

EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PEER OBSERVATION AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how teachers in higher education in Bangladesh perceive peer observation of teaching (POT) as a means of professional development, identify challenges they face during the POT process, and explore recommendations they have for improving the process. The research methodology used for this study was qualitative, utilizing observation and semi-structured interview techniques to gather data from participants at the principal researcher's college. Three pairs of teachers who have gone through POT experiences were purposefully selected for observations and in-depth interviews. The teachers observed each other's classes in pairs, using a peer observation technique partially devised by the researcher. After each observation cycle, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews to explore the participants' experiences, behaviors, and attitudes. Thematic analysis was used to investigate the findings, which revealed that peer observation of teaching is a useful tool for educators' professional development. The POT system promotes learning, develops collegiality, and improves instructional strategies. The study also identified some barriers to the implementation of the POT program, like teachers' unwillingness to cooperate with the faculty members, reluctance to change their typical teaching strategies, teachers' busy schedules, and nervousness about being observed. This study also recommended some suggestions for implementing a successful peer observation program. This research is significant because the knowledge gathered from POT would help novice and experienced teachers improve their performance and reflect on their instructional strategies. Policymakers can also use the research findings to evaluate whether peer observation should be implemented in higher education institutions in Bangladesh and beyond.

Keywords: Peer Observation, Professional Development, Quality Teaching, Sustainable Learning, Context of Bangladesh

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

This qualitative study aims to investigate the perspectives of teachers at a government college in Bangladesh on using peer observation of teaching (POT) as a way of professional development. The study seeks to identify the challenges they face during the POT process and explore their recommendations for improving the process. Peer observation is a practice in which an educator observes another teacher's

instruction with the aim of picking up aspects of instruction, teaching aids, or classroom management (Kenny et al., 2014). It is a developmental method of observation that aims to improve performance by identifying strengths and weaknesses through self-reflection and providing constructive feedback within a team setting (Cosh, 1999). Conversely, professional development for teachers encompasses all types of ongoing learning that result in better teaching practices that have a positive impact on students' education (Sonawane & Jadhav, 2016). Teachers need to stay up-to-date by trying out new methodologies in a variety of classroom settings and then reflecting on them in the light of the constructive feedback of their professional peers (Donnelly, 2007; Danko et al., 2016; Awal, 2022). In the teaching-learning process, a lot of attention is being paid to the peer observation of teaching (POT) these days. Ali (2012) defined POT as the process through which educators offer their peers feedback on their instructional endeavors and methods. Both teachers in the POT process -the observer and the observed- gain knowledge by seeing others' instructions and getting feedback (P'Rayan, 2013; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Teachers can improve their knowledge, abilities, and practice through a variety of professional developmental activities, including team teaching, peer coaching, peer mentoring, peer observation, self-monitoring, journal writing, action research, portfolio management, attending conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. Among them, peer observation acts as one of the most effective teaching strategies that promotes teamwork for career advancement (Alam et al., 2020).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In order to improve education in the face of global challenges, highly qualified instructors are essential (Jusuf, 2005). To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provide high-quality teaching experience in Bangladesh, along with content knowledge, teachers must have efficiency in pedagogical and technological understanding (Uddin & Bailey, 2024; Uddin & McNeill, 2024). The government of Bangladesh has made efforts to improve teacher performance through various initiatives (Chowdhury et al., 2018). Due to government funding limitations, there are few training programs available for teachers' professional development. As a result, most teachers rely on teamwork, sharing constructive feedback, and reflecting upon each other's classes to improve their instructional strategies, classroom management tactics, and assessment techniques. Although a lot of research has been done about teachers' perceptions of peer observation, most of the research (Belarouci & Abdellatif, 2023; Danko et al., 2016; Motallebjadeh et al., 2017; Tenenberg, 2014) focused on the benefits of the POT process. Some Bangladeshi researchers (Paul, 2021; Uddin, 2022) concentrated on implementing peer observation to increase teachers' performance; however, they did not explore teachers' perceptions of peer observation of the teaching process. Therefore, there is a dearth of research on tertiary education in Bangladesh that looks at teachers' perspectives on POT as a professional developmental tool through observation and in-depth interviews. This empirical gap prompts the researcher to conduct further research in this area.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to explore teachers' opinions on peer observation of teaching in their professional development, to identify challenges that the teachers face in the peer observation of the teaching process, and to investigate teachers' recommendations to enhance peer observation of teaching procedures.

1.4 Research Questions

To explore teachers' views on peer observation of teaching as a professional developmental tool, the following questions are addressed in the investigation:

1. To what extent do teachers consider peer observation of teaching helpful in their professional development?
2. What are the challenges teachers face in the practice of peer observation?
3. What are the teachers' suggestions to improve the practice of peer observation?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research is important for both academic and practical reasons, as it can help improve teachers' performance, leading to better learning outcomes for students in tertiary education. It will provide valuable information for both novice and experienced teachers to evaluate each other and improve their teaching skills. The study will particularly benefit developing countries like Bangladesh, where peer feedback plays a crucial role due to the lack of government funding for training programs. Additionally, the research has the potential to raise awareness among college administrators, department heads, policymakers, and teachers about the importance of teacher professional development in implementing effective teaching practices.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Peer Observation of Teaching (POT)

