World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews
eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr
Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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APPLICATION OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE IN THE EVALUATION OF A CAPACITY-BUILDING SEMINAR FOR PEDAGOGICAL SUPERVISORS OF SPORTS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN BRAZZAVILLE, REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2026, 32(01), 1845–1853

Publication history: Received on 25 August 2026; revised on 24 October 2026; accepted on 26 October 2026

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2026.32.1.2530

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the evaluative perceptions of pedagogical supervisors regarding a capacity-building seminar on Mosston and Ashworth's teaching styles. Using Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (CIT), the research explores how supervisors interpret the relevance, effectiveness, and limitations of the training, and how these perceptions inform their supervisory practices. A qualitative design was adopted, based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 150 inspectors and pedagogical advisors. Data were analyzed through Bardin's content analysis, following a five-step process of incident identification, floating reading, coding, categorization, and theorization.

Findings indicate that the seminar strengthened supervisors' pedagogical supervision skills, clarified the five reproductive and six productive teaching styles of Mosston and Ashworth, and fostered the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within sector inspections. Positive incidents highlight the value of interactive pedagogy, collaborative workshops, and structured documentation for enhancing professional learning. Negative incidents reveal material and organizational constraints - such as inadequate facilities, limited audiovisual resources, and insufficient observation tools - that hindered the full effectiveness of the training.

Overall, the study demonstrates the methodological utility of CIT for evaluating professional development initiatives in PES and underscores the importance of reflective, collaborative structures to support supervisory practice. The results offer insights for improving future training programs and strengthening pedagogical supervision systems in African educational contexts.

Keywords: Physical Education and Sport; Pedagogical Supervisors; Critical Incident Technique; Professional Development; Teaching Styles; Qualitative Research; Brazzaville.

1 INTRODUCTION

Capacity building, a form of continuing education for educational supervisors, is an undisputed lever for improving the quality of educational supervision. However, the evaluation of training programs often remains focused on primarily quantitative indicators, without providing sufficient insight into the concrete situations that either promote or, conversely, hinder the effective development of professional competencies. From this perspective, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), developed by Flanagan (1954), is a particularly relevant methodological approach for gathering significant events experienced by participants and analyzing their influence on the learning outcomes of a capacity-building program.

This study aims to identify the evaluative perceptions and assessments expressed regarding a training seminar for physical education (PE) instructional supervisors (educational inspectors and educational advisors) in sports and physical education in the city of Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. More specifically, the goal is to highlight critical incidents, perceived as positive or negative by the participants, in order to better understand the mechanisms that contribute to the effectiveness of the training program and, consequently, to identify avenues for improvement for future training sessions.

1.1 Research Question

Continuing education for educational supervisors is an essential tool for updating and developing professional competencies (Moussavou, 2025). In the Republic of the Congo, training seminars are regularly organized to strengthen the professional capacities of educational supervisors in the performance of their duties. However, the evaluation of these seminars most often relies on traditional tools such as questionnaires, interviews, and evaluation rubrics, whose criteria are predetermined. Although these tools provide an overview of participants' perceptions, they do not always allow for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, the difficulties they encountered, the learning that was actually consolidated, or the observable changes in professional practices.

Furthermore, these evaluative approaches generally devote limited attention to analyzing the concrete situations participants face in the field. This methodological shortcoming tends to reduce evaluation to a mere satisfaction survey, without clearly determining the actual impact of the training, its effects on skill development, and the improvements needed for future seminars. In this context, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) emerges as a particularly relevant data-collection tool for enriching the evaluation of training programs. By inviting participants to describe and analyze significant professional situations, this technique would help bring to light their perceptions, the difficulties they face, the behaviors they adopt, the skills gained from the training, as well as any unmet needs. It thus offers a more qualitative, reflective perspective centered on the participants' professional experiences, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of the training seminars.

The research questions are: 1) How does ICT improve the evaluation of a professional training seminar for physical education instructional supervisors in Brazzaville? 2) What types of information can ICT be used to collect from physical education instructional supervisors? 3) How does the information collected contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the effects of the training program?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The critical incident method has its roots in industrial psychology. Developed as part of the U.S. Air Force's Aviation Psychology Program, it was initially used for the selection and training of flight crews (Bradbury-Jones and Tranter, 2008; Leclerc et al., 2010; Lister and Crisp, 2007; Neale and Kies, 2000) . In 1954, Flanagan proposed a foundational definition, describing the critical incident technique as a set of procedures for the direct observation of behavior aimed at preventing or resolving practical problems. He defined an incident as an observable human activity that is sufficiently comprehensive to allow for inferences and predictions regarding the individual performing the action (Flanagan, 1954). To be considered "critical," an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose of the action is clearly identifiable and where the consequences of that action are sufficiently evident (Flanagan, 1954).

