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## **Heads of Department Supervisory Skills in Monitoring and Supporting Teachers' Planning, Delivery and Evaluation of Instructional Content in Public Secondary Schools in Nambale Sub-County, Kenya**

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## ABSTRACT

Effective curriculum implementation in secondary schools depends heavily on the extent to which heads of department monitor and support teachers as they plan, deliver and evaluate instructional content. This paper reports findings on the first objective of a broader mixed-methods study that examined heads of department supervisory skills on curriculum implementation in public secondary schools in Nambale Sub-County, Busia County, Kenya. Anchored on McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960) and Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Theory (1985), the study targeted 400 respondents comprising heads of department, teachers and school principals from 25 public secondary schools, from which a sample of 200 was drawn using Yamane's formula. Purposive sampling selected 63 heads of department and 12 school principals, while simple random sampling selected 125 teachers. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and an interview guide, and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) through SPSS for quantitative data, and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Findings revealed that heads of department inadequately monitored and supported teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content, registering an overall composite mean of 2.70 on a four-point scale. Respondents disagreed that heads of department regularly monitored the preparation of professional documents ( $M = 2.49\text{--}2.63$ ) and disagreed that they adequately monitored student assessment tools and records ( $M = 2.48\text{--}2.58$ ) and appropriate teaching strategies during instruction ( $M = 2.32\text{--}2.33$ ). However, respondents agreed that heads of department coordinated the acquisition ( $M = 3.00\text{--}3.01$ ) and use ( $M = 3.04\text{--}3.11$ ) of teaching-learning resources. Interview data corroborated these patterns, attributing gaps largely to high workloads, resource constraints and inconsistent enforcement. The study concludes that an imbalance in the utilisation of supervisory skills constrains heads of department from providing adequate direction and support to teachers, with implications for instructional continuity and learner outcomes. The paper recommends continuous professional development for heads of department, collaborative preparation and regular verification of professional documents, and the institutionalisation of structured monitoring schedules and standardised checklists.

**Keywords:** *Heads of department; supervisory skills; instructional supervision; curriculum implementation; secondary schools; Kenya*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Education remains a principal instrument through which societies pursue socio-economic, political and cultural development, and schools are central to fulfilling this mandate. School leaders are tasked with creating a working environment that enables effective teaching and learning through coaching and supervision (Pak, Polikoff, Desimone & Saldívar García, 2020). Within the school hierarchy, heads of department occupy a middle-level leadership position, situated below the principal and deputy principal (Fleming, 2019; Muriuki, Onyango & Kithinji,

2020), from which they connect the various elements of the school administrative structure (Nehez, Blossing, Gyllander Torkildsen, Lander & Olin, 2021).

Beyond their own classroom teaching commitments, heads of department carry a curriculum management mandate that requires them to keep abreast of developments in their subject, draw up programmes of work that align teaching with educational objectives, and decide on the resources used in implementing curriculum expectations (Shaked, 2023; Pak et al., 2020). Administratively, they are expected to supervise and monitor colleagues for policy compliance and to plan day-to-day departmental activities (Fleming, 2019; Muriuki et al., 2020). Their supervisory practices significantly shape how teachers plan, deliver and evaluate instructional content, and ultimately how well curriculum goals are achieved (Bancifra, 2022).

Nonetheless, gaps in supervisory skills including ineffective monitoring (Masawe & Majokava, 2022), insufficient feedback (Pak et al., 2020) and weak enforcement mechanisms (Ainsworth, Costa, Davies & Hammersley-Fletcher, 2024) have been associated with deviation from curriculum standards and, consequently, gaps in student learning (Kenya National Examinations Council [KNEC], 2022). Evidence from the United States (Nevenglosky, 2018; Pak et al., 2020), the United Kingdom (Ainsworth et al., 2024), New Zealand (Highfield, Thompson & Woods, 2024), South Africa (Khoza & Ngcobo, 2025), Namibia (Domingo, 2024), Lesotho (Tlali & Matete, 2021), Tanzania (Masawe & Majokava, 2022) and Rwanda (Niyibizi, 2024) consistently points to inconsistent monitoring, weak feedback and limited follow-up by middle-level supervisors as recurring threats to curriculum fidelity.

