

Iranian Language School Managers' Attitudes towards EFL Teacher Supervision

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Abstract

Almost all language schools in Iran enforce teacher supervision with the purpose of promoting good teaching practices and higher standards of quality education. Despite its widespread practice, the body of research on language teacher supervision in Iranian EFL setting is scant. This study focuses on EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. Based on a researcher-developed protocol, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven language school managers from Tehran and Karaj, Iran, whose managing experiences ranged from 5 to 18 years, with the purpose of identifying their attitudes, experiences, and challenges regarding supervision. The interviews were analyzed using grounded theory and the findings were categorized into five major attitudinal themes of *becoming a supervisor*, *the requirements and responsibilities of a teacher-supervisor*, *evaluating a supervisor's performance*, *challenges regarding teacher supervision*, and *supporting supervisors*. The findings revealed that there are not any transparent criteria and rubrics for language school managers to draw upon to select teacher-supervisors, and supervisors are mostly selected based on their teaching potentials, experience, and merits. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that apart from observing classes and providing feedback, too many other responsibilities are assigned to supervisors in Iranian language schools. To improve the ongoing supervisory practices, the interviewees suggested the need for the development of transparent criteria and rubrics for supervisor selection.

Keywords: Language teacher supervision, language school managers, EFL teachers, teacher-supervisors

Introduction

Supervision appeared in school practices at the beginning of the 20th century in line with the industrial models which were implemented to educational contexts (Glanz, 2000). Thus, school contexts were considered as factories in which students were regarded as raw materials to be changed into products with great qualities. It should be noted that in those ages in the USA, all schools and factories were managed by the same methods entitled as the scientific management methods.

Teacher professional development. The supervisor should improve the teaching process and the effectiveness of training without having a judgmental attitude (Chen & Cheng, 2013). On the other hand, there is not enough information to show that school supervisors have supportive positions, and their roles are to use autocratic observation and to restrict the instructors without providing them with any helpful direction to develop their teaching (Horn, 2010). In educational

Improvements in management theories, the meaning and aim of supervision have changed. There has been a move from governmental supervision to democratic supervision and support, which has been a function of the time (Kapusuzoglu & Dilekci, 2017). Therefore, according to this standpoint, the supervision and improvement of education are the most critical issues in achieving the goals of the education.

Historically, language instructors considered themselves as agents to follow the prescriptions good models of teaching most often determined and enforced by their supervisors. Over the years, this attitude has been noted and still exists among some instructors, but they nowadays see the more positive characteristics of teacher supervision and view teacher supervision as an essential part of the management and prefer discussions with their supervisor about the observation (Rahmany, Hasani & Parhoodeh, 2014). Although American instructors showed positive attitudes toward the directive, non-directive and collaborative supervisory approaches, their reaction to non-directive supervisory approach was less positive compared with the directive and collaborative approaches (Gordon, 1990). Gordon stated this by proposing the claim that these instructors have not had decision making responsibilities. According to Norris and Sawyer (2015), nowadays, many changes have been attributed to educational settings in which the so-called relationships between the people in charge within those settings have widely been changed; that is, the connections have been based upon shared responsibilities rather than obeying a single authority figure. There are several characteristics of teacher supervision, and evaluation which have complementary roles toward each other and both are essential for the teaching and learning processes. Moreover, teachers' evaluation is a kind of formal assessment which takes teachers' overall abilities into account; it is a kind of rating teachers. Thus, the evaluator evaluates the teachers regarding their skills in fulfilling the requirements of the language school (Nolan & Hoover, 2005; Pawlas & Oliva, 2007).

Managers are significant because they are the policy makers, key stake holders, and decision makers in language schools and set the management direction. Due to the importance of the role of supervisor, such decisions become instrumental. Thus, it is significant to explore how managers visualize supervision and what criteria they have for selecting supervisors. Moreover, the relationship between the manager and supervisor and the challenges they face in their job affect the outcome of supervision. Therefore, supervision is a pivotal feature, and because of that it becomes of paramount importance to delve into the perceptions of managers toward teacher supervision have not been addressed. However, due to the lack of knowledge, there have not been any studies in the literature on the attitudes language school managers hold toward EFL teacher supervision in the world in general and in Iranian EFL context in particular. Thus, this research topic has remained under-researched, and this prompted the researchers to undertake this study.

The present study aimed at discovering the attitudes language school managers hold toward EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools, and finding out the criteria language school managers draw upon to select a teacher-supervisor. Furthermore, it intends to explore the challenges these language school managers face regarding teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. By investigating manager's attitudes, it is expected that the study can provide insights into the nature of teacher supervision and benefit more from supervisory practices.

