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The influence of headteachers' classroom observation frequency on teacher performance within the context of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) implementation in Junior Secondary Schools in Mwea Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya

By

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Abstract
This study investigates the influence of headteachers' classroom observation frequency on teacher performance within the context of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) implementation in Junior Secondary Schools. Instructional supervision is a cornerstone of educational quality, yet its practical effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained rural contexts, remains under-documented. While policy mandates supervision, the relationship between its intensity and its developmental impact is not well understood. This research employed a quantitative descriptive survey design, collecting data from a purposive sample of 47 teachers across nine Junior Secondary Schools in Mwea Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests, including the chi-square test of independence. The findings reveal a significant "dose-response" relationship between the frequency of classroom observation and its perceived impact on teaching performance (χ^2=44.984, p<.001). Teachers observed weekly or monthly reported overwhelmingly positive outcomes (95.8% and 100%, respectively), primarily citing encouragement for reflection and instructional improvement. Conversely, teachers who were observed rarely reported zero positive effects and significantly higher levels of anxiety. The analysis establishes a minimum effective threshold, suggesting that observation conducted less frequently than once per month becomes counterproductive rather than merely ineffective. The study concludes that the efficacy of instructional supervision is not a linear function but is contingent upon meeting a critical frequency threshold. These findings have significant implications for policy and practice, suggesting that school leadership frameworks must prioritize ensuring a consistent, minimum frequency of developmental observation to maintain instructional quality and support teacher growth during systemic curriculum reform.

Keywords: Instructional Supervision, Classroom Observation, Teacher Performance, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), Educational Leadership, Kenya

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1. Introduction

The global discourse on educational reform consistently identifies instructional leadership as a critical lever for enhancing teaching quality and improving student learning outcomes (Hairon et al., 2020). At the core of instructional leadership lies supervision—the set of practices through which school leaders monitor, support, and develop teachers' pedagogical skills. In recent decades, the paradigm of supervision has shifted decisively away from traditional, compliance-oriented inspection towards developmental models that emphasize collaboration, reflective practice, and continuous professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In this contemporary view, supervision is not merely an administrative function but a dynamic process of professional learning designed to build instructional capacity within schools.

This shift is particularly salient in developing nations, where rapid curriculum changes and systemic challenges demand robust in-school support systems for teachers. Across sub-Saharan Africa, countries are grappling with the need to transition from teacher-centered, rote-learning pedagogies to more learner-centered, competency-based approaches (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011). However, the effective implementation of such reforms is often constrained by inadequate resources, limited training for school leaders, and large teacher-to-supervisor ratios, which hinder the establishment of strong, developmental supervision systems (Palacio & Digo, 2024).

Kenya's education sector provides a compelling case study of these dynamics. With the nationwide rollout of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), there is a heightened expectation for teachers to adopt innovative instructional strategies, including differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and project-based learning. Consequently, the role of the headteacher has been officially reframed from that of a building manager to an instructional leader, tasked by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Ministry of Education with actively guiding and improving classroom practice (TSC, 2015). Policy frameworks like the Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) system explicitly mandate that headteachers conduct regular classroom observations, provide constructive feedback, and facilitate mentoring to support teachers' professional growth.

Despite these clear policy directives, a significant gap exists between the prescribed ideals of supervision and its on-the-ground reality, particularly in rural and peri-urban contexts like Mwea Sub-County. While the what of supervision is defined by policy, the how specifically, how factors like the frequency, quality, and focus of supervisory interactions influence teacher performance remains empirically underexplored. Classroom observation stands out as one of the most direct and potentially impactful supervisory practices, offering leaders first-hand evidence of instructional quality. Yet, its effectiveness is not guaranteed; it

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can range from a powerful tool for professional development to a source of anxiety and resistance, depending on its implementation.

This study, therefore, aims to fill a critical knowledge gap by examining the specific relationship between the frequency of classroom observation by headteachers and its perceived impact on teacher performance in the newly established Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) of Mwea Sub-County. By focusing on the intensity of this core supervisory practice, the research seeks to move beyond a general assessment of supervision to provide nuanced, evidence-based insights into the mechanisms that make it effective, thereby informing more targeted and impactful leadership strategies for improving teaching quality in Kenya.