In Kenya, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC, 2015) has clearly assigned heads of department the role of monitoring and supporting teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content. Even so, persistent challenges remain. Martim and Likoko (2022) found low efficiency in supporting curriculum implementation as heads of department experienced burnout from combining teaching and administrative duties, while Anyango (2019) reported irregular preparation and inconsistent checking of professional documents such as schemes of work. KNEC (2022) linked frequent teacher absenteeism, failure to prepare schemes of work, ineffective time management and deviation from approved syllabi all falling under the purview of departmental supervision to a significant proportion of learners failing to attain benchmark performance levels across key subjects. Despite this evidence, limited empirical work has examined, within localised Kenyan settings such as Nambale Sub-County, how heads of department actually monitor and support teachers across the planning delivery evaluation cycle of instruction. This paper addresses that gap by reporting findings on the first objective of a wider study on heads of department supervisory skills and curriculum implementation.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Effective curriculum implementation depends not only on the availability of teaching and learning materials but, critically, on leadership and supervision that shapes instructional practice, upholds adherence to curriculum guidelines, and monitors the planning, delivery and evaluation of instructional content. Heads of department serve as the key instructional leaders charged with this responsibility (TSC, 2015). Yet they often operate under systemic constraints inadequate administrative support and heavy workloads while some teachers do not fully comply with curriculum guidelines, particularly where supervision is inconsistent. The resultant interruption of instructional continuity has been linked to poor learner outcomes, with a significant proportion of students failing to attain benchmark performance levels in core subjects. Despite these challenges, limited empirical evidence exists on the extent to which heads of department monitor and support teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content within the Kenyan context, and specifically within Nambale Sub-County. This study was designed to address this gap.

## **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The study sought to determine the extent to which heads of department monitor and support teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content in public secondary schools in Nambale Sub-County.

## **1.4 Research Question**

To what extent do heads of department monitor and support teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content in public secondary schools in Nambale Sub-County?

# **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960) and Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Theory (1985). Theory X assumes that employees are inherently averse to work and require close supervision, direction and control, whereas Theory Y assumes employees are self-motivated and thrive under participative, supportive supervision. Applied to heads of department, the theory illuminates the tension between directive monitoring (Theory X practices such as verifying professional documents and enforcing schemes of work) and supportive, collaborative supervision (Theory Y practices such as mentoring and joint planning) in shaping teacher compliance and performance. Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional

Leadership Theory (1985) complements this by framing the supervisor's role around three dimensions: defining the school mission, managing the instructional programme (which includes supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress), and promoting a positive school learning climate. This dimension of managing the instructional programme maps closely onto the study's first objective, providing a lens for assessing how heads of department monitor lesson preparation, coordinate resources and evaluate instructional delivery.

## **2.2 Supervisory Skills of Heads of Department**

Supervision in secondary schools falls substantially on heads of department, who monitor teachers' progress in curriculum implementation and adjust their approach depending on the situation (Loveline, 2020; Shaked, 2023; Gordon, 2023). Rasidi, Mydin and Ismail (2021), in a Malaysian study, identified self-awareness, the ability to communicate and lead change, instructional proficiency, and organisation and continuous improvement as key dimensions of teacher leadership relevant to departmental supervision. Because heads of department are considered the leading professionals in their subject area (Leithwood, 2016), they are well placed to direct teachers on learning objectives, teaching methods and instructional decisions (Shaked, 2023).

Alongside teachers, heads of department are expected to plan how schemes of work, assessment methods and examination criteria are prepared, while encouraging departmental lesson plans that support effective classroom practice (Namaulula, Kijana & Injendi, 2023). Where such collaborative planning and monitoring is weak, however, gaps emerge. Masawe and Majokava (2022) attributed failure to cover syllabi on time in Tanzania to inadequate time management, non-usage of schemes of work and lesson plans, and frequent teacher absenteeism all falling under departmental oversight. Niyibizi (2024), studying mathematics teaching in Rwanda, found inconsistent utilisation of schemes of work despite their pivotal role in sequencing lessons, resulting in syllabus coverage problems. In Kenya, Anyango (2019) documented a lack of uniformity in checking professional documents, which opened room for teachers to submit commercially obtained or borrowed schemes and lesson notes as their own.