Peer observation is a key instrument for collaboration, self-reflection, professional advancement, and, ultimately, enhancing the educational experiences of students in higher education. Bell (2012) defines peer observation as a cooperative learning process wherein educators observe one another's classes, explore what they have learned, share instructional tactics, elicit feedback from students regarding their quality of instruction, reflect on their own views, attitudes, and actions, and try out innovative concepts. Peer observation, according to Hendry and Oliver (2012), is a technique where two educators work together and watch each other's lessons with the main objective of maximizing teaching standards. This supports their own teaching methods and gives them new insights for their lessons. According to Gosling (2002), peer observation of teaching (POT) is frequently utilized to prepare novice instructors along with specific teachers or the whole department. Sometimes both parties agree on this process, and other times it is imposed. In addition to teaching, Gosling (2002) highlights how important it is for POT to handle student feedback, assessment processes, learning objectives, and instructional materials. According to Shortland (2004), POT is a part of a continuing professional development program for both new and experienced faculty members, giving educators an excellent chance to promote self-awareness and self-improvement. Peer observations often benefit the person being observed (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004), but it is becoming increasingly obvious that the observers who follow the same best practices as the teacher being observed expect to gain the most from the practice (Hendry & Oliver, 2012; Tenenber, 2014). According to most researchers (Bell & Mladenovic, 2008; Martin & Double, 1998), the POT process benefits both the observer and the observed, and it is also helpful for the observer to watch others teach because it provides ideas for their own instruction. Peer observation encourages cooperation and the exchange of educational experiences among educators, hence offering advantages to both the observed and the observer, according to Motallebzadeh et al. (2017). Consequently, POT focuses more on learning through observation and less on the feedback provided by the observing teacher.

2.2 Types & Models of Peer Observation

According to Volchenkova (2016), formative and summative are the two main categories of peer observation. Formative evaluation is often a component of instructional development and mentorship, with the exclusive goal of enhancing the teaching process (Volchenkova, 2016), while summative evaluations are more prevalent since they influence judgments about merit pay, tenure, contract renewal, and promotion (Zeng, 2020). In this study, teachers participated in peer observation of the teaching process as a part of formative evaluation. Both experienced and inexperienced peers have an interest in improving their own teaching effectiveness using this professional development instrument.

Gosling (2002) categorized peer observation into three models: evaluation, development, and peer review. The most obvious ways to distinguish these are by looking at who is conducting the observation (senior staff, educational experts, and other instructors, respectively), what the aim of the observation is (ensuring quality, developing instruction, introspection), and the salient features of this kind of observation (estrangement, lack of impact, self-satisfaction). The fundamental idea of the peer review model is that teachers watch one another frequently in a reciprocal manner. The evaluation is centered on a group of concerns that have been mutually agreed upon rather than being evaluated based on any externally established standards (Ewens & Orr, 2002). In this study, the peer review model is applied in the POT process, where both experienced and less experienced teachers of English discipline observe each other, decide what instructional practices should be observed, and deviate from strict standards.

2.3 The Phases of Peer Observation

(i) Pre-observation meeting: During this meeting, the observee and the observer reach an agreement on how to start the POT process. At this point, the observer and the observee might discuss contextual details about the course, instructional tactics, assessment practices, and particular areas of concentration for the observation (Davis, 2011). Moreover, the observer and the observee share the observation process (Sullivan et al., 2012). Thus, the purpose of the POT process is made clear at this stage (McMahon et al., 2007).

(ii) Observation of the lesson: In this stage, the observer goes to the class of the observee on a prearranged basis. Donnelly (2007) asserted that it is crucial to let students know about the observation and reassure them that the teacher's or observer's objective is to enhance their professional abilities rather than to assess them. The observer should also inform the students about his or her presence (Kohut et al., 2007). Field notes' written narrative format is perfect for documenting observations (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

(iii) Post-observation meeting: This meeting is an essential component of the POT procedure that results in

improved instruction (Chism, 2007). Donnelly (2007) stated that three main topics should be covered in the post-observation meeting: an analysis of the requirements and initiatives, a discussion of the lesson's learning objectives, and a lesson plan analysis. Gosling (2002) adds that the observer gives the observee feedback on the lesson they observed at this meeting, and they will talk about, contemplate, and implement the main points of the feedback in future practices. The feedback ought to be perceptive, precise, objective, and reasonable, according to Shortland (2010). The feedback could be given at a scheduled time and place, either the day after the observation session or immediately following it (Hampton et al., 2004; Richards & Farrell, 2011).

2.4 Peer Observation as a Tool of Professional Development

In educational institutions, peer observation is widely utilized to support teachers' professional development (Dos Santos, 2017). It can serve as an invaluable resource for both observers and observees in terms of professional growth (Tosriadi et al., 2018). While highly skilled faculty members value peer observation as a means for reflection, fresh educators view it as a way to improve their teaching methods (Bell, 2001). Thus, peer observation improves teachers' teaching performances as a continuous professional development (CPD) technique. Padwad and Dixit (2011) believe that continuing professional development is a continual, systematic, and long-term learning procedure through which educators can advance their knowledge, skills, and practices, increase their efficacy both personally and professionally, and help students and institutions by empowering teachers. Peer observation is one of the professional developmental activities that works best as an educational tool to promote collaboration for professional development (Alam et al., 2020). Through peer observation, educators can evaluate each other's teaching approaches, investigate novel approaches that could enhance instruction, and determine their own strong and weak points. According to Richards and Farrell (2005), engaging in this kind of activity may help teachers share knowledge and build a more insightful outlook on their professional growth. Tosriadi et al. (2018) also claim that peer observation serves as a reflective activity to advance teachers' educational understanding.

