Supervisory Feedback Efficiency: Developing a Framework Based on Iranian EFL Teachers' and Supervisors' Perceptions

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Abstract

Believing that providing EFL teachers with effective supervisory feedback during the post-observation conference is essential, researchers in the current study report on the views of Iranian EFL teachers and supervisors as to what constitutes effective supervisory feedback. Having conducted a qualitative content analysis of the data obtained from interviews with teachers and supervisors, researchers came up with a framework of the constituent elements of effective supervisory feedback, which includes 1) adopting a more creative approach 2) using above-the-utterance mitigation 3) gauging the teachers' ZPD 4) being socioculturally sensitive 5) assessing the teachers' beliefs and attitudes and 6) developing public relations. The results showed the teachers' overall dissatisfaction with the present supervisory feedback. The paper concludes by suggestions to include supervisory training courses in the existing teacher development programs to better empower supervisors in their dealing with EFL supervisees throughout the country.

Keywords: Feedback efficiency, language teacher supervision, post-observation conferences

1. Introduction

Providing effective supervisory feedback during the post-observation conference is one of the language teacher supervisors' most challenging responsibilities because it involves serious face-threatening acts (FTA) which can result in the supervised teachers' potential loss of face (Bailey, 2009).

FTAs can vary depending on the supervision model employed by the language teacher supervisors. Goldsberry (1988) distinguished three types of supervision: nominal supervision whose main purpose is to maintain "a façade that supervision is being practiced" (Goldsberry, 1988, p.2); prescriptive supervision which attempts to promote uniform practices by prescriptive feedback; and reflective supervision which aims to promote reflective adaptation by reflective feedback. Freeman (1982) also distinguished between the supervisory, nondirective, and alternative options. The first, directive in nature, is the same as Goldsberry's prescriptive supervision. The second option, however, is nonjudgmental. The third option expects the supervisors to provide the teachers with alternatives. Adding two more options, i.e the collaborative and the creative ones, Gebhard (1984) extended Freeman's models of supervision. The former, emphasizing a sharing relationship, expects the supervisors to closely work with the teachers but not to direct them. The latter expects the teachers to be selective and switch roles as the context in which they are working begins to change.

Wallace (1991) categorizes all these supervision models into classic prescriptive and classic collaborative approaches. The supervisor using classic prescriptive approaches will give teachers little power and authority, completely dictating teachers what to do and how to do things in the classroom. As a result, the feedback the teacher gets will be absolutely prescriptive in nature with the teacher having no power to make his or her own decisions. However, the more the teacher moves towards the classic collaborative approaches, the more democratic, reflective, and dialogic the feedback will be. Here, teachers will have their own voice during the feedback session with the supervisor willing to share his or her power to make agreed-upon decisions in the classroom.

Recently the prescriptive and directive view of supervision has been seriously challenged by social constructivism (Vygotsky,1978) which, according to Herschensohn and Young-Scholten (2013, p.708), "confers a major role on the social actor in the construal of reality and of world knowledge." Emphasizing the collaborative nature of learning in clinical supervision, Copeland, Dean and Wladkowski (2011, p. 28) also assert that supervision based on the postmodern social constructionism "promotes multiple possibilities, an emphasis on meaning that is coconstructed through dialogue, and a view of the supervisory relationship as collaborative rather than hierarchical."

Here, the challenge for the supervisor when providing feedback, as Wajnryb (1995) asserts, is to tactfully strike a balance between message clarity and politeness and deliver criticism "gently enough that teachers can listen to it but clearly enough that they can hear it" (Bailey, 2006, p. 170). This, according to Wajnryb (1995), is achieved through

mitigation which refers to the "linguistic means by which a speaker deliberately hedges what he / she is saying by taking into account the reactions of the hearer" (Wajnryb, 1995, p. 71). The most helpful kind is what Wajnryb (1995) calls "above-the-utterance-level mitigation" which "seeks to prepare the teacher for the forthcoming criticism by … building on her strengths, affirming the positive side of her teaching, engaging in interaction, and setting a tone of trust and professionalism" (Wajnryb, 1995, p. 74). As Wajnryb (1995) further argues, hypermitigation, which contains too much mitigation, can make the message vague and obscure while hypomitigation, which contains very little mitigation, might look too direct and rude putting the teacher on the defensive.

