

Identifying improvements in supervision practices in Ethiopian primary schools: A pragmatic perspective

Eshetu Mandefro

Hawassa University, Ethiopia

This article scrutinises the gaps in supervision practices in primary schools in Ethiopia. It examines the support being provided to teachers by supervisors, in three areas, teaching principles, teaching methods, and professional development. A mixed-methods design was used with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were completed by 382 in-service postgraduate diploma primary school principals and supervisors in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management at Hawassa University, Ethiopia in the 2018-2019 academic year. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 purposively selected senior principals and supervisors. Results showed deficiencies in supports provided by supervisors to teachers in the three areas. The study suggests that in teaching and learning activities, supervisory support plays a very significant role in empowering teachers and contributing to improvements. So, the quality of teaching depends to some extent on the quality of supervision practices. Therefore, the Ethiopian government and stakeholders should give greater attention to improving the competency of supervisory staff, who are vital assets in striving for better quality education.

Introduction

In the era of globalisation, improving the quality of education is an increasingly important concern everywhere in the world. Education is critical for creating quality human capital which can respond to the demands of globalisation in social, economic, political, and technological activities (Fessehation & Peng, 2019; Abulencia, 2015; UNESCO, 2015a; Misra, 2012). However, education is beset with a multiplicity of changes and developments in sociopolitical, economic, technological, and academic spheres (Bongco & David, 2020; Eshetu, 2019; UNESCO, 2015b; Lunenburg, 2010; Aggarwal & Aggarwal, 1985). Accordingly, to attain the desired goals, education must attain an adequate quality.

In this regard, one of the most important indicators of the quality of education is the quality of teaching and learning processes which is determined by the quality and competency of teachers. Teachers who have an adequate subject and pedagogical knowledge UNESCO (2015b) are essential to ensure the quality of teaching-learning provided in schools. Recognising this imperative, UNESCO (2015b) recommended that all countries ensure that qualified, professionally trained, motivated, and well-supported teachers should be available to address today's education challenges in the world. Notwithstanding its importance, currently the quality of education in Ethiopia is under serious challenges. These include inadequate teaching competency and inadequate pedagogical content knowledge amongst teachers, inadequate support systems (Eshetu, 2019; UNESCO 2015b); and difficulties with language, especially English in use as the language of instruction, (Eshetu, et al., 2016).

An extensive literature has indicated that professional competencies of teachers, leadership, supervision and support system, students' characteristics, parental involvement, instructional resources, institutional factors, the language of instruction, and policies, are major factors contributing to the quality of teaching and learning. Among those, perhaps the most important factor, with a long-lasting impact on students' learning, is the teachers (UNESCO, 2015a; UNESCO, 2015b; Stronge, 2007). This indicates that to ensure the quality of teaching and learning in schools, teachers should continuously improve their teaching competencies. What a teacher learned at school, college, and the university is only a beginning of knowledge. In this regard, all teachers require continuing support through professional development programs, from government, development partners, supervisors, local administrative echelons, to enable them to reflect on better teaching practices, foster motivation and help them to adapt to the dynamics of educational changes resulting from technology, globalisation and other societal trends (Eshetu, 2019; UNESCO, 2015b).

Recognising the importance of a well organised and structured support systems in schools, numerous studies have illustrate how supervision can meet developmental needs of teachers, help ensure effective working conditions, and provide them with information and resources that facilitate classroom practices to ensure students' learning and achievement (Tsakeni, Munje & Jita, 2020; Pineda-Báez, Bernal-Luque, Sandoval-Estupiñan & Quiroga, 2019; Eshetu, 2019; Habtamu & Eshetu, 2019; UNESCO, 2015b; Zepeda, 2010; De Grauwe & Carron, 2007; Glanz, 2005; Nolan & Hoover, 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Beach & Reinhartz, 1989).

Indeed, improving the quality of teaching and learning is multifarious, and it demands high efforts and commitment of teachers and supervisors. However, teachers are in the centre of the teaching improvement process, and supervisors are considered as driving forces that stimulate, support, guide and facilitate the commitments of teachers towards the improvement of the teaching and learning process in the schools. Thus, to make the supervision practices productive and result-oriented, the competencies of supervisors in using sound principles, techniques, methods, models, tools, and processes of supervision are paramount. Similarly, the way teachers gain professional support from supervisors and apply their supervisor's feedback is vital in the outcomes of supervision practices (Firth & Pajak, 1998).

