Teacher Autonomy and Supervisor Authority: Power Dynamics in Language Teacher Supervision in Iran

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A B S T R A C T

The power imbalance inherent in supervision can seriously challenge language teachers' autonomy leading to resistance, anxiety, frustration and even anger. This study explored the possible uses or abuses of power when teacher supervisors exercise their authority to fulfill their responsibilities. The study drew on Foucault's (1991) conception of power, and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism. Using mixed-methods design, the researchers interviewed both EFL teachers, and supervisors, and examined some post-observation feedback conferences. A questionnaire was also administered to survey teachers' and supervisors' conception of power dynamics in the language teacher supervision profession. Factor analysis of the data resulted in the extraction of two factors including "directiveness" and "uniformity promotion". Independent samples t-test did not indicate a significant difference between the teachers' and supervisors' perceptions of power. Analysis of the interviews and post-observation feedback conferences confirmed the findings indicating that supervisors mostly used classic prescriptive approaches to supervision in which teachers have little power. Supervisors mostly resorted to their position power and reward power seldom using their expert power which seems to have led to resistance on the part of the teachers. Finally, the paper provides a framework emerging from the qualitative data that presents some strategies to effectively manage the power imbalance in language teacher supervision profession.

Keywords: language teacher supervision; power dynamics; supervisor authority; teacher autonomy

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Introduction

Language teacher supervision is characterized by many complexities, one of which is the power asymmetry inherent in the process where the supervisors' authority can seriously challenge the teachers' autonomy and create a certain level of tension. This fact has made the emotionally, culturally, and politically charged supervision field feel like a "tug-of-war" (Bailey, 2006, p. xiii) or a "private cold war" (Blumberg, 1980, p. 25) which, if not understood and managed properly, can turn the otherwise rewarding supervision profession into an unequal power struggle.

Power has been thoroughly explored in other fields including management (Bolman & Deal, 1997), and psychology (Copeland, Dean & Wladkowski, 2011; Green & Dekkers, 2010; Quarto, 2003). Attending to power has been shown to provide a supportive environment leading to more supervisee satisfaction (Inman, 2006; Murphy & Wright, 2005). Power in language teacher supervision, although largely ignored in non-North American contexts, has also been addressed by some researchers in North America as it is, according to Bailey (2006, 2009), the only key factor which distinguishes Freeman's (1982, 1989) options for observers' roles, i.e. the directive, nondirective, and alternative options. It is also the key concept used by Wallace (1991) to conceptualize supervisory approaches in education ranging from classic prescriptive where the supervisor is an authority figure to classic collaborative ones where the supervisor is seen as a colleague who values teachers' knowledge and expertise attempting to promote reflection and self-evaluation.

Challenged by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism in which dialogic interactions play a key role in the construction of knowledge (Herschensohn & Young-Scholten, 2013), the general trend in language teacher supervision in North American contexts has been away from classic prescriptive approaches towards classic collaborative ones (Bailey, 2006, 2009). The trend has been also affected by Foucault's (1991) conception of power, according to which, wherever there is power, there will be resistance; which implies that problems must be negotiated by both parties to reach agreed-upon solutions. As Foucault (1991) further argues, power here is no longer seen as something repressive and coercive but it is considered to be something helpful and, as Monchinski (2008) says, even essential for the humanization of education. The trend in non-North American contexts especially in the Iranian EFL context, however, remains unexplored. This is while power differentials, if not attended and managed carefully, can turn supervision into a painful experience for teachers.

As mentioned, very few studies have addressed power dynamics in language teacher supervision in Iran leaving room for research in this area. Trying to address this gap in knowledge, the present study made an attempt to address power issues in language teacher supervision in Iran to see how it developed, how it was used, how it was perceived by teachers and supervisors, and what could be done to effectively manage it.

Literature Review

Power dynamics, although largely ignored in EFL contexts, has been addressed by many studies in psychology and management. Green and Dekkers (2010), for instance, investigated power dynamics in clinical supervision and found that supervision that attends to power and diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, physical ability, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation could provide a more supportive environment for supervisees. Inman (2006) and Murphy and Wright (2005) also found that attending to power and diversity could lead to supervisee satisfaction. But what is power and what types of power can supervisors use in their supervision profession?

This question was addressed in a study by Bolman and Deal (1997) in the field of management. They classified power into eight types, all of which provide important implications for language teacher supervision (Bailey, 2006). The first is "position power" which is the power given to the supervisors by the organization (Daresh, 2001). The second type is "expert power" or, as Bailey (2006) calls it, "genuine authority" which comes from the supervisors' expertise on the issue. Bolman and Deal (1997) call the third type of power "reward power" which is the supervisors' ability to either grant or deny raises. The fourth is "coercive power" which is the supervisor's ability to give supervisees punishment. The fifth type of power lies in "alliances and networks", according to which, the more supervisors work on building relations, the better they can get things done. According to the sixth type of power, "access to and control of agendas", some groups have more access to decision-making arenas and their interests are well represented when important decisions are made. The seventh type of power, "framing or the control of meaning and symbols", states that more powerful individuals in an organization can always define values and impose them on others. The last type is "personal power", according to which, people who possess charisma are imbued with power even independent of other sources. Despite the fact that language teacher supervisors will more or less have to use the same kinds of power (Bailey, 2006) when supervising teachers, very few studies have been conducted to investigate what kinds of power they use and if their uses of power are appropriate or not and what can be done to effectively manage it.