2. Statement of the Problem

The successful implementation of Kenya's ambitious Competency-Based Curriculum rests heavily on the capacity of its teachers to adapt to new, complex pedagogical demands. Instructional supervision by headteachers is positioned as the primary school-based mechanism for building this capacity. However, there is a pervasive assumption that the mere existence of supervisory policies and tools like TPAD automatically translates into improved teacher performance. This assumption masks a critical problem: the vast and undocumented variability in the quality and intensity of supervision across schools, which likely contributes to inconsistent instructional quality and uneven implementation of CBC.

In contexts like Mwea Sub-County, headteachers face numerous structural challenges, including large teacher-supervisor ratios, heavy administrative workloads, and limited formal training in instructional leadership (Mutune & Orodho, 2014; Cansoy et al., 2025). These constraints often force a trade-off between the breadth and depth of supervision. Consequently, supervision may devolve into a perfunctory, compliance-driven exercise such as signing off on lesson plans rather than a developmental process involving substantive classroom observation and feedback. This creates a significant disconnect between policy intent and classroom reality, leaving teachers without the targeted support they need to refine their practice.

While international literature underscores the importance of regular observation (Darling-Hammond, 2017), there is a lack of localized, empirical evidence in Kenya that quantifies the relationship between the frequency of observation and its impact. It is unclear whether there is a minimum threshold of observation required to yield positive developmental outcomes, or if infrequent observation is merely less effective or potentially even detrimental. Without this knowledge, school leaders lack evidence-based guidance on how to best allocate their limited time for supervision. This study addresses this problem by specifically investigating the dose-response relationship between classroom observation frequency and teacher performance, seeking to determine if an optimal intensity for this key supervisory practice exists within the context of rural Kenyan Junior Secondary Schools.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Global Shift Towards Developmental Supervision

The conceptualization of instructional supervision has undergone a profound evolution over the past several decades. Historically rooted in an industrial model of inspection and quality control, supervision was primarily an evaluative, top-down process aimed at ensuring teacher compliance with prescribed curricula and administrative mandates (Wanzare, 2012). This model often fostered a culture of fear and resistance, with teachers viewing supervisors as

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external judges rather than supportive colleagues. However, a growing body of research has propelled a paradigm shift towards developmental supervision, which reframes the practice as a collaborative and reflective process aimed at fostering continuous professional growth.

In high-performing education systems, such as those in Finland, Singapore, and Canada, supervision is deeply embedded within a culture of professional learning (Hairon et al., 2020). School leaders are expected to function as pedagogical leaders who engage teachers in ongoing cycles of observation, feedback, coaching, and collaborative inquiry. Fowler and Walter (2020) note that in many European and North American contexts, the emphasis is on formative, reflective supervision, which has been linked to higher teacher morale, enhanced instructional quality, and improved learner engagement. This approach is grounded in the understanding that meaningful improvement in teaching practice stems from a teacher's own reflection and professional agency, which can be cultivated through supportive, non-judgmental dialogue with a knowledgeable instructional leader.

3.2 Instructional Supervision in the African Context

While the global trend leans towards developmental models, the practice of instructional supervision in many sub-Saharan African countries continues to face significant challenges. Systemic issues such as resource scarcity, inadequate training for school leaders, and high teacher-to-supervisor ratios often perpetuate the use of outdated, administrative-focused supervision models (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011). Research by Palacio and Digo (2024) indicates that in many settings, supervision is still characterized by a focus on compliance checking lesson plans, monitoring attendance, and enforcing rules rather than engaging in substantive pedagogical dialogue aimed at improving teaching quality.

This administrative focus limits the potential for supervision to serve as a tool for innovation and professional growth. Ibrahim (2018) argues that in the face of rapid curricular reforms sweeping the continent, school heads must adopt more active, instructive roles. However, without a fundamental shift in both the mindset and the skillset of supervisors, supervision risks remaining a bureaucratic ritual that fails to address the complex instructional challenges teachers face.

Nonetheless, there is growing recognition of supervision's potential. Studies from Nigeria and Ghana show that when supervision is implemented with a developmental focus, involving regular classroom visits and actionable feedback, it can lead to significant improvements in instructional practice (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011). This suggests that the challenge lies not in the concept of supervision itself, but in its inconsistent and often-flawed implementation.

