A Critical Review of EFL Teacher Supervision Models

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ABSTRACT

Teacher supervision plays a significant role in teacher education in general and in professional development in particular. Whilst supervision occurs at several levels and in different contexts, it plays a particularly important role in pre-service teacher training. Nonetheless, it still retains an important place in in-service teacher education. This article critically reviews the main supervisory models and approaches with particular respect to language teacher education. For many English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, the notion of supervision can be a source of concern; therefore, this paper attempts to shed light on the various approaches and theories that have shaped the field of teacher supervision in general education and in EFL in particular. Finally, the article offers additional insights to practitioners into a different perspective on supervision from a post-method outlook with the idea of epistemology of practice as a central notion.

KEYWORDS

EFL, Supervision, Teacher Education, Teacher Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Amongst the issues of interest for a large number of language educators is the supervision of in-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. This issue is at the heart of teacher professional development and can be considered as an effective way to provide teachers with opportunities to improve and develop their skills and knowledge as language teachers. This idea stems from two fundamental assumptions that inform the nature of teacher education: (1) teachers are in constant need of growth and improvement and (2) supervision can play a decisive role in this process. Likewise, and more specifically, it is crucial to consider other elements as a premise to this discussion on EFL teacher education in general and EFL teacher supervision in particular. First, in principle, it is fair to say that teachers need to be provided with real development opportunities not only on a punctual basis, but more importantly, on the long-term as their professional development (PD) should be seen as a process over time rather than a fixed, punctual activity. In addition, with regards pre-service teachers, their formal training, no matter how effective it is, cannot fully prepare them for their entire career, hence the various programmes in place to support the induction of newly-qualified teachers or the ongoing PD provision available in many countries. Furthermore, teachers come from such varied and diverse backgrounds that the opportunities to share knowledge and disseminate good practice...
are potentially immense and limitless. In doing so, teachers can also actively partake in their own development using their unique professional environments which can provide them with a wealth of valuable experiences.

Based on this, the importance of supervision cannot be ignored in the overall process of teacher education and teacher PD. Supervision commonly occurs at different levels and in different contexts and although it is significant in pre-service contexts and during initial teacher training (Randall & Thornton, 2001), the focus of this discussion relates to in-service language teacher supervision. In a great number of EFL institutions, the question of EFL teacher supervision is fundamental because it may assist teachers in identifying issues and problems in their practice and help them in putting in place strategies to overcome these issues and find solutions (Kayaoglu, 2012). Hence, the field of teacher supervision has been shaped by a great wealth of approaches, techniques and theories in relation to general education and language education in particular. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to critically review a range of approaches to supervision in language teaching and to offer additional insights to practitioners into a different perspective on supervision from a post-method outlook.

**SUPERVISION**

Prior to engaging with the discussion, it is worth noting that far less literature has been dedicated to the topic of supervision in specific contexts such as foreign language teaching than in general education. The notion of supervision has been consistently addressed in the literature in general education contexts and most discussions in relation to foreign language teaching have been inspired from general education. Nonetheless, before attempting to suggest a definition of the term supervision, it is crucial to bear in mind two key issues. First, as teachers, we all have our own conception of the nature of supervision, or what it ought to be, since we have all been supervised at some stage within our career. Secondly, the conflicting views and conceptions regarding this notion are reflected in the variety of its possible definitions. Furthermore, the term supervision has been traditionally discussed in fields not related to teaching or education. For instance, references to supervision can be found in relation to the industry, social work, psychology or the business sector (Kaneko-Marques, 2015; Bailey, 2006). As a result, the term has been defined in many different ways depending on the context where it occurs. For instance, in industrial contexts, supervisors are commonly referred to as first line managers above subordinate workers. In such contexts, the supervisor’s task is to ensure workers achieve certain goals in terms of production or productivity according to a plan set by the company (Hay, 2007). Interestingly, the managerial aspect of this definition can still be found today in certain conceptions of supervision in education settings.

In general education, Daresh (2007, p. 25) provides a comprehensive definition that can probably cater for various education contexts including language teaching; he describes supervision as a “process of overseeing the ability of people to meet the goals of the organisation in which they work”. Nevertheless, without really breaking away from the industrial-managerial tradition, this definition is rooted in an apparently strong emphasis on a competency-based conception of supervision although he insists on the importance of the process aspect of supervision thereby suggesting that it should be seen as a long-term procedure.

In language teaching, a very simple, yet very concise, definition has been suggested by Gebhard (1990, p. 2) who explains that “language teacher supervision is an ongoing process in which the supervisor observes what goes on in the teacher’s classroom with an eye toward the goal of improved instruction”. Likewise, Gebhard stresses on the process-based aspect of supervision suggesting that it takes place over time; however, he insists that the ultimate goal of supervision should be the improvement of teaching and learning. The main concern of supervision, according to him, should be the development of teachers, and ultimately, the betterment of instruction. From this perspective, the focus of supervision is, therefore, the teacher while the supervisor acts as an observer.
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