2.5 Current Status of Professional Development and Use of POT in Bangladesh

The Bangladeshi government is currently working to improve the quality of education at all levels in an effort to meet the new challenges of the 21st century. To ensure quality education, it is important to guarantee the skills, qualifications, and responsibilities of educators at every level (National Education Policy, 2010). Consequently, the National University and the Ministry of Education established the practice of quality assurance in each institution by developing long-term process strategic planning, which improves the quality of the college system and educators (Afroz et al., 2024). According to Prodhan (2016), Bangladesh lags considerably behind the international standard in terms of the curriculum, the caliber of the teachers, the lack of political vision, etc. Accordingly, it can be difficult to deliver quality instruction, and continuing professional development is necessary to enable effective teaching (Khan, 2008). However, a number of training programs have been implemented as professional development initiatives through some projects, such as the College Education Development Project (CEDP), Higher Education Quality Enhance Project (HEQEP), Total Quality Improvement (TQI), etc. (Afroz et al., 2024). These attempts, however, fall short since they lack comprehensiveness, and Bangladesh lacks an appropriate institution-based CPD approach (Khan, 2014; Raqib, 2019). Nevertheless, CPD programs are not being implemented enough to improve the quality of teachers in Bangladesh's government and non-government colleges.

Though teachers in Bangladeshi tertiary colleges are not familiar with the idea of peer observation of teaching as a professional developmental tool, this technique is gradually gaining popularity in tertiary education under the patronage of the head of the institution and department head. Paul (2021) and Uddin (2022) focused on the implementation of peer observation to increase teachers' performance. Afroz et al. (2024) stated that teachers in government colleges are recruited without any prior experience or training through the Bangladesh Civil Service examination. In this regard, some informal CPD activities like peer observation, teacher collaboration, team teaching, and peer coaching are assisting new teachers in meeting the challenges of managing large mixed-ability classrooms.

2.6 The Advantages of Peer Observation

According to Belarouci and Abdellatif (2023), peer observation offers teachers several benefits that can help them enhance their teaching, students' learning, and professional advancement. One of the characteristics of POT is that it encourages a collaborative atmosphere (Bell, 2012). Instructors can improve their professional and interpersonal skills and boost stronger teamwork by offering constructive criticism on their areas of strength and weakness (Martin & Double, 1998). According to Whipp and Pengelley (2017), peer observation helps educators analyze their own teaching strengths and deficiencies, establish attainable professional goals, promote confidence, and foster faculty collegiality. Another advantage is that POT helps educators

improve their instruction by helping them reflect on their own pedagogical techniques. Peer observation, according to Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005), allows teachers the freedom to reconsider existing instructional approaches and try out new ones, which encourages introspection and satisfies individual development goals. McDaniel et al. (2019) state that teachers typically start reflecting on their instruction and enhancing their teaching strategies and instructional materials after participating in peer observation. Additionally, peer evaluation can support continuous professional growth as observers can offer fresh perspectives, concepts, and ideas for enhancement (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Consequently, the observers' varied points of view can contribute to more insightful and deeper discussions.

2.7 The Challenges to the Implementation of Peer Observation

Peer observation has numerous benefits and is generally well-received; nevertheless, there are also some common challenges associated with this teaching strategy. In many higher educational institutions, peer observation is regarded as a delicate technique, according to Akhmedova and Rozikova (2021), because of its underlying values and teachers' fear of being evaluated by their peers. Most teachers in Uzbekistan's local and foreign universities, according to their quantitative study of 230 teachers, are uninterested in attending post-observations meetings because of their workload. Additionally, this study demonstrates that a sizable portion of respondents describe this evaluative technique as a bureaucratic procedure, which validates Shortland's (2004) findings. Ahmed et al. (2018), in their mixed-method study, investigated the opinions of EFL instructors at a Saudi Arabian university on the use of peer observation as an instrument for professional growth. They noted a number of issues with POT, such as their lack of autonomy in peer selection, mistrust between the administration and EFL teachers, the unpreparedness of the observers, and a sense of unease and insecurity. Carroll and O' Loughlin (2014) examined the viewpoints, motivations, challenges, and results of first-time POT users and they emphasized a few barriers to POT, including nervousness, apprehension about the process, and the judgmental nature of peer observation. Twenty teachers at Najran University were interviewed by Khan (2019) to explore their views about peer observation. According to the study, most teachers saw evaluation as a reason for firing someone and were not familiar with how peer observation was implemented in practice. The aforementioned studies highlight the challenges of peer observation of the teaching process that may arise during the POT process.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research used a qualitative method to explore teachers' independent opinions about peer observation practice in a Bangladeshi government college. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) define qualitative research as an approach that gives researchers greater latitude in the application of techniques and methods while emphasizing the various individual perspectives on a specific scenario or issue. Thus, researchers can adapt their approach based on emerging themes or unexpected findings with freedom. In addition, a qualitative approach is chosen due to time restrictions and the delicate and complex nature of the problem (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) asserted that a qualitative technique can delve deeply into the research problem. Therefore, a qualitative method was chosen for this study.

