Exploring English Language Supervisors' Competencies from Kuwaiti Student Teachers' Perspectives: A Study in the College of Basic Education (CBE)

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Abstract

Supervision is an integral part of the language teacher education process which plays a significant role in improving teachers' teaching practice. This study explores Kuwaiti English as a foreign language (EFL) female student teachers' perspective on the performance of their supervisors during the practicum course. It sought to explore the general perspectives associated with supervisors' supervision competencies with the view to informing improvements to their instructional supervisory skills. 50 EFL female student teachers from CBE participated in the study. Using a case study approach, a combination of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews was used to generate answers to the research questions. The questionnaire findings suggested that student teachers generally have positive attitudes towards their supervisors' competencies; however, interviews with participants have shed light on various issues that need to be considered. For example, supervisors' feedback often focuses on participants' Content Knowledge (CK) rarely addressing their Pedagogical Content knowledge (PCK). In addition, student-teachers stated that their relationships with their supervisors tended to be formal and authoritative, which prevented them from asking questions freely. This article discusses these findings in detail and highlights some practical implications that are likely to help EFL supervisors to enhance their supervisory practices.

Keywords: instructional supervision, supervisor's competencies, pedagogy, student teachers, EFL

1. Introduction

Teacher education aims to enable student teachers to transition from the academic setting to the realities of managing their own classrooms (Borg, 2011b). The benefits of the practicum, "i.e., a period of practice teaching in a real classroom" (Borg, 2011a, p. 220) for facilitating this move are crucial, as highlighted by many scholars (Bialey, 2006; Gebhard, 2009; Wallace, 1991). The practicum offers a vital opportunity for student teachers to observe and participate in diverse educational settings, and to apply learned theories and concepts to their classroom practice (Wallace, 1991). During the practicum, student teachers are expected to encounter new school-based experiences, which allow them to teach in authentic contexts (i.e., real classrooms). During their initial teaching experience, they require supervision and guidance to help them developing what Shulman's (1987) terms pedagogical knowledge (PK, i.e., teacher's accumulated knowledge about the act of teaching) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK, i.e., the knowledge used to transform subject matter into content to deliver to students in a more comprehensible way). PCK includes the skills teachers have to develop to teach language skills, and the questions they can use to manage students' input and output and overcome form focused issues.

In the College of Basic Education (CBE), pre-service EFL teachers are required to develop different forms of knowledge, including CK (content knowledge), PK (pedagogical Knowledge) and PCK (pedagogical content Knowledge) during their four-year teacher education program. They are required to take a practicum course in their final semester before graduating. The total credit awarded for the practicum is 9, and during this course 2 supervisors (one from the CBE (cooperating teachers) and one from the ministry (a supervisor or a senior teacher) are assigned to guide and supervise student-teachers. Student teachers engage with their supervisors at

multiple supervisory conferences/meetings during the practicum to improve their teaching skills. The goal of these supervisory meetings is twofold, supporting students to teach appropriately, and assessing their ability to meet the standards required by the CBE. During these supervisory meetings, supervisors are expected to engage with student-teachers via instructional dialogue (Engin, 2015; Yoon & Kim, 2012) to improve their teaching practices. This somewhat idealistically portrayed mission assumes the existence of a professional working relationship between student teachers and their supervisors. However, supervisors may also adopt an authoritative stance; providing negative feedback and rarely engaging in instructional dialogues that could lead to improvements in teaching, which in turn creates tension between the two parties (Aghesheh & Mehrpour, 2021; Barahona, 2019; Ghulam, Yousuf, Parveen, & Kayani, 2011). Furthermore, supervisors often lack the skills and appropriate training to do their jobs effectively, which erodes the value of the practicum (Alghamdi & Alzahrani, 2016; Kayaoglu, 2012).

It is noteworthy that without proper supervision, student teachers may graduate with an acceptable level of CK without appropriately developing their PCK, since supervisors are granted sole responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching in an educational setting tailored to improving teaching practice (Wallace, 1991). Indeed, a substantial number of EFL teachers are graduating from the Faculty of Education, despite being incompetent in terms of their ability to deliver language and teaching skills effectively (Al-Mutawa, 1997). The success of a given supervisory process depends largely on the supervisors' competencies, skills and their style of supervision (Gebhard, 1984). In this study, supervisor's competence is defined as the combination of knowledge, skills and behaviors used to enhance performance. Despite the empirical literature on EFL supervisor's competencies, style of supervision and feedback, studies addressing this issue within a practicum program in the Kuwaiti context are scarce (see Al-Mutawa & Aldabbous, 1997). Undoubtedly, focusing on this topic is vital, since the CBE is one of the largest government institutions with a language teacher education program specifically designed to prepare students to become EFL teachers in primary schools. Therefore, the overarching aim of this study is to elicit EFL female student teachers' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of their supervisors. As indicated earlier, there is a dearth of research around this topic in the Kuwaiti context. It is therefore anticipated that the findings from this study will contribute to the enhancement of the supervisory practice of the supervisors on the practicum course. Arguably, other colleagues working outside the Kuwait context will benefit from the insights from our study. The study presents literature around supervision in language teacher education, a discussion of findings, including conclusions and recommendations for practice and further studies.