Situational leadership, originally designed and developed in management by Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (2001), has clear implications for the feedback provided in the post-observation conferences, too. It has been successfully adapted and implemented in clinical supervision by Bedford and Gehlert (2013) as situational supervision model and can be applied in language teacher supervision, too (Bailey, 2006). The model, as argued by Bailey (2006, p. 227), suggests that "effective leaders tailor their behavior to meet the needs of their followers." The model revolves around four major supervisory styles aligned with the supervisees' four major readiness levels.
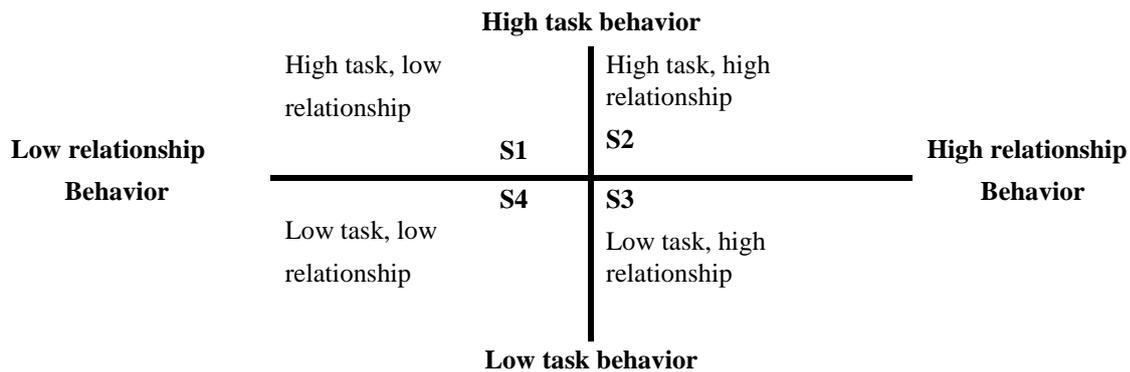
Figure 1. Continua of relationship and task behavior in situational leadership (in Bailey, 2006, p. 228)

The supervisor is supposed to change his or her supervisory style based on his or her perception of the supervisees' readiness level.
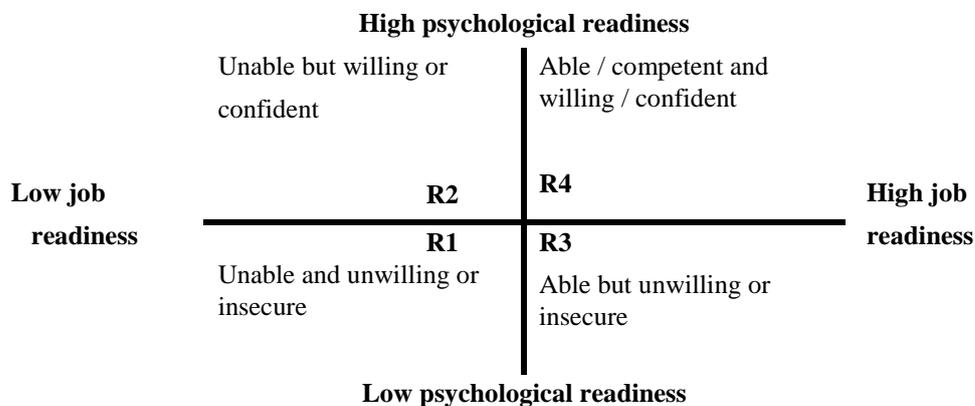
Figure 2. Continua of job and psychological readiness in situational leadership (in Bailey, 2006, p. 230)

Misjudging or misdiagnosing the supervisees' readiness level can lead to anxiety, frustration, and even anger. For instance, style 1 with a teacher with a readiness level of 4 will cause anger, style 2 frustration and style 3 anxiety as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1 Implications of Misdiagnosing by Bedford and Gehlert (2013)

