

**An Investigation into District Education Standards Officers' Monitoring Of Standards in
High Schools: A Case of Selected High Schools in Southern Province Of Zambia**

By

Kambunga Aiden

Austin Cheyeka

The University of Zambia

School of Education

Department of EAPS

P.O. Box 32379

Lusaka

Abstract

This study sought to investigate District Education Standards Officers' monitoring of standards in high schools in Southern Province in Zambia. A case study approach was used in conducting this research. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews from a sample of 38 teachers, 16 District Education Standards Officers and 10 Senior Education Standards Officers from the Provincial Education Office to accurately represent the population under study.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods in the collection of data for the study. The statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to analyse quantitative data from the questionnaires while qualitative data which was obtained through interviews was analysed by coding and grouping the emerging themes.

The study found out that very little, if any is being done in the area of high school inspection by District Education Standards Officers in Southern Province. Reports by both the teachers and standards officers revealed that teaching and learning materials were not easily available for use in high schools. The study has also shown that teachers were unwilling to be monitored by District Education Standards Officers who they felt have the same qualification as theirs. In some schools, teachers reported that the standards officers inspected subject areas that they were not trained in.

The study also showed that there was lack of in-service training for teachers in the province to equip them with the modern technology and that there is great need for more teachers with degrees, especially Mathematics and Science subjects.

The study recommended that:

- *MoE should ensure that officers trained in respective subject areas should monitor such subjects.*
- *MoE should ensure that relevant and adequate teaching/learning materials are provided to the high schools and at the right time.*
- *The PEO through the MoE should embark on in-service training workshops aimed at imparting new teaching methods in line with the ever changing technologies.*

Background

Almost all organizations that exist are a product of their own history and experience and the inspectorate in the Ministry of Education in Zambia is no exception to this. The inspectorate system has grown with the education system; from a few primary, secondary and teachers, colleges with no University, to the present day where we have several Basic Schools, High Schools and Universities plus several colleges. This expansion has not spared the inspectorate as it has expanded from the Headquarters to provinces and districts and even changed its name to the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum.

According to the National Policy on Education in Zambia (1996:155), "the inspectorate is an important Directorate within the Ministry of Education for ensuring the quality of education in primary and secondary schools. Inspectors have a variety of professional responsibilities that relate quite clearly to the quality and effectiveness of school education".

Essentially, inspectors have an advisory, supervisory and an evaluation function in relation to education provision. Their advisory function is performed through school inspections and on such visits; their principal concern is with improving teacher effectiveness and school organization (MoE, 1996). As disseminators of good practice, they should ideally stimulate teachers to examine their lesson preparation and follow –through their teaching strategies, the way they are developing or using curriculum materials, how they evaluate pupils, and how they

organize the teaching session. They also advise school heads on such issues as time-tabling, the effective use of teachers, and providing good leadership to all in the school (MoE, 1996).

Supervision is a process through which Standards Officers visit schools to work with the teachers and school administrators to ascertain the quality of teaching and administration and to provide advice and guidance to teachers and administrators where it may be necessary (Trait, 1993).

The *Malawi Handbook for Inspectors* (1982) defines inspection as, “that specific occasion when an education institution is examined and evaluated as a place of learning in such a way that advice may be given for its improvement.”

Trait (1993) defines inspection as, “the process through which the central authority, represented by inspectors, monitors and evaluates the teaching and administration in the schools.” Therefore, standards officers at different levels do inspect and monitor schools for many reasons some of which are those of ensuring quality and maintaining standards, evaluating the performance of teachers and schools, monitoring instruction and identifying needs of schools. They also provide professional development for teachers; they strengthen the supervision of head teachers and provide feedback to the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders among others, Better Schools (1998:6).

Studies have, however, shown that there appears to be laxity, or lack of professionalism by standards officers from districts to monitor the above mentioned areas in high schools of their respective districts. If this trend is not checked and redressed it has the potential to further bring down standards in high schools.

Methodology

A case study approach was used in conducting this research. The target population comprised all districts and high schools, standards officers and teachers in Southern Province. The sample consisted of 38 teachers, 6 District Education Standards Officers (DESOs) and 10 Education Standards Officers (ESOs). In selecting the 6 districts, random sampling technique was used whereas purposive sampling procedure was used to select the teachers that participated in the

study because these people were expected to be information laden that would provide the most needed information for this study.

