Focuses of school based instructional supervision

A further sub-problem in the study was to explore participants' perceptions about the focuses of school-based instructional supervision. This section reports the findings regarding the focuses of school-based instructional supervision based on questionnaire and interview data.

Questionnaire Findings

Twenty-two statements describing the focuses of instructional supervision were listed in each questionnaire instrument (Appendices A and B). The statements addressed the following major aspects regarding instructional supervision focuses: (a) organization of lessons, (b) subject matter, (c) pupils' academic development, (d) school curriculum, (e) lesson plan, (f) pupils' individual inquiry, (g) teaching guides, (h) course objectives, (i) teacher's personality, (j) pupils' character development, (k) pupils' progress records, (k) records of work covered, (1) teacher's dress and appearance, (m) pupils' sense of responsibility, (n) instructional course, (o) teacher's questioning style, (p) classroom management, (q) extracurricular activities, (r) pupils' performance in national examinations, (s) teacher self-evaluation, and (t) teacher-pupil relationship. For details about specific statements regarding supervision focuses, see Appendixes A and B.

The respondents were requested to indicate their existing and preferred extent of examination of each aspect by making choices from given alternatives ranging from 1 (never examined) to 5 (very frequently examined). The percentage and frequency distributions as well as mean scores and standard deviations were determined for each of the focuses.

The findings on teachers' perceptions of the focuses of school-based instructional supervision are presented in this section in terms of existing and preferred frequency of examination of the focuses. I have included only the focuses that ranked highest and lowest in terms of frequency of examination as perceived by teachers.

Teachers' perceptions of the frequency of examination of existing and preferred focuses of school-based instructional supervision were explored (Appendix D, Table 3. 1). The focuses have been ranked from highest to lowest frequency of examination based on mean responses for existing and preferred focuses of school-based instructional supervision (see Table 3. 2). The data collected suggest that availability of properly organized pupils' progress records ranked first in terms of existing frequency of examination, teacher's concern with pupils' performance in national examinations ranked second, and availability of up-to-date weakly record of work covered ranked third (Appendix D, Table 3. 2). At the other extreme, three focuses ranked lowest in terms of existing frequency of examination: teacher's dress and appearance, teacher's use of teaching aids, and the manner in which the teacher asks questions in the class (Appendix D, Table 3. 2).

In terms of preferred frequency of examination, the focus that ranked first was teacher's concern with pupils' performance in national examinations, followed by availability of properly organized pupils' progress records, and, finally, availability of up-to-date weekly record of work covered (Appendix D, Table 3. 2). The focuses that ranked lowest in terms of preferred frequency of examination included preparation of an appropriate lesson plan, the manner in which the teacher asks questions in the class, and teacher's dress

and appearance (Appendix D, Table 3. 2). Based on t-test analyses, there were significant differences at the 0. 001 level between teachers' perceptions of the frequency of examination of existing and preferred focuses of school-based instructional supervision. In general, teachers preferred that the focuses of school-based instructional supervision presented in this study be examined more frequently than was currently being done.

Interview Findings

Interviews with teachers, headteachers, and education officers indicated five major themes relative to focuses of school-based instructional supervision: (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) student success, (c) teacher performance, (d) teachers' artifacts of teaching, and (e) human relations.

Curriculum and Instruction

Three headteachers cited three focuses of instructional supervision that are primarily concerned with curriculum and instruction: (a) teacher's attendance to scheduled lessons, (b) teacher's participation in extracurricular activities, and (c) syllabus coverage by the teacher. One teacher, in a general remark, stated as follows:

I think it is important to check on attendance of teachers to their scheduled lessons or to their participation in extracurricular activities with pupils. Headteachers should also make sure that teachers cover the syllabuses in good time to prepare students for external exams.

Student Success

Two teachers agreed that instructional supervisors should endeavor to find out how teachers assess their pupils' work. They argued that the various strategies that teachers use to assess students' progress will determine how students are prepared for national examinations. As one teacher remarked, " It would be helpful to know teachers assess their pupils' academic work because this is important for students' success in the national examinations."

Teacher Performance

Another area regarding the focuses of school-based instructional supervision cited by four interviewees was concerned with teacher performance in the classroom. These participants agreed that, to facilitate teaching and learning, the teachers' level of preparedness and general effectiveness in teaching should be the major focuses of the supervision of instruction. As one education officer commented, " The best thing to do is for supervisors to address areas like effectiveness of their classroom teachers and how they are prepared to teach."

