

How do Teachers Make Sense of Peer Observation Professional Development in an Urban School

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Abstract

The purpose of the research study is to explore how a peer observation training programme could be beneficial to the professional development of English teachers in an East Asian environment. The research objectives were to improve teaching practice, examine how teachers make sense of the peer observation programme after they have taken part in, and to suggest alternative approaches.

Data were collected from three teachers who participated in a peer observation programme at a language school in Hong Kong through an interview process. The research discovered that peer observation can be a good tool for continuous professional development for teachers in order to develop their teaching strategies. This is especially important within the field of language education. From the analysis, most teachers are wary of the practicalities of peer observation due to the sensitivity that is associated with it. The research also discovered that teachers think that if the peer observation approach is well developed, it can be potentially interesting or generate excitement among teachers. It can support teachers to deliver their possible best practice. There is a general acknowledgement among the participants that there are certain elements of a teacher's performance that only colleagues in the same or closely-related disciplines can accurately assess. In the absence of a clear cut procedure and requirement for evaluating a person and for the person being evaluated, both parties become frustrated as there is no yardstick of performance. Recommendations for improvement have also been presented.

Keywords: adult learning, English language teaching, peer observation, teachers' professional development

1. Introduction

Programmes for the professional development of teachers are explored in relevant literature for decades. However, the literature generally focuses on the methodology of teaching, knowledge on teaching methods and application of theories into practice for enhanced student experience. The professional development of teachers is complex; it requires understanding of the linkages within a social environment, feedback from peers and colleagues and previous personal experiences of the teachers. The methodology adopted to establish such programmes vary depending on the emphasis, demand and mission of the stakeholders, namely, the society, schools, teachers, students, parents and policy makers.

Several researchers argue that professional development of teachers can be possible by offering additional training and requiring teachers to join postgraduate programmes that can further their teaching profession (Abuhmaid, 2011; Bound, 2011). However, Richard (2008) reports that teachers display a low tendency to apply new knowledge into their practice because they assume that their own teaching methodology is the most suitable for their students. At a school level, education can be classified into different types, such as urban, suburban, rural, remote, tribe and even homeschooling. Given such classification, not all teachers should take every teaching qualification and enhancement course. All schools and teachers have their own background and situation. Tailoring programmes for the professional development of teachers is an ideal solution.

Suitable strategies should be created for professional teachers to improve their current teaching experiences and thus widening their scope of possibilities for conducting lessons. The three most important characteristics of successful professional development programmes are lesson study, team teaching and peer coaching. The last two reflects the concept of peer observation in which teachers observe how other teachers conduct lessons to

assist in the enhancement of their current practices and provide as well as receive recommendations on improved teaching practice (Benedetti, 1997). Many English as Second Language (ESL) instructors in Hong Kong have probably experienced observing others or being observed. Nevertheless, how they perceive such experiences remains unexplored. In this study, teachers in a language school in Hong Kong participated in a peer-observation programme.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

This study investigates the development of a peer observation programme adopted in a language school in Hong Kong. Analysing the understanding of ESL teachers of peer observation and the manner in which they conduct peer observation in an unexplored context can benefit their teaching practice. This study can increase the awareness of school administrators, department heads, policy makers and teachers of the importance of the professional development of teachers in carrying out pedagogical strategies. Most school leaders measure the success of teaching and learning on the basis of how teachers apply critical theories inside a classroom. Despite the merits of professional development, not many in-service teachers have the time to take additional training courses at a university. In addition, teachers tend to listen to the recommendations of their colleagues regarding their current classroom teaching method than outsiders (even experts). The findings of this study provide school leaders with practical suggestions for creating in-house training programmes that fit their specific situation.

1.2 Research Question

As this study focuses on the development of a peer-observation programme at a language school in Hong Kong, the study is driven by one research question.

How do teachers make sense of the peer observation programme after they have taken part in it?

