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Beyond Numbers: Unveiling the Transition Experiences and Voices of Filipino Education Programme Supervisors

Abstract

This qualitative exploration is a follow-up study to the quantitative research published in a peer-reviewed international journal in 2023. Generally, the study delved into the transition experiences and preferences of 20 Filipino education supervisors in relation to their supervisory practices in over 80 Philippine public schools. Through validated open-ended interview questions, the responses were gathered and subsequently subjected to thematic analysis, which resulted in the emergence of the following themes: (1) the adjustments and challenges of the supervisors as they switched back from technology-assisted to in-person supervision; and (2) their preferred mode of supervision in the new normal of education.

Keywords: *face-to-face, in-person supervision, qualitative, thematic analysis*

Introduction

Beginning a school year in November 2022–2023 to August 2023–2024, the Philippine public schools under the Department of Education (DepEd) started opening classes with face-to-face modality as the primary mode for teaching and learning, consequently implementing in-person supervision for education supervisors. The said implementing guideline was specified in DepEd Order 22, series of 2023, which also provides detailed descriptions of onsite preliminary arrangements before the commencement of classes and face-to-face activities that the school stakeholders will partake in for the rest of the academic year. Likewise, education supervisors will carry out their supervisory duties and responsibilities in basic education institutions, from public elementary to senior high schools, by performing in-person supervision.

To define it, in-person supervision does not inherently exclude the power of technology but rather means that supervisors are in academic institutions most of the time to fulfil supervisory duties (Salva et al., 2023). In addition to examining the benefits and drawbacks of in-person supervision, which previous works of literature have already accomplished, it is also vital to scrutinise the methodology and research procedures that other scholars have employed. According to N. Patel and M. Patel (2019, p. 48), apart from getting acquainted with the process of choosing a specific procedure or the science of computing data, researchers “also need to know which of these methods or techniques, are relevant and which are not, and what would they mean and indicate and why”. The product of this scrutiny may result in better mechanisms for determining potential research gaps that necessitate further investigation. In recent years, researchers have used quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the issues pertaining to supervision. However, due to the limitations of the former, researchers eventually recommend employing the qualitative approach, chiefly because of its suitability in looking into the developmental supervisory practices of supervisors (Hoque et al., 2020). Nevertheless, “both of those two research methods have their own strengths and weaknesses, and it is exceedingly difficult to identify which research method is superior to the other” (Xiong, 2022, p. 956). It is unarguable that both research methods have their own pluses, equally contributing to the comprehensive exploration of an understudied topic. Given this ideology, the present researchers conducted a follow-up study that utilised a qualitative approach following their quantitative article on supervision in education.

Through this qualitative exploration, the researchers aimed to provide an in-depth analysis of the middling degree of supervisory challenges shown in the earlier quantitative study of Salva et al. (2023). The underlying factors and contextual details that contribute to the study's numerical findings were explored, specifically by seeking answers to this general question: *How do education supervisors describe their transition experiences from technology-assisted to in-person supervision?* This general question unveiled Filipino education supervisors' shared adjustments, challenges, and preferences as they transitioned from technology-assisted to in-person supervision. Published in "The New Educational Review", a peer-reviewed international journal, Salva et al. (2023) compared two datasets to determine the significance of differences between technology-assisted supervisory challenges in Philippine public schools. Thereafter, with the challenging process of monitoring and supervising curriculum articulation deduced from the evaluation of Filipino education supervisors, the extent of their experiences was further investigated in this follow-up study to prevent more complex supervisory issues in schools.

Research Methodology

Research Sample

For consistency purposes, the same cohort of Filipino Education Programme Supervisors, or education supervisors as referred to in this research, was invited to be the research participants. Aligned to the sample size utilised in the preceding quantitative research, 20 education supervisors also participated in this follow-up study, equally representing the two division offices in Cavite Province. Apart from assisting school heads and educators from over 80 public elementary to senior high schools for the academic year 2022–2023, the primary job description of these education supervisors "focuses on the articulation of a specific content area from one level to another" (Salva et al., 2023, p. 151).

Instrument and Procedures

The research instrument included open-ended interview questions that were cross-checked and validated before being distributed to each education supervisor. The questions were centred on the transition experiences of the participants from technology-assisted during the COVID-19 pandemic to in-person supervision after the peak of the aforementioned global health crisis. Upon the

fulfilment of the validation stage, the interview questions were administered using an online platform. The narratives of the education supervisors were continuously validated through respondent validation to ensure the credibility of the results.

Adhering to the ethical considerations that were practised in the earlier quantitative study, the researchers strictly observed similar procedures, such as submitting the required documents to obtain formal endorsements from two division offices, securing consent from the participants before the start of any data collection process, utilising pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants, observing voluntary participation to reduce potential risks, and reiterating the right to withdraw of the participants at any time without providing valid reasons.