3.3 Classroom Observation as a Core Supervisory Practice

Among the various supervisory practices, classroom observation is arguably the most direct and powerful tool for gathering authentic evidence about teaching and learning. It allows supervisors to move beyond proxies of quality, such as lesson plans, and witness instruction as it unfolds in the dynamic environment of the classroom (Halim et al., 2018). This first-hand perspective is invaluable for diagnosing instructional strengths and weaknesses, understanding classroom climate, and assessing the level of student engagement.

International research consistently demonstrates that when structured and followed by developmental feedback, regular classroom observation is a potent catalyst for teacher reflection and professional growth. Darling-Hammond (2017) asserts that cycles of

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observation and feedback not only improve the quality of instruction but also boost teacher motivation and professional efficacy. The effectiveness of observation, however, is contingent on several factors. Tarusha and Bushi (2024) argue that its impact is determined by its frequency, focus, and follow-up. Observations that are regular, pre-planned with clear criteria, and followed by collaborative post-observation conferences are more likely to be perceived as supportive and lead to meaningful changes in practice. In contrast, sporadic, unannounced, or purely judgmental observations can generate anxiety and defensiveness, undermining the trust necessary for professional learning.

In the African context, the practice of classroom observation has a mixed record. While policies in many countries mandate regular observations by headteachers and inspectors, implementation is often uneven. Ofoha (2017) notes that in many Nigerian schools, observation is often perceived as evaluative and punitive, leading teachers to perform "show lessons" that mask their typical practice rather than reveal genuine instructional challenges. This undermines the diagnostic purpose of observation. However, the orientation of the observation is key. When framed as a collegial and development-focused activity, even within resource-constrained environments, observation has been shown to enhance teacher performance (Mitchell & Milligan, 2023).

3.4 Supervision and Teacher Performance in Kenya

In Kenya, instructional supervision has gained prominence as a key strategy for ensuring the successful implementation of the CBC. The TPAD framework operationalizes this by requiring headteachers to conduct appraisals based on multiple performance indicators, with classroom observation being a central component (Wanjiku et al., 2024). The policy intent is clearly developmental: to provide teachers with the support needed to align their practice with the learner-centered principles of CBC.

However, studies reveal a significant gap between this policy intent and practice. Research by Mutune and Orodho (2014) in a Kenyan sub-county found that classroom supervision was often irregular and lacked systematic follow-up, a problem they attributed to heavy administrative workloads and the absence of standardized supervision tools. Wanzare (2012) similarly found that supervision often remained superficial, involving the checking of documents rather than substantive engagement with classroom instruction. This suggests that despite the TPAD framework, supervision may still be operating as a compliance-driven activity in many schools.

This is particularly concerning for JSS, where teachers are often at the beginning of their careers and are navigating the complexities of a new curriculum. The present study builds on this literature by moving beyond the question of whether observation occurs to ask a more nuanced question: how much observation is needed to make a difference? By investigating the relationship between observation frequency and its impact, this research provides empirical data to inform a more effective and efficient allocation of supervisory resources.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by a synthesis of leadership theories that frame instructional supervision as a developmental and collaborative practice. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 2015) posits that leaders influence followers through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Within

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supervision, this translates to headteachers who not only monitor but also inspire teachers, stimulate their professional thinking (e.g., through reflective dialogue after observation), and provide tailored support based on individual needs. The Pedagogical Leadership Model (Fonsén & Lahtero, 2024) further specifies this role, arguing that effective school leaders must possess deep pedagogical knowledge to guide instructional processes, model best practices, and foster a culture of reflective teaching. Finally, Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2005) suggests that leadership is not the sole purview of the headteacher but can be shared among various actors. This is relevant as effective supervision can cultivate a professional environment where peer mentoring and collaborative learning flourish, distributing the responsibility for instructional improvement. Together, these theories provide a lens for interpreting supervision not as a simple administrative task, but as a complex leadership practice aimed at building individual and collective capacity.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive survey research design. This approach was deemed most appropriate for systematically documenting the prevailing instructional supervision practices in Mwea Sub-County and for statistically examining the relationship between the frequency of classroom observation and teachers' perceptions of its impact on their performance (Siedlecki, 2020).

