

A Study on Instructional Supervision by Principals in Type 2 and Type 3 Schools in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to examine how principals engage in instructional supervision in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka. Three research questions were used to guide the study to a rational conclusion. Mixed-method approach was adopted in the study to triangulate data. A questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedules were used to obtain data from 150 teachers, 10 principals and 10 section heads in 10 selected Type 2 and Type 3 schools using the simple random sampling techniques. Tables, percentages and graphs were used to analyze quantitative data and the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis in order to address the research questions. The findings revealed that all principals in Type 2 and Type 3 schools have positive perceptions about the role of instructional supervision and have formed an instructional supervisory team including the principal in their schools. However, the study revealed that the majority of principals in Type 2 and Type 3 schools do not engage in instructional supervision on account of major administrative duties forced upon them. The study further revealed that the existing internal supervisory team, which engages in instructional supervision, does not conduct post observational discussions which help teachers to identify their strengths and the areas that need further improvement. It is, therefore, recommended that the principals need to carry out adequate instructional supervision of teachers to improve their teaching skills and professional development.

Keywords: Instructional supervision, internal supervision, professional development

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Introduction

Human resources are very important to an organization than any other resource. Instructional supervision has been identified as the most important mechanism and a key factor with regard to the professional development of teachers. Further, it has been found that the main purpose of instructional supervision is to support teachers to identify their strengths, areas that need improvement and thereby improve their teaching skills which will directly influence the educational performance of students (Zepeda, 2007). Farrell (2011) mentions that classroom observation is one of the most common ways of reflecting on pedagogical practices which can help teachers evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. The success of the school is mostly dependent on the principal's ability to supervise the teachers to explain instructional goals and work as a team to improve classroom instruction (Blasé et al., 2010; Smylie, 2010). According to Kutsyuruba (2003), there are different approaches in instructional supervision. They have been recognized as clinical supervision, peer coaching, cognitive coaching and mentoring. Implementing different supervisory approaches is essential not only to help teachers but also to provide an alternative to administrators and schools. The widely-used approaches to instructional supervision (formative evaluation) are categorized as clinical supervision, collaborative supervision (peer coaching, cognitive coaching, and mentoring), self-reflection (self-directed development), professional growth plans, and portfolios (Alfonso & Firth, 1990; Clarke, 1995; Poole, 1994; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Zepeda, 2007).

Anderson et al. (1980) recognized instructional supervision as one of the most important tools that can be used in building effective professional development of teachers. They further emphasize that there is a direct relationship between instructional supervision and the professional development of teachers.

Sergiovanni (1995) declared the importance of building a dialogue between the supervisor and supervisee to express their views freely. Sergiovanni (1995) further emphasized that supervision should not be done to find fault with teachers. It should be focused on providing necessary feedback to teachers so that they can overcome challenges and weaknesses. Supporting this notion, Anderson and Snyder (1993) highlight that the success of professional development of teachers depends on the mutual dialogue of the supervisor and the supervisee. According to them, the mutual dialogue particularly helps the supervisee to present their views regarding instruction. Goldhammer et al. (1980) and Cogan's contextual clinical supervision model includes classroom observation, data collection, analysis strategy, planning conference, post-observation conference, and post-conference analysis. Accordingly, educational researchers identify instructional supervision as a valuable tool that can be used to understand classroom realities and thereby achieve a high level of educational achievement in students. Principals as effective leaders of the twenty-first century schools need to maintain good rapport with school

stakeholders including teachers in making effective decisions that affect the whole school (Akinbode & Shuhumi, 2018).

In this connection school principals can use instructional supervision as an effective tool in order to enhancing the professional development of teachers. As stated by Orbeta and Decano (2019) educational initiatives such as instructional supervision and observation can be crafted to intensify students' performance. The state schools in Sri Lanka are classified into four types. They are Type 1AB, Type 1C, Type 2 and Type 3 which cater to the demands of the students who want to study at various levels and prepare for various examinations under various subject streams. While Type 1AB and Type 1C provide education from primary level to grade 13, Type 2 and Type 3 schools provide education from primary level to grade 11 only. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the role of instructional supervision of principals working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka. This study looks at the instructional supervision role by school principals on the pedagogical practices and professional development of teachers in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka.