Review of the Literature

Defining supervision is not a simple task, as some definitions are not compatible with one another. Supervision has a variety of definitions. In some contexts, supervision has been defined for contractual and legal aims. For instance, based on Hazi (1994, p. 199), New Jersey law assigned with the responsibility for supervision is defined by the administrative code and is very similar to evaluation. Besides, supervision has been used in different fields of life such as management, business, education, and health, military and social services (Dangel & Tanguay, 2014). Sullivan and Glanz (2000) defined supervision as a process of perusing and scanning a passage to identify errors and deviations from the original passage. Daresh (2001) provided a broader definition of supervision and believed that it is a process of overseeing the ability of individuals to meet the aims of the organization where they work. He emphasized that supervision must be considered as a process, not a professional role.

Supervision is one of the crucial strategies enabling language instructors to improve their classroom practices and professional development (Hoque, Subramaniam, & Islam, 2020). Therefore, it is vital to recruit and train language instructors to improve their instruction, and improve the quality of teaching (Mette, Aguilar, & Wiczorek, 2020). Teacher supervision and evaluation enhance teacher growth, teaching quality, and instructional leadership (Brandon, Hollweck, Donlevy, & Whalen, 2018). Supervision helps instructors learn from the complexity of teaching (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). Moreover, a successful supervisor is expected to help teachers connect theory to practice and learn from their experiences in the field (Diacopoulos & Butler, 2020).

EFL teacher supervision is a crucial part of a supportive system and empowering strategy for instructors and should be viewed positively by them (Gholaminejad, 2020). In order to decrease their classroom anxiety (Johnson, Ivers, Avera, & Frazee, 2020). Novice teacher supervision is one another in guiding teachers (Higgins, Morton, & Wolkenhauer, 2018).

Phillips and Park Rogers (2020) underscored the importance of establishing rapport and pointed out that building positive relationship with instructors is a crucial part of being a good supervisor. Supervisors support teachers in developing their instructional practices, and with considerable time in classes and close relationships with instructors, the benefits of such scaffolding could be felt among students as well (Garver & Maloney, 2020).

Supervision is about creating working associations with staff. Creating a trusting relationship requires time. But when a supervisor and a supervisee trust each other, their thoughts and efforts can be applied to each situation and the probability of time-wasting arguments decreases. The supervisor requires to trust the supervisee to get assigned tasks done adequately, and the supervisee should be able to trust the supervisor to back him fairly. Thus, both of them are required to exchange positive emotions and attitudes for the benefit of their organization and the enhancement of work. But when it comes to assessment and evaluation, the relationship between supervisors and those who are supervised becomes complicated (Siddiek, 2012).

On the other hand, language teacher supervision is not just concerned with the creative and positive aspects of assisting instructors accomplish their full potential. If it were, the title of language teacher supervision would be "language teacher supervision for the benefit of the organization".

(2000) maintained that, in the past, language teacher supervision was considered as an act of supervision equated inspection which is well put by Blumberg (1980) in his book entitled *“Supervisors and Teachers: A Private Cold War”*. Supervision is for all the staff at schools such as instructors, managers and other individuals in charge (Duke, 1987). Besides, in the context of teaching and learning, unfortunately, many language instructors never receive any training for performing the duties of supervisors. In addition, it is usually believed that language instructors who are upgraded to supervisory positions will automatically know how to supervise probably because they are higher in status than their colleagues (Bailey, 2006).

Each teacher should improve the teaching process and the effectiveness of training without having a judgmental attitude. Furthermore, the way teachers consider supervision in schools and classrooms is an essential factor that determines the results of the supervision process (Chen & Cheng, 2013). Moreover, because of evaluative approaches of supervision, novice teachers harbor more negative beliefs toward the act of supervision than skilled and professional teachers. Novice teachers believe that the main duty of supervisors is only finding their faults and fear that supervisors will report their deficiencies to the school managers (Tesfaw & Hofman, 2014).

Supervision has been examined by different researchers and scholars from a diverse range of aspects. Acheson and Gall (1997) reported that in Zimbabwe many teachers fear being supervised because they believed that teacher supervision has always been biased toward judgement. Furthermore, Zimbabwean teachers have a negative viewpoint about supervision and they consider their supervisors as fault finders in the classroom. Besides, teachers with opposing expectations may feel dissatisfied with a reflective rather than evaluative post-observation meeting. In most of the cases, what teachers expect to receive from the post-observation conference is a balance of positive appraisal and constructive criticism (Chamberlin, 2000). Further, Kutsyuruba (2003) examined the standpoints of Ukrainian and Canadian beginning high school teachers. According to the results of his study, the Ukrainian and Canadian participants believed that the supervision is important for their professional development. Moreover, the participants of his study agreed that as novice teachers, they should grow and develop in order to become professional teachers.

