



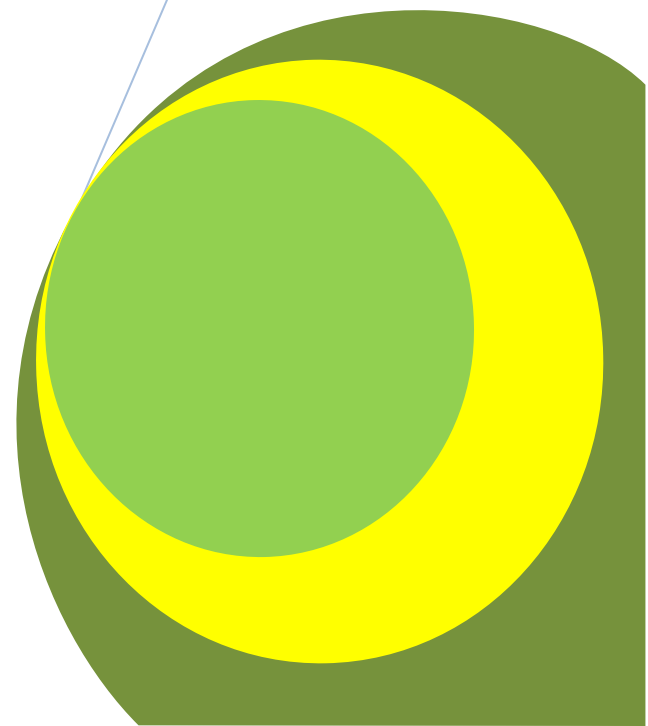
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Instructional Supervisory Practices of Zimbabwean School Heads

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Schools in developing countries including Zimbabwe face a host of problems related to the twin concepts of poor classroom instruction and low student achievement. According to (Boaduo, 2011a, Glanz, 2010), developing countries face common problems in providing sufficient education of high quality to their learners. Typically these challenges breakdown to matters of instructional supervision, teaching behaviours and general low learner performance. Given this context, it becomes necessary to construct new frameworks in the following aspects: teacher effectiveness, progressive models of supervision and effective leadership styles (Pajak, 2008). According to Boaduo (2011b), the search for instructional supervisory strategies that can deal with the lesson delivery capacities of teachers and poor performance of students of developing countries should be intensified. This study was therefore principally directed at investigating the instructional practices of Zimbabwean school heads of schools. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population comprised of all teachers in primary schools in three of Zimbabwe's educational provinces of the Midlands, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South. The random sample procedure was employed. A total of seven hundred and forty eight (748) respondents were used of which three hundred and ninety-two (392) were female and three hundred and fifty-six (356) were male. The main findings indicated that the majority of heads did not understand the concept of instructional supervision. The study, further, revealed that teachers had negative attitudes towards instructional supervision; that heads of schools engage in the most current and pressing issues like financial management, sporting and grounds development at the expense of instructional supervision. The recommendations are that heads should use effective models of instructional supervision and commitment to long term process of staff development including the prioritization of their operations so that the bulk of their time is taken up by instructional supervision related activities to improve the worth of their teachers.

Keywords: Instructional supervision, Leadership, Heads, Teachers, Models of supervision.

INTRODUCTION

In the process of improving teacher instructional competencies, many educators have come to realize that the quality of instruction depends not only on teachers but on supervisory staff (Boaduo 2011a & 2011b). Supervisors have the responsibility of assisting teachers in making decisions regarding the quality of their instructional competencies (Glanz, 2010). Yet supervisors often lack the necessary skills to provide teachers with the help they need to develop instructionally (Zepeda, 2012; Pajak, 2008; Marks, 2008). Madziyire (2013) quotes (Marks, 2008) who contend that in quite a number of schools due to shortage of trained teachers, inexperienced teachers have been placed in supervisory roles.