Readiness Level	Style 1	Style 2	Style 3	Style 4
R 4	Anger	Frustration	Anxiety	Match
R 3	Frustration	Anxiety	Match	Anxiety
R 2	Anxiety	Match	Anxiety	Frustration
R 1	Match	Anxiety	Frustration	Anger

Based on the four supervisory styles and the four readiness levels, Bedford and Gehlert (2013) define four different roles for supervisors to adopt when working with supervisees.

|	Supervisor Behavior	
High ↑ **Relationship Behavior** (Supportive Behavior) ↓ **Low**	**S3** (Counseling) Low Task/High Rel.	**S2** (Consulting) High Task/High Rel.
	S4 (Evaluating) Low Task/Low Rel.	**S1** (Teaching) High Task/Low Rel.
	Task Behavior ← (Directive Behavior) → **High**	

Figure 3. Adapted Situational Supervision Model (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013, p. 62) depicting supervisory styles based on level of relationship and task behavior as determined by the corresponding supervisee readiness level.

Teaching, adopted with readiness level 1 in which teachers are unable or insecure to change, requires the supervisors to give supervisees direct instruction taking a directive role with little attention given to the relational aspect (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013).

Consulting, according to Bedford and Gehlert (2013), is adopted with readiness level 2 in which the supervisees demonstrate a low level of ability but a high level of willingness or confidence. If the supervisor does not play the role expected, "the supervisee may feel stuck in her or his growth and frustrated by the supervisor's inability to assist in the development of skills necessary to assist both the trainee and the client" (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013, p. 64).

Counseling is adopted with readiness level 3 where the supervisee shows high ability but low willingness or motivation possibly caused, among many other things, by anxiety levels, poor time management skills, perceived institutional barriers, and issues with profession identity (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013, p. 64). Here a supervisory response that is high on relationship and low on task focus is appropriate.

Evaluating, adopted for readiness level 4, is assumed for tasks in which the supervisee demonstrates a high degree of both confidence and ability. This style is characterized with low task and low relationship.

Effective supervisory feedback, as implied above, is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional issue with central importance for language teacher supervision practices. Keeping this in mind, this paper made an attempt to investigate the constituent elements of effective supervisory feedback to come up with a framework to use when delivering supervisory feedback during the post- observation conference.

2. Literature Review

With recent emphasis on teacher education in the EFL/ESL context, language teacher supervision has gained tremendous momentum as one of the instrumental tools for teachers' professional development. Although largely ignored in EFF/ESL contexts in the past, supervision has been extensively investigated in other fields including general education, clinical supervision and management. Recently however, more and more studies have been devoted to this area, some of which are presented below.

With 210 male and female, experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers practicing in the secondary schools and a total of 215 EFL male and female student teachers studying English at Iranian universities, Rashidi and Foroutan (2016) investigated the Iranian in-service and pre-service language teachers' perceptions of educational supervision concerning their professional development. The data from a 43-item questionnaire and the interviews indicated that in-service and pre-service teachers had the same attitudes towards the role of their supervision in their professional development. They further indicated that the models of language teacher supervision in language teacher education are different from the models practiced in in-service classes.

Investigating the knowledge base of Ministry of Education (MOE) supervisors in Iran, Razmjoo and Rasti (2014) came up with a four-component framework of supervisory skill/knowledge domain which includes public relations skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and contextual sensitivity. The framework has clear implications for supervisory feedback efficiency. Language teacher supervisors, for instance, need to be cognizant of and familiar with the context of situation and context of culture if they wish to be effective supervisors and provide transformative feedback. They also need to possess the ability to establish a close and friendly rapport so that teachers do not develop defensiveness and resist the desired changes. Supervisors' attending to these supervisory skill/knowledge domains can, in Pennington's (1996) words, make the input provided by the supervisors "accessible" for processing.

Using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, Moradi, Sepehrifar, and Parhazkar Khadive (2014) explored Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions on supervision indicating that the current supervisory practice in the country was more evaluative and judgemental in nature with observers making sure that the teachers stick to program policies and teachers trying to please them to avoid the unsatisfactory rating. This clearly indicates the current supervision practice in the country aligns more with Wallace's (1991) classic prescriptive approaches which give observers absolute power. Emphasizing that feedback should be positive, encouraging, and constructive, they suggest a more democratic and collaborative involvement when working with teachers.

