

## EFL Teacher-Supervisors' Attitudes toward Supervision in Iranian Language Schools

<sup>1</sup>Shiva Azizpour

<sup>2</sup>Javad Gholami\*

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### Abstract

This qualitative study explored EFL teacher-supervisors' attitudes toward supervision in Iranian language schools. Based on a researcher-developed protocol, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven supervisors from Iranian language schools to identify their attitudes, experiences, and challenges regarding supervision. The interviews drew upon emergent methodology to categorize the interviewees' value-laden comments into four major attitudinal themes, namely *becoming a supervisor*, with five subthemes of characteristics of a good and ideal supervisor, change in supervision style over the time, missing their teaching job, supervision training, and supervisors' reasons to choose this line of work; *supervisors' responsibilities*, with three subthemes of challenges regarding teacher supervision, organizational conflicts within the school, and supervisors' difficult decisions; *observation procedure and protocol*, with one subtheme of keeping required logs and documentation; and *rapport and positive relationship with teachers and administrative staff*. The findings revealed that the teacher-supervisors are promoted to supervisory roles most often due to their outstanding teaching performance and academic credentials with no formal training on supervision. They also voiced some ethical conflicts they face in this position such as firing teachers or critically commenting on their friends' performance. Supervisors highlighted the fact that their workload is too demanding with many other presumably non-supervisory responsibilities. 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.

**Keywords:** EFL Teachers, Language Teacher Supervision, Language Teacher-supervisors, Language Schools, Supervision

### 1. Introduction

Supervision emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and was implemented vigorously in the 18th century (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992). Supervision in the sense of inspection was the most crucial supervisory practice (Glanz, 1995). 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 (Glanz, *ibid*).

Teacher supervision is a significant and fundamental part of language teachers' 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 was not enough information to show that school supervisors have supportive positions, and their roles were to use autocratic observation and to restrict the instructors without providing them with any helpful direction to develop their teaching (Horn, 2010). Further, Glanz (1995) considered supervision models, although collaborative in nature, to be still control oriented. In educational contexts,

<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate in TEFL, sh.azizpour@urmia.ac.ir; Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran.

<sup>2</sup> Associate professor (Corresponding Author), j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir; Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran.

supervision can improve the quality of instruction by identifying students' needs and parents' degree of satisfaction (Janssens & Van Amelsvoort, 2008). Moreover, with the 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 focus on guiding and developing instructors' practices. Nowadays, supervising is considered as a function that highlights the importance of teachers' improvement rather than supervision (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 instruments that could be investigated to make sure that they performed methods and procedures identified by their supervisors. Over the years, this attitude has been noted and still exists among some instructors, but they now see the more positive characteristics of teacher supervision (Rahmany, Hasani & Parhoodeh, 2014). For instance, some language instructors see teacher supervision as an essential part of the management, and they prefer discussions with their supervisor about the observation. Moreover, human relations have a significant role in supervision. Thus, the relationship between instructors and supervisors is expected to be similar to the relationship between colleagues rather than a dictatorial relationship (Cogan, 1973). Furthermore, instructors may consider supervision as a constructive and necessary activity if the supervisors give them security by supporting them, guiding them and evaluating them fairly in their supervisory activities (Wiles & Lovell, 1975). 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). He 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 attributed to teachers' 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).

The present study aimed at discovering the attitudes EFL teacher-supervisors hold toward supervision in Iranian Language Institutes and finding out the criteria based on which EFL supervisors change their hats from teacher to supervisor hats. Furthermore, it intends to explore the challenges these supervisors face regarding teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. By investigating supervisors' attitudes, language school managers, supervisors and teachers can gain insights into the nature of teacher supervision and benefit more from supervisory practices.

## 2. Literature Review

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 defines a supervisor as "any appropriately certified individual assigned with the responsibility for the direction and guidance of the work of teaching staff members." In that situation, 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. Moreover, Goldsberry defined supervision as "an organizational responsibility and function focused upon the

assessment and refinement of current practices” (1988, p. 1). He highlighted the hierarchical nature of supervision: “Because it is an organizational responsibility, it necessarily involves interaction between an organizational superordinate and a subordinate – meaning that legitimate authority for decision-making resides with the supervisor” (1988, pp. 1-2).

