



The Impact of Instructional Supervision on Professional Development of Iranian Intermediate EFL Teachers

Naser Janani¹; Aliasghar Ahmadishokouh²; Fatemeh Samadi³

¹ Foreign Languages Faculty, Shahid Sattari Aeronautical University of Science and Technology, Tehran, Iran

² Assistant Professor in TEFL, CASU, Tehran, Iran

³ Department of TEFL, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran

E-mail: naser.janani@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the impact of instructional supervision on professional development of Iranian intermediate EFL teachers. Moreover, this study aimed at discovering Iranian EFL teachers' attitude towards supervision and its influence on their classroom decision making and professional development. The study also accounted for their differences and similarities in this respect and explored the relationship between teachers' teaching experience and their attitude towards classroom supervision. In order to conduct the study 18 teachers from three different institutions along with three supervisors were chosen and the data was collected via observations, field notes, interviews, stimulated recalls, questionnaires and audio-video recordings. Based on the findings of this study instructional supervision had a significant effect on the professional development of Iranian EFL intermediate teachers.

Keywords: *Decision Making; Professional Development; Supervision; Supervisor*

1. Introduction

Supervision is an indispensable process for organizational effectiveness. Being unsupervised causes organizations to be alone, disorganized, impenetrable and stable (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). As in all organizations, supervision is a very important process in educational organizations. The need for and importance of educational supervision has been emphasized by many authors (Aydın, 2005, Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Pajak, 2002; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Wiles & Lovell, 1975; Zepeda, 2007).

Supervision is commonly used in education as a tool to support understanding and development and it is one of the most challenging areas in program management. English language teaching (ELT) classroom observation has traditionally been seen as a part of teacher evaluation and

supervisors are typically administrators and senior teachers. Feedback from supervisors as Sheal (1989) notes is usually unsystematic, subjective, and impressionist. Also, the relationship between observers and observees can be tense; the observers are evaluative, while the observees tend to be defensive. Classroom observations under such conditions might not help much in the observees' professional growth and development.

During the last few decades, researchers have emphasized the need for holding more developmental than judgmental view in classroom observations (Sheal, 1989). The main purpose of observations is not to judge subjectively what is good and bad teaching, but to work with the observee to explore and identify the limitations as well as the positive aspects in a class, thereby promoting the observee's critical thinking and professional growth. Such a view, as Williams (1989, p.85) states in an in-service teacher-training program, helps teachers to "develop their own judgments of what goes on in their own classrooms, sharpen their awareness of what their pupils are doing and the interactions that take place in their classes, and heighten their ability to evaluate their own teaching practices." This implies that observation can serve as an intermediary between teachers' teaching philosophies and practices. Nunan (1989, p. 76) also holds that since classrooms are "where the action is", spending time looking in classrooms can enrich our understanding of language learning and teaching.

2. Research Questions

The present study was an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the instructional supervision have any effect on the professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers?
2. What is the relationship between the instructional supervision and teachers' professional development?
3. How do Iranian intermediate EFL teachers react to instructional supervision?

3. Method

Supervision is seen as a fundamental aspect of each educational setting. It gives a more sense of systematic and scientific notion to the process of teaching. In this part of study, the participants, instrumentation, procedure, design and data analysis are explained.

3.1 Participants

Participants of this study were 18 EFL teachers who were teaching at 3 different language institutes in Tehran, Iran at intermediate level (Interchange 5th edition books 1 & 2 & 3, American File 2nd edition books 1 & 2 & 3). There were 11 males and 7 females among the teachers who were at least B.A. holders in one of English majors. There were also 3 supervisors who were holding at least M.A in TEFL.

3.2 Instrumentation

In order to carry out the present study, the researcher made use of the following instruments:

- (1) A 20-item researcher-made likert questionnaire which was validated through piloting and the reliability of which was measured using Cronbach's Alpha was delivered among the teachers who were observed at the end of the term.

- (2) A 20 likert scale items (ranging from total disagreement to total agreement) researcher-made questionnaire which was also validated and the reliability of which was measured was given to the supervisors at the end of their supervision.
- (3) A 22-item researcher-made observation checklist which was also validated and the reliability of which was measured was used by the supervisors in the supervision process.
- (4) The classes were audio and video taped.
- (5) Four cases of stimulated recalls as well as field notes were used.
- (6) There were some short informal interviews with teachers and supervisors.