The prescriptive approach to supervision, however, can work only with beginning Iranian EFL teachers whose decisions, according to Rahmani, Hasani, and Parhoodeh (2014), might be affected by the supervision process. According to Rahmani, Hasani, and Parhoodeh, who collected data from 74 language teachers in Iran using a questionnaire and observations, only teachers who had less than five years of experience could have been affected by the supervision process when it came to making decisions, with more experienced teachers holding pessimistic views towards supervision. These teachers tended to ignore the feedback provided to them by language teacher supervisors. This shows the necessity to adopt more collaborative and reflective supervision approaches especially with more experienced teachers.

Kaneko-Marques (2015) also indicated collaborative supervision was a much more efficient instructional tool to address the complexities inherent in educational contexts. Studying student teachers in Brazil using classroom observations, student teachers' reflective journals, research field notes, post-observation reflective sessions, and interviews, Kaneko-Marques showed that collaborative supervision encouraged teacher candidates' to recognize and understand the complexities of foreign language teaching and learning both in a local and global level.

Freiburg and Waxman (1990) investigated the supervisory feedback in general education in the United States and found that "most supervisors of student teachers receive very little preparation or training, and many do not have the expertise to supervise beginning teachers effectively" (p.8). They argue that cooperating teachers do not feel comfortable giving student teachers negative feedback though they are aware of the existing problems. This is because negative feedback involves FTAs about which both teachers and supervisors are sensitive.

Jyrhama (2001) examined the Finnish preservice teachers' perceptions of whether the supervisory feedback they got was helpful or not. She found that about sixty percent of the teachers felt that their supervisors' feedback was helpful, but a small percentage believed the supervisors' advice was not at all helpful. Jyrhama concluded supervisors' asking *why* questions could help student teachers figure out the elements of successful teaching better.

Lewis (1998) investigated the supervisory feedback she herself provided to her student teachers in New Zealand. According to Lewis, a supervisor's feedback serves at least five purposes (p. 69):

    1. Feedback can establish a bridge between theory and practice, but this link needs to be made explicit in the observer's written comments.

    2. The lecturer's comments can reinforce the teacher's developing professional language which will establish their membership of the TESOL community.

    3. Feedback can provide formative evaluation in that it offers advice which can make a difference at the time it is given, rather than simply establishing a final grade.

    4. The follow-up session in which the teacher and the observer discuss the evaluative comments establishes a process of collaborative reflection which is important during a practicum.

    5. The evaluation of teaching practice can make a difference to teaching by turning input into uptake or intake.

As we can see above, besides practical tips, supervisory feedback can promote reflective practice and socialize novice teachers into the discourse community.

Wajnryb (1994, p. 370) investigated the supervisory discourse of Australian teacher educators and showed that supervisors in feedback conferences

    1. are concerned with the impact of their words on the face and morale of the teachers and accordingly adjust their words, bearing in mind the teacher's unforeseen responses, both immediate and delayed;

    2. have to juggle the twin demands of helper (advising, counseling, nurturing, encouraging, guiding, supporting) and critic (judging, assessing, pointing out weaknesses);

    3. have to ride a fine line between not hurting the teacher with their words but also getting a clear message across;

    4. are aware of staging, managing, and handling the conference in ways that make it productive and facilitate the successful delivery of bad news;

    5. work hard at the affective factors of trust and empathy to create a context in which critical feedback might be well received;

    6. safeguard their instructive message to counter the mitigating impact that face has on their choice of words;

7. refer to the complexity of their functions, demonstrate an awareness of their own evolution towards more effective practice, and testify to the value that strategic training might offer.

Waite (1993) studied four novice teachers and their three supervisors and came up with three roles which teachers assumed during their conferences: "passive", "collaborative" and "adversarial". Teachers assuming the first role accept the supervisors' comments and authority and may accordingly change their teaching practice. Teachers taking the second role select which recommendations to attend to and how to apply those recommendations. There will be two possibilities here. First, teachers might pretend to accept the supervisors' recommendations but not apply them. Second, teachers might really accept the recommendations and really incorporate them into their teaching practice. The third role occurs when the teacher openly disagrees with the supervisors' positions. The implications of Waite's study is that to promote positive change teachers should be able to take in the feedback provided or as Pennington (1996) says the input must be accessible.