Although it has been more than eight decades since educational supervision was introduced into the Ethiopian education system, it has not been contributing as much as it could to improving the quality of teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools (Eshetu, 2019). Currently, supervision practices in Ethiopian primary and secondary schools are implemented at three levels. The first level of supervision is called school inspection which is carried out by the inspectorate division of district (*woreda*) education offices. These work units have been conducting a full inspection of all schools every one, two, or three years. Its main purpose is to evaluate the overall performance of the school improvement program and determine the status of each school based on a four-step

grading scale, successful (4); in progress (3); at the beginning stage (2) and in the preparation stage (1).

The second level of supervision is school-based or in-built supervision. This type of supervision is less formal and it has been conducted by school principals, department heads, and senior teachers with the purpose of mentoring and providing professional support to novice and under-performing teachers in the schools. The third level of supervision is cluster supervision. This is more formal and is carried out by a cluster resource centre supervisor, who is assigned to provide supervision support to 3 - 5 schools organized in the same cluster. Thus, this study has been focused on this type of supervision practice, based on the pragmatic perspectives of the research paradigm. Cluster supervision is a formal supervision system aiming to provide supervision support to teachers and other school personnel in administrative and pedagogic activities. This type of supervision exists in southern and eastern Africa, including Ethiopia (UNESCO, 2015b). The purpose of school clustering is organising 3 - 5 closer schools together, to provide administrative and pedagogic support to teachers and school leaders, by creating additional leadership structures closer to the school level (Giordano, 2008; UNESCO, 2011; De Grauwe, 2001). It is considered as an effective decentralised means of education management, with meaningful community participation in school affairs (Kasahun & Mitiku, 2017). In this regard, the roles of cluster supervisors are vital for ensuring curriculum implementation, providing support to teachers and school leaders, conducting research, program evaluation and monitoring, and coordinating the overall education quality improvement activities in the school system (Tefaw & Hofman, 2014).

In Ethiopian primary and secondary schools, cluster supervisors are expected to undertake three core functions: support school leaders and teachers in administrative and pedagogical activities, control the overall school activities and the implementation of different educational programs, and serve as liaison agents disseminating reforms and ensuring their implementation in schools. However, experience shows that concerns about supervision in Ethiopia have focused more on administrative matters than on pedagogical support for teachers (Eshetu, 2019; UNESCO, 2015b). According to information this researcher has obtained from reviewing literature and work by students in undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development programs at Hawassa University, many supervisors are working without having adequate foundation training, and the skills and knowledge required to support teachers in the schools. Furthermore, some individuals have been posted to supervisory positions without having any foundation training in education and teaching experience. For individuals to be posted to a supervisory position, being a teacher is not enough; they need to have adequate experience in leadership positions in schools. But some individuals who have been working in organisations other than educational institutions have become supervisors in schools after being demoted from their previous positions. Recognising these kinds of problems, this study aimed to identify gaps in supervision practices in Addis Ababa, Oromia, and the Southern Regional States, presenting evidence that contributes to reform in Ethiopia's education systems. Adopting a pragmatic perspective, this study seeks to answer the research question:

What are the gaps in supervision support for teachers, concerning teaching principles, teaching methods, and professional development in primary schools in Ethiopia?

Method

Research design

A mixed-methods design was deemed to be most suitable for this study because it is used to integrate more than one research approach to collecting data within a single study (David and Sutton, 2004). Data collection was accomplished during the first semester of the summer program in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Participants

The participants were selected to represent two different groups. Firstly, school principals and deputy principals who were receiving supervision support from cluster supervisors, and secondly, cluster supervisors who were providing supervision services for school principals and deputy principals. The participants were from three regions of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Oromia, and the Southern Regional States. The questionnaire respondents comprised 382 first-year students in the Department of Educational Planning and Management, College of Education, Hawassa University, including 142 principals and 240 supervisors, whilst the interviewees were six senior principals and six senior supervisors from the same program.

Data collection instruments

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert-style scale and contained 25 items divided into three themes, teaching principles (10 items), teaching methods (7 items), and professional development (8 items) (Appendix A). The content validity of the items was checked by a professor in the field at Hawassa University. The reliability of the items was tested after a pilot test was conducted at one primary school in Hawassa City. The aggregate reliability test value of Cronbach's alpha in the three dimensions was 0.90 (37 responses), so the instrument was considered reliable according to Santos (1999). The interviewing phase of the study used semi-structured and non-directive questions (Appendix B). Questions were based on the theoretical framework and the opinions of an expert in this field. With consent from the participants, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis using *MS Word*. Interview durations were approximately 50-60 minutes. During the interviews, some new questions for more discussions of diverse topics and understanding phenomena in depth were made as delineated by Glesne, (2011).