Ozigi (2000) advises that heads require conceptual skills in supervision in its broadest sense in order to ensure that they fully understand what their roles and tasks as supervisors of schools are. Lack of supervisory skills may result in conflict between teachers and supervisors when teachers feel unfairly treated (Ndebele, 2006; Marks, 2008; Madziyire, 2013). One way of improving the teacher supervisors' relationship, therefore, is through supervisor training (Zepeda, 2012). Harber and Davies (1997) note that in developing countries, heads of schools emerge from the teaching population and have had little or no training for the job. This might be because school heads are

promoted as teachers straight from the classroom without any prior training for taking up their headship posts. In that regard, newly promoted school heads would be lacking requisite instructional supervisory experience meant to improve teaching and assessment of learners. Marks (2008), states that heads are chosen because they are good at one thing (teaching) and put into managerial roles which can demand quite different skills. A possible reason supportive of Marks' observation, is that Zimbabwe's Ministry of Education assumes that competent teachers in the classroom tend to make good instructional supervisors, yet they should possess an array of skills that make them effective instructional leaders. Such skills include technical, conceptual, human and diagnostic skills (Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon, 2007; Madziyire, 2013).

Ndebele (2006) argues that it is perhaps in this context (portraying a lack of head's supervisory skills) that most teachers are apprehensive about being supervised, they appear to be dissatisfied with supervisors' classroom observations; hence their negative views towards instructional supervision. McLaughlin (2007) quoted in Madziyire (2013) comments that most teachers place several charges against classroom observation by supervisors. They criticize it for being infrequent and unreliable because heads appear not to plan their class visits and just do it sporadically and then delay giving teachers feedback. They undermine the fact that immediate knowledge of results motivates teachers to work harder. This is corroborated by Marks (2008) who states that many teachers fear a visit by the supervisor often with good reason. Some teachers are prone to heads' victimization for socio-economic even political reasons. Other heads who have the habit of making courtship advances to lady teachers are sometimes fond of trying to fix female teachers who will have turned down their requests by making incessant class supervision visits. They dislike having to defend methods and techniques which they found successful. They tend to dislike methods and techniques which are successful because they could be time consuming and labour taxing in terms of preparation and planning processes for teaching in spite of the imminent benefits they offer to the learners such as active learning, mastery learning and communal and individualized learning.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In Zimbabwe, instructional supervision has been a practice since education was introduced by missionaries in the nineteenth century (Murimba and Moyo, 1993). In early days, supervision was characterised by a different dimension, namely inspection. Chibvonga (1995) describes inspection as the act of scrutinizing officially or examining closely especially for faults or errors. The faults could be institutional, individual teacher, pupil and classroom-based. Institutional-based faults and errors include inappropriate classrooms, lack of furniture and text-books. Individual teacher-based faults range from indecent teacher personality, lack of thorough planning and preparation, lack of marking and supervision of pupils' work, poor seating arrangement and poor measurement, to evaluation and assessment practices. Pupil-related faults and errors that can be blamed on the teacher include indiscipline, text book tearing, poor handwriting and unswept classroom floors, as well as torn charts and exercise books. Madziyire (2013) argues that in those days supervision was focused on strict adherence to present curriculum content, timetable and methodology within a stipulated period of time. Perhaps the preceding practice was a result of the application of Scientific Supervision (Management) in which teachers' standards were set by their supervisors. Teachers had to do what they were told (McLaughlin, 2007). Those teachers who followed the given curriculum were highly rated while those who did not faced the wrath of inspectors. The former were assumed to be high performers who deserved to be rewarded through salary increments and promotional opportunities. The latter were considered non-performers who need to be coerced through charges, dismissal and firing threats with the intent to make them work harder (Madziyire, 2013). Inspectors forced teachers to use methods of teaching that encouraged rote learning. Teachers were viewed by their managers as implements and machines that had to work as directed by their supervisors (Ndebele, 2006; Zepeda, 2009).

As time moved on, some new development in the nature of supervision were experienced in Zimbabwe. Madziyire (2013) observes that the democratic administration movement which was occurring in the United States of America's education system during the period from early seventies to the eighties influenced the supervision process in Zimbabwe. According to Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983) the democratic administration movement was based on the assumption that improving instructional activity depends on the maintenance of warm and friendly relations between the supervisor and the teacher. Murimba (1999) states that with the post independence democratization of the education system and the popularization of discovery learning, there was (in Zimbabwe) some attempt of supervisory teachers so that they could demonstrate a concern for individual needs and interests of learners. Demonstration lessons became popular as supervisors sought to encourage the talent of each individual teacher.

