An Exploration into Iranian Novice EFL Teachers' Perceptions Toward a New Model of Teacher Supervision

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ABSTRACT

This study (one qualitative part of a mixed method study) explored novice EFL teachers' perceptions toward a four-stage (readiness, informing, improvement, evaluation) supervision model (Eryılmaz & Mutlu, 2017) administered for developing teachers' professionalism considering different components of a standard Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) model (Khany & Azimi Amoli, 2016). The participants of the whole study were 100 novice and 100 experienced male and female EFL teachers with different academic degrees from different regions of Alborz Province. The participants' classes were observed, and appropriate feedback was given (readiness), then a gathering was held, and all the information regarding the procedure of a TPD course was declared (informing), after that, the participants attended the 45 sessions TPD course during which all the components and sub-components of the standard TPD model were taught theoretically and practically (improvement), thereafter the second series of observations were carried out (evaluation). Finally, to elicit deep and careful perceptions from

participants regarding the effectiveness of the implemented supervision programs, 30 novice teachers as representatives of the population of the novice teachers were randomly interviewed, and the qualitative reports obtained from a semi-structured interview (Moradi et al., 2014) were content analyzed thematically (the current study). The results represented that the novice teachers' professionalism was highly developed and all of them were deeply satisfied with all the practices administered through this model. This study had some implications for policymakers.

Key Words: Novice teachers, Standard TPD Model, Teachers' professional development (TPD), Teacher Supervision

1. INTRODUCTION

Supervision is an incisive strategy that has a vital role in language teachers' professional development (Chen & Cheng, 2013), classroom management, and teaching practices (Hoque et al., 2020). Evaluative supervision which is conducted for rating teachers based on their performance in the classroom (Amini & Gholami, 2018; Glickman et al., 2008; Nolan & Hoover, 2005; Pawlas & Oliva, 2007) can improve teachers' performance or disappoint them (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Supervisor feedback (Baniabdelrahman, 2004; Amini & Gholami, 2018) may threaten the self-image of teachers or motivate them to do better performance and cause growth in the education system (Teddlie et al., 2003), and students' achievement.

Vast human and financial resources have been expended on teacher development programs (Ghoshooni, 1995; Khany & Azimi Amoli, 2016) but appropriate results are not met, yet. As Moradi et al. (2014) reported, language instructors were the followers of supervisors and performers of imposed prescriptions and predetermined models of teaching. In addition, Amini and Gholami (2018) claimed that supervisors apply autocratic observation and just restrict the teachers without providing any helpful recommendations. It was also found less experienced teachers had more negative attitudes toward supervision practice than more experienced teachers (Rahmany et al., 2014), and supposed supervisors as fault finders that report their weaknesses to the school managers (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998). Hence, it is necessary to employ qualified supervisors and evaluators to improve the quality of language instruction (Mette et al., 2020), help teachers to connect theory to practice (Diacopoulos & Butler, 2020), foster their growth, and enhance learners' achievement (Brandon et al., 2018) based on their needs and their parents' satisfaction (Janssens & Van Amelsvoort, 2008).

During the history of teacher supervision in Iran, there were many supervisors and a lot of programs but they did not meet the predetermined goals and teachers' expectations. Maybe the programs were not suitable

and efficient or they were not fulfilled as they should. Therefore, expert and professional supervisors should administer more efficient supervision programs to solve some problems of teachers .On the other hand, as Azizpour and Gholami (2021a) stated, investigating teachers' attitudes toward teacher supervision can inform school principals, supervisors, and EFL teachers of the nature of teacher supervision and increase the benefits of supervisory practices. Considering these reports, the researcher attempted to do this research to change the procedure of teacher supervision by presenting a new model and changing the perceptions of novice teachers toward supervision programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Morrison (2005), supervision has four fundamental integrated functions: Management, Development, Support, and Mediation. Depending on the resource pressure and practitioners' needs and support, the delivery of each function is different in practice (Earl et al., 2017). Supervisors can arouse reflection among teachers (Jaeger, 2013) by analyzing the beliefs of teachers, interrogating the activities of educational systems, and investigating the teaching process (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Reaching the point that the act of teaching becomes the main source of knowledge is the goal of supervision (Smyth, 1986), and improving the range of experiences and knowledge that a teacher carries in the classroom is the basic function of the supervisor (Nolan & Huber, 1989) that leads to improvement in learning (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Providing opportunities for implementing high-quality teacher supervision programs and enhancing teachers' professional development is the function of the education system (Arong & Ogbadu, 2010).

