Teacher educators' professional development through online peer-coaching

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Abstract

The outbreak of the pandemic caught educators unprepared for non-traditional ways of learning and teaching. Since remote teaching aggravated already existing challenges of the classroom, teachers and teacher educators began looking for alternative professional development (PD) arrangements that could address teaching-related needs. Peer coaching is a collaborative, non-hierarchical PD model that involves two or more colleagues reflecting on instructional practices, resolving classroom issues, and learning together new teaching techniques. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how online peer coaching could support the professional development of teacher educators by exploring their lived experiences under the pandemic conditions. Data were collected through reflective reports and semi-structured interviews. Following the five-step HILDA model for peer coaching, the participants held online discussions to get to know each other, identified strong and weak instructional strategies through observations, looked together at the possibilities to overcome barriers to remote teaching, decided on the actions for improvement and analysed the impact of their actions on learners. Data analysis revealed that the participants' perceptions of online peer coaching for PD included improved instructional practice, self-reflection, and a greater sense of well-being as a result of peer support. Reported difficulties were providing effective feedback to a colleague and a lack of different types of communication with learners. Finally, the participants offered suggestions for future improvements to the online peer coaching procedure.

Keywords: Online peer-coaching; HILDA model; remote teaching; professional development; teacher educators

1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 compelled countries to take emergency measures to prevent the pandemic from spreading. In order to respond quickly to lockdowns and school closings, educational institutions had to switch from face-to-face instruction to remote instruction by modifying existing technologies for online learning (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Jen et al., 2022). Teachers and students faced a variety of difficulties and opportunities due to the transition from a physical to a virtual setting because they had to quickly adjust to the new learning environment (Flores & Swennen, 2020) and carry on instruction with minimum learning losses. Teachers at all levels had to deal with issues such as, but not limited to, a lack of digital literacy, inadequate mentoring and collegial support, low student engagement, technical difficulties, inequalities among children, screen fatigue, and social distancing (Flores & Gago, 2020; Jen et al., 2022; Judd et al., 2020).

Higher education was no exception. Faculty members confronted numerous challenges. Some of the issues included lack of expertise in remote teaching, hardships of student evaluation, and the low levels of student motivation in online courses (Bao, 2020; Sahito et al. 2022; Zulaiha et al., 2020). Faculty members who offer courses in teacher education programs were similarly troubled by the departure from face-to-face teaching. According to Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020), teacher educators (TEs) in Israel sought social, professional, and emotional support from peers while attempting to design relevant and accessible online courses for their students and looking for ways to evaluate them. Rahiem (2020) claimed that since some TEs in Indonesia lacked ICT skills, they were unable to record sessions and use multiple screens. In a mixed-method study by Cutri et al. (2020), TEs were found to be concerned with assessment, equity and tenure issues the most. In many ways, they appeared to be in need of assistance from colleagues and school leaders more than ever (Tugend, 2020).

To more easily combat the problems of the pandemic and remote teaching, teachers and TEs could take part in professional learning communities, which can offer a variety of opportunities in such extraordinary circumstances (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). In professional learning communities, a group of teachers or TEs come together to discuss common problems, share insights, come up with ideas for better instruction in order to accomplish shared goals. They can then reflect on practice (Weißenrieder et al., 2015), receive emotional support (Antinluoma et al., 2021), better connect theory and practice (Jen et al., 2022), and continue their PD (Sleegers et al., 2013). As one form of a professional learning community, peer coaching is "a professional and supportive relationship, based on trust, between (usually) two colleagues" (Allison, 2014, p. 34). A review of literature has identified several benefits of peer coaching (Allison, 2014; Bennet, 2019; Çelik, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018). However, there isn't much

research indicating the potential use of peer coaching for TEs' professional development (PD).