Data collection

In collecting data for this research, the following instruments were used: semi-structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were used to gather information from the teachers and District Education Standards Officers while the focus group discussion guide was used to collect primary data from Provincial Education Standards Officers.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data from the questionnaires while qualitative data which was obtained through interviews was analysed by coding and grouping the emerging themes. Computer generated tables of frequencies, and crosstabulations and percentages were used in describing distributions of the variables which were presented in the form of tables or graphs.

Results and discussions

Whether District Education Standards Officers monitor high schools in their districts

The results of the present study showed that the District Standards Officers monitored schools as evidenced by the teachers reporting that they were inspected at least once (11%) or more than once (26%) although most of the teachers (63%) in the study denied having been inspected. This finding is in line with the Zambia national Assessment Survey Report (2008) which reported that on Classroom Pedagogical Performance, teachers generally indicated that they were supervised by their superiors in schools.

Table 1: Frequency of inspections by DESOs

Number of times inspected	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Once	4 (10.5%)	-	4 (10.5%)
More than once	6 (15.8%)	4 (10.5%)	10 (26.3%)
Never been inspected	12 (31.6%)	12 (31.6%)	24 (63.2%)
Total	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100.0%)

Whether head teachers' monitored teachers' work

As regards whether head teachers monitored teachers' work, the study showed that the majority of the teachers (68%) said that head teachers checked their schemes of work, weekly forecasts and lesson plans compared to 32% who reported not having been monitored. It is this 32% which is not monitored internally which should be a source of concern as to whether they were doing the right things in class or not, hence the need for external monitors like the standards officers to attend to them since it appears head teachers have no capacity to monitor them. In addition to supervision by school authorities, teachers were inspected by standards officers on a scale ranging from never been monitored to being monitored in the last 12 months.

However, despite the above gloomy picture, teachers felt that the frequency at which the standards officers inspected schools was not adequate as they visited the schools once per term as reported by most of the respondents (24%) in the study. They were of the view that it would help them much if the inspectors visited them at regular intervals.

Table 2: Frequency of inspections by DESOs

Number of times inspected	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Once	4 (10.5%)	-	4 (10.5%)
More than once	6 (15.8%)	4 (10.5%)	10 (26.3%)
Never been inspected	12 (31.6%)	12 (31.6%)	24 (63.2%)
Total	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100.0%)

Subjects in which teachers were inspected

As regards to subjects in which the teachers were inspected, the study revealed that most of the teachers were inspected in Social Sciences (58%) while only a few of them were inspected in other subject areas. This finding was also confirmed by 69% of the standards officers themselves.

Table 3: Subject area inspected

Subject area	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Social Sciences	14 (36.8%)	8 (21.1%)	22 (57.9%)
Other	8 (21.1%)	8 (21.1%)	16 (42.1%)
Total	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100.0%)

Whether teachers got reports from DESOs

As to whether the teachers received feedback from the inspectors, the study showed that there was no feedback from the standards officers as evidenced by 76% of the teachers who denied having received any feedback.

Figure 1: Whether teachers got reports from DESOs

This lack of communication between the teachers and the standards officers is of great concern as teachers would not know whether they are progressing in the right direction or not. This needs urgent attention of the Ministry of Education if the education standards in high schools are to be maintained.

Although teachers indicated that they were inspected, the inspections were irregularly done as reported by the District Education Standards Officers. To confirm the above statement, 85% of the respondents indicated that they irregularly inspected schools and only a minority (25%) of the said that they were able to inspect the schools in their districts regularly. The above

development is very sad as most of the schools do miss out on acquiring the needed information and latest materials for teaching and learning.

Whether standards officers' monitoring visits to high schools was useful

As regards whether visits by the District Education Officers were useful to the teachers, the majority of the teachers (79%) were of the view that the visits were very helpful to their teaching profession. Only a few of the teachers, were, naive about these visits. The overwhelming positive response by the teachers is an indication that standards officers performed their duties to the expectations of most of the teachers. This in its own is a positive move which should be commended.

Figure 2: Whether inspections by DESOs were helpful to teachers

Benefits teachers got from the standards officers during inspections

Among the benefits that teachers got from the standards officers on their visits were professional advice (37%) and latest teaching and learning materials (29%).