3.2 Sampling & Context

The principal researcher's college, one of the oldest teachers' training colleges in Dhaka, Bangladesh, served as the study site. Six educators (Table 1) from that institution who used peer observation as a technique for professional development participated in this study. The researcher chose a small number of six individuals to ensure a comprehensive collection and analysis of data, as recommended for novice researchers by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Consequently, six teachers, aged between 35 and 55, from her college were selected as participants for the study. Among them, three have less experience (5-10 years), whereas the other three have more experience (11-25 years). Therefore, three pairs of teachers were purposefully chosen for observation and in-depth interviews. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) opine that purposive sampling can effectively generate meaningful data.

Table 1: Profile of the Participants

Name of participants	Designation	Gender	Age	Instructional level	Years of teaching experience
Teacher 1 (T1) (Ph. D)	Associate Professor	Male	55	Undergraduate and Graduate level	25
Teacher 2 (T2)	Associate Professor	Male	50	Undergraduate and Graduate level	20

Teacher 3 (T3)	Associate Professor	Female	46	Undergraduate and Graduate level	16
Teacher 4 (T4)	Assistant Professor	Female	40	Undergraduate level	10
Teacher 5 (T5)	Lecturer	Female	37	Undergraduate level	07
Teacher 6 (T6)	Lecturer	Female	35	Undergraduate level	05

3.3 Validity and Reliability

The sincerity of the research procedures and the trustworthiness of the research findings are conveyed and demonstrated through the application of validity and reliability approaches. According to Neuman (2000), it is practically difficult to get complete validity and reliability in research. Before designing the interview protocols, the researchers reviewed pertinent literature to ensure the validity of this study. Two research professionals with Ph.D. degrees from the researcher's college reviewed the protocols. Their frequent responses to the questions made it easier to assess the efficacy of the instruments. Sensitive topics were avoided during the data collection procedure, and participants were given questions that were simple to understand and respond to. However, to prevent prejudice throughout the data collection procedure, queries pertaining to gender, race, and religion were avoided. The researchers used member checking following the interviews to check that the data accurately reflected their experiences. Meticulous transcription and recording protocols were used, and the interviewees' remarks were cited in the findings to ensure the reliability of this research.

3.4 Research Ethics

As a part of research ethics, permission was sought from the institution's head to perform the study. Invitations to participate in the POT process with pre-observation meeting schedules were mailed to the participants. In this study, participants were provided with comprehensive information sheets and consent forms, ensuring transparency regarding the research aim, potential risks, and confidentiality measures. Crucially, participants were assured of their voluntary involvement and provided explicit consent for their participation in the interview process. The participants were informed that their interviews would be audiotaped, and they were assigned pseudonyms such as T1, T2, T3, and T4 so that they could not be recognized from the reporting. Each teacher's actions and remarks were carefully observed during the interviews and recorded for the information's veracity. Upholding confidentiality safeguards, participants were reassured that their data would be handled with the utmost discretion. These ethical considerations prioritize the autonomy, well-being, and rights of participants, forming the cornerstone of responsible research conduct.

3.5 Research Instruments for Data Collection

Observations and interview protocols were employed as data collection tools. Observation provides first-hand knowledge and original insights into the research problem. Satapathy (2023) states that a researcher can collect lively and rich data from the sources available by employing his sense of observation while using observation as a data collection tool. According to Alshenqueeti (2014), interviews offer a high rate of feedback, regulate the sequence of responses, are relatively flexible, incorporate reality, and result in fewer imperfect responses. The interview protocol consists of 13 questions and is divided into two sections: the first asks for the respondent's personal details, while the second section includes some semi-structured questions.

The principal researcher and her colleagues served as the primary data collection tools and provided the partially developed peer observation procedure to the participants. At first, the six purposively selected participants are formed into three pairs. The participants were categorized into two groups- less experienced teachers and more experienced teachers. A teacher with little experience and an experienced teacher were made into a pair. During the observation period, each pair was given instructions to use the peer observation procedure to observe the other's class in turn. The participants were provided with peer observation forms. Data was collected from January 10, 2024, to January 31, 2024. The peer observation cycles were carried out weekly, as shown in Figure 1. With the principal researcher's assistance, the teachers in pairs observed each other teach following three-part observation meetings. After the completion of each pair's observation cycles, one-on-one interviews were arranged with the teachers. Based on the discussion, the structure of peer observation cycles is shown in Figure 1.




Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Pair 1 Teacher 1  Teacher 4	Pair 2 Teacher 2  Teacher 5	Pair 3 Teacher 3  Teacher 6
One-on-one interviews with teachers of pair 1	One-on-one interviews with teachers of pair 2	One-on-one interviews with teachers of pair 3

Figure 1: Peer Observation Cycles

The study followed Gosling's (2002) peer review model, and peer observation meetings were carried out using a three-part framework consisting of a pre-observation meeting, classroom observation, and post-observation feedback, as suggested by Danko, Kerzic, and Kotnik (2016) and Tenenbergh (2014). Based on the above literature, the structure of peer observation meetings is depicted in Figure 2.

