

A Comparative Analysis of Determinants of Effective Supervision in Public and Private Senior Secondary Schools in the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia, 2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400581>

Received: 12 February 2026; Accepted: 18 February 2026; Published: 19 May 2026

ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative analysis of the determinants of effective supervision in public and private senior secondary schools within the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia.

Drawing on a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 220 respondents, comprising teachers, administrators, and students who were selected through systematic random sampling from a target population of 440.

The research utilized a structured questionnaire, validated through pilot testing and expert review, to examine the frequency, nature, and strategies of supervisory practices in both public and private schools.

Analysis of findings revealed a marked disparity: private schools benefit from more frequent (biannual) and intensive supervision, leading to enhanced feedback and professional development, whereas public schools experience infrequent and more formal or casual oversight.

The study concludes that strengthening and standardizing supervisory practices, particularly by increasing the frequency and intensity of supervision in public schools, will advance educational quality and equity.

Key recommendations include aligning public school supervisory practices with those of private schools, adopting supportive supervision models, and developing unified policies to ensure consistent professional development across sectors.

INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

Liberia's education system, like those of many developing countries, faces persistent challenges in school supervision, which is essential for maintaining standards and fostering student achievement. In the Marshall Education District of Margibi County, the contrasts in supervision between public and private schools are particularly stark.

After the 14-year civil conflict, secondary school enrollment soared in both sectors (Enumuo, 2005), but this rapid growth exposed serious deficiencies in educational quality. Despite significant investments by the government, NGOs, and parents, teacher performance remains weak, as seen in public examination results. Government supervisory teams, led by District Education Officers, have been established, but their impact on student outcomes remains uncertain.

Supervision is widely recognized as vital to organizational success. Williams (2004) asserts that supervision has become "an essential part of any organizational setup, including the educational system." Effective supervision ensures that curricula are properly implemented and students remain engaged, supported by competent supervisors, clear priorities, varied approaches, and continuous evaluation.

However, supervision in the Marshall Education District is often reduced to routine classroom visits and paperwork, lacking the mutual respect, technical guidance, and institutional support emphasized by Knezevich

(1983), who described supervision as a “strategy to stimulate others toward greater effectiveness and productivity.”

Public schools, in particular, grapple with resource shortages, understaffed supervisory teams, inadequate funding, and political interference, all of which undermine effective oversight. These deficiencies impede teacher development and student performance, as compliance-based supervision limits professional growth and instructional quality.

Strengthening effective, professional supervision in the Marshall Education District is therefore essential for advancing Liberia’s secondary education and achieving national educational goals.

Statement of the Problem

Public outcry has emerged regarding the disparity between public and private secondary schools in the Marshall Education District of Margibi County. Despite the government’s responsibility for periodic supervision in public schools, private schools emphasize targeted, instruction-focused supervision with frequent classroom visits, feedback on teaching strategies, and close collaboration with teachers.

Private schools maintain more frequent supervision due to accountability to fee-paying parents, emphasizing high teaching standards through regular lesson observations and teacher evaluations.

Aims of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of effective supervision activities in public and private schools in the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia.

Objectives of the Study

The research was specifically guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine whether assigned government and non-government supervisors visit schools in the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia.
2. To determine the extent and frequency at which educational supervisors visit private and public schools in the Marshall Education District.
3. To establish the nature and strategies of supervision employed by supervisors during their visits to both private and public schools.

Research Questions

1. Do assigned government and non-government supervisors visit schools in the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia?
2. How frequently do educational supervisors visit private and public schools in the Marshall Education District?
3. What supervision strategies and approaches do supervisors employ during their visits to private and public schools in the district?

Delimitation of the Study

This study primarily focuses on the comparative analysis of effective supervisory practices and policies employed in private and public schools in the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia.

Data for this comparative study will be limited to school administrators, teachers, and educational supervisors directly assigned to public and private schools in the district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review constitutes a critical and comprehensive evaluation and synthesis of existing scholarly works on a specific topic (Franca et al., 2021). This review examines theories, concepts, and empirical studies on supervision through the following lenses: conceptual frameworks of supervision, historical and current perspectives, types of supervision, factors contributing to effective supervision, challenges in West African schools, and supervisory practices in Liberian public and private schools.

Conceptual Framework of Supervision

Supervision in education has evolved from mere inspection to a comprehensive, collaborative process that drives curriculum development, teacher training, and formative evaluation (Franseth, 1961; Glickman et al., 2018). Modern supervision is defined as leadership that continuously engages school staff in cooperative efforts to improve educational outcomes. It encompasses informal feedback, peer observations, data analysis, goal setting, and reflection (Glickman et al., 2018).

Zepeda (2017) emphasizes that supervision is an ongoing dialogue with teachers, fostering reflection and enhancing instructional practices to boost student achievement. However, Mette et al. (2017) note that when supervisors also evaluate teachers for employment decisions, trust and collaboration may suffer, limiting professional growth.