5.2 Population and Sample

The target population consisted of all 125 teachers working in the public Junior Secondary Schools of Mwea Sub-County. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants. First, nine schools were selected to represent a diversity of geographic locations (rural vs. peri-urban) and school sizes. Within these schools, teachers were sampled based on their direct involvement in teaching at the JSS level (Grades 7-9) and having at least one year of experience with the CBC. The final sample comprised 47 teachers, achieving a 100% response rate from those who were approached and consented to participate. This sample represents approximately 38% of the sub-county's JSS teaching force.

5.3 Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to align with the study's objectives. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering: (A) Demographics; (B) General Instructional Supervision Practices; (C) Classroom Observation and Performance; (D) Feedback and Mentoring; (E) Instructional Planning; (F) Challenges; and (G) Teacher Performance. Questions primarily used closed-ended formats, including Likert scales and multiple-choice options, to facilitate standardized data collection and quantitative analysis.

5.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and describe the nature of supervision practices. To address the core research question, a chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant association between the

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categorical variables of classroom observation frequency and the perceived impact of observation on teaching performance. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used for all inferential tests.

6. Results

6.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data revealed a teaching workforce that is relatively young, well-qualified, but largely inexperienced. There was a near-even gender split, with 51.1% female and 48.9% male. A majority of the teachers (57.4%) were in the 25-34 age bracket. Academically, the sample was well-prepared, with 70.2% holding a Bachelor's degree. Critically, the data on teaching experience underscored the need for strong supervisory support: a combined 78.7% of teachers had five years or less of experience, with 40.4% having taught for less than three years. This profile of a youthful and novice teaching force highlights the context in which instructional supervision operates.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=47)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	23	48.9
	Female	24	51.1
Age Group	Below 25 years	6	12.8
	25–34 years	27	57.4
	35–44 years	10	21.3
	45–54 years	3	6.4
	55 years and above	1	2.1
Highest Qualification	Diploma	11	23.4
	Bachelor's Degree	33	70.2
	Postgraduate	3	6.4
Teaching Experience	Less than 3 years	19	40.4
	3–5 years	18	38.3
	6–10 years	6	12.8
	More than 10 years	4	8.5

Source: Field Data 2025

6.2 Frequency and Impact of Classroom Observation

Data on classroom observation revealed a high degree of implementation. A majority of teachers (51.1%) reported being observed weekly, and an additional 31.9% were observed monthly. Cumulatively, 83.0% of teachers experienced classroom observation at least once a month.

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Regarding the perceived impact of these observations, the response was overwhelmingly positive. A combined 85.1% of teachers reported beneficial effects, with 44.7% stating that observation encouraged reflection and adjustment in their teaching, and 40.4% reporting that it led to significant improvement in their instructional delivery. Only a small minority felt it made no difference (8.5%) or had negative effects such as causing anxiety (6.4%).

6.3 The Relationship Between Observation Frequency and Impact

To test the central hypothesis of the study, a chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between the frequency of classroom observation and its perceived impact. The results, presented in Table 2, show a highly statistically significant association between these two variables.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Observation Frequency and Perceived Impact

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.984	12	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	35.838	12	0.000
N of Valid Cases	47		

Note: Cramer's V = .565 (Large effect size)
Source: Field Data 2025

The chi-square statistic (χ^2=44.984, df=12, p<.001) confirms that the perceived impact of observation is not independent of its frequency. The large effect size, indicated by Cramer's V of .565, signifies a strong relationship between the variables.
A detailed cross-tabulation revealed a clear dose-response pattern.

(i) High Frequency (Weekly/Monthly): Teachers who were observed weekly or monthly reported almost universally positive impacts. Of those observed weekly, 95.8% cited positive effects (improves delivery or encourages reflection). Similarly, 100% of those observed monthly reported positive impacts.
(ii) Low Frequency (Rarely): In stark contrast, among the teachers who were observed rarely, none (0%) reported any positive effects. Instead, 50% reported that it makes no difference, and the other 50% reported negative effects (causes anxiety" or discourages creativity).

This stark difference demonstrates a critical threshold effect. Regular and consistent observation (at least monthly) is strongly associated with positive, developmental outcomes. Infrequent observation, however, is not merely neutral; it is perceived as detrimental, increasing stress without providing any discernible benefit to the teacher.