1.1 Instructional Supervision

In language teaching contexts, Gebhard (1990) defined supervision as "an ongoing process of teacher education in which supervisor observes what goes on in the teacher's classroom with an eye toward the goal of improved instruction" (p. 107). The supervisor "has the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in an educational situation (Wallace, 1991, p. 107). Theoretically, the idea of supervision and human cognitive development relates to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT). SCT highlights the interrelatedness between social interaction and the individual's cognitive development (Donato, 2000; Lantolf, 2000). Thus, learning is a social activity with all higher mental activities mediated by people (social mediation) or technology (artefact mediation). Lantolf and Thorne (2007) clarify that an individual's cognitive development process, "takes place through participating in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings such as family life and peer interaction, and in institutional contexts such as schooling" (p. 197). Instructional supervision, which occurs between novice/expert teachers and supervisors in culturally situated activities (e.g., teaching lesson) can help teachers regulate and shape their thinking and behaviors (Engin, 2015; Martin, 2018). Regulation and development are most efficient if mediation occurs in what Vygotksy's called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the gap between what an individual is capable of doing independently (i.e., their current ability) and what they can perform with assistance from others (i.e., their ability potential). In EFL contexts, practical supervision is crucial, as it helps pre-service teachers in their practicum phase, and in-service teachers, to connect theory to practice. For example, Yoon and Kim (2012) found that the use of instructional talk, back channeling, elaboration questions and collaborative dialogue between mentors and mentees generated a dialogic conversation, which improved teaching practice. Linguistic analysis also revealed that conversational techniques, such as responsive mediation, mitigators, elicitation, recapping and meta comments in supervisors' talk can play a significant role in creating a positive student experience (Bhatti, Teevno, & Devi, 2020).

A review of the literature suggested different models of educational supervision (e.g., Freeman, 1982; Gebhard, 1984; Goldsberry, 1988; Wallace, 1991). For example, Freeman argued that the role of the supervisor determined the nature of supervision, suggesting (1) the supervisor as an authority, (2) the supervisor as provider

of an alternative perspective, and (3) the supervisor as a non-directive figure. Goldsberry (1988) specified three models of educational supervision: nominal supervision (involving maintaining the status quo to comply with standard requirements), prescriptive supervision (detecting flaws and correcting them) and reflective supervision (stimulating guided reflection to help novice teachers reflect on and refine their performance accordingly). Wallace (1991) discussed two main approaches to language teacher supervision practice: prescriptive and collaborative. While the former presumes the supervisor serves as an authority figure able to judge the supervisee's teaching skills, the latter describes the supervisor as a colleague able to listen attentively to supervisee's issues or problems to help them developing autonomy. For Wallace adopting the latter approach is more effective as a way to enhance teaching skills.

In addition, Gebhard (1984) stated that supervisors are responsible for counseling teachers about their teaching, and can offer recommendations, model teaching, guide teachers, and evaluate teachers' teaching. He discussed five models of language teacher supervision: direct supervision, alternative supervision, non-directive supervision, collaborative supervision, and creative supervision. The first model proposed an authoritative role, in which the supervisor directs and inform the teacher, models teaching behavior, and evaluates the teacher's mastery of defined behaviors. In the second model, the supervisor presents a variety of alternatives to broaden the scope of the teacher's teaching skills. The third model contradicts the first, since the supervisor must listen attentively and non-judgmentally when teachers describe their work and reflect on their teaching. The fourth model represents rapport, as the supervisor works actively with supervisees, attempting to establish rapport. The final model allows supervisors to be creative, enabling them to combine different models as supervisors to address the need to switch roles during supervision. Although a variety of different supervision styles have been proposed, the majority of former studies concerned language learning contexts, in which supervisors mainly implemented a directive supervisory style with few instances of a collaborative approach (Bhatti, Teevno, & Devi, 2020).

1.2 Teacher's Knowledge and Language Teacher Education Program

According to Borg (2010), language teachers should have (1) knowledge of the language, and (2) knowledge of teaching. Shulman (1987) specifically argued that the craft of teaching is focused on CK and PCK. CK details the teachers' knowledge of the subject matter (i.e., English language syntax, semantics, phonology, pragmatic, and cultural aspects), and pedagogical knowledge (PK) generic teaching strategies (i.e., how teachers teach). PCK thus describes teachers' specialized knowledge regarding how best to represent CK in diverse ways that students can understand. It encompasses teachers' ability to employ different teaching strategies and techniques to advance students' understanding of the target subject matter (e.g., how to teach EFL skills such as listening). In addition, PCK includes how best to teach grammar, as well as materials evaluation, EFL testing, EFL curriculum development and teaching methods. Language teacher education programs should focus on refining teachers' skills in all these knowledge domains, and practicum courses can assist with this if student teachers are provided with appropriate supervision and guidance.

2. Previous Research on Language Teacher Supervision

Research has recently been conducted examining the supervisory process from the stance of English language teachers. Various studies explored the perspectives of EFL supervisees on the supervision process, and the nature of feedback supervisors' focus during supervision (e.g., Albalawi, 2019; Ali & Al-Adawi, 2013; Aghesheh & Mehrpour, 2021; Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Bhatti, Teevno, & Devi, 2020; Chen & Cheng, 2013; Ghulam et al., 2011; Getu & Teka, 2018 Lindah & Baecher, 2015; Molla, 2021; Moradi, Sepehrifar, &Khadiv, 2014; Ochieng' Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011).