3.3 Procedures

- (1) Prior to the start of the term a 22-item observation checklist was distributed among the supervisors and the items were discussed one by one.
- (2) Any necessary modifications or changes in the items of the observation checklist were done.
- (3) The classes were all at the intermediate level.
- (4) The term consisted of 20 sessions and every session lasted for an hour and a half.
- (5) There were 3 observation sessions during the term. The observation scheduling was totally flexible and random in order to reduce the effect of pre-planned preparation by the teachers.
- (6) A 20 likert scale items was distributed among supervisors at the end of the term to evaluate their reactions, experience and assessment regarding the professional development of the teachers being supervised.
- (7) A 20-item likert questionnaire will also be delivered among the teachers to measure their attitudes toward supervision and to realize how effective it was on their professional growth.
- (8) During the feedback sessions the audio tape and stimulated recalls came into play when needed.
- (9) The informal and friendly interviews were performed to measure any data which remained untouched by the other measurement instruments.

3.4 Design

The design of this study was descriptive research method and based on the developmental investigation of cross-sectional branch. A group of teachers who were observed regularly had been selected and they participated in this study and answered the questionnaires. Finally, the data was collected and analyzed.

3.5 Data Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed among the English language teachers and supervisors for collecting the required data; the data analysis process consisted of likert-type item analysis. In order to measure the likert-type items the answers were tabulated and the frequencies of the answers were counted.

4. Results and Discussion

What comes next is the obtained results and the discussion.

4.1 Reliability Statistics

Three sets of instruments were used in the present study: Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire, Supervisor Evaluation Questionnaire, and Teacher Observation Form. These instruments were administered in a pilot study with 15 EFL teachers who were almost similar in characteristics with the main participants of this study. The piloting results in Table 1 indicate that the reliability of Teacher

Evaluation Questionnaire, Supervisor Evaluation Questionnaire, and Teacher Observation Form were estimated .84, .80, and .79 respectively using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Source	No. of Participants	No. of Items	Reliability Index	Reliability Method
Teacher Evaluation Q.	15	20	.84	Cronbach's Alpha
Supervisor Evaluation Q.	15	20	.80	Cronbach's Alpha
Teacher Observation Form	15	22	.79	Cronbach's Alpha

4.2 Investigation of Research Question Number One

The first research question of this study asked whether instructional supervision affects professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers. In order to analyze the data to answer this research question, the results of Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire, Supervisor Evaluation Questionnaire were analyzed using Nonparametric One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The results of each instrument are provided in the two following sections.

Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire Results

The results of the 18 EFL teachers' responses to the teacher professional development evaluation questionnaire are represented in Table 2 which shows that the minimum score was 2.50 with the frequency of one teacher, and the maximum score was 3.40 with the frequency of one teacher as well. That means the majority of the teachers selected "Agree" and "Totally agree" choices of the questionnaire about their professional development.

Table 2. Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire Results

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
2.50	1	5.6	5.6
2.55	1	5.6	11.1
2.65	1	5.6	16.7
2.70	1	5.6	22.2
2.80	1	5.6	27.8
2.85	2	11.1	38.9
2.95	1	5.6	44.4
Agree	3	16.7	61.1
3.05	1	5.6	66.7
3.10	1	5.6	72.2
3.20	1	5.6	77.8
3.25	2	11.1	88.9
3.35	1	5.6	94.4
3.40	1	5.6	100.0
Total	18	100.0	

Table 3 demonstrates the related descriptive statistics of the teacher evaluation questionnaire results. According to Table 4.3 the mean, median, and mode were 2.96, 3, and 3 respectively. These central parameters are all larger than the “Not sure” choice of the questionnaire implying that the teachers approved the effectiveness of instructional supervision on their professional development.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Teachers' Responses to the Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire

N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
18	.90	2.50	3.40	2.96	3.00	3.00	.265

Figure 1 illustrates a histogram of the distribution of the professional development scores obtained on the teacher evaluation questionnaire.