Moradi et al. (2014) explored the perceptions of EFL teachers concerning being observed during teaching by a supervisor. It was found that teachers tried to please the supervisors, they were worried about their scores and their consequences; sometimes they believed observation and feedback were superficial and sometimes they felt, the supervisors were intentionally finding weaknesses, causing trouble and damaging their confidence.

Eryılmaz and Mutlu (2017) introduced a four-stage model for having more effective supervised sessions. It was revealed that the use of that model reduced the counselor trainees' mistakes, and was beneficial for their counselor competencies in eight important dimensions.

Figure 1

Four Stages Supervision Model diagram adapted from Eryılmaz and Mutlu (2017)
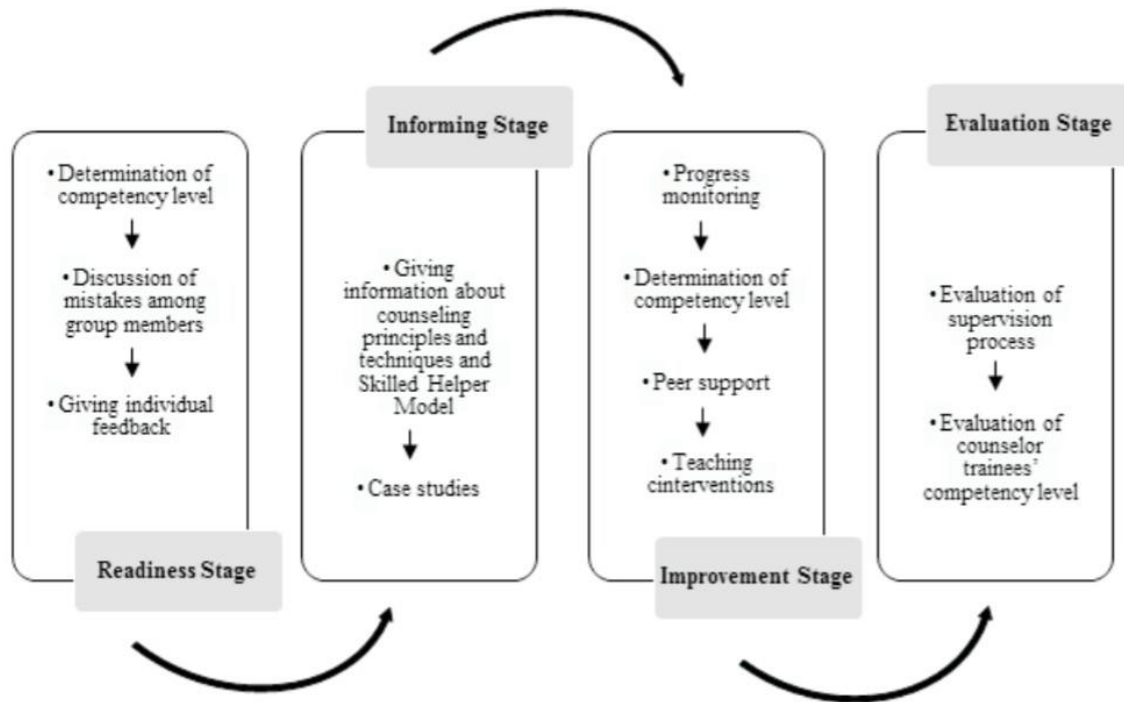
Azizpour and Gholami (2021b) investigated EFL teachers' attitudes toward supervision in Iranian language schools. The findings revealed that a great number of the participants found the implemented supervision useful for themselves and necessary for novice teachers, however, some held negative attitudes toward supervision and their supervisors' feedback. For supervision improvement, they suggested the development of transparent criteria and the discontinuation of unannounced observation.