In Pakistan, Ghulam et al. (2011) reported that 87.5% of supervisors rarely visit schools, and the patterns of interaction between supervisors and supervisees tend to be autocratic and authoritative. In total, 75% of supervisors did not have friendly, supportive, or democratic attitudes to develop professional guidance inside and outside of the class, and consequently did not help guide, motivate, or facilitate the teaching process. Teachers work without any type of help or guidance from internal and external supervisors. They find the staff to be authoritarian and so feel unable to share their problems with them. Moreover, they lend minimal credence to the opinions of the teachers. Similarly, Iranian teachers in Aghesheh and Mehrpour's (2021) study complained that from a directive supervisory style their supervisees identified problematic issues, such as struggling to access appropriate feedback and always receiving evaluative and directive feedback. Likewise, Moradi et al. (2014) conducted a study with 34 Iranian EFL teachers exploring their perceptions regarding being observed during teaching by a supervisor. It emerged that teachers typically try to please their supervisors and demonstrate adherence to program policy because they feel worried about the consequences of receiving an unsatisfactory

rating from a supervisor or losing their jobs. Feedback received was frequently only superficial, and teachers reported not being sufficiently challenged. Supervisors often criticize, but when bad practices in observations are pointed out this can affect their confidence negatively, especially if no remedial help is provided.

Kayaoglue (2021) and Ochieng' Ong'ondo and Borg (2011) found that EFL teachers in Kenya were pessimistic largely due to unsatisfactory feedback. According to Kayaoglue's findings, supervisors tended to provide brief, directive, and evaluative feedback lacking subject-specific pedagogy (i.e., PCK). Similar to Moradi et al.'s (2014) findings, supervisees simply seek to please their supervisors so they can obtain a pass mark in the practicum. A qualitative study conducted by Ochieng' Ong'ondo and Borg (2011), involving six supervisors and six student teachers and five cooperating teachers at a teaching practicum in a secondary school, also concluded that supervisors offer evaluative and directive feedback and disregard PCK, generally emphasizing generic teaching skills instead. Similarly, Getu and Teka's (2018) study involving Ethiopian's student teachers and supervisors reported that practice fails to adequately address PCK as developing a subject-specific pedagogy can become a peripheral issue in practicum supervision. Teachers often receive very limited subject specific feedback, as EFL teacher educators are marginalized, and generic teaching skills are emphasized at the over PCK. This represents a form of de-professionalism, as the importance of teachers' PCK is neglected. Therefore, they argued that teacher education and professional development training should focus on PCK so as to improve teachers' teaching practices. Lindahl and Baecher's (2015) study with 200 MA TESOL student teachers in a US urban university found an overall lack of language-focused feedback in the post- versus the pre-observation stages. During the early phases of the supervision cycle, more deliberate attention was directed toward declarative knowledge about language. As the cycle progressed, the supervisors' feedback and candidates' reflections addressed pedagogical practices more, with less explicit attention on language.

In contrast to previous studies, Ali and Al-Adawi (2013), when working with 46 ELT pre-service Omani student teacher and 20 university mentors found student teachers had positive attitudes toward the feedback they received during the practicum. Both written and oral feedback was shared with them; however, the participants in their study believed that written feedback is more important than oral. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, Albalawi (2019) conducted a study with 130 female EFL teachers from Tabuk investigating their perspectives on the experience of supervision. Their findings suggested supervisors generally have good skills when it comes to helping teachers create a good learning environment and engage in various professional development activities. Teachers felt their supervisors were not effective at providing feedback.

Akcan and Tatar's (2010) study of 52 pre-service Turkish EFL teachers highlighted discrepancies between university supervisors' style and that of teachers. That is, the former adopted a more collaborative style, while the latter anticipated a prescriptive stance. Thus, contrary to other studies, they reported that sometimes supervisors adopt a collaborative style, which could improve teaching practice. In another study (Cavanagh & Garvey, 2013), it was found that pre-service teachers helped one another by engaging in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as learning may be situated in the workplace through co-participation in professional activities (e.g., teachers learn from each other).

In summary, reviewing previous studies illuminated some important issues to consider. First, findings are mixed; some studies found supervisors adopted an authoritative stance, offering only limited and directive feedback. Consequently, supervisees had negative attitudes regarding the supervision process and simply observed their supervisors' feedback to pass the practicum. Other studies reported that generally student teachers are positive regarding the value of using written feedback to improve their teaching. Second, the topic is culturally situated; meaning similar results are more likely to arise in similar sociocultural contexts. Third, there is a dearth of research in the Kuwaiti context specifically in CBE.

3. Methodology

The overarching aim of this study was to enhance CBE supervisor's supervision competencies, by first exploring the general views of student teachers regarding their supervisors' competencies. The following research question was proposed with regard to this aim:

1) What are student-teachers' perceptions of their EFL supervisors' competencies during the practicum?

The previous overarching question will be explored by focusing on student teachers' perceptions with regards to different supervisors' competencies including communication skills, establishing an effective learning environment, supporting instruction preparation, enhancing classroom teaching, students' assessment, evaluation process, supporting professional development activities and developing students' skills.

To answer the research question, an interpretive-constructivist research stance was adopted. The

interpretive-constructivist paradigm considers reality as socially constructed by humans, meaning phenomena are understood subjectively (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Multiple methods were employed here, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Appendix A and B) were used for data collection purposes. Using mixed methods ensure triangulation by "bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 146). In this study, interpretation of the questionnaire data was strengthened by evidence provided from the interview data.

3.1 Participants and Context

Data were collected from 50 non-native EFL female student teachers studying at the CBE in Kuwait. The questionnaire was designed to explore their perceptions about their English language supervisors' competencies when administering the practicum. It was issued at the end of the course online using a private Teams channel designed specifically as a platform for student teachers at the CBE. Following completion of the questionnaire, the students were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. Those who volunteered to be interviewed (15 student teachers) were subsequently asked to come to the first researcher's office to complete a face-to-face audio-recorded interview which lasted approximately 10−15 minutes. The interview schedule paralleled the aforementioned questionnaire's themes.