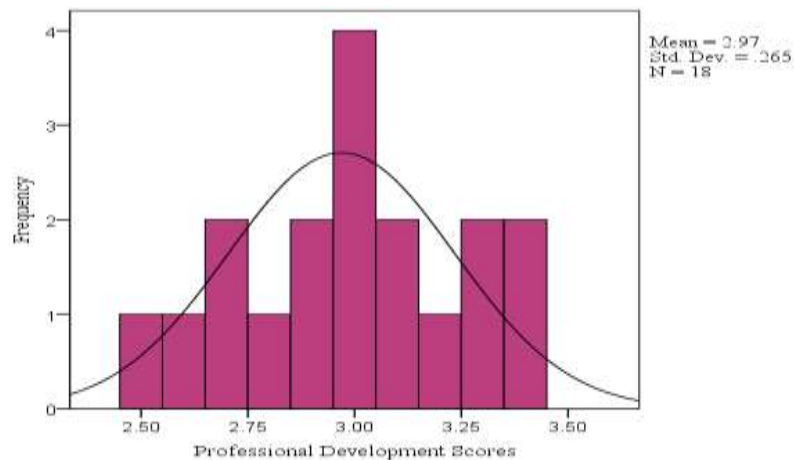


Figure 1 Distribution of professional development scores

The results of Nonparametric One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test that was used to test the null hypothesis as the instructional supervision affects professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers are set forth in Table 4.

Table 4. One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for the Effect of Instructional Supervision on Teaching Professional Development on the Teachers' View

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. The median of professional development equals 2.000	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.000

The level of significance is .05

One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results showed the p value of .000 which is well smaller than the selected level of significance in this study, .05 ($p = .000, p < \alpha$): accordingly, the p value was low enough that we safely **rejected** the null hypothesis. So we felt confident that the instructional supervision affects professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers based on the teachers' ideas.

Supervisor Evaluation Questionnaire Results

The results of the supervisors' responses to the professional development evaluation questionnaire are laid out in Table 5. As obvious in the table, that the minimum score was 2.50 with the frequency of one, and the maximum score was 3.35 with the frequency of one as well. That means the

majority of the supervisors selected “Agree” and “Totally agree” choices of the questionnaire about the teachers’ professional development.

Table 5. Supervisor Evaluation Questionnaire Results

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
2.50	2	11.1	11.1
2.60	1	5.6	16.7
2.65	1	5.6	22.2
2.70	1	5.6	27.8
2.75	1	5.6	33.3
2.80	3	16.7	50.0
2.85	1	5.6	55.6
3.00	2	11.1	66.7
3.05	1	5.6	72.2
3.10	1	5.6	77.8
3.20	2	11.1	88.9
3.25	1	5.6	94.4
3.35	1	5.6	100.0
Total	18	100.0	

The related descriptive statistics of the supervisor evaluation questionnaire results are provided in Table 6. The table shows that the mean, median, and mode were 2.89, 2.82, and 2.80 respectively. These central parameters are all greater than the “Not sure” choice of the questionnaire denoting that the supervisors supported the usefulness of instructional supervision on the teachers’ professional development.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of the Supervisors’ Responses to the Supervisor Evaluation Questionnaire

N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
18	.85	2.50	3.35	2.89	2.82	2.80	.260

The histogram of the distribution of the professional development scores obtained on the supervisor evaluation questionnaire is displayed in Figure 2 below.

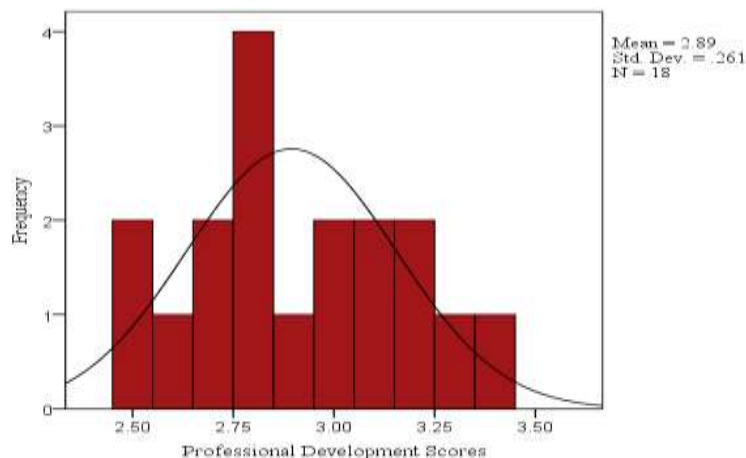


Figure 2 Distribution of professional development scores

Table 7 presents the results of Nonparametric One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test that was employed to check the null hypothesis as the instructional supervision affects professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers.

