How EFL Teachers Want to be Supervised

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Abstract

This paper provides a literature review of the field of teacher supervision with a focus on teachers' voices and how they want to be supervised. The aim is to contribute to the literature on teacher supervision by reviewing studies in which teachers have articulated their beliefs and expectations regarding supervisory systems. The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, the focus is on instructional leaders and what teachers expect from them. In the second part, the focus is on teacher involvement in the supervisory system and the importance of teacher feedback for improving supervisory systems. The paper ends with some practical considerations about making changes in supervisory systems based on teachers' perspectives.

1   Introduction

This paper will discuss teachers' perceptions about instructional supervision with a "solution finding" approach. The focus will be to highlight teachers' opinions on possible solutions instead of only dwelling on what the teachers say does not work for them. It is logical to give teachers a platform to voice their opinions about ways to improve the supervisory systems. Highlighting the shortcomings in current supervisory practices is only the first step in improvement. As Goldsberry states:

Certainly, [the] observation that the climate of a school can influence events is neither disputable nor novel. Absolutely, we need to document the obstacles to implementing clinical supervision in the schools and record and publish adaptation processes and consequences. Assuredly, we must put such ideas as colleague consultation and clinical supervision to the test of fire by applying them and documenting their impact. (1984, p.11)

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The next step is to find ways to make the supervisory cycle more productive based on feedback from teachers. Highlighting the shortcomings in supervisory systems should not be the final goal:

What is not needed is another wailing that conditions in our schools…are so bad that they will overcome the best of our efforts.…The challenge for school leaders and for educational researchers is to find and use tools that promote such professional growth and help overcome the bureaucratic influences that inhibit such development. (Goldsberry, 1984, p.11)

With this goal in mind, this article will review the literature on teacher supervision where teachers have articulated their beliefs about what they want from supervisory systems and practices. The paper is divided into two main parts. In the first part, the focus is more on the instructional leaders and what teachers expect from them. In the second part, the focus is more on the teachers and their involvement in the supervisory.

2   Part 1: Focus on Instructional Leaders

In this part, the focus will be on how teachers in different contexts have articulated their expectations from instructional leaders.

A national survey of public school teachers of kindergarten through grade 6 was conducted in 1993-94 in the United States of America by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the National Center for Education Statistics, Westat, Inc., and CREATE (National Center for Education Statistics, March 1994, cited in Shinkfield and Stufflebeam, 1996). It was the opinion of the greatest percentage of the teachers that evaluations of their performance should consider overall teaching performance, subject matter knowledge, classroom management, instructional techniques, helping students achieve, and unique teaching demands (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1996). Teachers find it disquieting that their evaluations are based on an observed lesson, which is usually only once a year. According to Shinkfield and Stufflebeam (1996):

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Clearly, the dominant practice of evaluating teaching mainly or only on the basis of classroom observations is not a sufficient means of evaluating the full range of important teaching responsibilities. (p. 25)

Toch and Rothman (2008) state:

[Classroom observations] are typically of little value—a single, fleeting classroom visit by a principal or other building administrator untrained in evaluation wielding a checklist of classroom conditions and teacher behaviors that often don't even focus directly on the quality of teacher instruction. (p.2)

Kennedy (2005) touches on this subject stating that the evaluator comes in with a checklist of items, some of which do not focus on the teaching/learning process, such as items focusing on the teacher's dress or the safety of the room. She states that in most instances, all they have to do is just mark an item 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory'. Goldhammer states that supervisors generally lack an instructional methodological approach that is sophisticated, unique and that goes beyond superficialities (as cited in Glanz, 2007, p. 120). Danielson and McGreal (2000) state that "Current systems rely heavily on the documentation of a small number of 'observable behaviors,' such as 'writing the learning objectives on the board,' 'smiling at students as you greet them,' and the like" (p. 1). Focusing on these "superficial and readily noted criteria" (Pizzi, 2009, p. 2) is not enough. Teachers want the supervisory cycle to be productive for them. Enacting the steps of the supervisory cycle mechanically to fulfill organizational requirements does not give the teachers a sense of empowerment and the feeling that they are engaged in a worthwhile activity:

