

# **Instructional Supervision in an Era of Change: Policy and Practice in Primary Education in Kenya**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the policy and practice of instructional supervision in primary education against a background of an educational change in Kenya. Primary education is an important sector of education in Kenya. This is because about 40% of children who start primary education each year terminate their education at that level. It is therefore important to ensure its objectives are achieved. Consequently the government frequently undertakes reforms aimed at improving access, participation, retention and completion rates. The latest ones are provision of free primary education and a revised curriculum. Despite these reforms this sector of education continues to experience problems in achievement of its goals. Instructional supervision has been identified as key in the improvement of teaching/learning and consequently achievement of educational objectives. The pre and post-independent education commissions in Kenya and other government reports have continued to identify supervision as an area that needs attention. Against this background, understanding what ought to be and what actually happens is important in order to identify areas that need attention for improvement of supervision and subsequently teaching and learning in primary schools in Kenya. This study therefore focused on: - the existing policies on supervision, and the policy expectations of the supervisors, - the actual instructional supervisory functions supervisors perform - head teachers' and teachers' expectations of supervisors, - supervisors', head teachers' and teachers' perceptions of the importance and frequency of performance of instructional supervisory functions, and - challenges faced by supervisors and teachers in implementation of curriculum change. The study employed a survey design with a mixed method approach. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there were significant statistical differences in the respondents' perception of importance and frequency of supervisory functions while Post Hoc test (Tamhane coefficient test which is suitable for unequal sized groups) was used to establish where the differences among the groups were. Both tests were carried out at 0.05 level of significance. Findings show that despite the legal backing and many policy documents supporting instructional supervision, the actual practice differs from the policy expectations. Supervisors were aware that according to policy they were expected to perform evaluative and supportive/advisory functions, however their actual performance emphasises the evaluative/assessment functions of supervision. The head teachers' and teachers' expectations on the other hand are in line with the policy expectations. For instance frequent supervisory visits, regular in-service training, opportunity for professional growth, induction on curriculum and other changes and evaluation without intimidation are some of the head teachers' and teachers' expectations. However, in their view, they differ with the actual practice of the supervisors with most of their expectations not being adequately met. On average all the respondents perceived the supervisory functions as important but supervisors rated evaluative functions as very important while head teachers and teachers rated the supportive/advisory functions as very important. On frequency of performance of supervisory functions, supervisors perceived almost all functions as frequently performed but head teachers and teachers perceived many functions as rarely performed. These findings have implications for policy and practice of instructional supervision in Kenya and other developing countries in similar contexts. There is need for revision of instructional supervisory policy with a view to separating the evaluative and the advisory functions with the evaluative functions being carried out by the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) and Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) to handle the supportive/advisory functions. In addition, training of supervisors for their role should be addressed.

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