1.3 Significant of the Study

This research has been conducted because of its practical and academic value. One of the contributions of the study is assisting many teachers to appreciate the merit of self-evaluation and how this method can improve the quality of their teaching. Krashen (1982) reported that education is a complicated and continuously evolving discipline; therefore, dynamic methodologies should be employed. Novel teaching methodologies and techniques should be introduced to meet the present needs and challenges.

A competent teacher remains crucial in the promotion of enhanced quality of education. Specifically, teachers should constantly evaluate their output without bias when teaching a language to non-native speakers. Most second-language teachers are non-native speakers who have been trained to provide language education.

The significance of this research lies in equipping teachers with the knowledge to effectively monitor and evaluate their colleagues. The study provides critical information for teachers to competently evaluate one another and build on their competencies. The information resulting from this study also contributes to the existing literature on the self-monitoring practices among teachers. The available information can be a useful source of secondary research information that students can draw on to enhance their knowledge in this area should they conduct a future research on peer evaluations. Similarly, researchers can find the necessary rudimentary information to build on at an advanced level.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classroom Observation Exercise

In general, observations can be classified into several types (e.g. supervisory and peer). Each type of classroom observation is briefly explained.

2.1.1 Nature of Peer Observation

Apart from supervisory observation, peer observation is extensively used in educational institutions for the professional development of teachers. Through peer observation, teachers select co-workers who would attend and observe their classroom lesson(s). Subsequently, both participants are encouraged to discuss the positive and negative aspects of the lesson. A follow-up plan is then devised. Peer observation encourages teachers to provide them with feedback. Peer observation features four characteristics:

- (1) Peer observation should be progressive rather than evaluative.
- (2) The result of the observation should be formative not summative.
- (3) The result should not emphasise any advantage, punishment and human resource decisions.
- (4) The observer should be respectful of the pedagogical strategy of the observed.

Effective peer observation is beneficial for departments and teachers. It can continue to shift higher education from regarding teaching as a fundamentally individual matter to making it a core topic in formal and informal meetings. Observations from peers can also be exchanged. Consequently, novice teachers can benefit from receiving positive feedback from their peers. The latter can indicate weak points that are not evident and offer suggestions for improvement (Stillwell, 2009). Figure 1 illustrates a sample of classroom observation involving junior instructors observing senior teachers and vice versa. Instructors from the same department commonly observe one another.

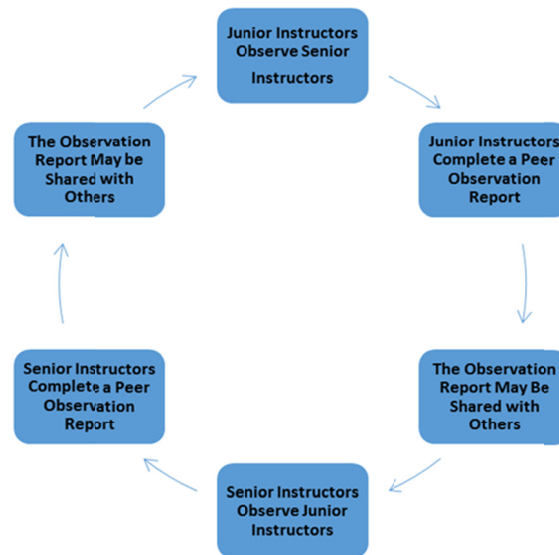


Figure 1. Sample of classroom observation activities

2.2 Explanation of Peer Observation

Richards (1998) explained that teachers exert their best to seek knowledge that can help them become better educators. In the past, developing suitable professional development plans for teacher education was complex because formal university-level programmes for the professional development of teachers did not exist in Hong Kong (Joyce & Showers, 1995). Currently, at least three local higher education institutions in Hong Kong (i.e. University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Institute of Education of Hong Kong) provide undergraduate education programmes, which offer interested people the opportunity to enter the education industry and consider teaching as their long-term career.

