

Pedagogy of Absence: Why Classroom Walkthroughs Rarely Change Teaching Practices

Rosendo N. Labrador
Doctor of Philosophy
Institute of Graduate and Professional Studies
Lyceum-Northwestern University
Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Classroom walkthroughs have become a widely adopted instructional supervision strategy intended to improve teaching quality through brief, informal classroom observations and constructive feedback. Despite their increasing use in Philippine public schools, teachers frequently perceive walkthroughs as compliance-oriented activities rather than opportunities for professional growth, creating a disconnect between the intended purpose of instructional supervision and its actual influence on classroom practice.

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers and the perspectives of school leaders regarding informal classroom walkthroughs. Specifically, it examined teachers' perceptions of walkthrough feedback, administrators' views of the walkthrough process, the perceived misalignment between supervisory goals and teachers' pedagogical needs, and the factors influencing teachers' decisions to adopt or disregard feedback.

A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Participants included experienced classroom teachers, school principals, and department heads from selected public schools in the Schools Division

Office of Nueva Ecija. Using purposive maximum-variation sampling, data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using comparative thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and compare the perspectives of teachers and school leaders.

Four major themes emerged. First, teachers viewed classroom walkthroughs primarily as routine monitoring activities that generated performance anxiety and produced superficial, checklist-oriented feedback. Second, school leaders described walkthroughs as mechanisms for ensuring instructional compliance but acknowledged barriers such as limited time, insufficient follow-up, and competing administrative responsibilities. Third, significant misalignments existed between administrative expectations and teachers' instructional needs, resulting in limited pedagogical improvement. Finally, teachers' willingness to implement feedback depended on relational trust, the practicality of recommendations, alignment with their professional beliefs, and the manner in which feedback was delivered.

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of classroom walkthroughs depends less on the observation process itself than on the quality of instructional relationships established between school leaders and teachers. Transforming walkthroughs from compliance-oriented monitoring into collaborative instructional coaching may strengthen teacher professional growth and improve classroom practice.

Keywords: Instructional Supervision, Teacher Feedback, Classroom Walkthroughs, qualitative research, thematic analysis, instructional leadership, professional learning

INTRODUCTION

Instructional supervision is widely recognized as a critical component of school leadership because it promotes instructional quality, teacher professional growth, and improved student learning. Among the supervisory approaches commonly implemented in schools, classroom walkthroughs have gained prominence as brief, informal classroom visits intended to provide immediate instructional feedback and foster reflective teaching practice. Unlike formal classroom observations conducted for performance evaluation, walkthroughs are designed to facilitate continuous instructional improvement through ongoing dialogue between school leaders and teachers.

In the Philippine basic education system, classroom walkthroughs have become an integral component of instructional supervision. School principals, head teachers, and department heads regularly conduct brief classroom visits to monitor instructional practices, determine compliance with Department of Education standards, and identify opportunities for professional support. Although these visits are generally intended to strengthen teaching effectiveness, many educators continue to question whether walkthroughs genuinely contribute to meaningful instructional improvement or merely function as mechanisms for monitoring compliance.

International literature consistently emphasizes that the effectiveness of instructional supervision depends not only on the observation process but also on the quality of feedback, professional trust, and collaborative relationships between teachers and school leaders. Constructive feedback that is timely, context-sensitive, and focused on instructional improvement is more likely to encourage professional reflection and pedagogical change. Conversely, feedback perceived as judgmental, superficial, or disconnected from classroom realities may

reduce teacher engagement and reinforce compliance-oriented practices rather than authentic professional learning.