Data analysis

Data collected through questionnaires were analysed using *SPSS V20*. With this 5-point Likert type scale, the mean value was interpreted as 4.21-5.00 "Strongly agree"; 3.41-4.20 "Agree"; 2.61-3.4 "Partly agree"; 1.81-2.60 "Disagree"; and 1.00-1.80 "Strongly disagree",

(Arcagök & Yılmaz, 2020). To measure the statistically significant differences between variables an independent sample t-test, and one way ANOVA were computed. The analysis of the qualitative data was done according to qualitative narrative written techniques as delineated by Creswell (2014). Member checking of the accuracy of the transcriptions was enabled. School principal interviewees were anonymised as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6, and supervisor interviewees as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5 and S6.

Findings

Findings from questionnaires

To trace the gaps in supervisory support to teachers, three areas were examined. Results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceptions of respondents on supervisory support to teachers in three areas

Area	Respondent	n	Mean	SD	Aggregate				
					Mean	SD	df	t	p
Teaching principles	Principals	142	2.360	.676	2.357	0.672	381	.154	.674
	Supervisor	240	2.349	.661					
Teaching methods	Principals	142	2.519	.727	2.513	0.722	381	1.673	.351
	Supervisor	240	2.510	.717					
Professional development	Principals	142	2.447	.710	2.477	0.718	381	.673	.562
	Supervisor	240	2.488	.722					

Table 1 shows that both groups of respondents rated supervisory support to teachers on the three areas as "disagree", the aggregate mean value for all dimensions being between 1.81 and 2.60. Thus the majority of respondents perceived that supports provided by supervisors to teachers in primary schools of the three regions are not effective.

An independent sample t-test was computed to decide whether perceptions of supervisory support differed between the two groups of respondents. No significant differences were found for teaching principles, teaching methods, and professional development [$t(381) = .154, p > .05$; $t(381) = 1.673, p > .05$; and $t(381) = .673, p > .05$; respectively]. Thus, it is understandable that supervisors in primary schools in the three regions are not playing effective roles in supporting teachers with respect to teaching principles, teaching methods, and professional development.

A one-way ANOVA test was also used to determine whether there were significant differences in the perceptions of respondents (Table 2). Results show that there were no significant differences [$F(2-379) = 0.623, p > 0.05$; $F(2-379) = 0.194, p > 0.05$; and $F(2-379) = 2.195, p > 0.05$, respectively]. Perceptions of support given to teachers by supervisors did not differ across three regions.

Table 2: Perceptions of respondents on supervisory support to teachers across regions

Dimension	Variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig. 2-tailed
Teaching principles	Between groups	.041	2	.020	.623	.537
	Within groups	12.370	379	.033		
	Total	12.410	381			
Teaching methods	Between groups	.037	2	.018	.194	.824
	Within groups	35.726	379	.094		
	Total	35.763	381			
Professional development	Between groups	.282	2	.141	2.195	.113
	Within groups	24.334	379	.064		
	Total	24.616	381			

Findings from interviews

All principals and supervisors who participated in the interviewee had more than ten years experience in teaching, school leadership, and supervision. Findings are presented below under a heading for each dimension.

Teaching principles

To examine the supports being provided by supervisors to teachers on the dimension of teaching principles, some specific principles were considered in the interviews (Appendix B). All the twelve interviewees shared the concept that the application of these teaching principles requires extensive support from supervisors. However, most of them indicated that there are knowledge gaps in many supervisors' support concerning teaching principles in a classroom. Supervisor interviewees S1, S2, S4 and S5 considered that many supervisors focused more on administrative matters than on pedagogical supports for teachers. Regarding his role, S6 said that:

... I believe that a supervisor must guide and work with teachers. But in my supervision task, I did nothing on this aspect of pedagogical support to teachers. Because, of this my supervision plan does not consider the supports to be provided to teachers about the application of teaching principles. (S6)

On the other hand, school principal interviewees P1, P2, P3, P4 and P6 disclosed that most supervisors are busy in administrative tasks, collecting information using checklists prepared by the education office rather than providing pedagogic support to teachers, including teaching principles. For example, "many teachers in Ethiopian primary schools today entail extensive support from supervisors" (P1); because "they lack the pedagogical content knowledge PCK" (P3) and skills in the selection and application of the pertinent "teaching principles to each content of the lesson" (P4). In this case, supervisors must work with teachers to upsurge the "understanding of teachers' PCK including the application of the teaching principles in the system" (P6).