Sivan and Chan (2009) specified the differences between supervised teaching practice and on-site peer observation. The former usually occurs at a teaching education programme in which university tutors guide student teachers at one of the partnered schools. In the course of the programme, supervision, guidance, modelling, counselling, coaching, evaluation and assessment may be offered along with formal coursework curriculum. Supervisors and university tutors give both spoken and written feedback to student teachers. Exchanging views and providing feedback may increase the understanding, skill and knowledge of student teachers along with their capability for self-reflection and application of theories. On the contrary, peer observation requires student teachers to observe one another to provide feedback. This method is also adopted in programmes for the professional development of teachers. Student teachers with different experiences can observe one another. For example, in-service teachers can observe pre-service teachers and vice versa. In doing so, student teachers with varying experiences may exchange pedagogical philosophies.

Peer observation is one of the most successful techniques in improving the practices of teachers. Learning about both Chinese and Australian peer observation systems is significant. Both China and Australia are located in the Asia-Pacific region, and, thus, the peer observation practices should be nearly identical to those in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is one of the two only developed regions (the other one being Macau) in the People's Republic of China, the government of Hong Kong has focused on developing teaching and learning. For example, K-12 English language instructors should have either a Bachelor of Education or Postgraduate Certificate in Education

to obtain a teaching license. The peer observation in mainland China and Australia are briefly explained.

2.2.1 Peer Observation in Mainland China

In mainland China, peer observation is one of the most crucial method of assisting teachers to improve their teaching activities. Schools partner with university departments to train student teachers, and in-service teachers may observe one other for continuous professional development (Wang & Seth, 1998; Shao & Dong, 2004; Cui, 2007). In a K-12 environment, experienced teachers observe novice teachers and vice versa. In mainland China, peer observation can be categorised into three primary types:

- (1) Random observation: Experienced teachers and leaders observe any educators without official notice. Summative feedback is given subsequently.
- (2) Demonstration observation/class: Teachers are required to participate in a staged lesson in front of a designed group of people (e.g. school leaders). Summative feedback is also provided afterward.
- (3) Open observation/class: Lessons can be observed by both internal and external constituents.

Annually, Chinese teachers participate to at least 15 peer observations; all teachers are also required to have at least two open observations/classes (i.e. observed by others). All experienced and novice teachers submit both formative and summative feedback reports. These peer observations gives opportunity for formative and summative sharing. Chinese instructors also learn how to handle the workload and stress from peer observations. Wang and Seth (1998) stated that the notions of teacher development and training remained relatively new in China because many teachers were unfamiliar with the purpose in the past decade (Cui, 2007). Classroom observation has gained a negative reputation among English language teachers because of its subjective evaluation, human resource decision and assessment. Although the observed has completed excellent teaching activities, observers should still offer a few negative comments for further recommendations. Such practice leads to teachers intensely resisting peer observations. Wang and Seth (1998) carried out a self-development peer observation programme among teachers at Qingdao University. They found that teachers were more open to the idea of unknown observers during the programme. The teachers believed that strangers could provide objective and fair feedback. Thus, the teachers exhibited more willingness to share ideas and exchange contemporary problems. Also, worksheets, checklists and framework were devised during the self-development peer observation programme, and they could be employed for further development. Upon completion of the self-development peer observation programme, teachers build up their self-esteem and relationships with those from other departments. Nevertheless, two important factors should be considered, namely, the support of administrators and the enthusiasm and devotion of those in charge of the programme. Such training programme is likely to be expensive and time consuming; if the comments of administrators are subjective, teachers may lose their desire to develop their pedagogical strategies and concepts (Wang and Seth, 1998).

2.2.2 Peer Observation in Australia

In Australia, Bell (2001) explored how activities of teachers can be enhanced by peer observation and how can this method reflect what teachers do inside a classroom. If senior teachers or department heads become involved in the discussions of observation, the potential issues can be addressed directly and solved efficiently.