On the other hand, Ochieng and Borg (2011) examined the process of supervision by teacher educators and its impact on English language student teachers during a practicum in Kenya. The study reported that supervision was brief and uncoordinated and that the feedback teachers received was mainly evaluative, directive and focused on general, rather than subject-specific, largely to pleasing their supervisors and getting a pass mark, so this limited the degree to which student teachers enhanced the pedagogical reasoning that is considered to be the main purpose of teaching practice by both the Kenya government and current literature in the field of language teacher education.

In another study, Kayaoglu (2012) surveyed the standpoints of Turkish supervisees and found that supervision has no specific value regarding professional improvement and growth of teachers. In addition, Turkish supervised teachers considered supervision as a negative experience. Regarding the issue of peer evaluation, Salih (2013) studied the viewpoints of instructors toward peer evaluation or review of teaching as a factor for professional enhancement and quality improvement. The study also examined the viewpoints toward peer evaluation as a process in the quality assurance system. Consequently,

the findings of the study revealed that peer evaluation is an efficient factor for developing instccc'''''' ''c.... eiii ...

Furthermore, Tesfaw and Hofman (2014) investigated the existing attitudes of instructors toward instructional supervision in secondary schools in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The purpose of their study was to determine whether there is any difference between experienced and novice instructors in their perceptions toward supervisory practices, and whether there is any relationship with perceived professional development. The findings of the study showed that the supervisory approaches were infrequently practiced in secondary schools. No significant differences were found between novice and experienced instructors in their attitudes toward supervisory processes practiced at their schools. In addition, there were significant weak to moderate positive eessssssssss ss eeeen hle acual eeeerrrrr r appaaacee,, tttt ccc'''''' 'ttttees add pfffeiii aal eeeemmmmm F,,,,,, ,,,, ccc'''''' 'ttttees ee ee ciiii eeed as ee iiiii iii att cttttttt tt oorrrr professional development and growth.

Besides, Moradi, Sepehrifar, and Khadiv (2014) investigated the perceptions of 34 teachers on supervision through a questionnaire and interview. The result of the study revealed that teachers in classroom observations attempted to please their supervisor and ensure supervisors that they adhere to the program policy because they were worried about the consequences of getting the unsatisfactory rating by supervisors and even being fired. Similarly, Rahmany, Hasani, and Parhoodeh (2014) identified 74 Iranian EFL teache'''' wwwswnn supervision and its impact on their decision making in their classes. Moreover, their study iiiiiii ii ddd ee eennnnmmnnneeeen tttt cccsss' aaagggg geeeeeence add rrrr eerceiii nn nn supervision. To this end, the researchers observed classes and utilized a questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that among the novice instructors, those who had less than five years of teaching experience were found to be more affected by the supervisory process when it came to making decisions in their classes. In addition, these teachers held positive attitudes toward supervision. Teachers with six to ten years of teaching experience were the most pessimists among others. Besides, the findings revealed that teachers with 16 or more years of teaching experience, noted that teacher supervision is mainly for paperwork formalities and regulations.

Amini and Gholami (2018) examined a novel model of language teacher supervision entitled rotatory peer-supervision, in which supervision is delegated to EFL teachers themselves. In aaayyyyyyy,,,,,, eeeeeenc.d aaaceess eeee sssss ssss ggggggggr eee'''' ceeeec nn a rotatory basis and providing constructive feedback. They examined the possibility of considering language teachers as supervisors in their study. Moreover, they identified what the teachers focused and what type of supervisory feedback they provided. In their study, four experienced aaaceess eaaeeeee iiiii r clll eae'''' eacgggg eeffaanaa nce ggggg a crrrrrrr eeeeeaiinn checklist, and the evaluative comments of teachers were classified in terms of suggestions, criticisms, and compliments. The results of their study showed that the teacher-supervisors offered compliments more than criticisms and suggestions, and offered their critical comments using mitigated and face-saving language.

As supervision is mainly done with the purpose of professional development and provision of constructive feedback and scaffolding to teachers in Iranian EFL context, the present yyyrrrrrr rrrr rr ee Feennn ss sseeerrrrr r mee'''' 22222 as tts rrrr riical rrawww... model confers the greatest importance to constructive feedback and the improvement of teaching and learning. According to this model, the supervisor acts as an evaluator and expert providing constructive feedback to teachers and evaluates the overall quality of their performance. Moreover, the supervisor makes recommendations to assist teachers to excel in their practices, and these recommendations could cover a wide range of areas such as lesson planning, teaching

activities, and classroom management. Freeman (1982) contented that the criteria for evaluation in this model need to be crystal clear and that throughout the supervision process, teachers should be made aware of the standards they are going to be judged against.