Effective supervision supports teacher development, stimulates motivation, and encourages continuous improvement (Ofejebe, 2007; Afianmagbon, 2007). Internal supervision by school leaders and external supervision by district or national offices (Neagley & Evans, 2001) can be intensive, routine, or focused on specific concerns (Musaaazi, 1982). Modern approaches emphasize teamwork and shared responsibility, moving teachers from passive participants to active collaborators (Burton & Bruckner, 1995).

Key factors for successful supervision include clear roles, strong leadership, adequate resources, and comprehensive evaluation programs involving all stakeholders (Neagley & Evans, 2001; Halpin, 1977; Baldrige, 1971; Eye & Netzer, 1972).

Empirical research confirms the impact of supervision: supervised teachers consistently deliver better student outcomes (Kinhart, 2000).

West African schools face challenges in supervision due to insufficient resources, inadequate training, poor accountability, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, cultural barriers, and political interference (Alhassan, 2014). These issues result in diminished teaching quality, reduced student performance, higher teacher attrition, and increased examination malpractice.

In Liberia, public schools typically experience compliance-focused supervision with infrequent visits, while private schools offer more regular instructional supervision and professional development (Liberia Ministry of Education, 2022). Yet, private schools also struggle with inconsistent quality and retention of qualified supervisors. Effective collaboration with education officers, as highlighted by LEAP (2024), is crucial but limited by funding constraints.

Other related studies

Comparative studies in Nigeria and Ghana show that supervision is vital for quality education, with collaborative practices involving principals, teachers, and student leaders (Ogakwu n.d. ; Essiam 2011).

Private schools generally enjoy greater autonomy and flexibility, focusing on teaching quality, while public schools prioritize curriculum and oversight (Liberia Ministry of Education, 2022).

The evidence is unequivocal: effective supervision is indispensable for achieving educational excellence. It must be a collaborative, developmental process that fosters teacher growth, enhances instructional quality, and improves student learning. Addressing supervision challenges requires robust training, improved accountability,

sufficient resources, community engagement, and consistent policy implementation. Quality education in West Africa, and particularly in Liberia, depends on supervision that inspires and empowers teachers to pursue continuous improvement.

METHODOLOGY

This presents a robust methodological framework designed to systematically investigate the research problem. The approach integrates multiple data sources and stakeholder perspectives to ensure comprehensive and credible findings.

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive survey design, enabling systematic comparison of variables across private and public schools while facilitating efficient data collection from diverse respondent categories (Thyer, 1993).

This design is particularly suited to capturing the multifaceted perspectives of teachers, administrators, supervisors, and students.

Population and Sample

The study targeted 440 individuals across private and public schools in the Marshall Education District, Margibi County, Liberia, including teachers (295), school administrators (55), supervisors (30), and students (60).

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Private	Public	Total
Teachers	250	45	295
School Administrators	48	7	55
Internal Supervisors	15	5	20
External Supervisors	5	5	10
Students	40	20	60
Total			440

Using systematic random sampling with a sampling interval of 2 ($K=N/n=440/220$), a representative sample of 220 respondents (50% of the population) was selected, ensuring statistical validity and equal representation across all categories.

Table 2: Sample Population

Category	Private	Public	Total
Teachers	104	22	126
School Administrators	26	4	30
Internal Supervisors	10	4	14
External Supervisors	5	5	10
Students	25	15	40
Total			220

Research Instruments and Validity

A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument, comprising demographic items and research-aligned questions. Pilot testing at two schools yielded exceptional reliability coefficients: 0.909 for teachers and students, and 0.924 for administrators and supervisors significantly exceeding the 0.60 threshold (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Content validity was established through rigorous expert review, ensuring the instrument accurately measures the intended constructs.

Data Collection

Data collection employed a strategic same-day administration and retrieval protocol, minimizing response bias and maximizing return rates. This approach, supplemented by follow-up visits and document analysis, achieved comprehensive data capture while maintaining methodological rigor.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software, with descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) employed to address research questions. This analytical approach provides clear, interpretable findings suitable for informing educational policy and practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Given the specific objectives and research questions guiding this study, it was essential to select a respondent pool that would yield the most accurate and insightful data. Therefore, only administrators, students, and teachers from both public and private schools were included. This decision was made to minimize bias and ensure that the data analyzed directly reflect the experiences and perspectives of those most involved in the educational process. Including internal and external supervisors could have introduced additional variables and potential biases, potentially compromising the integrity of the findings. By focusing on these key groups, the study remains firmly anchored in firsthand experiences, thereby enhancing both the credibility and relevance of the data to be analyzed.

Table One: Do assigned government and non-government supervisors visit your schools in the Marshall Education District?

Category	Public Yes (fx) & %	Public No (fx) & %	Private Yes (fx) & %	Private No (fx) & %	Total
School Admin	2 (1.02%)	2(1.02%)	20 (10.20%)	2(1.02%)	30
Teachers	7 (3.60%)	15 (7.65%)	95 (48.47%)	9(4.60%)	126
Students	5(2.55%)	10 (5.10%)	20 (10.20%)	5 (2.55%)	40
Total	14 (7.14%)	22(11.22%)	135(68.88%)	16 (8.16%)	196

Frequency and Presence of Supervisory Visits (Table One):

Findings: A total of 196 participants (teachers, students, and administrators) provided data on their awareness of supervisory visits, with supervisors excluded to reduce bias and all school names anonymized for confidentiality. Among administrators (n=30), most in private schools (20; 10.2%) and a few in public schools (2; 1.02%) confirmed supervisory visits, while only 2 in each sector reported no such visits. Among teachers (n=126), a higher proportion in private schools (95; 48.5%) reported supervisory visits compared to public schools (7; 3.6%); 15 public and 9 private teachers had not experienced such visits. Of the 40 students, 20 (10.2%) in private and 5 (2.6%) in public schools reported supervisory visits, while the remainder had not.