Statement of the problem

The main purpose of instructional supervision is to support teachers to identify their strengths, areas that need improvement and thus improve their teaching skills which directly advance students' educational performance. Further, it has been found that there is a direct relationship between instructional supervision and the professional development of teachers. Researchers believe that principals as instructional leaders in the school are supposed to engage in instructional supervision as frequent instructional discussions always help teachers to share their experiences and thereby support professional development. Therefore, the principal as an instructional leader of the school should motivate teachers by engaging in instructional supervision, holding post observational conferences and providing feedback which is necessary for teachers to enhance skills with regard to classroom teaching. However, there is a growing concern about the little attention given to instructional supervision by principals working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka. From the recent past the continuous poor academic performance of students in Type 2 and Type 3 schools has been a subject of concern for stakeholders of education in Sri Lanka. The decline in quality of education in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka could be a result of the lack of attention and commitment concerning principals' instructional supervision. To date, research into this field in the country has focused more on the process of external supervision rather than how the principals engage in instructional supervision as internal instructional supervisors in the school. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the role of principals as instructional supervisors working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine how principals engage in instructional supervision in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify how principals of Type 2 and Type 3 schools perceive the concept of instructional supervision
2. Find out how principals of Type 2 and Type 3 schools engage in instructional supervision and
3. Examine problems principals face when engaging in instructional supervision.

Research questions

The following research questions are raised to direct this study.

1. How do principals of Type 2 and Type 3 schools perceive the concept of instructional supervision?
2. How do principals of Type 2 and Type 3 schools engage in instructional supervision?
and
3. What type of problems/challenges do principals face when engaging in instructional supervision?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey in which both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were applied. Accordingly, the mixed methodology was employed in this study. As explained by Newby (2010) mixed methods research is becoming an increasingly popular approach in the fields of sociology, psychology, education and health sciences. Supporting this Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) stated that the combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone can provide. As explained by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) combining quantitative and qualitative approaches within different stages of the research process is possible. Accordingly, two phases of the study, a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase were included in the research design. The following diagram shows the research design of the current study.