Despite the widespread implementation of classroom walkthroughs, relatively little qualitative evidence exists regarding how teachers and school leaders experience this supervisory practice within Philippine public schools. Previous studies have largely examined walkthroughs from the perspective of instructional leadership effectiveness, with limited attention given to the differing interpretations of teachers and administrators regarding the purpose, usefulness, and consequences of walkthrough feedback. Consequently, the factors that influence teachers' acceptance or rejection of supervisory feedback remain insufficiently understood within the local educational context.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of classroom teachers and the perspectives of school leaders regarding informal classroom walkthroughs in selected public schools within the Schools Division Office of Nueva Ecija. Specifically, the study examines teachers' experiences during classroom walkthroughs, school leaders' perspectives on the purpose and implementation of walkthroughs, the perceived misalignment between administrative goals and teachers' pedagogical needs, and the factors influencing teachers' decisions to implement or disregard instructional feedback.

Beyond describing supervisory practices, this study proposes the concept of the Pedagogy of Absence to explain how classroom walkthroughs may fail to produce meaningful instructional improvement when professional trust, contextual understanding, sustained coaching, and collaborative dialogue are absent. Rather than functioning as mechanisms for instructional growth, walkthroughs may become routine compliance activities that reinforce administrative monitoring while leaving classroom practice largely unchanged. By illuminating this disconnect, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on instructional leadership

and offers evidence that may inform the development of more collaborative, teacher-centered supervisory practices in Philippine public schools.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' lived experiences of informal classroom walkthroughs and school leaders' perspectives on their implementation in public schools. The design was selected because it enables rich descriptions of participants' experiences and perceptions without imposing predetermined theoretical explanations. It was particularly appropriate for examining the complex interactions among instructional supervision, feedback practices, and teacher decision-making within authentic school contexts.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in selected public schools within the Schools Division Office of Nueva Ecija, Philippines. To capture diverse perspectives, maximum-variation purposive sampling was employed. Schools representing different organizational contexts, including large and small schools and those with varying performance profiles, were selected. Participants included experienced classroom teachers, school principals, and department heads who had direct involvement in classroom walkthroughs. Teacher participants had at least three years of classroom experience, while school leaders had a minimum of two years of experience conducting instructional supervision. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, resulting in approximately 10–15 teacher participants, 5–7 school administrators, and two to three focus group discussions composed of six to eight teachers each.

Data Collection

Data were gathered using multiple qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Semi-structured individual interviews served as the primary source of data. Separate interview guides were developed for teachers and school leaders to explore their respective experiences, perceptions, and practices related to classroom walkthroughs. Focus group discussions with teachers were conducted to examine shared experiences and collective interpretations, while document analysis of walkthrough forms, observation checklists, and feedback records provided contextual support and methodological triangulation. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis

The interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and documentary evidence were analyzed using comparative thematic analysis. Data analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to achieve familiarity with the dataset. Open coding was subsequently performed to identify meaningful concepts and recurring patterns within each participant group. Codes were organized into broader categories before being synthesized into overarching themes representing teachers' and school leaders' perspectives.

Following independent thematic development for each participant group, a comparative analysis was undertaken to identify areas of convergence and divergence between teacher and administrator narratives. The resulting themes were interpreted to explain how differences in perceptions, supervisory practices, and instructional expectations contributed to the limited instructional impact of classroom walkthroughs. Representative participant quotations were selected to illustrate each major theme while preserving participants' anonymity.

Trustworthiness

The rigor of the study was established through strategies that enhanced credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation involving interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Maximum-variation sampling enabled the inclusion of diverse participant perspectives, thereby enhancing the transferability of the findings to similar educational settings. Dependability was supported by maintaining a clear documentation of the research procedures and analytic decisions throughout the study. Confirmability was addressed through researcher reflexivity, systematic coding procedures, and the use of verbatim participant quotations to ensure that interpretations were grounded in the participants' accounts rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided every stage of the research process. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate educational authorities before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from transcripts and reports. Interviews were conducted in private settings to promote open and honest discussion, and all electronic and printed research materials were securely stored with access restricted to the researcher. The study adhered to the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and confidentiality throughout the conduct of the research.

RESULTS

The analysis of interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and documentary evidence generated four major themes that explain teachers' experiences with classroom walkthroughs and school leaders' perspectives on instructional supervision. These themes illustrate the disconnect between the intended purpose of classroom walkthroughs and their perceived influence on instructional improvement.

