

Preparing Instructional Supervisors for Educational Change: Empirical Evidence From the Sultanate of Oman

SAGE Open
April-June 2020: 1–10
© The Author(s) 2020
DOI: 10.1177/2158244020935905
journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo


Amal Al-Kiyumi¹ and Waheed Hammad^{1,2} 

Abstract

This article reports on findings from a larger research project examining instructional supervision in the Sultanate of Oman. It sought to explore how teacher supervisors perceived their preparation for the current education reforms. To realize this objective, the study adopted a qualitative research design. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with a sample of teacher supervisors in the Muscat Educational Supervision Directorate. The findings indicate that the supervisors considered their preparation to be inappropriate, reasoning that most of the training programs provided were short theoretical conferences or lectures with no or a few opportunities for practice. The supervisors expressed their need for more adequate and sufficient training to enable them to undertake their new supervisory roles.

Keywords

instructional supervision, educational leadership, educational change, leadership preparation, Oman

Introduction

In a context of increased awareness of the necessity for quality education, the Sultanate of Oman has been pursuing a process of education reform since the 1990s. As part of this reform program, a number of radical changes have been introduced to upgrade the education system in the country and bring it in line with international standards (International Bureau of Education [IBE], 2011; Ministry of Education, 2004). A World Bank (2013) report presents Oman as one of the countries that has made “impressive” developments in its education system over the past few decades. This is consistent with the significant educational developments currently taking place in the Arabian Gulf region at large (Wiseman et al., 2014; Zahlan, 2017).

Most notable among educational developments in Oman has been the introduction of the basic education system in 1998. The new system has adopted a comprehensive approach to education with the aim to develop all aspects of the individual’s personality and to provide the students with independent learning skills that would promote their lifelong learning (Al-Hammami, 2001). This was accompanied by the introduction of curricular and pedagogical changes, including a greater emphasis on the student as the center of the educational process and on the teacher as a learning facilitator rather than a knowledge transmitter (Ministry of Education, 2004; Rassekh, 2004). These developments have necessitated a parallel shift in the roles and practices of teacher

supervisors, with the aim to enable both supervisors and classroom teachers to work together to increase the effectiveness of teaching to enhance students’ learning (Ministry of Education, 2006). The same objectives have been recently reemphasized in the National Strategy for Education 2040 as part of the efforts toward quality in education in Oman. The strategy document identifies “improving educational supervision in schools to facilitate better teaching and learning” as one of the requirements for building educational quality (The Education Council, 2018, p. 33).

As part of the country’s move toward more decentralized educational management (IBE, 2011), regional-level supervisors (who link local school teachers with the central office) have been granted a greater say in the implementation of the new reforms at the school level (Ministry of Education, 2015). This is in line with international literature, which suggests that change does not occur unless it is instigated by the people who are supposed to implement it (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014). In recognition of their vital role in promoting teachers’ professional development and enhancing teaching and learning, the Ministry of Education has given

¹Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

²Damietta University, Egypt

Corresponding Author:

Waheed Hammad, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Al-Khoud St., Al-Khoud, Muscat 123, Oman.
Email: waheedhammad@gmail.com



special attention to the preparation of teacher supervisors. This can be seen in the variety of training programs and workshops provided locally by the educational supervision departments in the different directorates throughout the country (Ministry of Education, 2004), or centrally through the newly established Specialized Center for the Professional Training of Teachers (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is not clear to what extent these programs have been effective in terms of preparing Omani teacher supervisors for their new supervisory roles. A joint study by the World Bank and the Ministry of Education reported that the current supervisory practices have only had a minimal impact on teaching and learning in Omani schools (World Bank, 2013). Atari and colleagues (2005) found that most Omani supervisors encountered problems associated with their changing roles and practices due to the lack of adequate preparation for the proposed changes. Moreover, Al-Kiyumi and Hammad (2019) noted that the supervisors were aware of the new reforms and their implications in terms of the need for more collaborative and democratic supervisory practices. However, their actual practice of supervision reflected a more traditional approach that was mainly based on classroom observation. The authors recommended further research to explore the supervisors' preparation for their new roles. It is, therefore, the aim of the current study to undertake this investigation. It sets out to answer the following question:

Research Question 1: How do instructional supervisors perceive their preparation for educational change in Oman?

The significance of this study stems from its relevance to the current developments taking place in the Omani education system. We argue that exploring supervisors' perceptions of their preparation is important as it helps identify possible gaps in their current development and suggest ways to bridge them. The study also responds to calls for conducting more research to better understand the nature of educational leadership in Arab societies (Hallinger & Hammad, 2019; Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). More important, there is a need to build a culturally sensitive knowledge base in educational leadership that can inform future leadership development programs in the region (Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The current study is informed by the literature on instructional supervision/leadership in the context of educational change. Instructional supervision research has emphasized the role of teacher supervisors in supporting teachers in times of educational change through fostering their professional growth and development (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Kalule & Bouchamma, 2013; Oliva & Pawals, 2004; Palandra, 2010;

Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Tyagi, 2010; Zepeda, 2016). Resistance to change has been identified as a potential barrier to education reform, which suggests the teachers' need for support during change implementation (Fullan, 2001). This places a huge responsibility on instructional supervisors who play a crucial role in preparing teachers to accept and implement change (Heble, 2006; Oliva & Pawals, 2004; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). If change requires teachers to do things differently, then "dealing with change . . . is part of the supervisory process" (Beach & Reinhartz, 2000, cited in Kamindo, 2008, p. 51). Change usually comes with uncertainty and negative emotions such as fear and anxiety (Fullan, 2001). The supervisor's task then becomes one of communicating change in a way that teachers can understand (Kamindo, 2008).

Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) define instructional supervision as a process aimed at "helping increase the opportunity and capacity of teachers and schools to contribute more effectively towards students' academic success" (p. 6). Instructional supervisors help "teachers examine their instructional practices—what is working, what is not working, and how modifications can be made given the characteristics of students" (Zepeda, 2014, p. 11). In this sense, instructional supervisors can be seen as instructional leaders. Instructional leadership places teaching and learning "at the heart of leadership behaviours" (Brazer & Bauer, 2013, p. 647).

Conceptualized as instructional leadership, instructional supervision can be exercised at different levels by a variety of persons such as school principals, senior teachers, and regional-level (district) personnel (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). This contradicts the widespread view of instructional supervision as a process usually performed by a school administrator (see Glickman et al., 2007; Moswela, 2010; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Sullivan & Glanz, 2005; Wanzare, 2012; Zepeda, 2003). The literature on instructional leadership has documented a shift in its practice from being principal centered to a shared form of leadership involving stakeholders at various levels (Hallinger, 2010; Lashway, 2002; Lee et al., 2012). This links with the reconceptualization of school leadership as a distributed process (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006). What makes the role of regional supervisors more crucial is that today's complex schools make it quite hard for principals to focus on instructional matters. The problem is further compounded when we consider the scarcity of school leadership development programs focusing on instructional leadership (Brazer & Bauer, 2013).

Preparing Instructional Supervisors for Their Changing Roles

Although relevant literature stresses the crucial role instructional supervisors play in realizing educational change (e.g., Heble, 2006; Kamindo, 2008; Oliva & Pawals, 2004;

Palandra, 2010; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007), evidence suggests that supervisors may not be well prepared for their changing roles. For example, Daresh and Playko (2001) asserted that teacher supervisors seldom receive training to perform their roles. They pointed out that “the major concept of current supervisory behaviour is its undue emphasis on reactive performance . . . rather than through careful, logical planning and preparation” (p. 25). Bailey (2006) stated that very few language teacher supervisors have formal training, so they may work “at an instinctive level . . . or at the level of folk models about what supervisors do” (p. 73).

Hence, the need for continuous training for teacher supervisors is well established, especially when change is involved. Bouchamma and Michaud (2014) highlight the challenges associated with the implementation of change in schools, and suggest the need to equip instructional supervisors with the skills required for addressing those challenges. Oliva and Pawals (2004) explain that “Once appointed, the supervisor must not assume that the training period is over. As with the teachers he or she supervises, the supervisor must keep up with developments in the field of supervision” (p. 519). Lack of adequate training leads to supervisors losing direction as to how to perform instructional supervision, thus increasing “uncertainty that often accompanies role ambiguity” (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007, p. 52). For example, Heble (2006) reports that school supervisors faced difficulties in assuming their changing roles in special education as they did not have the background knowledge about disabilities and their impact on learning. Lack of guidance may also lead to teacher supervisors reverting to their own traditional experiences from when they were teachers. This forms the basis for what they encourage in their teachers (McQuarrie & Wood, 1991). One result is that they sometimes operate to reinforce traditional patterns of teacher-centered pedagogy, thus suppressing instructional strategies that could enhance student learning (B. Nicholson et al., 2005).

Glickman et al. (2007) identify three stages for effective instructional supervisors’ preparation: orientation, integration, and refinement. At the orientation stage, supervisors are exposed to learning that prepares them for the initial “real-world” application. Failure to take supervisors beyond this stage is one reason why many staff development programs are ineffective. The integration stage assists supervisors as they incorporate their previous learning into their supervisory activities. One aspect of this phase is the ability to adapt general learning to specific situations. In the third phase of learning, refinement helps supervisors’ transition from basic competence to expertise through continuous experimentation and reflection.

Empirical research has provided guidance on how to conduct effective professional development for instructional supervisors. Burns and Badiali (2015) recommend that supervisors’ professional development programs combine theoretical and practical knowledge. Joyce and Showers (1995) argue that effective professional development for

supervisors involves a sequence of relevant activities, including presentation of theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and application. They further contend that short-term conferences or workshops are seldom adequate because the importance of the application phase of training lies in the power of experiential learning. Similarly, Wiedmer (2007) stresses the need of aspiring instructional supervisors for experiential, field-based work as part of their preparation. She explains: “[t]heoretical and research-based practices are essential components to effective leadership in all professions; however, there must also be practicalities that are grounded in reality and application” (Weidmer, 2007, p. 17). In Barnes and colleagues’ (2010) study, the leaders valued a professional learning environment characterized by “activity-based processes” and interaction among trainees. Furthermore, Bouchamma and Michaud (2014) propose professional learning communities as an effective way to enhance supervisors’ in-service professional development. In terms of training content, Bredeson and Kose (2007) propose instruction, curriculum, and evaluation of students’ learning outcomes as areas of paramount importance. Ovando (2005) highlights instructional leaders’ need to learn how to provide constructive feedback to their teachers. Communication skills are particularly needed when change is involved because instructional supervisors will need to communicate the required policy changes to their teachers and assist them during implementation (Kamindo, 2008).

