Peer Observation as a Professional Development Intervention in EFL Pedagogy: A Case of a Reading Lesson on Developing the Top-down Processing Skills of the Preparatory Year Students

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Abstract

Most research on peer observation as a professional development intervention in EFL contexts focuses either on teachers' perceptions about its usefulness or the methodical frameworks. There are a few studies which report real-time incidence of a peer observed lesson. To fill this gap, the present study arranged a peer observation for a reading lesson on top-down processing skills to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson as well as develop the reading literacy of the students. The peer observation method included a pre-observation stage with the teacher and the observer deciding on the modalities of observation. The second stage was the lesson which was peer observed followed by the post-lesson reflection stage. The results obtained through teachers' reflection on different aspects of the lesson and the peer observer's report revealed that most stages and activities of the lesson went as planned except for the final where issues of activity management, teacher feedback, and coherent lesson progression came up to the fore. The study has significance for EFL practitioners interested in initiating self-directed professional development through peer observation in particular and for researchers of professional development studies in general.

Keywords: peer observation, professional development, reading literacy, reflective teaching, top-down processing

1. Introduction

The teachers and their activities are the most crucial variables in the scheme of teaching and learning at all levels of the educational system (Saha & Dworkin, 2009). For Hunt (2009 p.1), the construct of effective teaching entails "the collection of characteristics, competencies, and behaviors of teachers at all educational levels that enable students to reach desired outcomes". Professional development of teachers through observations thus assumes a crucial significance in academic settings. Taken from teacher development perspective, observations motivate reflection on one's teaching beliefs and practices and ultimately aid in minimizing the gaps which are observed between the beliefs and the practicum (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Peer observation (PO) which Shortland (2004, p. 222) calls "third-party observation" is one of the most effective teacher development interventions. PO can be most effective if initiated by the teacher himself and that too after identifying a specific teaching area the teacher wants to improve or reflect upon. Teacher and the observer's reflection on the lesson design and delivery can also be used as a needs analysis tool for not only reviewing one's teaching beliefs and practices but also for teacher development programmes at least at the institutional level. This can only be achieved if peer observation sessions are focused on reporting real-time classroom teaching on any area of interest which the teacher identifies. The present study proposes to follow this approach and plans to use a reading lesson based on top-down processing (TDP) to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson design and delivery through teacher reflection and peer observer's report.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Peer Observation and Professional Development

Teacher observations feature prominently in academic settings for achieving different professional and pedagogical goals. Gosling (2002 p.5) has suggested three models of teacher observation. His Evaluation Model concerns a teacher's observation by a senior for the purpose of performance appraisal; the Development Model is conducted as a source of feedback while the teacher is summatively assessed on a formal teacher training programme; and the Peer Review Model, which is formative in its orientation, involves a teacher observation by

one of the colleagues with the express aim of reflecting on and developing teaching beliefs and practices through 'non-judgmental constructive feedback'. Bell (2002) cited in McMahon, et al. (2007) introduced her "Performance Model" that corresponds with Gosling's "Evaluation Model", and the "Development and Training Model" which at the formal level corresponds with Gosling's second framework, and at the informal with the "Peer Review Model". PO is generally associated with the Peer Review or the Development and Training Model, and is designed around interventions which facilitate teacher development from a variety of pedagogic perspectives.

Research has established the role of PO as an effective medium of teacher development in EFL settings (Motallebzadeh, et al. 2017). Poumellec, et al. (1992 p.129) argue that "peer observation and feedback in teacher training and teacher development has natural appeal. It seems professional, non-threatening and non-prescriptive". For PO to be professional, it should be a reflective activity involving teacher collaboration for the identification of their strengths and weaknesses which can then be reflected upon for improvements in the teaching skills and other related competencies. This can reveal a number of pedagogic possibilities which teachers have not tried before or offer teachers solution to teaching problems they have not been able to figure out or motivate teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and teaching for more effective practice. PO can also be done on reciprocal basis when teachers decide on their development through collaboration (Bell, 2005) to the benefit of both the observer and the observed. A number of studies support this point of view (e.g. Bell & Mladenovic, 2008; Day, 2013). Mousavi (2014) found PO as an effective source of developing the self-efficacy beliefs of the observers which resulted in improvement in their teaching skills. Success of professional development initiatives depends on the value the teachers assign to PO which in result ensure readiness to bring changes to the traditionally held pedagogic beliefs and practices through reflection and engagement in developmental activities.

PO if not conducted in a relaxing environment, and not reported in a non-judgmental way can prove detrimental to teacher development. Ahmed, et al. (2018) in their study on PO in Saudi EFL context found that PO was a serious issue due tothe teachers' "lack of autonomy in deciding about the peers, trust deficit between administration and EFL teachers, rarely held pre-observation conferences due to the loads of teaching hours, observers' insufficient training and qualifications in conducting PO, and the element of threat and insecurity". In a similar vein, Crookes (2003, p. 29) opines that an observer in the role of an administrator "induces anxiety". Williams (1989, p.86) found that teacher observation on a traditional pattern can be intimidating, prescriptive with complete disregard to the teachers' voice and involvement in the observation process. Generally, teacher observations have been found daunting to the teachers since they are understood as part of the teacher appraisal process, and therefore, "need to be carefully negotiated between the participating parties" (Richards and Farrell, 2005 p. 94).