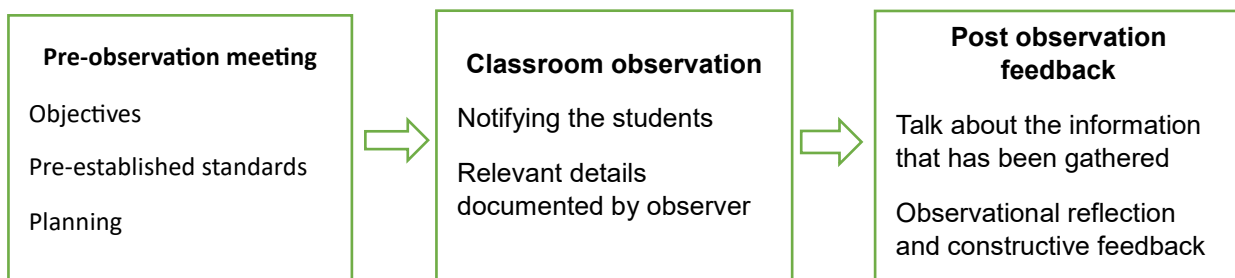


Figure 2: Structure of Peer Observation Meetings

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The observational data and semi-structured interviews were interpreted by thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a strategy used to identify, analyze, and present recurring themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This data analysis procedure consists of five processes: reading and re-reading, making baseline notes, recognizing emerging themes, cross-checking and looking for links between themes, and proceeding to the next transcript. At first, the researcher scrutinized the field notes and coded the data, examining the repeated ideas. After several readings, the codes were reviewed, and several broader themes were identified. Both the observational data and recorded responses were categorized based on similar themes and interpreted in relation to the research questions. At the end of the process, hard copies of the findings were shared with the participants so that they could be verified for corrections and reliability (Stringer & Aragon, 2020).

4.0 FINDINGS

This chapter provides an outline of the findings from the qualitative data analysis in accordance with the research questions. This review's purpose is not to answer the research questions but to present teachers' detailed perspectives on peer observation as a medium for professional growth. Three research questions served as the focal point for the arrangement of the findings according to multiple themes. The themes that appeared from the comprehensive examination of all the data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes of the Findings

Research Questions	Theme & Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes
1. To what extent do teachers consider peer observation of teaching helpful in their professional development?	Teachers' positive perception of peer observation as a professional developmental tool	(i) Peer observation is the first preference (ii) Peer observation contributes to professional development (iii) Frequency of peer observation boosts professional growth (iv) Peer observation is a reflective tool (v) The perceptions of feedback
2. What are the challenges the teachers face in the practice of peer observation?	Challenges of peer observation of teaching	(i) Negative attitude (ii) Lack of experience (iii) Anxiety (iv) Time constraint
3. What are the teachers' suggestions to improve the practice of peer observation?	Suggestions for improving the peer observation program	(i) Developing interaction (ii) Training and guidelines (iii) Clear objectives (iv) Balance in feedback (v) Selecting the peers (vi) Rewarding the participants

4.1 Respondents' Views on Research Question 1

When the teachers were asked what types of professional developmental activities they preferred, all noted that they were interested in peer observation.

I think peer observation has great potential to help me build my professional career. Professional development is a lifelong journey; hence, these observations must be done continuously to ensure that the best of me comes out more fairly. (T2)

Through peer observation of teaching, I can share my pedagogical knowledge with my experienced peers and adopt new teaching techniques. Thus, I can develop my professional activities. (T3)

All participants confirmed that peer observation leads toward learning.

Peer observation assists me in incorporating more diversity into my teaching than I did in the past, so, I try to deliver the class more professionally. (T3)

I was accustomed to instruction that was teacher-focused, had more lectures, and had little student participation. By observing the techniques used by the knowledgeable colleagues, I gain extra benefit by learning about the student-centered strategies that are appreciated in the classroom. (T4)

All participants emphasized that peer observation promotes cooperative relationships among colleagues.

Since we've to be present on both sides, we seem to be understanding of one another and appreciative of each other's classroom activities. The benefit of peer observation is that it allows one to reflect on why they wouldn't teach the same way in their own circumstances. (T5)

All teachers agreed that peer observation enhances instructional strategies.

During observation, I've learned how to motivate students towards reading by involving them in group work activities, and I'll apply this technique in my next classes to develop students' reading

skills. (T3)

Observing my peers helps me greatly enhance my teaching method. After modifying my instructional strategies based on observation, I now give students time to respond to questions when I pose them. (T5)

All teachers agreed that teachers should be engaged in peer observation activities twice a year.

Novice teachers should be involved in the POT process once a month for improving their teaching strategies. (T1)

Newly appointed teachers should observe the classes of experienced teachers during the first week of their employment and then invite the experienced teachers to observe their classes once a month to improve their pedagogical knowledge. (T4)

Four teachers believed that peer observation fosters critical thinking and helpful reflection in teachers.

Peer observation process helps me to reflect critically and thoroughly on the style and tactics of instruction after conducting a session. I can compare the observee's classroom activities to mine, as we both teach the same content and can identify a solution to an issue that I faced in my previous classes. (T3)

Peer observation helps to identify the points that I missed in my class, and after reflecting on that, I can understand the gap that should be minimized in my next classes. (T4)

Two inexperienced teachers agreed that peer observation enabled them to enrich their teaching practices.