This study was developed in response to the findings of a prior study that was based on an online team teaching practice and was carried out by Canaran and Bayram (2021) with two teacher educators during the pandemic. Canaran and Bayram's study's most notable finding was the participants' recommendations for the provision of more collaborative PD opportunities to faculty members (2021). As a result, the current study was designed with two TEs using online peer coaching (OPC) as a PD practice.

The particular aim of the study is to investigate how two TEs used OPC for their PD. The following were the research questions:

RQ1: How do teacher educators perceive the benefits and hardships of online peer coaching for their professional development?

RQ2: What do the teacher educators recommend for future practices with online peer coaching as a form of professional development for faculty members?

1.1. Peer coaching

Peer coaching entails two or more professionals working together to share ideas, perform classroom research, evaluate procedures, develop new abilities, and resolve issues at work (Arslan & Ilin, 2013). It has been conceptualized as an essential element of PD (Warnock et al., 2022; Kraft et al., 2018), encouraging individuals to adopt a "solutions-focused approach" in a "non-hierarchical" way to resolve instructional problems (Allison, 2014, p.34). In contrast to mentoring, peer coaching is based on mutual trust and power sharing (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). In peer coaching, the partners collaborate, share coaching responsibilities, and support one another in their professional endeavors (Fry & Hin, 2006). In a recent study by Arslan Dönmez and Şahin (2022) with foreign language lecturers in higher education setting, peer-coaching practice based on lesson observations, pre and post-observation meetings, and reflection was found to improve lecturers' instructional and classroom management skills while also improving relations between colleagues and school solidarity.

Teacher PD practices that had previously required traditional methods can now be carried out in various modes thanks to technology. Alternative modes can give teachers a more flexible option to pursue their PD despite their restricted time and space (Ching & Hursh, 2014; Tseng & Kuo, 2014; Zhang et al., 2017). During the pandemic lockdowns, when it was challenging for teachers to interact with peers in person, a large portion of PD and support was provided via distance learning in a variety of ways, such as open educational resources (OERs), massive open online courses (MOOCs), and public television in areas with poor internet connectivity. There have also been numerous examples of teachers collaborating virtually to support one another through peer support,

including mobile coaching (UNESCO, 2020). In a recent research implemented at an online university context with a group of faculty members, Bedford et al. (2021) found that peer coaching between educators resulted in a better understanding of pedagogical practices as long as the process was based on reflection and feedback.

Peer coaching dialogue can be organized and shaped using a variety of modes and models. In this study, the HILDA model of peer coaching by Allison and Harbour (2009) was adapted to a remote teaching mode for TEs to sustain their PD during the pandemic. The HILDA model was preferred as it offers a straightforward and focused framework to assist peers in asking the right questions to resolve issues related to teaching and learning. In the HILDA Model, Allison and Harbour (2009, p.11) suggest peers, coaches, and coachees to ask themselves and each other the questions below:

• *Highlight the issue:* What do they want to address? What do they want to be different and how?

• *Identify the strengths:* What do they already do well? How can these skills and attributes be used to address the particular issues?

• *Look at the possibilities:* In an ideal world, with no obstacles, what could they do to address the issues? What is getting in the way of doing this? How could these obstacles be overcome? What have they already tried? What worked and what didn't?

• *Decide and commit to action:* What are they going to do to address the issues? When are they going to do it? How are they going to do it?

• *Analyse and evaluate the impact:* How will they know if they have been successful? What will it look like?

When face-to-face delivery of PD is not possible, the HILDA model of peer coaching adapted for virtual settings may be an option for TEs to maintain professional and social interaction with one another. Because most people are distressed as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns (UN, 2020), the clear steps of the HILDA model can provide participants with comfort during a period of uncertainty. Furthermore, since coaching relationships are built on trust (Gardiner, 2012; O'Dwyer & Atlı, 2015), participants may be willing to take risks that they would not otherwise take due to their lack of experience with online teaching.