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 supervisors to facilitate language schools’ development, evaluate instruction, and improve the quality of teaching (Mette, Aguilar, & Wieczorek, 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-supervisors are required to observe classes in order to evaluate teachers’ instruction. Further, classroom observations must be employed as a part of a supportive system and empowering strategy for instructors and should be viewed positively by them (Gholaminejad, 2020). In recent years, supervisors tend to employ video recordings of teachers’ performance in order to decrease their classroom anxiety (Johnson, Ivers, Avera, & Frazee, 2020). Novice teacher-supervisors’ collaboration with one another enables them to think critically and support 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 should respect novice and experienced teachers’ needs and provide some opportunities for them to transfer information and construct deeper understanding of their teaching practices (Zepeda, 2017). 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 might be “teacher development”, rather than teacher supervision. Additionally supervision incorporates less rewarding and rather unpleasant duties, for example, giving negative feedback, making sure that instructors follow the program’s policy, and even firing teachers (Wiles, 1967).

Sullivan and Glanz (2000) maintained that, in the past, language teacher supervision was considered as an act of finding faults through observing language teachers’ classes. Therefore, by this very early definition, 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).

Teacher supervision is a significant and fundamental part of language teachers' professional development, and the supervisor 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 (Tefaw & 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. They 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 pedagogy. Additionally, student teachers' concerns during the practicum were related 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. Furthermore, 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 analysis of data provided different insights into the instructors' 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 instructors' teaching profession.

In another study, Tefaw 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 relationships between the actual supervisory approaches, instructors' attitudes and professional development. Finally, instructors' attitudes were considered as the significant contributor to their 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 teachers' views on supervision

and its impact on their decision making in their classes. Moreover, their study investigated the relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their perception on 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. Further, 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 rotatory supervision, experienced teachers take turns observing their peers' classes on 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 teachers evaluated their colleagues' teaching performance using a classroom observation 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.

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 supervisors' careers and 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-supervisors. It is worth noting that these supervisors' duties can be mainly evaluative and 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 contribution to this field, as it offers a detailed account of EFL teacher-supervisors' attitudes toward supervision in Iranian language schools. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there have not been any studies in the literature on the attitudes EFL supervisors hold toward 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 EFL teacher-supervisors hold toward supervision in Iranian language schools?

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Participants*

Seven teacher-supervisors took part in the present study. The participants were selected from different language schools in Karaj and Tehran, Iran. The teacher-supervisors participating in this

study were selected based on convenience sampling. Table 1 provides information on the participants. The supervisors comprised of six females and one male and their ages ranged from 27 to 41. The supervisors had MA, Ph.D., or they were Ph.D. candidates in TEFL or English language and literature. The participants' teaching experiences ranged from 6 to 16 years and their supervising experiences in language schools ranged from 2 to 8 years. Furthermore, participants' other educational qualifications included IELTS, MSRT, EPT, TOLIMO, and TTC. 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' Educational, Professional and Teaching Experiences and Qualifications

Participants	Academic Degree and Field of Study	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Supervisory Experience	Other Educational Qualifications
1. Supervisor (S1)	Ph.D. in TEFL	16	11	IELTS-MSRT
2. Supervisor (S2)	Ph.D. in TEFL	13	7	IELTS-EPT
3. Supervisor (S3)	Ph.D. Candidate in TEFL	11	7	IELTS-EPT-TTC
4. Supervisor (S4)	Ph.D. Candidate in TEFL	10	4	TOLIMO-TTC
5. Supervisor (S5)	Ph.D. Candidate in TEFL	6	3	EPT-TTC
6. Supervisor (S6)	Ph.D. Candidate in English Language and Literature	10	2	EPT
7. Supervisor (S7)	MA in TEFL	10	4	TTC

### 3.2. 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' experience and knowledge of supervision in Iranian language schools. Moreover, they set up one group interview session with two supervisors 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 teachers' professional development commented on them. The interviews drew upon emergent methodology to categorize the interviewees' value-laden comments into four major attitudinal themes, namely *becoming a supervisor*, with five subthemes of characteristics of a good and ideal supervisor, change in supervision style over the time, missing their teaching job, supervision training, and supervisors' reasons to choose this line of work, *supervisors' responsibilities*, with three subthemes of challenges regarding teacher supervision, organizational conflicts within the school, and supervisors' difficult decisions, *observation procedure and protocol*, with one subtheme of keeping required logs and documentation, and *rapport and positive relationship with teachers and administrative staff*. (See Appendix for the complete interview protocol).

### 3.3. Procedure and Data Analysis

As the current study is attitudinal in its scope and nature, it employed the principles of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) to collect data, investigate the participants' 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 supervisors' attitudes toward 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 supervisors. 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 supervisors 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 identify "value-laden instances" (Silverman, 2000) which indicated the supervisors' attitudes toward supervision. To help readers track each participant's contribution, the researchers assigned a code name to each participant. For example, S1 stands for Supervisor Number 1 (see Table 1). Furthermore, significant to note here is the wording of the interview extracts. As is evident in the results, some of the interviewees' comments on a single question mentioned the 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 supervisors hold toward teacher supervision.