Peer observation boosts me to rethink my own teaching procedures and inspires fresh ideas for improved instruction because it provides immediate feedback. I can identify the weak points of my teaching strategies and adopt the new teaching techniques by observing experienced teachers' classes. (T5)

All teachers affirmed that the feedback they got from their colleagues was beneficial to improving their teaching techniques.

Feedback is very important after an observation because there are some notions, aspects, or ideas about a person's teaching strategies in a particular subject that co-workers of one's department can evaluate better and give more honest opinions of the performance that help the observee to develop the weak areas. (T4)

I was quite delighted when my observer approached me after a lesson and shared comments about the session. He encouraged me regarding the use of instructional resources, presenting techniques, and the active engagement of the students throughout the session. It gave me more confidence about his mode of advising for that specific class. (T6)

Four teachers' experiences revealed that observers are the main gainers in the peer observation process.

I was impressed observing a class of my junior colleague who introduced a topic to her class by inspiring the students with a story. I like this novel approach to teaching, where students' attention is drawn by connecting the text's scenario to actual events. This technique will help the slow learners understand the topic. (T2)

4.2 Respondents' Views on Research Question 2

All teachers referred to the negative attitude of the teachers towards attending the peer observation process as the main barrier to effective peer observation.

Some colleagues hesitate to cooperate in the peer observation process for their lack of knowledge regarding the advantages and value of peer observation. (T2)

The negative attitude of some educators towards attending the procedure of peer observation of teaching hampers the success of the process. Some teachers believe that their pay is not performance-based, so they will not put extra effort into the peer observation process. (T3)

All teachers pointed to a lack of experience as one of the challenges they encountered in the process.

I was dissatisfied with my peers' behavior, which included arriving late for the classes I had scheduled for observation, skipping the pre-observation meetings where we were supposed to discuss the goals of the sessions, and not giving the students the teaching resources, they needed

to follow the lesson. This consideration isn't always returned. (T4)

Some observers are not competent enough to provide feedback on colleagues' teaching, which affects adversely the effectiveness of the peer observation process. (T3)

All participants addressed anxiety as one of the pitfalls of peer observation. Among them three participants agreed that fear of judgment affects the POT process.

Peer observation is beneficial in voluntary situations, but when peer observation is required, participants may feel uneasy. Some can experience acute fear when under observation. (T3)

Three participants opined that nervousness at being observed loses confidence among participants.

Most lecturers are too scared to conduct their classes in their normal and typical manner for their nervousness. 'Trust' is a key component in this strategy. But creating a respectful workplace and fostering genuine trust and intimacy among peers are also challenging. (T1)

Two participants expressed dissatisfaction with the time factor during peer observation.

Peer observation process planning and execution take too much time. (T5)

4.3 Respondents' Views on Research Question 3

All teachers agreed that building a culture of mutual trust and cooperation among colleagues, peer observation of teaching programs can be made effective.

Teachers can develop their pedagogical knowledge through developing a better working relationship with colleagues and sharing teaching experiences. So, mutual trust and respect should be established among faculty members. (T1)

Developing cooperation and collaboration is a pre-condition of successful peer observation of teaching. So, the observee should prepare such a collaborative environment that the observer feels comfortable to provide constructive feedback while observing his/her teaching, which helps improve pedagogical strategies. (T4)

All teachers proposed that observers need to have training in classroom observation techniques.

More trainings on how to use classroom observation would be the best way for instructors to reap the benefits of such a program. (T5)

'Workshops and seminars are necessary to acquaint teachers with the ideas and advantages of peer observation.' (T6)

All teachers revealed that clarification about the objective of peer observation should be ensured.

If there is no clear focus on what is to be watched, it is doubtful that the observed teacher will react favorably to the observer's feedback. (T3)

All participants asserted that the observation feedback should be encouraging and helpful.

Observers should deliver sandwich feedback, combining the positive with the critical throughout, beginning and ending with positive points. (T1)

The positive feedback from the observers helps me to improve my pedagogical knowledge and makes me feel confident. (T6)

Two teachers suggested self-selection for peers.

To preserve anonymity and maintain companionship among the colleagues, the program organizer could ask the instructors for their chosen names to collaborate with and then ask the peers for recommendations. (T1)

Two participants suggested that participants should be rewarded administratively for boosting professional development.

Teachers want recognition for investing their time and effort in peer observation programs which indirectly help develop themselves professionally. Rewarding the best performers, institution authority can motivate the teachers to improve their teaching skills. (T5)

5.0 DISCUSSION

Following the analysis of the data, three themes and fifteen sub-themes were found. Furthermore, the

study's findings are aligned with the research questions. This section assesses, examines, and talks about the findings of this study in relation to relevant literature. The study's discussions are covered below under the themes that arose from the observational and interview data.

