
English Language Teacher Supervision in Morocco in the Context of Covid 19 and its Aftermath

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ABSTRACT: The Coronavirus pandemic has affected education and triggered a number of debates relating to the plethora of online teaching and learning modes available. Debates focus mainly on the issues of training, challenges of implementation, and related impacts in the field of English language teaching and learning. Strong emphasis has been laid on the ways to improve teaching practices and boost student learning outcomes (Maher & Zollman, 2021; Mette, 2020). Teacher supervision in the Moroccan EFL context, however, is an area which has not received sufficient focus. In the context of the Coronavirus, ELT teacher supervisors have had to deal with new challenges and have been called upon to contribute to the community of teachers who have emerging in-service training needs and expectations and who are facing new challenges. The objective of this position paper is to discuss our experience of online teaching supervision with a specific focus on the emergent needs of teachers and to outline the ways we addressed these ongoing teacher professional development needs. The thrust of the argument is that despite the challenges that characterize online teacher supervision including lack of or limited ICT infrastructure, technological failures and digital literacy skills, online teacher supervision was largely a successful experience thanks to the convenience, flexibility and practicability of this online supervision mode. We specifically argue that collegiality and effective collaboration between and among ELT supervisors and teachers were key factors in the success of this undertaking. Implications are then drawn for more meaningful and transformative teaching and learning experiences in the future.

KEYWORDS: Teacher supervision, online teacher training, COVID-19, Morocco.

Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted all domains of life, including education. The pandemic has disrupted the normal schedules of school systems both nationwide and worldwide. With a shift to distance learning, teachers have confronted urgent and immediate needs for ICT integration to provide effective online instruction (Bakir & Phirangee, 2021). The pandemic has triggered huge debates on the plethora of online teaching and/or learning modes available (Loose & Ryan, 2020; Oyedotun, 2020). Most of these debates focus on issues of training, challenges of implementation (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo, 2020), their potentials and related impacts in the field of English language teaching and learning (Brock, Beach, Musselwhite & Holder, 2021). One area that has not received due attention is related to teacher supervision for practicing teachers.

This position article aims to share practical insights about teacher supervision in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic in Morocco. Specifically, it seeks to highlight the challenges teacher supervisors have faced and showcase the learning opportunities explored. Given the unusual circumstances of worldwide lockdowns, it was urgent to prepare teachers to be able to effectively teach online.

This paper is structured as follows. Section one provides the key definitional aspects of teacher supervision and highlights the practice of teacher supervision in the Moroccan EFL context prior to and amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Section two outlines the theoretical framework within which this position study is situated. Section three defines the methodology adopted in the study. Section four offers a detailed description of the researchers' online teacher supervision highlighting the challenges encountered and the opportunities discovered. The paper ends up with a conclusion and a set of implications.

1. Teacher Supervision

Teacher supervision has been defined in various ways given its multifarious tasks and purposes. For example, Sullivan and Glanz (2006) define teacher supervision as a process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue with the aim of improving teaching and thereby enhancing student learning. In a broader educational context, Daresh (2007) highlights the dynamic process of supervision in facilitating instructional improvement and, thus, promoting the overall quality of education. According to Beach and Reinhartz (2000), teacher supervision is viewed as:

a complex process that involves working with teachers and other educators in a collegial, collaborative relationship to enhance the quality of teaching and learning within schools. Supervision is contextual ... and supervisors serve as a bridge that supports and sustains efforts, leading to achieving personal and professional objectives. (pp. 8-9)

Along the same lines, Gebhard (1990) defines teacher supervision as “an ongoing process of teacher education in which the supervisor observes what goes on in the teacher’s classroom with an eye toward the goal of improved instruction” (p. 1). In certain situations, teacher supervision, however, is associated with “less rewarding and rather unpleasant responsibilities, such as providing negative feedback, ensuring that teachers adhere to program policy, and even firing employees if the need arises” (Bailey, 2006, p. 5).