#### 4. Results

The research question of this study dealt with the attitudes teacher-supervisors hold toward supervision in Iranian language schools. In this section, the researchers report and describe supervisors' attitudes toward teacher supervision through employing supporting extracts from the interviews. The teacher-supervisors participating in this study were asked 13 questions.

##### 4.1. *Becoming a Supervisor*

The first major attitudinal theme of the interviews was *becoming a supervisor* with five subthemes of characteristics of a good and ideal supervisor, change in supervision style over the time, missing their teaching job, supervision training, and supervisors' reasons to choose this line of work.

##### 4.1.1. Characteristics of a Good and Ideal Supervisor

All of the interviewees pointed out that an ideal teacher-supervisor must have at least five years of teaching experience and a related academic degree, for instance Ph.D. in TEFL. Moreover, all of the participants pointed out that a good supervisor should have the ability to judge and assess teachers. The following comments from S2 and S4 elucidate this:

*"A good supervisor should have Ph.D. in TEFL, and he should be capable of judging and evaluating the capabilities of teachers. This would help him in assigning duties and appraisal of a teacher's performance."*

*"In my opinion, a good supervisor must have minimum five years of teaching experience, he must be able to assess the teachers appropriately and he must guide the teachers on their teaching process as well."*

Furthermore, five supervisors underscored the importance of having great communication and interpersonal skills as well as the ability to listen and guide. This is evident in the following excerpts from S1 and S3:

*"Another important element of the process of communication is listening. A supervisor should be a patient listener. Listening is one of the most important, most difficult and most*

*neglected skills in communication. In my opinion, a successful supervisor should know how to communicate with the teachers. He should speak in such a manner that subordinates easily understand his viewpoint."*

*"I believe that one of the most important characteristic of a good supervisor is having the ability to communicate concisely and clearly with teachers and manager. Also, I think establishing a good, positive and friendly relationship with the teachers is really vital. Good supervisors must be compassionate and they should trust, respect, and encourage teachers."*

On the other hand, having the skills to hold meetings, give constructive feedback and provide teachers with appropriate teaching resources were also underscored by all of the participants. The following comment from S2, with seven years of supervisory experience, demonstrates this point:

*"In my view, a good and effective supervisor must hold teacher training courses, meetings and conferences for the teachers, he must provide teachers with effective and constructive feedback, input and advice and help them improve their teaching skills and knowledge. He should understand why mistakes happen and try to rectify them. Also, he must provide teachers (especially novice teachers) with appropriate materials and references that can benefit them."*

In addition, out of seven supervisors, two spoke about knowledge of the organization and technical knowledge and competence. They stated that a good and ideal supervisor should have sound knowledge of the organization for successfully carrying his functions and the knowledge should pertain to objectives, policies, programs and plans of the organization. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of having sharp memory and emotional stability. In this regard, S7 also provided this statement:

*"An ideal supervisor should possess a sharp memory. He should be fully convergent and memorize all the working rules, regulations and instructions to be communicated. On the other hand, he should always maintain emotional stability. He shouldn't lose his temper and shouldn't get irritated easily."*

Besides the above mentioned qualities, six participants noted that a good supervisor should be punctual and organized, he should know how to inspire and motivate teachers and he should have great patience. In addition, they pointed out that an ideal supervisor should possess great problem solving skills. In this respect, S5 pointed out that: "I believe that a good and ideal supervisor should be able to identify teachers' problems, needs, strengths and weaknesses and help them develop and grow."

#### 4.1.2. Change in Supervision Style over the Time

As the following interview excerpts reveal, many of the interviewees commented that their supervisory, judgmental, and communication skills have improved over time. Moreover, they indicated that they sometimes did not know what to do, and making the right decisions seemed very demanding. In this regard, S2, S3, S4, S5 and S7 pointed out that:

*"Today, I have developed my time management skills. Therefore, I'm able to manage my time for planning tasks at work. Also, now I try to be up to date and hold some workshops for teachers to improve their teaching knowledge. On the other hand, at first, I wasn't familiar with my responsibilities, and, at times, I had to be reminded. However, after these years, I have learned what to do exactly at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the semester."*

*"I have improved my communication skills. Rather than ordering and criticizing teachers, now I realize that listening is very important. I listen to what they say, encourage teachers to speak, and listen to their concerns and problems as well as their suggestions regarding development of the institute."*