Following Johnstone (2004 p. 651) that "one cannot restrict language teacher education to one set of rules or one ideology", PO can prove a very effective tool for exploring diversity in language teaching arts. It is important that the observer should encourage rather than "dishearten" (Stillwell, 2009, p, 354).Therefore, the recording of the PO can be based on written observer notes (Richard & Farrell, 2005) which should be created on a preset criteria (Montgomery, 1999). This might guide the observer to furnish objective and precise feedback on the events during the PO session. Equally important is the post observation reflection and meeting between the observer and the observed. Donnelly (2007) in Ahmed, et al. (2018 p.76) suggests three areas for reflection: "a review of the criteria and agreements, an analysis of learning outcomes of the observed lesson and a scrutiny of the lesson plan". Therefore, a professionally formatted PO which motivates the observed teacher to initiate change in his teaching beliefs and practices can be a really effective tool of professional development.

The domain of EFL is potentially rich for holding PO sessions from a wide range of teaching foci. One of the many possible PO areas could be to allow a teacher to design, conduct and reflect on a lesson which aims at developing the academic literacy skills of the students. This study chose to set a reading through TDP lesson to PO to identify the teaching deficit for further development as well as help learners go through an important reading literacy skill.

2.2 Reading Literacy and Top-down Processing

Reading is not only a linguistic skill for discourse comprehension but also a complex composite of social, psychological, belief and attitude systems (Angosto et al., 2013). Omaggio (1986, p. 122-123) considers reading "a problem-solving activity involving the formation of hypothesis, the drawing of inferences, and the resolution of ambiguities and uncertainties in the input in order to assign meaning".

This view of reading as a receptive skill is endorsed by Fayol (2004, p.191) who argues that it is a "complex activity which simultaneously mobilizes different representational levels and procedures".

This is because a text is situated socio-culturally in its generic class which defines its linguistic and rhetorical characteristics. Unlike the speaking skill where the interlocutors are in close physical proximity, reading as a

language skill involves, in most cases, a physically remote interaction with the writer through the medium of language, cognition, background knowledge, and familiarity with the target genre. Discourse interpretation thus becomes an exercise in text decoding through linguistic and cognitive resources which in turn facilitate discourse interpretation followed by the readers' evaluation of the text. At one level, the complexity occurs when the reader has to figure out the implicit meaning through inference (Castles, et al., 2018). This complexity means that finding a simple answer to questions like "how does reading comprehension develop" and "why does it sometimes fail" quickly becomes an impossible task (Nation, 2019, p.47).

Unlike the bottom-up approach which moves from the micro-level textual features to the macro level, TDP of reading is global in the sense that the focus is on understanding the topic, author's purpose, and the central idea of each paragraph. From an academic point of view, this entails the ability to understand, use and reflect on written discourse for achievement of the personal aims, enhancement of knowledge and abilities, and participation in society (Therrien, 2004). TDP lets the readers' prior knowledge aid general understanding of the text. Following this, comprehension of an ambiguous text is facilitated because TDP triggers the contextual information and background knowledge that directs the reading process (Angosto et al., 2013). Paran (1996) in Fatemi et al. (2014) considers TDP being embedded in socio-cultural context which provides a knowledge base to the reader in his attempt to decode the text for its holistic meaning. In the TDP model of reading, context is a multi-faceted phenomenon. The reader's world view or knowledge about the topic, and an association with the past experience or exposure, all facilitate the regulation of context for comprehension. In addition, the TDP model is also recognized as a cognitive process that the processing of a text begins in the mind of the reader (Suraprajit, 2019). Fieldin Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2006, p. 331) opines that context can also be derived from "a schema, an expectation set up before reading or listening; it can take the form of *spreading* activation, where one word sparks off associations with others; or it can be based upon the *probability* of one word following another. It is important to specify which of these cues is intended when the expression 'top-down' is employed".

The TDP model of reading generally involves the use of prediction, skimming, and scanning as reading strategies. Merriam-Webster dictionary (2009) defines prediction as the ability "to declare or indicate in advance; foretell on the basis of observation, experience, or scientific reason". Prediction helps our minds activate for the target task of listening or reading. The learners are made to use their background knowledge to predict what will happen next. This can be done with the help of realia, prompts such as pictures, questions, context clues etc. However, it is not necessary for the predictions to be true all the time. Skimming, on the other hand, is a type of speed reading when a reader runs his eyes over the text to get the gist. For example, he may skim read a chapter to find out whether the author agrees or disagrees with a certain point of view. Skimming is more effective than previewing especially in the pre-reading tasks and can provide an accurate picture of the text. It can also be effectively done for reviewing an already read text. However, Harmer (2001, p. 202) notes that "gist reading and listening are not lazy options. The reader or listener has made a choice not to attend to every detail, but to use their processing powers to get more of a top-down view of what is going on". In order to develop good skimming skills, it is important for the readers to carefully notice question words like *what, who, why, how* etc., the proper nouns, abbreviations, qualifying adjectives such as *best, unique*, and typographical cues, for instance, bold face, italics, underlining, asterisks etc. Scanning as a reading strategy refers to speed reading to locate a particular piece of information which can be a specific name, date, statistics, or a fact without reading the entire text. For instance, a reader may scan a TV schedule in a newspaper to find timing for his favourite programme.