Concerning trends in the application of teaching principles in their schools, P5 and S3 noted that the application of teaching principles in the classroom was a novel concept to them. They didn't have information about whether supervisors should guide teachers to apply the aforementioned teaching principles in their schools. P5 said that:

... in my experience, I have to work with many supervisors; but until today [the day of interview], no supervisors had discussed with teachers or me about teaching principles and its application in my school. (P5)

Regarding skills in supporting teachers to apply teaching principles in the classroom, S1, S4 and S6 admitted skill gaps in how to guide teachers. S3 said:

... to tell you the truth, I didn't think about the above mentioned teaching principles to be applied by teachers in the classroom. (S3)

Teaching methods

Teaching methods are the driving forces that bridge and move the activities of teachers and students towards the desired goals. Teaching methods serve as routes through which knowledge, skills, and attitudes pass and reach students. Regarding the roles of supervisors in guiding teachers to use more diverse teaching methods, P1 confirmed that "... in the Ethiopian context, supervisors should guide teachers to use varieties of teaching methods because all teachers in the same school may not have apt skills in selecting and using varieties of teaching methods to the different content of the lesson" (P1). A few supervisors rarely "observe teachers in the classroom and suggest they use a variety of methods" (P4), but are not indicating the strategies on "how to select and use them in a different context" (P6). Some supervisors had seen teachers' annual or lesson plans and suggested use of a variety of methods (P1). During conducting the school visitation "my cluster supervisors said nothing to teachers to use varieties of teaching methods in the classroom" (P5).

In the same way, interviews with supervisors revealed knowledge gaps and a shortage of time to support and work with teachers to use different teaching methods. S1, S2, S3, S5 and S6 confirmed "... how many supervisors today have more knowledge than teachers in selecting and using apposite teaching methods in a specific lesson" (S1); "I am afraid about the supervisors' understanding to support teachers towards selecting and using different teaching methods to the different content of the lesson" (S5); "Sometimes I am encouraging teachers to use different teaching methods in the classroom" (S6).

In the same way, S1, S2, S3 and S5 said "... I and my colleagues don't think about pedagogical supports including selecting and guiding teachers to use appropriate teaching methods in the classroom" (S2); because "we don't have enough time to observe classrooms and discuss instructional processes" with teachers (S3). Most supervisors assigned to support teachers "focused on routine tasks" that are not associated with supervisory work (S1); the "time they devote to pedagogical support including selection and utilisation of teaching methods with teachers is very limited or not at all" (S5).

Professional development

Professional development in this article refers to all forms of learning experiences and deliberate activities that contribute to the improvement of teachers' competencies. Teachers should undergo staff development to learn new pedagogical skills or to improve existing skills. For these purposes, supervisors should be central to facilitating all aspects of teacher development schemes. Bearing this in mind, this study aimed to investigate the roles of supervisors in supporting teacher professional development activities.

It has been noted by all interviewed principals that supervision must play a key role in enhancing professional development for teachers. Supervisors should demonstrate conceptual, human, diagnostic, and technical skills in supporting teacher professional development goals. P1, P2 and P3 expressed their feelings, "... many supervisors are not competent enough to provide support to improve the professional development of teachers in the cluster schools" (P1); "I have had chances to work with many supervisors and I knew a few of them are competent and supporting teachers on professional development goals" (P6); "some cluster supervisors have difficulty understanding supervisory activities and demonstrating the skill gaps in generating novel ideas and providing support to teachers on the professional development activities in the schools they are assigned to supervise" (P2). Also, (P4) said:

... I am not confident to say that, some supervisors providing integrated support to teachers to improve the professional development activities in the school; because some of them are not competent to discharge supervisory roles in the professional development activities of teachers in the schools they are assigned to supervise. (P4)

Another participant (P3) said:

... currently, there is continuous professional development (CPD) program in all Ethiopian primary schools but it is not effective because cluster supervisors don't support the program as it is indicated in the CPD guideline prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2009. (P3)

On the same scenario P5 noted:

... presently there is a CPD program in all primary and secondary schools, but it is not well organised and supported by educational leaders including school principals and cluster supervisors. (P5)

In the same way, the interviewees complained that there are no policy guidelines stipulating the working relationship between teachers and supervisors concerning professional development activities in schools. Concerning this, interviewee principals P2, P3 and P4 noted, "... several teachers do not recognise supervision as a means to support their professional development" (P2); "... there is no clear policy or guidelines which delineate the working relationship between teachers and supervisors on professional development activities in the school" (P3); there is no clear policy that stipulates the roles, responsibilities, and accountability for cluster supervisors how to lead and support teacher professional development programs ..." (P4).

P2 claimed that:

... there is no apparent job description and job specification which defines the roles, and responsibilities of cluster supervisors regarding the teachers' and school leaders' professional development activities in primary or secondary schools. I think, this situation adversely affecting the teachers' continuous professional development initiative in primary schools throughout the country.