## **2.3 Curriculum Implementation and the Role of Monitoring**

Curriculum implementation concerns how teachers deliver instruction and assessment using the resources specified in a curriculum (Nevenglosky, 2018), and it is centred on learners acquiring the prescribed knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Ross, 2024). Teachers, as the principal implementers, break curriculum content into teachable units (Katshuna & Shikalepo, 2023), a

process that requires competence and confidence in the tools, materials and methods available. Adherence to implementation guidelines ensures instructional strategies, learning activities and assessment practices remain aligned with learning objectives (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). This adherence is itself sustained through monitoring: departmental oversight of instructional planning (Alek, Fitria & Eddy, 2021), evaluation of students' progress and curriculum effectiveness (Katshuna & Shikalepo, 2023), and encouragement of current teaching practices (Aslam, Mushtaq, Noor, Maqbool, Khan & Sarfraz, 2024).

Where monitoring is weak, teachers may omit or substitute curriculum content according to personal preference, particularly under conditions of limited resources, inadequate training and insufficient administrative support (Nevenglosky, 2018). Pak et al. (2020) similarly found that inconsistent messaging from instructional leaders, including heads of department, left teachers struggling to balance prescriptive curriculum coverage against learners' needs. These findings underline the centrality of departmental monitoring and support to sustained curriculum fidelity.

#### **2.4 Empirical Review on Monitoring and Support for Planning, Delivery and Evaluation of Instruction**

Shaked (2023), studying department heads in Israel, found that middle leaders who drew on subject-matter expertise to direct teachers on learning objectives, teaching methods and instructional resources were able to align departmental practice with school goals, while also empowering teachers to take ownership of their instructional work. Similarly, Lowell, Fogelman and McNeill (2024) in the United States found that deep engagement in professional development and collaboration around curriculum materials strengthened teachers' understanding and use of those materials.

Where such engagement was absent, however, teachers struggled. Ainsworth et al. (2024) reported that intense external scrutiny in the United Kingdom narrowed heads of department's focus to compliance-driven, result-based improvement, diminishing their flexibility and, ironically, enabling unorthodox teaching practices adopted purely to satisfy inspection requirements. Khoza and Ngcobo (2025) in South Africa found that departmental monitoring was similarly compliance-oriented, driven by external pressures such as learners' progression to university rather than by internal instructional needs. In Kenya specifically, Martim and Likoko (2022) found that heads of department experienced burnout from combining teaching with departmental administration, constraining their capacity to support curriculum implementation, while KNEC (2022) linked failure to prepare and use schemes of work — an oversight function of heads of department — directly to weak learner performance in national assessments.

## 2.5 Research Gap

While prior studies have documented the challenges heads of department face in supervising curriculum implementation and have offered general recommendations, few have empirically examined, within a localised Kenyan sub-county setting, the specific extent to which heads of department monitor and support teachers across the planning, delivery and evaluation of instructional content. This study addressed this gap by focusing on Nambale Sub-County, Busia County.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), enabling the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to draw comprehensive conclusions on heads of department supervisory skills. It was conducted in Nambale Sub-County, Busia County, Kenya, which has 25 public secondary schools spanning national, extra-county, county and sub-county categories, and which was purposively selected owing to documented discrepancies in curriculum implementation (KNEC, 2022).

The target population comprised 400 respondents: 125 heads of department, 250 teachers and 25 school principals drawn from five departments Mathematics, Sciences, Humanities, Languages and Technical Studies found in every public secondary school in the sub-county. Using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 5% margin of error, a sample of 200 respondents was derived. Purposive sampling was used to select 63 heads of department and 12 school principals, while simple random sampling was used to select 125 teachers (one per department across the 25 schools).

Data were collected using structured, self-administered questionnaires for heads of department and teachers, and a semi-structured interview guide administered to school principals. The questionnaire's closed-ended section was organised around the study's objectives, with items on monitoring and support for instructional planning, delivery and evaluation rated on a four-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree), where mean scores of 1.0–1.9 were interpreted as strongly disagree, 2.0–2.9 as disagree, 3.0–3.9 as agree, and 4.0–4.9 as strongly agree. Content validity was established through expert review by university lecturers and supervisors, while reliability was established through a test–retest pilot in the neighbouring Teso North Sub-County, yielding a Pearson correlation coefficient above 0.7.