Consistent with the centralized nature of the education system in Iran, supervision of language schools is also centralized. Teacher-supervisors inspect teachers, observe their classes and evaluate their teaching performance, but what is being done in the name of teacher supervision is unclear and we do not know what attitudes teachers hold toward supervision system. Language teacher supervision is a necessary function and an integral part of teachers and eeee..... .. careers add professional experiences. According to Amini and Gholami (2018), language teacher supervision can develop the people in charge, language teachers and learners professionally, and it is regarded as an organizational duty. Thus, it is possible for all language teachers to have the responsibilities of supervisors, without taking into account their responsibilities within the language school they are working in.

Furthermore, EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools plays a crucial role in the improvement of education system and the way in which teachers perceive it. Nowadays, there is an extending scope of supervisory practices in Iranian language schools. Managers most often select an experienced teacher to act as a teacher-supervisor with too much authority entrusted in supervisors in most of the language schools, and they invest much money and time in their teacher-eeeeerrrrrr rr It ssrrrr hhhiii gg tttt tttt eeeerrrrrr rr iiii es can be yyyyyyyaaaeeeeceedd judgmental or more developmental in focus. Therefore, EFL teachers are supervised and evaluated by supervisors; however, most of them cannot benefit from the supervisors as much as they need. On the other hand, supervision in Iranian language schools does not enjoy a rich basis and requires improvements in both its theoretical foundations as well as classroom practices. The literature on language teacher supervision from the past few decades includes descriptions and analyses of supervisory approaches (Bailey, 2006). However, the current study makes a unique cttttttt ttt ooiii s eee,, as tt fffess a deddddddccctttt tt aaaaaaaa ccooll aaaa eess' att..ees toward EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. oo eee eett ff eee eeeeacée'' knowledge, there have not been any studies in the literature on the attitudes language school managers hold toward EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. Thus, this research topic has remained under-researched. The following research question was formulated to address the objectives of the present study: What attitudes do language school managers hold toward EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools?

Method

Participants

Seven language school managers took part in the present study. The participants were selected from different language schools in Karaj and Tehran, Iran. The managers participating in this study were selected based on convenience sampling. Table 1 provides information on the participants. The managers comprised two females and five males. Their ages ranged from 35 to 44, with 5-18 years of managing experience. The managers had MA, Ph.D., or they were Ph.D. candidates in TEFL, English language and literature, industrial management, or MBA. It should be noted that the names and language schools of the participants are not disclosed in this study to maintain anonymity.

Table 1*Participants' Academic Degree, Field of Study, and Job Experience*

Participants	Academic Degree	Field of Study	Years of Managing Experience
1. Manager (M1)	Ph.D.	TEFL	18
2. Manager (M2)	Ph.D. Candidate	TEFL	6
3. Manager (M3)	Ph.D. Candidate	English Language and Literature	5
4. Manager (M4)	MA	TEFL	10
5. Manager (M5)	MA	Industrial Management	10
6. Manager (M6)	MA	Industrial Management	16
7. Manager (M7)	MA	MBA	12

Instruments

In order to answer the research question of this study, semi-structured interviews based on the interview protocol developed by the researchers were conducted. The initial items for the interview protocol were developed based on a thorough review of the related literature and the researchers set up one group interview session with two managers in order to initially try out the interview questions and revise them in light of the given comments and suggestions. Furthermore, in order to validate the interview questions, two associate professors in Applied Linguistics with specializations in teacher education and commented on them. The interviews drew upon emergent methodology to categorize the supervisors' laden comments into five major attitudinal themes namely, becoming a supervisor with two subthemes of *characteristics of a good and ideal supervisor* and *the criteria managers draw upon to select a supervisor*, the requirements and responsibilities of a teacher-supervisor, with one subtheme of *resolving possible organizational conflicts*, and supporting supervisors with a subtheme of *establishing rapport and positive relationship with the teacher supervisor*. (See the Appendix for the complete interview protocol).

Procedures

As the current study was attitudinal in its scope and nature, it employed the principles of attitudes, and find out the answer to the research question of this study. Most of the qualitative studies which intend to explore the theory inherent in the data inductively and deductively follow an emergent methodology. Thus, this study intended to focus on the insightful attitudes regarding EFL teacher supervision that appeared from the data through employing the procedures followed by Grant-Davie (1992), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Coffey and Atkinson (1996). It must be noted that the researchers supplemented this approach by an in-depth content analysis (Dawson, 2002), a method in which a researcher analytically examines interview transcripts and assigns codes to the emergent concepts. Thus, in line with Harwood, Austin, and Macaulay (2009), the researchers conducted interviews to investigate the language school manager's attitudes towards EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools.