2.3 Learner Problems with Top-down Processing

The learners especially the second language learners face many problems in comprehending a written text for several reasons. First, the target language itself is challenging. The learners may find word or sentence length a big challenge in comprehension (Harmer, 2001, p.203). An unusually long word or a sentence with multiple clauses can be difficult for the novice reader to comprehend. Similarly, unfamiliar words and phrases are a big issue in understanding reading. New words, idioms, and phrasal verbs certainly impede the reading proficiency of the learners. In addition, lack of proper understanding of how discourse is organized with the use of cohesive devices may become a serious obstacle in understanding. The inability to distinguish the supporting detail from the main can also create problems in text interpretation. Field dependence is a learning style in which a learner tends to look at the whole of a learning task which contains many items. The learner has difficulty in studying a particular item when it occurs within a field of other items (Richards et al., 1992, p. 138). Moreover, most novice L2 readers do tunnel reading i.e. they read every single word. While doing this their eye contact is only on the word that is being read. They lose link with the context and find it difficult to understand the meaning of the text as a whole. In addition, the learners consider that reading in the target language is an altogether different phenomenon and hence do not use L1 strategies in reading. They do not apply prediction, and inference from the

context. The learners do not activate their schemata before reading a text. As a result, they do not do intelligent guessing and develop propositions about the text and therefore, lack in the appropriate background knowledge needed for good comprehension. Lack of interest or unfamiliarity with the genre may also result in poor understanding of the text (Harmer, 2001 p. 203). For instance, it would be difficult for an arts and humanities student to generate interest in an article on space science and then understand it. L2 learners often do not have background knowledge of the culture which is depicted in the text. This leads either to disinterestedness or inappropriate comprehension. If the comprehension tasks are above the level of the learners, there will be serious issues of understanding. Mostly, it happens that the learners are given a difficult passage with a lot of activities which they have to complete within a very short time. Some learners have attitudinal issues based on their previous experience with reading tasks. They take it for granted that the target text for reading will be difficult and that they will not be able to understand. Therefore, there is no need of putting in extra amount of effort. Reading is a receptive skill and needs complete concentration on the task in hand. Noisy environment, distraction of any other type, and illegible text can hinder the reading process and thereby the comprehension.

3. Aims and Objectives

Most research studies on PO are based on either theoretical issues such as the PO frameworks (e.g. Gosling, 2002) or perceptual understanding of the topic through surveys or interviews (e.g. Ahmed et al. 2018). As such there is relative dearth of real-time PO reports that are based on any of the pedagogical foci in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. This study aims to address this research vacuum, and proposes to conduct a PO session for the purpose of teacher development using a lesson design to help the students with TDP of reading. More specifically, the study will use the teacher's personal reflection and the observer's comments to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the target lesson based on PO criteria (Table 1). The findings are expected to benefit EFL practitioners interested in teaching TDP in particular and those interested in conducting PO on other domains in actual classroom contexts in general.

4. Method

Malderez (2003 p.75) refers to the four dimensions of teacher observations: for professional development, for training, for evaluation, and for research. For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose to focus on PO or observation for professional development dimension only. Following British Council (2012), this study designed the PO in three stages: Pre-observation discussion; the lesson; and the post lesson reflections

4.1 Pre-observation Discussion

The PO lesson was conducted at the English Language Institute (ELI), University of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The researcher requested a colleague who was a native speaker teacher with an MA and Celta certificate to conduct this PO lesson. He had more than 15 years of language teaching experience in different EFL contexts. Presently, he was involved in conducting formal teacher observations for the annual appraisal as a member of the Professional Development Committee. So, it was assumed that he was suitably qualified and experienced to observe the target lesson, and supply an objective report on the lesson.

The pre-observation stage included deciding on the time and venue for the lesson as well as sharing the lesson aims and plan, learner profile, learner issues with reading skill, tasks/activities with their rationale, and the PO evaluation criteria with the peer observer. The PO evaluation form (Table 1) was adapted from Cambridge ESOL evaluation form which was used for the teaching awards. However, the present study focused on five dimensions of the lesson to be observed: the choice of the topic; planning and preparation; lesson delivery; teacher knowledge; and classroom management. Each dimension had benchmarks which were rated by the observer on a three-point scale i.e. achieved; partially achieved; not achieved. There was also a provision for the observer's comments for each dimension.

Table1. Peer Observation Form

	Observation Descriptors	Observation Benchmarks The teacher;	1/2/3
1	Choice of the Topic	Identifies a specific area appropriate to learning context & learners' needs	
	Observer's Comments		
2	Planning & Preparation	Provides learner profile	
		States lesson aims	

		Includes language analysis (communicative features of discourse)
		Establishes link with the previous learning
		Mentions assumptions about learners' knowledge etc.
		Shows familiarity with learners' problems & solutions
		Sequences procedures & activities to achieve lesson aims
		Develops & keeps effective materials
		Manages time through lesson stages effectively
	Observer's Comments	
3	**Lesson Delivery**	Teaches as planned appropriate to the learners needs and level
		Allows equal participation
		Is receptive & responds to learners' participation
		Uses procedures, activities & techniques to achieve lesson aims
		Exploits materials to support learning to achieve aims
		Delivers a coherent & suitably varied lesson
		Monitors & checks students' learning & responds as appropriate
	Observer's Comments	
4	**Teacher Knowledge**	Uses language appropriate to the teaching context
		Provides appropriate models of language use
		Provides accurate information about language use
		Notices learners' output & incorporates it into the learning process
	Observer's Comments	
5	**Classroom Management**	Implements LP & adapts it to the emerging needs
		Manages the classroom space, furniture & other equipment effectively
		Sets up whole class/pair/group work as appropriate
		Ensures the learners stay focused on lesson aims & the learning outcomes
	Observer's Comments	

1 = Achieved; 2 = Partially Achieved; 3 = Not Achieved

4.2 The Lesson

This stage presents the preparations the researcher had made for the PO lesson, and includes information about the learners, aims and objectives of the lesson, learner problems with reading comprehension and their proposed solution, and the lesson plan/procedure with rationale for teaching different stages/activities of the lesson.