2. Method

This phenomenological study aimed to identify two TEs' particular experiences with online peer coaching and interpret the commonalities in their experiences within the research context (Fraenkel et al., 2012). More specifically, the study attempted to describe how TEs from English Language Education department perceived and reacted to their experience in OPC under the pandemic conditions. The study was implemented

in 2020-2021 spring semester and was completed in approximately 20 weeks. The participants were involved in OPC performing the steps adapted from Allison and Harbour's (2009) HILDA model for peer coaching. Figure 1 displays the process the TEs went through while implementing OPC.

Figure 1. Online peer coaching process based on the HILDA Model

As illustrated in Figure 1, OPC was carried out in five steps and each step took approximately 3-5 weeks to complete. OPC was implemented in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. The TEs gathered in bi-weekly online meetings and held discussions on a range of issues such as previous teaching experiences, teaching philosophies, individual and shared problems with remote teaching, lesson planning, managing online lessons and their expectations of OPC for improved instruction. The TEs used a shared drive file to keep and share lesson plans, observation checklists, video-recordings of lessons and reflective reports. Peer observation, document sharing, and reflective report writing took place asynchronously while meetings for lesson planning, evaluation and feedback were conducted synchronously.

The implementation of the model was facilitated by a trainer with experience in teacher professional development in higher education.   The facilitator introduced the HILDA model to the TEs, set the agenda for the meetings, moderated discussions, and distributed the related documents; in other words, she coordinated the effective OPC implementation.

The OPC was carried out by the participants in the following steps, which are detailed below:

1.   Highlight the issue: The first phase involved the TEs coming together to discuss their individual experiences with remote teaching. They explored the advantages and

difficulties of remote teaching, as well as the strategies, tools, and online teaching techniques they utilized in their classrooms. They were having conversations concerning students' motivation, active involvement and engagement in the online lessons. At this stage, the TEs also consulted another TE who was recently involved in team teaching practice. They noted her suggestions about the implementation of collaborative professional development and obstacles they might come across through the process. Three weeks were spent for the completion of the first step.

2.   Identify the strengths: The TEs' next step was to get to know themselves as professional individuals as well as knowing one another on a peer level. To do this, they first engaged in self-observation of a previously recorded lesson. Besides reflecting on online instruction, such as the things they did well and the areas that needed development, the goal of observation procedure was to see whether individual teaching beliefs matched their own classroom practices. Thanks to peer observation, the TEs observed a colleague teaching online and learned more about their own instructional strategies, strengths and points to improve. Before observations, the TEs were provided with self and peer observation checklists by the facilitator. This stage took three weeks to complete.

3.   Look at the possibilities: In this stage, the TEs sought possible ways to address a specific problem related to remote teaching. To do this, they conducted literature review on increasing student engagement in distance learning and polled students about what they thought might be done to increase their active participation in online courses. This stage was completed in three weeks.

4.   Decide and commit to action: Here, decisions regarding the best course of action in remote teaching were made by the TEs. They planned two online lessons where they could use each other as a source during the classes, and work through issues together in to encourage students to interact and participate more in the courses. This stage took the TEs five weeks to complete.

5.   Analyze and evaluate: At this stage, the TEs assessed their performance throughout the process and the impact of their collaborative efforts on students' engagement in lessons. They conducted group interviews with students and examined the video recordings of their courses, and observation notes in order to have a more thorough evaluation and reflection about their experience.

2.1. Setting and participant characteristics

The study was conducted in Türkiye during a period when all teaching and learning were done remotely due to COVID-19. The participants were two female TEs from the English Language Education Department of a private university. They took part in the study voluntarily. Both TEs were teaching remotely at the time of the study. They were