Within the context of the present paper, teacher supervision is viewed as “the enhancement of teachers’ pedagogical skills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement” (Marzano, Frontier & Livingston, 2011, p. 2). In this regard, the key task of the supervisor is to provide teachers with different in-service teacher training opportunities to ultimately empower them to respond to emerging needs. These needs can be psychological such as autonomy, competence and relatedness (Kim, Leary & Asbury, 2021) and in the context of the covid-19 pandemic, they can consist in sharing with teachers the effective teaching skills that can ensure a smooth transition to online teaching and

modeling teaching. Teacher supervision is thus considered as a collaborative process that aims to provide flexible support in this pandemic when the challenges faced by teachers are both unprecedented and fluid. The next two subsections will detail the practice of teacher supervision in Morocco prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and afterwards.

1.1. Teacher Supervision before the Covid-19 Pandemic

Before the coronavirus outbreak, teacher supervision in the context of English language teaching in Morocco was principally provided in a face-to-face mode. Initiatives to integrate information and communication technologies in the provision of in-service teacher training opportunities were encouraged but considered as a complementary option. In spite of the learning opportunities created by technology integration in the process of teacher supervision, a limited impact was noticed due to teachers' willingness, aptitude and attitude toward technology-based resources (Brandao, 2015; Ennam, 2021; Farjeon et al., 2019; Loose & Ryan, 2020; Ruggiero & Mong, 2015). The face-to-face mode of teacher supervision was dominated by a set of paper-based tasks. For example, when holding a pedagogical meeting in the Moroccan context, teachers should be informed through their administration in a paper-based way at least fifteen days before the meeting (Ministerial Circular 200, 1990). Reports of training meetings had to be submitted to the administration together with teacher attendance sheets.

The typical face-to-face mode of teacher supervision was characterized by a number of challenges. First, it was difficult for supervisors to conduct training workshops in different and geographically remote areas. It was difficult for teachers who work in different areas to meet in one school for a pedagogical meeting organized by the supervisor. Time was a second factor that affected face-to-face teacher supervision. Supervisors were assigned various tasks to perform in a short time, which made it difficult to organize training workshops in different remote areas. Third, the issue of equipment affected the provision of in-service teacher training opportunities given that not all schools were equipped with the necessary technological devices, namely video projectors. The fifth factor which directly affected student learning is that the face-to-face mode of teacher supervision was conducted at the expense of student learning time. Conducting pedagogical meetings during schooling time led to increased teacher absence and negatively impacted students' learning.

1.2. Teacher Supervision during the Pandemic

The Coronavirus pandemic has forced school systems to pivot to various forms of on-line instruction in order to continue to offer meaningful and engaging instruction. The challenge consisted in seeking to reach all students through screens, using both synchronous and asynchronous forms of instruction. In the midst of this unprecedented crisis, teachers needed to function effectively in a situation they had never encountered before (Kim & Asbury, 2020a) and take into consideration the practicalities of effective teaching online, including how to (i) adapt the lesson material to the online environment, (ii) provide task differentiation and (iii) offer feedback (König, Jäger-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020).

Their readiness to offer effective online instruction is not only pedagogical, but it also features what is technical and logistical (Ennam, 2021).

Along the same lines, supervisors were initially reluctant to make immediate and drastic changes to their practices in order to continue to respond to teachers' immediate and urgent needs (Loose & Ryan, 2020). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher supervision was mediated via "live or real time (synchronous); such as communication by web-camera or streaming video and chat rooms, and delayed time (asynchronous); such as communications via e-mail, listservs, and threaded discussions" (Chapman, 2008, p. 2). Integrating technology in the process of teaching and learning was no longer an option. Rather, both supervisors and teachers were obliged to make rapid adjustments to their practices and use a wide range of technological tools and applications to accommodate student learning online.

Teacher supervision was conducted using (Google)Meet, Teams or Zoom to offer in-service teacher training opportunities. Online training workshops consisted in providing theoretical frameworks to rethink teaching instruction amid the COVID-19 pandemic and sharing practical and hands-on teaching skills to enable teachers to engage all learners and improve their learning outcomes (Mette, 2020) while seeking effective ways to reduce both teachers' and students' exhaustion and screen fatigue. The online mode of teacher supervision was more practical and flexible as it was characterized by paperless-based tasks which included informing and sharing links with teachers a few days – or even hours – before the pedagogical meeting as well as sharing digital documents. Supervisors were able to schedule online pedagogical meetings for teachers at any time deemed to be mutually appropriate beyond student learning time (Watson, 2003).