4.2.1 Learner Profile

The group of learners for this study comprised of 25 Arabic speaking Preparatory Year Saudi monolinguals at the University of Jeddah - a public sector university in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. They took three 50 minutes lessons for five days of the week during this first term of the academic year. In the beginning of this course, they were shy, unable to express themselves, and reluctant to participate in the class room activities. But things had started to change since then and, a slow but steady progression was observed in the levels of motivation, interaction with one another and the teacher, and the task performance. However, good feedback was still dependent mostly on the teacher input.

Before this lesson, these PY students had completed a number of units both from the language systems and the skills areas. More specifically, they had done the past simple tense for affirmative, negative, question statements, and for recounts, present progressive and perfect, comparatives, personal pronouns, some basic vocabulary practice, and reading for specific information. They had also received good practice in listening for specific information. Besides, the learners had also read short texts for specific information with the use of context clues. And recently, they did a lesson on writing a biography using past simple tense and time-order organization. The teacher/researcher assumed that with this background training in English language, the students were set to learn how to read a short text using top-down processing, and specifically employ prediction, skimming, and scanning for comprehension.

4.2.2 Main Aim of the Lesson

1. To develop the top-down processing skills of the Preparatory Year students for reading through prediction, skimming, and scanning.

4.2.3 Sub-Aims

i. To introduce learners to new vocabulary

ii. To help learners arrange and match information

4.2.4 The Lesson Plan

The complete lesson plan is presented in Appendix H. In general, the learners focused on the top-down processing approach to develop their reading comprehension. They made use of prediction with the aid of prompts and schemata to notice and understand the key vocabulary for the text as well as the main contents of the text. Besides, they skim read to arrange different bits of information into a meaningful and coherent story. Then they scanned the text to find answers to a few specific questions. A post reading activity helped them recall information from the text and write answers to the questions using the past simple tense which they had already done in this course. The sub-sections below attempt to justify the choice of lesson stages and activities to help the students overcome their problems with the top-down reading lesson.

4.2.5 Awareness Raising

Awareness raising has been found to help students achieve their reading goals (Kuhi et al., 2013). It was decided to raise awareness of the learners in three different aspects. The first strategy was to activate their schemata by using a prompt (Appendix A) and try to elicit their responses on the prompt. Next, the teacher used L1 strategies such as L1 equivalents for the target lexis for reading so that the learners could predict and guess information from the prompts (Appendix B). Finally, to raise their awareness further, an interesting and familiar topic from history was chosen for top-down processing of reading i.e. the tragedy of the Titanic. It was anticipated that this would help the learners make use of their previous knowledge, and predict as well as engage with the reading tasks. The teacher assumed that this awareness raising would help the learners not only assimilate their previous learning and knowledge for the class room activities but also aid them to get rid of the negative expectations, as illustrated on the previous pages, they had with the reading activity on the whole.

4.2.6 Production Tasks

The teacher designed a set of practical tasks to help the students with the TDP of reading.

4.2.6.1 Resolving Language Issues

Following the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (Alderson, 1984; Cummins, 1981) the learners need a certain level of language proficiency before they are trained in using reading skills and strategies. The teacher anticipated that since the learners were PY level, they might have problems in understanding some of the vocabulary that was used in the text. So, pre-teaching the key lexical items using a learner-centered approach was included in the lesson plan. The learners saw prompts (Appendix B) on the white board and labeled them. It was also decided to reinforce the acquisition of the new vocabulary by providing the learners short definitions of the words (Appendix C) and asking them to match them with the right word.

4.2.6.2 Topic and Genre

In order to remove learner disinterestedness, a commonly familiar topic and genre i.e. narrative was chosen. It was a fact file on the sinking of the Titanic (The Titanic Worksheets, n.d). Since the learners had already done narrative writing in this class in the form of recounts and biography, it was anticipated that it would be easier for them to develop familiarity with the genre.

4.2.6.3 Comprehension Tasks

Following Williams' (1985) observation that classroom procedure should be inclusive of the projected, task based and synergistic orientation of reading, the comprehension tasks were graded to suit the level and needs of the learners so that they were doable without any serious difficulty. Since the focus of the lesson was to help the learners develop their TDP skills, the reading tasks were designed as such so as to allow the learners predict, skim, and scan. They would move from controlled to free practice activities. First, sentence strips were provided on different facts about the Titanic (Appendix D) in an envelope to each group. The groups then arranged the information in sequence. Following this, they did peer correction to see if their organization of the text was correct. The second task, a free practice activity, was done in pairs. The pairs received a set of questions (Appendix F). They located the answers at different points in the room.

4.3 Post-observation Reflections on the Lesson Delivery and Learning Outcomes

This stage was designed to include post-lesson reflection by the researcher, the observer's report, and action plan for the future.

5. Results

The sub-sections below present teacher and the peer observer's reflections on the lesson:

5.1 Post-lesson Reflection by the Teacher

The post-lesson reflections of the teacher cover both the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson.