*“At the beginning of my career, I was really worried about how I am perceived by the teachers and the manager. Also, I was too friendly with teachers and some of them exceeded their limits, but now I avoid being too friendly and I don’t let them exceed their limits.”*

*“As a novice supervisor, I easily made mistakes like recruiting the wrong individuals, but now I avoid making mistakes at work. Today, as an experienced supervisor, I’m able to watch each teacher’s performance in video recordings carefully, reflect on them, think critically and give them positive, effective and most importantly constructive feedback.”*

*“Over these years, I have learned to inspire, motivate, encourage teachers, and provide some professional development opportunities for them to develop their teaching performance. Now, I believe that it is really effective to praise them in public. Moreover, I have learned to build a positive relationship with teachers and develop trust and respect in the relationship with them.”*

#### 4.1.3. Missing their Teaching Job

In this regard, all of the supervisors stated that they loved being a teacher and never left teaching. They asserted that supervision is beyond teaching and requires a lot of tactfulness and knowledge. Moreover, as the following interview statements from S1 and S6 show, the participants found teacher supervision too challenging but rewarding and believed that they play a key role in teachers’ effectiveness and language school’s development:

*“I love teaching and I still teach, but not at a language institute like I did for ten years. Today, I’m a university lecturer, I teach university students. On the other hand, as the supervisor of this language school, I think I have always had a key role in supporting and guiding the teachers and the manager as well.”*

*“I don’t miss teaching because I never abandoned it. It was one of my pre-conditions to take the job. Supervision requires a lot of tactfulness and discretion. It also needs to be done by a patient person. This job confers a great opportunity to deal with new challenges and experiences. In this job, I have to cope with manager and teachers, as well as parents and students and I can learn from each and every one of them.”*

#### 4.1.4. Supervision Training

The participants stated that they have almost received no formal training to become a supervisor. However, they pointed out that they have covered several academic articles on teacher supervision which have been published in journals such as *“Australian Journal of Teacher Education, The Journal of Special Education, Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development, and Journal of Language Teaching and Research.”* Moreover, six supervisors asserted that they have covered a book on teacher supervision entitled: *“Language teacher supervision: A case-based approach”* written by Bailey (2006) and stated that they found it very helpful. Furthermore, they emphasized that they have been selected to act as a supervisor mostly based on their academic degrees and teaching experiences.

#### 4.1.5. Supervisors’ Reasons to Choose this Line of Work

The participants pointed out that their academic degree, for instance, holding Ph.D. in TEFL, their teaching experience in different language schools, their knowledge of supervision, their ability to observe, communicate, listen and judge teachers were among the main reasons which have led them to become a teacher-supervisor.

### 4.2. Supervisors’ Responsibilities

The second major attitudinal theme of the interviews described *teacher-supervisors’ responsibilities*, with three subthemes of challenges regarding teacher supervision, organizational conflicts within the school, and supervisors’ difficult decisions. In this regard, the supervisors asserted that they have to analyze and evaluate teachers’ performance, and periodically organize professional development conferences for them. Furthermore, the participants stated that they must

hold meetings with the manager, teachers and parents to evaluate the students' performance when the need arises. Also, they noted that they are responsible for developing and implementing curriculum, recruiting teachers and conducting placement exams and interviews. The following comments from S1, S3, S4 and S6 shed further light on their workload:

*"I must observe and assess teachers objectively, communicate with teachers about their progress, identify teachers' needs, concerns, strengths and weaknesses and use different problem-solving approaches."*

*"I have to hold meetings at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the semesters, hold conferences and workshops, let teachers have peer observation and discuss the effective teaching methods that their colleagues used in their classes."*

*"My important responsibilities as a teacher-supervisor in this institute are: developing curriculum, syllabus and tests, observing teachers' classes regularly in order to monitor their performance and the implementation of the curriculum, interviewing new students, hiring or firing teachers and acting as a role model for them."*

*"I should evaluate teachers' performance based on pre-established teacher performance standards of our language school, provide direction for teachers' development and arrange for teachers' promotion or recruitment."*

#### 4.2.1. Challenges regarding Teacher Supervision

Supervising language teachers is a challenging task. In this regard, S2, holding Ph.D. in TEFL with seven years of supervisory experience, asserted that some of the complicated challenges in supervision are: *"excessive workload of the teacher supervision, inadequate time in supervision, insufficient resources necessary to do the duties, monitoring too many teachers, recruiting or firing them."*