It's hard to expect people to make a task a priority when the system they are working in signals that the task is unimportant. That's the case with teacher evaluation. (Toch & Rothman, 2008, p.1)

 Schumacher (2004) writes:

In general, even though teachers may understand the process and procedures of the evaluation system and perceive it to be administered fairly, they are less likely to see the value in it if they

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perceive that their participation simply creates more work for them, causes stress, and doesn't produce rewarding personal outcomes for them. (p. 82)

Instead of limiting themselves to the superficial and readily observable items on the checklist, supervisors should focus on the teaching and learning process and provide feedback on it. According to Wang and Day (2002), classroom observations without specific feedback about the observed lesson may not be very useful for teachers. One participant teacher told them that her supervisor rarely gave feedback on the lesson beyond an occasional 'Thank you' or 'Nice job'. Even though she herself felt that her lesson went well, she was not sure if what she considered to be the strong points of the lesson were considered to be strong points by the observer. Focused and specific feedback would have helped to reinforce the teaching strategies she used appropriately. Wang and Day (2002) state: "The teachers felt disempowered because their supervisors afforded them no voice in the analysis of their own teaching, and failed to provide specific feedback for them to construct a better understanding of their teaching practices" (p.9). To actively engage the teachers and make the supervisory cycle productive for all the stakeholders, instructional supervisors have to "go beyond the procedural nature of events themselves" (Garman, 1990, p. 204). Smyth (1988) makes a similar point when he states that instead of focusing on the procedural events, we should be more concerned with important issues such as assisting "teachers to achieve forms of teaching that contribute to ways of learning that are more realistic, practical, and just for our students" (p. 145) because "The intellectual capital inherent in clinical supervision is more important than its workflow as articulated into steps, strategies, and procedures" (Sergiovanni, cited in Smyth, 1988, p. 145). Loughran (2014) writes persuasively about how teacher educators can go beyond the superficialities and technicalities:

Teaching teaching is about thoughtfully engaging with practice beyond the technical; it is about using the cauldron of practice to expose pedagogy (especially one's own) to scrutiny. In so doing, collaborative inquiry into the shared teaching and learning experiences of teacher education practices can begin to bring to the surface the sophisticated thinking, decision making, and pedagogical reasoning that underpins pedagogical expertise so that it might not only be recognized but also be purposefully developed. The result being the creation of conditions for the development of informed professionals who better understand, and are able to articulate, the complex and sophisticated business of teaching. (p.275)

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The supervisory cycle is a two-way process. The teachers have to be sincere about improving their instructional skills. At the same time, the ways in which supervisors approach the supervisory cycle has a significant impact on how teachers view the process. Welsh-Treglia (2002) states that there is a strong relationship between positive implementation of evaluation processes by administrators and the attitudes of the teachers toward the feedback received (p.73). According to Zimmerman (2003), "When there is positive rapport, trust, and respect between teacher and principal, the likelihood of improved pedagogy and increased student achievement is almost assured" (cited in Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003, p. 29). In two separate studies, Kelly (2006) and Lansman (2006) found that the attitude of the principal toward the teacher evaluation process and the working relationship that principal had with the teachers being observed had a positive impact on how those teachers viewed and implemented the feedback received. According to Lansman (2006, p.156), "the major factor impacting the teacher evaluation process" was the collaborative leadership of the principal. The relationship between a principal and faculty members has a pivotal effect on instructional effectiveness (McGreal, 1983). Davis, Pool and Mits-Cash (2000), who conducted a qualitative field study in a school district in the United States of America about issues related to the implementation of a new teacher assessment system, agree and state that the attitude of the principal toward the evaluation process and his or her expectations of teacher success had a significant impact on the attitude of the teachers towards the process. Milanowski and Heneman III (2001) write that one of the factors related to negative teacher attitudes toward evaluation was a perceived lack of a "collaborative attitude" (p. 207) on the part of their administrators. Bulach, Boothe and Pickett (1998) surveyed 375 teachers in the United States to reveal the behaviors that their principals practiced that they identified as mistakes. They identified 14 categories of mistakes or harmful behaviors of principals. Their main complaints were that principals failed to listen to teachers, had an uncaring attitude and that there was no trust in the teacher-principal working relation (cited in Bulach & Peterson, 1999, p. 1). Listening to teachers, having a caring attitude and trust are "components [that] must be first and foremost in an open…and honest reciprocal relationship between teachers and their principals" (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003, p. 35). Astor (2005), Kelly (2006) and Kimball (2002) (cited in Breedlove, 2011) also found that the supervisors' actions were partly responsible for teacher attitudes toward the supervisory process. This suggests that if supervisors want the teachers to be actively involved in the supervisory process, they have to ensure that they themselves as supervisors are enthusiastic and conscientious about the process as well. It is their responsibility to try and make the