In order to achieve the desired goals of the study, the researchers developed a set of interview questions for language school managers. It is worth mentioning that the researchers followed semi-structured interview protocol and asked more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewees rather than a straightforward question and answer format. The

interviews with managers were conducted either face to face or through Skype, lasting between 40 and 50 min, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The transcripts were sent to the participants for verification and possible modification through email.

Afterwards, the researchers manually coded and categorized the transcribed data to assigned a code name to each participant. For example, M1 stands for Manager Number 1 (see Table 1). Furthermore, significant to note here is the wording of the interview extracts. As is same opinion, and the voices were mostly similar. Thus, when reporting the number and identities of the interviewees who raised a similar issue, the researchers provided a number of sample extracts taken from the participants as support for an issue. Therefore, the researchers analyzed and reported the transcriptions based on the research question and research purposes in order to explore the attitudes language school managers held toward teacher supervision.

Results

The research question of this study dealt with the attitudes language school managers held toward supervision in Iranian language schools. In this section, the researchers report and from the interviews. The managers participating in this study were asked eight questions.

Becoming a Supervisor

The first major attitudinal theme of the interviews was becoming a supervisor with two subthemes of *characteristics of a good and ideal supervisor* and *the criteria managers draw upon to select a supervisor*.

Characteristics of a Good and Ideal Supervisor

All of the language school managers spoke about the significance of having the highest academic degree in ELT and excellent interactive communication skills. The comment from M2 demonstrates this point:

“I believe that the most important point is having a Ph.D. degree in the field of English language teaching (ELT) or being a Ph.D. student. On the other hand, a good supervisor must listen to teachers and communicate with them effectively and frequently. Being a great source of knowledge, support and guidance is another important point that must be noted.”

Out of seven managers, six underscored the importance of providing effective feedback, .. motivating teachers, resolving conflicts between teachers, and respecting them. The following comments from M1 and M2 elucidate this:

“An ideal supervisor must be able to provide effective and constructive feedback to the teachers and help them improve their teaching style. Also, he/she should hold some meetings and conferences and give teachers clear instructions.”

“I believe that a good supervisor respects, understands, motivates, inspires, guides and disciplines teachers, resolves conflicts between teachers and students and makes the right decisions at work.”

M5 and M7 highlighted the significance of being well-experienced and having great knowledge of supervision, observation, teaching, teacher development, teacher promotion, and regulations related to the recruitment and selection of teachers, respectively. Concerning this, they pointed out that:

“Well, I believe that an ideal supervisor is knowledgeable, experienced, organized, punctual, reliable, ethical, trustworthy, honest, confident and self-assured at work.”

“A good supervisor must observe teachers’ classes, and provide a detailed and accurate report of teachers’ teaching performance and classroom observations. Moreover, a good supervisor should be a good consultant and should be able to direct, recruit or promote teachers.”

The Criteria Managers Draw upon to Select a Supervisor

All managers suggested the need for the development of transparent criteria and rubrics for supervisor selection and noted that holding a related academic degree, for instance Ph.D. in the field of ELT, and teaching experience are considered as the most important criteria and qualifications they draw upon to select a supervisor for their language schools. On the other hand, one manager pointed out that he promoted individuals from teaching roles after they had proven themselves capable of teaching well. In this regard, M1 with almost two decades of language school management experience indicated that:

“When deciding who to advance to a supervisory role, I look for a teacher who is knowledgeable about teaching and supervision, who understands the roles and responsibilities, and has strong work ethics, punctuality, and time management skills.”

Furthermore, M4, MA in TEFL with 10 years of managing experience, pointed out that his language school appreciates a supervisor who:

“helps teachers utilize teaching methods that are better suited to the demands of the curriculum, develops good and positive relationship with teachers and other staff, serves as a model for teachers and attempts to improve the quality of education.”

On the other hand, five interviewees underscored the significance of possessing good communication and feedback skills. In this respect, M6 gave this comment:

“An individual who is selected to act as a supervisor must possess excellent communication and listening skills. Most importantly, someone who is able to motivate, support, and assist teachers and provide consistent feedback which is essential for improving teachers’ teaching knowledge and performance.”

The Requirements and Responsibilities of a Teacher-Supervisor

The second major attitudinal theme of the interviews described requirements and responsibilities of a teacher-supervisor. As the sample extracts from M1 and M3 reveal, five managers (M1, M2, M3, M4, and M6) reported that observing classrooms, evaluating the effectiveness, discussing complaints among teachers, students and parents, transferring knowledge, recruiting or promoting teachers, arranging their classes, conducting placement exams and interviews, and developing syllabus, curriculum and exam questions are the most essential responsibilities of a teacher-supervisor.