Moreover, all of the participants complained that they are required to do too much paperwork which is a really daunting task. For instance, recording documents, generating a record of teachers' activities, work schedules, etc. Furthermore, S6 and S7 reported some other challenges they face in their language school regarding supervision and stated that:

*"Making the teachers understand the expectations and requirements of the institute, identifying potential problems and setting clear expectations for teachers' teaching performance and behavior, interacting with teachers based on the differences in their personalities are some of the most important challenges and difficulties of my job."*

*"Having an observer in the classroom changes the class dynamics. Having another adult in the class just naturally riles up kids, early teens probably the most. If you don't introduce the observer, then all the kids start gossiping about why the observer is there. If you introduce the observer, then, the students will ask about the reasons of his presence. These are incredibly disruptive to a class and drive teachers nuts."*

On the other hand, S3 with seven years of supervisory experience expressed that:

*"It is really difficult and it requires a great deal of time and effort to provide a timetable for a class that matches with both the students and the teacher. In addition, it is sometimes impossible to gather all of the teachers for a meeting."*

#### 4.2.2. Organizational Conflicts within the School

The supervisors asserted that when they become aware of the conflicts among teachers, they hold some meetings to see what is not working in the language school affording the opportunity to improve the situation. Thus, they believed that holding a meeting is really helpful and significant in confronting problems and resolving them. Furthermore, they stated that they often resolve conflicts through eliminating negative feelings and creating a situation where the teachers, supervisor and manager discuss the problems. In this respect, S5 pointed out that:

*“Sometimes conflicts occur when the rules and regulations of the institute limit teachers’ autonomy. When having such problems, I handle the conflicts by holding a meeting with the teachers and manager and interacting with them.”*

Further, S6 pointed out that conflicts mostly occur as a result of not having enough opportunities to communicate and she commented that: *“Having insufficient resources such as materials and space is usually another source of conflicts in our language school. I often resolve the conflicts through communicating with the teachers.”*

Four supervisors (S1, S2, S3 and S4) noted that discrimination against teachers and jealousy among them are other considerable sources of conflict, pressure and stressful situations. The following comment from S4 demonstrates this point:

*“Teachers often compete with other teachers because of the differences in their teaching skills, levels of education, or payment. Then, this can turn into jealousy, which results in conflict among teachers. Also, when they feel that the manager discriminates against them, conflicts arise.”*

Besides, S7, having four years of supervisory experience, stated that:

*“Sometimes the person in charge in the institute forgets to well-inform parents during signing up. They don’t answer their questions while signing up. As a matter of fact, I have to deal with a pile of questions parents have about the time of the classes, books, intuitions, and etc.”*

#### 4.2.3. Supervisors’ Difficult Decisions

As for the difficult decisions they had to make, criticizing teachers, hiring or firing them, observing young learners or teenagers’ classes, selecting the most qualified teacher applicants were among the most difficult tasks the participants mentioned. Furthermore, all of the participants underscored the difficulty of criticizing a friend. This is evident in the following statement from S3:

*“As a supervisor, sometimes, I find myself in situations contrary to each other. When one of the teachers working in our language institute is my friend and I am in touch with her regularly out of the workplace, this friendship makes it really hard for me to do my job effectively and bias-free. I cannot evaluate her teaching performance in the same way that I criticize other teachers’ performance. Actually our friendship restricts the extent of critical comments. It is really difficult to give her negative feedback. In some cases, I must take the risk of endangering my friendship.”*

This extract draws attention to the difficulty of criticizing a teacher who is also the supervisor’s friend. Thus, it shows that it is too challenging for the supervisors to use their professional authority to criticize a teacher who is also their friend. Furthermore, the interviewees asserted that awkward situations and emotional conflicts can result if they criticize these teachers or provide negative comments on any aspect of their performance.

#### 4.3. Observation Procedure and Protocol

Another major theme of the interviews explored teacher-supervisors’ attitudes toward *observation procedure and protocol*, with one subtheme of keeping required logs and documentation. In this regard, three participants asserted that they employ video capture and review method of observation. The following comments from S3 and S4 demonstrate this point:

*“I use video capture and review method to measure effective teaching practices in the classes, evaluate their teaching performance, and provide constructive feedback for their professional development.”*

*“I observe classroom teaching in person or view a videotape of instruction. While doing so, I fill out the protocol, typically consisting of questions that (I) ask whether particular teaching*

*and learning behaviors were observed, (2) use a Likert-scale to capture the extent to which the behavior was seen in the classroom, and/or (3) allow for open-ended general feedback.”*