Relevant literature stresses the importance of evaluating professional development interventions offered to all educators, including instructional supervisors (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011; Guskey, 2002). As Coldwell and Simkins (2011) suggest, evaluation should not be limited to examining how the participants react to the overall training experience, but also measuring the effects of the provision on their learning and behavior. Moreover, besides formal professional development interventions such as workshops and seminars, evaluation should include other informal forms such as study groups, structured observations, peer coaching/mentoring, and action research (Guskey, 2002).

Method

Research Design

Given its exploratory nature, the study reported in this article employed a qualitative research design as it was deemed more suitable for eliciting participants’ perspectives. Qualitative research methods are particularly useful in studying lived experiences because they are centered on the research participants’ points of view (see Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In line with this design, individual, semistructured interviewing was chosen as a data collection method. A semistructured format was adopted because it enables the qualitative researcher to ask a set of predetermined open-ended questions related to the topic

under investigation, and at the same time provides opportunities for other subtopics to develop during the conversation (O'Leary, 2005).

Research Participants

The interviews were conducted with a sample of 25 regional supervisors (13 females and 12 males) from the Muscat Educational Supervision Directorate. Purposive sampling was employed (Patton, 2002), which means that the participants were chosen based on their suitability to provide the data relevant to answering the research questions. The sample included 19 teacher supervisors (those who centrally supervise teachers' work), four senior supervisors (those who supervise the work of teacher supervisors), and two acting senior supervisors (those who do the work of senior supervisors but are not formally appointed). Two senior executives from the directorate were also interviewed to add a different perspective to the investigation. All but three participants were Omanis. Years of experience ranged between 1 and 24 years. Areas of specialization included Islamic studies, Arabic, English, mathematics, social studies, and science. Most participants attended between one and three training courses provided by educational supervision specialists at the central training center in the Muscat Educational Supervision Directorate. These trainings took the form of short workshops, mostly related to pedagogy such as classroom management and teaching materials, supervisory competencies and roles, and more general areas such as communication and planning skills. Four participants received training related to the new basic education system. Only one participant attended the 1-year diploma degree in educational supervision offered by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

Data Collection

After obtaining necessary approvals from the concerned authorities in the Ministry of Education (MOE), 25 individual interviews were conducted by the first author in the directorate following arrangement with the research participants according to their circumstances. Interview time ranged between 60 and 90 min. Using a semistructured interview format proved useful as it made it possible to start with a set of predetermined questions and, at the same time, ask follow-up questions to address emerging issues (O'Leary, 2005). During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to reflect on their training and preparation for their new supervisory roles and practices following the introduction of the new reforms. All interviews were conducted in Arabic as it was more convenient for the participants. Following consent from the research participants, the interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed in preparation for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out by the first author and checked by the second author for accuracy and consistency. Analyzing qualitative data involves the process of organizing and providing explanations to make sense of the information and of what the researchers have learned (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis involved reading carefully through the transcripts, organizing, and coding the generated data. Coding was conducted inductively using the thematic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify emerging themes and patterns. This was achieved by generating categories (codes) and indexing chunks of data accordingly. Examples of the categories generated included "importance of training," "shortcomings of training," "preparation for the reforms," "positive perspectives," and "training novice supervisors." The process also included refining the list of categories to eliminate repetitions and redundancies and combining codes into relevant themes. Three main themes emerged from the data, namely, the need for supervision preparation, supervisors' perceptions of the preparation provided, and the perceived impact of supervision preparation on the supervisors' performance.

Findings

The data analysis provided interesting insights into instructional supervision preparation as perceived by Omani regional supervisors. In this section, we present these findings under three subtitles according to the three themes mentioned above.

The Need for Supervision Preparation

The Ministry of Education has put regional teacher supervisors in the front line in assuring actual implementation of the principles of the basic education system in the schools throughout the country (Ministry of Education, 2006). The interview data revealed participants' consensus over the importance and urge for the changes introduced in the educational system in general and in teacher supervision in particular. The senior directors specifically highlighted the efforts deployed by the Ministry of Education to facilitate the implementation of the reforms, including the promotion of high-quality supervisory practices. They also spoke of the key role regional supervisors play in the change process and their subsequent need for adequate preparation. One of them specifically referred to the diploma degree in supervision offered by SQU as a prerequisite for appointment in supervisory posts in schools.

The new policy that has been recently implemented regarding the training of our supervisors is that any teacher supervisor must get the Diploma degree in educational supervision from Sultan Qaboos University prior to appointment. This clearly

shows the consideration and emphasis that the ministry has placed on preparing and training novice supervisors in the principles, roles, and practices related to the profession.