Table 7. One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for the Effect of Instructional Supervision on Teaching Professional Development on the Supervisors' View

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. (2-tailed)
The median of professional development equals 2.000	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.000

The level of significance is .05

The results of One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that the p value was .000 which is well lower than the selected level of significance in this study, .05 ($p = .000, p < \alpha$): as a result, the null hypothesis was **rejected**. So it can be claimed that the instructional supervision influences professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers according to the supervisors' opinions.

4.3 Investigation of Research Question Number Two

The second research question of the current study seeks to find whether there is any significant relationship between the instructional supervision and teachers' professional development. In order to answer this research question, Gall et al. (1996, p. 10) advised that it is helpful to vary in some way the approach used to generate the findings the researcher intends to corroborate. The use of multiple data-collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 1999, p. 20). For that purpose, a mixed method approach was employed. The researchers called this process "triangulation" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 12). It is the process of using multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to check the validity of research findings. Triangulation helps to eliminate biases that may result from relying exclusively on any one data-collection method, source, analyst or theory.

An informal unstructured interview procedure was used to acquire specific answers to questions referring to teachers' perceptions and preferences of supervision. This allowed the researcher to probe into areas on which participants were able to expand their ideas. This qualitative method of data collection allowed the participants freedom to express their ideas about a variety of issues relating to teacher supervision, not addressed or limited in the survey.

Stimulated recalls and *field notes* are two other sources in the process of data collection which came into play when needed. The information revealed by these two sources made a great contribution to the findings of this study. Last but not least, the use of audio-video tape recordings is also beneficial to clarify any misunderstanding and ambiguity.

As a matter of fact, based on the findings of the above-said sources of data, the researcher came to the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between the instructional supervision and teachers' professional development.

4.4 Investigation of Research Question Number Three

How Iranian intermediate EFL teachers react to instructional supervision was the third research question in this study.

The findings showed that the majority of the intermediate teachers participating in this study perceived supervision to be important for their professional growth. Analyzing their actual perceptions, it

was observed that supervision of instruction in the Iranian institutions needs to be conducted. The majority of the teachers suggested that ideally intermediate teachers should be supervised more often and informally. The teachers stated that supervision should be conducted by the competent specialists in the area of language teaching and methodology. The teachers, however, were concerned that institutions policies do not allow choice in the supervisory approaches. Furthermore, the teachers identified the need for more time and preplanning in the process of supervision. Feedback from teachers and administration may be coupled with the feedback from students.

The majority of teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the supervision process and that it met their individual professional needs. Overall, the level of satisfaction with the supervisory process was relatively high.

Teachers agreed that supervision should be closely connected to professional development, which was viewed as the desired outcome of the supervisory process. The teachers suggested that intermediate teachers should be provided with options in professional development activities that are designated especially for the novice teachers.

5. Discussion

This study aims at investigating the impact of instructional supervision on professional development of Iranian intermediate EFL teachers. Moreover, this study aims at discovering Iranian EFL teachers' attitude towards supervision and its influence on their classroom decision making and professional development. The study also accounts for their differences and similarities in this respect and explores the relationship between teachers' teaching experience and their attitude towards classroom supervision. As noted earlier, three research questions were formed in this study based on which one null hypothesis was raised. The findings revealed that the afore-said null hypothesis was rejected i.e. the instructional supervision significantly affects the professional development of the intermediate EFL teachers.

The results of this study are of great significance since it has taken the teachers' perspectives into account. In fact, this study is the reflection Iranian EFL teachers regarding instructional supervision.

The findings of this research are also relatively compatible with the findings of the study conducted by Parhooode (2010). The findings of his study regarding the teachers' perceptions towards the contribution of supervision to their growth shows that from Iranian EFL teachers' point of view the current supervision that they receive helps them better understand their shortcomings and solve problems in the classroom and lead to the growth of their teaching skills and improvement of instruction. However, in his study fewer participants believed that supervision has a positive impact on their professional and career development in the long-term. In addition, classroom supervision does not seem to help teachers in their courses by providing educational materials.

