

Supervision of Instruction in English as a Foreign Language: A Vietnamese Perspective

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TESOL Journal
Vol. 5, pp. 3-20
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Abstract

The City University of New York (CUNY) and the Vietnam-USA Society English Centers (VUS) have engaged in a ten-year relationship in which CUNY faculty visit VUS English language schools in Ho Chi Minh City every six months, observing classes and post-lesson conferences, and providing teacher and teacher supervisor workshops about current practice in English language teaching. In order to more fully understand Vietnamese supervisors' views on English language teaching (ELT) supervision, a web-based questionnaire was developed and administered to VUS and non-VUS ELT supervisors in Ho Chi Minh City. Results showed how these supervisors approach observations, what they chose to observe, how they conduct post-observation conferences, and the challenges they face in their roles, with implications for culturally responsive teacher supervision in EFL contexts.

Key words: Supervision, TEFL, teacher observation, Communicative Language Teaching, Vietnam

Introduction

*Qua sông thì phải lụy đò
Muốn con hay chữ, phải yêu lấy thầy
(To get across the river, you have to build a bridge;
To have well-educated children, you have to respect the teacher)*

The cultural contexts for teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) vary widely, from preschool to university classrooms. Variables such as whether the instruction is for those studying English as a foreign language (EFL), whether this schooling takes place in an English-dominant community, quality of institutional resources, and the philosophic orientations of these programs all influence the type of experiences offered to learners. Cultural expectations on the part of students will shape instructional interactions, as teacher behaviors also reflect local norms. For instance, the expectations of learners of English regarding how to initiate turn-taking, or how to exchange information with their instructors, is likely to differ from setting to setting. Understanding local context thereby

informs instruction. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the international professional organization for teaching English as a second or foreign language, counts culturally appropriate pedagogy among its main standards for teacher behavior (TESOL, 2010).

As reflected in the Vietnamese quote above, regard for teachers is a product of deep-rooted cultural values. Although usually explored through the lens of teacher-student interaction, the study described in this paper seeks to better understand those who support and guide the teacher behind the scenes—the workplace teacher supervisor, who has a critical but underexplored role in shaping instruction. While much has been written about the practicum or in-service supervisor, there is a dearth of research on teacher supervisors in the workplace, and none at all in the context of Vietnam. The purpose of this paper is to capture some of the ways in which the supervision of EFL teachers in Vietnam may be informed by cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences, in the context of the burgeoning English teaching field in Vietnam, where Western and Vietnamese notions of pedagogy are interacting. It is hoped that this investigation may be of relevance to both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese teacher educators, school administrators, and teacher supervisors working to preserve local norms while accommodating new approaches against the backdrop of the globalization of English language teaching (ELT), as well as to the study of cross-cultural teacher study generally.

Context for the Study

The City University of New York (CUNY), a large, multi-campus urban university located in New York City, and the Vietnam-USA Society English Centers (VUS), a large, multi-campus urban private English language school located in Ho Chi Minh City, have engaged in a ten-year relationship in which CUNY faculty visit VUS English language schools on a twice-yearly basis, in order to provide teacher and teacher supervisor workshops about current practice in English language teaching. As part of these visits, 3-5 CUNY faculty members observe classes and a post-observation conference between a VUS teacher and teacher supervisor. In order to more fully understand Vietnamese supervisors' views on supervision for ELT, a questionnaire was developed and administered to active supervisors in Ho Chi Minh City. All of them had taught at least five years prior to becoming supervisors, and all engaged regularly in classroom observation and post-observation conferencing at all levels of ELT.

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

- What are the key instructional practices Vietnamese supervisors look for when observing?
- How do they conduct the post-observation conference?
- What, if any, cultural aspects are present in the supervisory conference?

Vietnam as Context for English Language Teaching

As English instruction continues its spread across Asia, research has begun to investigate its development in Vietnam. Historically, the instruction of English directly parallels socio-political realities, with 1986 ushering it in as a foreign language of choice, in lieu of Russian. More recently, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced large-

scale reforms for education across Vietnam, and one of its main objectives is the improvement of English language education (Nguyen & Truong, 2007).

For the past twenty years, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been given top priority, yet there have been several researchers who claim that Vietnamese teachers have struggled to make sense of it. Viet (2008) suggests two reasons that CLT has met with resistance among Vietnamese teachers. First, many teachers were trained to teach through a grammar-translation approach; therefore teacher-centered and teacher-led lessons are expected norms, by which language is learned through rule memorization and through repetition rather than creative output. Second, since Vietnamese students may have been predominantly interested in becoming proficient in English only to pass national grammar-based tests, teachers question the appropriacy of fluency vs. form-focused instruction, and therefore may resist CLT in favor of more grammar-based instruction. Dang (2008), in a review of three Vietnamese universities of education, found opportunities to develop learner-centered curriculum severely curtailed by the lack of current training materials, course program requirements, and the lack of modeling of CLT practices by teacher trainers. Dang observed that EFL students at these universities reported very little pair or group work, a lack of ownership in the learning process, and a product rather than a process orientation. Pham (2001) cites the rapid growth in the demand for English teachers, which led to the hiring of many untrained teachers, as one reason teachers may not have developed methods in CLT. Since the low salary of these English teachers generally requires them to teach additional hours, this hinders opportunities for professional reflection and planning. Additional constraints for typical Vietnamese teachers cited by Pham include lack of authentic English language teaching resources, pre-determined syllabi and textbooks, large class sizes, and the limitations of their own English proficiency. Nunan (2003) stated that in Vietnam as well as other Asian countries, CLT “is the rhetoric rather than the reality” (p. 606).

