching strategies and curriculum changes, since it creates opportunity for sharing between formal education workers and the teacher [9, 16]. This keeps teachers abreast with current trends in education, thereby, making them competent or capable on their job. The rationale for supervision is to ensure face-to-face interaction and rapport building between teachers and supervisors and also to promote capacity building within the teacher and his/her institution [9]. Supervision, which ever form it may take eventually targets improvement in the teaching skill of the teacher for an enhanced improvement in learners' achievement and a strengthened educational institution. Supervision when carried out base on its modern principles of support, democratic relationship, sharing, direction giving and development among others rather than the traditional notion of judgment and criticism or fault finding goes a long way to enhance teacher's performance and improves learners' achievement, [3, 17]. This implies that teachers' conceptualization of the concept of school supervision, and subsequent development of a positive attitudes towards supervisors is a pre-requisite for their cooperation and subsequent promotion of their professional growth and enhancement of their students learning. A study conducted by Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu observed that English language teachers in Northern Cyprus are of the conviction that their supervisors were interested in finding faults in the classroom, rather than engaging them in discussions that reflects improvement on their weaknesses and consolidation on their strengthens [18].

In a study on beginning teachers' perception of instructional supervision, beginning teachers opt for frequent instructional supervision that satisfies their professional needs, promotes trust and collegiality, and equips them with support, advice and help [3]. Studies have shown that lack of the required quantity and quality of instructional supervision leads to the development of negative attitudes and a sense of disappointment in teachers towards the supervision processes [3, 19]. This shows that instructional supervision requires careful planning and execution, if the expected result has to be felt.

1.3. Challenges of External Supervision of Schools in Remote Regions

Supervision of schools ought to be given equal attention regardless of the geographical location or setting of every school. This is to ensure equal opportunity for learners irrespective of their geographical location. However, the absence of government institutions in most rural settings and infrastructure regarding good roads, communication and utilities discourage many professional teachers to accept posting to rural areas. As a result of these, and some other personal reasons, many teachers refuse posting to rural communities, and the few who accept often do not show commitment [20, 21]. In Zimbabwe majority of teachers detest postings to serve in schools located in rural communities, more especially rural settings that do not have good accessibility [22]. This situation no doubt leaves majority of schools in rural communities usually under staffed.

In Ghana, a preponderant majority of professional teachers' refuse postings to rural and difficult to access communities. A survey conducted revealed that 115 out of 262 representing 44% of newly trained teachers posted to four education districts in the Upper West Region of Ghana did not Honour their postings to the schools that were assigned to them [23]. Most basic schools in rural Nigeria have no well-built classrooms, instruction take place under trees and thatched structures [24]. A study conducted on assessment of teaching and learning conditions in basic schools for selected schools in the Offinso North District, Ghana revealed that majority of teachers were dissatisfied with their job, attributing their stands to insufficient instructional materials, such as textbooks, curriculum materials and content references among others which make their job cumbersome [25]. In that same study the teachers indicated that they are unable to function effectively because they travel long distances on daily basis on bade roads to school, which makes them tired, hence, are unable to deliver as expected of them [25].

A study on "issues of instructional supervisory practices in primary schools of Ebonyi State", Nigeria that the inaccessibility of some schools due to poor road network and bad bridges is a major issue to supervision in pre-tertiary educational institutions in the country [10] The study also showed that supervisors were not equipped with motor vehicles and cellular phones to facilitate movement and communication [1]. Consequently, inaccessibility of some schools is a major factor to poor attitudes of supervisors towards school supervision, which creates challenges for effective supervision of basic schools [1]. Also, some schools do not get access to supervisors throughout the year as a result of poor road network. Inadequate resources and equipment in most basic schools constitute a major challenge to supervision [1]. In a related development, a study on "co-curriculum responsiveness for adaptability and challenges for teachers in hard-to-live areas on Mkushi and Luano Districts, Zambia", established that majority of professional teachers are not ready to accept postings, and to stay and work in rural Zambia due to the deplorable condition of schools, and the absence of basic social amenities in such parts of the country [22]. Logistical constraint and the inaccessibility of some schools mostly in the public sector constitute a major hindrance to effective school supervision in most parts of developing countries.

The work of the SISO's is also monitored and supported by the Frontline Assistant Directors (FAD's) for supervision at the MMDD's of education. To make the FAD's effective the SISO's report to the FAD's on monthly basis about their supervisory roles of the various schools assigned to them. The FAD's also visit the various schools to have for themselves first-hand information of actual happenings on the ground, as part of their monitoring and supportive roles to the SISO's and the schools as well. The execution of these critical supervisory roles the FAD's and the SISO's render to the schools are not without challenges in general, and in particular with schools in geographical locations that are difficult to access. Majority of these schools exist in island communities of education district within the Volta Lake basin, of which the Krahci-East and Krachi-West education directorates of the Oti Region, Ghana are of no exception.