2. Theoretical Framework

To understand this sudden transition from face-to-face to online teaching and/or learning, Moore's theory of transactional distance (1993, 2012) has provided a theoretical basis for our discussion of online teacher supervision experience. Having articulated a revolutionary conception of the process of teaching and learning, the theory of transactional distance has built a framework for the conception of teaching and learning in the virtual environment. This theoretical framework has provided a detailed explanation of the flexibility of the online mode of teaching and learning. According to Moore (2012), transactional distance is "the gap between the understanding of a teacher (or teaching team) and that of a learner, and distance education is the methodology of structuring courses and managing dialogue between teacher and learner to bridge that gap through communications technology" (p. 34).

Moore's theory of transactional distance (2012) stresses the importance of personalizing the learning experience. In other words, distance education addresses the personal character of the learning process, recognizing the key role learners play in managing their own learning. In this online supervision experience, Moroccan EFL teachers have been informed about the utility of various applications of the online mode in terms of

highlighting individual learning time and offering different ways for their own learners to learn autonomously at their own pace. In this regard, teachers have been aware that

autonomous learners are more comfortable with less dialogue, receiving instruction through more highly structured course materials, comfortable with finding information and making decisions for themselves about what to study, when, where, what ways, and to what extent. In other words, the greater the transactional distance, the more opportunity (and necessity) for the learners to exercise autonomy. (Moore, 2012, p. 39).

In light of Moore's (2012) theory, online teaching is characterized by three main facets, namely dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy. Dialogue is concerned learner–instructor and learner–learner interactions (Moore, 2012; Huang et al., 2015). This construct is “synergistic” in nature given that “each party in the exchange builds upon comments of the other” (Moore, 2012, p. 35). The nature of dialogue in a given lesson is determined by a number of variables, including the medium of online communication, the course subject, teachers’ and students’ interpersonal communication skills and cultural differences between teachers and learners (Moore, 2012). As for the construct of structure, it is associated with the procedure of instruction, including learning objectives, teaching skills, materials, and appropriate assessment tools (Garrison, 2000; Moore, 2012; Huang et al., 2015). Most importantly, structure highlights the extent to which the design of instruction accommodates each individual learner’s needs and interests (Moore, 2012; Stein et al., 2005).

With regard to the construct of learner autonomy, it conveys the learners’ degree of their control of the learning process. It describes “the extent to which [learners participate] in making decisions normally reserved exclusively for teachers, decisions about what to learn, how to learn, and how much to learn” (Moore, 2012, p. 33). In a word, effective online teaching is determined by defining the structure of the lesson, managing dialogue in all its dimensions and knowing the ability of each individual learner to manage his or her own engagement with the teaching process.

3. Method

This position paper adopted a self-study design (Samaras, 2011) to examine the researchers’ online teacher supervision experience. A self-study design is conceived of as “a [research] stance that a researcher takes towards understanding or explaining the physical or social world” rather than a way of knowing or doing research (LaBoskey, 2004b, p. 1173). This form of systematic inquiry enabled the researchers to analyze their online experience in terms of responding to the Moroccan EFL teachers’ urgent needs amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers engaged in individual and collaborative inquiry to generate knowledge and transform practices (Samaras, 2011). During the COVID-19 shutdown, the researchers were supervising Moroccan EFL teachers virtually in Settat Directorate with the aim of continuing to offer teacher professional development opportunities.

To critically examine the researchers' online work, data were generated in terms of reflective narratives about the online experience as well as an evaluation of teachers' lesson plans and documents created and shared with teachers during the regular virtual meetings. These data were examined in light of Loose and Ryan's (2020) four R professional inquiry model (Recognition, Reflection, Reaction, Results) which was informed by Moore's (1993, 2012) theory of transactional distance. The recognition phase was intended to identify teachers' needs in adjusting their instruction to meet their students' needs. In the reflection phase, the researchers encouraged teachers to share their own practices, reflect on lesson components in light of discovery-based teaching methodology, structure and learning environments. Based on the two previous phases, teachers were called upon to react by refining their teaching practices to provide effective online instruction. During those phases, the researchers obtained feedback relating to the results of their online teacher supervision experience, namely the opportunities discovered and the challenges encountered (Loose & Ryan, 2020). Additionally, the model enabled the researchers to critically examine their online experience and identify areas for improvement in order to ensure an effective online teacher supervision experience (LaBoskey, 2004).