On the other hand, most of the interviewed supervisors indicated that the core role for supervision is supporting teachers to deliver quality instruction in the schools, though many factors are affecting their support for teachers in cluster schools. Some (S2, S3 and S6) noted, "... there is no clear position attributed to supervisory staff with clear-cut authority and responsibility in the structure of educational leadership and management including the strategies to manage professional development activities ..." (S2); "Supervisors [are] assigned to the supervisory position from the principal or teaching by the district education office" (S3); then "district (*woreda*) education offices prepare checklists and supervisors [are] supposed to follow up on the activities of schools depending on the checklists" (S6); "I think the checklists are considered as the job description of supervisors ... in the checklists there are no defined strategies [that] guide supervisors to support teacher professional development activities" (S6).

On the same concept, S4 and S5 said:

... professional development issues of teachers and the strategies to be used by supervisors are either neglected or too loose in the checklists prepared by the district education office. Therefore, as a supervisor, I am entirely focused on the list of activities given to me from head office. I believe that am not effectively supporting teachers towards professional development goals; because it is not clearly defined in the checklists that guide my activities in the schools. (S4)

... to tell you the truth, some school principals are reluctant to work with supervisors not only to support the professional development activities of teachers but also to the other school activities. This is because supervisors do not have a legally approved position in the school leadership and management. (S5)

Discussion

One of the dimensions this study has focused on is teaching principles that represent the fundamental theories and guidelines that teachers must apply during instruction to enable more meaningful learning. Application of teaching principles is demanding upon technical responsibilities and professional competencies of teachers. To examine the supports being provided by supervisors for this dimension, some specific principles were considered in the questionnaires and interviews. As a proponent of pragmatism, the author of this study believed that supervisors should be proficient in all aspects of pedagogical practices, including the application of teaching principles, because this entails extensive practical support for teachers from supervisors. However, data collected through questionnaires indicated supervisors in primary schools are not playing effective roles in supporting

teachers in the dimension of teaching principles. Similarly, interviews with principals and supervisors indicated that there are knowledge gaps in many supervisors' supporting of teachers concerning classroom teaching principles.

Considering the findings of this study, the author advises that supervisors should support teachers to implement basic teaching principles, for example connecting classroom instruction with the life experiences of students. Supervisors should support teachers in this principle, because students come to school with some sort of previously acquired knowledge and experience. Connecting lessons with students' life experiences helps them to assimilate new information (Delvin, et.al, 2012; Nolan & Hoover, 2005; Day, 1999). Likewise, to attain integration into society, students have to be taught about various existing conditions, so classrooms become active places to adjust students towards society's desired directions. Supervisors should also support teachers to prepare instruction based on the syllabus, because this principle helps teachers use the instructional resources (e.g. time, energy, materials...) effectively and efficiently. Similarly, supervisors guide teachers to integrate their instruction across different subjects, because concepts a student has acquired from one subject may assist easier understanding of similar concepts in other subjects (Matejka & Kurke, 1994). Finally, this study acknowledges that supervisors should guide teachers to create active engagement of students in the classroom, and work with teachers to attain an all-rounded development of students in the school.

Regarding supports provided by supervisory teachers to use a variety of teaching methods in classrooms, this study confirms that supervisors do not effectively support teachers in the schools. Teaching requires its practitioners to clearly understand what should be done to bring about best learning for students (Gerges, 2001). So teachers should be highly proficient in teaching skills (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Marshall, 1991), which include a sound knowledge of strategies and techniques available, and an ability to select and use, based on familiarity with the learners and an understanding of learning theories and their application (Felder & Brent, 2013; Alaka, 2011). In this regard, this study acknowledges that supervisors must support teachers to harmonise the classroom activities of both teachers and students by using appropriate teaching methods.

Regarding supports provided by supervisors for professional development activities, this study confirmed that supervisors do not effectively support teachers in the schools. Unfortunately, this study indicates that the main role of supervisors in primary schools of Addis Ababa, Oromia, and the Southern Regional States is the collection and dissemination of information between school and district (*woreda*) education offices. The method of disseminating across the three regions is the same, using checklists prepared by education offices. This kind of supervision is not developmental, psychological and evidence-based for supporting teachers' professional development goals.

Considering the findings, the author of this study acknowledges that quality supervision is an imperative for quality teaching, which is the prime instrument for attaining quality education. Consequently, supervisory staff should play very significant roles in shaping the ideas, habits, attitudes, interests, and values of teaching staff towards quality education. To

attain the desired improvement, supervision practices need to become more developmental, evidence-based and well planned to inspire teachers towards quality teaching and improved skills and attitudes.

