

Challenges of Instructional Supervision faced by Primary School Heads

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Abstract

This quantitative study examined public primary school head teachers' challenges in improving instructional supervision. A sample of 50 head teachers from public primary schools in Lahore responded to a self-developed 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The scale measured head teachers' perceived challenges across ten indicators identified from the literature. Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS 17 to determine frequency, means, and standard deviations. Results revealed that head teachers faced moderate challenges in key areas like lack of teaching staff, teachers' lack of motivation and cooperation, overloaded curriculum, high student absenteeism, and declining parent respect. In contrast, issues like facilities, teacher workloads, and transfers were lesser obstacles. The data indicates that persistent systemic barriers related to overstretched capacities, resource deficits, overloaded work demands, and disengaged stakeholders constrain administrators' supervision effectiveness. However, research shows instructional leadership practices focused on motivation, data analysis, and community partnership can aid progress despite adverse realities. Recommendations include increased budgetary and policy provisions to address teacher shortages and overloaded systems, elevating professional respect and autonomy to foster ownership. Developing heads' capacities for customized developmental supervision is equally important.

Keywords: Instructional Supervision, Head Teachers, Challenges, Primary Schools

1. Introduction:

Education systems worldwide acknowledge the foundational role of primary schooling in developing the competencies and talents needed for the 21st century (Battle & Lewis, 2002). The early school environment shapes children's learning habits, life perspectives, and future trajectories, making quality primary education pivotal for human capital formation. Effective instructional leadership and supervision focused on continuously improving teaching practices remain vital for enhancing educational quality, implementing reforms, and raising student achievement (Samford, 2022). Research affirms that pedagogical guidance systems centered on monitoring learning environments alongside providing context-specific, growth-oriented feedback to teachers offer a proven pathway to bolster outcomes cost-effectively, even amidst systemic constraints (Lochmiller, 2016).

However, school administrators with such academic development face significant leadership challenges rooted in adverse working conditions, resource limitations, bureaucratic pressures, and reluctant stakeholder groups that constrain supervision capacities (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Consequently, existing studies indicate substantial gaps between optimal, instructionally focused models and the sporadic, administrative-centered supervision predominant in many developing country contexts, undermining reform delivery. Bridging this strategy-implementation disconnect calls for a contextualized understanding of barriers administrators encounter so tailored solutions enabling meaningful pedagogical leadership may be developed (Heystek, 2008).

Within academic settings, leadership drives staff motivation, cultural cohesion, sustainable growth, and performance excellence (Eyal & Roth, 2011). The principal or head teacher holds the mantle for the school's managerial oversight and instructional progress. Studies worldwide have established effective leadership as a significant predictor of teacher job satisfaction, commitment, and self-efficacy, ultimately cascading into students' achievements and well-being. Primary schools have a distinct organizational structure with designated head teachers/headmasters charged with administrative authority over curriculum implementations, student evaluation, resource allocation, and, not least – the critical task of pedagogical supervision. Instructional leadership forms an indispensable lever whereby heads mentor professional practice, enrich domain knowledge, identify capability gaps, and bolster competence among teachers for improved classroom instructions (Southworth, 2002).

In many developing countries, while policy formulations duly direct school leaders to emphasize instructional leadership, ground realities constrain meaningful implementation due to systemic inadequacies in principal training, job autonomy, resource support, and monitoring mechanisms (Bush & Glover, 2016). The pressure to accomplish managerial compliance on administrative minutiae further erodes the focus on core teaching duties. In Pakistan, prior surveys have indicated inadequate leadership capacities in areas like instructions and student evaluation, which constrained school improvement efforts. The excessive non-academic workload borne by head teachers also constrained meaningful instructional involvement, thus requiring urgent corrections (Khan et al., 2009). There is a glaring need to comprehensively investigate ground realities around supervisory challenges faced by primary school heads across Punjab schools in elevating teaching standards.

2. Objective of the Study:

1. To examine the challenges of instructional supervision by heads of public primary school.

3. Research Question:

1. What instructional supervision challenges are faced by heads of public primary schools?

4. Literature Review

Effective instructional supervision and leadership are critical for enhancing teaching practices, implementing educational reforms, and improving student achievement (Samford, 2022). However, administrators carrying out such pedagogical guidance face varied contextual challenges constraining supervision quality, consistency, and effectiveness.

The role of principals as instructional leaders directing teaching-learning processes has become more pronounced in education systems worldwide, aiming to enhance student outcomes (Bendikson et al., 2012). Researchers have proposed various models characterizing key behaviors instructional leaders deploy to build teaching effectiveness in schools. Prominent theories like Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) framework of Instructional Leadership and Marks and Printy's

(2003) Integrated Leadership model construe the principal's pedagogical guidance central for improvement.

Recent studies across diverse settings highlight systemic barriers from infrastructure deficits, overstretched capacities, and resource limitations that hamper supervision efforts. Analysis from Guatemalan primary schools found key obstacles reported by principals included high student-teacher ratios, limited parent cooperation, and inadequate school facilities (Cunningham et al., 2022). Meanwhile, research in rural Bangladesh high schools revealed heavy administrative workloads and political interference as significant impediments undermining leaders' abilities to prioritize academic development (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Such findings align with insights from Fijian administrators indicating curriculum expansion policies overstretched supervision capacities, prompting urgent policy needs to foster leadership development and curb duties unrelated to enhancing instructions.