Other researchers have challenged this view, suggesting that CLT in many instances is indeed being implemented. For instance, Dang (2006), in a case study of a Vietnamese university level class, showed CLT operating successfully, due to multiple conditions working together, namely highly motivated and proficient students, a teacher with high English proficiency and a strong orientation to learner-centered classrooms, and an institution that supported them in their efforts. Another challenge arises from the concern that Western researchers’ notions of what constitutes successful implementation of CLT are culturally biased (Ellis, 1996; Holliday, 1994). In Kramsch and Sullivan’s (1996) research, CLT took place in ways that differed from Western norms. In the Vietnamese EFL classrooms observed, they found that typical Western CLT criteria, such as pair work, small group negotiations, or authentic tasks, were not displayed. Instead, students often responded chorally or in a collective interaction with the teacher as facilitator, thus enacting local norms of classroom as “family”. Kramsch and Sullivan found that Vietnamese traditions of the classroom as a family, the teacher in the role of moral leader and coach, and the oral traditions of being playful with language carried over and were responsible for the unique form of CLT they observed. Kramsch and Sullivan state that, “appropriate communicative language teaching in Hanoi, for example, might use the same pedagogic nomenclature as in London, but look very different in classroom practice...the question is not how to control this local appropriation, but how to let a thousand flowers bloom” (p. 201).

That CLT may be on the surface at odds with cultural norms in Vietnam has been discussed in other literature. Le (1999) describes the English language teacher in Vietnam as “a cultural island where the teacher is expected to be the sole provider of experience in the target language” (p.10). As CLT places an emphasis on students as the center of the classroom, this upends the traditional Vietnamese view of teachers as the center of the classroom. Viet (2008) also points to this as a source of conflict for Vietnamese teachers. The Confucian ideology, which views the teacher as the center of learning, is cited as being in contrast to the “learner-centered” approach of CLT. In their study of teacher educators in Hong Kong, Katyal and Pang (2010) question the idea that “best” teaching practices must contradict traditional, Confucian notions, and caution against the imperialism of any methods which claim supremacy. Against this backdrop of English language teaching in Vietnam, what role do teacher supervisors play? Are western ideals infused into methods for ELT supervision as well?

Vietnam as Context for Teacher Supervision in ELT

Supervision of instruction is a universally accepted means of assessing the classroom performance of the teacher, supporting the curricular goals of the institution, and monitoring student learning. How this supervision occurs is also common across settings: a supervisor observes a classroom lesson, then discusses this lesson with the instructor soon afterwards. The nature, however, of these observation cycles may reveal cultural norms and practices that highlight how we differ in our views about instruction, student learning, and how to develop teachers’ skills.

While an abundance of literature exists regarding supervision of in-service or trainee teachers enrolled in certificate or teacher education programs, there is little regarding the role culture plays in the style of supervision, and little in terms of supervision of ESL/EFL teachers in the workplace. Kullman (1998) questions this in his investigation of supervision of EFL teachers:

The lack of consideration of contextual factors in mentoring and, more generally in English language teacher education, is surprising in light of the attention given to such factors within ELT methodology, which in recent years has placed considerable emphasis on the learner's sociocultural background and previous learning experience. This has led to debate on whether ‘self-direction’, ‘learner-centredness’ and ‘autonomy’ are appropriate concepts which can be applied to all contexts, with the humanistic aspects of learner or learning training in ELT receiving the greatest attention (p. 481).

Many supervisors of EFL instruction have received their TESOL credentials from Western institutions, and the most widely available texts in supervision for ESL/EFL instruction are written by British, Australian or American authors (e.g. Richards & Nunan, 2000). Western approaches to professional teacher supervision tend to value supportive rather than authoritative approaches to supervision, and generally suggest the use of collaborative models, in which teachers from the same institution work together to explore and innovate their teaching, using each other’s expertise as resource. Gebhard (1984) sorted styles of supervisory behaviors into several categories: directive, alternative, collaborative, non-directive, and creative, with the first considered least supportive of

teacher professional growth by the author.

There are at least three problems with directive supervision. First, there is the problem of how the supervisor defines "good" teaching. Second, there is the problem of negative humanistic consequences that may arise from using a directive model of supervision. And third, there is the problem of who is ultimately responsible for what goes on in the classroom (p. 502).

Gebhard proposed a mixed use of all supervisory styles, cautioning that an overly directive style can make teachers feel threatened and defensive, and therefore least likely to accept or initiate professional learning. How this directive style might manifest in an observation cycle is organized in Table 1. Here, *directive* is contrasted with the other *non-directive* approaches.

Table 1
Direct and Indirect Styles of Supervision

Direct Style of Supervision: Supervisor tells teacher what to look for to "fix" teaching	
Pre-observation conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors may not let teachers know they are coming • Lesson plan is not discussed in advance • Teacher does not know what the supervisor is going to be looking at in the observation
During observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor takes notes • Teacher is unsure of the target of observation
Post-observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor begins by telling the teacher what was noticed in the lesson • Teacher takes notes
Alternative observation techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors may tell teachers whom to observe
Indirect Style of Supervision: Supervisor supports teacher in professional learning	
Pre-observation conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors always let teachers know they are coming • Lesson plan is discussed in advance • Teacher and supervisor mutually decide on what is going to be looked at in the observation
During observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor takes notes, video records, and other teachers may be observing as well • Teacher has determined the target area of instruction they wish to focus on in the lesson
Post-observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher begins by telling the supervisor what was noticed in the lesson • Both supervisor and teacher take notes, examine video, or analyze student work samples
Alternative observation techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers suggest whom they wish to observe • Use of video to conduct self-observation

Several Vietnamese researchers have found that collaborative approaches, which might include class observations, seminars, workshops and informal talks, are uncommon in Vietnam, where teachers tend to work independently from one another (Dang, 2006; Pham, 2001). One challenge for Vietnamese teacher supervisors cited by Viet (2008) is the very concept of collaboration in teaching, which is an unfamiliar practice to many. Viet posits that Vietnamese teachers may approach their positions with a sense of competition, and believe that by keeping their best ideas and methods to themselves, they protect their positions. Peer observation, while somewhat common among Western teachers, is highly unusual for Vietnamese teachers, who may “feel uncomfortable or reluctant when their colleagues attend their class” (p. 170).

