

The Role of University Supervisors' Visits and the Enhancement of Student Teachers' Teaching Competencies.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine how university supervisors' visits enhance student teachers' teaching competencies. A research question guided the study. The research design was the mixed method sequential explanatory. The research sample was gotten through the simple random, purposive and proportionate sampling techniques while instruments for data analysis were collected through observation guide, 3 sets of questionnaires, and semi-structured interview schedule. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation while qualitative data derived from interview and observation were analysed using the thematic analysis approach. Findings revealed that there was a correlation between university supervisors' visits and the enhancement of student teachers' competencies in teaching. Based on this, it was recommended that a lot of emphasis has to be placed on the manner in which supervisors perform their supervisory responsibilities by paying effective supervisory visits to student teachers on field placement.

INTRODUCTION

Following Decree No 79/309 of August 10, 1979, some attempts were made to give the Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde (ENS) some structure and effective functioning. This decree structured the institution in to two cycles and nine departments. The first cycle was operational both in Bambili in English-speaking part of Cameroon and Yaoundé, the French-speaking part of the country. The duration of courses varied from two to three years and four for those doing the bilingual series (Tchombe; 2000, Fonkeng; 2005). Again, the structure of Teacher Grade 1 and 2 were provided in Decree No 80/159 of 9th June 1980. The former and latter institutions trained nursery and primary school teachers. Article 2 of this decree stated that teacher training colleges were responsible for training, retraining and the provision of specialisation courses for teachers (Tchombe, 2000). It also traced the reforms that brought in to existence a number of universities and schools of teacher education. Not leaving out how student teaching training and supervision were to be carried out.

The University of Buea had its full status in 1993 following a government decree re-organising Higher Education institutions. The Faculty of Education is one of its establishments with mission to prepare educational personnel in order to promote excellence at all levels of schooling, as well as undertake professional training and advanced studies in educational sciences.

In addition, the Faculty of Education, is supposed to conduct and develop appropriate research and carry out outreach activities in line with the three traditional missions of higher education in Cameroon which are teaching, research and outreach in various forms to the community (University of Buea, 2012). The University of Bamenda which opened its doors in 2011 as the second English-speaking University in Cameroon. It began with the Higher Teachers Training College (ENS) and the Higher Technical Teachers' Training College (HTTTC). Other faculties, institutions and colleges were gradually opened among which was the Faculty of Education (University of Bamenda, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature examining the influence of supervisory visits in the enhancement of student teachers' competencies in teaching is established on the ground of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic under study.

Theoretical Review

Theoretically, the study makes use of two theories, namely: Robert Merton's Role theory and Bandura's social cognitive theory. The postulation of role theory by Robert Merton suggests that every society defines its roles and activities. Many societies treat each role as a duty or behaviour. According to this theory, roles can be described as the social position people have and behaviour associated with that position. According to Jones (1970) the supervisor assumes not one but many principal roles ranging on a spectrum of leadership, interpretative, cooperative, observational, counseling, analysis, evaluative, clinical, and humanistic during the practicum period. Based on this study, proper supervision requires the establishment of mutual understanding among all stakeholders involved and this could only be achieved through supervisory visits in which there will be a one-on-one interaction between the university supervisor and the student teacher and the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher. Focus on this interaction will be based on the actual classroom events as observed by the university supervisor and cooperating teacher during instructional delivery. Again, Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy that enables individuals to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Schunk & Pajares, 2010). Self-efficacy theory, clearly endorsed a democratic idea that suggests that all individuals are competent and capable of being successful, provided they have the opportunities and self-efficacy necessary to pursue their goals. With regards to this study, mastery experience which is the most important factor deciding a person's self-efficacy. Thus, planning and executing effective supervisory visits entail mastery experience on the part of the university supervisor as student teachers perceive the supervisor as an expert who has the answer to all their worries. The opportunities here will be the influence of supervisory visits in the enhancement of teaching competencies.