Discussion: The results indicate that that supervisory visits are more frequently recognized in private schools than in public schools across all respondent groups. The exclusion of supervisors and maintenance of school anonymity bolster the credibility of the findings. These trends highlight a disparity in supervisory oversight between private and public schools, suggesting a need for policy attention to supervisory practices, particularly in public institutions, to promote consistent and effective educational oversight.

Table Two: Extent and Frequency at which educational supervisors visit private and Public Schools

Category	# per Status	Monthly	Quarterly	Bi-yearly	Once yearly	Total
Public Sch. Admin	2				2 (1.34%)	2
Private Sch Admin	20			20 (13.42%)		20
PublicTeachers	7				7(4.69%)	7

Private Schools	95			95 (63.75%)		95
Public Students	5				5 (3.36%)	5
Private Schools	20			20 (13.42%)		20
Total	149			135 (90.60%)	14 (9.40%)	149

Extent and Frequency of Visits (Table Two)

Findings: This table highlights the frequency of visits by supervisors to the various schools under review, which remain anonymous to protect the research. of the 196 respondents, 149 were considered qualified to provide insights into supervision practices, as they were knowledgeable about supervision in their respective schools (as identified in the first table).

The findings reveal that a significant majority of 135 respondents (90.60%) from private schools, including school administrators, students, and teachers reported that supervision occurred at their schools, typically on a twice-yearly basis. In contrast, 14 respondents (9.40%) from public schools (comprising administrators, students, and teachers) indicated that supervision at their schools was conducted once per year.

Discussion: The findings highlight significant differences in supervisory visits between private and public schools. In private schools, 90.60% of respondents, comprising administrators, teachers, and students, reported that supervision occurs twice per academic year, reflecting a strong commitment to educational quality and accountability. In contrast, only 9.40% of public school respondents indicated annual supervisory visits, suggesting fewer opportunities for feedback and professional growth. This disparity underscores the need for more frequent supervision in public schools. Adopting the twice-yearly model used by private schools could enhance educational standards and outcomes across the sector.

Table Three: Nature and Strategy of Supervision Employed by supervisors during visits

Category	Casual	Intensive	Rare	Occasional	Total
School Admin				2 (1.34%)	2
Private Schools	5 (3.35%)	15 (10.10%)			20
Teachers	2 (1.34%)			5 (3.35%)	7
Private Schools	20 (13.42%)	75 (50.33%)			95
Students	2 (1.34%)			3 (2.01%)	5
Private Schools	4 (2.68%)	15 (10.10%)		1 (0.67%)	20
Total	33(22.14%)	105 (70.47%)		11 (7.38%)	149

Nature and Strategy of Supervision (Table Three):

This table describes the supervisory strategies employed by supervisors during visits to various public and private schools in the Marshal Education District.

The data indicate that a significant majority of 105 participants (70.47%) from private schools, comprising 15 administrators (10.10%), 75 teachers (50.33%), and 15 students (10.10%) reported experiencing intensive supervisory practices during these visits. In contrast, 33 participants (22.14%) acknowledged a more casual approach to supervision. This group included 5 private school administrators (3.35%), 20 private school teachers (13.42%), and 4 private school students (2.68%). Additionally, only 2 public school teachers (1.34%) and 2 public school students (1.34%) reported exposure to casual supervisory practices.

Regarding occasional formal supervisory practices, 11 participants (7.38%) indicated experiencing this approach. Of these, 10 were from public schools (6.71%): 2 administrators (1.34%), 5 teachers (3.35%), and 3 students (2.01%). Only 1 participant (0.67%), a private school student, reported experiencing occasional formal supervision.

These findings suggest that intensive supervisory practices are most prevalent in private schools, while public schools more frequently report occasional formal approaches. Casual supervision appears less common overall but is present in both sectors to a lesser extent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion:

The findings reveal a clear disparity in supervisory practices between private and public schools in the Marshal Education District. Private schools benefit from more frequent (twice-yearly) and intensive supervisory visits, while public schools experience less frequent and more formal or casual oversight. These patterns suggest inconsistent supervision and reduced opportunities for feedback and professional growth in public institutions.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, the researcher formulated the following for adherence by stakeholders and authorities to improve the pattern and strategy of supervision across schools in the Marshal education school district .

1. Increase the frequency of supervisory visits in public schools to at least twice per academic year, aligning with private school practices.
2. Encourage the adoption of more intensive and supportive supervisory approaches in public schools to enhance educational quality.
3. Develop consistent supervision policies across both sectors to ensure equitable professional development and accountability for all educators.

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