4. The Online Teacher Supervision Experience

The online teacher supervision experience upon which the present research is based consisted in continuing to offer teacher ongoing professional development opportunities amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Informed by the characteristics outlined in the theoretical framework, it comprised a wide range of activities and tasks, including a series of online presentations and workshops concerned with the effective strategies to teach the language four skills and components. Drawing on effective communication and collaboration with teachers, we managed to respond to their emergent needs in transitioning to online teaching. Moroccan EFL teachers in Settat Directorate were trained on asynchronous online instruction in terms of discussing effective ways of the delivery of online teaching as well as synchronous online instruction manifested in the design of video lessons. The implementation of discovery-based instruction in workshops enabled teachers to explore the lesson and its related impact on students in the virtual environment (Liu et al., 2018). The workshops displayed the effectiveness of discovery teaching in highlighting student-initiated explorations of solutions to authentic problems (Zhao & Watterston, 2021).

The process of online feedback served as an important facet of this online teacher supervision experience. Teachers received timely feedback in terms of planning lessons effectively following the discovery-based teaching methodology and seeking different ways to engage all learners in the virtual environment. This process of regular feedback enabled teachers to conceptualize teaching with technology (Rice & Deschaine, 2020). A number of debriefing sessions were conducted before and after teacher performance in the classroom context. During these sessions, teachers were encouraged to reflect upon and share their own teaching practices. This process of regular feedback enabled teachers to make sense of their teaching experience in the virtual environment, thereby recognizing

the various pulls and pressures that might impact their performance in the classroom context (Diacopoulos & Butler, 2020).

A third salient aspect of our online teacher supervision experience was manifested in supervising teachers' productions of online presentations and video lessons. Teachers across Settat Directorate participated in various online workshops about designing video lessons which covered the syllabus of the second semester of the school year of 2019 -2020. The videos were structured in terms of lessons, exercises and tasks, progress checks, and quizzes and global tests. It is worth mentioning that a number of video lessons designed under our supervision have were broadcast on different Moroccan TV channels.

A further aspect of this online teacher supervision experience was associated with the provision of training opportunities on syllabus coverage in light of the teaching modes advocated by the national ministry of education, namely face-to-face teaching, online teaching and autonomous learning. Teachers were trained on how to provide effective instruction alternating the aforementioned teaching modes. In this regard, a series of workshops demonstrating an effective implementation of discovery-based instruction was conducted. This teaching method places much responsibility on the learner, which is a characteristic of the circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. To cover the syllabus and still provide an effective and meaningful hybrid instruction for all learners, teachers were trained on setting a clear objective for each lesson and providing an effective procedure in terms of adjusting the content and encouraging learners to monitor and process their own learning. An effective implementation of a discovery-based teaching sequence in a face-to-face or online environment was intended to equip learners with the necessary skills and strategies to apply on their own while learning autonomously.

Last but not least, this online teacher supervision experience comprised a series of productive discussions with teachers over emails, phone calls and Zoom meetings about creative ways to reach all students at home. Teachers were encouraged to innovate and make rapid adjustments to their teaching practices in order to reach all students wherever they were (Loose & Ryan, 2020). It is essential in this regard to facilitate an effective online learning environment in which students interact effectively with the learning material, their classmates and their teachers. Carefully designed online instruction can engage all learners and enable them to continue to build relationships and develop a sense of community, thus encouraging dialogue in different ways and lessening transactional distance (Moore, 2012).

However, our online teacher supervision was characterized by a number of challenges which, at times, hindered the effective performance of both teachers and supervisors. During early meetings with the teachers, it was difficult to establish an online environment and encourage teachers to communicate their urgent needs. Additionally, it was hard to reimagine instruction and connection amid the pandemic (Loose & Ryan, 2020).