Conceptual review

Supervision is a concept born in the western education system specifically in the United States of America and has evolved over centuries from an inspection and control model to humanistic and collegial model (Bala, 2012 as cited in kalita, 2017). Similarly, Sullivan & Glanz (2013) stated that the history of supervision is marked by different models ranging from inspection, social efficiency, democratic, scientific management, and leadership, clinical and changing concepts. Supervision transits from supervision as inspection sailing through democratic supervision, scientific supervision, supervision as leadership, and to the latest clinical supervision (Moswela, 2010).

Contemporary writers have slightly different concepts about what supervision means. Most of them however, seem to agree that supervision is an organised, democratic process involving the supervisor and the persons or groups of persons supervised, for the achievement of desired objectives. Nwaogu (2006) views supervision as a process of stimulating growth and a means of helping teachers to help themselves. Ojelabi (1981) describes supervision as a constant and continuous process of personal guidance based on frequent visits to a school to give concrete and constructive feedback and encouragement to teachers, so as to improve the learning and teaching situation in schools. Hence,

supervision is a modern idea that should assist student teachers in improving instruction in the classroom. Again, Obagah (2001) as cited in Omemu (2017) describes supervision as the process of bringing about improvement in instruction by working with the people who are working with pupils/students.

As stated by Chakma (2022) there are general and specific objectives of supervision. The general objective is the improvement of the whole student teaching process by making maximum utilisation of resources of teacher education programmes and educational institutions. Douglass, Bent & Boardman (1961) as cited in Chakma (2022) remarked that the whole purpose for supervision is the development of better education for youth via effective supervision of instruction.

Supervision is the core of student teaching exercise. Through student teaching, valid information on student teachers' performances is obtained only through the supervision of their live teaching. According to Glickman (1985) the professional development of a teacher is the focus of the supervisors' work where the teacher trainee is helped to increase his conceptual level of development. Similarly, Endeley (2014) assert that the role of supervisors therefore is of great importance in ensuring quality. Researchers and scholars in the field of supervision agree that the primary role of the supervisor is to provide guidance and emotional support to the novice teacher who is in need of significant support (Halai, 2006). Mpkwar (2006) indicates as a guidelines to be used during orientation of student teaching that the supervisor is expected to make at least four supervisory visits for each student teacher. Mpkwar further elaborated that when arranging the visits, the student teacher should plan a time when it is possible for the supervisor to confer with the student teacher following the observation and to confer with the cooperating teacher after that. Mpkwar equally explained that when the university supervisor visits the classroom, the student teacher must provide the supervisor with his or her daily lesson plans, as well as any additional material requested by the university supervisor. As earlier stated, proper supervision requires the establishment of mutual understanding among all stakeholders involved and this could only be achieved through supervisory visits and a one-on-one interaction between the supervisor and the student teacher. Focus on this interaction will be based on the actual classroom events as observed by the university supervisor and cooperating teacher during the teaching practice exercise.

Empirical Review

In a pair of studies, conducted by Yilmaz (2011) which confirmed the dissatisfaction of teacher trainees on the performance of university supervisors in a Turkish university setting. The 75 teacher trainees reported that the university supervisors did not visit their school, they did not read teacher trainees observation reports and that teacher trainees were graded by university supervisors without reading observation reports made by the cooperating teacher or conducting any classroom observations. This had an adverse effect on the student teachers' performance.

Similarly, Ünver (2003) carried out a case study, collected information about the duties and responsibilities of primary stakeholders in the teaching practice. Data were collected from university faculty, university supervisors, teacher trainees, cooperating teachers and practice school administrators. Data analysis revealed all stakeholders had high expectations for the university supervisors who failed to perform these expectations. They expected the university supervisor to provide information, guidance and maintain the university-school connection.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent do university supervisors' visits enhance student teachers' teaching competencies?