Higher education is successful in Australia. Hence, a dozen of universities have developed peer observation programmes. Decades ago, at University of Sydney, the students of Education Bachelor of Education (Secondary) were required to participate in peer observations of the classroom practices of their classmates. To complete a Graduate Certificate programme in higher education, training in peer observation is also required for Universities of Darwin, Macquaries, Monash, Tasmania, Western Australia and Wollongong (Bell, 2002). Both university tutors and students exchanged ideas at a peer level, enabling the former to broaden their horizons. Currently, the Faculty of Education has extended the professional practice curriculum. In 2015, the Bachelor of Education (Secondary) students should complete both coursework and professional experiences curriculum to meet the requirements for graduation. Students must obtain an 80-day long professional experience, which includes on-site experiences at one of the partnered schools throughout their four years of college.

Swinburne University of Technology improved its teaching practicum programmes. Previously, pre-service teachers observe the teaching practices of experienced teachers at one of the partner schools. In 2015, as recommended by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the Bachelor of Education (Secondary) students have to complete the coursework and obtain professional experiences to become secondary teachers. Three professional experience units are required. In the current mentoring programme three peers from the same-interned school are assigned to observe the lesson. All formative feedback are shared with colleagues. Finally, three of the students participate in a mock/staged lesson, and each student is required to provide

feedback.

2.3 Empirical Research Studies on Peer Observation

In the existing literature, several studies have been conducted to validate the interest and perception of teachers towards peer evaluation programmes. The approaches are conflicting. Some studies have taken a qualitative perspective, while others have adopted a quantitative perspective. Nevertheless, several common themes exist among the studies.

Goker (2005) conducted a study on 32 student teachers at the University of Lefke in North Cyprus. Although some teachers genuinely believed it could benefit them, peer evaluation was not prioritised over their current tasks (Goker, 2005). This practice was perceived impractical. Similarly, Yang and Li (2008) confirmed previous claims. Particularly, they found that many teachers were sceptical toward the practicality of peer observation because of the lack of incentives for teachers. By analysing the responses of teachers selected from Chengdu in the Sichuan Province, Yang and Li (2008) also noted that teachers might conduct peer evaluation only to please the authorities. Teachers assume that peer observation is not popular among teachers, so they were unlikely to devote much time and attention to it unless required. The need to please authorities is an extrinsic factor that can mediate between teacher's interest and their willingness to conduct peer observation.

2.4 Summary

This chapter outlines the varying definitions and goals of peer observation. The general environment and practice of peer observation in mainland China and Australia are also analysed. The researcher and readers are given an idea about the programmes for the professional development of teachers in Hong Kong by outlining the practice of peer observation in the selected countries or regions. Peer observation is a common practice in western countries for the professional development of teachers. Through this method, teachers can better understand themselves, which, in turn, help them identify their problems. Apart from the professional development of teachers, leaders from different positions may consider developing peer observations to encourage workers in participating in professional development programmes continuously.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in a language school in Hong Kong, a Chinese and English language speaking international city located in Southern China. As of 2015, the city has a population of 7.3 million (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2016). Due to the massive population and diversity link to the business-oriented industry, for more than five decades, English became the second most spoken language in city. Beside the business industry of the city, during the early 2000s, there were 158,000 Filipinos in town which made 56.6% of the minority population. The second most minority population was Indonesians, more than 40,000 people or 14.4% of the minority population (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2001). As of these groups of minority population in Hong Kong, 60.4% of the populations claim that they can speak fluent English. Therefore, English language becomes one of the most important languages in the city.