As implied by Bolman and Deal's (1997) classification, power is not always bad as are not expert power and personal power. Even position power, which is often seen as repression and coercion, is not always negative (Foucault, 1991). As Foucault (1991) further argues, position power is sometimes even positive or as Monchinski (2008) discusses in his book on critical pedagogy, it is even essential to humanize education. Positive or negative, what is it that governs power dynamics in supervision?

The type of power used by supervisors in clinical supervision is found to be influenced by the evolving interactions between supervisors and supervisees (Muse-Burke, Ladany, & Deck, 2001) which is itself a function of the supervisees' development level (Quarto, 2003) or readiness level (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013) which seem to be closely related to social constructivists' concept of ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Bedford and Gehlert's (2013) situational supervision in clinical psychology, which has been adapted from Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson's (2001) model of situational leadership in management, specifically addresses this development or readiness level. Providing four supervisory roles for four readiness levels, Bedford and Gehlert's (2013) argue beginning supervisees might expect more structured supervision with direction from supervisors while more advanced ones might prefer less structured supervision environments. Discussing the model's possible applications, Bailey (2006) presents the four supervisory styles and the four readiness levels that the model draws on to define language teacher supervisors' roles (See Figures 1 and 2).

High task behavior

High task, low relationship	High task, high relationship
S1	**S2**

Low relationship   **High relationship**

| **S4** | **S3** |
| Low task, low relationship | Low task, high relationship |

Behavior   **Behavior**
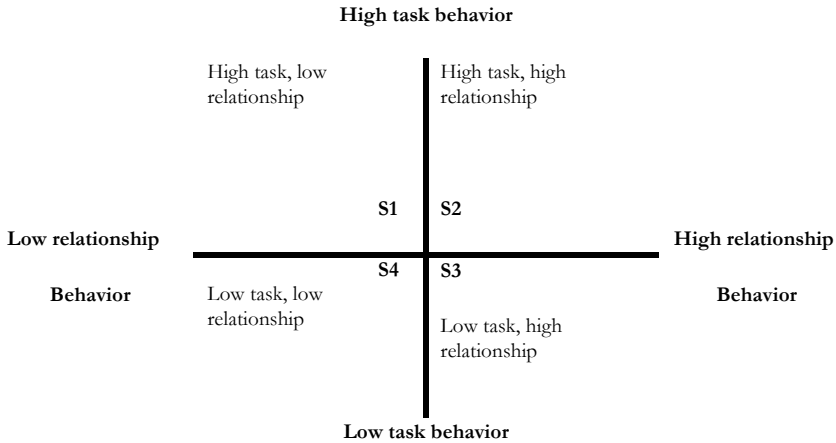
Low task behavior

Figure 1. Continua of Relationship and Task Behavior in Situational Leadership (Bailey, 2006, p. 228)

Task behavior here, according to Hersey et al. (2001), is the extent the supervisor specifies an individual's duties. These behaviors include telling people what, how, when, and where to do something. Put simply, it is the amount of direction supervisees get from their supervisors.

Relationship behavior, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the supervisor adopts bilateral or multilateral communication (Hersey et al., 2001). The supervisors are supposed to change their supervisory style and role based on the supervisees' readiness level i.e. the supervisees' confidence (psychological readiness) and competence (job readiness).
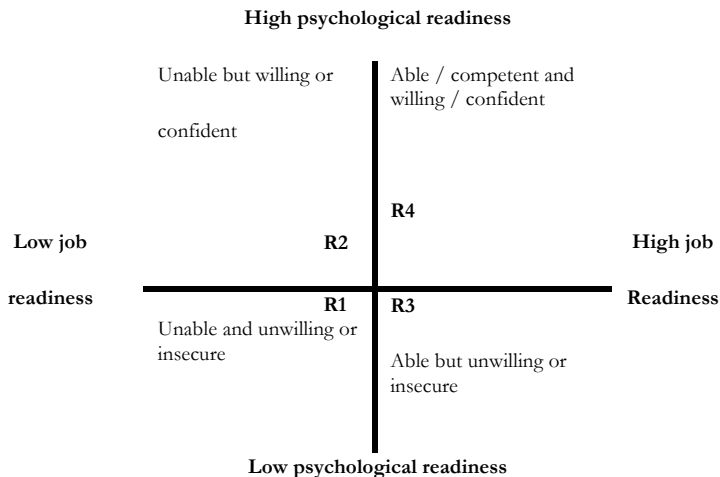
High psychological readiness

| Unable but willing or confident | Able / competent and willing / confident |
| | **R4** |

Low job   **R2**   **High job**

| **R1** | **R3** |
readiness | Unable and unwilling or insecure | Able but unwilling or insecure | **Readiness**

Low psychological readiness

Figure 2. Continua of Job and Psychological Readiness in Situational Leadership (Bailey, 2006, p. 230)