Following approval from Kibabii University, a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and clearance from the Nambale Sub-

County Education Office, questionnaires were administered and collected on the same day in each school, while interviews with principals were scheduled separately. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively (frequencies, percentages and means) using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data from open-ended items and interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically, with selected responses reported verbatim. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, assured confidentiality, secure data storage, and approvals from NACOSTI and relevant institutional review structures.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Response Rate

Table 1 presents the questionnaire and interview return rates achieved.

**Table 1: Response Rate**

| Respondent category | Sample size | Response rate |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Heads of Department | 63          | 63 (100%)     |
| Teachers            | 125         | 121 (96.8%)   |
| School Principals   | 12          | 10 (83.3%)    |

All 63 questionnaires dispatched to heads of department were returned (100%), while 121 of the 125 teacher questionnaires were completed and returned (96.8%). Of the 12 sampled principals, 10 were interviewed (83.3%), as two were unavailable owing to official school commitments. These response rates exceed the 50% threshold considered adequate for validity (Kothari, 2004), lending confidence to the findings reported below.

### 4.2 Extent of Monitoring and Support for Planning, Delivery and Evaluation of Instructional Content

Respondents rated five items measuring the extent to which heads of department monitor and support teachers across the planning, delivery and evaluation of instructional content. Table 2 presents the combined responses of teachers and heads of department.

**Table 2: Responses on Heads of Department Monitoring and Supporting Teachers in Planning, Delivering and Evaluating Instructional Content**

| Item                                                                                                                           | Respondent       | SA (4)   | A (3)    | D (2)    | SD (1)   | Mean        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|
| Regularly monitor preparation of professional documents (lesson plans, schemes of work, records of work, lesson notes)         | Teachers (n=121) | 12 (10%) | 39 (32%) | 66 (55%) | 4 (3%)   | 2.49        |
|                                                                                                                                | HODs (n=63)      | 9 (14%)  | 23 (36%) | 30 (48%) | 1 (2%)   | 2.63        |
| Coordinating acquisition of teaching-learning resources (e.g. textbooks, laboratory equipment)                                 | Teachers (n=121) | 29 (24%) | 68 (56%) | 20 (17%) | 4 (3%)   | 3.01        |
|                                                                                                                                | HODs (n=63)      | 12 (19%) | 41 (65%) | 8 (13%)  | 2 (3%)   | 3.00        |
| Coordinating the use of available teaching-learning resources                                                                  | Teachers (n=121) | 35 (29%) | 60 (50%) | 22 (18%) | 4 (3%)   | 3.04        |
|                                                                                                                                | HODs (n=63)      | 14 (22%) | 43 (68%) | 5 (8%)   | 1 (2%)   | 3.11        |
| Monitoring student assessment tools and use of assessment records to check curriculum progress (e.g. syllabus coverage, exams) | Teachers (n=121) | 10 (8%)  | 45 (37%) | 59 (49%) | 7 (6%)   | 2.48        |
|                                                                                                                                | HODs (n=63)      | 8 (13%)  | 24 (38%) | 28 (44%) | 3 (5%)   | 2.58        |
| Monitoring the use of appropriate teaching strategies during instruction                                                       | Teachers (n=121) | 5 (4%)   | 42 (35%) | 61 (50%) | 13 (11%) | 2.32        |
|                                                                                                                                | HODs (n=63)      | 2 (3%)   | 22 (35%) | 37 (59%) | 2 (3%)   | 2.33        |
| <b>Composite mean</b>                                                                                                          |                  |          |          |          |          | <b>2.70</b> |

Regular monitoring of the preparation of professional documents lesson plans, schemes of work, records of work and lesson notes was rated poorly by both teachers ( $M = 2.49$ ) and heads of department ( $M = 2.63$ ), with a majority of both groups disagreeing that such monitoring occurred

regularly. This suggests that, in most schools, teaching preparation is not consistently structured, weakening the instructional planning stage of curriculum delivery.