“Observing teachers’ classes, evaluating the effectiveness of their performance, providing effective feedback as well as constructive criticism, interviewing new students, hiring or firing teachers, arranging their classes, finding sub-teachers and sharing teaching knowledge or experience with them are among the most important responsibilities of a supervisor.”

“A supervisor must develop and update syllabus, curriculum and exam questions. Also, he should hold some meetings with teachers to clearly communicate instructions and information, provide them with modern teaching methods, skills and techniques, and discuss complaints among teachers, students and parents.”

Furthermore, four managers spoke about keeping required records and documents, and asserted that:

“A supervisor must keep required documents in a clear and understandable manner, report absences and time off with adequate notice and report the matters related to the discipline of teachers.”

Besides, M2 underscored the importance of politeness, trust and respectful behavior and stated that:

“Apart from evaluating teachers, a supervisor should interact respectfully with teachers, respect the teachers to be respected, act in a trustworthy manner and be a model for teachers.”

Evaluating a Supervisor’s Performance

All of the managers indicated that they evaluate of the language school and success, achievement and satisfaction of students, parents, and teachers. This is evident in the following excerpts from M6 and M7, respectively:

“A supervisor has good supervisory skills if she holds regular meetings and keeps me informed of all issues, if she has creative ideas for development of the institute, if she provides a positive and trustful atmosphere in the institute, if she addresses and resolves teachers’ performance issues in a timely and proactive manner, if she provides teachers with the information they need to improve, and offers regular and constructive feedback.”

“Actually the success, achievement and satisfaction of students, parents, and the teachers are really important to me. That’s why I evaluate the supervisor by checking whether her work contributes to the improvement of my language school or not.”

Language Schools’ Challenges Regarding Teacher Supervision

Three managers (M1, M2 and M5) asserted that the anxiety and inconvenience reported by language learners and teachers in classroom observations are the most important challenges regarding supervision. In this regard, M5 pointed out that:

“Students feel uncomfortable and anxious in the presence of supervisors in their classes. In addition, teachers fake their manners in presence of the supervisor and their behaviour is totally different from what it is in their everyday classes and they don’t reveal their real performance.”

On the other hand, M2 and M3 spoke about the difficulty, and significance of selecting an accountable, experienced, effective and trustworthy supervisor, respectively:

“Supervisors usually don’t consider effectiveness and importance of their job and responsibilities. Therefore, it is really hard to trust them. In my opinion, it is vital that supervisors take their job seriously and try to improve the quality of the time they spend at language schools with managers, teachers, and students.”

“I believe that in some language institutes, supervisors devote inadequate attention to the development of instructors’ teaching knowledge and skills and they are unable to design teacher training programs that will address the weaknesses for growth.”

Meanwhile, five managers asserted that one of the other challenges they face regarding teacher supervision is dealing with supervisors who have poor relationship with teachers. This is evident in the following excerpt from M6:

“Some supervisors don’t possess the sufficient communicative skills and abilities to observe teachers and deliver messages to them. They are unable to build positive relationship with teachers in the institute, and this will result in conflicts, disputes, mistrust and weak cooperation between the supervisor and teachers.”

Resolving Possible Organizational Conflicts

All of the managers pointed out that they resolve conflicts with the supervisors by scheduling a meeting with them to address the issue and find a solution. This is evident in the following statements from M2, M3, M4 and M6:

“I never neglect complaints. I always manage conflicts and try to prevent further conflicts. For example, when a supervisor complains about something, I listen carefully to what he says, try to understand him, consider his complaints, and find a solution.”

“When it comes to managing a conflict, I always treat the supervisor with respect and attempt to understand her views, discuss all of the possible options for a solution positively, describe the desired changes, and try to obtain agreement from the supervisor.”

“As I know our conflict has negative impact on teachers’ performance, I immediately resolve conflicts, issues and disagreements by holding a meeting with the supervisor in my office. In the meeting, I respect the supervisor’s emotions, encourage great energy, restate the rules and end our meeting by apologizing and thanking her for her efforts.”

“I confront the problem and don’t let it become worse or difficult to resolve. Therefore, I resolve the dispute by calling the supervisor to my office, discussing the problem and listening to her ideas to develop the institute.”

Supporting Supervisors

... tttt tttt .. eee ff eee ttt eeeee s eeeeeee tee aaaaaae ccllll ll aee”” attttees toward supporting teachers with one subtheme of *establishing rapport and positive relationship with the teacher-supervisor*. The managers put under the spotlight the significance of motivating supervisors, supporting them financially, offering praise in public meetings, trusting them, giving them the right amount of autonomy, considering rewards, and providing them with sufficient equipment. The statements from M1, M2 and M3 demonstrate this:

“I always establish a safe and positive work environment, assure the supervisor that I will support him financially, and provide her with sufficient payment as well as the opportunity to make decisions for observing, evaluating, and developing teaching and learning.”