Teachers' Artifacts of Teaching

One headteacher observed that teachers' teaching artifacts, such as examination and test papers, should be addressed during supervision process. This headteacher remarked, " Instructional supervisors should check the quality of examination and test papers set by teachers because these are important teaching tools that would shape students' success in the final examinations. Do they set high quality papers which can promote learning?"

Human Relations

A final area relating to focuses of instructional supervision mentioned by some interviewees was concerned with human relations. One education officer noted that how teachers interact with students should be considered in the practices of instructional supervision and that the teacher-pupil relationship should be a major focus of instructional supervision. Another education officer commented, “ When you are supervising a teacher, for example in the classroom, you must look at how the teacher interacts with pupils. This interaction is important because it will affect learning.”

In general, the focuses of school-based instructional supervision cited by interviewees concur with high-ranking focuses relative to the existing and preferred extent of examination by the teacher from the questionnaire data.

Synthesis and Discussion of School-based instructional supervision Focuses

The findings relating to teachers’ perceptions of existing and preferred frequency of examination of the focuses of school-based instructional supervision revealed by questionnaire data indicate that three focuses received the highest ranking in both existing and preferred frequency of examination: (a) availability of properly organized pupils’ progress records, (b) availability of up-to-date weekly record of work covered, and (c) teacher’s concern with pupils’ performance in national examinations. Similarly, one focus-the manner in which the teacher asks questions in the class-received the lowest ranking in both existing and preferred frequency of examination as perceived by teachers.

The findings from the interview data revealed the following focuses of school-based instructional supervision: (a) teacher's attendance to scheduled classes, (b) teacher's preparedness, (e) teacher's methods of assessment of pupils' academic progress, (f) quality of test papers set by the teacher, (g) syllabus coverage by the teacher, (h) teacher's participation in extracurricular activities, and (i) teacher-pupil relationship.

Indicators of Teacher Preparation

The three focuses of school-based instructional supervision that received the highest ranking in terms of existing and preferred frequency of examination by the headteacher- availability of properly organized pupils' records, availability of up-to-date records of work covered, and teacher's concern with pupils' performance in national examinations-were particularly interesting because, in Saudi Arabia, the three focuses are among the indicators of teachers' preparedness for effective teaching that the Ministry of Education expects headteachers to ensure. As explained by Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education (1998) headteachers, as managers of approved school curriculum, are expected to ensure that teachers prepare comprehensive tools of work, such as lesson plans and weekly records of work done, and check periodically pupils' exercise books, practical work, assignments, and continuous assessment to ensure regular marking and systematic use in guiding learners.

Teacher's Concern with Pupils' Performance

Teachers' concern with pupils' performance in national examinations is an important aspect of Saudi Arabia's education system, which seems to put a

great deal of emphasis on passing of examinations. As Babtain (2004) noted, the overloaded system of education imposes cut-throat competition among schools, where learners are pushed to cut down others in national examinations, and forces teachers to be busy all year round as they struggle to complete the curriculum. To facilitate students' success in national examinations, as noted by Ibrahim (2000), teachers are expected to develop and transmit desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes to pupils, it is hoped, through instructional supervision.

Teacher's Attendance to Scheduled Classes

Teacher's attendance to scheduled lessons is an important focus in school-based instructional supervision because it facilitates curriculum implementation. Highlighting the role of the school head as a manager of the school, Hassan (1998) observed that the headteacher should ensure regular teaching of subjects to implement the school curriculum effectively.

Teacher attendance to scheduled lessons is a major issue in the Saudi Arabian education system because numerous cases of student unrest in the recent past have been attributed to teachers' failure to attend scheduled lessons. For example, Mahmoud (2004), commenting about student protest in one school cited " lessons missing" as one of the reasons for the student strike that paralyzed the school and led to its closure. Similarly, Attari (2005) cited teachers' boycott of scheduled classes as a major reason for the indefinite closure of the school and the temporary removal of students from the school.

Teacher’s attendance to scheduled classes is linked to six other related focuses of school-based instructional supervision revealed by the interview data: (a) teacher’s presence in the school, (b) teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom, (c) teacher’s level of preparedness, (d) teacher’s methods of assessment of pupils’ academic progress, (e) quality of test papers set by the teacher, and (f) syllabus coverage by the teacher, because they are all concerned with facilitating effective and quality curriculum implementation in the school. In the Saudi Arabian context, as explained in the Education Act (Saudi Arabia, 1980), curriculum means “ all the subjects taught and all the activities provided at school, and may include the time devoted to each subject and activity” (p. 4), and syllabus means “ a concise statement of the contents of a course of instruction in a subject or subjects” (p. 5). To facilitate curriculum implementation, in particular, Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (1998) has underscored the role of the headteacher in supervising the school curriculum to ensure effective teaching and learning. And Mohammed (2002) has concluded that the quality of curriculum implementation and management may determine student performance in external and school-based examinations.