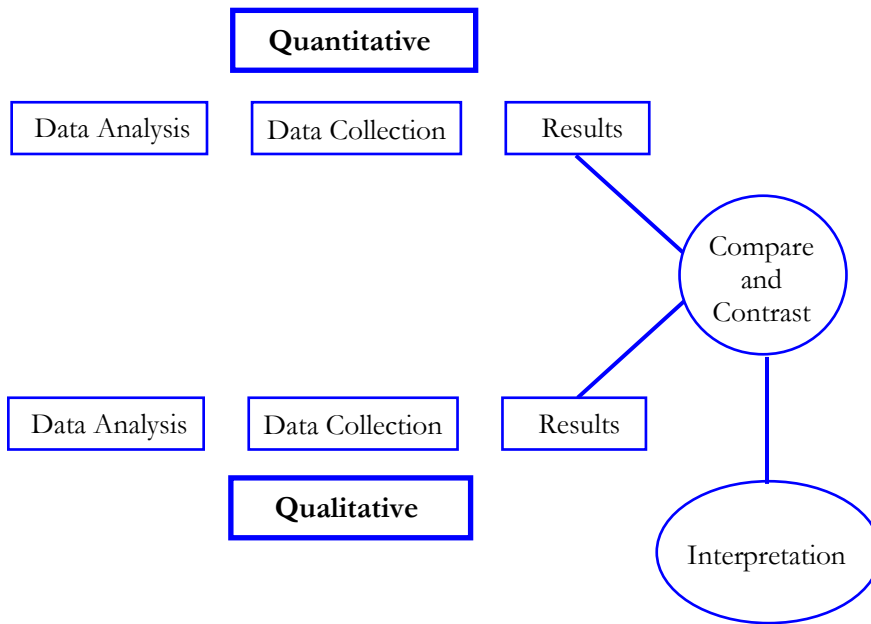


Figure 1. Mixed-Method Research Design approach – Adopted from Creswell 2012

Study Sample

The following table shows the total number of study samples of the current study

Table 1

Study Sample

School Type	School Sample	Principal Sample	Teacher Sample	Sample of Section Heads
Type 2	05	05	75	05
Type 3	05	05	75	05
Total	10	10	150	10

Accordingly, the study sample included 150 teachers randomly selected from 10 government Type 2 and Type 3 schools, 10 school principals, and 10 section heads.

Data collection instruments

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the necessary data and information. Accordingly, the instruments used for data collection were researcher-developed questionnaires for teachers and semi-structured interview schedules for principals and section heads. As mentioned by Cohen et al. (2008) the questionnaire is one of the most important data collection instruments as it plays a significant role in terms of collecting a wide range of data from a large sample unit. They further mentioned that there are different types of questionnaires such as close-ended, open-ended, structured and unstructured and the researchers can use any type of questionnaire depending on the aim and nature of the study.

The items selected for the questionnaire and interview in the current study were focused on four main elements related to instructional supervision particularly the concepts such as classroom observation, analysis technique, post-observation conference and post-conference analysis. The teacher questionnaire had two sections. Section A contained items regarding the respondent's profile while section B had two sub-sections designed to identify principals' instructional supervisory roles. The teacher questionnaire consisted of 20 items that covers the areas of principals' instructional supervision role as perceived by the teachers. Four-point scale with a response mode of A = Always (4 points), S = Sometimes (3 points), R = Rarely (2 points) and N = Never (1 point) was used to measure the item responses. The respondents to the teacher questionnaire were requested to indicate by ticking (√) in the appropriate boxes, the response applicable to the items.

In addition to the questionnaire survey with teachers, interview was also used to collect qualitative data. The interview can be identified as one of the most popular data collection instruments among researchers. Kvale and Brinkmann (1996) identified interviews as an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of interest. As they explain interviews help create knowledge through exchanging ideas and views on the topic or issue being studied. Discussing the subject of interviews Opie (2004) stated that more useful information regarding an issue being studied can be gathered through interviews. According to Creswell (2003), semi-structured interview is deemed the most appropriate way to obtain in-depth information about the experience of individuals. Therefore, the semi-structured interview was selected as a data collection technique to obtain data and information from individual principals and sectional heads about principals' instructional supervision roles. Hence semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals and section heads. Altogether 10 questions were included in the interview schedule for principals and section heads.

The instruments were pilot tested to make sure about the validity and reliability. Two research assistants were trained in administering the questionnaire. The consent of

the principals of the selected 10 Type 2 and Type 3 schools was obtained and a questionnaire was administered to the teachers in the schools. The principals and section heads were interviewed by the researcher herself. Respondents were properly guided to avoid misunderstanding of the purpose of the study. The exercise was completed within three weeks.

Data analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the main data. According to researchers, mixed methods research entails a combination of ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ approaches to generate a more accurate and adequate understanding of social phenomena than using only one of these approaches. Accordingly, one of the common ways to describe a single variable is with a frequency distribution. Therefore, in the current study frequency distributions are shown as tables. Distributions are displayed using percentages of teachers’ responses in Type 2 and Type 3 schools selected for the study. In addition, Chi-Square (X^2) statistics have also been calculated where appropriate to investigate whether there is a significant difference among the responses of different categories of the schools. In particular, the significant difference was considered between actual value (the actual number representing how often principals engage in ten instructional supervision roles) and expected value (expected value is the value obtained based on contingency table according to the sample of 150 teachers) given by teachers for ten instructional supervision roles. Therefore, ten Chi-Square tests have been conducted to find out whether there is a significant difference in the response rates.