“I think building trust, communicating effectively and encouraging the supervisor are very essential. I try to trust the supervisor and follow his guidance. I also consider some rewards (such as pay raise) for his positive suggestions for future growth, development, and advertisement of the institute.”

“I have shared my office with the supervisor. Also, I have provided her with a computer along with a desk and locker for storing her personal possessions. On the other hand, as well as clarifying the expectations, roles, responsibilities and objectives, I always appreciate and praise the supervisor publicly in order to perform her job well.”

Establishing Rapport and Positive Relationship with the Teacher-Supervisor

All managers noted that respect, trust and honesty are extremely influential in establishing rapport and positive relationship with the supervisors. In this regard, M1 pointed out that:

“In my point of view, respecting the supervisor, being honest, and showing him I trust his knowledge and experience and understand the challenges he faces in his role are so important in

establishing rapport with him. Also, I believe that paying the supervisor what he deserves is another important point that should be taken into consideration because, other than establishing rapport, it will help him do his best.”

Besides, four managers (M1, M2, M3, M7) emphasized the importance of holding meetings, having effective communication skills and providing positive feedback. This is evident in the following excerpt from M2:

“In my opinion, holding regular meetings with the supervisor, communicating effectively, providing feedback and offering to help as well as asking for her feedback, help or advice, welcoming her ideas and discussing her suggestions really help me build positive relationship and rapport with the supervisor.”

Discussion

The current study aimed to identify the attitudes of language school managers toward EFL teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. As a result of conducting this research, the researchers found that, in Iranian language schools, teacher-supervisors are selected and recruited based on their relevant academic degree such as holding a Ph.D. degree in the field of ELT, teaching experience, and communication or feedback skills. This may be owing to the fact that language school managers in Iran have no transparent criteria to draw upon to select a supervisor. Moreover, managers promote individuals from teaching roles after they have proven themselves capable of teaching well. Many language school managers assume that because these teachers performed well in their teacher role, they will be able to perform well in their new role as a supervisor as well. However, without question, training is needed for these teacher-supervisors to change their hats from teacher to supervisor and enhance their supervisory skills. Thus, lack of training can negatively influence the teacher-supervisor, teachers, manager, and ultimately, the language school. In the same vein, Elfer (2012) asserted that little has been done in terms of the preparation of teacher-supervisors. Therefore, teacher-supervisors are left alone with little or no training (Cuenca, 2010). Further, Bailey (2006) noted that in the context of teaching and learning, unfortunately, many language instructors never receive any training for performing the duties of supervisors. Thus, it is usually taken for granted that language instructors who are upgraded to supervisory positions will automatically know how to supervise probably because they are higher in status than their colleagues.

Further, the findings of the study revealed that a good teacher-supervisor is expected to have good feedback skills, teaching experience, great knowledge of teaching, supervision, observation, teacher development, teacher promotion, and regulations related to the recruitment and selection of teachers. Furthermore, he should be honest, organized, punctual, reliable and guide, motivate, respect teachers, communicate effectively and frequently with the teachers and manager, resolve conflicts between teachers and help them improve their teaching styles. These are illustrated in the literature by some scholars (Bailey, 2006; Murdoch, 1998; Gürsoy et al., 2016). For instance, Bailey (2006) demonstrated that a good teacher-supervisor is expected to develop teaching and learning through guiding instructors, establishing an appropriate relationship with them, and respecting their views. In the same vein, Murdoch (1998) underscored the importance of employing feedback and noted that an ideal and effective teacher-supervisor is required to persuade the language instructors through providing positive feedback and promoting their self-esteem. Besides, Gürsoy et al. (2016) noted that a good teacher-supervisor must have the instructional knowledge to guide teachers in their professional development.

The findings also suggest that Iranian language school managers have no criteria to the teacher- development of the language school and success, achievement and satisfaction of students, parents, and teachers. This is echoed in the literature by Janssens and Van Amelsvoort (2008). They demonstrated that language teacher-supervisors in educational settings are required to satisfaction. Moreover, policy makers and teacher educators are required to develop objective rubrics for evaluating EFL teacher-supervisors, and develop well-designed supervisor evaluation checklists and techniques for language school managers to improve the efficacy of supervisory practices. Thus, as pointed out by Hanna and Smith (1998), rubrics can improve the quality of supervision and assessment.