Another difficulty inherent in implementing imported models of teacher supervision is that teachers will be less likely to attempt practices that they believe will run counter to their students’ expectations. Pennington, et al. (1986), in examining the teaching of writing in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore, found that the process and product approaches to writing somewhat paralleled western vs. eastern traditions of schooling. Australian teachers were most likely to employ process-oriented techniques, while Japanese teachers least likely. Results from surveys of participant teachers indicated that while all the teachers accepted the process approach theoretically, many did not believe they could implement it successfully because it was foreign to their learners’ experiences and expectations. Le (1999) also claims that even after active participation in professional development, Vietnamese teachers did not alter their teaching and did not actually believe that the methods being presented would be relevant to their Vietnamese classrooms.

Likewise, Potcharapanpong and Thongthew (2010) discuss the implementation of teacher development programs in the Thai context, where they determine “most EFL teachers tend to be passive participants in the training contexts. They just listen to the instructors with little attempts to adapt to their real practices” (p. 39). In their teacher development approach, it was therefore determined that a site specific, culturally relevant style of professional development was needed, as was also the case in Korea (Howard & Millar, 2009). This sort of negotiation may take place in the work of teacher supervisors, as they balance their beliefs about how supervision should occur with the constraints of their contexts and cultures.

Vo and Nguyen (2010) investigated how one Western model of teacher professional development, the “Critical Friends” approach, would be applied in the Vietnamese context. This model involves 4-10 colleagues who meet regularly in a democratic collaboration. The lack of authority to guide the group, and the control of the member teacher to shape the focus of their group, likens it to the learner-centered model of EFL teaching, also an import from the West. Like introducing CLT to learners, there was some discomfort and lack of familiarity with the approach, but Vo and Nguyen found the participants enthusiastic and positive about it, although they admit that it was attempted with young, first year teachers. Pham (2001) cautions that in Vietnam, the ways professional teachers develop their skills on the job, for instance by viewing colleagues teach, engaging in inquiry meetings, planning and reflecting on lessons collaboratively, or organizing in-service seminars, is still not the norm.

As programs and institutions offering English language instruction rapidly expand in Vietnam, how professional development of teachers is organized and conducted needs to

be better understood. The scant literature on both teaching and teacher supervision in Vietnam surface more conundrums than understandings. While some research seems to indicate resistance to CLT, other studies suggest that it has been adapted and shaped by local conditions, and other settings, adopted fully. The few studies on teacher professional development also seem divided between a discomfort with non-hierarchical forms of supervision on the one hand, and a desire for innovative structures, on the other. The research is unclear as to how Vietnamese norms, preferences, and styles of interaction shape approaches to the observation of teaching. The confluence of Vietnamese cultural values and expectations with Western approaches to teaching, teacher observation and professional development create a context rich for investigating the role of culture in teacher supervision. While teachers have been participants or subjects of previous research, teacher supervisors have not been the focus of investigation. By inviting their perspectives, the role of supervision will be better understood both in Vietnam and in other EFL settings.

Method

After visiting Ho Chi Minh city with a CUNY faculty delegation and working with Vietnamese teacher supervisors and teachers, as well as observing lessons and post-lesson observation conferences during the summer of 2010, the first author asked the co-author, the academic advisor at VUS, to collaboratively investigate how supervisors approached observations, what they chose to observe, how they conducted post-observation conferences, and the challenges they faced in their roles. As we began to seek out literature on supervision of instruction in Vietnam, we found ourselves pioneers in virtually uncharted territory. Together, we developed questions and interpreted responses to a questionnaire completed by 13 teacher supervisors, who all were currently supervising ELT in Ho Chi Minh City, at VUS and other English language schools. After these were completed, we returned to one key informant with 4 years of supervisory experience of EFL in Vietnam for further, in-depth questions and to provide triangulation on the responses from the initial survey.

Data Collection

“Survey Monkey” (www.surveymonkey.com), a web-based, online survey instrument, was used to enable participants to respond anonymously and outside of temporal and geographic constraints, since the data was being collected and analyzed through internet communications between the U.S. and Vietnamese researchers. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, the scope of which was to elicit supervisors’ beliefs and practices regarding the components of effective supervision and the role of culture in supervision in their Vietnamese school context. The closed-ended questions involved forced ranking as well as multiple-option responses. Open-ended questions could be answered by writing into a text box.

Data Analysis

The closed-ended questions are summarized using descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions were analyzed according to the traditions of content analysis (Bogdan &

Biklen, 1998). From the categories and themes that emerged, a second set of in-depth, structured questions were developed and both the VUS co-author and one participant supplied further details and confirmatory explanations of responses, via multiple email exchanges.

Findings

Preparation for the Role of ELT Supervisor

While all of the participants had at least 5 years of teaching English as a Second/Foreign language prior to becoming a supervisor, fewer had that amount of experience as a teacher supervisor. Out of those who responded, 3 had less than a year of experience, 4 had between 2-3 years, 2 had 4-5 years, and 4 had more than 5 years of experience as a supervisor of teachers. Most supervisors received TESOL credentials in Australia, followed by the USA and Singapore. Only one participant reported training during university studies to act as a teacher supervisor. Participants reported that the training that had prepared them to be supervisors of EFL instruction mostly came through formal on-the-job training or informal, one-on-one mentoring by a more experienced supervisor. When asked about the age group of English language students for whom they felt most prepared to supervise instruction, adult learners were rated highest, followed by adolescents and children (see Figure 1). Supervisors commented that this was a result of more years of teaching experience with adult learners and fewer years of seeing ELT in classrooms with young learners.