Although the teachers received professional and materials support from the standards officers they still held different opinions on the visits by these officers. Most of the teachers (34%) were of the view that the inspection was good as it brought about professionalism in teaching. However some of the teachers perceived the inspections as not helpful as most of the inspectors had little knowledge of the subject areas they inspected. This brought about discomfort on the part of teachers and thus preferred not to be monitored by DESOs but instead SESOs. The other issue of concern, as revealed by this study was that teachers felt that the inspectors were not

worth enough to inspect them as they had the same qualification and lamented that they were better off to teach without these inspections. This on its own is a warning to government and the Ministry of Education in particular to ensure that they send qualified personnel to inspect schools if these inspectors were to be accorded the respect they deserved. Subsequently, this entails that the MoE should ensure that these officers are sent to higher institutions of learning to acquire the needed professional qualifications in the areas of their concern.

Whether all standards officers from each district monitor high schools

As regards this aspect, the study found out that most of the standards officers (81%) were reported to have been inspecting high schools in their respective districts. Only 12% of them were reported not to have been inspecting the high schools in their respective districts.

Figure 3: Whether all standards officers inspected schools

Although the study found that the standards officers inspected the high schools in their districts, the frequency at which they did this was very minimal, i.e. “irregularly”. Interviews with six Senior Education Standards Officers also confirmed the above finding. The lack of regular inspection of high schools could be attributed to the poor conditions in which the schools are because the district officers hardly know what problems the schools were passing through and this is the more reason that they need to be monitored. It is no wonder that in most schools visited by the standards officers, there were reports of over-enrolments and lack of teaching and learning materials in the schools under study. It is therefore imperative that the MoE encourages school inspections by way of providing them with the necessary assistance such as equipment

and transport for them to perform their duties as expected and thus maintain the standards in high schools.

Kind of assistance standards officers give to teachers during their inspections

As regards the kind of assistance that teachers received from the District Education Standards Officers, the study showed that in most instances teachers received professional advice (84%) as compared to social advice (16%). The above findings were in agreement with the revelation from the standards officers, who upon being asked to say the type of assistance they rendered to the teachers, positively stated that they gave teachers professional advice (75%). Only a few of them (31%) said that they gave teachers information on curriculum interpretation, motivation and counselling.

Figure 4: Type of assistance teachers received from DESOs

Subject area in which teachers were assisted

In terms of subjects in which teachers were assisted, the study showed that most of them received assistance in the content area (48%) as opposed to methodology (29%).

Figure 5: Subject areas in which teachers were assisted

However, it is interesting to note that more male teachers than female received assistance in the methodology whereas more female teachers received assistance in the content area than the males. This was a very interesting outcome probably indicating to the fact that male teachers don't seem to be following prescribed teaching methods and prefer to teach the way they feel than it is supposed to be. On the other hand female teachers don't seem to go deep into explaining the content of what they teach and this sometimes is exhibited when they are asked questions by pupils and they get stranded in their explanations.

Kind of materials DESOs brought to schools during inspection

In relation to teaching materials, teachers revealed that the District Education Standards Officers brought with them materials such as monitoring instruments (29%) and teaching and learning materials (8%).

Table 4: Kind of materials DESOs brought to schools

Kind of materials brought to schools	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Monitoring instruments	7 (18.5%)	4 (10.5%)	11 (29.0%)
Policy documents	2 (5.3%)	-	2 (5.3%)
Teaching and learning materials	3 (7.9%)	-	3 (7.9%)
None	10 (26.3%)	12 (31.6%)	22 (57.8%)
Total	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100.0%)

However, it is surprising to note that the majority of the teachers indicated that the officers from the Ministry of Education brought nothing during their visits to schools (58%).

Kind of assistance the teachers expected from the District Education Standards Officers

As regards the kind of assistance the teachers expected from the District Education Standards Officers during their visits to schools, the study showed that most of the teachers expected professional advice (37%). This professional advice concerns the teachers' core business what they are qualified to do best and that involves, adequate preparations and effective lesson delivery.