5.1.1 Strengths of the lesson

The lesson started well as had been planned and the key vocabulary items were successfully elicited from the learners. They were actively involved in predicting and guessing from the prompts. The prompts were clear and helpful for the students to identify the target object. The students did not know the suitable word for some of the vocabulary items and, so a need was created and aptly addressed. The lesson provided for reinforcement to the key vocabulary items. The first activity involved the students in matching the words with their definitions and got a clear concept of the target word. The activity on skimming went well as the learners were engaged in groups on a task where they were to skim read to put the jumbled pieces of information into order. Similarly, the activity on scanning also made the learners move from their chairs and scan for the specific information which they did quite successfully. The overall lesson was communicative and allowed for learner autonomy most of the time. The learners worked in pairs as well as in groups for task completion. They provided for the correct answers for themselves, and wrote the correct model on the white board which was noticed and checked by others.

5.1.2 Key Weaknesses

While eliciting from the learners for the target vocabulary and the instructions, the teacher did not acknowledge the students' response immediately and provided help where required. As a result, there were multiple responses from the learners that could have been avoided at that stage. It would have been better had the words been drilled along with the prompts. This could have given learners a clearer pronunciation of the words and an opportunity to revise at a later stage in the lesson. Since the learners did peer correction and wrote their answers on the white board, and the teacher pointed to the correct answers, it would have been more effective if the learners had decided by themselves. This could have resulted in better understanding. The last activity was not efficiently managed as the student who wrote the sentence passed it onto the next and waited till all the students had written their sentence. The task consumed more time than had been allocated. The teacher could have involved all the learners in the writing task. Moreover, the lesson could have been made more time-efficient. In this case, the teacher could use his back-up activity on speaking and could have given students more practice on the target lexis as well as recapitulate the information they had with the help of skimming and scanning.

5.2 Peer Observer Report

This section reports the peer observers comments as received in the PO form. The observer generally found relaxed and pretended to encourage the demeanour in this lesson which was largely student-centered and maintained a clear focus on reading skills. The learners were generally on task and managed to demonstrate their competence to a degree in the reading tasks and exercises. The lesson followed a model reading lesson until the post reading stage when everything came to a halt. There could have been some concluding feedback which would have provided clear evidence of learning.

5.2.1 Topic Relevance

The teacher was able to provide clear identification of 'reading' as the topic and identified specific sub- skills in order to define the scope. The reasons for their choice were stated with reference to learners' needs.

5.2.2 Planning and Preparation

The teacher included a wide range of activities, and the procedure was succinctly and clearly highlighted. However, the teacher could have provided more detail on the activities he proposed. This should include why these activities were effective and how they addressed the issues the teacher had anticipated. The teacher attempted to relate the activities to points raised under 'learner problems' but this needed to be more explicit. Nevertheless, it was good to include specific examples and material samples in the appendices.

The teacher also presented a range of information about the course and the group as a whole. There was need to relate this information to the lesson aims (i.e. reading skills) where possible. The general intent of the aims was appropriate to the needs and level of the group. The aims were stated as 'to develop top-down processing skills

and specifies prediction, skimming and scanning. These were feasible in 50 minutes and the limitations of the aims were clear. The sub aims mentioned lexis but the items were not specifically stated, and 'arranging and matching' which was not a language aim. A breakdown of specific lexis would be useful. There were a range of anticipated problems and solutions that could be implemented if needed. These were relevant and demonstrated a depth of preparation. However, they needed to be categorized into problem areas – i.e. linguistic, management problems etc. The procedure was largely clear, fitted with the stated main aims and had a logical progression and coherence. The timing looked feasible on paper but lost pace and direction in the last few activities. The materials were in keeping with the focus. The lesson maintained a focus on the main aims.

5.2.3 Lesson Delivery

The teacher taught the group in a way that was broadly suited to their needs and level. He encouraged all of them to participate and contribute - most were engaged initially but the interest inevitably waned when students were asked to write sentences individually round the class. Nevertheless, they were challenged by the reading tasks. There were some role variations as the different stages varied in focus. The teacher listened to contributions and exploited those that were suitable to the lesson ends. He could have more effective eliciting in this lesson – i.e. from pictures and instructions. The teacher could have made sure that he highlighted and praised when he successfully elicited his target language. Handouts were also used effectively, and the whiteboard was organized and used more effectively as a record of lexis. The teacher should get into the habit of eliciting and marking part of speech and stress on new lexis. In general, there was an overall focused and learner centered delivery.

5.2.4 Teacher Knowledge

The reading tasks were appropriate to the needs and level of the group. The teacher language was accurate and provided a good model. The structure of the lesson involved a clear focus on reading skills. There was minimal attention to pronunciation (maybe not so relevant in this type of lesson). The teacher successfully monitored and provided feedback (mainly individually) as appropriate.

The lesson as a whole had a logical shape but lacked coherence at the end. The lesson followed logical stages – arouse interest/ set context – prediction – skimming – scanning- more detailed reading – follow up. The lesson highlighted the reading skills used. However, the lesson stopped when students were asked to write a sentence individually on a piece of paper – this activity needed to be thought through more carefully. Instructions and providing demonstrations / examples needs continual attention.