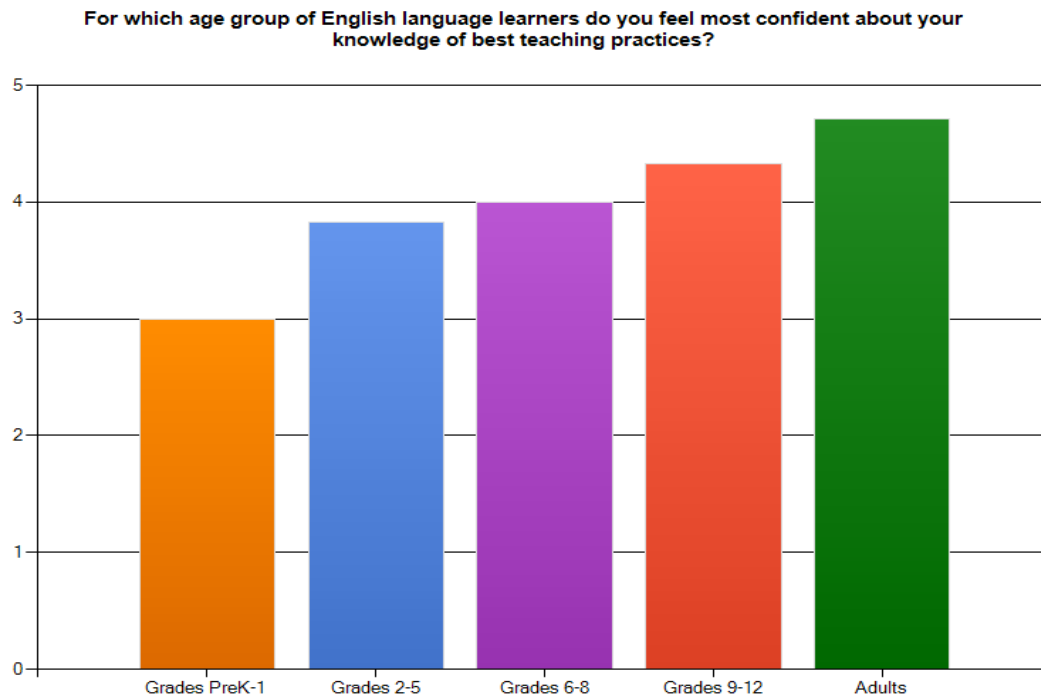


Figure 1. Age of EFL learners and Supervisor Confidence

Procedures for Supervision

Participants were asked both closed and open-ended questions about the procedures they tended to follow over the course of an observation cycle. Participants were first asked about pre-observation conferencing, and while they reported that teachers were aware of when observations would occur, for the most part, reviewing lesson plans and pre-observation conferencing did not take place (see Figure 2). Most supervisors reported only occasionally discussing the focus of the observation in advance of the observation, and that this was an issue of limited time to work with teachers. Responses were almost evenly divided between two seemingly opposed items: whether the supervisor set the agenda for what to observe, or whether the teacher was asked to.

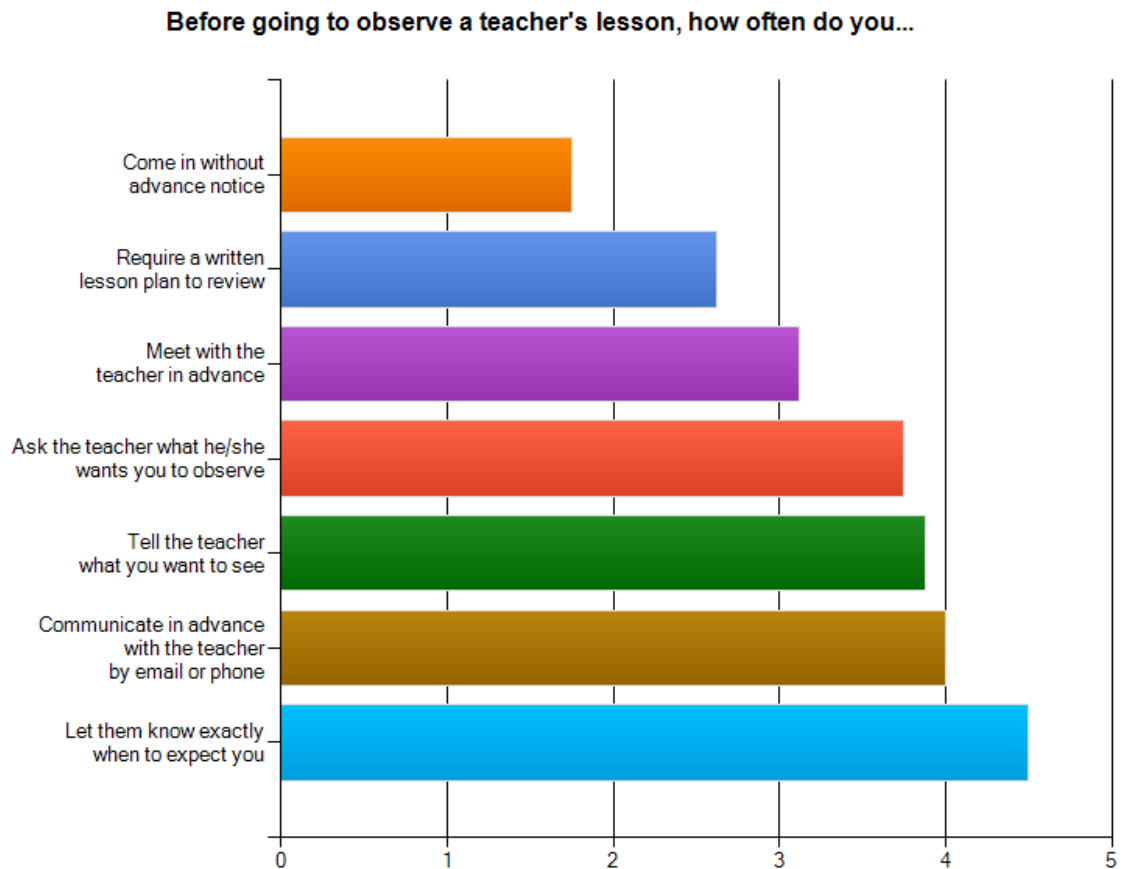


Figure 2. Procedures Involved in Pre-Observation

These two avenues of communication with the teacher—in one case, asking the teacher what he/she wishes to focus on in the lesson, and the other, to tell the teacher what the supervisor wishes to see, may not have been either/or options. In conducting the post-observation conferences, participants stated they began by asking the teacher what he/she thought of the lesson, and then shared their impressions of the lesson. In the words of one participant, “The teacher supervisor would ask teacher how they feel about the class, and to comment on their own teaching performance. The teacher supervisor would begin by

giving positive feedback. The teacher supervisor would mention and discuss teachers' areas of improvement by suggesting alternatives in certain teaching stages or steps that need improving." Another frames it as, "Sharing experience rather than 'teaching', I prefer 'coaching' than evaluating, being helpful to teachers any time they need help"; another participant describes the post-observation as, "The teacher knows they will be observed and will have a clear idea of what areas the observer will focus on. After the observation the observer will provide feedback that is concise that highlights the teacher's strengths and areas that the teacher can continue development on."

