

Principals' Strategic Approaches to Instructional Supervision and Teacher Professional Development in Public Secondary Schools in Nairobi and Kajiado Counties, Kenya

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Abstract: *Instructional supervision is a crucial responsibility of school principals as it supports teachers' professional growth and improvement of instructional practice. This study examined strategic approaches to instructional supervision and teacher professional development among public secondary schools in Nairobi and Kajiado Counties, Kenya. The study focused on direct assistance, group development, curriculum development, along with action research. Guided by Developmental Supervision Theory, a descriptive survey design using quantitative, as well as qualitative approaches was adopted. Data were collected from 34 principals, 134 Heads of Departments (HoDs) and 245 teachers using questionnaires and interviews. Respondents ranked instructional-supervision tasks using a three-point scale. Findings showed that immediate feedback was ranked most important by 67.6% of principals, compared with 25.4% of HoDs and 21.6% of teachers. Gathering teachers for decision making regarding instructional concerns was ranked most important by 61.8% of principals, 33.6% of HoDs and 33.5% of teachers. Advising teachers on new curriculum developments was ranked most important by 91.2% of principals, 61.9% of HoDs and 59.6% of teachers. Teacher self-evaluation was ranked most important by 91.2% of principals, 58.2% of HoDs and 54.7% of teachers. The study concludes that principals should strengthen practical classroom support, collaborative learning, curriculum implementation and systematic teacher inquiry to enhance professional development.*

Keywords: Instructional supervision, direct assistance, group development, curriculum development, action research

1. Introduction

The quality of teaching and learning is closely associated with teachers' professional knowledge, instructional skills and opportunities for continuous professional development. Teachers operate in changing educational environments that require them to improve their pedagogical approaches, assessment practices and capacity to respond to curriculum requirements. Consequently, schools require leadership practices that enable teachers to reflect on their work, receive constructive feedback, collaborate with colleagues and address instructional challenges.

Instructional supervision is a key mechanism by which school leaders can support this process. Contemporary approaches increasingly view supervision as a developmental rather than purely evaluative activity. In Development Supervision Theory, Glickman & Gordon (1987) conceptualize developmental supervision as a process through which supervisors provide appropriate forms of assistance according to teachers' professional needs. The framework includes direct assistance, group development, curriculum development along with action research as important supervisory tasks (Ruchmayano et al., 2025).

Direct assistance provides individualized support through activities including classroom observation, feedback, coaching along with assistance with teaching methods. Such approaches are consistent with evidence on effective professional development. Tuerah (2025), in review of 35 rigorous studies, identified coaching, expert support, feedback along with reflection as recurring characteristics of effective professional development.

Group development provides opportunities for teachers to work collectively on instructional issues. Collaboration is

similarly identified as an important feature of effective professional learning because teachers can share ideas, examine practice and develop solutions within their school context (Merino et al., 2025).

Curriculum implementation is also important since professional development has a high likelihood of influencing teaching when it is focused on the content and instructional practices teachers are expected to implement. Adhikari, & Budhathoki (2025) emphasize content-focused professional learning and the use of models of effective practice.

Action research provides another developmental mechanism. It enables teachers to investigate problems arising from their own practice, collect evidence, implement interventions and reflect on the outcomes. Research has shown that action research can serve as a form of school-based professional development and can strengthen teachers' reflective and inquiry-oriented practice (Ghamrawi et al., 2026).

The Kenyan context is particularly relevant because instructional supervision has historically been associated with monitoring and compliance. Kinyua (2025) found that instructional supervision among selected public secondary schools in Kenya was often perceived as checking teachers' work and ensuring adherence to bureaucratic requirements, although supervision was also recognized as contributing to teacher quality and instructional improvement.

The present article is derived from the broader study by Atieno (2019), which examined the effectiveness of principals' instructional supervision in enhancing teacher professional development in public secondary schools located in Nairobi and Kajiado Counties. The original research identified strategic approaches used by principals and found that principals generally performed instructional-supervision

responsibilities but experienced challenges related to supervisory skills, knowledge and resources. This article therefore focuses specifically on the strategic approaches used by principals to support instructional supervision and teacher professional development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Developmental Supervision Theory

The study was guided by Developmental Supervision Theory developed by Glickman and elaborated by Glickman and Gordon (1987). The theory conceptualizes supervision as a developmental process through which supervisors provide teachers with appropriate professional assistance rather than simply evaluating their performance.