Practices of School-based instructional supervision

A further sub-problem in the study was concerned with the perceptions of participants regarding the practices of school-based instructional supervision. This section reports the findings relating to the practices of school-based instructional supervision based on questionnaire and interview data.

Sixteen statements describing the practices of school-based instructional supervision as conducted by headteachers were listed in each teacher instrument (Appendices A and B). The statements covered the following major aspects relating to the practices of instructional supervision: (a) conducting teaching, (b) evaluating teachers' work, (c) providing information about supervisory process, (d) reducing teachers' anxieties regarding supervisory program, (e) collecting information about teachers, (f) pre-observation conferencing, (g) using examination results to indicate teacher performance, (h) interviewing students about teacher performance, (i) conferencing with teachers about classroom practice, (j) encouraging self-evaluation, (k) improving instructional quality, (1) writing supervisory reports, (m) providing supervisory feedback, (n) post-observation conferencing, (o) identifying areas of instructional improvement, and (p) rewarding deserving teachers. For details regarding specific statements about the practices of instructional supervision, see Appendices A and B.

The respondents were requested to indicate their preferences for existing and preferred importance given to each practice by making choices from given alternatives ranging from 1 (no importance) to 5 (great). The percentage and frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations were determined for each practice. The data obtained from teachers, headteachers, and education officers relative to the practices of school-based instructional supervision are reported in Appendix D, Tables 4. 1 and 4. 2.

This section reports the findings relating to teachers' perceptions regarding the practices of school-based instructional supervision in terms of the

importance they attach to the practices. Only the practices that received the highest and lowest rankings as perceived by teachers have been reported.

Teachers' responses relative to existing and preferred importance of practices of school-based instructional supervision were explored, as were comparisons between the existing and the preferred means and standard deviations of the practices of school-based instructional supervision as perceived by teachers (Appendix D, Tables 4. 1). The practices have been ranked from highest to lowest based on the mean responses relating to existing and preferred practices (Appendix D, Table 4. 2).

Encouraging teachers to evaluate their own teaching (i. e., self-evaluation; n= 256) ranked first in order of importance as existing practice, followed by using examination/test results as indicators of teacher performance (n= 254; see Appendix D, Table 4. 2). Setting up specific sessions with teachers to discuss how teaching should be conducted (n= 256) and recognizing and rewarding excellent teachers (n= 256) formed a cluster in third position in order of importance as existing practices. At the other end, the practices that received the lowest ranks as existing practices included (a) writing supervisory reports for different audiences (n= 250), (b) conducting conferences soon after observing teachers (n= 248), and (c) meeting with teachers prior to classroom observation (n= 250; see Appendix D, Table 4. 2).

Regarding preferred practices, recognizing and rewarding excellent teachers (n= 256) ranked first in order of importance, encouraging teachers to evaluate their own teaching (i. e., self-evaluation; n= 256) ranked second,

and providing teachers with an adequate amount of information to become familiar with the supervisory process (n= 256) ranked third (Appendix D, Table 4. 2). The least preferred practices in order of importance were (a) meeting with teachers prior to classroom observation (n= 250), (b) writing different supervisory reports for different audiences, and (c) obtaining information from students about their teachers' performance through face-to-face interview (n= 252; see Appendix D, Table 4. 2).

Based on t-test analyses, there were significant differences at both the 0. 05 and 0. 001 levels between teachers' perceptions of existing and preferred practices of school-based instructional supervision, except for one practice, holding face to-face interviews with teachers to obtain information about their classroom practice. In general, teachers preferred that more importance be attached to practices of school-based instructional supervision listed in the instrument than was currently the case.

Interview Findings

Teachers, headteachers, and education officers interviewed cited the following practices of school-based instructional supervision that they had experienced: (a) checking teachers' professional tools of work or artifacts of teaching, such as schemes of work, records of work covered, lesson notes, lesson plans, lesson-focus books, mark books, daily preparation books, and part test papers; (b) examining students' exercise books; (c) using students to obtain information about teachers; (d) holding conferences with teachers; (e) observing teachers in their classrooms; and (f) supervision by walking around.

Frequency distributions of teachers, headteachers, and education officers regarding their mention of practices of school-based instructional supervision were also synthesized from the interview data (Appendix D, Table 4. 3). Eleven teachers, four headteachers/deputy headteachers, and three education officers interviewed mentioned checking teacher’s tools of work or artifacts of teaching, especially schemes of work and records of work covered, as an important practice of school-based instructional supervision in the schools (Appendix D, Table 4. 3).