In the post-observation conference, both asking the teacher for their impressions of the lesson and sharing their observations were rated highly, but the most selected option of all was "Tell the teacher the aspects of the lesson that were ineffective" (see Figure 3).

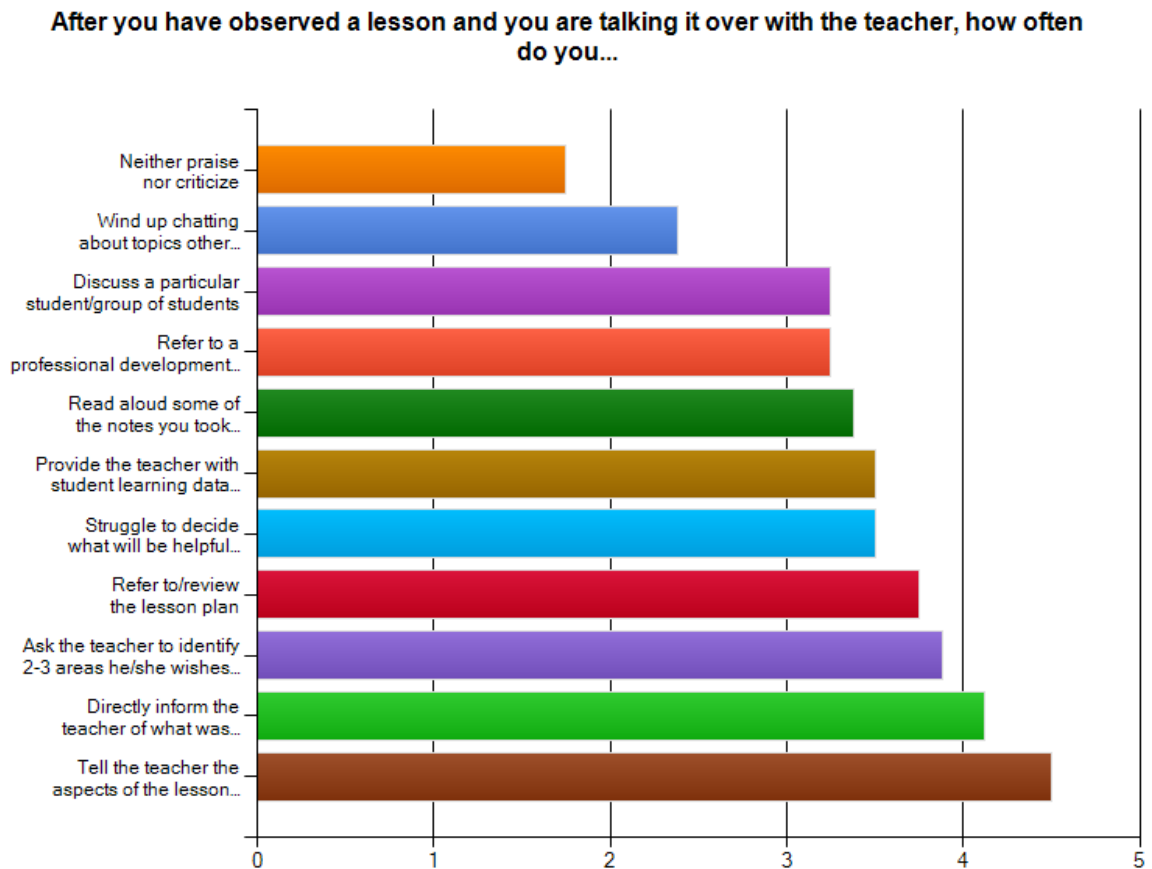


Figure 3. Components of the Post-Observation Conference

Focus of Supervision

Supervisors were asked to rank order a number of features of EFL instruction in terms of its importance to them when observing a lesson. Of primary importance were methods associated with CLT, such as "lots of student-talk", "pair work", and "teacher rapport", while the items not associated with CLT were rated as least important during

observation visits, such as “clear grammar point”, “use of assigned textbook” and “individual work” (see Figure 4).