All interviewees highly supported the idea that the training of teacher supervisors was crucial for successful change implementation. One senior supervisor stated,

Regional teacher supervisors play a dynamic role in the reform process, and therefore, they need to be trained . . . in these reforms before any other group of stakeholders . . . This importance stems from the fact that those supervisors are the ones who will initiate the implementation of the reform principles and policies in schools with teachers. They are the ones who determine whether or not the reform process is going to succeed. (Senior Supervisor I)

Another supervisor commented,

We need training all the time. You can see that our education system and policies are always changing. This with no doubt affects our supervisory work which is also moving from one theory or practice to another. We are the trainers of teachers, but if we are not prepared for this role, how can we perform it properly? (Supervisor O)

Supervisors' perception of the importance of supervisory training stemmed from their awareness of the crucial role they play in the professional development of their teachers and in preparing them for implementing the reforms.

If there is no training for teachers for the new policies and system, they are not going to implement the reforms in their real daily practices. Supervisors are the agents who carry the responsibility of preparing and training teachers. This is why our position in the process of educational reform is highly regarded and recognized by the Ministry of Education. (Supervisor O)

There was also evidence that the need for supervisory training was mainly justified by the introduction of the basic education system, which, according to one participant, necessitated the training of teacher supervisors to enable them to convey the new policies to teachers and schools. Another supervisor added,

The implementation of the basic education system has influenced the process of educational supervision. Previously, supervisors were not prepared for their new roles and practices in educational supervision. Now, supervisors need good training and preparation for the new proposed requirements and skills. If we don't get this training, we, for sure, cannot do what we are supposed to do with teachers. (Supervisor L)

In summary, the importance of supervision preparation was recognized by both senior directors and regional teacher supervisors. All felt the need for supervisory training as part of their preparation to implement the new changes associated with the introduction of the basic education system. The next

section addresses how the preparation provided was perceived by the supervisors.

Supervisors' Perceptions of the Preparation Provided

Research participants expressed different views concerning the preparation provided for regional teacher supervisors. The two senior directors from the MOE spoke at length of what they claimed to be "adequate" preparation provided for regional supervisors all over the country. One of them highlighted the variety of training programs covering the proposed supervisory roles and practices:

There are so many training workshops and programs that are provided for our supervisors to prepare and equip them for the new supervisory roles and practices . . . I, myself, participated in presenting a paper about the clinical supervision approach in one of those workshops last year. (Deputy director)

The other director added,

If any new educational policy or teaching innovation is proposed by the Ministry, regional teacher supervisors are prepared and trained in it before it is implemented in schools. Supervisors in turn, are required to train classroom teachers to enable them to adopt the new policy in their teaching practices. (Senior director)

Regarding the training of novice supervisors, she stated that they must attend a 1-week workshop on supervisory methods and practices at the beginning of their career as supervisors. When asked whether this was sufficient, she replied that it was "alright," but it did not provide participants with the real subject's supervisory practices as those are usually provided on the job. She maintained,

Those practices are met when those novice supervisors start their real supervision in schools. When they start their first visits to schools, they are usually accompanied by their senior supervisors or by other veteran teacher supervisors in the same department. (Senior director)

The two directors were generally positive about the training opportunities provided to the supervisors. They also seemed confident about the supervisors' readiness to embrace the new reforms, yet indicated that a few supervisors were still reluctant to cope with the changes. The training approach that they referred to was short workshops presented by academic staff from SQU, in addition to the diploma program offered to aspiring supervisors.

However, despite the optimistic picture drawn by the senior directors regarding supervision preparation, the responses of teacher supervisors told a different story. As far as exposition to supervisory training is concerned, some participants reported that they received training that was specifically linked to the introduction of the basic education system,

whereas many others stated that they have never been exposed to such training. Lack of training was highlighted by many participants as one of the challenges they encountered as they practiced supervision. This was particularly an issue for novice supervisors.

At the beginning of our supervision profession, I and other colleagues were thrown in at the deep end! We were not prepared for the new profession's roles and practices. No one even accompanied me in my first visit to school . . . I had no knowledge in supervision, but I learned [by myself] from the field! (Supervisor N)

The participants who received supervisory training expressed mixed views about their experience. Some commented on it positively, considering it as a good learning opportunity: "As I was in the first batch of the basic education system, I was lucky to get to attend many workshops in the new policies and methods, and be trained in many aspects of supervision," commented Senior Supervisor B. It was noticed that English teacher supervisors were generally more positive about their preparation than those of other subjects. Supervisor J mentioned, "All English language training programs are good and practical because they are usually given by English experts from the Ministry of Education. You cannot get this in other subject areas."

Many other supervisors, however, held negative views about their training experience. Some perceived it as insufficient compared with the scale of the changes introduced.