Using the supervisory styles and the readiness levels above, Bedford and Gehlert (2013) present the situational supervision model where they elaborate on the four different roles the supervisors

can adopt when they work with supervisees i.e. teaching, consulting, counseling and evaluating (See Figure 3). The model provides supervisors with general guidance about which roles to adopt based on supervisees' needs and when to adjust roles based on the feedback they get from their supervisees.
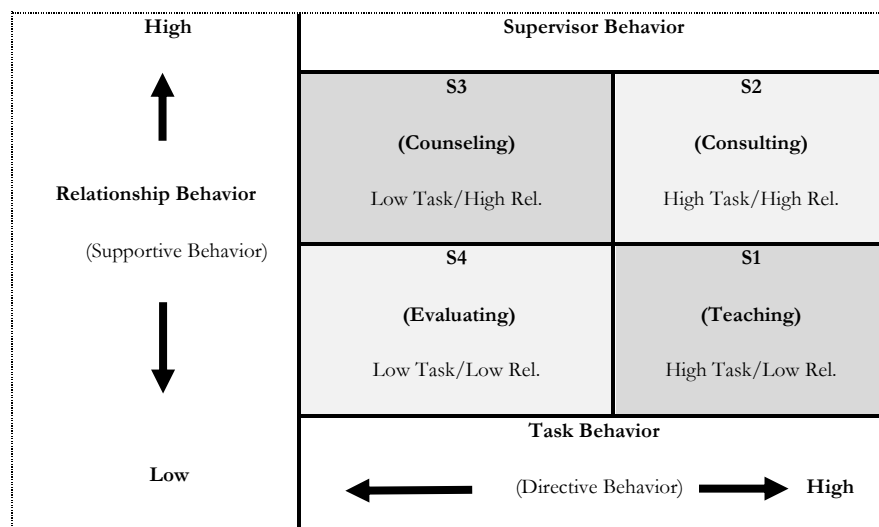
High	Supervisor Behavior	
↑ Relationship Behavior (Supportive Behavior) ↓	S3 (Counseling) Low Task/High Rel.	S2 (Consulting) High Task/High Rel.
	S4 (Evaluating) Low Task/Low Rel.	S1 (Teaching) High Task/Low Rel.
Low	Task Behavior ← (Directive Behavior) → High	

Figure 3. Adapted Situational Supervision Model (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013, p. 62)

As we can see from Figure 3, teaching is used with readiness level 1 where teachers are both unwilling and unable to change and supervisors take a directive role and pay almost no attention to the relational aspect. Consulting is employed with readiness level 2 where the supervisees show a low level of ability yet a high level of willingness or confidence. The supervisors take a directive role again but with a substantial amount of attention given to the relationship behavior. Counseling is used with readiness level 3 where the supervisees are highly able but quite unwilling. Here we need a style that is high on relationship and low on task focus. Evaluating, which is appropriate for readiness level 4, works where supervisees demonstrate a high level of both ability and willingness/confidence. This style is low both in task and in relationship.

Misjudging the supervisees' readiness level, which is one of the shortcomings of the model, may result in anxiety, frustration and even anger (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013). For example, using a reflective and collaborative approach with less able teachers in readiness levels 1 and 2 where they might need direction and instruction will lead to what Copeland et al. (2011, p. 30) called "power vacuum," which may, in turn, cause frustration. On the other hand, using a prescriptive approach with more able teachers in readiness levels 3 and 4 where teachers expect a more reflective process with somewhat neutralized power dynamic will lead to "teacher resistance" (Borders, 2009) where teachers as active social agents will exert their own power and agency (Foucault, 1991). This is exactly why Trout (2008, p. 252) calls the supervision profession "the supervision dance" because supervision is, in fact, achieving harmony between supervisors' inclination to lead and their desire to follow their dance partner. This harmony can be heavily affected by the two sides socio-pragmatic comprehension, in which, according to Malmir and Derakhshan (2020), there are formality, indirectness, politeness, and distance/power influences.

Another study on power dynamics with clear implications for language teacher supervision comes from Copeland et al. (2011). Drawing on postmodern social constructivism and Foucaul's conception of power, Copeland et al. (2011) examined power dynamics in clinical supervision problematizing the traditional view of supervision in which the supervisor is an expert who exercises a considerable degree of power and influence. They proposed a supervision which draws on social constructivism where multiple possibilities are encouraged. They believe meaning should be constructed via dialogue, and the relationship should be collaborative not hierarchical.

The study which marks the move from traditional, modernist ways of thinking to postmodern social constructivism clearly emphasizes dialog where supervisees are able to negotiate and co-construct their own world of knowledge. Social constructivists, according to Myles (2013), sharply criticize the traditional theories which see communication as the transmission of predetermined meanings something which has also been seriously challenged by Friere (1985) who called it the banking system of education.

Power dynamics, so extensively discussed in psychology and management as we saw above, remains one of the under-explored areas in language teaching contexts especially in the non-North American contexts including Iran. Regarding the amount of power exercised by language teacher supervisors in North America, Bailey (2006, 2009) argues that the general trend in the west has been away from traditional prescriptive and directive approaches to more democratic, reflective and collaborative ones where supervisors are seen as colleagues. These collaborative models have been shown to be more efficient in Brazil in South America too (Kaneko-Marques, 2015). The trend in Iran, however, still awaits exploration since very few studies have been conducted on the issue so far. Do Iranian language teacher supervisors attend to power? What kind of power do they use? Do they have the same perceptions of power dynamics as their teachers do? And what can they do to effectively manage the power asymmetry inherent in the supervision process?