The participants in this study were three female ESL teachers. Their teaching experiences range from 2 to 20 years, and they all agreed to participate in this study. All participating teachers are Asian with local personal background, aged 24 to 45, and are all bilingual speakers of Chinese Cantonese and English. All participants have an English teaching qualification attached to their academic degrees. The following is a table of the participants' demographic information. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Name	Position	Academic Qualification	Teaching Qualification	Years of Teaching Experience
Teacher #1	Senior Teacher	Bachelor of Psychology (Local University in Hong Kong)	DELTA	20
Teacher #2	Mid-level Teacher	Bachelor in Applied Linguistics (Local University in Hong Kong)	CELTA	8
Teacher #3	Junior-level Teacher	Bachelor in Applied Linguistics (Local University in Hong Kong)	CELTA	2

3.2 Observation and Pre-Observation Cycles

The observation cycle has adapted the mentor development method of Stillwell (2009) with minor enhancement. Three participants establish one group. Teacher #1 or the senior teacher observed Teacher #2 or the mid-level teacher; Teacher #2 or mid-level teacher observed Teacher #3 or junior-level teacher; and Teacher #3 or junior-level teacher observed Teacher #1 or senior teacher. As shown in Figure 1. Before the observation, all participants were invited to a pre-observation conference for the clarification of the observation progress. During the pre-observation conference, the research explained the detail of the observation. The participants were encouraged to ask questions regarding to the progress, such as which class, what would be the preparation, and the order of observation.

3.3 Actual Observation

The complete observer position was employed the most suitable for the objective of this study. The observers or the participants were asked to sit in back corner of the classroom without any behaviours. In addition, the observers should make field notes as much as possible during the observation.

3.4 Post-Observation Sharing Chat

After a complete observation cycle, participants were asked to participate in a post-observation sharing chat. The function of this chat offered the idea sharing and expressing opportunities about their skills as well as improvements. As a peer level chatting, each participant should express their idea freely without any class-level considerations.

3.5 Post-Observation Cycle Interview with the Researcher

In order to gain the answers for the research question, semi-structured interview was used as a useful method, allowing participants to provide in-depth responses regarding the experiences (Merriam, 2009). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher outlined a list of topics and questions for discussions. These questions were arranged before conducting the interview. Figure 2 illustrates the progress of the observation cycle.

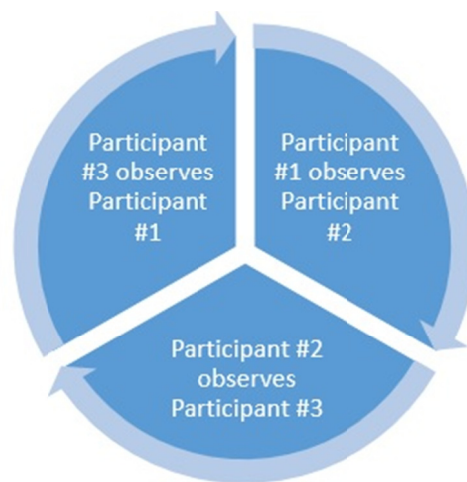


Figure 2. Peer observation cycle

4. Finding and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data. Through this qualitative inquiry, the researcher was able to inductively analyse the data and build themes, answer the research questions, and discuss the findings in order to understand how peer-observation influence the teaching practice of teachers (Creswell, 2007). The themes were derived from the researcher's examination of all of the data collectively. The analysis of the interviews yielded three themes for the research question, as the following:

- (1) Ideal but not practical;
- (2) Potential to generate excitement;
- (3) Potential for professional development; and

(4) Strong willingness for future participation.

4.1 Ideal but Not Practical

When asked about their overall feelings towards a peer observation programme, many said that they possessed a positive attitude towards it because they were told that it was good when they were trained as a teacher. The key was that although they genuinely believed it could benefit them, but it was almost never their priority given the tasks that they have in hand. Therefore, it was perceived as not practical. Teacher #4 was able to verbalise the potential benefits of a peer observation programme.

‘Ideally, we can see and tell each other what we have been doing well and not so well. We all have blind spots in the sense that we may not be aware of our own weaknesses. There is no doubt that discussion among peers could contribute to better teaching practice.’

Teacher #1 said he came over the topic at university, and he was very impressed. He said:

‘I can recall reading the literature on peer observation. So, I know that this is quite a good idea. I agree with the philosophy behind the practice as well.’