The theory recognizes that teachers differ in experience, competence and professional needs. Consequently, supervision should provide different forms of support according to the circumstances of individual teachers. The technical tasks associated with developmental supervision include direct assistance, group development, curriculum development, along with action research.

The theory is particularly relevant because the four approaches examined in this study represent complementary mechanisms for professional development. Direct assistance addresses individual instructional needs; group development promotes collaboration; curriculum development supports curriculum-related practice; while action research promotes reflection and inquiry.

2.2 Direct Assistance

Direct assistance involves individualized support through observation, feedback, coaching and assistance with teaching methods. Zeggelaar et al. (2022) found that effective professional development commonly incorporates coaching, expert support, feedback and reflection. They further argue that coaching is most useful when it addresses teachers' individual needs and is connected directly to classroom practice. Feedback is therefore not merely an assessment mechanism but can support professional learning while it enables teachers to understand their practice and make appropriate changes. However, Kuviyo et al. (2022) caution that instructional supervision in Kenya has sometimes been experienced primarily as checking and compliance. This suggests that direct assistance should be constructive and developmental rather than punitive. The key finding in this research was that direct assistance was a central task of developmental supervision.

2.3 Group Development

Group development involves teachers working collectively to address instructional concerns. It can include departmental meetings, subject groups, professional learning communities and collaborative decision-making. Bergmark (2023) identifies collaboration as a major feature of effective professional development. Collaborative professional learning allows teachers to share knowledge, examine instructional practices and develop solutions within their own

professional context. In the Kenyan context, Kumonya (2025) similarly highlights the importance of interaction in instructional supervision and staff development. Group development can therefore reduce dependence on the principal as the sole source of professional knowledge. Gore & Rosser (2022) on the other, emphasize collaboration in professional learning communities, where collaboration is found to be most effective when it is embedded within teachers' everyday work.

2.4 Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum development involves supporting teachers to understand, interpret and implement curriculum requirements. It includes communicating curriculum changes, discussing their instructional implications and helping teachers translate curriculum expectations into classroom practice. Nande (2023) specifically examined principals' instructional supervision in assisting teachers with curriculum implementation in Namibia. Their study found that principals experienced challenges associated with inadequate funds and an overloaded curriculum and recommended strengthening principals' training in curriculum implementation, as well as instructional supervision.

The link between instructional supervision and curriculum implementation is also supported by Ralebese et al. (2025) in their study in public secondary schools in India which found that instructional supervision had a significant influence on curriculum implementation and recommended continuous collaboration between principals and teachers to improve teaching and learning approaches.

Adhikari & Budhathoki (2025) further identify content-focused professional development as an important characteristic of effective teacher learning. Their review indicates that professional development is strengthened when it focuses on curriculum content and the pedagogical practices teachers are expected to use. The literature therefore suggests that curriculum supervision should move beyond communicating curriculum changes towards practical support that enables teachers to interpret, implement and evaluate curriculum requirements in their classrooms.

2.5 Action Research

Action research involves systematic inquiry into professional practice through which teachers identify instructional problems, examine evidence, implement interventions and evaluate their effects. Berku (2026) conceptualizes action research as practitioner inquiry that enables teachers examine as well as enhance their practice. It can therefore provide a school-based approach to teacher professional development by linking professional learning directly to teachers' classroom experiences.

Self-evaluation is an important element of action research as it encourages teachers to critically assess their instructional practices and identify areas requiring improvement. Li (2025) identify reflection as an important feature of effective professional development, particularly where teachers are given opportunities to examine their practice and apply what

they learn. Self-evaluation can therefore provide the starting point for identifying professional and instructional needs.

Action research also involves needs assessment based on classroom practice. Teachers can identify specific instructional problems, gather information about those problems and use the evidence to determine appropriate interventions. Berku (2026) emphasizes the importance of identifying problems of practice and using systematic inquiry to guide improvement. Needs assessment therefore helps connect teacher professional development to actual classroom challenges rather than relying solely on externally determined training needs.

A further component is the systematic study of classroom activities. Action research requires teachers to collect and examine evidence about their instructional practices, implement appropriate changes and assess the outcomes. Noone & Kong (2025) emphasizes this cyclical relationship between inquiry, action and reflection. Thus, systematic classroom inquiry can enable teachers to move beyond general reflection towards evidence-based improvement of instruction. The literature therefore suggests that action research comprises interconnected processes of self-evaluation, needs assessment and systematic examination of classroom practice. These processes provide teachers with opportunities to identify instructional challenges, reflect on their practice, implement improvements and evaluate their effectiveness.