Reviewing literature revealed that there is not any Iranian research investigating the effect of a specific model of teacher supervision on different components of EFL teachers' professional development based on a specific model of TPD and also exploring just novice EFL teachers' perceptions toward a specific

supervision model. For filling this gap, the researcher was motivated to conduct this study, maybe some of the shortcomings of teacher training programs and teacher supervision practices can be solved by administering a new model of teacher supervision and receiving the opinions and suggestions of novice teachers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section will address participants, instruments and procedures.

Participants

This study is one qualitative part of a vast mixed-method study. One-third (30) of the whole population (100) of novice teachers (NTs henceforth) randomly participated in this study. The participants were one or less than one-year experience, male and female EFL teachers with different degrees of education, BA, MA, and Ph. D from urban and rural regions of Alborz Province, teaching in state junior and senior high schools.

Instruments

A Likert scale questionnaire with 102 items and an observation form with 75 items, both of them adapted from Khany and Azimi Amoli's (2016) TPD model was used for the quantitative section, and a semi-structured interview adapted from Moradi et al. (2014) containing six items was used in the qualitative section to elicit the participants' perceptions toward the implemented supervision programs.

Procedures

The procedure of the whole study was carried out based on a four-stage model proposed by Eryılmaz and Mutlu (2017). They designed this model based both on Egan's (1975) skilled helper model and on the principles and techniques of counseling (Carkhuff, 2000; Cormier & Hackney, 2008; Egan, 1975; Ivey et al., 2010). This model encompasses four stages: readiness stage, informing stage, improvement stage, and evaluation stage. Supervision was administered by four experienced, knowledgeable, TEFL Ph. D holder supervisors with professional ethics and behavior, each one from one main district of Alborz Province, with the cooperation of six experienced, knowledgeable, Ph. D holder teacher trainers, each one expert in some

subcomponents of TPD, under the leadership of the researcher.

Stage 1 (Readiness)

Behind receiving permission on the part of school principals and teachers (a short time about one hour before observation) the supervisors had a warm dialogue with the teachers and then observed their classes so that they entered the classes with the teachers and left the classes with them. During class, the supervisors carefully observed everything and filled out the observation form. After observation and determination of the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher's performance, the supervisors gave feedback to the teacher so that they reported the strong points and particular abilities of the teachers to the teachers themselves and the school principals to encourage the teachers to develop them and then told the weak points mildly to the teachers confidentially and offered lucrative and constructive guidelines. If a teacher lacked the capacity for hearing weak points the supervisors kept them and added them to their collection to bring up them during the TPD course indirectly and offer recommendations for removing or decreasing them. The teachers' virtual classes in SHAD (local application of the Department of Education) were also observed so that the supervisors were added to the classes by the school principals or the teachers and they were allowed to observe the classes online or offline (after Qvid19 pandemic, in addition to face-to-face class, every teacher has a virtual class in SHAD).

Stage 2 (Informing Stage)

After pre-observations were finished by supervisors, a gathering was held and all the participants were invited. Through the gathering, the weak points and shortcomings observed during the pre-observations were explained by one of the supervisors, and the participants' questions were answered. The attendees were informed of the existing problems and invited to attend a TPD course in the form of a series of workshops to solve the problems mentioned. They were informed of the timetable and the number of workshops as well as activities and practices that would be performed there. The experienced and knowledgeable teachers who had been identified and determined through the pre-observations were also introduced through this gathering

and they were respectfully invited to share their experiences with novice teachers through sample teachings.