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teachers drop the façade of docile acquiescence and become active members of the supervisory cycle. Wang and Day (2002) also make a similar point when they say:

The observer is to assume the responsibility to provide an atmosphere for the teacher to present a representative class. Without such support from the observer, many teachers, particularly novice teachers, will continue to face the challenge of making their observation lesson a truly positive learning experience. (p.12)

Another crucial point that teachers are very conscious about is the supervisor's own academic competence and training. In institutions where teachers do not have the authority to prevent supervisors from visiting their classes and observing their lessons, they can still limit the supervisor's access to their "teacherhood" by creating a façade of interest for the sake of civility. They can go through the motions without any intention of bringing about any changes in their pedagogical practices (Blumberg & Jonas, 1987). The participants interviewed by Blumberg and Jonas (1987) described supervisory behaviors and qualities that made the supervisory experience productive for them and persuading them to grant the supervisor access to their "teacherhood", for example, discussing their teaching philosophies and practices openly and honestly. Their ideas were gathered under forty-one descriptors, which in turn were grouped under eleven themes and three categories. One of the three categories was the supervisor's own competence as an educator. Zimmerman and Deckert-Pelton (2003) conducted a survey of 86 teachers in five northwest Florida counties to examine their perceptions of their principals as effective evaluators. From the respondents' comments, four key domains emerged as pivotal components to a successful professional evaluation process, one of which was that the principal should be "knowledgeable in pedagogy, content, and evaluation" (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003, p.28). Protheroe (2002) argues that principals can understand, critique, and evaluate teachers only if they are knowledgeable and experienced educators. Elliott and Calderhead (1995) state that "in order best to facilitate professional growth, the trainer needs to have clear ideas about teacher professional development" (p.42). Blumberg contends that many teachers see supervision and evaluation activities as perfunctory at best, and damaging at worst, due in large part to supervisors' lack of instructional and curricular information (cited in Pizzi, 2009). In their study conducted in the state of Missouri in the United States of America, Valentine and Prater (2011) found that the principal's education level is associated with teachers' perception of the principal's

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effectiveness. Principals with greater levels of formal preparation focusing on the 'principalship' were perceived as more capable leaders. As a principals' educational level increased, so did the teachers' perceptions of their principals' competence (Valentine & Prater, 2011). The importance of observers' educational background and credentials was one of the major themes highlighted by teachers interviewed by Abdul Rehman and Al-Bargi (2014) in Saudi Arabia. One of the participants gave a colorful example of how he views the situation of a teacher being debriefed by an observer who is less qualified than him: "It's like a lawyer who is arguing a case in front of a judge who has no knowledge of the law" (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014, p. 1565).

In some ways, the purpose of the supervision cycle is defeated when teachers are indirectly forced into adapting their lessons to give 'exhibition' classes. When a supervisor visits a class once or twice a year and is required to rate the teacher on dozens of items on a checklist, the teachers could be forgiven for giving a lesson with the primary objective being not to educate the students but to get a positive rating on the checklist, especially when one considers that sometimes the evaluation reports have ramifications for teachers' contracts. It is one thing for supervisors to conduct observations based on agreed upon evaluation criteria, but we must question the underlying assumption that "all of the steps of the clinical model occur in a single lesson in one class period-everyday!" (Sahakian & Stockton, 1996, p. 50). Supervisors should focus on the different facets of a teachers' job that can affect student learning, the promotion of which is the ultimate goal of supervision. Robles (2007), who interviewed fourteen veteran teachers in his study conducted in Los Angeles County, USA, to examine their perspectives on evaluation and how they want to be evaluated, found that the participants wanted the evaluators to visit their classes more often and conduct scheduled and unscheduled observations. According to the participants, with frequent scheduled and unscheduled observations, evaluators would get a better picture of what is going on in their classes on an everyday basis. They wanted the evaluators to see them in a 'regular' lesson as opposed to an 'over prepared' lesson. They also wanted their evaluations to be based on multiple data sources such as self-evaluation, student growth data, and alternative methods such as the use of a portfolio/project, peer, parent, and student feedback (Robles, 2007).