Conclusions and implications

Considering the participants' outlook from questionnaires and interviews in the application of teaching principles in the teaching-learning process, supervisors are not providing the required professional support to teachers in primary schools in the regions of Ethiopia sampled. Supervision practices in these regions have been dominated by traditional approaches to supervision, such as the collection of information, too many tasks for supervisors being unrelated to supervision objectives (support, advice, guidance, ...), and supervisors being too busy on administrative tasks, so that pedagogical support to teachers became neglected. This situation adversely affects the quality of education in Ethiopian primary schools. Therefore, the author suggests that the government, development partners, international donors, higher education institutions, and those who are striving to achieve the UN's *Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations, n.d.) should recognise the problems and make supervision practices more developmental, more evidence-based and more practical, to better contribute to quality improvement in the Ethiopian education system.

On the other hand, supervisors should recognise that effective supervisory support concerning teaching-learning processes can create positive attitudes towards supervision practices. Based upon this study, the author suggests that supervisors and the education department which oversee the overall education system at local and national levels, must understand the underlying reasons for undertaking the supervision function, as interviewees have identified policy gaps. The author suggests that government should have a clear policy which defines the organisation and structure of supervision practices throughout Ethiopia, with clearly and logically defined job descriptions for supervisors, principals, and teachers. A well-defined job description can reduce role conflict between supervisors and principals, and also separate administrative tasks from pedagogical tasks, to allow supervisors to concentrate on crucial pedagogical issues rather than be overly focused on urgent administrative tasks.

Regarding the supervisory support for teachers to use a variety of teaching methods in the classroom, this study confirmed that supervisors do not effectively support teachers in the three regions included in this study. In the instructional process, the teaching method considered as the lifeblood which makes teaching interesting for learners. To design and select appropriate teaching methods for specific lessons teachers should have skills and knowledge. Also, the teacher's creativity, flexibility, commitment, and self-assessment must be taken into account. As it is indicated in the introductory section, many teachers have gaps in pedagogical skills to do so. Therefore, the federal and regional governments, national and international partners, universities and colleges of education should create different mechanisms to improve the capacity of cluster supervisors in introducing new approaches of supervision practices and models used to support teachers to use a variety

of teaching methods depending on the content, objectives and the context to which teaching-learning process carried out.

It has been acknowledged that there is a direct relationship between supervision and the professional development of teachers. However, from this study it could be concluded that primary school teachers have not been supported effectively with respect to professional development. The author believes that supervisors should not always be the designers of professional development goals for teachers; individual teachers should have scope to plan and design their professional development goals. In this context, one role for supervisors is to help teachers explore all possible alternatives and plans for their career development.

The findings from this study provide evidence that the efforts made by the government to date to improve supervision practices in Ethiopian schools have been prescriptive and inadequate. Accordingly, this study suggests that supervisory support plays a significant role in empowering teachers, which contributes to the improvements in teaching and learning processes. In this regard, the quality of teaching depends to some extent on the quality of supervision practices, which in turn depend on the quality of supervisors. Therefore, the Ethiopian government and stakeholders should give greater attention to improving the competency of supervisory staff, who can be vital assets in striving to obtain a better quality education at primary and secondary levels in Ethiopia.

References

- Abulencia, A. S. (2015). The unraveling of K-12 Program as an education reform in the Philippines. *Sipatahoenan: South-East Asian Journal for Youth, Sports & Health Education*, 1(2), 229-240.
<http://journals.mindamas.com/index.php/sipatahoenan/article/view/689>
- Alaka, A. M. (2011). Learning styles: What difference do the differences make? *Charleston Law Review*, 5(2), 133-172. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1675168>
- Aggarwal, S. C. & Aggarwal, S. (1985). The management of manufacturing operations: An appraisal of recent developments. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 5(3), 21-38. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb054741>
- Arcagök, S. & Yılmaz, C. (2020). Intercultural sensitivities: A mixed methods study with pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 1-18.
<http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/arcagok.pdf>
- Beach, D. B. & Reinhartz, J. (1989). *Supervision: Focus on supervision*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Bongco, R. T. & David, A. P. (2020). Filipino teachers' experiences as curriculum policy implementers in the evolving K to 12 landscape. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 19-34. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/bongco.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. [6th ed.]
<https://www.pearson.com.au/products/Creswell-John-W/Creswell-J/Educational-Research-Planning-Conducting-and-Evaluating-Quantitative-and-Qualitative-Research-eBook/9780134519395>