5.2.5 Classroom Management

The teacher kept the learners busy and firmly focused on the aims. The pace was a bit slow but not pedestrian. He was able to implement the plan largely as intended although not all the activities at the end were the most effective use of time. He used the room and the resources well. The scanning of texts on the wall was particularly effective as a collaborative, competitive, learner centered scan reading activity. There were opportunities in the lesson when he moved the students into new pairs – this variety of interaction focused attention. Most instructions were fairly clear although needed to be backed up with examples – students were on task and there were only a few moments of confusion. The teacher should consider how and why to follow up reading texts i.e. post reading activities.

6. Discussion

By the end of the lesson, the learners had practiced how to predict, skim, and scan to obtain general as well as specific information. They also noticed and learned new words in the context of the lesson and used their understanding in arranging and matching the information. The top-down processing was adopted to develop the reading skills of the Preparatory Year learners. The lesson plan that the teacher had designed was, in fact, the outcome of several considerations. First, since this was a peer observation initiative with a slight departure from routine teaching as far as description of the lesson and procedures was concerned, the teacher had to link the lesson plan with the context that had developed to date and further develop on this context to maintain the logical progression of the teaching activity. The learners had recently done *recounts*, writing a biography, scanning for specific information, and bottom-up processing for listening comprehension. Top-down processing through prediction, skimming, and scanning would be a logical corollary to this background learning. Secondly, by the time the teacher started to plan this lesson, he got a good understanding of the learners' needs and could predict what should come next. As the learners had done some basic vocabulary on *nouns, verbs, adjectives,* and *pronouns*, singular and plurals, past simple, present perfect, past perfect, he could introduce time order organization, reinforce the past simple tense as it is used in historical accounts, some new lexis, and reading practice in obtaining both general and specific information to the learners at this point of the course. Besides, it was very appropriate to the learners' needs and use as they do it in academic and social contexts quite frequently. The teacher also had the

consideration that understanding sequenced information was extremely important for good reading comprehension. If the learners understood text organization, this would help them in prediction, skimming and scanning. However, keeping in mind the level and the needs of the learners, the teacher had to prioritize his teaching options and focused only on top-down processing for reading. He adapted materials from different sources as well as designed his own to use in the class.

However, the last part of the lesson as also noted by the peer observer was flawed in its attempt to manage the activity and maintain logical pace of the lesson. This motivates reflection on what changes or alternatives to look for in future attempts so that a more balanced and effective lesson could be delivered.

7. Limitations and Recommendations

The study is not without its limitations. First, it was based on one lesson report only, and therefore, might not predict highly generalizable results. Secondly, the topic focus TDP accounts for only a partial training in developing students' reading comprehension, and hence both the lesson procedure and PO criteria cannot be generalized to aspects of reading literacy such as the bottom-up approach. Thirdly, the study has limitations of the teaching context. The lesson was designed in response to a self-directed initiative by the researcher in collaboration with the peer observer. Keeping in view the range of individual differences in teaching skills and approaches, other teachers may use a different procedure and may come up with different outcomes.

Nevertheless, the study is expected to be promising to the extent that it may motivate further research, especially in the domain of conducting peer observation for reading literacy skills. One viable choice could be to plan a series of PO sessions on different aspects of reading literacy with one teacher and then collate the findings to see the changes in teacher beliefs and practices. Different teachers can do PO sessions and design their own lessons on the same focus and then correlate the observer's report to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons. Yet another could be to involve different teachers to do PO lessons on reciprocal basis as a self-directed professional development initiative.

8. Conclusion

Readiness to bring change to teaching beliefs and practices is perhaps the most crucial variable in the professional development of teachers across the academia which can be brought to effect through peer observations. What makes peer observations one of the most effective interventions of teacher development is that they are not as evaluative and intimidating as other forms of teacher observations are. Whether initiated as a self-directed move or on reciprocal basis, POs do reveal immense possibilities of teacher growth and development to control teaching deficit from a number of pedagogical perspectives such as lesson planning, teaching strategies and techniques, materials development and adaptation, feedback etc. Not only this, PO can also provide some models of effective teaching which can be incorporated by the observer in his own teaching.