All the participants were taking practicum course as a compulsory module in their fourth year of a teacher education program. They had almost completed the compulsory and elective courses for the teacher's preparation program at the CBE. When recruiting for the practicum, student teachers are required to complete a seminar course (to discuss/reflect on classroom teaching practices). In their first-two weeks of the practicum, the students are invited to attend and observe classes for experienced teachers in the school at which they will be teaching. They are assigned at least two classes from different grades and are observed by supervisors (one from the CBE and one from the Ministry of Education, such as senior teachers). Student teachers are observed once or twice weekly by the College's supervisor, and regularly by the Ministry's supervisors. The assessment format provided by the CBE focuses on assessing students' performance in terms of their preparation, personality and language use, lesson presentation, classroom management, classroom atmosphere and utilization of materials and technology. After attending the lesson, the supervisor and student teachers meet for a briefing session to discuss teaching performance and for the supervisor to deliver feedback.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaire used here was adopted from a previous study (Albalawi, 2019), and assessed eight constructs: (1) supervisor's communication skills, (2) curriculum and instruction preparation, (3) classroom teaching, (4) the learning environment, and (5) students' assessment, (6) evaluation process (7) professional development activities and (8) students' skills (Appendix A). The content validity of the questionnaire was established by reviewing 4 professors working in the CBE, and some minor changes were made according to their recommendations. In addition, the questionnaire was piloted before conducting the main study, and some slight changes then were made to clarify it for participants. After all the revisions, to check its reliability, the Cronbach's Coefficient was used, and the reliability for the questionnaire found to be statically significant at the level of (0.99).

In terms of triangulation, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide additional complementary information revealing the participants' perspectives more fully. The semi-structured interview schedule's themes were based on the questionnaire themes (Appendix B). After which, all the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed statistically with descriptive statistics, providing such as means, and standard deviations to present an overview of the participants' perceptions with regard to their supervisors' competencies. The questions were based on the Likert scale four degrees of measurement, and included: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, and 6 = strongly agree.

The semi-structured interview data were analyzed thematically, then coded deductively according to pre-defined themes, and then codes grouped into categories and organized under major themes of the questionnaire. Trustworthiness was maintained by triangulating data gathered from multiple participants.

4. Findings

To measure the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of their supervisor's competencies to answer the first research question, a statistical descriptive analysis was performed for the main question according to the

eight constructs on the questionnaire: Supervisor's communication skills, (2) learning environment, (3) curriculum and instruction preparation, (4) classroom teaching, (5) student assessment, (6) supervision and evaluation, (7) professional development activities and (8) students' skills. Table 1 summarizes the student teachers' perspectives with regard to their supervisors' competencies.

Table 1. Student teachers' perspectives with regards to supervisors' competencies

Constructs	Mean	Std. deviation
Supervisors' communication skills	4.01	1.151
The Learning environment	4.22	1.097
Curriculum and instruction preparation	3.75	1.019
Classroom teaching	3.55	0.720
Students' assessment	3.59	1.189
Supervision and evaluation	3.91	1.053
Professional development activities	3.90	1.098
Students' skills	4.15	1.026
Total	3.89	0.962

An overall analysis of each of the eight constructs strongly indicates that most of the student teachers had developed positive attitudes toward their supervisors' performance. It is noteworthy that "learning environment" received the highest mean (mean 4.22), suggesting the supervisors' guidance was helpful in establishing a better learning environment during the practicum stage. This was followed with "students' skills" (mean 4.15), implying the student teachers found their supervisors helpful in improving various skills, including communicating with their supervisors, assessing students, and participating in professional development activities. As shown in Table 1, the student teachers were also satisfied with their supervisors' instructional supervisory practices and communication skills (mean 4.01); the majority believed their supervisors had good communication skills. Table 1 also reveals "classroom teaching" achieved the lowest mean (3.55); this indicates the student teachers believed that their supervisors pay less attention relatively to guiding them toward improving the pedagogy of teaching. The following sections present these findings in greater detail by focusing on each theme.

4.1 Instructional Supervisory Practices and Communication Skills

A good supervisor must possess certain skills to be effective in their role. In addition to their formal qualifications, an effective instructor needs to have strong interpersonal skills, such as good communication ability, and a willingness to listen to students' needs and concerns and establish rapport. Table 2's findings reveal the majority of students strongly agreed that their supervisors communicated effectively with them during the practicum. The highest rated items related to supervisors assisting student teachers to set improvement goals (m = 4.08), and encouraging them to overcome obstacles (m = 4.06), which suggested supervisors were guiding students toward setting their own teaching goals to solve the problems they encountered. The lowest rated item concerned establishing a positive working relationship (m = 3.94).

Table 2. Supervisors' communication skills

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively creates a positive working relationship with me	3.94	1.281
My supervisor effectively communicates with me	3.96	1.241
My supervisor effectively listens to my concerns and needs	4.02	1.233
My supervisor effectively encourages me to overcome any obstacles that get in the way of my professional effectiveness	4.06	1.144
My supervisor effectively assists me to set improvement goals	4.08	1.256
My supervisor effectively works to meet my needs	4.02	1.181

Table 2 also confirms that generally supervisors exhibited good communication skills when interacting with their students during the practicum course. Interviews with the students afforded further details about the nature of the relationship between student teachers and supervisors. Sarah, one of the student teachers who attended the practicum stated that:

> My supervisor was very respectable, very organized and visited me at the time arranged. I enjoyed working with her, but I felt the relationship was very formal and lacking in any social communication, we always spoke about the classroom and nothing else.