Stage 3 (Improvement Stage)

In this stage, the participants attended the workshops so that 45 two-hour workshops were predesigned, and each week one subcomponent of the standard TPD model was taught and practiced during three two-hour workshops. Shortcomings and weak points regarding each sub-component of the Standard TPD Model were explained, clarified, and discussed; and constructive suggestions were offered by supervisors. Needed theories and principles were also taught theoretically by teacher trainers. Subcomponents of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge were taught by a knowledgeable, TEFL Ph. D holder, teacher trainer, subcomponents of lesson management, classroom climate control, and supportive emotional skills were taught by a psychology Ph. D. holder teacher trainer, critical thinking skills, reflection, and self-evaluation were taught by a sociology Ph. D. holder teacher trainer, technological knowledge and its subcomponents were taught by a TEFL Ph. D holder, teacher trainer expert in educational technology, planning and preparation and lesson presentation were taught by a TEFL Ph. D. holder teacher trainer expert in curriculum development, and assessing students' progress was taught by a TEFL Ph. D holder teacher trainer expert in assessment and evaluation. It should be added that all the teacher trainers had experience in supervision, too. The knowledgeable, experienced, skillful, and professional teachers who had been selected and invited by the supervisors were asked to demonstrate their best teaching in front of the participants (each day, one or two demonstrations), and they were also asked to share their experiences with novice teachers and mention the key and strong points of their practices in the classroom. After each demonstration, a critical interaction was run among participants respectfully, and during critical interactions, the supervisors managed the workshops and also recommended useful guidelines with considering the dignity of the demonstrators. In fact, they were playing the role of a leader, advisor, counselor, and guide during discussions and interactions. The workshops finished after the 15th week.

Stage 4 (Evaluation Stage)

The same supervisors carried out the second series of observations (post-observations) in face-to-face and virtual classes. The post-observations were carried out to investigate the effect of the supervision programs, specifically the TPD course, on the different components and sub-components of professional development of all the NTs.

Finally, in order to elicit deeper and more careful information, 30 NTs were randomly interviewed by a semi-structured interview adapted from Moradi, et al, (2014). The interview questions were open-ended and the supervisors had an opportunity to discuss with the participants freely. For anonymity, a code was given to each participant, for example, NT1 (novice teacher 1), and they were assured that their information would remain confidential. Each interview lasted 30 to 40 minutes and it was recorded with the interviewee's permission.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

For analyzing the data elicited from the participants, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework a top-down analysis was run. In step one, the recorded insightful perceptions and attitudes of the participants were transcribed verbatim, they were read and re-read several times, in step two, the data was organized in a meaningful and systematic way and then, general initial codes were found manually, in step three, the codes were organized into broader themes, in step four, the main components of the Khany and Azimi Amoli (2016) standard TPD model were reviewed and considered as themes, in step five, the sub-components of the Khany and Azimi Amoli (2016) standard TPD model were noted as sub-themes, and in step six, the results of the thematic analyses were written up. All the themes and sub-themes are hierarchically demonstrated in Table 1, and some excerpts related to each one, are presented as evidence.