Data Analysis

The transition experiences of education supervisors from two Philippine division offices were put into written text using either edited or verbatim transcription. The researchers transcribed the narratives and responses of education supervisors depending on their raw dataset. Conversely, the experiences of education supervisors were closely examined through the qualitative thematic analysis of Braun and Clark (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Based on the shared responses of the supervisors, the researchers gained familiarity with the transcribed data. Moreover, the significant words and meaningful statements from the transcriptions were coded and clustered into emergent themes, eventually substantiating the degree of supervisory challenges computed in the study by Salva et al. (2023).

Results and Discussion

The results of this qualitative exploration validated the significant changes in supervisory practices in schools, similar to the learning and teaching modalities in the post-pandemic era. From a two-year technology-assisted approach, the return to face-to-face classes this year calls for transitioning to in-person supervision. Therefore, the insights of the education supervisors on the adjustments and opportunities in fulfilling their responsibilities after the post-pandemic times are herein presented.

Transitioning from Technology-Assisted to In-Person Supervision: The Adjustments and Its Impediments

The reopening of the schools necessitates some adjustments in school governance and leadership. As seen in the descriptive results of this study, the education supervisors from the two divisions recognise the relevance of balancing instruction, safety, and the mental well-being of every student and school personnel. While it is of the utmost importance for instruction to be a top priority, health and safety must also be considered. The education supervisors know that for educational institutions to fulfil their commitment to provide quality education, all stakeholders' physical safety and mental well-being must be looked after. A participant uttered that one of the factors considered during the transition was the "need to reassess and be reoriented on how to deal with the teachers, especially with all their mental health concerns and physical readiness" (Education Programme Supervisor 2, Division Office B). Considering that "most teachers suffered mental breakdowns and depression during the pandemic" (Education Programme Supervisor 6, Division Office B), comprehensive plans must be prepared to alleviate the rising number of stressors and mental health-related cases among teachers. In a foreign study by Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021), it was proposed that the mental health protection of teachers should be prioritised in light of the soaring number of teachers who exhibited signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. Gustems-Carnicer et al. (Jimenez, 2021) expressed the importance of checking the mental health status of teachers in order to prevent other complicated concerns from developing, which can disturb their work performance and personal relations. This Philippine-based research of Jimenez also found that teachers occasionally experience stress and trouble sleeping less frequently than once per seven days. Although both articles were written amidst the pandemic, whether these experiences have gotten worse or better a year later has not yet been determined. Consequently, the well-being of supervisors was not directly regarded in these publications. However, given how badly teachers and their supervisees were affected, it may have implied the level of disturbance that supervisors must endure to continue helping their supervisees through difficult times. It shows that with schools gradually returning to face-to-face instruction, it remains indisputable that "health and safety should still be the primary consideration" (Education Programme Supervisor 9, Division Office A). Supervisors should adjust their plans to include mental health awareness and mindfulness exercises to encourage their supervisees to be mentally stable while physically present.

Another potential impediment for the education supervisors as they transition to in-person supervision is the readiness of the school community. Physical preparations, psychological readiness, and ways to mitigate the threats of the current situation are also within the realm of their tasks as supervisors. Furthermore, in post-pandemic in-person classes, some supervisors must adjust their time and schedule to avoid conflicts (Education Programme Supervisor 2, Division Office A; Education Programme Supervisors 3, 5, 6, & 10, Division Office B). With the expected physical presence of supervisors in schools, there is a need to allot time for travel and other necessary preparations before their onsite visits. To cite a participant, though in-person supervision is fulfilling, it is noteworthy to mention that, at times, the said mode of supervision is “more time-consuming” (Education Programme Supervisor 10, Division Office A). In terms of scheduling, in-person supervision demands supervisors to undertake onsite observation, contrary to technology-assisted supervision that conducts online observations. If schedules are not synchronised in online observations (Smith, 2018), onsite observations may not have the same flexibility. This limitation of in-person supervision makes the education supervisors feel that there should be synchronicity in the schedules of the schools in the division so that conflicts can be avoided. Since all of them handle more than one school, properly plotting the activities to be in sync with the schedule of the division office is going to be helpful as they do the functions of the office they represent.

With the in-person supervision now in place, financial constraints were also mentioned since supervising many schools entails moving from one place to another. These financial constraints include transportation costs (Education Programme Supervisor 2, Division Office A) and high gasoline consumption (Education Programme Supervisors 1 & 5, Division Office B), which means higher expenses due to increasing gasoline prices. In a report written by Riñoza and Maitem (2022), one of the biggest problems in the Philippines is the skyrocketing fuel prices, which are raising the cost of transportation, prices of basic goods, and the inflation rate. Due to the notion that education supervisors handle many schools, their expenses will multiply when performing in-person supervision, specifically when executing onsite observation and monitoring in schools.