Wallace and Woolger (1991, p. 322) suggest four stages in the post-observation feedback conference. The first called "establishing the facts," relates to what happened during the lesson. Supervisors here should ask two questions: "What did the teacher do?" and "What did the pupils do?" In the second stage again, supervisors should ask two important questions: "What was achieved?" and "What did the pupils learn?" and "How do you know?" In the third stage, supervisors are supposed to generate alternatives and ask, "What else could have been done?" This clearly relates to the alternatives option (Freeman, 1982, 1989; Gebhard, 1984, 1990). In the last self-evaluation stage, supervisors ask teachers, "What have you learned?" They add that the question "What have you learned?" should apply to the supervisor too.

The current study will address feedback efficiency in language teacher supervision, an area which has been largely ignored, especially in non-North American EFL/ESL contexts.

3. Significance of the study

Supervisory feedback efficiency in language teacher supervision, especially in non-North American contexts, has been largely ignored. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has so far addressed supervisory feedback efficiency in the language teacher supervision context in Iran. This is while as Wajnryb (1994a, p. 87) states, "research evidence suggests that various processes operate within informal face-to-face interactions between supervisors and subordinates that militate against supervisors' ability to give negative feedback." Keeping this in mind, this study will attempt to shed some light on what constitutes effective supervisory feedback in language teacher supervision contexts of Iran.

4. Statement of the problem

One of the largely ignored areas in language teacher supervision is the supervisory feedback given during the post-observation conference. The feedback, if delivered inappropriately, can put the teacher on defensive leading to resistance, frustration, and anxiety. Addressing this gap in literature, the present study will investigate the broad research question below.

What constitutes effective supervisory feedback as perceived by Iranian EFL teachers and supervisors?

5. Method

5.1 Design

Dörnyei (2007) asserts some research questions lend themselves more easily to either qualitative or quantitative methods. And qualitative research, as Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010) assert, provides an in-depth examination of the phenomenon at hand. With these in mind, the research question was addressed by the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and focus groups.

5.2 Participants

The participants of the study consisted 10 individual teachers, 8 individual supervisors and 3 focus groups each with four teachers who participated in the interview. Teachers taking part in the interview were twelve males and ten females, and the supervisors were five males and three females aged 25 to 60. They held B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in English literature, translation, or TEFL. The teachers and supervisors came from Iran Language Institute, Shiraz University Language Center and Safir Language Teaching Institute in Tehran, Shiraz, and Gorgan.

5.3 Instruments

Using semi-structured interviews containing twelve questions followed by some probes when the need arose, 10 individual teachers, 3 focus groups each with four teachers, and 8 supervisors were interviewed. Focus groups were used to overcome the limitations of one-on-one interviews including the problem of social desirability, according to which, "respondents want to please the interviewer by giving socially acceptable responses that they would not necessarily give on an anonymous questionnaire" (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010, p. 381). Besides, focus groups let the informants challenge one another when the need arises and provide more in-depth naturalistic data. As Kleiber (2004, p. 90) says

> the focus group operates on the assumption that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, the choice of focus groups is not justified simply by being an efficient alternative to

conducting, say, seven interviews in sequence. Rather, the method depends on the interaction of the group to stimulate participants to think beyond their own private thoughts and to articulate their opinions.

5.4 Data collection procedures

Briefing the informants on the procedures for conducting focus groups, the researchers set a specific time and location for the interviews. The interview consisted of twelve questions which were developed by the researchers based on the literature available and were carefully examined and adapted by two TEFL professors at Shiraz University and Farhangian University. The same questions were used for one-on-one interviews with teachers and supervisors. With the informants' consent, the interviews were recorded. Some one-on-one interviews were conducted and recorded on the phone. The interviews which were all conducted in Farsi lasted 20 to 35 minutes with individual teachers and supervisors and approximately one hour with focus groups. The data were transcribed and subjected to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) method of constant comparison.