Various empirical studies validate direct proactive efforts by principals in exercising instructional leadership to foster superior teaching standards and student outcomes. A meta-analysis by Robinson et al. (2008) deduced that promoting professional learning through discussions, modeling effective instructions, and observations is impactful. Leadership practices emphasizing academic achievement via high visibility, performance reviews, curriculum coordination, and test results evaluation showed substantial effect sizes on pupil learning in the meta-analysis by Waters et al. (2003). The authors recommended principals devote more time to supervising classroom practices.

However, research also provides vital evidence on instructional leadership behaviors fundamental for mitigating contextual barriers, securing teacher investment, and delivering supervision systems proven to raise student outcomes even amidst adverse realities. UChicago studies in Ghana, India, and Pakistan demonstrate thoughtful reallocations of time focused on monitoring performance data and mentoring lagging instructors can yield significant learning gains cost-effectively (Morelli & Rohner, 2015). Meanwhile, initiatives integrating community monitoring and decentralized management targeted at motivating female instructors in rural Pakistan enhanced school functioning and participation despite religious pushbacks (Duflo & Dupas, 2009). Different studies have been conducted in different contexts. In a study by Aman et al. (2021), challenges faced by female principals were explored in public colleges. The challenges faced by the participants while performing their duties were unpleasant working conditions, lack of economic resources, students' discipline-related problems, poor teacher behavior, over-workload, and the non-cooperative role of parents and society.

Similarly, another study was conducted to explore the perspectives of secondary school head teachers about their leadership styles and their linkage with students' achievement. Teachers' perception regarding the effect of instructional leadership practices was found on teachers' effectiveness for primary school head teachers (Ahmad & Hamid, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2020). In another study, the impact of head teachers' instructional approaches on teachers' competencies was found at Campus Schools in Karachi (Ahmad, Sewani, et al., 2021). Secondary school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership were explored, and its effect was found on teachers' professional development (Ahmad, Ali, et al., 2021).

5. Research Methodology

This quantitative study examined the challenges faced by heads of public primary schools in Lahore in providing instructional guidance. Using random sampling, the participant sample was comprised of 50 head teachers from government-run primary schools in Lahore, Punjab. Data was collected through a self-developed 5-point Likert scale questionnaire based on indicators identified

in prior literature with ten key areas of challenges faced by heads of schools. Descriptive analysis was then conducted using SPSS version 17 to determine frequencies, means, and standard deviations for the respondents' perceived challenges across the ten identified indicators.

6. Findings of the study

Based on the objective and research question for the study focused on examining instructional supervision challenges of primary school heads in Punjab, the following are the findings of the study:

7. Challenges faced by Headteachers in Instructional Supervision

Following table presents the summary of the Challenges faced by the head teachers:

Table 1: Summary of Challenges Faced by Head Teachers in Improving Instructional Supervision

Challenge	Mean	SD
Terrible working conditions	2.62	1.086
Workload of teachers	2.50	0.73
Lack of teaching staff	3.08	1.25
Overcrowded and under-furnished classrooms	2.34	1.06
Parents less respect for teachers	2.78	1.075
Teachers' lack of commitment and cooperation	3.32	1.058
verloaded curriculum	3.08	0.944
Student's absenteeism	3.06	1.132
High rates of teachers' burnout	4.06	1.132
Frequent transfer of teachers	4.14	1.088

The above table illustrates the challenges headteachers face regarding improving their instructional supervision. The data suggests that headteachers face several moderate challenges in improving school instructional supervision. The major obstacles identified based on mean scores above 3.0 were:

1. Lack of Teaching Staff (Mean=3.08): Respondents viewed this as a moderate challenge. There were mixed views, with 32% saying it was a low-extent issue but 34% viewing it as a high-extent challenge. It points to staff shortages posing difficulties for head teachers in carrying out instructional supervision.
2. Teachers' Lack of Commitment and Cooperation (Mean=3.32): 40% of respondents viewed this as a normal extent challenge. It indicates issues with teacher motivation and buy-in are obstacles faced by heads. Getting all teachers actively committed to improvement efforts is an ongoing leadership challenge.
3. Overloaded Curriculum (Mean=3.08): Responses were mixed, but 42% saw this as a normal extent problem. An overly packed curriculum makes providing quality supervision, giving feedback, and monitoring learning harder. It is a systemic issue limiting heads' leadership.
4. Student Absenteeism (Mean=3.06): Views on this were split, suggesting it is a moderate hindrance. High absenteeism disrupts supervision continuity and also signals deeper engagement issues. Addressing this requires heads to problem-solve barriers.
5. Additionally, the data points to parents' lack of respect for teachers as an emerging issue to monitor. Overall, the challenges reflect systemic barriers like staffing shortages, overloaded systems, and lack of resources/support - issues heads have partial control over but require district-wide initiatives.