To me, the training workshops are not sufficient especially in a stage of radical change in our education system. Also, the duration of those workshops is usually very short and limited. There are many new policies and systems that are applied in the schools I supervise, but I have not been trained in them. (Supervisor N)

Within two years, I was provided with only one training workshop. We need more training and preparation especially as our curriculum is always in a continuous change. We sometimes do not know about a new policy until we visit one of our supervised schools and recognize that it is applying it. (Supervisor V)

Some participants were particularly concerned about the quality of training, especially in terms of its content and methods: "Those programs are very old-fashioned. They have nothing new and interesting. They all are the same; same topics, same way of lecturing, and same people," stated Supervisor V. Another supervisor was cynical about the replication of the same content over several years, commenting,

Many of those programs have not been changed for more than five years, although the field of education is in a continuous change. I remember once when we had a workshop and we were given papers related to the workshop, and then I discovered that my colleagues who attended a similar workshop five years ago received exactly the same papers! (Supervisor W)

Another significant weakness that was stressed by several participants was that most of the training programs and workshops were merely theoretical and lacked practical application: "Most of the training programs and workshops that are provided for supervisors are theoretical with no practice. I wished that they did not waste our time in attending those programs while we could have just read them on paper!" commented one supervisor. The same point was underscored by Supervisor W:

I attended a two-week workshop at the beginning of my profession as a supervisor. I think such workshops are generally idealistic with little connection to the reality in the educational field. They are mainly theoretical with only a small section of practice.

Another participant (Supervisor R) expressed her disappointment in the instructors themselves, describing them as "incapable and unable to teach properly."

Inconvenient timing of supervisory training was raised as another weakness by some participants. Supervisor M noted,

The time of the training is usually in September, that is the beginning of the academic year, when we are too busy preparing our schedules and organizing our annual and semestral plans. If we do not attend during September, we will miss out.

One final drawback centered on the absence of follow-up and assessment activities aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the training conducted. According Supervisor M,

There is no follow-up practices and assessment for those programs. We attend, listen all the time to the instructor . . . and when the workshop finishes, everyone goes back to their work. No one even asks us to reflect upon what we have gained from such programs.

When asked whether she was asked to fill in an evaluation form at the end of the workshop, she replied, "No. we don't do this. Very few instructors would request our feedback . . . Certainly they don't want to hear bad things from us!"

To sum up, the supervisors felt that the training they received for their new roles was inadequate for reasons to do with its frequency, scope, content, and methods of delivery. They expected more intensive training that is more practice oriented and whose content is relevant to their interests. Some also wanted to have the opportunity to share knowledge and skills with other colleagues in Oman and beyond through participation in conferences and symposia related to supervision.

The next section addresses how the perceived inadequate preparation has affected the supervisors' performance.

Impact of Inadequate Preparation on Supervisors' Performance

The research participants shared their views of the impact of what they perceived as inadequate preparation on their

practice of supervision. For example, some supervisors indicated that the theoretical nature of their training has affected the type of professional support they provided to their own teachers.

The training provided by the Ministry is mainly theoretical. And when we train teachers, we also focus on theories instead of practice . . . We have come to know later that those types of programs are not productive because our teachers cannot apply what they have learned. (Supervisor G)

One novice supervisor (Supervisor S) recalled her experience with supervision and explained how difficult it was for her to support her teachers without adequate preparation, noting,

When I started my supervision profession, I was required to train classroom teachers in some teaching aspects, but I had no preparation in training teachers. I did not know how to train teachers. I remember the very difficult times I went through.

Evidence also indicated that inadequate preparation has affected the supervisors' understanding of their expected roles under the new reforms. One supervisor stated,

Many of us keep doing the same traditional practices that we used to do before the reforms. Many of us do not know that the roles of supervisors are not limited to evaluating teachers' performance, but instead they involve students' performance and achievement, the curriculum . . . (Supervisor V)

Another participant had a particular concern about the supervisor's role in catering for students' learning needs. He indicated that although the current reforms stress the student as the heart of the supervision process, the actual practices of supervisors do not reflect such emphasis. According to him, this has been the result of what he considered inadequate preparation.

Another interesting point raised by some supervisors centered on their perception that their own level of professional growth and performance was low compared with that of their teachers. They attributed this to inadequate preparation. The two following statements highlight this point:

Sometimes, we supervise schools where new educational policies are implemented, but we have no idea or knowledge about those policies. How can we supervise teachers in doing something they know about much better than we do? It's funny, isn't it? (Supervisor S)

We lack a lot of training, especially in the new policies and projects that are being implemented . . . It happened to me twice when I came to know that my teachers were implementing a new project in physics and I had no prior knowledge or information about it. (Supervisor D)

However, a different perspective provided by a few other supervisors suggested that the lack of formal training should

not necessarily have a significant negative impact on the supervisors' professional growth as there are other ways in which they may attain professional development. For example, one supervisor noted that although he did not receive any training from the MOE, it did not hinder him from learning through interaction with his senior supervisor.