However, as ideal as it may seem, many believed that running such a programme would not be very practical. One rationale repeatedly offered by the participants was that there would not be any incentive for teachers to do this. Teacher #2 hit the nail when he said:

‘Why would I need to do this [peer observation]? Our pay is not performance-based. Why would teachers, who think they are doing okay, put extra efforts into this peer observation? Not to mention the already heavy workload that we all have. One needs to be very passionate about teaching to run such a programme. But bear in mind that one passionate teacher would not be enough. You need a team.’

From the data, it seemed that teachers thought that peer observation was a good idea, but they thought such a programme would not be popular. Two possible reasons could be suggested: first, the teachers were only paying lip service to the benefits of peer observation. They might have done so because it was ‘politically correct’ to make such a claim in the sense that they were trained to appropriate such practice. The second reason would be that they found it difficult, if not impossible, to follow this practice of peer observation because of various feasibility issues. Such understanding of peer observation in China echoed Wang and Seth (1998)’s notion about the contemporary situation in Chinese classroom.

4.2 Potential to Generate Excitement

When the respondents were asked about the extent to which they enjoyed the process of evaluating their peers and being observed themselves. The responses were mixed because the teachers expressed different views. Some of them were of the opinion that the process had some degrees of excitement but a large number of them rather said that the process was full of tension and that reduced their interest and excitement in the peer evaluation process. The evidence of this is seen in the comments by some of the respondents. For example Teacher #3 said that:

“You see, it was the first time, and I thought it was something new so I was really happy and enjoyed the process. It’s always a fun to try something new and the prospect of evaluating your peers while your peers do the same to you was something funny”

Also, when talking about engagement and peer development, Teacher #2 said that:

“All along I was looking at how we teachers will react to one another’s report after the evaluation. It was exciting subjecting your colleague to rigorous assessment at what he or she is expected to know best while he does the same to you, I was anticipating the kind of jokes that we were going to crack about each other’s weaknesses and strength in the staff common room and that energised me to enjoy the process”

While the above information provided a positive review about the process there were others who expressed a more negative reevaluation of the experience. For example one of the respondents said

“I was quite tense so I did not really enjoy the programme. I did not know what my colleagues were actually going to say about me and neither was I very sure whether I should really grade my colleagues based on my perception of their performance. I was not sure where my assessment was going to lead them to and anticipated the disappointment to see them lose their job because I gave them lower marks”.

In addition, Teacher #1 also said that:

“Because we are not given criteria for how to evaluate effectively, I was merely employing heuristics and personal affiliation with the colleagues, I was largely influenced by my subjective bias in the assessment hence I saw it as mere formality and that affected my enjoyment of the process”

Based on the responses above, it is possible to suggest that several factors determine the extent to which respondents perceive peer evaluation process as either exciting or not. Specifically even though the respondents agree that the evaluation process generated some degrees of excitement, there are different reasons for this excitement which is not necessarily about the love for the process. One specific instance is the fact that the teachers think they will have fun after the evaluation with the colleagues after the evaluation to see how each of them performed. Additionally, the respondents said that they had challenges with what to evaluate because they were not given any specific or standard guide as to what to evaluate and this affected them. From this it can be concluded that the absence of a standardised parameter or measuring criteria to evaluate the peers during observation significantly attenuates any fun and excitement that is generated from the process. Further, familiarity and uncertainty about the outcome of the teacher's observation rather moderates the excitement that can be generated from it. It will be recalled that in the analysis of the literature, it was pointed out that it is usually better for people to be evaluated by those they are not familiar with as it generates more positive and less emotional response. This point of view seems to have been supported by the evidence adduced in this part of the research.