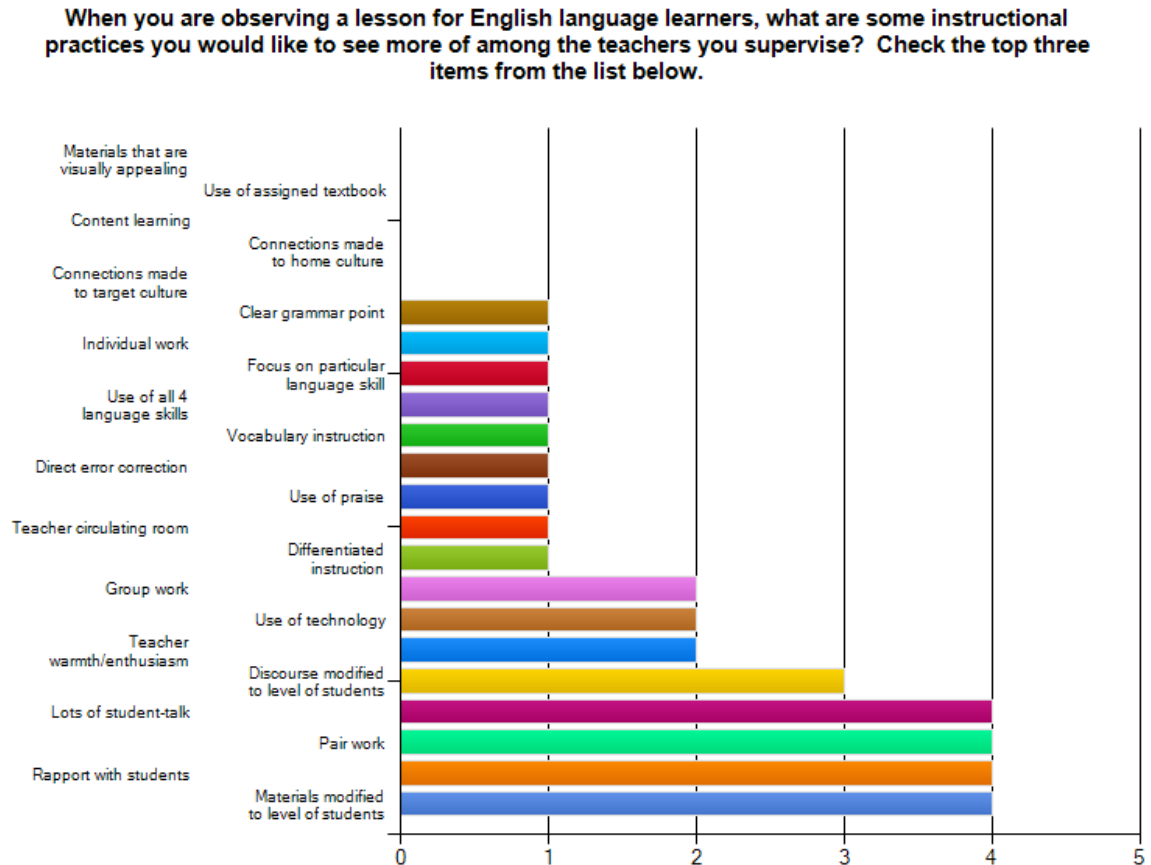


Figure 4. Features of ELT Instruction Supervisors Seek to Observe

One participant comments that an ideal lesson would be one in which “Students can fully understand the target language and use them appropriately in their own situations. At the same time, students find learning enjoyable”. Another participant reports, “since VUS aims at teaching communicative English, CLT is actualized in many classes here...Efforts have been made to make the classroom more communicative and less teacher-centered. Teachers are expected to use CLT in all class levels, including exam prep classes. Monthly workshops on classroom management and teaching methodology, conducted by VUS teacher supervisors, are held for Vietnamese and ex-pat teachers to make the classroom more communicative and less teacher-centered.” Materials being modified to meet the level of the learners was also highly ranked, and one participant stated, “[good teaching is] teaching to the student level, not teaching the book.”

Challenges of Supervision

Participants reported on the main challenges they faced as teacher supervisors, and the types of teachers they felt most challenged by. Overall, the greatest challenges reported

were their lack of time to talk with teachers in pre- and post-observation conferences, teachers' lack of background knowledge in TESOL, and teachers' resistance to change and defensiveness (see Figure 5).

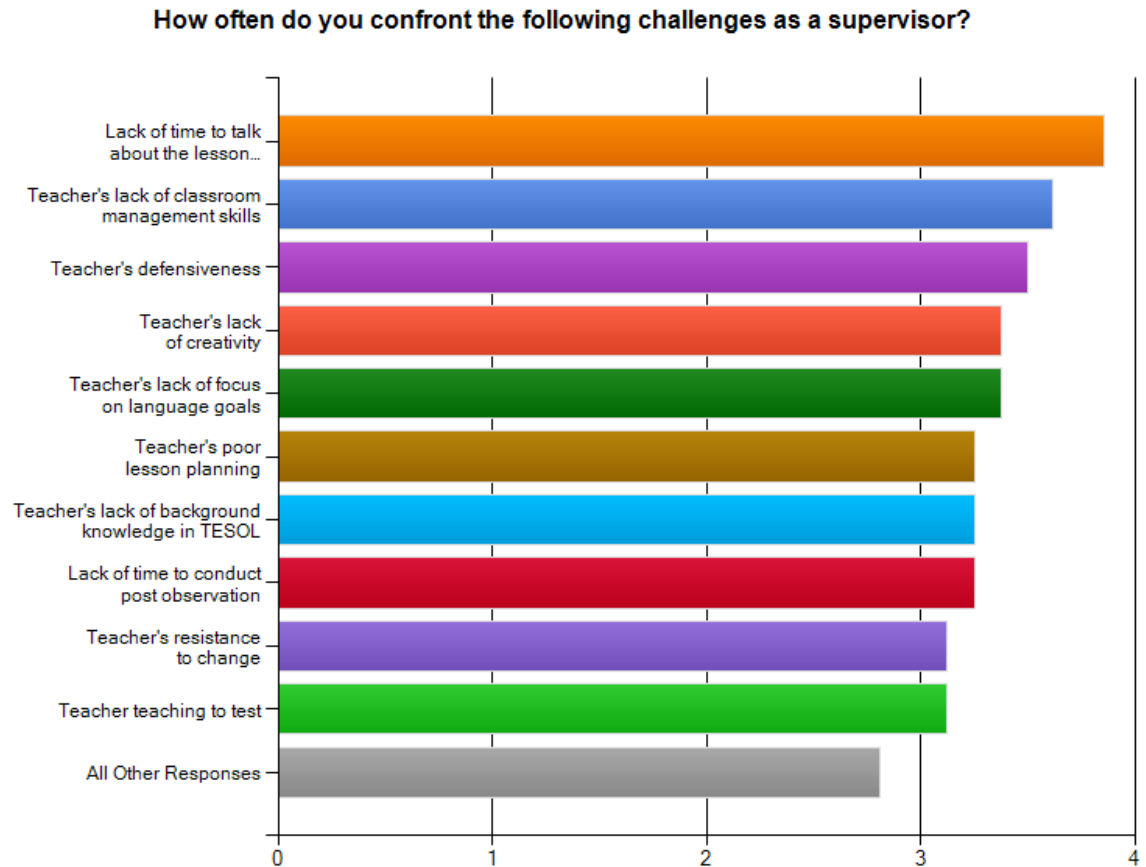


Figure 5. Challenges of Supervision

Lack of time is likely due to the high ratio of teacher/teacher supervisor in these settings. For instance, at VUS, there are 20,000 English language students, 500 teachers, and 10 teacher supervisors. A participant reports:

The need for qualified teachers also increases with the booming of English language centers. With the heavy workload, teachers find it hard to have adequate time for lesson planning and for self-reflection. In English language schools where a range of programs are taught, teacher supervisors have to struggle with a heavy workload, blending administrative paperwork and teacher mentoring.