giving online instruction in the same faculty on a weekly-basis. TE1 was a full-time lecturer in the faculty for three years and was offering 12 hours of weekly online instruction. Before beginning to instruct in pre-service teacher education, TE1 had taught as an in-service English language teacher for 15 years. TE2 was a part-time lecturer with four years of experience in pre-service education and 13 years of in-service teaching. At the time of the study, TE2 was offering four hours of online instruction in the faculty. The participants had neither taught any courses remotely nor taken part in an online collaborative PD before. One of the participants had conducted some research on technology and language teaching but she had not implemented any online instruction in her own classes. The other participant had no online teaching experience except for the courses she had offered since the beginning of the pandemic in March, 2020.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews and reflective reports were used to collect the data. Reflective reports, which were kept electronically, were intended to describe the TEs' experiences going through the OPC steps. Reflective reports were crucial to the OPC and data collection of the study. Throughout the course of the study, five reflective reports were written. Each report was written upon the completion of the steps in the HILDA model. The reports were recorded in a 300-350 word composition format.

The purpose of the interviews was to understand how the participants perceived and reacted to their peer-coaching experience. There were two one-on-one and two focus-group interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted after the participants observed their own and their peer's online class. Focus group interviews were held at the onset and at the end of the study to identify and understand the background and previous PD experiences of the participants as well as their reflections on OPC. The interviews were held online.

For the analysis of qualitative data, four main steps were followed. Data analysis began by reading the reflective reports and listening to the interview recordings several times. The aim was to identify the TEs' notes and statements that seemed meaningful in interpreting their experience with OPC (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In the second step, organization of data, relevant statements from the participants' descriptions were selected and grouped into themes by the researcher. The researcher then asked a teacher trainer with a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction Department to review the codes and themes for coherence and reliability. In the final stage of data analysis, emerging themes were combined and described in a narrative account.

3. Results

Results indicated OPC had benefits and challenges with respect to the TEs' professional development. Data analysis revealed three benefits to the TEs in the study: *improved practice, reflection on teaching* and *enhanced well-being*. Regarding the perceived challenges, the findings suggested the TEs experienced *difficulties in giving each other constructive feedback* and *having limited communication types with students*. Finally, the TEs offered recommendations for better OPC implementation that would help improve future practice. See Figure 2 below for the emergent themes:
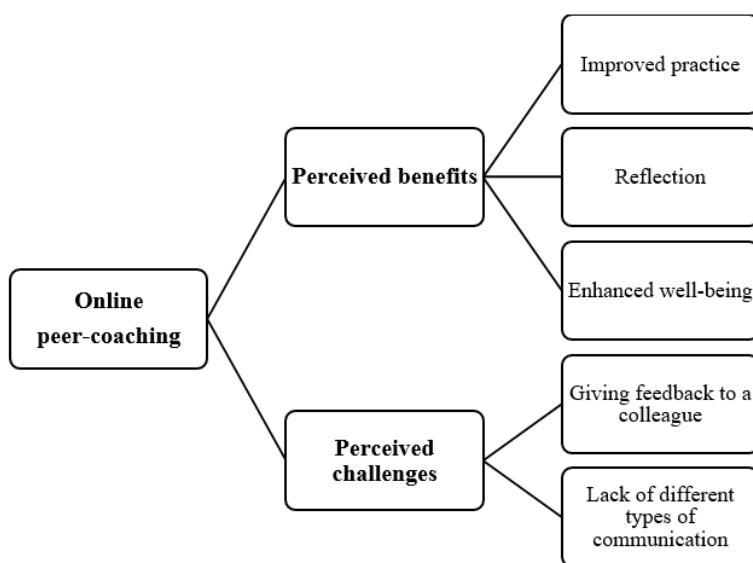

Figure 2: Perceived benefits and challenges of OPC

3.1. Perceived Benefits of OPC

Data analysis revealed three themes in relation to the perceived benefits OPC for TEs' professional development.

3.1.1. Improved Practice

The results of the study demonstrated that the TEs raised the quality of their instruction while collaborating to identify strategies for increasing student engagement in online classes. Both cited the advantages of the "looking at the possibilities" process in HILDA model, where they read about remote teaching in academic journals and discovered cutting-edge digital technologies, thereby enhancing their teaching skills for

virtual learning environments. TE1 commented, "*I had never heard of digital tools like Mentimeter and Socrates*". Beginning to implement them in her virtual class, TE1 added, "*By conducting some research, I was able to bring some originality to my teaching while using them [Mentimeter and Socrates] in my classes*".