One study with some implications for power dynamics in language teacher supervision in Iran was conducted by Mehrpour and Agheshteh (2017). Inspired by Chamberlin's (2000) contention that power asymmetry in the post-observation conferences does not encourage a friendly atmosphere to help teachers disclose and explore their beliefs and practice, Mehrpour and Agheshteh (2017) set to investigate supervisory feedback efficiency in the Iranian EFL context. Indicating the teachers' dissatisfaction with the present feedback, they identified six elements of effective supervisory feedback, where supervisors need to employ a more creative approach, use above-the-utterance mitigation, gauge the teachers' ZPD, be socioculturally sensitive, assess the teachers' beliefs and attitudes and develop public relations. The first constituent element i.e. adopting a more creative approach (See Gebhard, 1984) requires supervisors to combine less power-sharing prescriptive approaches with more power-sharing collaborative ones, based on their teachers' ZPD. And since the post-observation conference is a type of unequal power discourse, language as the main tool to mediate power should be also used carefully as implied by the second constituent element i.e. using above-the-utterance mitigation (See Wajnryb, 1994). This requires supervisors to highlight teachers' strengths and properly mitigate their criticism when discussing their weaknesses (Agheshteh, 2019). Considering sociocultural factors, assessing the teachers' beliefs and attitudes, and developing public relations can also help reduce teacher resistance i.e. teachers' exerting their own power and agency. Of course, as discussed before, we need to remember that this resistance is not always negative as Copeland et al. (2011) talk of "healthy resistance" which is exactly in line with Foucault's (1991) new conceptions of power.

One more study on language teacher supervision in Iran was carried out by Razmjoo and Rasti (2014) who investigated the Ministry of Education (MOE) supervisors and found a perceived trend towards more humanistic approaches. Emphasizing the teachers' discontent with the present supervision process, they presented a four-component framework of supervisory

skill/knowledge domain including public relations skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and contextual sensitivity. This framework provides implications for power dynamics in supervision as the MOE teachers' emphasis on subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge may indicate their preference for supervisors' expert power rather than position power. However, MOE supervision in the country is fundamentally different from its EFL context. Supervision in MOE is only nominal (See Goldsberry, 1988) i.e. a formality while in EFL contexts it is not, indicating that there are more complicated power relationships in supervision in EFL contexts which, as discussed before, have not yet been explored. Such being the case, the present study was an attempt to address this gap and shed some light on how power dynamics developed in the Iranian EFL language teacher supervision. It specifically attempted to answer the following questions.

1. What factors determine power dynamics in the language teacher supervision in Iran?

2. Do supervisors and teachers have the same perceptions of power dynamics?

3. What kinds of power do language teacher supervisors use in the Iranian EFL context?

4. What can language teacher supervisors in Iran do to effectively manage the inherent power imbalance in supervision?

Method

Participants

The study consisted of 151 participants including 110 teachers (55 male and 55 female) and 41 supervisors (19 male and 22 female) who completed the questionnaire. Ten teachers (5 male and 5 female), 8 supervisors (5 male and 3 female) and 3 focus groups each with four teachers i.e. 12 teachers (7 male and 5 female) also participated in the interviews. Nine post-observation conferences of 9 teachers were also recorded to corroborate the findings. The participants were chosen through a two-stage cluster sampling procedure. Using simple random sampling, three cities i.e. Tehran, Shiraz, and Gorgan were selected. Using simple random sampling again, two language institutes were selected in each city. Teachers and supervisors in Shiraz came from Iran Language Institute, Shiraz University Language Center; teachers and supervisors in Tehran and Gorgan came from Safir Language Teaching Institute and Iran Language Institute. Teachers whose post-observation conferences were recorded were, however, selected using convenience sampling for privacy and confidentiality issues. Teachers and supervisors held B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in different fields including English literature, translation, or TEFL.

Instruments

Interviews

There were twelve questions in the interview which were all developed by the researchers drawing on the literature available on the topic. The questions were then carefully examined and adapted by two TEFL professors at Farhangian University and Shiraz University. With the informants' consent, the interviews were recorded. The interviews were carried out in Farsi and lasted 20 to 35 minutes with individual teachers and supervisors and about one hour with focus groups.

Attempting to ensure that the instruments were appropriate for the purpose of the study, the researchers took all measures to minimize the possible sources of bias especially in the interviews (Dörnyei, 2007) including the content, sample size, interviewer's behaviors and interviewees' reactions. The questions in the interview were also carefully selected and worded and then discussed with two EFL experts and were accordingly reworded. With data saturation in mind, the study used an appropriate sample which, according to Dörnyei (2007), could be 6 to 10 people. To overcome social desirability, the researchers used focus groups where the dynamics of the groups let the researchers have more in-depth naturalistic data reducing the possibility of the respondents' giving socially desirable answers only (Kleiber, 2004).