Despite the above assertion by Murimba (1999), Beaton (2005) observes that while the political changes that were taking place in Zimbabwe in the 1980s encouraged supervisors to be more human in their supervision of teachers, an element of inspection still lingered on. Mlilo (2007) confirmed Beaton's (2005) assertion through a study

he conducted on the effectiveness of school heads in Hwange District in Matabeleland North Province in the western part of Zimbabwe. He found that a large number of teachers would not look forward to supervision as they felt supervision was a very unpleasant experience. According to Chibvonga (1995), what is currently happening in Zimbabwean schools is that supervision is through inspection and control. Teachers are hired to carry out specific duties according to clearly stipulated requirements of management. Chivore (1996) describes this type of supervision as autocratic, dictatorial and tense. Such an atmosphere is riddled with non-supportive, suspicious and apathetic tendencies which are not conducive to effective supervision. Thus, inevitably, the relationship that exists between principals and teachers is that of bosses and employees.

What further complicates the relationship between heads and teachers in Zimbabwe is the situation described by Madziyire (2013). He argues that another reason why teachers resent supervision could be because of the role conflict of the head as the instructional supervisors and administrator. When supervision is undertaken by the administrator (as is the case in Zimbabwe) there is potential role conflict. This conflict is based on the fact that expectations of supervisory behavior are not in keeping with those of administrative behavior. This is because the administrative behavior is based on bureaucratic authority. As Beach and Reinhartz (1989) observe; bureaucratic authority calls for such action as being impersonal and sticking to rules and regulations. However, when the same administrator takes on the role of supervision, he/she is expected to be a colleague, helping the teacher to develop and grow professionally. Beaton (2005) states that supervision calls for personal relationships and a non-threatening and trusting atmosphere, yet the administrators' perceived authority in the school does not allow for collegiality. The head is the administrator to the subordinate and is in no way seen as a colleague.

In the Zimbabwean context, there is no officer in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture who has the obligation and authority to carry out instructional supervision at school level other than the school head. This was corroborated by the then Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture (Aneas Chigwedere 2001) in Ndebele (2006) who stated that the head of school by virtue of delegated authority from the Minister and Director General, he/she is in undisputed control of his/her school, they have the widest liberty to vary courses, alter the timetable, to decide the organization of the school and government within the school, to experiment with teaching methods and to assess student achievement. The above information clearly demonstrates that Zimbabwe's Ministry of Education Sport, Arts and Culture puts the head firmly at the centre of all operations at school level. According to Ndebele (2006) Head Office, Provincial Officers and District Officers can give guidance but must keep the distance. Since supervision of instruction is at the core of learning in the school and is the responsibility of the head with other players merely complementing his/her efforts, it seemed necessary to investigate the supervisory practices of Zimbabwean heads of schools.

Statement of the Problem

The study sought to investigate the supervisory practices of Zimbabwean school heads.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to empirically explore the actual supervisory practices of Zimbabwean school heads in order to gain a better understanding of the complex process of instructional supervision so as to assist school heads in making the supervisory process more effective. The study also sought to come up with suggested models of supervision for use by heads to promote effective instructional supervision.

Research Questions

1. What models of supervision are commonly used by Zimbabwean school heads?
2. What are the problems faced by heads of schools during the supervision of instruction?
3. What are Zimbabwean teachers' views towards instructional supervision?
4. Do heads of schools effectively help their teachers to improve their teaching skills?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study stemmed from the fact that it sought to conscientise heads of schools about the best supervisory practices that they can apply in order to promote teacher effectiveness. It was hoped that the research would contribute significantly towards a better understanding of the complex process of instructional supervision and would assist school heads in making the supervisory process more effective. This is important because, as stated, the merits of proper supervision are the improvement of the pupils' performance and, ultimately, their results. It was

also hoped that the study would also contribute to the existing corpus of knowledge on supervision which Zimbabwean Education Officers, Provincial Directors, Universities and the Government Departments may use for staff development purposes in future in order to improve the instructional process in schools.