5.1 Theme 1: Perception of Peer Observation as a Professional Developmental Tool

The findings of this research indicate that peer observation of teaching is a beneficial practice for their growth as qualified educators. Peer observation programs were effective as a professional developmental tool. Respondents' comments match the study of Tosriadi et al. (2018), who believed that peer observation could be a helpful technique for professional growth for both observers and those being observed. The participants felt that the POT system not only promotes learning but also develops collegiality and enhances instructional strategies. Numerous studies on peer observations cover these advantages of the peer review process (Belarouci & Abdellatif, 2023; Byrne et al., 2010; Shortland, 2010; Whitlock & Rumpus, 2004). All participants believed that peer observation possesses the capacity to foster collaboration, which augments teachers' pedagogical knowledge and enhances their instructional skills. Bell (2012) also supported the idea that POT contributes to promoting a cooperative atmosphere. Richards and Farrell (2005) also claimed that peer observation encourages educators to foster a culture of collegiality wherein they feel free to express and discuss their concerns and future teaching opportunities.

This study demonstrates that peer observation gave teachers useful reflection and critical thinking about their problems in the instructional process, and inexperienced teachers were enabled to incorporate valuable insights into their teaching through the POT process. This result is in line with the study of Bell (2001), who stated that the POT process is valued as a reflection tool by experienced teachers, and it is taken into consideration by newly appointed instructors to enhance their teaching strategies. Regarding the frequency of peer observation, the result demonstrates that for novice teachers, once a month and for experienced teachers, twice per year it is perfect for boosting professional growth. The study by Akhmedova and Rozikova (2021) also suggested that classes should be observed once a semester by peers.

The results of this research show that peer observation offers a chance to learn by seeing a colleague's teaching. This lesson is further supported by the study of Thomson et al. (2015), which reinforced the opportunity to learn by observing the POT process. Peer observation improves teachers' instructional strategies by providing constructive criticism. This result parallels the assertions of Cosh (1999) and Snyderman et al. (2013) that the constructive feedback that the participants received from their colleagues in post-observation sessions was valuable in improving their instructional practices. The quantitative study of Kohut et al. (2007) supported the result by stating that the observers found that the peer observation process had a significant effect on how they developed their own teaching instead of enhancing the instruction of the observed teachers. Hendry and Oliver (2012), and Tenenberg (2016) also supported the idea that it is helpful for the observer to watch others teach because it provides ideas for their own instruction. However, most researchers (Bell & Mladenovic, 2008; Martin & Double, 1998) believed that the POT procedure benefits both the observer and the observee.

5.2 Theme 2: Challenges of Peer Observation of Teaching

The study's second theme, which draws attention to some challenges of peer observation, such as negative attitude, lack of experience with the process, anxiety, and time constraints, may be related to some studies that found implementation hurdles.

This study demonstrates that the negative attitude of the instructors towards attending the peer observation procedure is one of the main barriers to effective peer observation. This study also referred to the reluctance of colleagues to cooperate and change as the challenges of an effective peer observation process. This finding is aligned with the study of Tsoulou (2016), who claimed that teachers hesitate to attend the POT process for their misinformation about the advantages of peer observation. Knight (2002) has also reinforced the idea that some faculty members are resistant to change and think of the observation process as an intrusion into the learning environment. The result also shows that the lack of experience of the teachers about peer observation procedures and providing constructive feedback also hampers an effective peer observation process. This result matches with that of Shousha (2015), who stated that lack of familiarity with observation techniques and the lack of ability to provide constructive feedback are the major challenges of the peer observation process.

Time constraint is a significant problem that might hinder the implementation of peer observation, and this finding matches that of Bell (2001), who found that a shortage of time and the workloads of the teachers create obstacles in the peer observation process. These tasks include taking classes, marking answer sheets, serving on committees, administering tests both internally and externally, supervising examination rooms, and much more. So, it will be difficult for the teachers to schedule time to attend the peer observation

procedure. Teachers felt uncomfortable or somewhat nervous when they were going to be observed. Their fear is also consistent with Motallebzadeh et al. (2017), who asserted that anxiety and a lack of self-confidence are caused by peer observation. Chamberlain et al. (2011) also said that instructors were cautious about peer observation because they believed it could be excessively troublesome, requiring them to submit the observation forms to those observing the process. While implementing peer observation in educational institutions, some studies, like Adshead et al. (2006), Cosh (1999), and Kohut et al. (2007), found that many participants viewed the model as frightening. Keig and Waggoner (1994) reported that during observation, some teachers felt it was a threat to their academic freedom.

5.3 Theme 3: Suggestions for Improving the Peer Observation Program

The study showed that mutual trust and collaboration were needed for a successful peer observation program. This finding is supported by the literature. Gosling (2002) asserts that for a peer review model to be truly successful, faculty members must be treated as actual peers, where genuine respect prevails, regardless of their position within the department. The opportunity to take part in peer observations was highly valued in the study of Bell and Mladenovic (2008) as a means of exchanging best practices and fostering collaboration. According to Leonard and Leonard (2003), professional collaboration should be promoted in educational institutions where teachers collaborate on a regular basis, share knowledge, offer ideas, and create plans for accomplishing learning objectives. According to Shortland (2004), treating the observer as a critical friend fosters reciprocal respect and trust between the observer and the observed. Besides, some teachers of this study suggested self-selection of peers, and this finding also matches the studies of Shortland (2004), Siddique et al. (2007), and Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014), who claimed that teachers should be allowed to select their peer observation partners to reduce anxiety and develop a shared understanding of constructive feedback.