Supervisors felt most confident working with teachers who were younger and less experienced, and whose native language was Vietnamese rather than English (see Figure 6).

How would you rate your confidence in your skills when supervising the following types of teachers?

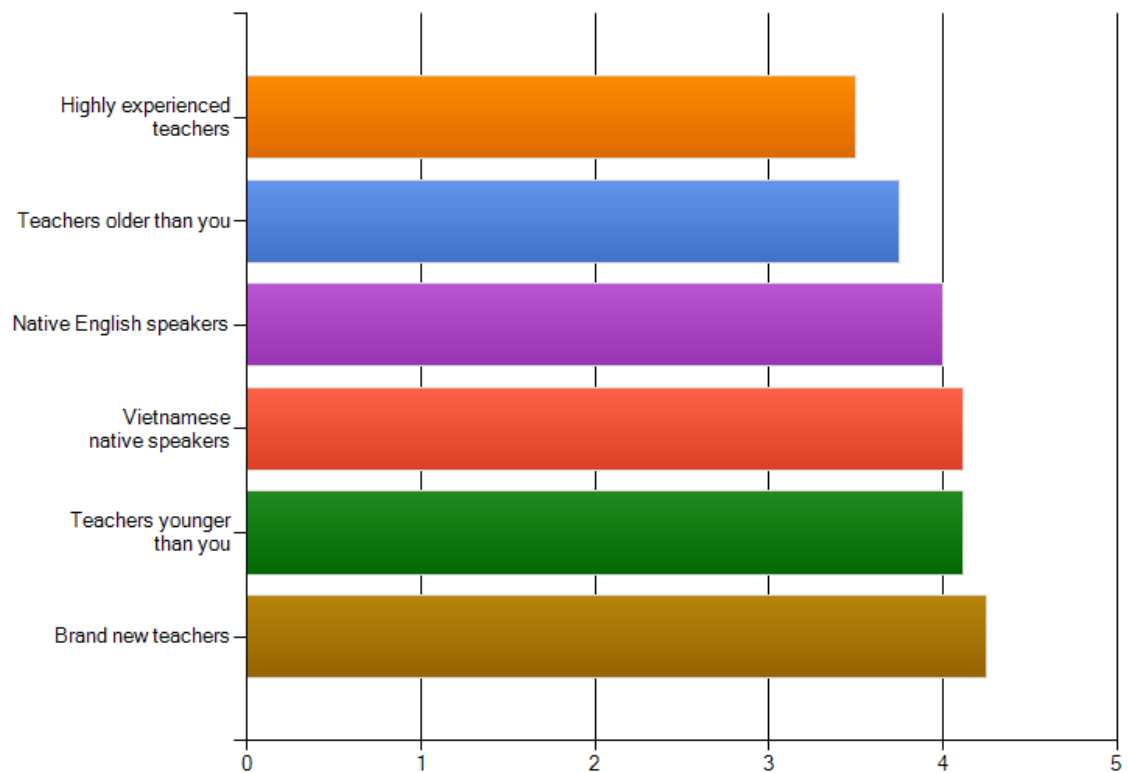


Figure 6. Supervisor Confidence and Teacher Type-(1=least confident, 5=most confident)

This led to the question of whether supervisors believed there was a cultural aspect to the supervisory interaction, and whether their interactions with native English speaking versus Vietnamese teachers would differ. One supervisor states, “The Vietnamese teachers of English are quite enthusiastic about developing related skills whereas the ex-pat teachers are a bit more circumspect. I attribute this mainly to their relative lack of classroom experience as compared to the Vietnamese teaching staff.”

When asked about how the role of culture, 100% of participants strongly agreed with the statement, “There are clear cultural aspects to the Vietnamese style of supervision”, yet responses were split in terms of whether this style could be termed “direct” or “indirect”, with about 40% of responses in accordance with each view, and the remaining 20% choosing neither to agree nor disagree. However, the open-ended responses seemed to imply a more direct style. For example, one participant states that the supervisor should, “Discuss what has been done and what *should* be done in a lesson to make students benefit more” and another states, “Teachers should know exactly what they are expected to achieve and their strong points as well as the areas of improvement.”

When asked to interpret the fact that all of the participants agreed that there was a cultural aspect to the Vietnamese style of supervision, yet were split as to whether this style was direct or indirect, one participant explained:

I do agree that, for the most part, Vietnamese supervisors are indirect. The cultural aspect has to do with the Vietnamese desire to reach a consensus on issues both personal and professional...As the Vietnamese people strive to maintain harmony in both their working and personal relations, disagreement raises anxiety levels and is seen as a direct challenge to the desired consensus. Of course, this is a generalized notion but the following illustrates this point: Whereas Americans have little difficulty separating personal aspects of a relationship from business, (“Business is business.” or “Let’s get down to business.” are familiar phrases in the American lexica) the Vietnamese would never be so direct in this fashion. It would be common for a business deal to include many meetings that were strictly personal in nature (friendly meetings for lunch, dinner, karaoke, etc.) before any business was actually discussed. The purpose of these types of personal meetings is to establish consensus on a whole range of points (e.g. likes in music, beer, food) and building on that sense of harmony...[However,] employing these tactics would be an inefficient and time consuming way to de-brief an observed teacher without any assurance that the observed would know what the observer wanted to share...Vietnamese supervisors are either concerned (and as a consequence hesitant) about appearing to be critical or are so assertive as to be considered overbearing. In both cases, well-intentioned supervisors can come across as either ineffectual or confrontational thereby closing off opportunities to exchange information.

Another possible explanation for the split view is that some of the supervisors worked in public and others at a private institution. One participant explains:

Despite the cultural norm, teacher supervisors from private schools or English language centers tend to be more direct than their counterparts from public schools and universities when giving feedback to teachers since they have to deal with students’ feedback and complaints more often. Clarity is needed to get the message across and make changes in the classroom.