Supervising teachers in online settings was challenging in many ways. Some teachers' limited experience with computer-based technology was a potential barrier to effective online teacher supervision (Altekruse & Brew, 2000; Ennam, 2021; Kim, 2020; Wat-

son, 2003). Technology-related failure was another challenge that affected the quality of online teacher supervision. With these occasional failures, it was challenging to train teachers on designing and delivering effective online lessons. Another significant challenge of the online teacher supervision mode is manifested in seeking ways to replicate and enhance the regular interactivity among supervisors and teachers in a virtual space characterized by the absence of non-verbal communication (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007) and human contact (Alterkruse & Brew, 2000). In this regard, building a professional relationship based on trust and personal connection was a challenging endeavor.

An additional challenge which faced online teacher supervision mode consists in the related impact of teachers' preoccupation with the mastery of technological tools and applications on improving classroom instruction. This preoccupation is informed by the premise that teachers are capable of applying new technologies to teaching practice given that the current situation "requires not only knowledge and skills but also confidence regarding success in online teaching" (König, Jäger-Biela & Glutsch, 2020, p. 4). Given the static nature of the online learning environment, mastering the technological tools used for online instruction delivery becomes a daunting task (Loose & Ryan, 2020).

Finally, supervisors and teachers' worry about increased risk to confidentiality by computer-based supervision has become a serious issue (Watson, 2003; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, supervisors' and teachers were connected using multiple digital tools without paying attention to the amount and nature of the personal data they share. There was an increasing possibility of having an illegal access to both supervisors' and teachers' personal information if not protected (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). Remley and Herlihy (2020) state that "even encryption-protected telecommunications systems are highly vulnerable to intrusion (p. 366).

Despite the aforementioned challenges, a number of opportunities were discovered, which facilitated and promoted supervisor-teacher performance. As a matter of fact, online teacher supervision was time-and cost-effective (Kim, 2020). Teacher supervision was conducted in the comfort of one's home or office and no travel was involved. Substantial time savings from travel resulted in increased supervisor productivity. The online environment also made it easier and practical to schedule multiple teacher supervisory meetings. In addition, the superiority of online teacher supervision was manifested in quick and continuous access to information (e.g. easy to share links to materials - online or via drive) during online meetings.

Online teacher supervision was a more convenient and practical means for communication among participants. This online mode stressed the personal character of ongoing teacher professional development in many ways. Teachers were offered a variety of opportunities to share their own online teaching experience. In an online meeting, every individual teacher had the opportunity to communicate his/her own teaching ideas and suggestions, which was not possible in a face-to-face setting. Transitioning to online instruction facilitated teacher reflection for continuing professional growth.

Remote teacher supervision offered more significant opportunities for supervisors to bring a facilitated session to life in the digital environment. To promote the process of generating and testing new teaching ideas, it was possible to run remote workshops with audio configurations and plugins through Microsoft Teams, for example. Furthermore, teachers were given opportunities to take control of the technological tool used (Zoom, for example) in order to share the workshops' findings and demonstrate teaching sequences.

Conclusion and Implications

This position study sought to discuss and reflect upon the researchers' online teacher supervision experience in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. In light of the characteristics of the transactional theory, it outlined the ways the researchers addressed Moroccan EFL teachers' emergent needs amid the pandemic. Despite the challenges encountered, the study highlighted the brighter side of the online teacher supervision experience.

It could be safely stated that our online teacher supervision experience was successful in many ways. The pivot to online mode enabled teacher supervisors to explore innovative ways in responding to the emergent needs and challenges of teachers at a regular basis. The online mode made supervisory intervention a timely process. More importantly, a positive impact on both supervisor & teacher productivity was observed in the online environment, respecting student learning time.

Given this unprecedented crisis, a number of implications were drawn for more meaningful and transformative teaching and learning experiences in the future. First, supervisors and teachers should join efforts to reconsider the pedagogical practices adopted to engage all students in meaningful and transformative learning experiences. Second, teachers are called upon to draw on the experience accumulated thus far to integrate online learning opportunities into their teaching. Third, to motivate teachers to continue to offer effective instruction, it is essential to recognize and value their work manifested in producing reliable video lessons. Despite the somewhat end of the pandemic, we have to continue to employ technology in our teacher supervision practices and capitalize on the experience accumulated thus far.

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