Meanwhile, Amna, another of the student teachers shared a similar view, stating:

> We were working in a very rigid manner; she is very sweet and kind, but I felt she set boundaries from the beginning not allowing me to have off topic talk about other things. This does not mean she was not good, but that she wasn't too friendly. This led us to have a very formal relationship. It is good to respect each other but at the same time I wished she had also interacted with me as a colleague, especially as I am expecting to graduate soon.

The above comments suggest that supervisors possess the professional communication skills to act as supervisors, and that their communication skills tended to be strict and formal when interacting with students. Mona is another student who reported that:

> I actually felt that my supervisor was very helpful, she tried to explain the goals that I need to consider and listen to my problems, however I always feel that she is superior to me […] I know this is normal but if she had developed a friendly relationship from the beginning, I would have maybe been more relaxed and open to asking questions.

Feelings of fear during supervisors' visits can also lead student teachers to lose control over a class. One student complained about the authoritative stance that her supervisor adopted, this is expressed as follows:

> Each time they visited me, I felt lost and under pressure. They gave me lots of comments on my language and my lesson plan without discussing it with me. They just asked me to read and sign the report […] I am under their control because they are going to assess me and write my report […]; sometimes I disagree with what they suggested but I cannot say so because I have to obey them at the end of the day, they are my supervisors (Majda).

4.2 The Learning Environment

Creating a safe and attractive learning environment is essential, not only for teachers, but also for learners. Therefore, one of a supervisor's many responsibilities is helping student teachers create a safe and trusting learning environment by organizing the classroom in a way that supports the teaching and learning process. As shown in Table 3, the findings suggested that the majority of student teachers strongly agreed that their supervisors encouraged them to establishing an effective environment for teaching and learning English. The highest rated items were for supervisors encouraging student teachers to create a safe and trusting learning environment (m = 4.33) and establishing a positive learning environment toward learning English (m = 4.24). The lowest rated item was developing a productive classroom organization (m = 4.18). These findings suggest that generally supervisors assisted students in establishing a safe and positive learning environment.

Table 3. Learning environment

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively encourages me to create a safe and trusting learning environment	4.33	1.107
My supervisor effectively helps me to create a positive learning environment toward learning English	4.24	1.146
My supervisor effectively motivates me to develop a productive classroom organization	4.18	1.149
My supervisor effectively assists me to develop classroom management skills	4.22	1.141

The EFL student teachers articulated their opinions regarding the usefulness of their supervisors' feedback in helping them to establish an effective learning environment. Their comments were consistent with their responses to the questionnaire items, as presented above. One of the students (Fatma) mentioned that her supervisor usually asks her to be tolerant towards students' behaviors and language mistakes, while another student (Samira and Maram) mentioned her supervisor encourages her to build rapport with her students. Examples of pertinent quotes are as follow respectively:

> My supervisor advised me to think about my students' emotions, I was teaching grade 5 and she told me to be tolerant with students' language errors as long as they did not impede meaning, she said to me you have to let them feel safe so that they can learn effectively.

> My supervisor told me to have some off topic chat with my students about their weekends, their day and about their lives […] I think she wanted me to get closer to them to help them feel safe when talking to me

in class.

I was very strict with my students in grade 5 and she told me to be more flexible and take things easy […] she spent a whole meeting talking about the importance of being friendly to kids and how this affects their classroom participation positively.

4.3 Curriculum and Instruction Preparation

During the practicum an effective supervisor is the one who guides students on how to prepare a good lesson plan, teach students how to navigate curriculum changes, help students design different activities, and guide students to identify different methods of delivering instruction, including developing traditional and online materials. As shown in Table 4, student teachers' responses regarding their supervisors' support in curriculum and instruction preparation were generally positive. They stated that their supervisors had guided them to design English language learning activities (m = 4.02) and identified different methods of delivering instruction (m = 3.96). The lowest rated items concerned using media related materials to improve learning (m = 3.53) and update the curriculum as changes occurred (m = 3.63).

Table 4. Curriculum and instruction preparation

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively encourages me to update the curriculum when changes occur	3.63	1.202
My supervisor effectively assists me to prepare lesson plans which aligned with students learning goals as prescribed in teachers' guidebook	3.86	1.291
My supervisor effectively motivates me to design English language learning activities	4.02	1.145
My supervisor effectively encourages me to identify multiple methods of delivering instruction	3.96	1.117
My supervisor effectively assists me in identifying internet based instructional materials	3.67	1.125
My supervisor effectively models for me how to use media materials to improve learning	3.53	1.324

The interviews with students supported their responses to questionnaire items, confirming that their supervisors were helping them prepare their teaching in advance. One student (Farah) mentioned that her supervisors shared different types of language games with her, as well as engaging in activities to support her teaching. She explained, "*my supervisor was helpful, she taught me different language games, such as spin the wheel for teaching vocabulary, she also commented on some activities of my own design, offering ways of improving them*". Another student (Batool) stated that without the help of her supervisor, she wouldn't be able to finalize the curriculum topics.

She guided me in finding out ways to summarize and simplify things in the curriculum, there were lots of holidays, she taught me how to link between lessons and design activities in a way that integrate previously and newly taught materials… without her help I would not be able to teach effectively now I am capable to teach independently.