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3 Part 2: Focus on Teacher Involvement in the Supervisory System

In this part, the focus will be on how teachers expressed their views with regards to being involved in the supervisory system by being given the opportunity to provide feedback and become partners in the process.

Blase and Blase (1999) conducted a qualitative study to determine the characteristics of school principals that positively influence classroom teaching and the effects which those characteristics had on classroom instruction. Two major themes emerged from the data collected from more than 800 teachers from southeastern, midwestern, and northwestern United States: talking with teachers to promote reflection (e.g. making suggestions, giving feedback) and promoting professional growth (e.g. emphasizing the study of teaching and learning, supporting collaboration efforts among educators). The supervisory cycle can be made productive via continuing dialogue between the teachers and supervisors. Supervisors can convince teachers to become actively engaged in the cycle by talking to them at all stages of the supervisory cycle. By engaging in dialogue with the teachers, supervisors can understand and help teachers articulate their beliefs about teaching. It is not enough that supervisors only visit a class once or twice a year with a rubric which is given an infallible status based on the claim that it is research-based. By relying too much on observation instruments, supervisors might be putting too much stock on practices that are given a 'stamp of approval' and afforded the prestige of being declared 'research-based' or 'evidence-based'. These practices should be investigated in more depth because at times

> Iffy, imprecise inquiry, elevated by its characterization as 'scientific' (and by its association with prestigious institutes and foundations providing funding), gains a form of status hitherto unprecedented. Further, practices supported by this form of inquiry, and treated as though they were fully generalizable, become iconic as 'research based', indicating a level of certainty attached to their implementation that is unwarranted. (Nicholson–Goodman & Garman, 2007, p. 284)

Another point to consider is that not all questions in teaching are empirical; some are related to beliefs.

> Teacher educators need to have expertise in sorting out which questions about teacher education are empirical and which are questions of values and beliefs. Questions of value cannot be settled simply by assembling good evidence . . . these questions can be shaped,

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reformulated, or understood more profoundly on the basis of evidence, but evidence must always be interpreted. (Cochran-Smith, 2005, pp. 224-225)

Another reason to engage teachers in dialogue is to involve them in discussions about what an organization considers to be effective teaching practice which it requires the teachers to adopt. Observation instruments are developed around those practices. Observation instruments themselves are also not value free, but reflect the pedagogical philosophy of the organizations that use them. Caughlan and Jiang (2014) compared the valued knowledge, activities, and participant roles reflected in three observation instruments used in the USA as performance assessments in teacher education programs:

(1) The Christopher Newport University Student Teacher Observation Form (CNU)

(2) The Michigan State University Field Instructor Feedback Form (FIFF)

(3) The Performance Assessment for California Teachers and Preservice Teachers (PACT)

Their study used the framework of critical discourse analysis to examine these three instruments to note the features that imply what is valued as quality teaching practice. They argue that the observational instruments which were used as tools to assess the progress and the exit performances of teacher candidates are not neutral. Instead, they reflect the values of the programs that use them through particular (and sometimes contradictory) discourses of teacher learning and student learning (Caughlan & Jiang, 2014). In common with the administrators of these programs, teachers should be given a chance to provide input in the development of observation instruments. Murdoch (2000) states that to empower and motivate teachers, "An effective system will give [them] an active role in initiating and contributing to the instruments and procedures that are used to evaluate their performance" (p.55). Bailey (2006) notes that, although involving teachers in the process of designing evaluation criteria is time-consuming, it can give teachers a sense of ownership and could also promote "buy-in" among them (p.113).