Table 5: Kind of assistance expected from DESOs

Expected kind of assistance	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Professional advice to upgrade lesson delivery and teaching and learning	3 (7.9%)	-	3 (7.9%)
Latest teaching/learning materials	3 (7.9%)	8 (21.0%)	11 (28.9%)
Professional advice and policy interpretation in the delivery of quality education	4 (10.5%)	-	4 (10.5%)
None	2 (5.2%)	4 (10.5%)	6 (15.9%)
Professional advice	10 (26.3%)	4 (10.5%)	14 (36.8%)
Total	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100.0%)

This aspect seem to have been achieved as evidenced by earlier statements which came from the teachers themselves stating that they actually got professional advice from the District Education Standards Officers. However, some teachers in the study expected to get latest teaching and learning materials (29%).

Whether DESOs have ever organised in-service training for teachers in schools

The study also showed that the District Standards Officers had not held any in-service training for most school in Southern Province. This is evidenced by 76% of the teachers in this study who confirmed not having received any in-service training at all.

Figure 6: Whether DESOs have ever organised in-service training for teachers in schools

The lack of in-service training as can be seen deprives teachers of the latest teaching methods which are cardinal in this modern world of teaching. Latest material such as computers would be of no use to such teachers as they lack the necessary skills. It is imperative that these teachers are exposed to new teaching methods and skills in handling the latest equipment in line with the ever changing world of technology. This can actually be enhanced by continuous teacher development (CPD) strategies which are not very active in most schools in the province. However, for the few that said that their standards officers had at least organised an in-service training for them, they were trained in APAS and subject area improvement.

Areas for improvement

As regards to the areas in which teachers were advised to improve on, most of the respondents (29%), especially females (21%) said they were advised to improve on their dressing. It should be mentioned here that the manner in which a teacher dresses sends some positive or negative messages to pupils on the profession.

Table 6: Areas for improvement

Areas	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Dress code	3 (7.9%)	8 (21.1%)	11 (29.0%)
Writing lesson plan	2 (5.3%)	-	2 (5.3%)
Use of teaching aids	2 (5.3%)	-	2 (5.3%)
Organising workshops	3 (7.9%)	-	3 (7.9%)
Departmental teacher inspection	-	4 (10.5%)	4 (10.5%)
None; have never been inspected before	12 (31.7%)	4 (10.5%)	16 (42.1%)
Total	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100.0%)

Teachers ought to be models to their pupils as such their way of dressing should depict that of decency. Nonetheless, according to the findings of this study, some teachers were advised on how to conduct departmental teacher inspection. This area is of prime importance in their professional development as the heads of departments would be in better position to advise.

Conclusion

The study has shown that very little, if any, is being done in the area of high school inspection by district standards officers in Sothorn Province as evidenced by the results of this study. Teaching/learning materials are another source of worry as these were reported by both the teachers and standards officers as being very inadequate in most schools. The study has also shown that teachers were unwilling to be monitored by the standards officers who they deemed were “equals”, as they felt that they had the same qualifications. This attitude by the teachers calls for an immediate attention from the MoE to ensure that the standards officers’ academic and professional qualifications are upgraded for them to receive the respect they deserve from the teachers in high school. In some schools, teachers reported that the standards officers inspected subject areas that they were not trained in. Lack of organisation of in-service training for teachers in the province is another source of concern. In-service training equips teachers with new teaching techniques in line with the ever changing world of technology. Thus its lack entails teachers applying the same old methods of which are in most cases outdated, thereby contributing to poor performance of pupils in high schools.

The study also showed that the staffing levels in the province were not adequate because when one takes into considerations that out of 16 of the provincial officers only 4 indicated that the staffing levels were adequate and the rest 12, said that the staffing levels were average. This shows that though there was dire need for more teachers with degrees.

As regards ways of improving high school education, the study revealed the following: give administrative positions to performers and transfer teachers regularly; have correct number of qualified staff; improve sanitation; reduce enrolments at grade 10 and employ more science and mathematics teachers; improve teacher qualifications by sending them to higher institutions of learning; improve on the working culture; and have well stocked libraries.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- MoE should ensure that only officers trained in respective subject areas should monitor those subjects.
- MoE should ensure that relevant and adequate teaching/learning materials are provided to the high schools and at the right time.
- MoE through its appropriate organs should ensure that standards officers are either taken for refresher courses or given scholarships to upgrade themselves.
- The PEO through the MoE should embark on in-service training workshops aimed at imparting new teaching methods in line with the ever changing technologies.
- MoE should revisit the policy on the administrative reporting system that was made during restructuring as it does not serve any meaningful purpose.

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