Contemporary research, however, has profoundly transformed the use of this method. Butterfield et al. (2005) show that recent applications in the humanities differ markedly from Flanagan's early work. According to Leclerc et al. (2010), the initial applications aimed to determine the requirements of a job function or to identify risk factors in order to propose corrective measures. Rooted in the dominant positivist paradigm, these studies relied on the observation of identifiable and reproducible situations, as well as on the identification of factors that could be directly manipulated.

Today, the method is no longer used to objectively describe or modify behavior, but rather to understand psychosocial constructs embedded in the subjective and intersubjective experiences of individuals (Butterfield et al., 2005). It has thus been used in intercultural training for social workers (Cohen-Emerique, 1984), in management training (Jolly, 2004), to analyze managers' beliefs about their roles (Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002), to study the experience of unemployment (Borgen et al., 1990), to support reflective learning among nurses based on their clinical experience (Parker et al., 1995), and to examine stressful situations at work and coping strategies (O'Driscoll and Cooper, 1996). Pourtois and Desmet (2007) also emphasize that the method is particularly well-suited to studying social representations and uncovering the implicit rules of everyday life. It is also used in collaborative research projects and in the supervision of students in the field of career counseling (Leclerc et al., 2010).

In the field of training educational supervisors, Leclerc et al. (2010) define the critical incident as an event that may seem trivial at first glance but proves to be significant for the subject and for the people with whom they interact in their professional setting. Generally occurring within a delicate situation, this event is perceived as having the potential to alter the course of events. Williaume (2025) clarifies that a critical incident can be explicit, such as a conflict, or implicit, such as a silence, and that it occurs within the group of trainees, causing a shift from the framework initially planned by the trainer. The trainer may then be led to adjust or innovate in their intervention strategies. A critical incident can thus be positive or negative; it must be explainable by the subject. These incidents serve as landmarks in one's professional history: they give meaning to the emergence of new representations, new strategies, or new behaviors, and can act as catalysts for practical transformations.

Leclerc et al. (2010) identify three criteria for selecting critical incidents:

1.2.1 Incidents must describe actual, lived experiences rather than imagined ones.

This criterion ensures the plausibility, depth, and richness of the situations described, while also ensuring that the concrete conditions of work are taken into account. It fosters individuals' subjective and intersubjective engagement by drawing on their feelings, emotions, conscious and unconscious intentions, values, and beliefs.

1.2.2 Incidents must be time-bound.

This requirement allows the analysis to focus on the elements deemed essential by the person recounting the incident, to maintain the emotional or existential tension that stimulates expression, and to prevent the attention from wandering.

1.2.3 Incidents must unfold within an interaction.

Interaction is a prime setting for the emergence of professional dilemmas and controversies in the helping professions. It is through their relationships with others that professionals reveal themselves and establish their positions; the analysis of these interactions opens up unique perspectives for reflection and the transformation of professional practices.

2 METHODS

2.1 The Epistemological Stance

We have prioritized a qualitative approach, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of the social and individual processes underlying professional choices, decisions, and practices. Qualitative studies indeed offer privileged access to information capable of fostering a genuine capacity for foresight by shedding light on emerging dynamics and the rationales for actors' actions (Bancketh, 2025).

From this perspective, Wahnich (2006) emphasizes that qualitative approaches, through sociological analysis, make it possible to understand the mechanisms of opinion formation: they allow us to examine why individuals adopt certain positions rather than others, why they do or do not engage in certain practices, and how they interpret and construct their social environment.

Thus, the qualitative approach appears particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of educational supervisors, the meanings they attribute to the professional situations they encounter, and any changes in their practices following a training program.

2.2 Data Collection Strategy

2.2.1 Participants

The study participants were educational supervisors (educational advisors and educational inspectors). One hundred fifty (150) educational supervisors (women n = 70 and men n = 80) voluntarily participated in the capacity-building seminar at the invitation of the Departmental Director of Physical Education and Sports.