I did not attend a particular training for preparing me as a supervisor. However, at the beginning of my supervision profession, I was accompanied by my senior supervisor for three days to learn from him how to conduct supervisory visits and observations in schools. Senior and teacher supervisors are always helping each other. We exchange our experiences and information in our meetings. (Supervisor Y)

Another example was given by a female supervisor:

I am so happy and thankful to my senior supervisor because she has given me and my colleagues many opportunities for learning and development. She always encourages us to read and search for new knowledge and practices in supervision and teaching. (Supervisor W)

The two above statements illustrate the role that learning on the job can play in fostering professional growth in the absence of organized training (Bouchamma & Michaud, 2014; S. Nicholson & Reifel, 2011). The comments also stress the value of collaboration among staff members in supporting each other's learning (Levine & Marcus, 2010).

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study explored the perceptions of teacher supervisors about their preparation for educational change, drawing on qualitative data collected from a sample of regional supervisors located in the Muscat Educational Supervision Directorate in Oman. The study's findings support previous research conducted in other contexts. Specifically, evidence from this study supports the international literature regarding the importance of training for instructional supervisors, especially in times of educational change (e.g., Bouchamma & Michaud, 2014; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Oliva & Pawals, 2004; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007); the need to consider the relevance of the content and delivery methods when designing supervisory training (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hunzicker, 2011; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012); as well as the importance of training evaluation and follow-up (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011; Guskey, 2002). The findings also align with previous research highlighting the ineffective nature of instructional supervision in Oman (see Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2019; Atari et al., 2005; World Bank, 2013). They may help explain the gap between the supervisors' awareness and endorsement of the current educational changes and their actual supervisory practices (see Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2019).

The findings demonstrated that despite the emphasis placed on the importance of supervisory training as suggested by

the MOE senior directors, the supervisors' responses indicated that the level of preparation they had received did not meet their expectations. In terms of frequency, there were concerns about the amount of training provided as it was perceived by many participants (especially novice supervisors) as insufficient in comparison with their training needs under the reforms. These concerns are understandable because in a context characterized by processes of restructuring and reculturing school organizations, sufficient and constant training and development programs are necessary to enable the concerned stakeholders to actualize these changes in their real professional practices (Fullan, 2005). In countries where policy changes were introduced, instructional supervisors played a crucial role in facilitating change implementation (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Palandra, 2010), which renders their preparation for change particularly important. This is especially true for regional supervisors in Oman who are regarded by the MOE as the guardians of the implementation of the new policies at the school and classroom levels (Ministry of Education, 2006; Rassekh, 2004). Leaving them untrained felt like throwing them "in the deep end" as expressed by one participant. This sink-or-swim approach to staff development has been criticized by Waite (1995) because it leaves teacher supervisors without guidance on how to practice supervision (cited in Bouchamma & Michaud, 2014).

On a qualitative level, the participants identified factors that seemed to have affected the quality of the provision. These included irrelevant content and methods, in addition to lack of follow-up and evaluation. The literature on leadership preparation (e.g., Bush, 2012; McCarthy, 2015) and teachers' professional development (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hunzicker, 2011; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012) is clear about the importance of taking into consideration the suitability of the content and delivery methods of preparation programs to increase their effectiveness. The supervisors seemed more interested in practical training that provided "hands-on" guidance on how to perform teacher supervision under the new reforms. The training programs provided were short theoretical conferences, lectures, or workshops with little practical orientation. As such, the current provision ignores the characteristics of effective professional development outlined in the relevant literature such as combining theoretical and practical aspects (Burns & Badiali, 2015), being collaborative and ongoing (Hunzicker, 2011; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012), supporting active learning and offering reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), and providing job-embedded learning opportunities (Zepeda, 2011). It also clearly fails to meet the three stages of supervisors' learning (orientation, integration, and refinement) proposed by Glickman et al. (2007) for effective supervisory training.

Supervisors' challenges were compounded by the lack of feedback and evaluation of the training offered. The literature on professional development stresses the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of professional development programs (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011; Guskey, 2002). It is worth noting that the observation about lack of evaluation was made by only one participant as part of her comment on her training

experience, and not in response to a direct question about evaluation. However, the observation is supported by evidence from recent reviews suggesting the scarcity of research focused on evaluating leadership preparation programs, not only in Oman but also in the Arab region at large (see Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019).

The findings also showed that the lack of adequate preparation has affected the supervisors' practice of supervision. This lends support to previous research carried out in other international contexts (e.g., Bailey, 2006; Daresh & Playko, 2001; Heble, 2006; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). For example, Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) presented a case where department chairs struggled while supervising their teachers as they lacked formal preparation for their supervisory roles. In our study, the lack of training led to some supervisors lacking confidence as they felt less qualified than their teachers. Oliva and Pawals (2004) comment on this issue: "Nothing can be more incongruous in a school system than to see a faculty experiencing professional growth while the supervisory staff remains stagnant" (p. 519).

Nevertheless, it was positive to find some participants trying to compensate for their lack of organized training by learning on the job through interaction with their senior supervisors. In situations where staff are thrown into the field without appropriate training, learning on the job can play a crucial role in staff professional development (Bouchamma & Michaud, 2014; S. Nicholson & Reifel, 2011). S. Nicholson and Reifel (2011) argued that professional development cannot be limited to organized training, but includes interactions with peers in the workplace. Their study found that a group of teachers without adequate preparation were able to overcome the challenges by learning from one another. Moreover, Bouchamma and Michaud (2014) described how a group of supervisors attained on-the-job training by working directly with their own teachers. The study also demonstrated how a community of practice setting enabled those supervisors to maximize their learning experience and enhance their supervisory practices. Some of our participants were aware of the importance of direct interactions with their seniors and valued them as learning opportunities. This is a healthy practice that should be encouraged in Omani schools.