- Day, C. (1999). Researching teaching through reflective practice. In J. J. Loughran (Ed.), *Researching teaching: Methodologies and practices for understanding pedagogy* (pp 215-232). London: Falmer. <https://www.routledge.com/Researching-Teaching-Methodologies-and-Practices-for-Understanding-Pedagogy/Loughran/p/book/9780750709477>
- David, M. & Sutton, C. D. (2004). *Social research: The basics*. London: SAGE.
- Delvin, M., Kift, S., Nelson, K., Smith, L. & McKay, J. (2012). *Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Practical advice for teaching staff*. Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. <http://www.lowses.edu.au/assets/Practical%20Advice%20for%20Teaching%20Staff.pdf>
- De Grauwe, A. (2001). *School supervision in four African countries: Vol. I: Challenges and reforms*. Paris: UNESCO: IIEP. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000124823/PDF/124823eng.pdf.multi>
- De Grauwe, A. & Carron, G. (2007). *Reforming school supervision and support for quality improvement: Module 7: Alternative models in reforming school supervision*. Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000215935>
- Eshetu, M. (2019). Assessment of the competencies of supervisors and their roles in primary and secondary schools of Sidama Zone, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(6), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijhss.11.6.1>
- Eshetu, M., Mebratu, M., Tesfaye, A. & Yohannes, Y. (2016). Perception of students and English language teachers towards English language instruction: The case of schools in Sidama Zone, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 8(4), 1-9. https://issuu.com/ijhss/docs/vol_8_no_4_-_august_2016
- Felder, R. M. & Brent, R. (2013). Understanding student differences. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94(1), 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2168-9830.2005.tb00829.x>
- Fessehation, P. W. & Peng, P. (2019). Social justice and equity in Eritrean schools: Lessons from school principals' experiences. *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(4), 1143-1159. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/fessehation.pdf>
- Firth, G. R. & Pajak, E. F. (1998). *Handbook of research on school supervision*. New York: Macmillan.
- Gerges, G. (2001). Factors influencing pre-service teachers' variation in use of instructional methods: Why is teacher efficacy not a significant contributor? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 28(4), 71-88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23478317>
- Giordano, E.A. (2008). *School clusters and teacher resource center*. Paris: UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000159776/PDF/159776eng.pdf.multi>
- Glanz, J. (2005). Action research as instructional supervision: Suggestions for principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 89(643), 17-27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650508964303>
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. 4th ed. Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. [5th ed.] <https://www.pearson.com/us/highereducation/program/Glesne-Becoming-Qualitative-Researchers-An-Introduction-5th-Edition/PGM214061.html>
- Glickman, C. D, Gordon, S. P. & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (1998). *Supervision of instruction: A developmental approach* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Habtamu, G. & Eshetu, M. (2019). Analysis of the supervisory support to teachers in primary and secondary schools of Sidama zone, Ethiopia. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 24(10), 45-51. <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2024%20Issue10/Series-11/G2410114551.pdf>

- Kasahun, T. & Mitiku, B. (2017). Practices of primary schools cluster supervision: The case of Jimma Town Primary Schools in Ethiopia. *European Scientific Journal*, 13(17), 124-151. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n17p124>
- Kolb, A. Y. & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4(2), 193-212. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMLE.2005.17268566>
- Lunenburg, F. C. (2010). Forces for and resistance to organizational change. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, 27(4), 1-10. <http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Lunenburg,%20Fred%20C.%20Forces%20For%20and%20Resistance%20to%20Change%20NFEASJ%20V27%20N4%202010.pdf>
- Marshall, C. (1991). Teacher' learning styles: How they affect student learning. *Clearing House*, 64(4), 225-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1991.9955852>
- Matejka, K. & Kurke, L. B. (1994). Designing a great syllabus. *College Teaching*, 42(3), 115-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.1994.9926838>
- Misra, S. (2012). Implications of globalization on education. *Romanian Journal for Multidimensional Education*, 4(2), 69-82. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1800740>
- Nolan, J. J. & Hoover, L. A. (2005). *Teacher supervision and evaluation: Theory into practice* (Revised ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. <https://archive.org/details/teachersupervisi0000nola#maincontent>
- Pineda-Báez, C., Bernal-Luque, R., Sandoval-Estupiñan, L. Y. & Quiroga, C. (2019). Challenges facing novice principals: A study in Colombian schools using a socialisation perspective. *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(1), 205-222. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/pineda-baez.pdf>
- Santos, J. A. R. (1999). Cronbach's alpha: A tool for assessing the reliability of scales. *Journal of Extension*, 37(2), 1-5. <https://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/tt3.php>
- Sergiovanni, T. J. & Starratt, R. (2002). *Supervision: A redefinition* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. [9th ed.] <https://www.mheducation.com/highered/product/supervision-redefinition-sergiiovanni-starratt/M9780073378664.html>
- Stronge, J. H. (2007). *Qualities of effective teachers* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. [3rd ed.] <https://shop.ascd.org/productdetailcross.aspx?productId=207705549&Qualities-of-Effective-Teachers,-3rd-Edition>
- Sullivan, S. & Glanz, J. (2000). *Supervision that improves teaching: Strategies and techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc. [4th ed.] <https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/supervision-that-improves-teaching-and-learning/book239339>
- Tesfaw, T. A. & Hofman, R. H. (2014). Relationship between instructional supervision and professional development. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 13(1), 82-99. <http://iejcomparative.org> <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/IEJ/article/view/6888>
- Tsakeni, M., Munje, P. N. & Jita, L. C. (2020). Instructional leadership sensemaking for science and maths in South African multi-deprived middle schools. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 345-364. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/tsakeni.pdf>