3. Problem Statement

Teacher professional development is essential for improving teachers' instructional knowledge, skills and classroom practices. While professional development may be provided through formal training programmes, workshops and other professional learning activities, its effectiveness also depends on continuous support within the school environment. Instructional supervision by principals is therefore expected to provide teachers with opportunities for professional guidance, feedback, reflection and improvement in their instructional practices.

However, in many public secondary schools, instructional supervision may not adequately support teacher professional development. Instead of functioning primarily as a developmental process, supervision may focus largely on administrative requirements, compliance with school procedures, checking professional records and evaluating teacher performance. Such practices may limit the extent to which teachers receive constructive feedback, professional guidance and opportunities to reflect on and improve their classroom practices.

This problem potentially affects a large number of teachers in public secondary schools who depend on school-based professional support to continuously improve their instructional competencies. When instructional supervision does not adequately contribute to teachers' professional development, teachers may have limited opportunities to identify weaknesses in their instructional practices and receive the guidance required to address them. Consequently, instructional improvement may be constrained, with possible

negative implications for the quality of teaching and learning within schools.

The problem is therefore the limited understanding of the effectiveness of principals' instructional supervision in enhancing teacher professional development in public secondary schools. Although principals are expected to play a central role in supporting teachers' professional growth through instructional supervision, it remains necessary to establish the extent to which supervisory practices actually contribute to teacher professional development within the study context. This study therefore seeks to examine the effectiveness of principals' instructional supervision in enhancing teacher professional development in public secondary schools in Nairobi and Kajiado Counties, Kenya.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Study Area

The study utilized a descriptive survey design incorporating quantitative along with qualitative approaches. It was conducted among public secondary schools found in Nairobi and Kajiado Counties. Nairobi provided an urban context, while Kajiado provided a contrasting context characterized by rural and semi-arid areas. The use of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled the study to obtain both broad patterns of respondents' views and in-depth explanations of principals' instructional supervision practices.

4.2 Participants

The article presents responses from 34 principals, 134 HoDs and 245 teachers. Participants were selected from public secondary schools using stratified random sampling. Principals, HoDs and teachers constituted the key respondent groups in the various stratum because of their respective roles in instructional supervision and classroom practice. Questionnaires were administered to the three respondent groups, while interviews were conducted with principals.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection was done through the use of questionnaires and interview schedules. The questionnaires were developed to obtain respondents' views on respondents' instructional supervision tasks and the strategic approaches used to support teachers. The interview schedule enabled respondents to provide detailed explanations and experiences regarding instructional supervision. The interview schedule allowed respondents to provide detailed explanations and experiences about instructional supervision. These instruments were reviewed and refined prior to data collection to ensure that the questions were clear and relevant to the objectives of the study.

4.4 Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

The validity of the quantitative instruments was enhanced through review of their content and relevance to the study objectives. Reliability was addressed through the procedures applied in the original study to ensure consistency of the questionnaire items. For the qualitative component,

trustworthiness was enhanced by obtaining detailed accounts from principals and comparing the interview explanations with the quantitative findings from the questionnaires.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Respondents ranked instructional-supervision tasks using a three-point scale:

1 = Most important

2 = Somewhat important

3 = Least important

The four strategic approaches examined were direct assistance, group development, curriculum implementation along with action research.

Quantitative data were analyzed by use of frequencies and percentages. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically and were used in the explanation of quantitative findings.

4.6 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were observed during the entire study. Participation was voluntary and the respondents were informed of the reason of the study. The responses from participants were treated confidentially, and information obtained was used solely for the purposes of the research. The permission to conduct the study was obtained from NACOSTI and Kenyatta University graduate school.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Direct Assistance

Direct assistance included provision of personal assistance in teaching methods, observation and assistance in classroom instruction, and immediate feedback. The findings showed that 23 (67.6%) principals ranked immediate feedback to be the most important direct-assistance task, compared with 34 (25.4%) HoDs and 53 (21.6%) teachers. Observation and assistance in classroom instruction was ranked most important by 41.2% of principals, while personal assistance in teaching methods was ranked most important by only 20.6%. The high ranking of immediate feedback among principals is consistent with Zeggelaar et al. (2022), who identify feedback, coaching and reflection as essential features of effective professional development. Their review indicated that professional learning is more effective when teachers receive opportunities to receive input on their practice and make changes based on that input.