Recommendations

We wish to conclude this article by providing some recommendations designed to improve supervisory training in Oman. Given that our participants' complaints about the lack of supervisory training specifically focused on the new reforms, our main recommendation concerns the need to adjust current provision to the challenges inherent in change implementation. We believe that in the current context of educational change, it is imperative that supervisors' training programs in the country have a clear focus on the understanding of change and its implications for school leaders, teachers, and students. Zepeda (2014) asserts the challenging nature of change and argues that "for instructional leaders to assist

teachers with the many challenges associated with meeting the needs of students and the school, an understanding of change is necessary” (p. 10). Some of our participants felt unconfident about their ability to implement the proposed changes due to lack of adequate training. We are optimistic that the designers of supervisors’ professional development programs will take this into account when designing future interventions.

In response to participants’ concerns about the mismatch between the training offered and their actual interests, our second recommendation centers on the importance of aligning these preparation programs with the individual needs of supervisors, which requires seeking their feedback on their professional development requirements. An effective professional development provision is one that follows an “interest-driven design” to ensure fulfillment of the participants’ needs (Lutrick & Szabo, 2012). We also recommend that supervisory training providers in Oman benefit from international experiences in the field, while also considering their fit for the local context (see Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). We argue that exposure to examples of good practice would benefit existing preparation programs and enhance their effectiveness.

Our final recommendation focuses on the need for supervisory training to be grounded in a solid, culturally appropriate knowledge base on leadership preparation. Currently, this knowledge base is nonexistent, or at best immature (Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). This leaves educational leadership scholars in Oman with the challenge to develop this knowledge base and make it available for those responsible for preparing instructional leaders to inform their future preparation programs.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Waheed Hammad  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4388-7230>

References

- Al-Hammami, H. (2001). *Curricular development in Oman and the challenges of the twenty-first century* [Paper presentation]. Management of Curriculum Change and Adaptation in the Gulf Region. http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/archive/curriculum/GulfStatesProjectsPdf/omanrep.pdf
- Al-Kiyumi, A., & Hammad, W. (2019). Instructional supervision in the Sultanate of Oman: Shifting roles and practices in a stage of educational reform. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 22(1), 1–13.
- Atari, A., Issan, S., & Jum’a, N. (2005). *Instructional supervision: Theoretical orientations and practical applications*. Al-Falah Library for Publication and Distribution (in Arabic).
- Bailey, K. (2006). *Language teacher supervision: A case-based approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barnes, C. A., Camburn, E., Sanders, B. R., & Sebastian, J. (2010). Developing instructional leaders: Using mixed methods to explore the black box of planned change in principals’ professional practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(2), 241–279.
- Beach, D. M., & Reinhardz, J. (2000). *Supervisory leadership: Focus on instruction*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bouchamma, Y., & Michaud, C. (2014). Professional development of supervisors through professional learning communities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 17(1), 62–82.
- Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brazer, S. D., & Bauer, S. C. (2013). Preparing instructional leaders: A model. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(4), 645–684.
- Bredeson, P. V., & Kose, B. W. (2007). Responding to the education reform agenda: A study of school superintendents’ instructional leadership. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 15, 2–24.
- Burns, R. W., & Badiali, B. J. (2015). When supervision is conflated with evaluation: Teacher candidates’ perceptions of their novice supervisor. *Action in Teacher Education*, 37(4), 418–437.
- Bush, T. (2012). International perspectives on leadership development: Making a difference. *Professional Development in Education*, 38(4), 663–678.
- Coldwell, M., & Simkins, T. (2011). Level models of continuing professional development evaluation: A grounded review and critique. *Professional Development in Education*, 37(1), 143–157.
- Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design (international student edition): Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daresh, J., & Playko, M. (2001). *Supervision as proactive leadership* (3rd ed.). Waveland Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (2005). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- The Education Council. (2018). *The national strategy for education 2040*. Secretariat General of the Education Council.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership & sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (2014). *Teacher development and educational change*. Falmer Press.
- Glickman, C., Gordon, S., & Ross-Gordon, J. (2007). *SuperVision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach* (7th ed.). Pearson Allyn & Bacon.
- Gronn, P. (2003). *The new work of educational leaders: Changing leadership practice in an era of school reform*. Sage.
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership*, 59(6), 45–51.
- Hallinger, P. (2010). Developing instructional leadership. In B. Davies & M. Brundrett (Eds.), *Developing successful leadership* (pp. 61–76). Springer.
- Hallinger, P., & Hammad, W. (2019). Knowledge production on educational leadership and management in Arab societies: A systematic review of research. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(1), 20–36.