- UNESCO (2011). *Reforming school supervision for quality improvement: Module 2: Roles and functions of supervisors*. Paris: UNESCO.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000215929>
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2015a). *The challenge of teacher shortage and quality: Have we succeeded in getting enough quality teachers into classrooms?* Policy Paper 19. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/challenge-teacher-shortage-and-quality-have-we-succeeded-getting-enough-quality-teachers-classrooms>
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2015b). *Investing in teachers is investing in learning: A prerequisite for the transformative power of education*. Background paper for the Oslo Summit on Education for Development. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/investing-teachers-investing-learning-prerequisite-transformative-power-education>
- United Nations (n.d.). *Sustainable development: The 17 goals*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Zepeda, S. J. (2010). *Instructional supervision: Applying tools and concepts* (3rd ed.). New York: Eye on Education. [4th ed, 2017] <https://www.routledge.com/Instructional-Supervision-Applying-Tools-and-Concepts/Zepeda/p/book/9781138649347>

Appendix A: Survey items

- Directions: Dear respondent,
 Please read each item carefully. Then put a “√” mark under suggested alternatives which most likely represent your opinion within the boxes as:
 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Undecided; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Dimension one: Teaching principles						
Item	Supervisors support teachers to:	1	2	3	4	5
1	connect instruction with the life experience of the student					
2	relate instruction to life in society					
3	apply instruction to the real-life situation of learners					
4	prepare instruction based on the syllabus					
5	integrate instruction in different subjects					
6	increase the role of students in their learning					
7	make instruction bring all-rounded development for students					
8	base instruction on students' abilities and learning pace					
9	make the instruction existing and clear to students					
10	use continuous assessment of learning					
Dimension two: Teaching methods						
Item	Supervisors support teachers to:	1	2	3	4	5
1	design suitable teaching methods based on the lesson					
2	use a variety of teaching methods based on the objectives					
3	use instructional technology in the classroom					

4	become familiar with the updated school curriculum					
5	be involved in the curriculum improvement process					
6	use research findings to improve the teaching process					
7	carry out different co-curricular activities in the school					
Dimension three: Professional development						
Item	Supervisors support teachers to:	1	2	3	4	5
1	be aware of current education policies, programs and strategies					
2	self-learning activities to update their professional experience					
3	improve professional growth through in-service training					
4	identify and plan their professional development needs					
5	conduct action research to solve problems affecting their work					
6	apply professional development activity based on their plan					
7	share experience with colleagues					
8	use feedback from others regularly					

Appendix B 1: Interview items for school principals

- How supervisor support teachers to apply the following teaching principles in your school?
 - connect instruction with the life experience of the student
 - prepare the instruction based on the syllabus.
 - integrate instructions on different subjects
 - increase the role of the students in the instruction
 - make instruction to bring all-rounded development pupils
 - make the instruction based on the students' abilities and learning pace
 - make the instruction existing and clear to students, etc.
- What are the practices being performed by supervisor/s in supporting teachers to use different teaching methods in your school?
- What are the practices being performed by supervisor/s in supporting teachers to enhance the teachers' professional development activities in your school?

Appendix B 2: Interview items for supervisors

- How do you support teachers to apply the following teaching principles in the classroom?
 - connect instruction with the life experience of the student
 - prepare the instruction based on the syllabus
 - integrate instructions on different subjects
 - increase the role of the students in the instruction
 - make instruction to bring all-rounded development pupils
 - make the instruction based on the students' abilities and learning pace
 - make the instruction existing and clear to students, etc.

2. What are the practices you are performing to support teachers to use different teaching methods in the schools?
3. What are the practices you are performing to support teachers to enhance the teachers' professional development activities in the schools?

Eshetu Mandefro is an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management in the Department of Educational Planning and Management, College of Education, Hawassa University, Ethiopia. His research interests include teaching and learning, professional development, leadership, supervision, school improvement, language and literature, technology in education, curriculum, research methods and teacher training. Email: eshe1974@gmail.com

Please cite as: Eshetu, M. (2020). Identifying improvements in supervision practices in Ethiopian primary schools: A pragmatic perspective. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(3), 866-882. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/eshetu.pdf>