The results are evaluated based on “P” values. For example, if the P-value is less than 5%, it indicates that there is a significant difference between the actual value and the expected value. The Chi value was calculated using the following equation.

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

X^2 = Chi Value

O = Observed Value

E = Expected Value

Accordingly, the quantitative aspects of the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Daly et al. (1997) identified thematic analysis as a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the data that have been collected. Accordingly, interview data were analyzed thematically.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented in Tables 2 - 4. In this section, data presentation, analysis interpretations and discussion of findings are presented. In terms of the responses obtained to the question “How frequently does your principal observe your instruction” irrespective of school type, more than 74% of teachers from the entire sample responded ‘Never’. Compared to this, the percentages of teachers who had responded ‘Sometimes’ were less and amounting to 7.33%. Further, a Chi-Square calculation also indicated that there was no significant difference between school type and principals instructional supervision as the P-value is more than 5%. This situation has been shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Teacher Response to the Statement of how frequently does your principal observe your instruction

School Type	Teacher Responses								Total	
	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		No	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Type 2	5	6.66	7	9.33	12	16.00	51	68.00	75	100.0
Type 3	3	4.00	4	5.33	8	10.66	60	80.00	75	100.0
Total	8	5.33	11	7.33	20	13.33	111	74.00	50	100.0

This position has been further shown in figure 2 below.

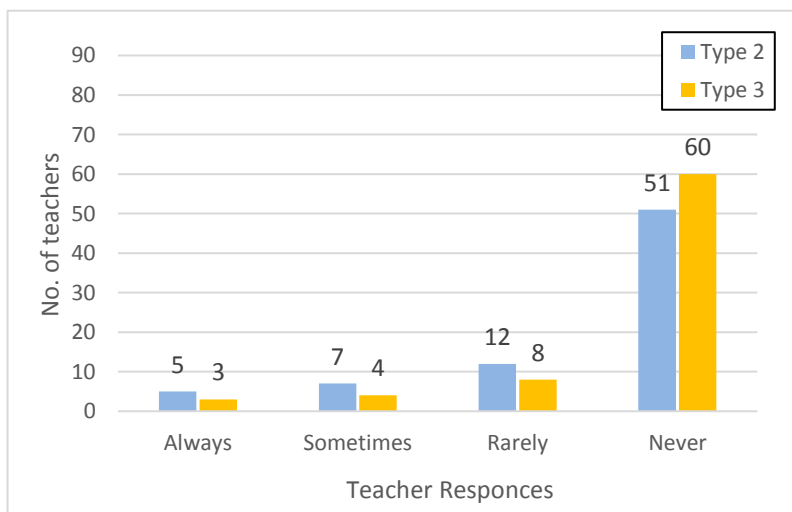


Figure 2. Teacher response to the statement of how frequently does your principal observe your instruction

Teachers' interviews in all ten schools of Type 2 and Type 3 also provided strong evidence that principals never engage in the observation of instruction. Teacher 1 from Type 3 school highlighted the importance of direct engagement in instructional supervision by school principals. Moreover, she further mentioned the unsatisfactory situation they have in terms of instructional supervision and observation. According to her,

“Supervision of teaching and learning is one of the most important tasks every principal should engage in. Because, I see this is the most effective method that the principals can use to identify both strengths and weaknesses of classroom teaching and learning and this of course helps teachers to rethink and re-plan the teaching-learning process to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, unfortunate thing is that the principals in our schools do not engage in instructional observation....”

(Teacher 1 from Type 3 school)

Expressing a similar view to the above response, Teacher 3 from Type 2 school said,

“Even though supervision of instruction has been recognized as an effective tool that can be used to enhance the professional development of teachers, I should say that principals in our schools find it very difficult to directly engage in this role and hence teachers in our schools do not have an opportunity to get feedback about the instructional process....”

(Teacher 3 from Type 2 school)

Further, a Chi-Square calculation also indicated that there was no significant difference between school type and principals instructional supervision as the P-value is more than 5%.