Questionnaire

Drawing on the literature available, a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was developed. The questionnaire was designed to measure how much Iranian language teacher supervisors tended to use prescriptive and directive approaches to supervision where teachers have almost no power and autonomy. A pool of all possible questions was developed and then fifteen items were selected after consulting two EFL experts. The items were discussed for their clarity and appropriateness.

The content validity of the questionnaire was estimated through discussions with EFL experts including Kathleen M. Bailey. The questionnaire, then, was piloted with 30 teachers, the results of which were used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire through Cronbach's alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. To probe the construct validity of the questionnaire, an exploratory factor analysis was run using SPSS version 18, which yielded four factors. The results, then, underwent parallel analysis using Monte Carlo PCA for Parallel Analysis (Watkins, 2010). Only two of the eigenvalues were higher than the corresponding random eigenvalues, indicating that the number of factors to be retained was only two i.e. directiveness and promotion of uniformity. Therefore, factor analysis was run again with two fixed factors to get valid results.

Post-observation feedback conferences

The study also examined 9 post-observation conferences, all recorded with the permission of the teachers and supervisors. The conferences which ranged from 15 to 30 minutes were done both in English and Farsi. The researchers decided to focus on the supervisors' and teachers' verbal interactions in the feedback sessions because "language is the most important medium to guide, resist or mediate power" (Bailey, 2006, p. 63). Supervisors' amount of using mitigating devices i.e. "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) can, according to Bailey (2006), provide researchers with clues regarding the supervision approach they adopt and the amount of power they share.

Data collection procedure

After briefing the participants on the procedures for conducting interviews and focus groups, the researchers interviewed 10 individual teachers, 3 focus groups each with four teachers, and 8 supervisors at a specific time and location already set by the participants in the study. Where the teachers and supervisors were available, face-to-face interviews were conducted and where they were not available, the interviews were conducted through telephone. Permission was sought to record the interviews with strict anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed. The interviews were all conducted in Farsi since the teachers could express themselves better using their native language.

The questionnaire was designed online using Google Form and mailed to teachers and supervisors. To share the link and increase the return rate, new applications including Telegram and WhatsApp were also used.

The researchers also spoke to some teachers and supervisors to get their post-observation feedback conferences recorded. Some rejected the idea saying the data were confidential. Some teachers and supervisors, however, agreed to record the post-observation conferences on the condition of anonymity.

Data analysis procedure

To analyze the qualitative data, the researchers followed the three-step approach proposed by Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010) which includes organizing and familiarizing, coding and reducing and finally interpreting and representing.

The data were organized based on the answers the informants gave to each of the twelve interview questions. The first researcher read and reread the transcripts and repeatedly listened to the audiotapes to familiarize himself with the data.

The first researcher, then, set to code and reduce the data using Corbin and Strauss's (2008) systematic approach in which the constant comparative method is the main technique of analysis. Using open coding, the first researcher created tentative categories. Then using axial coding, the researcher examined the relationships among the open codes making connections between and across categories to see if they could be put into larger categories. Using selective coding, one category was finally chosen as the core category i.e. the theme.

The above process was repeated by the second researcher to assess the dependability of the coding using inter-rater agreement. The codes which were specified by the two raters were compared using Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 64) formula of "Reliability=No. of agreements/total number of agreements + disagreements*100." It gave us a value of 87.89 % which meets the general check coding standard.

After developing the themes, the researchers also checked the credibility of the findings by 'member checks'. The participants were asked to review and evaluate the recordings for the accuracy of the findings. After writing the results of the study at the margin, the researchers sent them back to the same participants to see whether they agreed with the identified codes or not. When there were disagreements, they were all put to negotiation. The same was done with data from post-observation conferences. Where the informants were not available, the researchers used 'peer review', in which, the first researcher gave the colleagues the raw data along with his interpretations. Discussing the interpretations with the colleagues, the researchers made the necessary changes where the colleagues did not agree with the interpretations of the researchers.

The data which came from the questionnaire were factor analyzed using SPSS version 18 to detect the latent factors. The suitability of the data was checked too. A parallel analysis was also run to check the number of the factors to be extracted. Informed by the results of the parallel analysis, the researcher reran factor analysis to ensure valid results. To compare the teachers' and supervisors' perceptions of power dynamics in the current supervision practices in the country an independent samples t-test was used.

Findings

To answer the first question, we analyzed the data from both quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. To run principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax (orthogonal) rotation on the questionnaire data, we first examined factorability of the items. As shown in Table 1, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .83, above the commonly recommended value of .60, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was also significant (x^2 (105) = 1105.48, $p <$ .05).

Table 1
KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.835
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1105.481
	Df	105
	Sig.	.000

Having run PCA and based on the results thereof, which are presented in Table 2, factor 1 was labeled "Directiveness" due to the high loadings by the items 4 to 15 where supervisors tried to direct and control teachers seldom giving them a say in the process. This first factor explained 38.60% of the variance. The second factor derived was labeled "promotion of uniformity." This factor was labeled as such due to the high loadings by the items 1 to 3. The variance explained by this factor was 14.77%. These two factors explained for a total of 53.38 % of the total variance. See Table 3 and figure 4 for its scree plot. These two factors clearly indicate that the current supervision practice in Iran aligns more with Wallace's (1991) prescriptive approaches.