Table 1

Content analysis of the data collected from NTs through the interview

Themes	Sub-themes	Excerpts
Knowledge	Content Knowledge	Through the implemented teacher training course, all the useful theories that we had learned in university were reviewed and their practical uses were taught.
	Pedagogical Knowledge	The recommendations offered by supervisors taught me that I should behave with different students differently.
	Technological Knowledge	Before this course, I didn't know how to produce an educational video, how to cut and paste the useful parts of a video or a voice, and how to compress a file and reduce its volume. Before this course, I didn't know which applications were better for different purposes in face-to-face, virtual or online classes, and which websites are better for downloading appropriate files and introducing them to students".
Skills	Planning and Preparation	I'm very appreciative of learning how to write a unified national lesson plan in this teacher training course; up to now, I was confused about how to write a good lesson plan.
	Lesson Presentation	Demos were very interesting, we understood how to teach different subjects, how to assess students' learning through teaching, and how to engage students.
	Lesson Management	Theories presented by the psychologist teacher trainer [releasing happy hormones, deep breathing theory, resilience theory, …] were very useful for developing such TPD components as classroom management, classroom climate control, and supportive emotional skills. Through supervisors' guidelines, I learned how to manage the time spent on different subjects so that I don't fall behind the predesigned schedule or I don't come too far ahead of it.
	Classroom Climate Control	The supervisors though us how to foster students' self-confidence and self-esteem by giving positive feedback. I learned that we should select topics related to the student's experiences to encourage and motivate them to present creative activities.
	Assessing Students' Progress	Before this program, I was confused about how to assess different skills, what are the standard criteria for the final exam, how to record the students' scores, how to calculate the final score, ….
	Reflection and Self-evaluation	We learned from the psychologist teacher trainer to use some strategies like deep breathing theory to decrease our stress and reach relief after challenging circumstances. After passing the current teacher training course, I learned to review my class activities and the time spent on different parts every day and make changes if needed.
	Critical Thinking Skills	Sociologist teacher trainer presented valuable points, suggestions, and examples for developing our critical thinking skills.
	Supportive Emotional Skills	Through this program, we as novice and inexperienced teachers learned how to deal with and interact with students with behavioral problems, how to tolerate shortcomings, and look for suitable solutions. We learned how to behave students as a human whose future is in our hands.
TPD Prog	Sharing experiences	The shared experiences of experienced teachers helped me to solve some of my problems.

	Observation	Observing the classes of all the participants by qualified supervisors and collecting defects and weak points before the administration of the teacher training course and presenting solutions for removing or reducing them was accurate and wise work. The supervisor had a friendly dialogue with me before observation, …, this dialogue gave me a good sense and decreased my stress.
	Feedback	Considering the character, mood, and condition of the teacher for presenting weak points directly and frankly through feedback after pre-observation or indirectly through the teacher training course shows the meticulous planning of this supervision program. …, the supervisor's feedback increased my self-confidence and encouraged me to do more creative activities in my class.
	Supervisors	The supervisors were knowledgeable, experienced, and compassionate supervisors. …, the supervisor was expert, committed, and fair with professional ethics.
	Teacher trainers	Inviting a group of expert teacher trainers in different fields in addition to TEF such as technology, psychology, and sociology for teaching different components of TPD theoretically and practically was an interesting opportunity for us as beginner teachers.

5. DISCUSSION

As the results indicated, following the recommendations of Azizpour and Gholami (2021b), Chen and Cheng (2013), Janssens and Van Amelsvoort (2008), and Moradi et al. (2014), the supervisors after observing the classes, consultation with teachers and collecting a corpus of shortcomings, weaknesses, and needs of teachers and students, administered a comprehensive teacher training course that highly improved the participants' professionalism, the quality of their instruction (Danielson & McGreal, 2000), and their students' learning (Ebmeier, 2003; Ellett & Teddlie, 2003). Also following the suggestion of Azizpour and Gholami (2021b), the statements of the participants showed the manner of giving feedback and presenting recommendations in the current supervision program improved the NTs' self-confidence and certainty of the correctness of their performance in the classroom. In contrast to the claims of some studies such as Azizpour and Gholami (2021b), Amini & Gholami (2018), Glickman, Gordon et al. (2008), Horn (2010), Moradi et al. (2014), Nolan and Hoover (2005), and Pawlas and Oliva (2007), the results showed that the procedure of the current supervision programs and the behavior of supervisors did not increase the teachers' anxiety, did not damage their self-confidence and motivation, was not bureaucratic, autocratic or