Two participants disagreed with the traditional way of supervision that utilizes feedback and critique and is employed at some language schools. They spoke about clinical supervision and different techniques to collect objective data through this method of observation. They noted that teachers should know what is expected of them during the observation and highlighted the significance of reducing teachers' anxiety and establishing a feeling of trust. Furthermore, in this respect, S1 and S2 pointed out that:

*“As a supervisor, I try to help the teachers improve their teaching ability through analyzing and discussing the data that I collect during observation. Thus, by establishing a close cooperative relationship with them, I can help them develop strategies for improving their performance.”*

*“I often allow teachers to monitor their own classroom behaviors and that of their peers. Also, I hold a pre-observation session to state and discuss the objectives before the observation. Therefore, the teachers will know what I am doing in their classes while they are teaching. I believe that running a pre-observation session can definitely help them become more effective in their classes. On the other hand, I take notes during observation and bring them to the attention of each teacher only during the post-observation conference.”*

#### 4.3.1. Keeping Required Logs and Documentation

The participants underscored the significance of keeping documents and records and stated that they store all the necessary information in official files or their computer. Furthermore, all of the participants emphasized that they often keep the records simple, clear and short and use an unambiguous and standard format in a way that is easily read and understood. The comments from S4 and S5 demonstrate this point:

*“In our language institute, I keep the records and documents on a computer in my office which is shared with our manager as well. I record the teachers' activities and duties and how they are completed, describe how often their classes are observed, record the date and time each class is observed, and describe how observations are done. I always backup and restore the documents in my personal iPad as well.”*

*“I always keep a working file to track performance related information. My working file typically contains documents of ongoing work such as notes of conversations, assignments and status reports to support annual performance evaluations. Any information upon which I intend to take formal action should be moved into the personnel file in the form of a performance evaluation, or other disciplinary documentation.”*

#### 4.4. Rapport and Positive Relationship with Teachers and Administrative Staff

The last major attitudinal theme of the interviews identified teacher-supervisors' attitudes toward rapport and positive relationship with teachers and administrative staff. In this regard, six supervisors spoke about being respectful to teachers and administrative staff, being available, friendly and grateful to them and establishing trust and empathy. Furthermore, they stated that appreciating teachers and employing praise and feedback can bring motivation and engagement in their work. Therefore, building a positive relationship with teachers can motivate them and develop their teaching performance. These points are evident in the following excerpts from S3, S5, S6 and S7:

*“Being respectful is really important. I always respect the teachers and their opinions. I never make them feel neglected and avoid being harsh on their face when I disagree with them. I respect their views and try to explain my point of view with empathy. Also, I believe that if I respect them, they will respect me back.”*

*“As a supervisor, I often have eye contact and wear a smile at work. I try to build trust with the teacher and administrative staff at workplace. I let them express their ideas and let me know what they think. Most importantly, I always welcome questions and concerns from the teachers and appreciate them if they have any suggestions on improvement of the institute.”*

*“We try to be friends in the first place. I always try to be grateful to them because of their great job. Therefore, I usually appreciate them as I believe this can lift their mood up and keep them motivated.”*

*“I believe that it is really necessary to give praise or feedback to teachers on a regular basis. That is why I usually tell the teachers they are doing great work or that I appreciate their efforts. Hence, I often try to find out what motivates teachers and inspire their desire to perform well.”*

On the other hand, three participants highlighted the significance of having a good communication and one to one interaction as well as being an active listener. The comment from S2 demonstrates this point:

*“To me, communication is one of the most important aspects of building rapport and it helps me understand the needs of the staff. Therefore, I often try to be an active listener, through giving my full attention to what teachers say. Therefore, this can help me know them better and understand their different views easily. On the other hand, I never criticize teachers in public. I have one to one interaction with them whenever needed. This would create a sense of support for them.”*

## 5. Discussion

This study explored teacher-supervisors' attitudes toward supervision in Iranian language schools. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is not any similar study in the literature delving into the perceptions of supervisors on supervision. 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 (Acheson & Gall, 1997; Kayaoglu, 2012; Kutsyuruba, 2003; Moradi, et al., 2014; Rahmany, et al., 2014; Tesfaw & Hofman 2014).