2.2.2 The Data Collection Tool

A critical incident questionnaire consisting of two open-ended questions was used. For positive incidents, participants were asked the following question: *"During this training seminar, describe an event that you consider positive (or that you liked the most) and explain why."* For negative incidents, participants were asked to answer the following question*: "During this training seminar, please describe one event that you consider negative (or that you disliked the most) and explain why"*

This critical incident questionnaire invited instructional supervisors to write down the positive critical incidents on one side of a sheet of paper and the negative critical incidents on the other, in detail. This approach encouraged participants to recall both the positive and negative experiences they had during the training seminar. The collection of this information was intended to promote a fact-based reflection process among supervisors and to provide facilitators with essential insights to draw upon during future training sessions.

2.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted by having participants fill out a form. Participants were asked to list two critical incidents on a single sheet of paper: a positive critical incident on the left side and a negative critical incident on the right side of the same sheet. Upon completion of the critical incident questionnaire, the forms were collected on the same day for analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

The analysis strategy used is based on the classic content analysis process as described by Bardin (2013). This process unfolded in five successive stages:

- Initial grouping of incidents

First, all collected incidents were classified into two broad categories, distinguishing incidents perceived as positive from those considered negative.

- Free-form reading

An exploratory, non-directive reading was then conducted for each category to capture initial impressions, recurring themes, and the general tone of the narratives.

- Content coding

Each incident underwent systematic coding to identify relevant units of meaning and significant elements related to the experiences reported by the participants. All verbatim transcripts were coded inductively, without attempting to qualify or interpret the participants' statements.

- Categorization of Codes

Codes were then grouped into thematic categories within each of the two broad incident categories, allowing us to structure the emerging dimensions and identify interpretive patterns.

- Theorization

Finally, a theorization process was conducted to link the resulting categories to existing conceptual frameworks, identify explanatory mechanisms, and propose interpretive avenues likely to shed light on the effects of the training program. In fact, this step consisted of a meticulous and exhaustive effort to account for the "multidimensionality" and "multicausality" of the various reasons cited by the participants. The goal was to develop a preliminary theoretical framework or description of the participants' thinking.

3 RESULTS

All of the critical incidents reported by the participants focused both on the organizational aspects of the training and on the quality of its content.

3.1 Critical incidents related to the format of the training

3.1.1 Positive critical incidents related to the format of the training

This section analyzes the positive critical incidents associated with the format of the training, as identified through content analysis. This analysis reveals that several elements related to the format of the training were perceived as particularly satisfactory by the participants. These elements concern both the facilitation of the sessions and the participants' engagement, as well as the quality of the learning environment.

3.1.1.1 The facilitator

In general, participants highlight the quality of the presentations and the relevance of the answers provided by the facilitators. They highlight the clarity with which knowledge was conveyed, as well as the value of the hands-on workshops, which were seen as an essential complement to the theoretical presentations.

The following verbatim quotes illustrate these assessments:

- *"The hands-on workshop activities and the discussions helped us gain a clear understanding."*
- *"Knowledge was conveyed effectively."*
- *"What I particularly liked was the workshop activities and the clarity of the explanations."*

3.1.1.2 Participants

Participants felt that the seminar provided a valuable space for reflection and training, contributing significantly to strengthening their skills in educational supervision.

The following verbatim quotes reflect this perception:

- *"This seminar was beneficial to me because it allowed me to master pedagogical tools related to supervision."*
- *"I appreciated this seminar because it strengthened my abilities for my future supervision."*

3.1.1.3 Positive aspects related to the learning environment

Study participants unanimously stated that the discussions held during the workshops, as well as the theoretical presentation on teaching styles, were particularly constructive. These elements contributed to a better understanding of the content and to improved pedagogical supervision practices.

3.1.1.4 The following verbatim quotes illustrate these assessments:

- *"I am satisfied with the content of this seminar, which allowed me to discover Mosston and Ashworth's eleven teaching styles in very accessible language."*
- *"The quality of the discussions enabled us to improve the conditions for pedagogical supervision in Congo-Brazzaville."*

3.1.2 Negative Critical Incidents Related to the Format of the Training

The analysis of negative critical incidents highlights several shortcomings related to the organization, material conditions, and environment of the training. According to the participants, these factors hindered the quality of learning and limited the effectiveness of the training program.

3.1.2.1 The facilitator

All participants noted the absence of observation sheets related to Mosston and Ashworth's eleven teaching styles—which are essential for understanding and mastering these teaching styles—during the seminar. This shortcoming was perceived as a major obstacle to putting the covered content into practice.