described that a supervisor must observe classrooms, evaluate the effectiveness of teacher performance, conduct placement exams, interviews, and meetings, analyze problems, identify promote teachers, arrange their classes, develop syllabus, curriculum and tests, clearly communicate instructions and information, provide teachers with modern teaching methods, discuss complaints among teachers, students and parents, keep required records and documents, and report absences and the issues related to teacher with some previously conducted studies (e.g. Alfonso et al., 1984; Allwright, 2014; French, 2001; Hazi, 1994; Siddiek, 2012; Wallace & Bau, 1991; Wilson et al., 2003). In this regard, Allwright (2014) stated that, in language schools and educational contexts, the teacher- methodology. The findings of the present study also revealed that, in Iranian language schools, managers expect their supervisors to hold regular staff meetings to improve the quality of instruction. Further, we found that the managers promote and encourage their supervisors through many ways such as giving them the right amount of autonomy, offering praise in public meetings and pay raise, and trusting their knowledge and experience, while the importance of establishing trust was underscored in the literature (Siddiek, 2012). Moreover, supervisors are responsible for teacher instruction in language schools (Wallace & Bau, 1991). Despite lack of transparency on the responsibilities of supervisors, they are pivotal figures affecting what the manager and language institute can accomplish in the long term as echoed by (Bailey, 2006). Iranian language school managers need to define clear role definitions for their supervisors to create an efficient work environment.

Besides, the present study revealed that one of the important sources of challenges Iranian language school managers face is dealing with supervisors who possess poor communication skills and are unable to build positive relationship with teachers in the work environment. In this regard, Memduhoglu et al. (2015) asserted that one of the important purposes of educational supervision is establishing rapport and appropriate interpersonal relationships with instructors. Further, teacher-supervisors are required to have rapport with instructors, but they are hardly ever given guidance about how to do so (Gebhard, 1984).

To the best of our knowledge, there is not any similar study in the literature delving into the perceptions of school managers on supervision in general and supervisors in particular. The previous studies on teacher supervision merely dealt with examining teachers' perceptions on supervision through a questionnaire and interview and revealed that teachers in classroom observations attempted to please their supervisor and ensure supervisors that they adhere to the

program policy because they were worried about the consequences of getting the unsatisfactory rating by supervisors and even being fired (Kutsyuruba, 2003; Moradi, et al., 2014; Rahmany, et al., 2015; ...). In this study, classroom observations were considered as one of the most important responsibilities of teacher-supervisors.

On the other hand, holding meetings was also underscored by the managers in this study. In this line, Hart (1929) investigated supervision from the viewpoints of supervisees and examined frequencies, aims, and contribution of supervision in the process of instruction as well as the standpoints of the supervisees, and reported that there was a need for more supervision visits and teachers wanted to hold more post-observation meetings with the purpose of improving their teaching performance rather than reporting some ratings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that there are no clearly defined criteria and rubrics for Iranian language school managers to draw upon to select teacher-supervisors for their language schools and to evaluate their performance. Besides, the findings demonstrated that apart from observing classes and providing feedback, too many other responsibilities are assigned to supervisors in Iranian language schools.

The results of the current study provide some pedagogical implications that can be of benefit for EFL teachers, educators, teacher-supervisors and managers in Iranian language schools. Educators can draw upon the findings to define the responsibilities of supervisors. Moreover, they can provide some training opportunities for teacher supervisors, clarify their roles and improve the quality of their supervisory practices. At the same time, the comments could be used to develop the criteria based on which language school managers can appoint an individual to act as a teacher-supervisor in Iranian language schools. Furthermore, the findings can be of importance to teacher-supervisors and can familiarize them with the expectations managers harbor for supervision and address those concerns in their future practices.

The present study faced certain limitations which need to be taken into account in interpreting the findings. The first limitation of this study concerns the number of the participants. Therefore, future studies can include more participants to yield more generalizable results. Furthermore, the participants of this study were selected from language schools in Karaj and Tehran, Iran. Therefore, it made it a little difficult to provide a clear picture of all Iranian EFL teacher-supervisors. Future studies can replicate this study with managers from different cities of Iran or even other countries. On the other hand, the participants of the current study were selected based on convenience sampling. Therefore, this study can be duplicated with other procedures to make the results more generalizable. Moreover, future studies can investigate attitudes toward teacher supervision considering the differences in their age, gender, academic degree, and job experience.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Protocol: Language School Managers' Attitudes toward EFL Teacher Supervision

1. What characterizes a good and ideal supervisor from your point of view?
2. Describe the criteria you draw upon to select a supervisor / supervisors for your school.
3. Explain the requirements and responsibilities of a teacher-supervisor in your language school.
4. What challenges do language schools face regarding teacher supervision?
5. How do you resolve possible organizational conflicts with your supervisor(s)?
6. How do you support your supervisor(s) to do their job better?
7. How do you establish rapport and positive relationship with the teacher-supervisor?