Theme 1. Classroom Walkthroughs are Perceived as Routine Monitoring Rather than Instructional Coaching

Teachers consistently described classroom walkthroughs as administrative monitoring activities rather than opportunities for professional learning. Participants reported that walkthroughs were commonly associated with compliance, documentation, and performance evaluation rather than instructional support. Consequently, many teachers experienced heightened anxiety during classroom visits and perceived feedback as checklist-oriented rather than developmental.

Representative teacher narratives revealed that walkthroughs often emphasized observable compliance with prescribed teaching practices instead of meaningful discussions about instructional improvement. Teachers expressed a preference for coaching conversations that acknowledged classroom realities and encouraged reflective practice.

Theme 2. Administrative Constraints Limit the Effectiveness of Classroom Walkthroughs

School leaders acknowledged that classroom walkthroughs were intended to strengthen instructional quality but identified several organizational barriers that limited their effectiveness. These barriers included competing administrative responsibilities, insufficient time for

classroom observations, limited opportunities for sustained follow-up, and resource constraints.

Participants explained that these conditions frequently reduced walkthroughs to brief observations with limited post-observation dialogue. As a result, instructional supervision often emphasized documentation and procedural compliance rather than continuous professional development.

Theme 3. Misalignment Between Administrative Expectations and Teachers' Professional Needs

Comparative analysis demonstrated substantial differences between teachers' expectations and administrators' intentions regarding classroom walkthroughs. While school leaders viewed walkthroughs as mechanisms for monitoring instructional implementation and maintaining accountability, teachers expected individualized coaching, collaborative problem-solving, and context-sensitive instructional support.

Teachers further perceived those systemic challenges—including limited instructional resources, increasing administrative workload, and inadequate coaching support—were often overlooked during walkthroughs. Instead, responsibility for instructional challenges was frequently attributed to individual teacher performance rather than broader organizational conditions.

Theme 4. Teachers' Decisions to Implement Feedback Depend on Trust, Practicality, and Respectful Communication

Teachers identified four interrelated factors that influenced whether walkthrough feedback was implemented: relational trust, practicality, alignment with professional self-efficacy, and the manner in which feedback was delivered.

Feedback was more likely to be adopted when teachers respected the instructional expertise of the observer, perceived recommendations as immediately applicable, and received suggestions through private, supportive conversations. Conversely, feedback delivered through evaluative or punitive communication, recommendations requiring substantial additional workload, or suggestions that contradicted teachers' professional beliefs were frequently disregarded. These findings indicate that successful instructional supervision depends not only on the quality of feedback but also on the professional relationships established between teachers and school leaders.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the instructional value of classroom walkthroughs is shaped less by the observation process itself than by the quality of professional relationships, organizational support, and collaborative dialogue that accompany supervisory feedback.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the effectiveness of classroom walkthroughs depends less on the frequency of classroom observations than on the quality of professional relationships established between teachers and school leaders. Although walkthroughs were originally intended to promote instructional improvement through formative feedback, teachers frequently interpreted them as mechanisms of administrative surveillance. This perception transformed what should have been a collaborative professional learning process into an activity associated with compliance, anxiety, and performance evaluation.

The first major finding demonstrates that teachers perceived classroom walkthroughs primarily as routine monitoring rather than instructional coaching. This perception appears to stem from feedback practices that emphasize compliance with observable teaching behaviors

instead of reflective dialogue about instructional improvement. When walkthroughs become procedural rather than developmental, opportunities for meaningful professional learning are diminished. These findings reinforce instructional leadership theories that emphasize coaching, collaboration, and reflective practice as essential components of teacher development.

School leaders likewise recognized that administrative demands limited the effectiveness of walkthroughs. Competing responsibilities, extensive documentation requirements, and limited opportunities for sustained follow-up often prevented instructional supervision from developing into an ongoing coaching process. Consequently, walkthroughs frequently ended with observation rather than instructional support. These findings suggest that organizational conditions, rather than individual leadership intentions alone, influence the quality of instructional supervision.