- Hammad, W., & Hallinger, P. (2017). A systematic review of conceptual models and methods used in research on educational leadership and management in Arab societies. *School Leadership & Management, 37*(5), 434–456.
- Heble, G. (2006). *A model of expert instructional supervision: A descriptive cross case study* (Unpublished Ed. D.), Wilmington College, Delaware.
- Hunzicker, J. (2011). Effective professional development for teachers: A checklist. *Professional Development in Education, 37*(2), 177–179.
- International Bureau of Education. (2011). *Oman country profile*. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995). *Student achievement through staff development: Fundamentals of school renewal* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Kalule, L., & Bouchamma, Y. (2013). Supervisors' perceptions of instructional supervision. *ISEA, 41*, 89–104.
- Kamindo, C. M. (2008). *Instructional supervision in an era of change: Policy and practice in primary education in Kenya* [Doctoral dissertation]. Durham University.
- Karami-Akkary, R., & Hammad, W. (2019). The knowledge base on educational leadership and management in Arab countries: Its current state and its implications for leadership development. In E. A. Samier & E. S. ElKaleh (Eds.), *Teaching educational leadership in Muslim countries* (pp. 77–92). Springer.
- Lashway, L. (2002). Developing Instructional Leaders. *ERIC Digest, 1*–7.
- Lee, M., Hallinger, P., & Walker, A. (2012). A distributed perspective on instructional leadership in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 48*(4), 664–698.
- Levine, T. H., & Marcus, A. S. (2010). How the structure and focus of teachers' collaborative activities facilitate and constrain teacher learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(3), 389–398.
- Lutrick, E., & Szabo, S. (2012). Instructional leaders' beliefs about effective professional development. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, 78*(3), 6–12.
- McQuarrie, F., Jr., & Wood, F. (1991). Supervision, staff development, and evaluation connections. *Theory into Practice, 30*(2), 91–96.
- Ministry of Education. (2004). *National report on quality education in Oman*. http://www.international.ac.uk/resources/oman_part_1.pdf
- Ministry of Education. (2006). *Educational supervision in Oman*. Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman.
- Ministry of Education. (2015). *Supervisory posts guide*. General Directorate of Educational Supervision, Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman.
- Ministry of Education. (2018). *The specialized centre for professional training of teachers' guide*. Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman.
- Moswela, B. (2010). Instructional supervision in Botswana secondary schools: An investigation. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 38*(1), 71–87.
- Nicholson, B., Harris-John, M., & Schimmel, C. (2005). *Professional development for principals in the accountability era: An examination of four states' professional development practices*. Appalachian Educational Laboratory.
- Nicholson, S., & Reifel, S. (2011). Sink or swim: Child care teachers' perceptions of entry training experiences. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 32*(1), 5–25.
- O'Leary, Z. (2005). *Researching real-world problems: A guide to methods of inquiry*. Sage.
- Oliva, P. F., & Pawals, G. (2004). *Supervision for today's schools* (7th ed.). John Wiley.
- Ovando, M. N. (2005). Building instructional leaders' capacity to deliver constructive feedback to teachers. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education, 18*(3), 171–183.
- Palandra, M. (2010). The role of instructional supervision in district-wide reform. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 13*(2), 221–234.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rassekh, S. (2004). *Education as a motor for development: Recent education reforms in Oman with particular reference to the status of women and girls*. http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/archive/publications/free_publications/IBE_en.pdf
- Reiman, A., & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1998). *Mentoring and supervision for teacher development*. Longman.
- Sergiovanni, T., & Starratt, R. (2007). *Supervision: A redefinition* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Spillane, J. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- Sullivan, S., & Glanz, J. (2005). *Supervision that improves teaching: Strategies and techniques* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press.
- Tyagi, R. S. (2010). School-based instructional supervision and the effective professional development of teachers. *Compare, 40*(1), 111–125.
- Waite, D. (1995). *Rethinking instructional supervision: Notes on its language and culture*. Falmer Press.
- Wanzare, Z. (2012). Instructional supervision in public secondary schools in Kenya. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(2), 188–216.
- Wiedmer, T. L. (2007). Highly qualified instructional supervisors: A case for standards-driven and experiential learning. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, 74*(1), 17–24.
- Wiseman, A., Alromi, N., & Alshumrani, S. (2014). *Education for a knowledge society in Arabian Gulf countries*. Emerald.
- World Bank. (2013). *Education in Oman: The drive for quality (Vol. 2): Main report (English)*. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/280091468098656732/Main-report>
- Zahlan, R. (2017). *The making of the modern Gulf states: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman*. Routledge.
- Zepeda, S. (2003). *Instructional supervision: Applying tools and concepts*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Zepeda, S. J. (2011). Instructional supervision, coherence, and job-embedded learning. In T. Townsend & J. MacBeath (Eds.), *International handbook of leadership for learning* (pp. 741–756). Springer.
- Zepeda, S. J. (2014). *The principal as instructional leader: A handbook for supervisors*. Routledge.
- Zepeda, S. J. (2016). *Instructional supervision: Applying tools and concepts* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zepeda, S. J., & Kruskamp, B. (2007). High school department chairs—Perspectives on instructional supervision. *The High School Journal, 90*(4), 44–54.