Constant comparison, which is "typically inductive and data-driven" (Duff, 2008, p. 160), seeks to spot patterns or associations encoded in the naturalistic data. Here, the transcriptions were read and the tapes were listened to again and again to spot the prominent codes, categories, and themes.

Having come up with some themes, the researchers set to check the validity of their findings using 'member checks', according to which, "the researcher may ask participants to review and critique … tape recordings for accuracy and meaning" (Ary, et al., 2010, p. 500). Having recorded the findings in the forms of comments at the margin of the remarks made by the informants, the researchers sent them to the same informants to see whether they agreed with the codes identified or not. In case there were inconsistencies, they were all put to negotiation.

6. Findings

The findings of the present study yielded the constituent elements of a framework for effective supervisory feedback in the form of the following themes.

6.1 Adopting a more creative approach

The supervision approach adopted by the supervisors greatly affects the type of feedback they provide the teachers with. A theme recurrently mentioned by the teachers was their widespread dissatisfaction with the current supervisory conduct, which was more prescriptive than collaborative, regardless of the teachers' readiness level which, according to situational supervision (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013), needs to be evaluated to select the appropriate supervisory style. The teachers wished the supervisors were more flexible moving between prescriptive and collaborative approaches to be able to meet the supervisory needs of different teachers. The following quotes from the interviews typify this attitude towards the issue at hand.

> Observation of a beginner teacher and a teacher with … let's say twenty … twenty five years of experience should not … that is cannot be the same. The observer cannot treat them the same. Anyway … the teacher with a lot of experience cannot be directed … but the story is different for … for the teacher who … who has just started and … knows nothing except … except his university courses… this teacher is different … different from experienced teachers. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

> I believe there must be direction but mostly for beginners. For someone who has been at the university … for let's say four years … and has never been into a classroom. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

> Well, it is clear it is much better to use more flexible methods to supervise teachers. But we have organizational requirements to consider, too. (English translation of a supervisor's quote)

This confirms Rahmani, Hasani, and Parhoodeh's (2014) finding, according to which, prescriptive approaches to supervision can work only with beginning Iranian EFL teachers whose decisions might be affected by the supervision process. According to Rahmani, Hasani, and Parhoodeh, only teachers who had less than five years of experience could have been affected by the supervision process when it came to making decisions, with more experienced teachers holding pessimistic views towards supervision. This shows the necessity to adopt a more creative supervision approach (Gebhard, 1984) when observing different teachers, which was also emphasized by Moradi, Sepehrifar, and Parhazkar Khadive (2014) who suggested more democratic and collaborative approaches to supervision in Iran. Teachers with a lot of experience usually possess a big repertoire of knowledge and experience which, according to social constructivism (Herschensohn & Young-Scholten, 2013) need to be tapped by supervisors when providing feedback. So with postmodernism promoting multiple possibilities and social constructivism promoting the coconstruction of knowledge, listening to what teachers have to say is one step toward efficient feedback which can, in turn, result in much less resistance on the part of the teacher.

Proposing the reflective model of teacher education, Wallace and Woolger (1991, pp. 320-321) contend that "a true supervisory dialogue is essential, because the supervisor must *start with the teacher's expertise.*" Common ground must be established. There must be agreement on what happened, and what was intended to happen."

Chamberlin (2000, pp. 653-654) contends the power imbalance in the feedback session "does not promote a collegial interpersonal setting that is conducive to self-disclosure and exploration of beliefs and practice." Since the post-observation is a type of unequal power discourse, it can be very face-threatening. So aware of the differential power base affecting the discourse and its possible adverse effects on the accessibility of the supervisory input, supervisors should adopt a more dialogic approach in which teachers can have their own say and solutions can be mutually negotiated.

6.2 Using above-the-utterance mitigation

Language as the main tool to mediate power and the way it is used to deliver feedback was the next recurring theme. Besides "whatness", the "howness" of delivering criticism counts, too. Teachers rightly expect supervisors to highlight their strengths before they deal with their weaknesses and use appropriate supervisory discourse to discuss their shortcomings. In what follows two quotes from the participants referring to the same point are provided.