Additionally, peer observation and dialogues helped the TEs get to know one another professionally and better. They were able to identify and build upon each other's abilities, and they transferred good practice of each other to their own classes. TE2 reported, "*I became aware of my inability to manage time in online lectures as successfully as my colleague after observing her. My pacing improved as a result of my increased timing awareness*". She said she began devoting more time to lesson planning as well as using tasks that would attract learners' attention more, "*Previously, I didn't spend a lot of time for planning lessons and didn't think much of how students would want to learn. Student-centered discussions with my peer led to the better planning and implementation of lessons.*"

3.1.2. Reflection
Development of reflective teaching skills was perceived as another advantage of OPC. The TEs reported three important procedures in OPC motivating them to reflect on their teaching. Primarily, self-observing one of their own online classes, both participants developed awareness of their strengths and their professional needs to improve in remote teaching. For instance, TE1 noticed, "*I don't pay attention to wait time. I ask questions and answer without waiting for students to think and reply*". With some heightened awareness, they seemed to be encouraged to think more critically about their instruction. This was supported by a quote from TE2, "*Despite its being hard to observe my own class at first, self-observation put me in the shoes of my students. I started asking questions like "Why do I do this?"*

Another procedure perceived to foster reflection was peer observation. The results showed the TEs had not observed a peer's class very often in the past and never observed online instruction of another colleague. Observing each other's two recorded lessons prompted both self-evaluation and thinking about how they could adapt a good practice of a colleague's to their own teaching. TE1 said, "*I thought about myself teaching the same class while observing my peer. Her adoption of educational tools as well as encouraging students to learn from mistakes was great. I felt motivated to use similar practices in my own teaching.*"

Lastly, the discussions that were held during the online biweekly meetings aided reflection as the TEs were stimulated to see their own teaching with a more critical eye as exemplified by TE2's comment; "*During the meetings, we shared what and how we were doing with a shared problem. Those discussions helped me focus on the sources of the problems as well as the ways of solving them more deeply*".

3.1.3. Enhanced well-being

The OPC allowed the participants to draw social and professional support from one another during a period when all schools were closed, which helped them handle feelings of worry and loneliness. TE1 said, *"I did not meet other faculty members in person because of the pandemic. We didn't have any occasions to socialize except for some formal and online department meetings".* Nevertheless, OPC seemed helpful to combat isolation, as TE1 continued, *"I was feeling alone because I didn't have much company. Joining OPC was a relief as I could find someone whom I could consult and speak to from my department".*

In addition to helping socially, OPC assisted the TEs to tackle professional isolation. *"While seeing my peer's class, I felt relieved realizing that we had similar issues with remote teaching and we could help each other to sustain our PD throughout lockdowns."* said TE2.

3.2. Perceived Challenges of OPC

The TEs identified two major difficulties with OPC: *difficulty in providing effective feedback to a colleague* and *the challenge of engaging in various forms of communication with students.*

3.2.1. Giving effective feedback to a colleague

Both TEs admitted it was challenging to provide effective feedback to one another. The facilitator provided them with a checklist to utilize during peer observations. However, they were unsure of the best way to explain the markings and notes on their observation checklists to their peers without coming out as disrespectful or judgmental. As expressed by TE1, *"OPC helped me see I didn't know how to express my notes on the peer observation checklist to my peer without being evaluative and impolite."* TE1 also felt that she was unable to provide constructive feedback because she did not feel qualified enough to do it for another colleague. She said, *"I didn't feel competent to tell a colleague with a similar teaching experience about what needed to be improved in her teaching."*