4.3 Potential for Professional Development

Another major argument in the analysed literature is that the primary purpose of peer observation leads to the professional development of teachers. Teachers' professional development refers to teachers who may participate in a set of process for personal growth with the understanding that peer observation should be a continuous activity. Specifically, staff development, professional development and in-service education are a set of progress that should be developed for personal growth. Peer observation is one of the key activities that may assist instructors to enhance their teaching practices (Bailey & Bergthold, 1996). Some evidence has been collected in this research to support the claims made in the literature. This is because in response to the question about what the teachers thought the major objective of the peer evaluation programme was, whether it has been achieved and whether they have become more professional as a teacher after their participation in the programme, the responses generated also differed even though the theme is the same.

For example one of the respondents Teacher #2 said that:

“I think the peer observation has a great potential to help me build my professional career but a single event is not enough. Professional development is a lifelong journey hence these observations must be done continuously in order to ensure that the best out of me comes out more fairly”.

Another respondent Teacher #3 also agreed and said that:

“I see this peer observation as a tool to elicit my strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. It will be more effective if afterwards the report is given to me and then I am made to understand my strengths and weaknesses. Merely collecting my strengths and weaknesses without making them known to me will not be useful to me and this is what I think has just happened”.

More still another respondent Teacher #1 also said that:

“I think that just like all other policies and evaluative tools that are available for teachers to develop their potential, peer observations are also very good and will contribute directly to my professional development. Being observed by my colleagues in the classroom helped me to dig deep into my educational repertoire and deliver the class more professionally than I would have done without observation. To that extent I agree with those who think that it is one of the major tools by which we can develop professionally.”

From the above comments, it only means that the potency of the peer observation in professional development is not in doubt and this is known by the teachers who participated in this research. The findings also point to the fact that conducting peer observation is not the ultimate goal of enhancing teacher's efficiency in the classroom. What is more important is the extent to which the information that is generated from the process is used to support the teacher to develop their competencies and capabilities to deliver quality teaching practices.

4.4 Strong Willingness for Future Participation

When asked about the extent to which the teachers will be willing to submit themselves to this observation, the evidence collected from the respondent are more positive confirming the fact that they see the programme as largely beneficial to their professional progress and development. Out of the six respondents, only few of them indicated that they were not likely to be interested in future process suggesting that majority of them actually does agree with this process. Further evaluation of the reasons given by the respondents as to why they want to participate in future peer observations is because they believe that peer evaluation can contribute to their continuous professional development.

For example Teacher #2 said that:

“I will definitely want to participate in future programme now because I feel that it can help me to give off my best. Irrespective of the fact that my colleagues were those that were observing me, I had an impetus to give off my very best and to adopt more pedagogical methodologies that I would not have done. Thus I was encouraged to be more professional in my encounter, take care of the classroom and enforce more of the principles of education that I had learnt in my teacher training and this I think is an important thing that must be done”.

This confirms the literature position that effective peer observation is beneficial for both department, teachers, administrators, and even policy makers. It has the capacity to shift in both K-12 and further education setting about teaching as a greater personal notion to make it a serious topic of communication in both formal and informal conferences.

Another respondent Teacher #3 also said that:

“By and large I will take part in any future observation programme because I believe that in any institution there is the need to do an assessment once a while. It does not matter who is doing the assessment but being able to get a feedback is very important. I also think it is especially good with the peer observation because there are some notions, or aspect, or idea about a person’s teaching strategies and practice that one’s co-workers could be evaluated better. They can give more honest assessment of my performance and help me to develop the areas where I have weaknesses better than having an outsider”

Based on the above responses, it is likely that the future of peer observation appears brighter than it is today because of the willingness of teachers to participate fully in the future. It can be said that teachers now better acknowledges that colleagues can help them to become better teachers and how they organise their teaching materials. Through teacher peer review methods, the teacher can access module content, module organisation, coursework organisation, the proper programme objectives and the appropriateness of teaching materials and texts (Bailey & Bergthold, 1996). Similarly, responses from the teachers also shows their agreement with the view that being observed by their colleagues can help them to better assess their teaching and test materials, strategies, teaching practices, methodology, student achievement based on performance on tests, assignments etc. It helps them to support departmental instructional efforts. However, the willingness of teachers to in peer review observation in the future will be enhanced if school authorities have a clearly laid down observation structure so as to reduce the level of subjectivity involved in peer observation. This new dimension to observation is incorporated into future observations because what one may observe to be a good presentation may equally be seen by another as a bad presentation. Thus, helping to remove subjective biases is very important. Another issue which came up is the extent to which peer observations can help novice teachers to better integrate into the teaching environment and deliver improved teaching methodologies.