> A supervisor should, I believe, start with … with the teachers' strengths… with what he has done successfully and … then … little by little move to the weaknesses. When criticizing he should be … be very careful with his diction… I mean his choice of words. See … a supervisor … for example … says 'You must ask more detailed questions' … if the same supervisor says "You might ask more detailed questions' … well … I think this is more effective. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

This is also confirmed by the data coming from the supervisors. A supervisor said

> See … the way you say something is also important. It is better … much better we start with the teachers' strengths … gradually moving to their weaknesses. If the language we use … is … is direct and harsh … it can seriously hurt the teachers. To criticize a teacher for his classroom management, for example, you can say … 'When I started teaching, I had the same problem myself.' (English translation of a supervisor's quote)

This is in line with Wajnryb's (1995) "above-the-utterance-level mitigation" which "seeks to prepare the teacher for the forthcoming criticism by … building on her strengths, affirming the positive side of her teaching, engaging in interaction, and setting a tone of trust and professionalism" (p. 74).

This will also help teachers take Waite's "collaborative" role which is absolutely essential to let teachers take in the supervisory feedback provided. If the teachers take the "adversarial" role, the input (feedback) given will not be "accessible" as Pennington (1996) puts it. The teachers might openly resist the feedback given by the supervisor, or worse, they might simply pretend they are attending to the feedback.

6.3 Gauging the teachers' ZPD

Another theme recurrently mentioned by the teachers was the supervisors' ability to gauge the teachers Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The following quote from teachers participating in the study indicate such a need.

> One time I had serious concerns with my error correction. I was extremely worried about that. But the observer never mentioned a word about it and instead went to something I did not at all I expected. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

> They seldom see you … talk to you before the observation. It is most of the time done unexpectedly. How do they want to figure out what we need … what we are concerned about … what we expect. They often observe us … and judge us with their own world seldom getting to know what our concerns and problems are. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

Each person approaches a task or problem with his own unique perspective – his own subjective ways of making sense of that task or problem. Through discussion, according to Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997), individuals can establish shared understandings which are mutually agreed-on, or intersubjective. These authors add, "through collaboration within each person's zone of potential understanding, the knower and the learner may reach intersubjectivity or a shared understanding" (p. 508). Intersubjectivity, as van Lier (1996, p. 161) puts it, means "participants are jointly focused on the activity and its goals, and they draw each other's attention into a common direction." When giving supervisory feedback to a teacher, intersubjectivity can be built if the supervisor can gauge the teachers' levels of current and potential development. This can, in turn, be achieved by supervisors' talking to teachers during the pre- and post-observation conferences.

6.4 Being socioculturally sensitive

The next theme repeatedly mentioned by the informants was the supervisors' being cognizant of and familiar with the immediate context of situation and the larger context of culture. Teachers' experience, education, degree, age and sex

and the supervisors' social acceptance in terms of seniority, experience, education and academic degree were repeatedly brought up by the informants. Regarding the immediate context of situation, one teacher said

> I believe a supervisor … before observing a class should get to know the class he or she is going to observe. I mean some information about the students, the teacher, the things done the previous session and the things to be done that week. (English translation of a teachers' quote)

Another teacher said

> I think the supervisors' age is very important. It must be someone a bit old someone accepted by the teachers. You see it is hard to have someone younger than you yourself… someone who has less experience than you. Education is also important. I think it is better they hold high degrees especially in teaching. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

This confirms Razmjoo and Rasti's (2014) finding, according to which, contextual knowledge / cultural sensitivity was one of the key components of their supervisory skills / knowledge framework. As Bailey (2006, p. 6) has put it, the supervisor's role is, in part, "culturally defined and conceptually located in the educational and political history of a particular region." The choice of the supervision model, for instance, largely depends on the context the supervisor is working in. The supervisor needs to be very careful with the teachers' age, sex, educational level, experience and culture. Highly educated and experienced teachers might prefer more reflective and dialogic feedback compared to less educated and experienced teachers. Still in some specific cultures even these highly educated and experienced teachers might prefer more directive and prescriptive approaches.

6.5 Assessing the teachers' beliefs and attitudes

Getting to know and working on the teachers' beliefs and attitudes was a theme recurrently mentioned by the supervisors and teachers. This was especially fueled by the teachers' resistance towards supervisors and their critical feedback. Teachers, especially the more experienced ones, expected supervisors to respect their knowledge and experience and the beliefs they have developed thereon. The following quotes represent such an attitude.