The finding also supports Kuviyo et al. (2022) who identify direct assistance as a central task of developmental supervision. Direct assistance enables the supervisor to respond to individual teacher needs rather than applying a uniform supervisory approach. However, the relatively low ranking of classroom observation and practical assistance among HoDs and teachers raises an important concern. Kuviyo et al. (2022) also found that Kenyan instructional supervision has sometimes been dominated by checking and compliance. If feedback is provided without sufficient classroom-based coaching, teachers may receive

recommendations without adequate support for implementing them. The finding therefore suggests that principals should combine immediate feedback with practical coaching, classroom observation and follow-up. This would align more closely with evidence by Zeggelaar et al. (2022) which suggests that effective professional development requires coaching, expert support, feedback and opportunities to practice and reflect.

5.2 Group Development

Group development involved gathering teachers for decision making on instructional concerns, facilitating collegial groups attain instructional goals and addressing dysfunctional group behaviors. The findings indicated that 21 (61.8%) principals ranked gathering teachers for decision making on instructional concerns as most important. The corresponding proportions were 33.6% among HoDs and 33.5% among teachers. The finding is supported by Bergmark (2023), whose review identifies collaboration as one of the central features of effective professional development. Collaborative learning enables teachers to exchange ideas and develop professional knowledge within their own working environment.

The finding is also consistent with Kumonya (2025), who emphasizes the interpersonal and developmental dimensions of instructional supervision in Kenyan schools. Bringing teachers together to discuss instructional concerns can help shift supervision from an individual principal-teacher activity towards collective professional learning. However, the lower proportions among HoDs and teachers suggest that principals may attach greater importance to collaborative decision-making than those directly participating in the activities. This perceived difference is important because effective professional development has to be relevant and engaging from teachers' perspectives.

The qualitative findings showed that principals used meetings and smaller departmental groups to discuss school and instructional concerns. This approach is consistent with the literature by Gore & Rosser (2022) on professional learning communities, where collaboration is most effective when it is embedded within teachers' everyday work. Thus, group development should be strengthened through structured departmental discussions, peer learning, collaborative lesson planning and joint problem-solving rather than relying exclusively on general staff meetings.

5.3 Curriculum Development

Curriculum development involved modification, as well as revision of instructional content and resources, advising teachers on curriculum implementation and advising teachers on new curriculum developments. The strongest finding was that 31 (91.2%) principals ranked advising teachers on new curriculum developments as most important, compared with 83 (61.9%) HoDs and 146 (59.6%) teachers. The high proportions across all three groups indicate that communicating curriculum developments was widely regarded as an important supervisory responsibility. This finding is directly supported by Nande (2023), whose study in Namibia examined principals' instructional supervision in

supporting teachers with curriculum implementation. Their study identified curriculum implementation as an important area of instructional supervision and recommended strengthening principals' training in curriculum development and supervision.

The finding is also consistent with Ralebese et al. (2025) who noted a significant positive relationship between instructional supervision and curriculum implementation in Indian public secondary schools. They recommended continuous collaboration between principals and teachers to improve teaching approaches. Adhikari & Budhathoki (2025) provide further support by identifying content-focused professional development as an important feature of effective teacher learning. Professional learning has a high likelihood of influencing practice when it is connected to the curriculum content and pedagogical practices teachers are expected to implement.

5.4 Action Research

Action research in this study included systematic study of classroom activities, conducting needs assessments focusing on classroom instruction, and encouraging teachers to undertake self-evaluation. The findings showed that 31 (91.2%) principals ranked encouraging teachers to undertake self-evaluation as most important, compared with 58.2% of HoDs and 54.7% of teachers. This finding is consistent with Li (2025), who identifies reflection as an important component of effective professional development. Self-evaluation enables teachers to examine their practice and identify areas requiring improvement.

The finding on needs assessment further supports the role of action research in professional development. The results showed that 61.8% of principals, 34.3% of HoDs and 31.4% of teachers ranked directing teachers to conduct needs assessments focusing on classroom instruction as most important. This finding is consistent with Berku (2026), who emphasizes identifying problems of practice as an important stage in practitioner inquiry. Conducting needs assessments based on classroom experiences can help ensure that professional-development activities respond to actual instructional needs.