4.4 Classroom Teaching

With regard to the fourth construct, which related to supervisors' support improving classroom teaching practices. The student responses were high to statements linked to engaging with students' learning (m = 3.69) and implementation of different teaching strategies (m = 3.63). Furthermore, the student teachers agreed that their supervisors supported them in improving their English pronunciation (m = 3.55). The lowest rated item considered the supervisors' feedback on student engagement when student teachers are teaching (m = 3.45).

Table 5. Classroom teaching

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively encourages me to implement different teaching strategies	3.63	0.782
My supervisor effectively encourages me to engage with students in their learning	3.69	0.796
My supervisor effectively assists me in the pronunciation of English language during instruction	3.55	0.843
My supervisor effectively assists me in identifying instructional difficulties	3.49	0.820
My supervisor effectively empowers me to overcome instructional difficulties	3.51	0.820
My supervisor effectively provides feedback on students' engagement while I am teaching	3.45	0.891

Overall, the students' responses to construct questions was to some extent positive; however, the interviews with them suggested their supervisors had commented harshly on their language skills more than on their teaching practices. For example, one mentioned (Sarah) that her supervisors advised her to take an English language course, while the other two students (Dalal and Zinab) stated that although their supervisors had been helpful, most of their comments focused on language accuracy:

> I felt bad about my supervisors; they were always commenting on my language, which prevented me from focusing on teaching itself […] I mean yes I might have made some mistakes but not in class […] I mean when the class is over, they spoke with me in English and at some points when talking with them I was making some mistakes; it was then when they started to talk about my language, and one of them told me that I need to take basic English language courses; it was very embarrassing.

Another student (Dalal) also had received similar comments:

> My supervisors were nice and helpful, and they provided useful feedback; however, they rarely guided me on how to deal with problems and difficulties in class. Their main concern was my English language, and so instead of learning to teach effectively I spent the whole practicum improving my own pronunciation because I was afraid of making language mistakes in front of them.

Also, the following student (Zinab) reported comments on pronunciation:

> The practicum was very challenging for me and most of my supervisors' comments focused on my language. One of them commented on my pronunciation and she asked me to adopt either a British or an American accent […] I felt disappointed I think my supervisor should attend the class not to downgrade me but to help me, and I did not find the comments helpful.

Instead of language related comments, the student teachers stressed that they would have preferred more feedback on their teaching practice. For example, they mentioned that they needed more guidance on how to teach grammar to children and how to control the classroom.

> My supervisors always come into the classroom unexpectedly, and what they do is just sit at the back of the class taking time to read my lesson plan and comment on it […] nothing else […] I wish I could have had a different type of supervision to that I experienced in the practicum. I really need a supervisor who guides me on how to teach grammar, I really struggled to teach kids in grade 3 during the practicum (Manal).

And another commented:

> Once she [the supervisor] attended my class unexpectedly […] I was organizing the board […] some students were hyper-active. I could not do anything because I was surprised by her attendance […] she stopped me and asked me to deal with the students' behavior in front of the class. This actually frustrated me she should have asked in a different way (Amal).

4.5 Students' Assessment

With regard to the supervisors' effectiveness in assisting student teachers with assessment, the questionnaire data in Table 6 illustrates that students received support from their supervisor on developing formative assessments (e.g., ongoing feedback) with a mean of (3.69). This was followed by supervisors' encouragement to raise students' achievement levels (m = 3.63). The lowest rated item supported students to prepare treatment plans for low performing students (m = 3.51).

Table 6. Supervisors' support during students' assessment

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively challenges me to raise my student's achievement levels	3.63	1.220
My supervisor effectively helps me to develop formative assessments on students' learning	3.69	1.245
My supervisor effectively helps me to develop summative assessment on students' learning	3.53	1.226
My supervisor effectively supports me to prepare treatment plan for low performing students	3.51	1.386

The interviews with the student teachers illustrated that supervisors were encouraging the use of formative assessment methods over summative assessments. One of the students mentioned that her supervisor had highlighted to her the differences between the two methods of assessment, and encouraged her to adopt formative assessment:

> I was thinking of exams as the only method for assessment, but in the practicum my supervisors taught me

the difference between exams and other methods of assessment, such as ongoing observation, homework and classroom exercises. They told me that I can identify low performing students from ongoing classroom observation, and provide them with the necessary support when they need it (Heba).

Despite this, the interview data highlighted that their supervisors rarely proposed any treatment plan for low performing students. For example, three students reported that their supervisor had never spoken to them about how to deal with low performing students:

Firstly, Samira reported:

My supervisors were really helpful when it came to teaching me how to design worksheets and exams. They also told me how to be fair when assessing students. However, I was struggling to deal with low performing students, and they did not offer me guidance on how to deal with them.

Then Malak commented:

I was disappointed, I was given a third-grade class with lots of low performing students, I wish I could have received more guidance from my supervisors on how to deal with these students.

And finally, Monira stated:

One of the major problems in classroom, is how to assess students and how to help them to improve their language skills. I did not have any issues with high and mid performing students; my only concern were low performing students. I need to develop my skills in how to treat these students.

4.6 Supervision and Evaluation

The students' responses to the questionnaires suggested their supervisors were effective in terms of their regular attendance and assistance at supervision meetings. As shown in Table 7, the students stated that their supervisors regularly provided them with a written report regarding their evaluations (m = 4.12) and conducted a post-observation meeting (m = 4.04). Additionally, they stated that their supervisors encouraged them to evaluate their own teaching practices (m = 3.80).