Table 2
Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis With Varimax Rotation of the data on power dynamics in the Current Supervision in Iranian EFL Context

	Factors	
	1	2
1. Observers check to see if teachers stick to predetermined policies.	.121	.854
2. Observers make teachers teach things in similar ways.	.257	.811
3. Observers impose teachers how to teach things.	-.214	.509
4. Observers give teachers a voice.	.664	-.165
5. Observers emphasize sharing information.	.794	
6. Observers tap into teachers' previous knowledge.	.701	.110
7. Observers encourage negotiated (agreed-upon) solutions.	.801	-.132
8. Observation is done for improvement not inspection.	.734	.108
9. Observers let teachers choose alternative ways of teaching.	.641	-.444
10. Observers pay attention to and utilize teachers' experience.	.714	-.162
11. Observers promote teacher reflection and deep thinking.	.677	
12. Observers leave the final decision on how to teach things to teachers.	.575	-.465
13. Observers consider listening to what teachers say as important as what they tell.	.714	
14. Teachers' viewpoints when they are against those of the observer are valued.	.631	
15. Observers try to have teachers come up with their own solutions to the problems.	.617	.108

Note. Factor loadings > .50 are in boldface

Table 3

Total Variance of Power Dynamics in Current Supervision in Iranian EFL Context Explained

Component	Total Variance Explained					
	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.910	39.397	39.397	5.791	38.604	38.604
2	2.097	13. 983	53.380	2.216	14.776	53.380

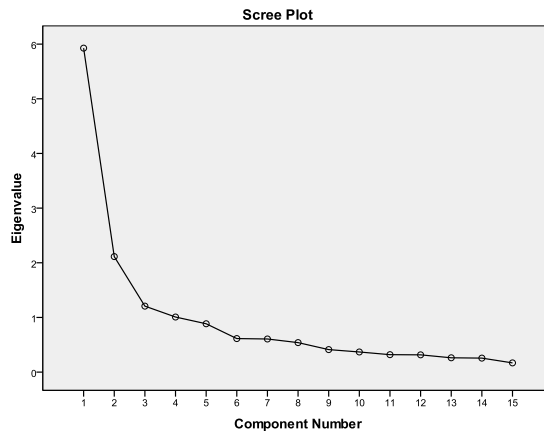Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Figure 4. Scree Plot for PCA of Power Dynamics in Current Supervision in Iranian EFL Context

The themes which were developed from the qualitative data corroborated the findings of the quantitative phase. The most recurring themes obtained from the interviews and focus groups are: abusing power, promoting uniformity, and teacher resistance.

Power abuse

Teachers constantly complained about "supervisors' threat to deny promotions", "supervisors' judgmental and evaluative reports to the management", "not having any voice in the process", "not being listened to", "supervisors' imposing their own solutions", and "supervisors' devaluing the teachers' knowledge and experience". This "power abuse" was a theme recurrently mentioned by the teachers in one-on-one and focus groups in the study. Enjoying a superior position, supervisors seldom listened to what teachers had to say. As one teacher [T5] succinctly said

All they [supervisors] want is a yes-man.

Another teacher [T9] observed

See … They [supervisors] seldom listen to what you …. you have to say. Even if they do, I mean, if they get the time to listen to you, they will never accept the way you have done the things in the class.

This is also recognized by the supervisors themselves as one of them [S5] stated

> *Well, you see … it is true … supervisors have power over the teachers and I should … I should say that that power is not always used appropriately.*

Analysis of the post-observation conferences also showed the supervisors' dominance over the post-observation conference. The supervisor was the single speaker determining the topics to be discussed in the feedback session with the teacher seldom taking turns except to approve what the observer has just said. The supervisor was almost always the only one who talked and asked questions and the teacher was supposed to listen and answer. The teachers seldom raised questions of their own.

Promoting Uniformity

Teachers also complained about "having to teach according to the methodology", "teaching as instructed in the TTC", and "no room and respect for personal creativities". This is well reflected in a teachers' comment saying, "Well, you should do everything in the class according to the Bible." One supervisor [S1] also commented

> *In the teacher training courses … the courses we have … before we give anyone any classes, we … we give the teachers a series of steps to follow … to teach the things in the coursebook. And obviously, when we observe them, we expect them to follow the steps.*

> *One teacher [T6] also uttered*

> *You should … you should always follow the steps you had in the TTC. If you don't, you will be certainly criticized by the observer. This is necessary … very necessary to get a raise, too. If you don't follow the steps, there is going to be no promotion. Besides, you will have it reported in the observation form as 'violation of the methodology.'*

Evidence from the post-observation conference corroborates this, too. One supervisor in the post-observation conference [POC2] contended

> *Well, I think this is not in line with what we had in the TTC courses. When teaching the vocabulary, I expected you to have a lead-in, asking students some questions using the real objects in the class.*

> *Another supervisor [POC7] remarked*

> *According to the methodology, you're supposed to have the students take their seats before you correct them. After they take their seats, you can correct their mispronunciations and structural mistakes using the board. Never correct the students at the board.*

Teacher resistance

Teacher resistance, i.e. the fact that teachers exert their own power, agency and autonomy despite the supervisors' authority is another characteristic of the current supervision practice in Iran which is largely ignored by the supervisors in the country. Teachers repeatedly talked about "saying yes to the supervisor and doing things in their own way", "temporarily teaching as the supervisors desired only to get a raise", and "pleasing the supervisors during the class". One teacher [T1] said

> *I never argue with my supervisor. I just say yes to his face and do things in my own way when I go back to the class.*

The themes above are all in line with Wallace's (1991) classic prescriptive approaches corroborating the findings of the quantitative phase of the study.