> Come on! Sometimes they [supervisors] say something you cannot accept. Something you cannot agree with. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

> Well, as a teacher teaching for a long time I have my own ideas which are mostly based on my teaching experience and studies. Now a supervisor … who is completely divorced from my class … comes and says, "Do this like this or like that." But how can I be sure he is really right? (English translation of a teacher's quote)

As Bailey (2006, p. 277) says two of the most interesting challenges in supervision are

a) Understanding the teachers' various attitudes, and
b) Working with those attitudes to ensure program quality and promote teachers' continued professional development

Bailey (2006, p. 280) reports Blumberg and Jonas who state "any changes need to fit their [teachers'] established belief system about good teaching." In other words, "the changes need to mesh with what those teachers believe to be right" (Bailey, 2006, p. 280). Besides examining the teachers' belief system, supervisors need to recognize the teachers' experience and valorize their knowledge of teaching.

The feedback on effective teaching is supposed to promote positive change through increasing awareness (Bailey, 2006). According to Bailey's (2006, p. 142) "principle of feedback", which underlies the post-observation conferences between teachers and supervisors, "knowledge of the results of one's actions is necessary to change those actions." However, being aware of one's actions does not mean that they will automatically change their behavior. There is more to feedback efficiency than awareness. Difficulties will arise when the supervisors and the teachers hold different beliefs on what language is and how it is best learnt and taught (Bailey, 2006).

6.6 Developing public relations skills

Supervisors' ability to establishing a close and friendly rapport with mutual respect and trust was the next recurring theme. Frequent mentions were made of the need for supervisors to be friendly, warm, patient, kind and honest. This is, in fact, essential for the supervisors to create a comfortable and supportive environment in which teachers can develop positive, open attitudes towards teacher supervision and classroom observation, This positive, open tone will allow teachers to carefully listen to and process the input given by the supervisor. It will also make teachers examine and even question their teaching practice and most possibly change and improve it. The following quotes indicate such an attitude.

> An observer should, first of all, be the teachers' friend. He should… should be able to establish a friendly relationship with the teacher. A smile, for example, or … a warm greeting … a smiling face

… if an observer does not have this, I should say …. say that he is good for nothing. He will never be a successful observer. (English translation of a teacher's quote)

This point was recognized by the supervisors too. A supervisor said

Well, as an observer …you are an experienced teacher … a senior teacher … and you have some power over the teachers … this power will never cause any problems as long as you can establish a close rapport with the teacher… and go … go into his heart. (English translation of a supervisor's quote)

This finding confirms Razmjoo and Rasti's (2014) four-component framework of supervisory skill/knowledge domains of which developing public relations skills is one. They believe the supervisors' ability to establish rapport and to deem themselves on a par with the teachers is a main prerequisite for carrying out supervisory responsibilities.

7. Conclusion

One of the key factors in any teacher supervision context is the supervisors' ability to provide effective supervisory feedback during the post-observation conference. This effective feedback, from among many other things, will help supervisors overcome teacher resistance and reluctance to change. The central question here, however, is what the key components of effective supervisory feedback are. With this question in mind, the current study set to investigate the constituent elements of effective supervisory feedback in the Iranian language teacher supervision context. The themes, which are grounded in naturalistic data from one-on-one and focus group interviews with both Iranian teachers and supervisors, yielded a six-component framework to let supervisors effectively manage the complex, multi-faceted issue of supervisory feedback. According to this six-component framework, supervisors definitely need to adopt a more creative approach, use above-the-utterance mitigation, meet the teachers' ZPD, be socioculturally sensitive, assess teachers' beliefs and attitudes and, last but not least, develop public relations skills.

The findings of the study have implications for language schools and their teacher supervisors in some respects. Firstly, language schools urgently need to incorporate supervisory training courses in the existing teacher development programs to better empower supervisors in their dealing with their supervisory responsibilities especially that of providing critical feedback. Secondly, unless supervisors have an adequate understanding of the complications of the feedback politics, there will be no positive change on the part of the teachers.

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