The following verbatim quotes illustrate this concern:

- "The fact that there were no observation sheets was a shortcoming."
- "The absence of an observation sheet is an obstacle to our training. "

3.1.2.2 The Human Environment

Participants unanimously indicated that the delay that accumulated on the first day of the seminar, as well as the lack of audiovisual aids (particularly slide projections), had a negative impact on the training dynamics. These shortcomings were perceived as obstacles to understanding and engagement.

3.1.2.3 The following excerpts highlight this perspective:

- *"The lack of a projector for an event of this scale hindered learning."*
- *"What I didn't like was that not all the necessary conditions were in place for this seminar: no backup generator had been provided. "*

3.1.2.4 The physical environment

Participants unanimously emphasized that the lack of an adequate sound system and the unsuitability of the room—particularly the echoes that interfered with audibility—were major obstacles to the smooth running of the seminar. These factors significantly limited the quality of discussions and the transfer of knowledge.

3.1.2.5 The following excerpts reflect these concerns:

- *"The lack of electricity stifled the discussions we should have had with the speaker."*
- *"Improve the quality of communication and the sound system, and prepare teaching materials in advance."*
- *"No precautions were taken regarding the power supply, even though the city experiences power outages; as a result, the slides could not be displayed." "*

3.1.2.6 Planning of Material and Physical Resources

Several organizational shortcomings were noted, such as the brevity of the training, the limited number of handouts, the absence of documentation from INRAP, time management deemed inefficient, repeated schedule changes, lack of Internet access, and failure to publicize the training program.

The following excerpts from the verbatim transcripts illustrate these concerns:

- *"Lack of a projector for visual aids, which would have facilitated understanding."*
- *"The seminar was poorly organized: the sound system was inadequate, and the schedule was not followed"*
- *"The lack of certain materials prevented us from properly following some of the presentations."*
- *"The timing of the training was inappropriate due to travel difficulties."*
- *"The logistics were insufficient and the time allotted was too short."*

3.2 Critical Incidents Related to the Training Content

3.2.1 Positive Critical Incidents

An analysis of the positive critical incidents related to the training content highlights two main dimensions: 1) understanding the training objective; 2) the quality of the resources used to support learning.

3.2.1.1 Positive aspects related to the training content

Participants unanimously stated that they understood the five teaching styles in the "reproducer" category as well as the six teaching styles in the "producer" category. Several of them indicated that, thanks to the seminar, they had discovered the structure of these two categories, which they had previously applied intuitively without fully grasping the theoretical foundations.

3.2.1.2 The following quotes illustrate these assessments:

- "*Discovering the two categories we've been using without realizing it. This seminar has really enlightened us"*
- "*Through this capacity-building seminar, I discovered the categories, which are: the reproducer with 5 styles and the producer with 6 styles*"

3.2.1.3 Positive aspects related to resources

Participants collectively stated that they appreciated the wealth of materials made available to them, as well as the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within each sectoral physical education (PE) inspectorate. They emphasized that these initiatives provide essential support for continuous professional development and for improving teaching practices.

3.2.1.4 The following verbatim quotes illustrate these assessments:

- "*The establishment of professional learning communities in each sectoral inspectorate in Brazzaville*"
- *"The explanations regarding the content of the documents received, as well as the answers provided to the participants' questions, were satisfactory"*
- *"The presentation and the documents were very interesting, and they allowed us to gain more knowledge in the field of teaching, particularly regarding the different categories of teaching styles"*

4 DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to identify the evaluative perceptions and assessments regarding a training seminar for physical education and sports supervisors in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. To this end, the critical incident technique was used as the primary data collection tool, allowing for the identification of experiences deemed significant by the participants.

The results regarding pedagogical and professional learning outcomes show that positive critical incidents are primarily associated with the clarity of the presentations and the relevance of the hands-on workshops. The participants unanimously highlighted the quality of the practical workshops, discussions, and role-playing exercises, thereby confirming that active and collaborative learning methods promote better mastery of the content than lectures alone, in line with Kolb's (1984) work on experiential learning.

Furthermore, participants report having discovered or gained a clearer understanding of Mosston and Ashworth's teaching styles, as well as their classification into two broad categories: "reproductive" and "productive" teaching styles. This realization reflects a process of conceptualization that allows for a better understanding of practices that had previously been employed intuitively. This observation aligns with the work of Mosston & Ashworth (2008), who emphasize the importance of formalizing and understanding teaching styles to improve the quality of instructional practice.