paperwork, instead considering the recommendations of Azizpour and Gholami (2021a), and Moradi et al. (2014) it was helpful, humanitarian, constructive, encouraging and problem solving with mutual respect and rapport. Contrary to the claims of Azizpour and Gholami (2021b), and Moradi et al. (2014) the comments and guidelines of the supervisors were not imposed on the teachers and their feedback were not superficial or unsatisfactory, but in opposition to the claim of Rahmany et al. (2014), all the participant were satisfied and all the programs were voluntary and in line with the development of teachers' professional growth and students' achievement. In response to the claim of Azizpour and Gholami (2021a) the four hired supervisors of the current study were knowledgeable, Ph. D. holders, TEFL teachers with more than five-year experience in supervision, they were expert and skillful, and considering the recommendations of Esia-Donkoh and Ofosu-Dwamena (2014), as the reports of the participants revealed the supervisors were not fault finders, they were trustful, committed, empathetic, with professional behavior and flexibility, and they tried to find shortcomings, and remove them through constructive and friendly dialogue, and implementing useful TPD programs. As it is inferred from the results, weakening the claim of Azizpour and Gholami (2021a, 2021b) all the teacher supervisors in the Department of Education have some checklists for different purposes, such as observation, inspection, and evaluation of final exam questions, but they have some shortcomings and deficiencies that must be removed. It is also worth noting that the supervisors of this study had a comprehensive 75-item observation form adapted from the standard TPD model of Khany and Azimi Amoli (2016) which is recommended to be revised by eliminating some unnecessary items and be used for future observations. Considering the suggestion of Azizpour and Gholami (2021b) all the observations were administered with the announcement but less than one hour before observation in order to lower the teacher's stress and at the same time, limit the opportunity of artificial performance in the classroom.

6.Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that all the participants were deeply satisfied with the currently implemented supervision model generally, and had a positive attitude toward each practice based on different components or sub-components of the standard TPD model. All the participants were deeply appreciated not only for the punctilious, precise, detailed, and careful procedures and the content of the teacher training course but also for the ethical and professional behavior of supervisors and teacher trainers. As the TPD model used in this study is a broad model that includes 7 sub-components with 29 items for the knowledge component and 8 sub-components with 68 items for skills, it takes into account almost all the needs of both experienced or novice teachers, and it can be interpreted from the results that it highly developed the NTs' professionalism. In comparison to the ETs (experienced teachers), the NTs were at a higher level in general English and theoretical parts such as different learning theories, post-method theories, and different methods of teaching, but they did not know how to use the theories effectively in practice, they also did not have any practical experience in formative and summative assessment of different skills, as well as online or virtual teaching and assessment and the related needs specifically through SHAD application. Therefore, the attendance of ETs in the TPD course and sharing of their experiences was very beneficial for NTs' professional growth.

The findings of this study have some implications for policymakers, teacher supervisors, school principals, and teachers. Policymakers should allocate more budget to supervision programs specifically observation, and teacher training courses, increase the working hours of supervisors to concentrate more on supervision programs, employ a group of professional pre-trained supervisors for each subject, the most experienced as the head member and others as the group members, increase the executive power and authority of supervisors to be able to give cash and non-cash privileges to active teachers and attract them to different programs and improve competition among them, allocate fees, transportation, and catering to teacher trainers and also participants of professional development courses out of duty hours, and repeat the current

administered supervision model in future years by supporting the supervisors.

As a new model of supervision in the Department of Education, this study suffered some limitations. First, the participants of this study included both genders with different ages and different academic degrees which affects the results. Second, the population of the whole study was just 100 EFL NTs and 100 EFL ETs, and for this study just 30 EFL NTs from Alborz Province. Third, this study was administered at the expense and efforts of the researcher. Therefore, replication of the study with the participation of all the Iranian EFL teachers and controlling gender, age, and degree of education may yield different results. Further, replication of this study with financial and non-financial support on the part of the Department of Education may also entail different results.

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