Table 7. Supervision and evaluation

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively conducts the pre-observation meeting	3.86	1.118
My supervisor effectively uses the pre-observation meeting to explain the observation process	3.88	1.184
My supervisor effectively uses the pre-observation meeting to discuss what she will observe during my lesson	3.84	1.214
My supervisor effectively conducts observation often enough to improve my instructional practices	3.84	1.313
My supervisor effectively conducts a post-observation meeting	4.04	1.172
My supervisor effectively provides me with a written report of my evaluation	4.12	1.148
My supervisor effectively encourages me to evaluate my own teaching	3.80	1.354

Although the students' responses to the questionnaire items were positive, interviews with them suggested they were suffering as a result of the short amount of time afforded to them. For example, some students complained that their supervisors spend approximately 10 to 15 minutes after each lesson providing written comment, which according to them is a very short time.

My supervisors regularly attend my lesson twice a week, then after the lesson they ask me to read their written report about my teaching without explaining what I have to do to improve myself. I felt hesitant to ask questions about their written report, because I always feel they are in a hurry (Manal).

Another reported:

My supervisors attended my lesson and after each lesson we meet to talk about my teaching. I found this useful however, the time wasn't enough; I did not have enough time to read their written comments and discuss these with them […] I wish I had been given the chance to take it home read it, and then discuss unclear points with my supervisors (Malak).

Also, regarding time, another explained:

The post-observation meetings were really helpful but I think we need more time to discuss what our supervisors have written […] it is really important to understand what they want us to improve (Lina).

And another mentioned the same issue:

> I don't feel I benefit that much from the post-observation meeting […] My supervisors just check on me and spend most of the supervisory visit reading my lesson plans to find mistakes and comment negatively on my language (Sarah).

4.7 Professional Development

Table 8 below explains students' perspectives toward their supervisors' competence in guiding them to develop their professional knowledge. Overall, students reported that their supervisors encourage them to develop their professional knowledge (m = 4.04) and assisted them to identify appropriate professional development activities (m = 4.02). Also, as a way of improving teaching practices, supervisors encourage students to attend conferences and workshops held off-campus (m = 3.92).

Table 8. Professional development activities

	Mean	Std. deviation
My supervisor effectively encourages me to increase my professional knowledge	4.04	1.098
My supervisor effectively assists me to identify appropriate professional development activities	4.02	1.108
My supervisor effectively encourages me to hold professional conversation with other teachers	3.82	1.236
My supervisor effectively inspires me to conduct micro-teaching activities with other teachers	3.73	1.303
My supervisor effectively assists me in setting goals for my professional improvement	3.90	1.229
My supervisor effectively allows me to attend professional conferences and workshops held off-campus	3.92	1.256

Interviews with the students corroborated these findings. The students stated that their supervisors were enthusiastic about encouraging them to expand their professional development activities. For example, some students mentioned their supervisors motivated them to attend professional development training courses held by the Ministry of Education. For example,

> She told me to attend the Ministry of Education professional development training courses and gave me some previous training courses handouts about planning and designing classroom activities (Manal)

And

> My supervisors asked me to sign up for an upcoming workshop in their school, and this workshop focused on using different technologies in the EFL classroom, and I felt motivated to join the workshop and develop my knowledge in this area (Heba).

4.8 Students' Skills

Table 9 below presented the overall student teachers' perceptions about whether they are more effective in certain areas after working with their supervisor. Student teachers were positive, and the result suggested that they have significantly improved as a result of working/interacting with their supervisors. The highest rated item was creating a positive learning environment with (m = 4.24) while the lowest rated item was participating in professional development activities (3.96).

Table 9. Students teachers' skills

	Mean	Std. deviation
As a result of working with my supervisor I am more effective in communicating with my supervisor	4.08	1.222
As a result of working with my supervisor I am more effective in creating a positive classroom learning environment	4.24	1.109
As a result of working with my supervisor I am more effective in understanding the curriculum	4.27	1.016
As a result of working with my supervisor I am more effective in preparing for instruction	4.12	1.053
As a result of working with my supervisor I am more effective in delivering effective instruction	4.22	1.046
As a result of working with my supervisor, I am more effective in assessing students' learning	4.14	1.080
As a result of working with my supervisor I am more effective in participating in professional development	3.96	1.154

5. Discussion

Cognizant of the vital role of supervision in the development of new teachers, this study was designed to evaluate the competence of supervisors who support students during their practicum course. This was achieved by eliciting feedback from student teachers using a combination of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This section discusses the findings from the study, highlighted in the preceding section, in light of the

consulted literature. The study findings revealed that the student teachers were generally positive about the support they received from their supervisors. However, there were few concerns that emerged from the data as shown below.

The study findings indicated that it is significantly important for supervisors to possess strong interpersonal skills including the ability to communicate and the willingness to listen to students' needs. Student teachers felt comfortable when they were treated with respect and in a friendly manner. This underscores the importance of establishing and maintaining good rapport with students to facilitate their learning. The data show that student teachers strongly appreciated the support they received when setting their goals and with advice on how to overcome barriers to their progression. It was clear that although student teachers understand the importance of professionalism, they expected their supervisors to be friendly and not too formal in their interactions with them. It can be challenging to achieve a good balance between maintaining a professional stance and being friendly. However, based on our study findings, establishing a positive working relationship remains an area that requires further development. This finding from our study echoes the findings by Ghulam et al. (2011) who state that autocratic and authoritative interactions between supervisors and student teachers in Pakistan were not very helpful. Although it is important to maintain professional boundaries, collegiality is likely to benefit student teachers in their professional development. Arguably, they can feel safe and confident to share their problems with supervisors if relationships are friendly. A study conducted in Iran showed that a directive supervisory style makes it difficult for students to access appropriate feedback, and this undermined their professional development (Sepehrifar & Khadiv, 2014).