Furthermore, the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) represents a foundational achievement. As Wenger (1998) points out, communities of practice foster collective learning, the sharing of knowledge, and continuous professional development. From this perspective, the establishment of CAPs undoubtedly serves as a means to strengthen pedagogical supervision and support for teachers within sectoral inspectorates.

Positive critical incidents also reveal that the interactive teaching methods used during the seminar fostered a better grasp of the subject matter. Participants highlighted the quality of the hands-on workshops, the clarity of the explanations, and the richness of the discussions—elements that contributed to a deeper understanding of the content. This finding aligns with the work of Magendie (2019), who emphasizes that pedagogical supervision in physical education relies on the application of professional frameworks and on trainers' ability to present concrete situations that promote learning.

However, several limitations were identified. The brevity of the training and time management deemed inefficient reduced the seminar's overall impact. As Jombe and Pretorius (2025) demonstrate, critical incidents frequently highlight organizational shortcomings that may hinder the implementation of pedagogical objectives. Furthermore, the critical incident technique stimulates reflection among participants and provides the facilitator with valuable data on their perceptions of missing situations (Amade-Escot, 2005). A critical incident, in fact, refers to a specific, significant, and often unforeseen event (Nadeau et al., 2020). According to these authors, using this technique offers two major advantages: 1) it systematizes the reflective process among participants, and 2) it allows the facilitator to gain insight into participants' reasoning in order to better understand their decisions and needs. For the facilitator, this method thus serves as a support tool for identifying potential solutions, initiating discussions to clarify issues, and designing targeted learning scenarios for future training sessions.

With regard to negative critical incidents, the results highlight several structural weaknesses. The absence of Mosston and Ashworth's style observation forms was a major obstacle to participants' mastery of the content. However, as Christie (2007) points out, the critical incident technique requires tangible materials to enable a detailed analysis of professional practices.

Logistical constraints (lack of electricity, absence of a sound system, unsuitable room) also affected the quality of learning. These factors serve as a reminder that the physical environment is a determining factor in the success of a training program (Beeke, 2011). The lack of audiovisual materials and supplementary documentation—particularly those from INRAP—limited the scope of what was learned, confirming that material and time planning are inseparable from pedagogical effectiveness.

5 CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to identify the evaluative perceptions of a training seminar for instructional supervisors in physical education and sports in the city of Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. To this end, the critical incident technique was the primary method used as a data collection tool to highlight the significant experiences reported by the instructional supervisors. The results show that the seminar contributed to capacity building in instructional supervision, to a clarification of the teaching styles described by Mosston and Ashworth, as well as the establishment of collective initiatives such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These achievements reflect a sustained trend toward professionalization, grounded in both the conceptualization of practices and collaborative learning. However, several material and organizational constraints limited the training's full effectiveness. These factors underscore the importance of rigorous resource planning to ensure optimal learning conditions.

Methodologically, the critical incident technique proved particularly relevant for evaluating training initiatives. It made it possible to precisely identify the elements perceived as facilitators or obstacles, while providing a space for reflection for the participants. The data collected thus confirm the value of this evaluative approach for understanding learning mechanisms, analyzing professional practices, and guiding improvements to future training programs.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Acknowledgments

The authors sincerely thank the Brazzaville Departmental Director of Sports and Physical Education and his team for their efforts in making this research possible. They also thank Laurentian University (Sudbury, Canada) for providing funding for this activity.

Funding Source

The authors received financial support from Laurentian University through the "Fund for Knowledge Mobilization Activities and Initiatives - SSHRC Knowledge Exchange Grants – 2026 - for the project titled "Toward Informed Pedagogical Supervision: Mobilizing Mosston and Ashworth's Teaching Styles Among Pedagogical Supervisors in the Republic of the Congo".

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval Statement

This study is part of a larger study for which a research approval certificate was obtained from the Laurentian University Ethics Committee (No. 6021508, dated January 25, 2024). Furthermore, throughout this study, Therefore, ethical principles relating to respect for participants, data confidentiality, and informed consent were observed throughout the research process.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in this study prior to their participation in the training seminar. Participants were informed about the objectives of the research, the study procedures, and the use of the data collected. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The confidentiality of the information collected was maintained throughout the research process.

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