The Voice of the Supervisors: In-Person Supervision, Regardless

The pandemic introduced education supervisors to technology-assisted supervision, which has its own challenges and opportunities. Repeatedly, in-person supervision is not free from all its potential advantages and disadvantages. The

apparent advantages and disadvantages of both modes of supervision may justify the responses of two supervisors from one division (Education Programme Supervisors 8 & 9, Division Office A) who prefer the combination of in-person and technology-assisted supervision. The findings of Smith (2018) support the integration of technology-assisted and in-person supervision, claiming that “this combination added efficiency and a close view of the teacher’s performance for both self-evaluation and supervisor feedback while maintaining the benefits of a supportive mentor with a realistic understanding of the classroom” (p. 31). According to a supervisor, this hybrid approach is more practical when multitasking is warranted. To quote, “I prefer both because multitasking is a culture in our agency; sometimes one is more appropriate than the other depending on the circumstances” (Education Programme Supervisor 9, Division Office A). When handling many concerns at once, a supervisory position may find it useful to multitask. It may also occur naturally when activities at several schools overlap, and a combination of the two is better in situations like that.

Nevertheless, in-person supervision has commendable features, much as the previous theme revealed the adjustments made and the impediments encountered in this mode of supervision. Despite the need for time management, scheduling, and expense control, some advantages can substantiate why participants constantly choose in-person over technology-assisted supervision. To quote a few of its articulated advantages, the supervisors agree that with in-person supervision, “authenticity of actions” (Education Programme Supervisor 7, Division Office A) and “genuine observation and interaction” (Education Programme Supervisor 2, Division Office A) are more evident. Compared to technology-assisted supervision, where supervisors are obliged to devise fresh strategies in assisting and involving teachers in a digital environment (Brock et al., 2021), in-person supervision offers supervisors better personal relations with their supervisees when giving technical assistance. One supervisor said, “I still choose in-person supervision. Presence is a great way to show support and appreciation. A smile, though covered with a mask, is important to rebuild lost confidence. Presence for me is the best cure” (Education Programme Supervisor 2, Division Office B). These words hold value with a supervisor emphasising how in-person supervision encourages the supervisees to achieve more in their jobs after receiving technical assistance from their supervisors. Apart from listening, monitoring their well-being, and supporting teachers in dealing with stress (Desierto, 2022), school leaders can effectively help teachers through real-time and face-to-face human interactions that in-person supervision permits. It is a positive feature of onsite supervision that online monitoring lacks.

With the advent of the return to classroom order, educational leaders have experienced online and onsite supervision. After due reflection and analysis, most admit that they would rather perform supervision in a face-to-face setup than carry out their responsibilities with greater support from any technological infrastructure. Though their word choices vary, most answers still point to similar reasons. One of these is the decreased likelihood for their supervisees to misinterpret them when giving instructions related to instructional delivery or curriculum articulation. A supervisor explained that in onsite supervision, “it is easier to express oneself without a chance of being unclear or even misinterpreted. Feedback is more immediate with in-person supervision” (Education Programme Supervisor 1, Division Office A). Conforming to this statement is a supervisor from the same division office saying, “no one can replace the actual and physical presence because the chance of being misunderstood on what you really wanted to convey is lesser” (Education Programme Supervisor 9, Division Office A). Unlike technology-assisted supervision that misses body gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues (Salva, 2021), supervisors performing in-person supervision may be less likely to be misunderstood. It suggests that communication flow will most likely be fluid and convenient. Along with these benefits, the multinational study of Newson et al. (2021) discovered a positive link between better levels of well-being and having real, face-to-face interactions. In consonance, the education supervisors opt for in-person over technology-assisted supervision since it provides authentic connection and communication to their supervisees, as deduced from their interview responses.

The education supervisors can clearly see the situations and needs of the schools under them with in-person supervision. They can obtain first-hand knowledge of the concerns that need to be addressed (Education Programme Supervisor 3, Division Office A), plus necessary data is better and more accurately collected (Education Programme Supervisor 10, Division Office A; Education Programme Supervisor 7, Division Office B). Moreover, prompt giving of feedback and technical assistance (Education Programme Supervisors 2 & 5, Division Office A) is highly expected with face-to-face discussions. Carrying out supervisory duties and responsibilities will require numerous observations, interviews with school personnel, and document analysis, particularly concerning curriculum articulation and delivery. Although these data-gathering methods can be completed remotely, supervisors can compare the results when these methods are accomplished in person.

Conclusion and Implication

Noting all the narratives based on their experiences, Filipino education supervisors expressed that, as much as they welcomed the idea of transitioning back to onsite supervision, adjustments and impediments were still encountered. Akin to the disadvantages of technology-assisted supervision, in-person supervision has its own gaps and drawbacks. It may affirm the calculated degrees of challenges faced by the participants in implementing either online or onsite supervision, proving the struggle to find the ideal mode of supervision. While it is true that in-person supervision strengthens relationships, establishes smoother communication, and provides real-time assistance, educational institutions and their leaders must be critical in determining which mode of supervision is flexible enough to be put into practice. One of the implications of this qualitative exploration is that the to-be-executed mode of supervision should withstand its weaknesses while keeping pace with its strengths in the face of adversity. Even so, a resounding majority of the education supervisors who participated in this qualitative exploration believe in-person supervision is more favourable, regardless. It aligns with the quantitative findings in the earlier study of Salva et al. (2023), which indicated that in-person supervision yielded lower mean scores or was less challenging when compared to technology-assisted supervision.

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