A number of basic schools are located in several island communities found within the basin of the Volta Lake, Ghana. Most of these island schools are located in the Krachi-

East and Krachi-West education districts of the Oti Region in Ghana. Access to these communities is by water transportation largely by canoes. The inaccessibility of most schools contributes to poor attitudes of supervisors towards supervision of schools" [1]. Though, basic schools in Ghana in general have some level of challenges with effective supervision, Integrated Social Development Center (ISDEC) a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) observed that the geographical location of these island schools might further aggravate the problems of school supervision [1, 7]. This study seeks to examine the challenges external supervisors encounter in supervising island schools in the Krachi- East and Krachi-West Municipalities and the strategies the supervisors employ to overcome these challenges. This study possesses the potential to expose the challenges external supervisors encounter in their supervision exercise of island schools, to help inform policy makers in ensuring the appropriate support for effective supervision of such schools.

The study was guided by these research questions – (1) What strategies do the external supervisors employ to access schools in island communities? (2) What accessibility challenges do external supervisors encounter in supervision of island schools?

2. Materials and Methods

The study employed the mixed method approach to studying phenomena, precisely the sequential explanatory mixed method. Both the qualitative and quantitative data that were collected and analyzed were given equal attention. The sequential explanatory design ensures the "collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data with equal attention for both phases. The data is then integrated during the interpretation stage [26]". The population of the study included all Frontline Assistant Directors (FAD's) and School Improvement Support Officers (SISO's) of the two education districts. Twenty (20) participants were purposively selected because they were perceived to possess special knowledge on the subject matter. Data collection was made possible with the administration of questionnaire and semi structured interview guide. It must be noted that to design a valid and reliable instrument, the researcher must consider the purpose of the study and the research questions [27]. The quantitative data was analysed descriptively with the help of the SPSS software package and presented in table. The qualitative data that was gathered and analysed based on themes that are related to the research questions.

3. Results

3.1. Practices of external supervisors of schools in island communities?

What strategies do the external supervisors employ to access schools in island communities? (2) This section present results on the Research Question One: *What strategies do the external supervisors employ to access schools in island communities?* The respondents were made to respond to seventeen (12) measurement items with a Likert scale of; Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree ranging from 5-1. Table 1 displays the results.

Table 1. Practices of external supervisors of schools in island communities

S/n	Items	Mean	Standard deviation

1.	Schools in island communities are not easily Accessible	4.8	0.4
2.	Supervisors are unable to visit island community schools as often as is required	4.6	0.5
3.	External supervisors encounter accommodation problems in island communities when they are on supervision duty.	4.7	0.5
4.	Canoes are not readily available for supervisors' visit to island schools	4.7	0.5
5.	Movement from one island school to the other is possible within a day for purposes of supervision	4.7	0.5
6.	Supervisors do not have access to personal life protective jackets for their visits to island schools	4.7	0.5
7.	Supervisors do not possess the skill of swimming	4.7	0.5
8.	Supervisors feel insecure on canoes trips for supervision of island schools	4.7	0.5
9.	Communication network is ineffective in island Communities	4.5	0.5
	Total Average Mean Score	**4.6**	**0.6**

The results from Table 1 indicated that all the 9 measurement items showed mean values above 4.0 ranging from 4.5 to 4.9, with overall mean score of 4.6. Again, all the measurement items showed a standard deviation rang of 0.3-0.5 with a total average standard deviation of 0.6. All the mean scores and the overall mean score are far above the average score of 2.5 presented by the scale. The standard deviations obtained further revealed that the responses from the participants were clustered around the mean scores. This reveals that all the respondents strongly agree/agreed to the challenges external supervisors encounter as indicated by the constructs found in Table 1.

Difficulties in accessing island communities have mean score of 4.8 and standard deviation score of 0.4. The challenges of lack of accommodation, the absence of readily available canoes for traveling to island communities, supervisors' inability to access two island communities within a day, the absence of protective jackets for supervisors, lack of swimming skills and the fear that the supervisors possess in traveling by water all recorded mean score of 4.7 and standard deviation score of 0.5. Lack of communication network also indicated means score of 4.5 and standard deviation score of 0.5.

3.2. Accessibility challenges external supervisors encounter in supervision of basic schools located in the island communities

This sub-section presents results on the research question *What accessibility challenges do external supervisors encounter in supervision of island schools?* Themes that emerged out of this research question are; patronage of commercial canoes, hiring of canoes and residing in island communities for days.

The study revealed that the Districts Education Directorates (DEOs) do not own canoes for travelling to the island communities, hence, supervisors rely on commercial canoes for visits for supervision. The entire respondents spoke to the fact that due to lack of readily available canoes for visit to island communities, accessing schools in such communities often does not happen as scheduled. Respondent District Education Officer (RDEO-1) had this to say: "Officially we are supposed to have a minimum of three visits to each school within a term, but due to the lack of readily available canoes we are not able to make it". According to the respondents, the commercial canoes are not even readily available all the time, but only on periodic market days, which happens only once on weekly basis. Even on the market days their movement is determined by the readiness of the village folks who are their regular patrons. The respondents further indicated that the struggle to board and for space in commercial canoes with village folks during our visits to island schools is a major problem to be contended with. This according to them is a great disincentive to them, when it comes to supervision of schools in island communities. Respondent School Improvement Support Officer (RSISO-1) contended that;

"On one of my usual visits I became frustrated when having endured the congestion in the canoe, somewhere in the middle of the journey on the water a pregnant woman began to labour and the owner of the canoe had no option than to return to town for the woman to be sent to the hospital for safe delivery. This thwarted my journey for the day and I had to return to the house".