Limitations of the Study

The decisions about the limited number of provinces, heads of schools and teachers naturally limits the validity of the study. Therefore, in view of the size of the sample and sub-samples used, the findings of the study would have limited generalization.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was concerned with the instructional supervision practices of Zimbabwean school heads in three of Zimbabwe's ten provinces. The core respondents were heads of schools and teachers. Parents, pupils, education officers and other stakeholders were not the concern of this study in terms of how they perceive instructional supervision in the schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. The population consisted of heads of schools and teachers from three of Zimbabwe's provinces, namely, Matabeleland North, Midlands and Matabeleland South. The sample was made up of 748 respondents of which 392 were female and 356 were male and the random sampling technique was used.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions and a few open-ended questions. The questionnaire was selected because as Cohen and Manion (1995) observe, it has the ability to reach many respondents who live at widely dispersed addresses and preserves anonymity which encourages greater honesty. However, the questionnaire as Anderson (2008) argues, generally has a low response rate and is inflexible in that it does not allow ideas or comments to be explored in-depth and many questions may remain unanswered. The researchers distributed the questionnaires at various meetings and workshops for heads and teachers and collected the questionnaires after a day or two through the organizers of the gatherings. Data collected from the questionnaires produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to explore the instructional supervision practices of Zimbabwean school heads in Zimbabwean schools. This section is presented in two parts, namely, presentation of data and discussion.

Presentation of Data

Table 1: Profiles of heads and teachers

Categories of respondents	Number of questionnaires	Number of questionnaires returned	% of questionnaires returned
Heads	200	176	86
Teachers	600	572	95

The response rate from both heads and teachers was relatively high. The size of the sample from which the results will be based was therefore not significantly decreased by the problem of non-returns. Non-returns, according to Phillips and Pugh (2010) introduce a bias in as much as they are likely to differ from respondents in many important ways thereby adversely affecting reliability and validity of the findings.

Table 2: Composition of sample by gender

Categories of respondents	Male		Female	
	nf	%f	nf	%f
Heads (N=176)	99	56	77	44
Teachers (N=572)	257	45	315	55

The heads' sample contained more males (56%) than females (44%). The teachers' sample on the other hand contained more females (55%) than males (45%). Both sets of data were considered statistically significant to the extent that they tended to confirm the gender gap (in favour of males) with regards senior management in education which had always been pointed out by many gender activists and educational publications.

Table 3: Demographic profiles of heads and teachers by approximate age

Categories of respondents	18-25		26-30		31-35		36-40		41-45		Over 45	
	nf	%f	nf	%f	nf	%f	nf	%f	nf	%f	nf	%f
Heads (n=176)	0	0	1	1	4	2	67	38	56	32	48	27
Teachers (n=576)	67	12	103	18	160	28	137	24	69	12	34	6

The table above shows that 97% of the heads are above thirty five years. Only 3 percent are below thirty six years. Teachers are generally younger. More than 82 percent of the 572 involved in the sample are below forty-one years.

Table 4: Demographic profiles of heads and teachers by academic qualifications

Academic Qualifications	Principals n=176		Teachers n=572	
	nf	%f	nf	%f
Ordinary Level	113	64	370	65
Advanced Level	34	19	160	28
Bachelor of Arts	24	14	13	2
Bachelor of Science	4	2	21	4
Master's Degree	1	1	7	1
Totals	176	100	572	100

Table 4 shows that the two groups are almost identical in many respects. Only one percent of each group is in possession of Masters' Degrees. Most teachers and heads have ordinary level as their highest academic level (65% and 64% respectively).

Table 5: The head is very knowledgeable of all models of instructional supervision

Response category	Heads (n=176)		Teachers (n=572)	
	nf	%f	nf	%f
Strongly agree	39	22	68	12
Agree	66	38	188	33
Disagree	20	11	125	22
Strongly disagree	7	4	191	33
Not sure	44	25	0	0
Totals	176	100	572	100

Table 5 above shows that 60 percent of the participants were heads and 45 percent of them were teachers respectively, who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the head is knowledgeable of all models of instructional supervision.

Table 6: The classroom observations that the head carries out clearly promote the professional growth of teachers.