Furthermore, the results of the analysis of teachers' reaction to their supervision program shows that the majority of teachers showed a positive behavior towards supervision. Most teachers said they read the report carefully and use it to improve their teaching practice. However, the number of teachers who were unwilling to change their teaching approach based on the notes of the supervisor in the supervision report are considerable.

In another similar study, Kutsyuruba (2003) conducted a study entitled "Instructional supervision: perceptions of Canadian and Ukrainian beginning high school teachers". He claimed that during the past several decades, instructional supervision and professional development have been identified as vehicles to enhance the performance of teachers. One of the most critical problems facing the profession is how to

improve the development of beginning teachers. The purpose of his study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of actual and ideal approaches to supervision and their perceived connection to professional development in Canadian and Ukrainian high schools. The findings revealed that in both countries beginning teachers desired more frequent use of supervision that meets their individual professional needs.

A choice in Supervisory approaches, better planning, and active involvement in decision making process regarding the supervisory practices were viewed as being beneficial for the teachers. Beginning teachers advocated a need for supervision that promotes trust and collaboration, and that provides them with support, advice, and help. Respondents advocated supervision that is closely connected to professional development. They expressed the desire to grow professionally and improve their instruction in order to provide quality education for students. Participant responses, for the most part, aligned with the literature which indicated that beginning teachers need extensive supervisory assistance. The study was based on the belief that the supervisory process should be a collaborative effort reflecting the professional concerns of the individual teacher. The conceptual framework dwelt upon supervisory choices for beginning teachers, namely collaboration with supervisors or peers, and self-reflection. Stemming from the need for improved supervision of teachers was a need to develop a connection between supervision and professional development for the purpose of instructional improvement.

In the same vein, in a “A Guide to the Supervision of EFL Teachers in Saudi Arabia” by Alkhalaf, Alkholeif & Alosaimi (2010) has similar findings. In their understanding of educational supervision as support for professional development, they argue that it is more crucial that supervisors have expert supervising skills that can be directly related to EFL teaching in schools in Saudi Arabia. The teachers need to be able to establish rapport with the teachers in order to discover what their understanding of teaching is, and to be able to observe and interpret various teaching styles and learning events, so that the development processes can begin.

Similarly, in a study done by Ghapanchi and Baradaran (2011) the feedbacks from their study reveal that still observation is conducted on traditional basis in most educational systems. However, there are some institutes which are doing well in improving this trend. Just as the knowledge based for teaching foreign languages remains highly contested, what a supervisor needs to know and be able to do and where that knowledge comes from are all questions that remain little addressed in the research or practice literature for L2 teaching and learning. That said, based on their experiences working with teachers and supervisors, they have tried to make the case here that effective supervision requires flexibility and, perhaps most of all, attention to the bigger picture of sustainable teacher development. Lastly, it is essential to note that although important progress has been made in most educational supervision systems today, further reforms are necessary to renew the purpose, function, method and structure of educational supervision.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine intermediate teachers' perceptions of actual and ideal approaches to supervision and their perceived connection to professional development. The responses of the participants in this study revealed some valuable insights into the supervision of Iranian intermediate EFL.

The results of the data analysis revealed teachers' positive attitude toward instructional supervision. Interestingly, teachers demanded more supervision of their teaching in order to receive greater feedback about their classroom performance. Their work and a more informal and constructive feedback was viewed as being beneficial for them. Teachers wanted to be supervised by individuals who were familiar with them and possessed certain experience and knowledge in teachers' subject areas.

Respondents wanted supervision to be collaborative in nature, providing them with support, advice, and help. They identified the need to trust their supervisors and be trusted in response. Planning and active involvement in the decision making process regarding the supervisory practices was considered to be valuable and necessary. They wanted more time to engage in reflective and collaborative approaches to supervision and also indicated the need for experienced teachers and administrators to address their individual needs and provide them with necessary resources. Respondents wanted supervision to be connected to professional development as close as possible and expressed the desire to grow professionally and improve their instruction in order to provide quality education for students.

Intermediate teachers are the future of the schools or institutions; and their concerns, worries, and opinions, when taken into consideration, can only enhance the quality of teaching and learning for the students. In order for teachers to be successful in instruction, supervision needs to provide the support, knowledge, and skills that will enable teachers to succeed.

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