Similarly, TE2 stated there were moments when she felt communication was poor due to the absence of non-verbal communication in the online meetings. She supported her point with an example drawn from feedback sessions. She said, *"I understood effective peer coaching required a strong dialogue, I mean both verbal and non-verbal dialogue. We sometimes missed facial expressions, and gestures in online setting, which prevented the successful exchange of ideas."* She added that working in an online environment sometimes led to a breakdown in their collegial dialogues, thus they could not articulate their ideas as well as they wished. She continued, *"Reflecting on my lesson was more comfortable than that of my peer's. Commenting on each other's instruction, I feared of*

being misunderstood while giving feedback to my partner. It was due to missing gestures and expressions in online setting."

3.2.2. Limited forms of communication with students

Another difficulty of OPC was reported as the hardship of engaging in various forms of communication with students. TE2 said they allocated more time to the students individually in the peer-taught lessons and student participation was relatively higher thanks to collaborative planning. Nevertheless, while communication in face-to-face lessons occur in a variety of ways, including verbal, written, non-verbal, between students and teachers, and between students themselves, the majority of communication occurred in a written form via chat box on the digital platform, resulting in TEs not communicating with students effectively. TE2 expressed her opinion, *"Students participate in lessons in a variety of ways when we meet them in physical classrooms, but they generally favored written communication in a virtual setting. I can say this has significantly and negatively impacted our practice as we didn't receive much student feedback".* TE1 agreed that teaching in an online setting prevented them from interpreting thoroughly how peer-planned and taught lessons influenced student engagement. She said, *"Due to little communication and interaction in the online courses, we were not able to adequately reflect on how OPC lessons engaged our students",* as most of the student interaction was written, not verbal.

3.3. TEs' recommendations for future OPC practice

The need to lessen participants' workload during the process was one of the first suggestions for more successful OPC implementation. Even though the TEs voluntarily agreed to take part in OPC, they admitted that they occasionally found OPC difficult to implement because the pandemic brought other commitments in addition to their regular tasks at the faculty. They suggested reducing the number of synchronous meetings and reflective reports because they were a bit tiring for them. As TE1 stated, *"With less paperwork, OPC experience could be more practical and less tiring".*

The compatibility of peers was a further recommendation. With partners who agreed with each other both personally and professionally, the TEs thought, the procedure would move along more smoothly. This was supported by TE2 who said, *"Although we did not know each other well before the study, I came to understand we were gradually understanding each other better and speaking the same language."* TE1 agreed, *"I think OPC would be challenging unless we got along well. We did not meet in person due to lockdowns but working with a colleague with similar views and ideas helped the process go smoothly."* TE1 further emphasized the importance of personality in feedback giving and said, *"I found it hard to provide feedback to a colleague I got along well with, and I can't imagine how to do this with someone I am not any compatible with."*

After realizing the benefits of the OPC for their own professional growth, the TEs suggested carrying out future OPC projects where TEs from other universities or countries would collaborate to share knowledge, experience and practice. TE2 said, *"Combining peer coaching with technology can allow for the acquisition of new and wider experiences. For instance, I'd like to peer coach with a colleague in a different university or abroad to improve myself as an educator."*

The final recommendation is about sustainability of the OPC. The TEs suggested disseminating their OPC experience among the faculty members. TE2 said, *"We should let other faculty members learn about OPC from our experience as we had learned team teaching from another colleague"*. Additionally, they expressed that collaboration is a topic they frequently emphasize in their lessons with pre-service teachers, yet they hardly engage in collaborative work or PD activities among themselves in the faculty. TE1 said, *"Joining OPC, I became aware of the absence of peer support at my workplace and became more willing to take part in collaborative projects like OPC."*