For his contribution RSISO-3 was of the conviction that: "There can never be effective supervision for schools in island communities because of the challenges we face with supervision of such schools even though we are try to do our possible best".

Again, the study found out that the geographical location of some island schools are such that supervisors ought to travel out of the jurisdiction of their education directorate to another education directorate before they can access such schools. For instance, RDEO-1 remarked: "We in the Krachi-East District have to travel to a town called Abotoasi which is in a different education directorate (Biakoye Education Directorate), in order to have access to commercial canoes on market days before we can visit some of the island schools under our care, because it is only the commercial canoes at Abotosi that pass through such communities".

The respondents established that circumstances that warrant emergency visit to such schools bestow on them the need to hire a canoe before such a situation could be attended to. As stated earlier on, the reason they cited was that; commercial canoes are available only on market days. The hiring of a canoe, according to the participants comes with a higher financial commitment, which the education directorates often do not have financial resource readily available to meet; hence they ought to finance themselves. When the researcher wanted know how the supervisors arrange for the canoes this is what RDEO-2 had to say: "We usually inform the head teacher of the particular school concerned, who gets us a canoe form the community. The canoe is then brought to pick us from Kete-Krachi to the community and brings us back".

Another strategy employed by external supervisors according to the respondents for supervision of these schools is by resorting to reside in these communities for some number of days. This strategy to them helps them escape the financial burden of commutation and the risk of travelling by water, which majority of them do not have the skill and experience for on daily basis. They were quick to add that living in these communities leaves them with numerous inconveniences, due to lack of accommodation. Often, they have to share single rooms with teachers who have no spouse living with them in the community. For instance, RDEO-1 retorted:

"During the 2017/2018 academic year, I was part of a team of eight (8) supervisors which included the District Director of Education, Krachi-East that visited Galikope one of the island communities for school supervision. Upon arrival the team was given only two rooms for accommodation, our number was more than the rooms could contain, so we ended up sleeping in the open".

4. Discussion

The study found out that supervision of schools in island communities is largely a challenge due to accessibility. The participants strongly agree/agreed that island schools are not easily accessible with a mean score of 4.8 and standard deviation of 0.4. According to the participants the island schools are only accessible by water transportation which makes it difficult for effective supervision. The study was supported by precious research that teachers detest postings to serve in schools located in rural communities due to lack of accessible roads to such communities [22]. The study found out that the participants resort to the patronage of commercial canoes as a means to ameliorating the challenge of accessibility to island schools. The participants revealed that due to the absence of accommodation facilities in island communities, they sleep in open spaces should they pass the

night in island communities for supervision purposes, and this is possible only during the dry season. This corresponds to the observation that many teachers refuse postings to rural communities and the few who accept often do not show commitment to stay due to accommodation and other challenges [28, 29].

Transportation by water is sometimes scary if the people involved do not have the experience, and also lack the necessary accompaniments. This is especially, the case of external supervisors of schools located in island communities in the study area. The participants agreed to the lack of experience and the required logistics for travelling by water as indicated in Table 1 with a mean score of 4.7 and standard deviation of 0.5. This finding corroborates with earlier study that assessment of teaching and learning conditions in basic schools for selected schools in the Offinso North District, Ghana with the observation that accessibility to schools by teachers contributes to the lack of effective teaching in the area. Telephone communication was found to be nothing to be contended with, making prior information for supervision between teachers and external supervisor, which is required for preparing the grounds for supervision a big challenge [25].

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is evident in the literature that supervision is crucial for meeting the educational goals and demands of every educational institution. However, the phenomenon presents itself sometimes in different forms with regard to challenges. The study focused on accessibility challenges external supervisors in charge of island schools in the Krachi-East and Krachi-West Education Directorates of the Oti Region, Ghana. The study also revealed that the external supervisors of such schools have it as a herculean task in visiting such schools due to the absence of readily available canoes and the other accessories for safe travelling by water. In the face of these challenges and others as indicated in the study, they employ measures such as resorting to commercial canoes which are available on market days on weekly basis. It is recommended that due to the critical nature of supervision for meeting the goals of every educational system, and the fact that all learners must be given equal opportunity for education. Educational authorities ought to ensure that the challenge of accessibility to island schools do not become a barrier for effective supervision of such schools in island communities. It is also recommended that education directorates with schools located in island communities should be provided with outboard motors and canoes, with people who can operate them readily available to support easy accessibility to such schools just as vehicles and drivers are always provided for such exercises. Stakeholders of such communities should be involved in this regard. Personal life protective jackets should also have made available to supervisors of such island schools.

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