The student teachers appreciated the opportunity to meet with their supervisors prior to the observation and they also valued the post-observation meetings. They found it immensely useful to receive both verbal and written feedback from their supervisors. Similarly to observations by Kayaoglue (2021), our student teachers also expressed concern about feedback that focused on mistakes only. They felt that feedback should be comprehensive and constructive. Commenting on the post-observation meetings, student teachers appreciated the opportunity to discuss their performance with the supervisors. This is consistent with observations by Yoon and Kim (2019) who found that the use of instructional talk and collaborative dialogue between mentors and mentees enhances teaching practice. However, feedback from the student teachers showed that the time for these dialogic conversations was limited. They stated that 10-15 minutes was not enough for a thorough discussion of feedback. Perhaps, limited time compromises the quality of feedback, and this raises pessimism as observed among student teachers in Kenya by Ochieng Ongondo and Borg (2011). Perhaps it is worth exploring this further to find out if there is any standard time that should be allocated for providing meaningful feedback? Alternatively, supervisors should be left to make their own professional judgements regarding what works best for their particular students.

Our study also revealed that student teachers benefited significantly through their interactions with supervisors. For instance, they felt that their supervisors were providing useful help in terms of developing effective learning environments to facilitate learning. They also received good support for effective lesson planning, and they were also advised on new approaches to teaching. It was quite evident that student teachers drew a lot of inspiration from their supervisors, and they found the advice they received useful in terms of improving their practice. These findings reinforce observations made by other authorities who indicated that these interactions between the supervisors and supervisees contribute to the enhancement of teaching practice. For instance, Engin (2015) and Martin (2018) contend that instructional supervision that occurs in culturally situated activities can help teachers to regulate and shape their thinking and behaviours.

Our study findings resonate with observations made by other authorities in teacher education, in particular, those that attribute the success of the supervisory process to the supervisors' competencies (Gebhard, 1984). Listening to the feedback provided by most student teachers in our study, it was clear that the student teachers valued lessons learnt from their supervisors and they commented that without the support of their supervisors, they would not have been successful. It is against this backdrop that emphasis should be placed on the ongoing development of supervisors' knowledge and skills, that is, both content knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge. Arguably, mentors should be well prepared to be able to advise their mentees effectively in a culturally sensitive manner.

Overall, our study raises some important issues around the importance of relationships and supervisory approaches used by the supervisors in the Kuwait context that can also be applied in other contexts. As observed by Alghamdi and Alzahrani (2016) and Kayaoglu (2012), if supervisors are ill-prepared, this can erode the effectiveness of the practicum experience. Arguably, in any context, it is vitally important to ensure that supervisors are competent to support student teachers in a professional manner. Some student teachers commented that they find themselves in a panic mood when the supervisors choose to be directive and

authoritative (Agheshteh & Mehrpour, 2021; Barahona, 2019). This emphasizes the need to be colleagiate and sensitive to the cultural context to ensure that relationships of trust are developed, and that student teachers feel safe to share their experiences with the supervisors.

An effort must be made to cultivate a collegial atmosphere that fosters student teachers' professional development. This way, supervisors can have a chance to support the development of their student teachers (Shulman, 1987). It is fair to say that although the supervisors in Kuwait context are generally reported to be doing a good job, it is still necessary to develop other aspects highlighted in this study as areas for potential development such as: building friendly but professional relationships with students, and ensuring that feedback is always comprehensive and constructive, not focusing on the negatives only. Our study also highlights the importance of ensuring that adequate time be allocated to the feedback meetings between supervisors and the student teachers. This will facilitate productive conversations which will benefit the student teachers. Although contextual factors are important, we feel that the findings from our study can be used by colleagues beyond Kuwait who are involved in supervising students on practicum courses.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring the competencies of English Language supervisors at the Ministry of Education in Kuwait is crucial in ensuring the success of English Language Programs. These competencies include effective communication, leadership, mentorship, curriculum development and assessment. All of these competencies are measured against the cultural aspect of Kuwaiti society and the attitudes towards education in general. By possessing these competencies supervisors are able to both support and guide the student teachers to further enhance their practicum teaching practices and improve student teachers' outcomes. It is important for English Language supervisors to continue further developing and improving their competencies to keep up with the changing needs of the Education sector. Overall, the competencies of the English Language supervisors play a critical role in promoting the competencies of the student teachers and therefore English Language education.

Through careful examination of the competencies required for English language supervisors and administrators involved in the assessment of student teachers, we can get a clearer picture and understanding of the skills and knowledge necessary for effective supervision. Additionally, this exploration can inform any current and future English Language supervisor training programs that can help improve the quality of language instruction and ensure that English Language supervisors are well equipped to meet the needs of their students.

The feedback that was given to student teachers is of immense value, it helps the student teachers to look back and reflect upon their previous sessions and shows them the areas that need further development and helped them draw conclusions as to how they may place a plan of action to overcome these hurdles.

In conclusion there should be further research on the subject of enhancing the assessment of student teachers in schools and the focus should be on the differences between genders and various rubrics that could be used. This will help in standardizing the assessment criteria making it equal across all schools and all disciplines. Adhering to standards of education will raise the level of competencies for both English Language supervisors and student teachers.

Aknowledgements

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