However, systematic study of classroom activities received considerably lower ratings. Only 32.4% of principals, 11.9% of HoDs and 11.8% of teachers ranked it as most important. This finding contrasts with the systematic inquiry emphasized by Noone and Kong (2025), who describe action research as a cyclical process in which practitioners investigate problems, collect evidence, take action and evaluate outcomes. The relatively low ratings may therefore indicate that, although self-evaluation and identification of instructional needs are encouraged, systematic classroom inquiry receives less emphasis.

This distinction is important because reflection alone does not constitute a complete action-research process. Effective practitioner inquiry requires reflection to be linked to the systematic identification of problems, collection of evidence, implementation of interventions and evaluation of results. Dyngeland et al. (2025) similarly emphasize active learning

and reflection as important elements of professional development. Principals should therefore strengthen action research by supporting teachers to move from self-evaluation and needs identification towards structured classroom inquiry and evidence-based improvement.

6. Comparison of Findings Across Respondent Groups

Table 1: Tasks Ranked as Most Important

Strategic approach	Most important task	Principals (%)	HoDs (%)	Teachers (%)
Direct assistance	Immediate feedback	67.6	25.4	21.6
Group development	Gathering teachers to make instructional decisions	61.8	33.6	33.5
Curriculum development	Advising teachers on new curriculum developments	91.2	61.9	59.6
Action research	Encouraging teacher self-evaluation	91.2	58.2	54.7

The results reveal a consistent pattern: principals generally assigned higher importance to the identified supervisory tasks than HoDs and teachers. The largest difference occurred in direct assistance. While 67.6% of principals ranked immediate feedback to be the most important, only 21.6% of teachers did so. This difference may indicate that principals perceive feedback as a significant professional-development intervention, whereas teachers may expect more practical classroom-based support. This interpretation is consistent with Zeggelaar et al. (2022), who distinguish feedback from broader coaching and expert support. Effective professional development benefits from combining feedback with opportunities to practice, receive guidance and reflect on changes in practice.

The second major pattern concerns curriculum development and action research. Both received the highest ratings among principals, with 91.2% identifying the leading task under each approach as most important. This suggests that principals strongly value curriculum communication and teacher self-evaluation. The findings are in line with literature by Dyngeland et al. (2025) emphasizing reflection and self-evaluation and that by Nande (2023) which highlights the importance of strengthening principals' capacity to support curriculum implementation.

Nevertheless, the relatively low importance attached to practical curriculum implementation and systematic classroom inquiry suggests that the approaches may not yet be fully operationalized as sustained professional-learning processes.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that principals use direct assistance, group development, curriculum development, and action research to support instructional supervision and teacher professional development. Immediate feedback, collaborative instructional decision-making, guidance concerning

curriculum developments, and teacher self-evaluation emerged as prominent strategies. Differences between principals, Heads of Departments, and teachers indicate that supervisory priorities are not always experienced similarly across respondent groups. Greater emphasis on classroom-based coaching, collaborative professional learning, practical curriculum implementation, and systematic classroom inquiry could strengthen the developmental contribution of instructional supervision.

8. Recommendations

- Principals should strengthen classroom-based coaching by combining immediate feedback with classroom observation, demonstration and follow-up support.
- Schools should institutionalize collaborative professional learning through departmental teams, subject groups and structured professional-learning activities.
- Principals should strengthen curriculum implementation support by helping teachers translate curriculum requirements into classroom practices rather than concentrating primarily on communicating curriculum changes.
- Schools should strengthen systematic action research by supporting teachers to identify instructional problems, collect evidence, implement interventions and evaluate outcomes.
- The Teachers Service Commission and Ministry of Education should strengthen supervisory capacity building for principals and HoDs in coaching, feedback, collaborative supervision, curriculum implementation and action research.
- Teacher perspectives should be incorporated into supervisory planning, since the substantial differences between principals and teachers indicate that supervisory activities may not always be experienced in the same way by different groups.

9. Future Research

Future studies could examine:

- Classroom-based instructional coaching and teacher professional development among Kenyan public secondary schools.
- Collaborative instructional supervision and teacher professional development.
- Action research and reflective teaching practice among secondary school teachers.
- Principals' instructional-supervision competencies and teacher professional development.
- Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of feedback and classroom coaching.

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