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7. Discussion

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the mechanics of effective instructional supervision, particularly challenging the notion that any supervision is better than none. The central finding of a dose-response relationship between observation frequency and teacher performance provides strong empirical backing for the importance of systematic, regular supervisory engagement.

The establishment of a minimum effective threshold at least monthly observation is the study's most critical contribution. The data clearly shows that once the frequency of observation drops below this threshold, its function transforms from a developmental tool into a source of anxiety and a perceived waste of time. This can be interpreted through the lens of Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 2015). Regular observation allows for consistent intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, fostering a relationship of trust and professional dialogue. Teachers come to see observation as a normal, supportive part of their professional life. In contrast, infrequent observation becomes a high-stakes, evaluative event. It lacks the context of an ongoing relationship, leading teachers to perceive it as a judgmental inspection rather than a supportive check-in, thus triggering anxiety.

Furthermore, the mechanism through which observation appears to work is primarily cognitive. The largest group of teachers (44.7%) reported that observation "encourages reflection and adjustment." This suggests that the primary value of observation lies not in the supervisor directly "correcting" teacher behavior, but in prompting teachers to engage in self-assessment and critically analyze their own practice. This aligns with the Pedagogical Leadership Model (Fonsén & Lahtero, 2024), which emphasizes the leader's role in fostering a culture of reflective teaching. Weekly observation appears to drive more direct behavioral improvement, while monthly observation allows for a more reflective cycle, giving teachers time to process feedback and experiment with new strategies.

The study also provides context for these findings. Despite operating in a rural sub-county with a largely inexperienced teaching force, headteachers in Mwea are demonstrating a high commitment to supervision, with 83% of teachers being observed at least monthly. This high frequency of engagement is likely a key reason for the universally high self-reported teacher performance and the finding that novice teachers are performing at levels comparable to their more experienced colleagues. Supervision, when implemented consistently, appears to function as a powerful equity-promoting mechanism, accelerating the professional growth of new teachers and compensating for a lack of experience.

However, the findings on structural challenges particularly large teacher-supervisor ratios (42.6%) and inadequate time (36.2%) highlight the precariousness of this success. Headteachers are maintaining a high frequency of observation, but this may come at the cost of depth. The documented gap between observation and post-observation feedback in the broader study suggests that leaders are forced to prioritize the breadth of their supervisory reach over the depth of their engagement. This underscores the need for structural solutions, such as distributing leadership roles or reducing administrative burdens, to make developmental supervision sustainable.

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8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the effectiveness of classroom observation as a supervisory tool is fundamentally dependent on its frequency. A clear dose-response relationship exists, establishing a minimum effective threshold of at least monthly observation. Below this threshold, observation ceases to be a developmental tool and becomes a counterproductive source of teacher anxiety. This finding refutes the simplistic assumption that any supervision is beneficial and provides a clear, evidence-based benchmark for effective instructional leadership practice. In the context of Kenya's CBC, where teachers require continuous support, ensuring this minimum frequency of observation is not just best practice it is essential for maintaining instructional quality and fostering teacher growth.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **For Policy Makers (TSC and Ministry of Education):**
   (i) Revise instructional supervision guidelines to mandate a **minimum frequency of one documented classroom observation per teacher per month**.
   (ii) Address the structural barriers that hinder effective supervision by reviewing headteacher workloads. Policy interventions could include reducing the teaching load for headteachers in larger schools or providing administrative support staff to free up time for instructional leadership.
   (iii) Incorporate training on the principles of developmental observation and reflective feedback into all leadership preparation and continuous professional development programs for school heads.

2. **For Headteachers and School Leaders:**
   (i) Prioritize the scheduling of a systematic, school-wide observation calendar to ensure that every teacher is observed at least monthly.
   (ii) Frame classroom observations as a developmental and collaborative process. This can be achieved by conducting pre-observation conferences to set a focus and post-observation dialogues that emphasize reflective questioning over directive criticism.
   (iii) Where time constraints are severe, leverage Distributed Leadership by training and empowering heads of department or senior teachers to conduct peer observations and provide supportive feedback within their subject areas.

This study provides a clear directive: for instructional supervision to fulfill its promise of improving teaching and learning, it must be implemented with sufficient intensity. Consistency and regularity are not just desirable features; they are the very foundation upon which effective developmental supervision is built.

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