Teachers should also be afforded opportunities to learn, try new ideas and solicit help from their peers and supervisors without fear of failing or being considered incompetent. According to Wang and Day (2002), the participant teachers in their study reported that "they kept problems and concerns to themselves, and when they needed help and support, they hesitated to turn to someone who wielded the power to evaluate them" (p.16). This is an inevitable

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corollary of "faultfinding supervision" (Glanz, 2007, p. 115). Teachers will be nervous about soliciting help from their supervisors or departing from an elaborately planned and rehearsed lesson that is being observed when they know that everything that could be construed as "incorrect" will be part of the evaluation report that will become part of their personnel file. Hazi and Arredondo Rucinski (2009) argue that "administrators and teachers must hold blame-free conversations about the curriculum, student learning, and what quality teaching mean to them" (p.38). When the aim is to come up with better ways to impart knowledge, teachers have the "right to be wrong… If we lose this right, we can also lose the courage to try new ideas, to explore more than one alternative, and to explore freely" (Gebhard, 1990, p.158). Kennedy (2005) also discusses how teachers improve their teaching practice. She found that when teachers were dissatisfied with some detail of their teaching (lesson momentum, efficiency, accommodating students), they made minor adjustments in routine over time. Hazi and Arredondo Rucinski (2009) state:

> Experience tends to influence teacher change, more than new knowledge gained from institutional sources (e.g., tests, curriculum standards, textbooks, building requirements) or knowledge vendors (e.g., professional development, university courses, professional associations). (Hazi & Arredondo Rucinski, 2009, p.33)

Teachers would be reluctant to try new ideas and strategies if supervisors create an atmosphere of anxiety through 'faultfinding' supervision and thereby inadvertently ignore a potentially very valuable source of professional development.

Wang & Day (2002) list four key teacher needs that they say must be fulfilled to make a supervisory system worthwhile:

1) **Respect**--to be treated as professionals
2) **Safety**--to be provided with opportunities to learn and grow in a non-threatening environment
3) **Trust**--to be encouraged to assume the responsibility of working towards accomplishing their own instructional and pedagogical goals
4) **Collaboration**--to be provided with support and to experience camaraderie.

They further claim that "These needs… are considered key ingredients of effective teacher development, and hence need to be at the core of any teacher observation model. Without these ingredients, teacher observation can simply become a ritual" (p.17).

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Other researchers have also listed ways of making the supervisory cycle more productive for teachers: voluntary, continuous professional development, in teams, and embedded within the school day (e.g., Arredondo Rucinski & Hazi, 2008); the use of multiple observations by a trained team of multiple observers, using clear, comprehensive standards (Danielson, 2001; Toch, 2008; Toch & Rothman, 2008); instructional coaching, mini observations and well-constructed rubrics (Marshall, 2005, 2008).

4   Conclusion

In this paper, I have reviewed teachers' perceptions about how they wanted to be supervised and what they expected from the supervisory cycle. In the end, I must highlight one point for the sake of fairness. It is true that the onus should be on supervisors to bring about changes in the supervisory system to make it worthwhile for the teachers. However, there needs to be an awareness that not all demands from all teachers can be considered to be important or fair. When reading about what teachers want from supervisors, the question that needs to be asked is: 'Are these needs real and pressing and must be met, or are the teachers just engaging in a bout of academic whining?' Pizzi (2009) states that teachers' attitudes concerning their professional remediation can prove a formidable barrier to effective evaluation. According to Waintroob (1995), the teachers who deny their own need for remediation and professional development are often those who need it the most. She further contends that "inevitably, the non-remediable teacher's denial that he or she has a problem is accompanied by an attack on the credibility, the competence, or integrity of the administrator" (cited in Pizzi, 2009, p.52). Hoerr (1998) states that while outstanding teachers tend to be self-evaluating regardless of what system of evaluation is in place, marginal or incompetent teachers tend to criticize others.

Another point that needs to be highlighted is that giving teachers a platform to voice their opinions and preferences is not just about listening to them and giving them what they want. There is more nuance to it than that. Firstly, there is a limit to which an instructional leader can listen to, act and agree on teacher suggestions because after a certain point, it could bring up questions regarding standardization and organizational requirements. Secondly, what a teacher says she or he wants might not be the best option based on the data gathered from multiple sources, such as classroom observations, student complaints and feedback from parents. To sum up, there has to be a sincere endeavor for improvement from teachers, since without this

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no amount of changes in the process of supervision can compensate for the teachers' unwillingness to be a partner in the supervisory cycle.

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