To answer the second question and to see if teachers and supervisors had the same or different perceptions of power, an independent samples t-test was run. To this end, the Leven's Test for Equality of Variance was first checked. Since it was not significant ($p = 38 > 0.05$), it was assumed that the variances were approximately equal. As shown in Table 4, there was no significant difference between the supervisors' (M = 49.19, SD = 9.23) and teachers' (M = 46.70, SD = 8.90; t (149) = -1.49, p =.138).

Table 4
The Independent Samples t-test to Compare the Teachers' and Supervisors' Perceptions

Group	N	M	SD	df	t	Sig.
Supervisors	110	49.19	9.23	149	-1.49	.138
Teachers	41	46.70	8.90			

Regarding the third question, analysis of the post-observation conferences and the interviews showed that teachers mostly resorted to their position power and reward power seldom using other types of power including expert power, coercive power and personal power.

> *Indicating the position power he was using in one of his feedback sessions, a supervisor [S3] argued*

> *This is the way recommended in the methodology, pages 14 and 15 especially on page 15. There are some notes on how to correct errors. Refer to page 15 and you will see how you're supposed to correct errors in this institute.*

With respect to "reward power", a teacher in one of the focus groups [FG1] stated

> *Well … we discussed the types of questions I asked … and he said I was supposed to ask questions that way if I were to get a raise.*

> *Another teacher [T10] remarked*

> *To get promotion, you have to say yes … yes and nothing else. Say yes … ok to his face and teach it in your own way. Else … forget everything about the raise … the promotion. Observers should leave your class while they are satisfied with you.*

> *A supervisor [S1] also said*

> *See … a teacher … observed for several times …! But he still has the same problems! How do you want to give this teacher promotion and send him to the next higher level?*

The fourth research question sought to develop a framework of strategies which could let supervisors effectively manage power asymmetry inherent in language teacher supervision. The framework consisted of three themes as below.

Using a more dialogic approach

Complaining about the monologic nature, i.e. one-sidedness of the current supervision practice, teachers recurrently wished to "have a say", "have a two-way relationship" and "be listened to" in the supervision process. They wanted their supervisors to respect their experience, knowledge and skills negotiating the possible solutions to the problem areas. A teacher [T2] uttered

In my opinion, the supervisor should not be the sole speaker … I mean the relationship must be two-way.

Another teacher [T3] stated

Well … we all … as teachers have experience, knowledge and even character and we need to be heard.

Using genuine authority coming from expert power

Teachers wanted the problems to be discussed mostly in light of the supervisors' "expertise", "knowledge", "experience" and "recent research on second language acquisition". The data were replete with quotes on this theme. One teacher [T4] said

See… there is a time when …. when an observer says 'You are supposed to do it this way because the methodology requires everyone to do it this way' … if the same supervisor says 'Research has shown that …' See … it's the same point… but … how you say it is different.

Another teacher [T9] stated

There is a big difference between a supervisor saying 'The methodology says' and a supervisor saying 'My own personal experience has taught me.'

Being socioculturally sensitive

Teachers frequently preferred sociocultural factors including their "cultural background", "education", "degree", "experience", "age", and "sex" to be taken into consideration when they were being observed. A teacher [T5] commented

For example, suppose a supervisor … has observed someone … someone with a PhD … See a PhD I say … a PhD in the teaching field … well … his observation … I think should …. should be definitely different from one who has a much lower degree.

Another teacher [T2] argued

Well … the one who is the eldest in the institute … probably with the most experience … well … his observation … must be different or someone who is … for example … a female … well, women are more sensitive… By the way, his degree, education, age … are also important.

Discussion

The factors extracted from the questionnaire data and the themes developed from the interviews clearly indicated power abuse and struggle in the current supervision practice in the Iranian EFL context which aligns with Wallace's (1991) classic prescriptive approaches to supervision where teachers are given little power to make their own decisions and supervisors exert their power, mostly their position and reward power. This power abuse by supervisors has led to teacher resistance where teachers either overtly or covertly exerted their own authority, power and agency in line with Foucault's (1991) assertion that wherever there is power, there is resistance.

The interesting point here is the fact that the independent samples t-test, conducted to answer the second research question, showed no significant differences between teachers' and supervisors' perceptions of power dynamics indicating that both teachers and supervisors were aware of the power gap and abuse.