Also, six teachers, three headteachers/deputy headteachers, and two education officers agreed that holding conferences with teachers was one of the practices of school-based instructional supervision. Furthermore, two teachers, three headteachers/deputy headteachers, and two education officers identified observing teachers in their classrooms as one of the practices of school-based instructional supervision.

However, a few teachers and headteachers interviewed reported that classroom observation, in particular, was not a common practice in their schools. As one headteacher commented:

Visiting teachers in their classrooms to see how they teach is very difficult in our situation. And most teachers resent it so much, and personally I don’t think I have done it. I don’t think it is a practice. You know how it can be taken. In most cases, those who have attempted it have met with a lot of negativity. It is like you want to find faults from the teacher. Teachers fear it most.

Three teacher interviewees concurred that there were no supervisory reports on teachers written by headteachers, to the best of their knowledge. As one teacher remarked, “ Once teachers have been supervised by the headteacher by whatever means, no supervisory reports are made, not at the school level. Maybe the headteacher would have his or her own reports.”

The interviewees also gave least emphasis to practices such as examination of students’ exercise books and using student leaders, commonly referred to as prefects, to obtain information about teachers. As one education officer stated, “ But I don’t think we need children to write anything about teachers for us to know whether or not teachers are on duty.”

Synthesis and Discussion of Practices of School-based instructional supervision

The findings regarding the practices of school-based instructional supervision based on the questionnaire data revealed that recognizing and rewarding excellent teachers was ranked highest by teachers as existing and preferred supervisory practice, whereas writing different supervisory reports for different audiences received low ranking as existing and preferred practice. The interview findings revealed six major practices of school-based instructional supervision:

(a) checking teachers’ artifacts of teaching, (b) examining students’ exercise books, (c) using students to obtain information about teachers, (d) holding conferences with teachers, and (e) observing teachers in their classrooms.

Recognizing and Rewarding Deserving Teachers

That recognizing and rewarding excellent teachers ranked highest is noteworthy because it seems to be a viable strategy for motivating teachers, especially when the recognition is initiated by the headteacher as an instructional leader. This finding supports Sergiovanni's (2001) belief that one of the school principal's responsibilities is to build and to nurture motivation and commitment to teaching and that when teaching is rewarding professionally, teachers are likely to keep improving their effectiveness. The importance of recognizing and rewarding teachers has also been supported elsewhere. For example, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) observed that setting up a work structure that rewards and recognizes teachers for their efforts was an important part of the principal's role in creating a positive learning climate.

In the Saudi Arabian context, as explained by Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (1998), the headteacher's proper management, especially in recognizing excellent performance, may facilitate high morale, motivation, integrity, and appropriate work ethics.

Artifacts of Teaching

The practices of school-based instructional supervision revealed by the interview data were also observed. For example, checking teacher's artifacts of teaching or tools of work is important in Saudi Arabian schooling because it is concerned with teachers' preparedness to teach classes. Whereas the Ministry of Education (1987) expects classroom teachers to prepare artifacts of teaching, it is the responsibility of the headteacher and heads of departments, especially, to ensure that such items are actually prepared

appropriately and to check their relevance to the intended subjects. Furthermore, as the Ministry of Education explained, heads of departments, in particular, are responsible for maintaining a record of work of the subjects to be completed weekly by all subject heads.

Questionnaire and Interview Findings Compared

A comparison of questionnaire and interview findings regarding the practices of school-based instructional supervision revealed some interesting similarities. For example, the practice that ranked lowest in both existing and preferred extent of examination as perceived by teachers-writing different supervisory reports for different audiences-was also viewed by some interviewees as being nonexistent

Also, the practice of obtaining information from students about their teachers' performance through face-to-face interviews, which received relatively low ranking in both existing and preferred extent of examination as perceived by teachers, was also considered inappropriate by some teachers and education officers interviewed. I can speculate that this practice was perhaps common especially in schools where feedback from students regarding teacher performance was productive. However, several views in the literature supported the involvement of students in evaluation of teachers. For example, Stronge and Ostrander (1997) argued that, because students are the primary consumers of teachers' services and have direct knowledge about classroom practices on a regular basis, they are in a key position to provide information about teacher effectiveness.

Whereas the questionnaire data indicated that meeting with teachers especially prior to classroom observation ranked lowest in order of importance as existing and preferred practice as perceived by teachers, the interview data indicated that holding conferences with teachers was prevalent in schools. I can speculate that conferencing with teachers was not a popular practice in many schools.