According to the teacher-supervisors' perceptions, having teaching experience, relevant academic degree in the field of English language teaching, excellent communication and problem solving skills along with the ability to evaluate, motivate, inspire and respect teachers were among the most important characteristics of an ideal teacher-supervisor. Meanwhile, the interviewees asserted that a good supervisor must be a knowledgeable, trustworthy, punctual and organized individual and should be able to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses, provide constructive feedback, hold some teacher training courses for teachers and help them improve their teaching skills and knowledge. These notions are well reflected in the literature by some scholars (Bailey, 2006; Gürsoy et al., 2016; Murdoch, 1998). For instance, Bailey (2006) pointed out that an ideal teacher-supervisor is required 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, a good teacher-supervisor must have the instructional knowledge to guide teachers in their professional development (Gürsoy et al., 2016).

The supervisors' statements indicated that their supervisory skills have improved over time. Further, the supervisors commented that they try to be up to date in this field and provide some professional development opportunities for teachers to develop their teaching knowledge and performance. They enjoy teacher supervision despite being too demanding and consider such

services very instrumental in promoting the quality of teaching. In contrast, surveying the standpoints of Turkish supervisees, Kayaoglu (2012) found that supervision has little explicit value as far as teachers' professional improvement is concerned.

Supervisors' reasons to choose this line of work demonstrated that there are not any transparent criteria to draw upon to select supervisors in Iranian language schools. Thus, they have been designated to act as a supervisor mostly based on their teaching experience and the highest academic degree in ELT without receiving any pre-service and during-service professional training on supervision. Further, the findings indicated that the supervisors are promoted from teaching roles after they have proven themselves capable of teaching well. Supervisors assumed that because they performed well in their past roles, they are eligible to work as supervisors as well. However, undoubtedly, training is warranted for these teacher-supervisors to change their hats from teacher to supervisor and enhance their supervisory skills. 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). Moreover, Bailey (2006) noted that, in the context of teaching and learning, many language instructors never receive any training for performing the duties of supervisors, and 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.

The supervisors' attitudes toward their responsibilities illustrated that they are expected to observe, monitor, evaluate, and analyze teachers' performance, promote, recruit, or fire teachers, organize professional development conferences, hold meetings with the teachers, and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. Meanwhile, supervisors stated that other responsibilities assigned to them in their language schools are designing curriculum, syllabus, and tests, holding placement exams, providing reports and required documentation and submitting them to the manager.

These findings are in line 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-supervisors are required to monitor the instructors' performance in order to develop their teaching methodology. Besides, supervisors are responsible for developing other teachers' 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). In Iranian language schools, there is confusion about what to expect of teacher-supervisors and what roles and responsibilities to delegate to them.

On the other hand, excessive workload of the teacher supervision, inadequate time in supervision, insufficient resources, and too much paperwork were among the most important challenges supervisors face. The supervisors noted that observing too many teachers, making them understand the expectations and requirements of the institute, recruiting or firing them, identifying potential problems, interacting with teachers based on the differences in their personalities, providing a timetable for a class that matches with both the students and teacher, and gathering all the teachers for a meeting were considered as the other difficulties of this job.

These findings demonstrate that, in Iranian language schools, EFL teacher-supervisors lack time to do their responsibilities effectively. Therefore, this influences the language school and results in job frustration and low productivity in the workplace. Moreover, this has a negative impact on supervisors' practices and results in work stress, anxiety and job inefficiency. In contrast to these findings, Marshall (2005) argued that the processes by which instructors are supervised and evaluated are inefficient, and a poor use of supervisors' time.

The interviewees' statements revealed that organizational conflicts within the school occur as a result of insufficient communication opportunities, discrimination against teachers and jealousy among them. Furthermore, as echoed by Siddiek (2012), the participants stated that holding a meeting is always helpful in discussing issues and resolving conflicts. Another eye catching finding

of this study, which has not been discussed in the literature, is regarding criticizing. The participants of this study described the difficulty of criticizing a teacher who is also their friend and pointed out that it is challenging for them to use their professional authority to criticize a teacher who happens to be a friend.

The researchers found that the supervisors utilized video capture and review method of observation as well as clinical supervision, often allowing teachers to monitor their own classroom behaviors and that of their peers. Moreover, they underscored the importance of using pre-observation, during observation and post-observation techniques. The importance of holding post-observation meetings was underscored in the literature by Hart (1929). Besides, as pointed out by Hanna and Smith (1998), checklists and rubrics can improve the quality of teacher supervision and assessment. In Zimbabwe, many teachers fear being supervised because they believe that teacher supervision has always been biased toward judgement (Acheson & Gall 1997). In the same line, Salih (2013) reported that peer evaluation is an influential factor in teachers' professional enhancement and quality improvement. Peer coaching is crucial for teachers to develop professionally (Lam, 2001).