4. Discussion

Regarding the perceived benefits and difficulties of peer coaching, the study's findings are consistent with the literature. Results showed peer coaching in an online setting enabled the TEs to exchange knowledge and experience, adopt new online teaching strategies, and transfer their learning from OPC into their classroom to enhance their instruction. Although there is hardly any peer coaching study involving TEs, similar findings have been found by the research studies on peer coaching with in-service teachers in face-to face environments (Arslan & İlin, 2013; Murray et al., 2009; Yee, 2016) and online teaching settings (Ma et al. 2018; Warnock et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2017). This outcome might imply that TEs themselves do not have a strong preference for teamwork and collaboration in the faculty with their colleagues. Furthermore, the TEs understood hearing students' voices would improve their instruction by seeing teaching-related problems through students' eyes. The findings have confirmed the previous research (Morris, 2019; Allison, 2014), which emphasized that students' perspectives could aid educators at all levels in advancing their own PD.

Results showed the TEs were encouraged to rethink their own instructional strategies and the root of instructional problems. Their increased awareness and reflection thanks to self-observation, peer observation, and collegial talks was revealed as a reported benefit of OPC. Having little to no experience in lesson observation, they had the chance to see themselves from the views of the students through self-observation and see another colleague teaching the same course remotely through peer observation. Reflection was prompted by conversations conducted with a peer about observational experiences, which was similarly emphasized by the former research (Ma et al., 2018; Passmore, 2015; Zhang et al., 2017).

Another finding of the study was that OPC improved well-being of the TEs who worked from their homes. Without any social or professional support from the faculty due to the lockdowns, the TEs were attempting to combat the challenges of remote teaching on their own before volunteering to join the OPC practice. Their involvement in OPC seemed to help them feel more at ease because OPC lifted some of the weight off their shoulders by fostering their socialization, sense of collegial solidarity, and ability to look for solutions to problems with a peer. This finding complements other studies (Froehlich et al., 2022; Galazka & Jarosz, 2021), which found that teachers' well-being increased thanks to the peer support received in a digital setting.

The TEs acknowledged the usefulness of obtaining feedback from a peer after being observed (Haneda et al., 2019; Jao, 2013; Passmore, 2015), but they also mentioned the difficulty of giving effective feedback to each other. Despite their compatibility on a personal and professional level, the TEs struggled to express themselves appropriately because they felt they lacked expertise in providing constructive feedback. Similarly, based on the findings of their study, Arslan Dönmez and Şahin (2022) proposed training lecturers in effective communication if effective peer-coaching practice is desired. Underlining the shortcomings of feedback mechanisms among faculty members, Gormally et al. (2014) similarly confirmed that faculty members are more likely to recognize the value of peer feedback for their PD but the majority had minimal opportunities for professional growth as many lack knowledge, training and pedagogical methods for giving feedback. Another reason why the TEs thought they couldn't provide appropriate peer feedback was due to the limited usage of non-verbal communication in the online setting, where only verbal and written contact was possible. Nevertheless, facial expressions and nonverbal conduct assist in interpreting both the speaker's verbal message and underlying emotions in relation to the interaction (Dragomir et al., 2021). This lack of non-verbal communication during the online feedback sessions was cited as a problem by the TEs in the study.

Although the TEs reported to observe relatively higher student engagement in lessons designed through peer coaching than those performed individually (Arslan & İlin, 2013; Witkowski & Cornell, 2015), they thought they couldn't collect varied feedback from students as most students preferred to participate in the lessons by writing in the chat box on the digital platform. In contrast to face-to-face learning environments where lecturers can monitor learning and communication in a variety of ways, online learning environment might limit the channels of communication for students and teachers (Aboagye et al., 2021; Adarkwah, 2021). As such, the TEs were unable to collect sufficient data as to how peer coaching impacted students in a virtual environment, which was similarly confirmed by the former studies carried out in physical learning environments (Murray et al., 2009; Russo, 2004).