Concerning the responses obtained to the question “How frequently does your principal engage in the post-observation conference and provide necessary feedback in improving instruction” irrespective of school type 93.33% of teachers from the entire sample responded ‘Never’. Further, a Chi-Square calculation also indicated that there was no significant difference between school type and principals engagement in the post-observation conference and provide necessary feedback in improving instruction as the P-value is more than 5%. This situation has been shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Teacher Response to the Statement of how frequently does your principal engage in the post-observation conference and provide necessary feedback in improving instruction

School Type	Teacher Responses								Total	
	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Type 2	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	5.33	71	94.66	75	100.0
Type 3	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	8.00	69	92.00	75	100.0
Total	0	0.00	0	0.00	10	6.66	140	93.33	150	100.0

This position has been further depicted in figure 3 below.

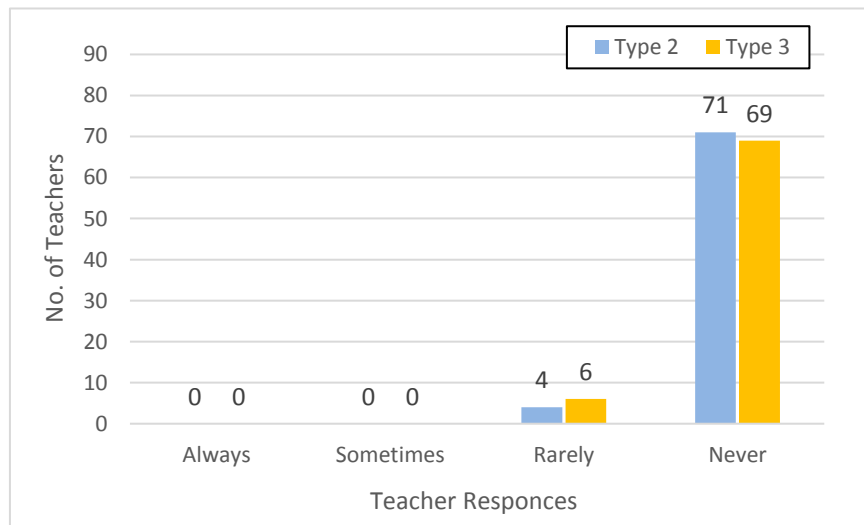


Figure 3. Teacher response to the statement of how frequently does your principal engage in the post-observation conference and provide necessary feedback in improving instruction

Teachers’ interviews in Type 2 schools also gave strong evidence that principals never engage in the post-observation conference and provide necessary feedback to improve the quality of instruction and professional development of teachers. Teacher 3 from Type 2 School stated that,

“Principals in our schools are very busy persons and they do not have time to observe our lesson and provide feedback. I strongly believe that this is one of the main reasons for the gradual decline of the

educational achievement of students and quality of education particularly in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in our country. Further, I think ...”

(Teacher 3 from Type 2 school)

Expressing a similar view to the above response, Sectional head 1 from Type 2 School said,

“Principals in our schools are very busy as they have to engage in general administration roles rather than instructional roles. Therefore, principals do not directly engage in instructional supervision roles and do not conduct post observational meetings and”

(Section head 1 from Type 2 school)

According to the above extracts of the responses of teachers and section heads of Type 2 and Type 3 schools, it is clear that the principals working in both categories of schools find it very difficult to engage in instructional supervision roles as they have to play several other general administration roles in their schools. Accordingly, it can be concluded that principals of Type 2 and Type 3 schools have not succeeded in managing their time and focused more on the role of instructional supervision.