The findings that the researchers have presented regarding required logs and documentation reflected that the supervisors have always kept the records simple, clear and short and have located the complete documentation and records in their desk file or a computer in their office. In this regard, Bailey (2006) highlighted the importance of a supervisor's notes and documents, and argued that a supervisor's notes and documents must be carefully prepared and sufficiently detailed to be clear and convincing.

The supervisors' perceptions toward rapport and positive relationship with teachers and administrative staff indicated that respecting, appreciating, motivating, being friendly with teachers, building trust and empathy, and employing praise and feedback are significant in establishing rapport with the teachers and administrative staff. Meanwhile, the participants underscored the importance of communicating effectively, being an active listener, and having one-to-one interactions. In this regard, Bailey (2006) pointed out that teacher-supervisors have to identify the value of language teachers as humans. They are required to establish trust in their relationship with them, recognize the certain capacity of each instructor, and respect the views of instructors who are influenced by the supervision.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, this study provides an in-depth coverage of language schools supervisors' attitudes to their supervisory practices and found that transparent criteria do not exist to draw upon to select supervisors in Iranian language schools. The teacher-supervisors are promoted to supervisory roles without receiving any pre-service and during-service professional training on teacher supervision. Thus, lack of training can negatively influence the teacher-supervisor, teachers, manager and ultimately, the language school.

In accordance with the findings, the supervisors are appointed to this position without having clear expectations of their duties and priorities in their new role. On the other hand, supervisors must establish rapport with teachers and the administrative staff. In order for the teacher supervision to be effective, positive working relationship between the supervisor, teachers and manager should be ensured.

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 could be informed about the findings of the study to define the responsibilities of supervisors. Moreover, they can provide some training opportunities for teacher-supervisors in order to train them, specify their roles and improve the quality of their supervisory practices. Meanwhile, the results of this study could make them develop the criteria based on which language school managers could appoint an individual to act as a teacher-supervisor in language schools.

Furthermore, the findings will be of importance to language school managers and could help them appreciate teacher-supervisors' attitudes toward supervision as supervisors are in fact one of the main stakeholders shaping the quality of education. Thus, they can have an opportunity to cater to supervisors' feelings. In addition, the results of this research can assist language school managers in identifying EFL teacher-supervisors' strengths and weaknesses, recognizing the challenges these teacher-supervisors encounter, and offering more effective guidance, support and scaffolding to them to act as supervisors.

To sum up, EFL teachers, teacher-supervisors, and language school managers can consult these results as a means of identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis (Hill & Westbrook, 1997) of teacher supervision in Iranian language schools. SWOT analysis is a framework for identifying and analyzing the internal and external factors that can have an impact on the viability of a project, product, place or person (Hill & Westbrook, *ibid*). The SWOT analysis of teacher supervision could help supervisors develop a full awareness of all the factors involved in making decisions and can increase control over teaching and supervisory practices in addition to improving professional development among teachers.

The current study faced the following limitations throughout its conduction, and these limitations should be taken into account in interpreting the findings. The first limitation concerns the number of the participants. Therefore, future studies can replicate the present study involving more participants. Furthermore, the participants of this study were selected from language schools in two cities of Iran. Therefore, it may not fully represent a complete picture of EFL supervisors' attitudes toward teacher supervision in Iran. Thus, further research can replicate this study with supervisors from different cities of Iran. On the other hand, the participants of this study were selected based on convenience sampling. Moreover, this study calls for further investigation to explore the participants' attitudes toward teacher supervision considering the differences in terms of age, gender, academic degree, and job experience.

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### Appendix

#### **Semi-structured Interview Protocol: EFL Supervisors' Attitudes toward Teacher Supervision**

1. What characterizes a good and ideal supervisor from your point of view?
2. What are your educational, professional and teaching experiences and qualifications?
3. Explain the responsibilities assigned to you as a supervisor to do in your language school. Describe a typical day of your job as a supervisor.
4. What observation procedure and protocol do you follow in your language school? Elaborate on the extent and type of oral and written post-observation feedback you provide.
5. What challenges do language schools face regarding teacher supervision?
6. What special aspects of your education, training, or working experience have led you to become a supervisor? Why did you choose this line of work?
7. What possible organizational conflicts may arise from your supervision role within the school? How do you resolve them?
8. How do you establish rapport and positive relationship with the teachers and administrative staff?
9. Have you covered any materials and/or received any special training to become a supervisor? Elaborate on it.
10. What are the difficult decisions you have to make as a supervisor?
11. How do you keep required logs and documentation in this job?
12. How has your supervision style changed over the time?
13. Do you ever miss your teaching job? How does supervision as a career look in the long term to you?