The Study reported that observers must be trained to develop observational skills for peer observation. So, effective peer observation requires proper training for both observers and those being observed. Cosh (1998) believed that observers can be trained in how to offer constructive comments to optimize the advantages of POT. Moreover, Bozak et al. (2011) suggested that before implementing a peer observation program, teachers should undergo training in observation, collaboration, and constructive feedback. Kotsiomyti (2014) also recommended arranging seminars and workshops to familiarize teachers with the technique of peer observation. The findings also noted that it is necessary to define the aims and protocols of peer observation, considering its significance in professional development. Cosh (1998) supported this idea by asserting that participants should consult and make collective decisions regarding issues like who will be observed, how frequently, what strategy should be applied, what the purpose should be, and how feedback will be given in order to give them a sense of ownership and control over the procedure. Adshead et al. (2006) also thought that to maximize the benefits of peer observation as a professional development tool, it was beneficial to create more specific learning objectives with students. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) also recommended that peer observations may be pointless if they lack defined objectives.

The Study noted that teachers should provide constructive feedback to help their peers improve their instructional practices. This statement is supported by Martin and Double (1998) and Whitlock and Rumpus (2004), who believed that it is crucial to provide constructive feedback in addition to acknowledging and discussing how both sides may learn from the observation process. Peel (2005) suggested that constructive feedback should be thorough, evidence-based, and provided with numerous examples and nonjudgmental details. This study also suggested that teachers who performed well in peer observation programs should be rewarded administratively to boost their professional growth. This statement is supported by Khan (2019) and Shousha (2015), who claimed that intrinsic motivation helped teachers attend peer observation programs voluntarily, and teachers may be encouraged to participate in the peer observation process if they get additional extrinsic motivation as a part of their administrative rewards. In this way, having both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation guarantees that teachers will participate more in POT in the future, which will undoubtedly result in greater advancement of teachers' professional growth.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The researcher found that peer observation of teaching is a useful instrument for the professional growth of educators. The studies of Alam, Aamir, and Shahzad (2020) and Dos Santos (2017) also supported this idea. Peer observation of teaching (POT) emerges as a valuable tool for the professional growth of educators, particularly in contexts where formal training programs are limited. The studies referenced in this paper, along with our own findings, underscore the positive impact of POT on promoting learning, professional development, instructional quality, and collegiality. However, the implementation of POT programs is not without challenges, including teacher reluctance, negative attitude, lack of experience, scheduling constraints, and anxiety surrounding observation. Despite these hurdles, this research suggests that creating

a supportive environment, offering proper training, emphasizing constructive, evidence-based feedback, encouraging self-selection of observation partners, establishing clear goals, and administering rewards the effectiveness of POT initiatives can be enhanced. The knowledge gathered from this research will help teachers improve their performance and think more critically about their instructional strategies. Both novice and experienced teachers will be inspired to assess one another professionally and advance their competencies.

6.1 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for the professional development of teachers in higher education. Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) can be a valuable tool that promotes continuous growth among educators, benefiting both those being observed and those conducting the observations. As noted by Bell and Mladenovic (2008), Martin and Double (1998), and Tosriadi et al. (2018), the process encourages reflection, allowing teachers to receive feedback and support from their peers, which can help them refine their instructional strategies. This collaborative process also gives observers valuable insights into different teaching methods, potentially enriching their own practices.

For educational institutions, these findings imply that fostering a culture of collaboration through voluntary POT programs could lead to the development of higher teaching standards. By encouraging open feedback and dialogue, institutions can help teachers enhance their instructional skills, resulting in a better learning environment for students. However, to maximize the benefits of POT, institutions must ensure that the process is well-structured. This includes setting clear, well-defined goals for peer observation that are aligned with the needs of the educators and ensuring that observers are trained to give constructive and helpful feedback.

Moreover, establishing clear guidelines for the observation process will ensure fairness and consistency, which is crucial for maintaining trust and participation in the program. Overall, the findings suggest that when properly implemented, POT has the potential to become a powerful and ongoing tool for teacher development, helping educators improve their practices while fostering a community of mutual support and professional growth. The study encourages institutions to adopt peer observation as a key strategy for enhancing teaching quality and professional development in higher education.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations. First, it only involved six teachers from one college, which makes it difficult to apply the findings to teachers in other institutions or with different experiences. The small sample size limits the variety of opinions and may not represent the views of a broader teaching community. Also, the teachers chosen for the study had all experienced peer observation before, so their perspectives might be different from those who have not. Furthermore, the study was conducted at a single institution, so the findings may not reflect the practices or challenges faced in other schools or regions. While the interviews were conducted carefully to ensure unbiased responses, the limited number of participants and the narrow focus on one institution reduced the overall scope of the study. To strengthen the findings, future research should include more participants from diverse educational backgrounds.

6.3 Future Research

Future research should aim to address the limitations of this study by expanding the sample size to include more teachers from various institutions and subject areas. This would provide a broader range of perspectives and make the findings more generalizable across different educational settings. Including teachers who have not participated in peer observation could also offer valuable insights into the potential barriers or concerns that prevent some educators from engaging in this professional development technique. Additionally, conducting the study in multiple schools or regions would allow researchers to explore how institutional culture and resources impact the effectiveness of peer observation. By incorporating a more diverse group of participants and settings, future studies could provide a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of peer observation as a professional development tool, ultimately leading to more comprehensive recommendations for its implementation.

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