By contrast, coordination of the acquisition of teaching–learning resources such as textbooks and laboratory equipment was rated favourably by both teachers ( $M = 3.01$ ) and heads of department ( $M = 3.00$ ), and coordination of the use of available resources was rated even more favourably (teachers  $M = 3.04$ ; heads of department  $M = 3.11$ ). Nonetheless, a notable minority in both groups disagreed, suggesting that in some schools resource acquisition and use proceed without departmental approval or full departmental engagement, potentially resulting in materials that do not meet instructional needs.

Monitoring of student assessment tools and the use of assessment records to track curriculum progress including syllabus coverage and examinations was again rated poorly (teachers  $M = 2.48$ ; heads of department  $M = 2.58$ ), as was monitoring of the use of appropriate teaching strategies during instruction, which recorded the lowest means overall (teachers  $M = 2.32$ ; heads of department  $M = 2.33$ ). Taken together, the five items produced a composite mean of 2.70, indicating that heads of department inadequately monitored and supported teachers across the planning, delivery and evaluation of instructional content.

Interview data from school principals corroborated and contextualised these patterns. One principal explained that departmental schemes of work were compiled annually and certified before being submitted for record-keeping, with lessons expected to follow the approved schemes to ensure syllabus coverage. However, another principal observed that heavy workloads, tight timelines and performance-appraisal pressures led some teachers to download professional documents from commercial sites or borrow them from colleagues, editing only the title page — a practice that risks documents failing to reflect learners' actual entry behaviour or the practicalities of the specific classroom. A further principal noted that while heads of department regularly presented budgets and requisitions for learning materials, financial constraints often limited their ability to fully meet departmental needs, while another principal pointed to high workloads and limited staffing as constraining what heads of department could realistically accomplish beyond their own classroom teaching duties.

These qualitative accounts align with the quantitative findings: heads of department performed adequately in ensuring the availability of professional documents and coordinating resources, but fell short in verifying the preparation and substantive use of those documents, in monitoring assessment practices, and in observing classroom instruction. This pattern mirrors KNEC's (2022) finding that failure to prepare and use schemes of work, and deviation from approved syllabi, are linked to poor learner performance in Kenya. It is also consistent with Ainsworth et

al.'s (2024) finding in the United Kingdom that inadequate supervision permits compliance-oriented, unorthodox documentation practices that undermine the intended purpose of curriculum implementation, and with Nevenglosky's (2018) finding in the United States that teachers omit or substitute curriculum content where resources, training and administrative support are lacking.

Overall, the findings indicate an imbalance in how heads of department in Nambale Sub-County deploy their supervisory skills: they engage more readily in resource coordination a largely logistical function than in the closer, more time-intensive work of verifying professional documents, monitoring assessment practices and observing classroom delivery. This imbalance leaves gaps in the instructional planning, delivery and evaluation cycle that curriculum implementation depends upon.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The study concludes that heads of department in public secondary schools in Nambale Sub-County exercised inadequate monitoring and support of teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content, as reflected in an overall composite mean of 2.70. While heads of department performed reasonably in coordinating the acquisition and use of teaching-learning resources, they fell short in verifying the preparation of professional documents, monitoring assessment practices and observing instructional delivery. Because professional documents constitute the blueprint through which curriculum knowledge is disseminated and against which curriculum objectives are measured, this shortfall in oversight driven substantially by heavy workloads and resource constraints undermines the structural integrity of curriculum implementation and, by extension, threatens learner outcomes.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on these findings, the study recommends that:

- i. The Teachers Service Commission provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for heads of department to strengthen their capacity to monitor and support teachers in planning, delivering and evaluating instructional content, with particular attention to less-experienced heads of department who may require closer mentorship.
- ii. School principals ensure that professional documents are prepared collaboratively with subject teachers and are checked regularly at least weekly with particular emphasis on schemes of work, lesson plans and assessment records.

iii. Principals, deputy principals and heads of department institute regular departmental fora to sensitise teachers on improving their instructional practices and to reinforce accountability for curriculum coverage.

iv. Heads of department establish a structured monitoring schedule and a standardised checklist focused on performance indicators and learner activities, to guide the systematic collection of data on academic progress and curriculum implementation.

Future research could usefully replicate this study across other sub-counties in Kenya to enable comparative analysis, and could examine how existing Teachers Service Commission policy on the professional development of heads of department might be strengthened to keep pace with evolving curriculum demands.

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