Response category	Heads (n=176)		Teachers (n=572)	
	nf	%f	nf	%f
Strongly agree	59	34	47	8
Agree	89	51	45	8
Disagree	8	4	285	50
Strongly disagree	2	1	195	34
Not sure	18	10	0	0
Totals	176	100	572	100

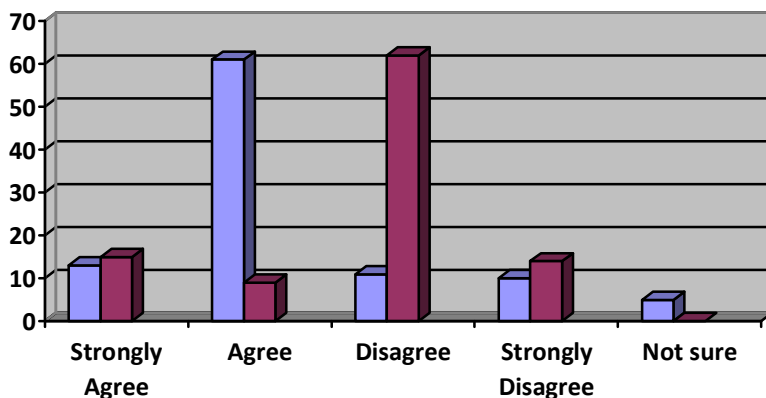
Table 6 shows that 84% of the teachers indicated that the classroom observations carried out did not promote the professional growth of teachers, whereas 85% of the heads felt that their observations were promotional of the professional growth of teachers.

Table 7: When the head carries out instructional supervision he/she will be on a fault finding mission

Response category	Heads (n=176)		Teachers (n=572)	
	nf	%f	nf	%f
Strongly agree	4	2	234	41
Agree	16	9	228	40
Disagree	33	19	63	11
Strongly disagree	123	70	47	8
Not sure	0	0	0	0
Totals	176	100	572	100

Table 7 above shows that 81% of the teachers strongly agreed that the heads of schools used instructional supervision for fault finding whilst only 11% of the heads strongly agreed with the assertion.

Figure 1: My school atmosphere is supportive enough to help the effective conduction of class visits



Key - Blue (Heads)
Purple (Teachers)

The information in figure 1 above shows that 76% of the teachers thought that their school atmosphere was not supportive of effective classroom observations and 74% of the heads thought their school had conducive atmospheres for classroom observation.

Table 8: The head of school usually engages in the most current present issues affecting the school at the expense of instructional supervision

Response category	Heads (n=176)		Teachers (n=572)	
	nf	%f	nf	%f
Strongly agree	48	27	39	7
Agree	40	23	51	9
Disagree	84	48	316	55
Strongly disagree	4	2	166	29
Not sure	0	0	0	0
Totals	176	100	572	100

Table 8 above reveals that 73% of the heads agreed with the statement that the head of school usually engages in the most current issues affecting the school at the expense of instructional supervision. Of the sample teachers, 86% of the teachers concurred with their principals on this statement.

DISCUSSION

Data reveals that heads have limited knowledge of models of supervision. Although 60% of the heads indicated that they were aware of a variety of supervisory models, when asked to name these models of supervision in the open-ended question they cited clinical supervision and spot-checks. About a quarter of the heads 25% said they were not sure of these models. It is also significant to mention that despite the fact that heads mentioned clinical supervision, the evidence on the ground reveal that they do not apply it to their instructional supervision activities.

The investigation also revealed that most teachers indicated that they did not benefit from the class visits carried out by their heads. This information is consistent with findings by Chivore (1996) who posits that it is widely felt that what heads meant to be supervision in terms of guidance of teachers aimed at improving teacher-performance and through this, pupils' performance often turned out to be mere inspection of teachers, with teachers not receiving the necessary guidance and substantive support.

The study also found that heads use instructional supervision as a fault-finding mechanism. Despite the denial by heads (81%), the majority of teachers (89%) indicated that heads use instructional supervision for fault-finding. In the open-ended question where teachers were asked to comment on how they felt when their heads visited them for lesson observation, most teachers echoed the same apprehension when they indicated that they felt uncomfortable because the head usually commented negatively without highlighting anything positive from the observed lesson. This is consistent with supervisory practices associated with the traditional scientific management theory (Carey 2008). Such supervision is more concerned with the efficient attainment of the goals of the school as an organization. Teachers are considered as employees who are merely hired to teach children a prescribed content and using clearly stated methods of teaching and learning. Supervisors (heads) supervised teachers through inspection and control (Firth 2008). Teachers are regarded as mere appendages of management. Relationships that exist between the teacher and the supervisors (head) are that of boss and the employee (Wiles and Bondi, 1999). The teacher as a junior partner in the relationship has no say and his/her creativity is stifled by bureaucratic control (Sergiovanni and Starratt 1983).