5. Conclusion

These reservations confirm the prevalent perception of teachers. That is, if peer observation is well developed, then it can be potentially interesting or generate excitement among teachers. Support and alacrity are important factors to consider. Peer observation can motivate to teachers to deliver their possible best. It may also create a sense of competition among teachers. If well managed, competition can be harnessed for effective productivity rather than a source of animosity and rancour. This study concurs with the claims in the extant literature. Certain elements of a teacher’s performance can only be assessed accurately by colleagues in the same or closely-related disciplines. They can give more honest assessment of the performance and assist the teacher to develop their weak areas than an outsider. The findings attest that the future of peer observation appears bright considering the willingness of teachers to participate. Teachers are beginning to acknowledge that colleagues can help teachers to better access mastery of course content and course organisation; appropriateness of course objectives,

instructional materials, evaluative devices (i.e. exams, written assignments) and methodology for teaching specific content areas; commitment to teaching and concern for student learning; student achievement based on performance on exams and projects and support of departmental instructional efforts.

Teachers believe that peer observation can contribute to their long term professional development, especially when senior teachers assess the junior teachers. A system where the junior teachers can assess the senior teachers can also be devised. Peer observation can serve as a bridge between experience and innovation in teaching languages. It can also eliminate unhealthy competition. In response to the second research objective, which is to determine the perception of teachers towards the peer observation programme after participating, the study found that not many participants had previous experience, and they lack knowledge of what exactly to assess. The lack of a clear-cut procedure and requirement for evaluation resulted in both parties being frustrated; they were not given a yardstick of performance (Sivan & Chan, 2009). Although the respondents expressed their concern about the time constraint, the majority of the participants showed willingness to take part in future programmes.

5.1 Recommendation

Teachers should be given incentives to carry out peer observation. Motivation may be either monetary or non-monetary in form. Regardless, providing motivation is crucial because interest will determine the extent of their engagement. When teachers become engaged, their observations may improve significantly, influencing the innovativeness of the system and voluntary participation.

For peer observation to be effective, an outsider or unrelated person should observe a teacher. Familiarity lessens the seriousness of the evaluation and reduced its effect on the teacher's input. A standard procedure and measurement of peers should also be designed. This guideline should detail what should be observed and how to score teachers. Similarly, it informs those being observed about what is expected of them. Armed with this knowledge, the observed teachers can better prepare and improve on all areas during observation. All these measures can be highlighted if the teachers are involved in the programme planning. In doing so, the teachers will be open to the notion because they are involved in the planning; they can also contribute in developing better guidelines based on teacher sensitivities, which principals generally lack knowledge and experience.

5.2 Future Research Direction

This research has emphasised the key strengths and weaknesses of the peer observation practices among teachers in Hong Kong by focusing on language teachers. In the existing literature, teachers whose linguistic roots are different from the second language and second language learners face significant challenges. Given this issue, this research has explored the fundamental methods to strengthen peer observation as an ideal tool towards effective second language acquisition. Alternative approaches to supporting language teachers to deliver enhance quality of teaching have been suggested. Evidence-based learning practices can be implemented in language acquisition class as alternative, but this approach lacks a long history even in the mainstream educational learning. The greatest success of evidence-based learning and teaching is probably in the field of medicine. Therefore, the extent to which these measures and approaches can be adapted to the language teaching context to improve teaching and learning requires broader academic space and context.

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