Alternative forms of supervision, such as observing peers or the use of video, was seen as unlikely to occur in public schools, but possible in private ones. One participant states:

In public schools, peer observation is so infrequently applied as to be almost non-existent. VUS has recently instituted peer observation with head teachers conducting the observations. There was coaching provided to the head teachers before implementing peer observation. Video observation...will be used during de-briefing to highlight both what the observed is doing well in the class and highlight areas they can focus on for further development. The video will be theirs [the teachers’] to keep.

This indicates the possibility that video-based observations may be a tool to bring about the use of peer observation in the near future, primarily in private contexts with access to the technology.

Discussion

While the literature review suggested an inconsistent implementation of CLT in teaching English in Vietnam, the findings from this study resoundingly confirm the pre-eminence of CLT, as evidenced in the observation foci of supervisor participants. It was clear that supervisors in this study were keen to see student-teacher rapport and a high degree of student talk in their observation visits, and that these were elements stressed in their observation conferences with teachers. Supervisors know that they wish to see teachers in dynamic interaction with students involved in language use with their peers, as opposed to students working independently on grammar-based tasks. This is still more likely to occur in a private versus a public school. For instance, whereas public school language classes can range from 35-50 students, VUS class sizes are limited in size to 22 students and CLT is continuously reinforced through both formal workshops and through informal sessions conducted by head teachers at each campus.

Filling the gap in the literature on English language teacher supervision in Vietnam, findings from this study indicated that the supervisory cycle is organized according to processes familiar in the West. In their observation visits, supervisors let teachers know they are coming in advance, take into account what the teacher wishes to focus on in the lesson, and in the post-observation conferences move through the well-known pattern of asking teachers first to share their thoughts about the lesson, before sharing their own observations. All of this is done under tremendous time constraints and with a large caseload of teachers, which leaves these supervisors wishing to have more time to discuss the lessons in advance and afterwards. Vietnamese teachers usually have more pedagogical training than expat teachers, and they also have first hand knowledge and experience with English language acquisition and learning as Vietnamese learners of English themselves. Supervisors also uniformly expressed confidence about their ability to support teachers working with older learners, rather than younger ones. Since the age of learning English has also more recently dropped to younger children, this is also an area understandably less familiar to supervisors.

What is more complex and perhaps still emerging, is how cultural norms of interaction play out as supervisors perform two roles: that of evaluator, and that of collaborator. These opposing roles are perhaps made more difficult where the art and science of supervision is still newly developing as an area of teacher learning. While teacher supervisors noted teacher defensiveness, lack of creativity, and resistance as top concerns, the connection to how they conducted their observation conversations was not clear. For instance, teacher supervisors ranked telling teachers what was deficient in their lesson as their top choice in feedback, which may be a part of why teachers are reacting defensively. Supervisors feeling they needed to tell teachers what was not working in their lesson may be a result of a number of factors, such as (1) a lack of time to spend on eliciting teacher's ideas; (2) concern about the teacher's ability to notice key features of the lesson; (3) the EFL teacher's lack of training, and hence inability to scaffold/plan/organize a lesson; (4) a lack of training in alternative approaches as to how to give supervisory feedback; (5) a belief that stating these observations directly will change teacher behavior; or (6) a sense of pressure to get "results" from teachers they supervise. While the "what" to talk about in the feedback sessions seemed very clear to supervisors, the "how" to give feedback was less so. Culturally responsive supervision may then involve a recognition of

how one's own patterns of communication might influence how we share feedback in this very specialized speech event, and second, exposure to a number of options that can promote teacher autonomy and professional growth, that is meaningful within a cultural context.

Conclusion

In Vietnam, the demand for learning English is increasing rapidly. English is required for recruitment purposes, for socializing, for the workplace, for schools and universities. As publishers recognize the growing market for teaching English in Vietnam, Vietnamese educators are updated with new EFL catalogs, full of new textbooks and teaching ideas, introducing the latest developments and trends in ELT. Alongside changes to English language teaching, language teacher supervision in Vietnam has undergone changes over the last ten years. In many English language schools, surprise observations and inspections have been replaced by announced observations and post-observation discussions. Evaluation criteria, checklists, and report forms have been introduced, allowing more transparency in the observation and evaluation process. Peer observations are also implemented to encourage teachers' reflection and collaboration.

Possible future directions for exploring teacher supervision in Vietnam could include:

- Introducing the role of “teacher leader” to offer effective teachers the opportunity to develop observation and coaching skills, in order to share responsibility for conducting observation visits. This could lighten the large caseload of supervisors and provide professional learning for experienced teachers.
- Developing professional learning communities or inquiry groups in which teachers of mixed experience levels could discuss key instructional practices, share lesson plans, and observe videos of teaching as stimulus for discussion. These groups could be led by a teacher supervisor or responsibility could be rotated on a weekly basis, thus allowing for more interaction and exchange of ideas among teachers.
- Utilizing “walk-throughs”, brief visits of 15 minutes or less which are designed to provide the observer a glimpse of a particular practice, student level, or teaching strategy. These can be done by a teacher supervisor and a teacher in a paired walk-through.
- Carefully introducing video-based observation into the supervisory cycle, by inviting volunteer teachers to video-record their own lessons for review and analysis, sharing excerpts from these videos with peers or small groups, and applying the institution's observation rubric to videos. When done in a manner that respects the teacher's sense of vulnerability, video-mediated observation can be a powerful tool in teachers' professional learning.
- Using cases, simulations, and role-plays in the preparation of teacher supervisors which specifically outline scenarios involving cultural, age, and experience differentials to elicit discussion and awareness among supervisors as to how these variables impact their interactions with teachers.

Deepening our understanding of the complex act of teacher supervision requires both respect and familiarity with the context in which it occurs. As English teaching materials, methods and language continue to intersect traditional Vietnamese classrooms and teachers, the call to proceed with caution and be sensitive to pedagogical imperialism has been clearly made. How and in what manner teacher supervisors may be placed in the

role of cultural mediators is one that is worth exploring, and how the highly sensitive and complex interaction that is the post-observation conference can support supervisors' and teachers' sense of efficacy can be further explored through the lens of culture. Affiliation and cooperation in training between English schools in Vietnam and those in the world can provide opportunities to explore teacher growth, but with an eye to mutual, rather than imperialistic, development.

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