METHODOLOGY

Key aspects relating to methodology used in guiding the study were highlighted. Since the study sought to investigate the extent to which supervisory visits enhance student teachers competencies in teaching. The study made use of mixed-methods sequential explanatory design which integrated aspects of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The universities of Buea and Bamenda were

considered as the area of the study and the population of the study was equally identified. The participants who were proportionately and randomly selected, consisted of 260 level 400 and level 300 student teachers who had had the field experience at once or twice, 103 cooperating teachers and 20 university supervisors from both universities. Instruments used for data collection consisted of observation guide, questionnaires and interview schedules all made up of 7 items each. The questionnaire was constructed based on the objective of the study using the Likert scale response format of strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 for positively worded questions and vice versa for negatively worded questions. Similarly, the observation guide was constructed using the Likert scale response format of Very Evident (VE) = 4, Evident (E) = 3, Not Very Evident (NVE) = 2 and Not Evident (NE) = 1 for positively worded statements and vice versa for negatively worded statements. All the observation items were closed-ended and 1 overall observation item which was optional to the researcher based on what was observed.

Validity and Reliability of instruments

Validation of the instruments was carried out in two phases namely: internal and external validity. For internal validity, items of the questionnaires were examined in relation to relevant variables. Unsuitable items were definitely eliminated and ambiguous items were rephrased. This procedure guaranteed the internal validity. For external validity, a pilot study was conducted.

According to Amin (2005), reliability examines the consistency of the instrument to measure what it intends to measure. A test-re-test reliability method was used to determine the consistency of the instrument. To ensure this, the researcher after designing the instruments, conducted a pilot study with a group of 10 supervisors (4 university supervisors and 6 cooperating teachers) and 12 student teachers were randomly selected from 3 cooperating schools in Buea sub-division, Fako Division in the South West Region and in Bamenda central sub-division, Mezam Division in the North West Region. This exercise was conducted three times within three weeks with the same group of supervisors and student teachers. The results from this exercise revealed that the instruments were reliable due to the consistency in the responses. The aim of this exercise was to find out whether the items asked in the instruments are clear and understandable.

Administration of Instruments

The direct delivery technique was used to administer the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observation guide.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed in two phases. Firstly, quantitative data were analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistics and secondly, qualitative data derived from interview were analysed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, groundings/frequency and quotations. A qualitative lens offered advantages and insights that were richer and more context-specific than what might have been possible with just a quantitative study. Finally, issues related to validation and ethical considerations were equally well handled.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study discusses findings on the extent to which supervisory visits enhance student teachers' competencies in teaching. Note should be taken that the concept of supervisory visits within the context of this study is directly linked to university supervisor's visits to observe the student teacher engaged in the teaching process, guide and assist the student teacher attain a satisfactory professional experience. In addition to observing, and meeting with the student teacher, the supervisor confers with the cooperating teacher, encourages and motivates the student teacher toward professional growth suggested by Mpkwar (2006).

The influence of supervisory visits in enhancing student teachers' competencies in teaching was investigated from 3 different perspectives. Namely, the USs, the cooperating teachers and the student

teachers. Based on questionnaire opinions from university supervisors, majority of them 97.9% with an overall mean of 3.32 on a scale of 1-4 agreed to effectively carry out supervisory visits while 2.1% disagreed to effectively carry out supervisory visits. This opinion was however contradicted by interview statements from some of the supervisors who indicated that supervisors are not very regular and consistent with supervision as some of them paid just one visit and some did not show up at all.

Similarly, based findings, 62.0% (62) of cooperating teachers indicated that supervisors paid supervisory visits to the student teachers on teaching practice, while 38.0% (38) denied. However, this opinion was also contradicted by interview responses from the same cooperating teachers who denied the fact that for some years now these supervisors have not been coming to the field to supervise, they only come to evaluate the student teachers as indicated in this statement “the supervisors visited once and the main reason was to evaluate the student teachers. Supervisors only come in on evaluation day and they do not have a one-on-one discussion with student teachers”

Again, findings from student teachers clearly indicated that these supervisors did not pay supervisory visits as majority 82.1% of them indicated that supervisory visits was not effectively carried out. Specifically, 68.5% (178) of student teachers indicated that their supervisor did not pay supervisory visits to them during teaching practice, while 31.5% (82) agreed.