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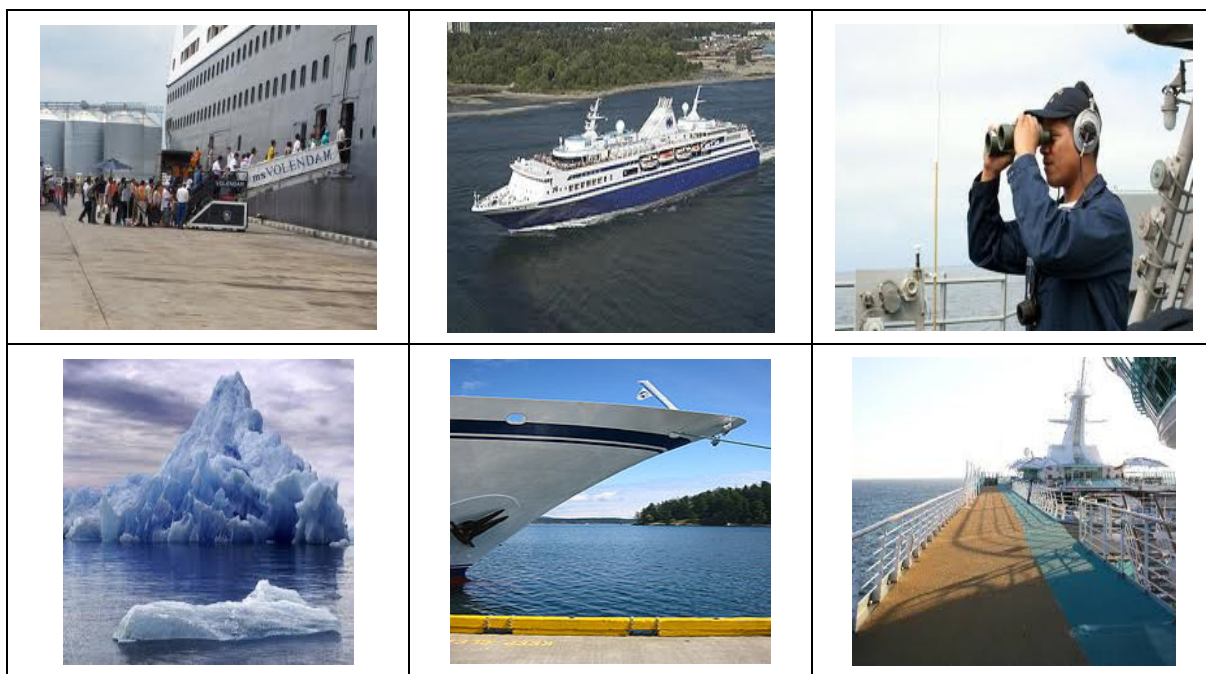
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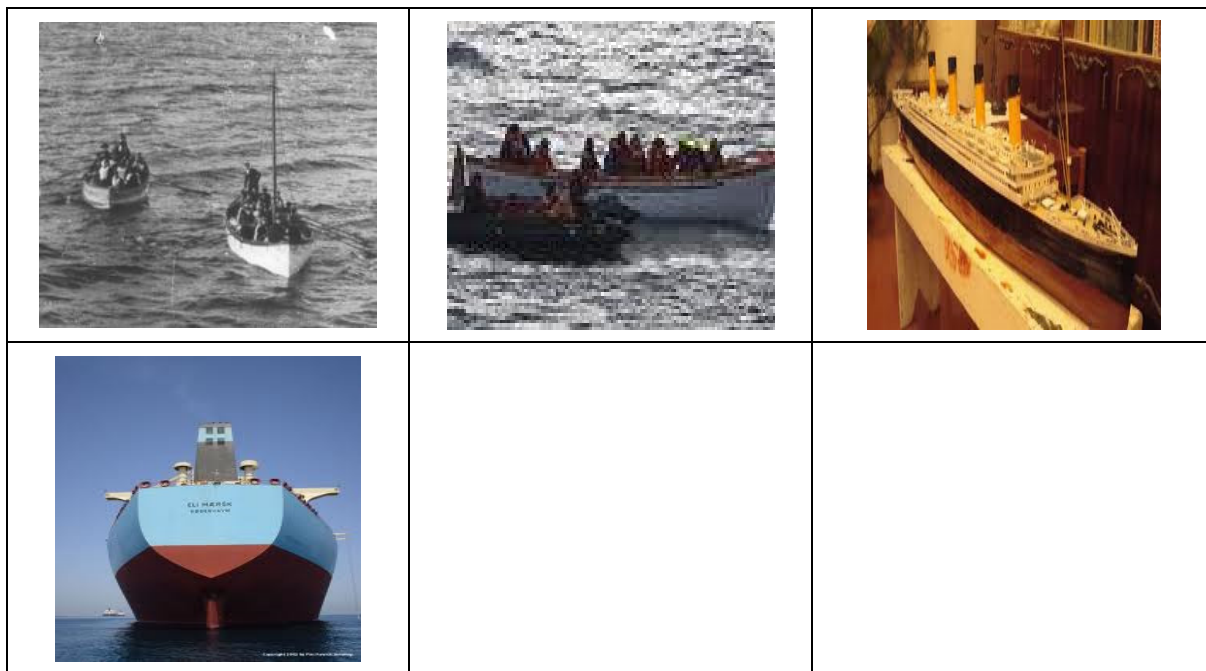
Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix B

Source:
http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&rlz=1T4SKPT_enSA413SA414&biw=1360&bih=482&tbm=isch&sa=1
&q=titanic+images&oq=titanicima&aq=0sx&aqi=g-sx9g-
msx1&aql=&gs_sm=c&gs_upl=677l17676l0l11061l3l3l0l0l0l0l250l655l0.1.2l3

Appendix C

Match column A with Column B. An example is done for you.

	Column A			Column B
A	**Board**	**J**	**A**	**a large piece of ice from freshwater**
B	**Voyage**		**B**	**save from danger**
C	**Lookout**		**C**	**remain on water**
D	**Iceberg**		**D**	**sea journey/travel**
E	**Bow**		**E**	**people who are safe in an accident**
F	**Afloat**		**F**	**The forward/front part of the deck**
G	**Deck**		**G**	**the rear/back part of a ship or boat**
H	**Lifeboat**		**H**	**a covering over a ship**
I	**Rescue**		**I**	**the forward/front part of a ship**
J	**Tilt**		**J**	**to get on the ship**
K	**Stern**		**K**	**small boats to rescue people on ship**
L	**Survivors**		**L**	**a person on a ship to look for dangers**

Adapted from: http://www.historyonthenet.com/Lessons/worksheets/titanic.htm

Appendix D

On April 10, 1912, passengers arrived in Southampton and boarded the ship and at 12:00 noon, the Titanic began her first voyage.

Between April 12 and 13, the Titanic sailed through calm waters.