Concerning the responses obtained to the statement ‘In your school how frequently internal supervisory team functioned’ more than half (52.66%) of teachers from the entire sample replied ‘Sometimes’ while another considerable percentage (34%) of teachers from the entire sample replied ‘Never’. The highest percentage responded to ‘Sometimes’ by type of school at 53.33% was from Type 3 schools while the highest percentage responded to ‘Never’ by Type of school at 37% was from Type 2 schools. A Chi-Square calculation also indicated that there was a significant difference between school type and function of an internal supervisory team as the P-value is less than 5%. The results of this analysis are given in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Teacher response to the statement of in your school how frequently internal supervisory team functioned

School Type	Teacher Responses								Total	
	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		No	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Type 2	0	0.00	39	52.00	8	10.66	28	37.33	75	100.0
Type 3	0	0.00	40	53.33	12	16.00	23	60.66	75	100.0
Total	0	0.00	79	52.66	20	13.33	51	34.00	150	100.0

This situation is depicted in figure 3 below.

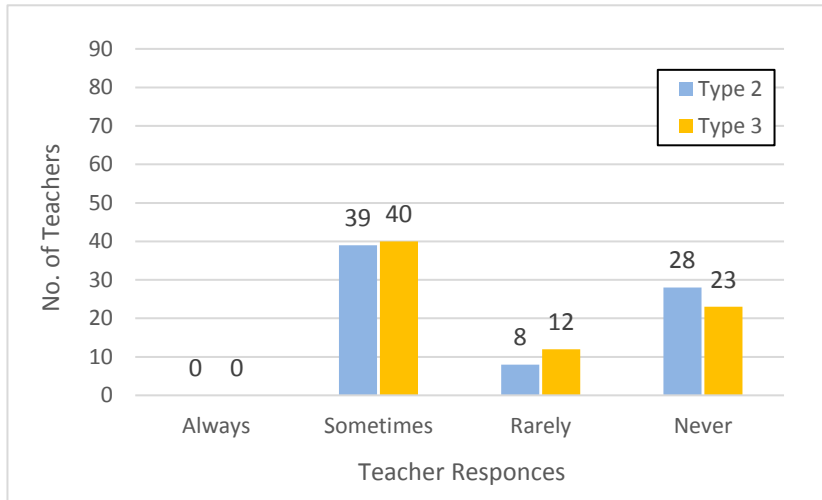


Figure 4. Teacher response to the statement of in your school how frequently internal supervisory team functioned

Principals’ interviews in Type 2 and Type 3 schools provided evidence that principals sometimes engage in instructional supervision and conduct post observational conferences to discuss teachers’ strengths and also the areas that need further improvement. As principal 1 from Type 2 school stated,

“I believe that formal regular instructional observation and feedback facilitates teachers to improve their teaching skills which in turn enhances the quality of the teaching-learning process in the schools. However, to be honest I am not in a position to engage in regular instructional supervision formally. However, I should say that I sometimes engage in instructional supervision that ...”

(Principal 1 from Type 2 School)

Expressing a similar view to the above response, principal 2 from Type 3 School stated that,

“I believe that one of the main factors of school success is supervision and observation of the instructional process. Therefore, whenever time permits I directly engage in instructional supervision role and conduct post observational conferences to provide the necessary feedback for teachers instructional improvement. However, I should say that it is very difficult to find time to engage in instructional supervision roles as we principals have to play more roles in regarding general administration. He further highlighted that, “An internal supervisory team was formed including me and responsibilities have been given to the head of the supervisory team and other experienced teachers in the team. However, I am experienced that most of the times teachers are not committed to undertake the responsibilities as they try to get transfers to so-called 1AB

schools in our country and this is a big challenge we principals have to face in these particular types of schools”

(Principal 2 from Type 3 School)

This was further supported by the interviews held with sectional heads in Type 2 and Type 3 schools where there was a perception “principals in our schools do not have time to engage in instructional supervision as they have to do much administrative works”.

(Sectional head 1 and 2 from Type 2 and Type 3 Schools)

According to the above extracts of the responses of principals of Type 2 and Type 3 schools, it is clear that whenever time permits they engage in instructional supervision roles and conduct post observational conferences to give feedback for teachers. However, this is at variance with the questions in the questionnaire where a large number of teachers from Type 2 and Type 3 schools responded that principals of their schools ‘never’ engage instructional supervision roles. The results further revealed that irrespective of school type, retention of qualified, experienced teachers has become a major challenge for principals working in both types of schools as teachers of these schools are trying to get transfers to “1AB schools” in the country.