Finally, based on findings from observation carried out by the researcher, it was observed that supervisory visits was not effectively carried out as some supervisors did not pay supervisory visits. In situations where they visited, it was strictly for evaluation purpose. Statistically, findings showed that there is a significant, very strong and positive relationship between supervisory visits and the enhancement of student teachers’ teaching competency with the r-calculated value between effective supervision through supervisory visits is .854** and .719** for enhancement of student teachers’ teaching competency which are all greater than the r-critical value of .124. The positive sign of the correlation values implies that effective supervision through supervisory visits and enhancement of student teachers’ teaching competencies is more likely to be attained when supervisory visits is effectively carried out. The following tables are statistical representation of findings.

Multiple Response Set Calculation for University Supervisors

Supervisory visit

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		n	Percent	
Supervisory visit	Strongly Agree	48	34.3%	240.0%
	Agree	89	63.6%	445.0%
	Disagree	3	2.1%	15.0%
Total		140	100.0%	700.0%
a. Group				

Multiple Response Set Calculation for Cooperating Teachers

Supervisory visit

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		n	Percent	
Supervisory visit	Strongly Agree	24	3.4%	24.0%
	Agree	190	27.1%	190.0%
	Disagree	383	54.7%	383.0%
	Strongly Disagree	103	14.7%	103.0%
Total		700	100.0%	700.0%
a. Group				

Multiple Response Set Calculation for Student Teachers

Supervisory visit

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		n	Percent	
Supervisory visit	Strongly Agree	28	1.5%	10.8%
	Agree	298	16.4%	114.6%
	Disagree	1005	55.2%	386.5%
	Strongly Disagree	489	26.9%	188.1%
Total		1820	100.0%	700.0%
a. Group				

These supervisory visits however has a very vital role in enhancing student teachers' teaching competencies. In line with this study, supervisors are expected to perform certain roles and responsibilities towards a successful teaching practice. To support this claim, Endeley (2014) opines that all supervisors have an important role to play in order to ensure quality or effectiveness. Cox (2019) equally assert that student teachers need competent and concerned supervisors to help them assume the full range of duties of a teacher. The supervisor has to perform different roles to improve student teachers' professional competence. As suggested by Vertemara & Flushman (2017) the university supervisor has to perform the role of a coordinator, planner, consultant, evaluator, motivator, problem solving, absorbing internal and external information, decision making, communicator, morale boosting and creating confidence, creating a climate of professional growth, etc. In other words, the supervisor needs different traits in his personality such as confidence, empathy and sensitivity, enthusiasm, originality, sense of humour, sense of relative value, resoluteness, sincerity, clarity of vision, sound judgement, intelligence, communication skill, professional competence situational context, understanding of human psychology, commitment, intuitive ability, listening ability, trustworthiness, etc. To emphasise on the importance of supervisory visits, Ezewu, Okoye & Onyekwelu (1994), insisted that, the modern supervisor of student teaching should go to the cooperating schools as a professional to meet the student teachers as co-workers in the educational programmes. Similarly, Olorode & Adeyemo (2012) equally pointed out that for any visit to schools to be meaningful, the supervisor should have a clear understanding of what he/she wants in terms of purpose and how he/she would go about it.

With reference to North Michigan University Student Teaching Guide, the supervisor has it as a responsibility to schedule regular observations and supervisions on separate days according to the dates provided for the semester (a minimum of 3 visits) based on the secondary school calendar of activities. During each visit to the classroom, the supervisor has well defined roles to perform such as reviewing of lesson plan, conferring with the cooperating teacher, observation of scheduled lesson, filling of observation form and summative evaluation. It is worth noting that supervisory visit represents effective supervision. In order to maintain the quality of supervision, supervisors are expected to pay this supervisory visit which is almost unavoidable since it requires observable judgement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above literature and findings, it is evident that supervisory visits influence student teachers' competencies in teaching in that the supervisors have specific responsibilities towards these student teachers. These responsibilities could only be carried out effectively through supervisory visits as the supervisor will have the opportunity to observe the student teacher engage in the teaching process, guides and assists the student teacher attain a satisfactory professional experience, confers with the cooperating teacher, encourages and motivates the student teacher toward professional competence. Based on this, it was recommended that a lot of emphasis be placed on the manner in which supervisors perform their supervisory responsibilities by paying not only supervisory visits but making these visits effective and efficient to the student teachers on field placement.

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