One reason why power abuse in the Iranian EFL supervision context persists despite the stakeholders' awareness might be the little training the supervisors get to manage their very complicated and multi-faceted task of teacher supervision (Bailey, 2006, 2009). Or it could be because language teaching methods imposed by language institutes require supervisors to exert their "explicit power" (Copeland et al. 2011, p.28) to fulfill their strictly-required legal and professional responsibilities as defined by the assessment criteria.   Besides these explicit assessment criteria, there is also a good deal of other pedagogic talk in the post-observation feedback session (Copland, Ma & Mann, 2009). They relate this "other pedagogic talk" to Bernstein's (2000, p. 109) "invisible pedagogies" or what Copland (2008, p. 109) called "hidden curriculum." How much of the Iranian supervisors' pedagogic talk relates to their "explicit power" and how much of it relates to their "hidden curriculum" is, of course, a question which remains unexplored and future research studies might investigate it.

As discussed before, the supervisors' responsibilities in North American contexts have moved away from that of a prescriptive and evaluative one to one which is more developmental in focus (Bailey, 2006, 2009). However, the prescriptive and directive approaches to supervision continue to dominate the Iranian EFL supervision context. This is while teachers in Iran, in line with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism, preferred more dialogic, reflective and collaborative approaches to supervision where meaning is co-constructed through dialog (Lantolf, 2000). As van Lier (1996, p. 191) contends, researchers working in the Vygotskian mould believe "that social interaction, by virtue of its orientation toward mutual engagement and intersubjectivity, is likely to home in on the ZPD and stay within it." This is in line with Bedford and Gehlert's (2013) situational supervision where supervisors are expected to change roles based on the supervisees' readiness level. This readiness level or development level which is closely related to the concept of ZPD can be diagnosed best if supervisors employ a dialogic approach where the evolving interactions between the supervisor and the supervisee can help the supervisors gauge the teachers' readiness level or ZPD (Muse-Burke et el., 2001) and develop their socio-pragmatic comprehension (Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020). Meeting teachers' ZPD, as indicated by Mehrpour and Aghesheh (2017), is one of the constituent elements of effective supervisory feedback, too.

Regarding the type of power, teachers in the country preferred expert power, something which has also been indicated by Razmjoo and Rasti's (2014) informants when they emphasized supervisors' possessing both subject matter and pedagogic content knowledge. The findings of the present study, however, indicated supervisors used mostly their position power and reward power seldom referring teachers to their expert power. Position power, as Bailey (2006, p. 73) says, is only "a matter of appointment," i.e. it is just "delegated authority" given by the organization. Expert power, on the other hand, is what Bailey (2006, p. 73) calls "genuine authority," which comes from a supervisor's knowledge and skills needed to perform the supervision job.

This is not, however, to say that supervisors should never use their position power. As Bailey (2006) believes the ideal supervisor is the one who possesses both the delegated (Position power) and genuine (Expert power) authority, and the worst one is a supervisor who enjoys the delegated power but lacks genuine authority. This is in line with Foucault's (1998) assertion (1998) that power is not always a negative force and, according to Monchinski (2008), it is sometimes even necessary. Gaventa (2003, p. 2) reports Foucault saying "power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society." This is why Quarto (2003) and Copeland et al. (2011) talk of "healthy resistance" on the part of supervisees, which is in line with the basic tenets of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972) which, as its main goals, attempts to give teachers and learners their agency emancipating them from oppression and dehumanization.

Finally, in line with the findings of Mehrpour and Agheshteh (2017) and Razmjoo and Rasti (2014), teachers' cultural background, education, degree, experience, age, and sex play a key role in the supervision process. This is because attending to sociocultural factors, as stressed by Rahmati, Sadeghi, and Ghaderi (2019), is an essential component of reflective practice in English language teaching contexts. As Bailey also (2006, p.6) says, a supervisor's role is to some extent "culturally defined," and depending on the social, cultural, educational, and political context they are working in, supervisors will need to vary their supervisory styles moving between prescriptive and collaborative approaches. This will provide supervisees with a more supportive environment (Green & Dekkers, 2010) and will lead to more supervisee satisfaction (Inman, 2006; Murphy & Wright, 2005).

Conclusion

Power dynamics have been thoroughly examined in other fields including psychology and management. In language teacher supervision in the North American context, the trend has been from less power-sharing approaches to more power-sharing ones. Language teacher supervision in non-North American contexts especially in Iran, however, has been largely ignored.

Based on the findings of the present study, it has been argued that Iranian language teacher supervisors tended to use prescriptive approaches to supervision which is characterized by teachers' lack of autonomy and power while the teachers preferred more reflective and collaborative approaches where there is more power-sharing.

It should be noted that the current study focused only on in-service teachers and the findings should be approached more cautiously with pre-service contexts where the supervision models which are employed are essentially different (Rashidi & Forutan, 2015). And since the current study focuses on supervision by language teacher supervisors in language teaching institutes only, the results should be also used more cautiously with peer observations, public schools and universities where power dynamics may develop in completely different ways.

Future research is needed concerning the question of to what degree supervisors' (ab) use of their power comes from their "explicit power" or their "hidden curriculum" and to what degree teachers' resistance is due to supervisors' "explicit power" or "hidden curriculum". Future studies can also examine supervision practices in the country to decide how much space it leaves for reflection and agency on the part of the teacher. Power relations in peer observations can be also intriguing. Some research might also focus on the supervisory discourse used by language teacher supervisors to see how language is employed to mediate power.

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