This finding is important for several reasons. Firstly, if principals working in different categories of schools are not engaged in school instructional supervision roles to a satisfactory level, it may be seen as not providing necessary facilities and opportunities to improve the teaching skills of the teachers who work in the same categories of schools and obtain professional development. Secondly, it may be seen as not having a proper annual plan within the school in terms of the professional development of teachers and school development. As mentioned by Haris and Muijs (2008) the supervision and observation of the instructional process is very important concerning the improvement of quality of teaching and learning and also staff development. Furthermore, they highlighted how instructional supervision helps principals to identify both strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning and thereby introducing and implementing professional development program within the school. As stated by Cogan (1960), it is important to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional process. According to him, post-observation discussions need to be held soon after the instruction, without any delay as this helps both supervisee and supervisor to remember what has exactly happened during the instructional process and thus paving the way for more constructive feedback. As stated by Cogan in this way school principals can use instructional supervision as an effective tool to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the schools through raising aspirations of both teachers and students.

The findings further revealed that irrespective of school type retention of qualified, experienced teachers has become a major challenge for principals working in both types of

schools as teachers of these schools are trying to get transfers to “1AB schools” in the country.

Discussion

Findings of the study revealed that all the principals in Type 2 and Type 3 schools have positive perceptions of the role of instructional supervision. They believe that instructional supervision is one of the most important mechanisms and also a key factor in terms of professional development of teachers and hence internal instructional supervisory teams were formed including the principal in both types of schools. However, it was found from this study that the internal instructional supervisory teams have not functioned satisfactorily in both types of schools. Further, principals in these types of schools do not engage in instructional supervision roles due to heavy general administrative work which they are expected to perform in their capacities. The results reveal that when a properly functioning instructional supervision team is absent, it could negatively affect the quality of the instructional process and the decline of educational achievements of students. As mentioned by Leithwood et al. (2008) the supervision and observation of the instructional process is very important concerning the improvement of quality of teaching and learning as well as staff development. Moreover, they highlighted how instructional supervision helps principals and teachers to identify both strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning and thereby introducing and implementing professional development programs within the school. As stated by Cogan (1960), it is important to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the instructional process and post-observation discussions. This way school principals can use classroom observation as an effective tool to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as educational achievements of students.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the results of this study, it is evident that the principals working in both Type 2 and Type 3 schools have a positive perception in terms of instructional supervision and have formed internal supervisory teams within the schools. However, it was revealed that principals working in these particular types of schools do not directly engage in instructional supervision roles to a satisfactory level as they are compelled to engage in more administrative roles. Furthermore, it was found from this study that the instructional supervisory teams were not functioning satisfactorily in both types of schools. Therefore, teachers working in both types of schools do not have an adequate opportunity to identify their strengths and the areas that need to be improved in their pedagogical practices.

Therefore, it is recommended to enhance the pedagogical practices of teachers and their professional development through the implementation of instructional supervision roles by the school principals together with the members of the internal supervisory team.

Further, it is recommended that principals working in different categories of schools should be adequately trained about the instructional supervision strategies through seminars and conferences. These strategies will include classroom observation, analysis strategy, post-observation conference and post-conference analysis. This will have a direct positive impact on the professional development of teachers. Regular in-service training is recommended not only for principals but also for section heads and subject heads on how to conduct instructional supervisory programs.

It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should organize regular inspection programs of schools to examine the attitude of principals, section heads and subject heads. It is also important to determine the challenges they face regarding the implementation of the instructional supervision of teachers. Finally, it is recommended for future researchers to focus on the instructional supervision roles of principals working in these types of schools in other educational zones as this study was limited only to the Type 2 and Type 3 schools in the Trincomalee education zone.

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