6. In contrast, most respondents did not rate things like terrible work conditions, teacher workload, and crowded classrooms as major current obstacles. However, the low to moderate mean scores indicate they could likely worsen and need continued oversight in the long run.

The major challenges identified were a lack of teaching staff, parents' lack of respect for teachers, teachers' lack of commitment and cooperation, an overloaded curriculum, and student absenteeism. The data suggests that headteachers face moderate obstacles in improving instructional supervision. Respondents viewed issues like terrible working conditions, workload, overcrowded classrooms, teacher burnout, and frequent teacher transfers as less significant challenges.

8. Conclusions

The critical role of instructional supervision in enhancing teaching practices and improving student outcomes is well-established. However, as the data indicates, head teachers face systemic and human resource barriers that constrain their ability to supervise effectively. Based on the survey results, lack of teaching staff, teachers' motivation and cooperation, overloaded systems, high student absenteeism, and emerging issues like lack of parent respect are key obstacles that need addressing. Most significantly, persistent staffing shortages undermine supervision continuity and quality. With teacher-to-pupil ratios high, administrators are overstretched. Limited capacity reduces the time for in-class observation, post-conference discussions, and pedagogical guidance. Additionally, fostering greater teacher ownership and willingness to engage is vital. Teacher cooperation shapes the scope for heads to exercise instructional supervision. However, the data reflects commitment issues - whether due to limited accountability, inadequate feedback systems, or lack of empowerment.

Moreover, student attendance issues signal deeper engagement barriers that supervision must prioritize. Customized mentoring programs, parent-teacher partnerships, identifying context-specific needs of first-generation learners, and infrastructural improvements are some strategies heads can adopt to help tackle student absenteeism. Furthermore, overloaded curriculums constrain administrators' abilities to provide meaningful ongoing supervision. Large class sizes also limit individual attention, and reflective post-conference opportunities are crucial for adopting new techniques. The data also points to emerging human resources issues like declining community respect for the teaching profession that can undermine morale and retention. It requires system-wide initiatives to elevate status through professionalization efforts, awards, recognizing model schools/staff or awareness campaigns showcasing positive impact.

9. Discussion

Effective instructional supervision is widely recognized as pivotal for improving teaching practices and enhancing student learning outcomes (Glickman et al., 2001). However, as the survey findings illustrate, school heads contend with multifaceted challenges constraining their ability to conduct quality supervision. From systemic barriers like staff shortages, overloaded work demands, and inadequate infrastructure to motivating reluctant teachers amidst declining community support, results affirm heads face significant obstacles in prioritizing pedagogical leadership. These bottlenecks reflect wider issues documented across educational systems. Studies identify systemic issues such as high student-teacher ratios, limited budgets, and poor facilities as key structural barriers that undermine supervision quality and effectiveness globally from US inner city schools (Lochmiller, 2016) to rural classrooms in developing contexts like Ghana, Pakistan, or India. Such material deprivations fundamentally constrain leadership capacities, prioritizing administrative tasks versus instructional guidance. The issue becomes particularly stark in disadvantaged communities where learning lags most. Our findings echo results from rural Botswana, indicating

administrative workloads, infrastructure deficits, and student attendance challenges severely impede school heads' efforts to enhance teaching practices (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Scherz, 2013). Tactical reallocations of time and effort focused on customizing school-based developmental strategies that motivate reluctant teams and utilizing data to identify teaching gaps offer sustainable solutions heads can implement despite systemic bottlenecks (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Such instructional supervision helps secure stakeholder buy-in, which is vital for school improvement plans to progress. Instructional leaders adept at balancing bureaucratic-administrative needs with sustained pedagogical guidance can foster greater teacher willingness for classroom observations, reflective post-conference dialogues, and adoption of innovative techniques - facilitating wider transformation (Naicker et al., 2013). Undeniably, political will and budgetary allocation aligned to strengthening the teaching profession are imperative for alleviating core material bottlenecks categorically impeding supervision effectiveness like severe staff shortages or overcrowded systems. However, creative grassroots initiatives focused on pedagogical mentorship, co-learning practices and reflective dialogue to enhance continuous development and local level cooperation are promising practices heads can pioneer even within existing constraints.

10. Recommendations

1. There should be an allocation of greater budgetary resources specifically towards hiring additional teaching staff to reduce pupil-teacher ratios and ease supervision burdens related to overstretched capacities.
2. Institute mandatory instructional supervision training programs should be conducted for heads focused on developing motivational, data-driven, and community partnership strategies to supervise systemic bottlenecks.
3. District-level teacher cooperation incentives and accountability structures linking supervision engagement should be created with transfer decisions and professional growth opportunities.
4. The current curriculum load might be revised, and programs to secure time to prioritize pedagogical leadership through updated flexible policies decrease non-academic duties.
5. Parental awareness campaigns should be managed, and teacher awards, and model school programs should elevate community respect for the teaching profession and boost teacher retention.
6. There should be customized professional development opportunities addressing student absenteeism, staff burnout risk, parent engagement, and the adoption of digital tools to support heads' context-specific supervision needs.

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