The majority of the sample teachers (76%) felt that their school atmosphere was not supportive enough for effective lesson observations despite the fact that the majority of heads (74%) indicated that their school atmospheres were supportive enough to help them to effectively conduct class visits. The school climate or atmosphere influences the behaviour of people in a school (Paula and Silver 2009). A closed climate leads to people not giving their best. Even if one hires competent workers, if they are subjected to a negative climate they respond with lower productivity (Doll 2008; Bolin 2009).

The evidence from the study also revealed that the head usually engaged in the most current and pressing issues affecting the school at the expense of instructional supervision. The heads' day was described as sporadic, characterized by short activities, variety and fragmentation. This finding is consistent with findings by Martin and Willower (2006) who reported that school heads perform an average of 149 tasks a day, with constant interruptions .

Over 59% of their observed activities were interrupted. Heads demonstrated a tendency to engage themselves in the most current and pressing situation. They invested very little time in reflecting planning. Instruction related activities took up only 17% of their time (Martin and Willower 2006).

There is also evidence that most of the heads' time is spent on administrative house-keeping matters and maintaining order at the expense of instructional supervision. Of the heads under study, 85% agreed with the above assertion with 91% of the teachers agreeing with them (heads). This information is consistent with findings by Sarason (2004) who observed that most of the head's time is spent on administration house-keeping matters and maintaining order. Many heads expect or feel that they are expected to keep everyone happy by running an orderly school and this becomes the head's ability to manage (Sarason 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

- Both theoretical and empirical data in this study converge on the fact that most head of schools in Zimbabwe do not adequately understand the concept of instructional supervision. They seem to confuse instructional supervision with inspection. Chibvonga (1995) alludes to inspection as the act of scrutinizing officially or examining closely especially for faults or errors.
- Heads of schools carry-out staff development programmes haphazardly just for the purposes of routinely fulfilling this obligation. The concern for teachers as individuals is not the focus of the staff development activities.
- Teachers were generally found to have negative attitudes towards instructional supervision because of the way it was being carried out. Teachers resented unannounced class visits and viewed these with suspicion.
- Teachers also indicated that their school atmosphere was not supportive enough for effective lesson observations despite the fact that the majority of their heads thought that their school atmospheres were supportive enough to help them effectively conduct class visits.
- Findings of the study seem to confirm that Zimbabwean heads experience a lot of problems as they carry-out their instructional supervision. Heads under study were engaging in the most current and pressing issues at the expense of instructional supervision. Most heads expect or feel that they are expected to keep everyone happy by running an orderly school and this becomes the major criterion of the head's ability to manage; even if it means ignoring instructional supervision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations.

- Heads are encouraged to use instructional supervision models that encourage interaction between the head and the teacher as opposed to using models that promote fault-finding or head dominance during the instructional supervision process.
- It is also recommended that when planning and implementing staff development activities, heads should be aware of the fact that staff development is for all teachers, not just for those with instructional problems. Such goals as improved skills and professional commitment are possible to accomplish if instructional supervisors (heads) attend to what literature say about staff development and view teachers as learners.
- Heads should strive very hard to create positive or open climates in their schools. A good climate is important because it does not only affect teacher competence and productivity, but also student behavior and outcomes. A negative climate would manifest itself in student indiscipline and poor examination results.
- It is also recommended that heads of schools should prioritize their operations so that the bulk of their time is taken up by instructional supervision. The core-business of the school is to provide learning to pupils, and instruction/teaching which is at the centre of learning must be closely monitored. Heads are therefore encouraged to plan their days and inform all the school's stakeholders about their timetable so that there is minimum interference with the instructional supervision process.
- As a way of both coping with the circumstances and improving the instructional supervision process in Zimbabwean schools, this study strongly recommends that school heads should be trained before they occupy their jobs. The assumption that if a teacher is good in the classroom, he/she will necessarily make an effective instructional supervisor is essentially premised on whims rather than on empirical evidence. In this regard, it is important that heads of schools are trained to create democratic schools before they adopt autocratic styles which make effective instructional supervision very unlikely.

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