One of the study's most significant contributions is the identification of a persistent disconnect between administrative expectations and teachers' professional needs. School leaders generally viewed walkthroughs as mechanisms for ensuring instructional consistency and accountability, whereas teachers expected constructive coaching, contextual understanding, and collaborative problem-solving. This mismatch reduced teachers' acceptance of supervisory feedback and weakened the instructional impact of the walkthrough process. Effective supervision therefore requires alignment between organizational goals and teachers' professional learning needs.

The findings further demonstrate that teachers' decisions to implement feedback were influenced by four interrelated conditions: relational trust, practical applicability, alignment with professional self-efficacy, and respectful communication. Teachers were more willing to adopt recommendations from observers whom they regarded as credible

instructional experts, particularly when the suggestions addressed authentic classroom concerns and were communicated privately through supportive dialogue. Conversely, feedback delivered in a punitive or evaluative manner often generated resistance regardless of the technical quality of the recommendation. These findings indicate that professional trust functions as the central mechanism through which instructional supervision influences pedagogical change.

Taken together, these findings support the concept of the Pedagogy of Absence, which explains how instructional supervision fails when essential elements of effective professional learning are absent. These elements include sustained instructional coaching, mutual trust, contextual understanding, constructive feedback, and meaningful follow-up. Under such conditions, classroom walkthroughs become administrative routines that document instructional practice without substantially improving it. The study therefore argues that the effectiveness of classroom walkthroughs should be evaluated not by the number of observations conducted but by the extent to which they promote reflective teaching, collaborative learning, and continuous instructional improvement.

The study has several limitations. The findings were derived from participants within selected public schools in one Schools Division Office, which may limit transferability to other educational settings. In addition, the study focused on the perspectives of teachers and school leaders; future research may include students, instructional supervisors from other divisions, and policymakers to obtain a broader understanding of instructional supervision. Comparative studies across different regions and educational contexts may further validate and refine the proposed conceptual framework.

CONCLUSION

This study explored teachers' lived experiences and school leaders' perspectives regarding informal classroom walkthroughs in Philippine public schools. The findings demonstrate that the instructional effectiveness of classroom walkthroughs depends primarily on the quality of professional relationships established during the supervisory process rather than on the observation procedure itself. Teachers valued feedback that was grounded in trust, instructional expertise, practicality, and respectful communication, whereas compliance-oriented monitoring and limited follow-up reduced the perceived value of walkthroughs.

The study further identified a persistent mismatch between administrative intentions and teachers' professional learning needs. Although school leaders implemented walkthroughs to strengthen instructional quality and accountability, teachers frequently experienced them as mechanisms of surveillance rather than opportunities for professional growth. This disconnect limited the capacity of walkthroughs to produce meaningful pedagogical improvement.

The study introduces the Pedagogy of Absence as a conceptual explanation for why classroom walkthroughs may fail to influence instructional practice. The concept emphasizes that when trust, coaching, contextual understanding, collaborative dialogue, and sustained follow-up are absent, supervision becomes procedural rather than developmental. Transforming classroom walkthroughs into collaborative coaching experiences may therefore strengthen instructional leadership, teacher professional learning, and classroom effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The Department of Education may review existing classroom walkthrough policies to ensure that instructional supervision prioritizes teacher development alongside accountability requirements.
2. School principals and instructional leaders should redesign classroom walkthroughs as coaching-oriented professional learning opportunities rather than compliance-monitoring activities.
3. Department heads and instructional supervisors should provide timely, individualized, and context-sensitive feedback through confidential coaching conversations that encourage teacher reflection and continuous improvement.
4. Professional development programs should strengthen instructional coaching competencies, feedback delivery skills, and relationship-building among school leaders to enhance teacher trust and engagement.
5. Future researchers should validate and expand the proposed Pedagogy of Absence framework using diverse educational settings, larger participant groups, and complementary qualitative and quantitative research designs.