With respect to the recommendations for future OPC implementations, the TEs suggested more flexibility (Bostancıoğlu, 2016), such as less paper work and fewer synchronous meetings in OPC as their already busy schedule became more challenging during the pandemic (Jao, 2013; Zhang et al., 2017). Another suggestion was that peers should get along and be understanding of each other (Murray et al., 2009; Pearce et al., 2019) as it can help reduce the stress and anxiety due to peer observation, planning, and feedback giving. Further, the TEs emphasized their desire for more peer coaching opportunities in the faculty where they could form communities of practice as well as ensure quality instruction. Since information and communication technologies enabled the creation of educational networks between various countries and regions (Rangel-Pérez et al., 2021), the TEs suggested implementing OPC with other colleagues teaching in different parts of the world. Finally, as collaborative practices are generally rare among TEs (Nevin et al., 2009), TEs in the study advise that those with OPC experience should disseminate their learning to other faculty members for the sustainability of PD in teacher education programs.

5. Conclusions

TEs rarely work together to pursue their PD. Peer coaching, a form of professional learning community, is a practical approach for assisting TEs in collegial learning and reflection even in the times of crisis. Thanks to remote teaching, moving PD practices to the internet platform using synchronous and asynchronous modalities has made it easier to use them in a variety of settings and at different times. The results showed peer coaching conducted remotely had some perceived positive effects on the participants' online teaching strategies, reflective skills and well-being. Along with the advantages, TEs found it difficult to give each other effective constructive comments about their instruction. Due to limited verbal communication and a lack of non-verbal communication, they couldn't gather enough feedback about OPC from students. The participants also stressed the significance of personality factors for peer coaching to run more effectively and the need for more collaboration among TEs in the faculty.

The utilization of alternative teaching and learning models is the future of education, as the pandemic has demonstrated. The same holds true for PD of educators. In various modes and platforms, PD practices can be carried out in a way that is more flexible, adaptable, and practical for educators depending on their needs. OPC proved to be useful for TEs in times of isolation when they needed the support of a peer who was going through a similar struggle and had first-hand experience of the difficulties associated with virtual classrooms. Since the OPC in the present study only involved two participants and was conducted over a brief period of time, it is impossible to generalize the findings. Nevertheless, we suggest providing participants with an initial training about the principles and procedures of peer coaching, observation and feedback-giving for

better practice in the future. Lastly, greater emphasis on the role that peer coaching plays in student engagement needs further researching as the findings did not prove sufficient data with this respect.

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Appendix. Interview and Reflective Report Questions

Focus group interview questions (At the beginning of the study)

1. Have you involved in any form of professional development practice before? If yes, please mention the type and date of the practice.

2. What do you know about peer coaching?

3. What do you expect to improve in your instruction through OPC?

4. What challenges do you think you might face throughout the process?

Focus group interview questions (At the end of OPC)

1. Have you found the OPC practice useful for your professional development? Why and why not? Please explain by giving specific examples from your experience.

2. In what ways do you think the OPC has improved your instructional practice?

3. How has the OPC contributed to your PD during the pandemic?

4. What challenges have you experienced while implementing OPC?

5. What suggestions do you have for making OPC more useful for TEs professional development?

One-on-one interview questions (After self-observation)

1. What did you address in the lesson? What did you like / dislike about the lesson in particular?

2. What did you already do well? How could your strengths be used to address the particular issues?

3. What were the main obstacles? How could these obstacles be overcome? What worked and what didn't?

4. How do you know if your lesson was successful?

5. What are you going to do to address the issue next time? How are you going to do it?

One-on-one interview questions (After peer-observation)

1. What did your peer address in the lesson? What did you like / dislike about your peer's lesson in particular?

2. What did your peer already do well? How could her strengths be used to address the particular issues?

3. What were your peer's main obstacles? How could these obstacles be overcome? What worked and what didn't?

4. How do you know if your peer's lesson was successful?

5. What could your peer do to address the issue next time? How could she do it?

Reflective Report

Reflect on your experience through the ……………..step of HILDA model describing the moments that improved and challenged you most during its implementation. Describe your experience in 300-350 words.