The lookouts saw an iceberg ahead on April 14 at 11:40 p.m. The iceberg hit the Titanic on the right side of her bow. Water poured in and rose 14 feet in the front part of the ship.

April 15:12:00 a.m.: The captain was told that the ship could only stay afloat for a couple of hours. He gave order to call for help over the radio.

April 15 12:05 a.m.: Orders were given to uncover the lifeboats and to get passengers and crew ready on deck. There was space for only half of the total 2,227 on board in the lifeboats.

April 15 12:25 a.m.: Lifeboats were now loading with women and children first. There was a lot of trouble for men.

April 15 12:30 a.m.: The Carpathia, southeast of the Titanic by about 58 miles, picked up the distress call and immediately went full speed to the rescue.

April 15, 12:45 a.m.: The first lifeboat was safely lowered away. It could carry 65 people, but left with only 28.

April 15 2:05 a.m.: The last lifeboat left. There were now over 1,500 people left on the ship. The tilt of Titanic's deck grew steeper and steeper.

April 15 2:20 a.m.: The Titanic's broken off stern settled back into the water, becoming more level for a few moments before sinking into the sea. People in the water slowly froze to death.

April 15 4:10 a.m.: The first lifeboat was picked up by the Carpathia.

April 15 8:50 a.m.: The Carpathia left the area bound for New York. It carried 705 survivors.

April 18: 9:00 p.m.: The Carpathia arrived in New York.

Adapted from: http://www.historyonthenet.com/Lessons/worksheets/titanic.htm

Answer Key: F, G, D, E, H, K, A, L, M, B, C, I, J

Appendix E

The lookouts saw an iceberg ahead on April 14 at 11:40 p.m. The iceberg hit the Titanic on the right side of her bow. Water poured in and rose 14 feet in the front part of the ship.

The captain was told that the ship could only stay afloat for a couple of hours. He gave order to call for help over the radio.

The Carpathia, southeast of the Titanic by about 58 miles, picked up the distress call and immediately went full speed to the rescue.

April 15 2:05 a.m.: The last lifeboat left. There were now over 1,500 people left on the ship. The tilt of Titanic's deck grew steeper and steeper.

April 15 8:50 a.m.: The Carpathia left the area bound for New York. It carried 705 survivors.

Adapted from: http://www.historyonthenet.com/Lessons/worksheets/titanic.htm

Appendix F

Wheredid the iceberg hit the Titanic?

What was the captain told about the titanic?

How far was Carpathia from the Titanic when it received the call for help?

How many people were there on the ship after the last lifeboat had left?

When did Carpathia leave for New York?

Adapted from: http://www.historyonthenet.com/Lessons/worksheets/titanic.htm

Appendix G

Questions for the interview

Do you think the lookouts did not keep good watch?

What were the orders given by the captain of the Titanic?

Why did the first lifeboat carry only 28 people although it could take 65?

What is your opinion about this sad accident?

Adapted from: http://www.historyonthenet.com/Lessons/worksheets/titanic.htm

Appendix H

Lesson procedure

Time	Stage/Stage Aim(s)	Procedure	Interaction	Materials
3 min 19:30-19:33	Lead-in: - to activate the schemata of the students (SS) for the target lesson by usingprompts - to help the SS predict the story with the help of prompts - introduce the topic	Greet the SS Show SS picture of the Titanic (Appendix A) Elicit SS response What is this? What is its name? What happened to it? Show SS different pictures about a ship/titanic (Appendix B) Ask SS to question and answer each other about the pictures. What is this/its name? Introduce the topic	T ↔ SS SS↔SS (P/W) T↔SS	Pictures White board
10 min 19:33-19:43	Context set-up: - To create a meaningful context for the lesson - To pre-teach key vocabulary of the lesson - To help the SS notice and understand the key vocabulary	Stick the pictures on the board and ask learners to identify them. Drill the words and mark the stress (board, voyage, lookout, iceberg, bow, afloat, deck, lifeboat, rescue, tilt, stern, survivor) Give them definitions of the words and ask them to match them with the right word. (Appendix C) One student will write the answers on the board. The SS will then check their work	T ↔ SS SS↔ SS(PW) T ↔ SS	Pictures White board Worksheet
12 min 19:43 – 19 :55	Reading Practice 1 To help learners skim for comprehension To help learners organize information in a meaningful way	Task 1 Form 2/3 groups Give students sentence strips (Appendix D) in an envelope Ask SS to arrange the strips to make a meaningful story. The group which completes first will be the winner. Ask the groups to write the letters of their answers on the board. The SS check their work	T ↔ SS S↔S (GW) T ↔ SS	Worksheet White board
10 min 19:55–20:05	Reading Practice 2 To give students practice in scanning for specific information To let SS do peer correction	Task 2 Form SS pairs Stick extracts from the story at different places in the room. (Appendix E) Give SS a set of questions (Appendix F) and ask them to find the answer from the strips Where did the iceberg hit the Titanic? What was the captain told about the titanic? How far was Carpathia from the Titanic when it received the call for help? How many people were there on the ship after the last lifeboat had left? When did Carpathia leave for New York? The pair who completes first will be the winner. The pairs match their answers for correction.	T ↔ SS S↔S (pw) T ↔ SS	Worksheet White board

10 min 20:05 - 21:15	Reading practice 3 To provide SS post-reading practice	Task 3 Ask a S to write a sentence about the Titanic and pass it on to the next S who will write a new/different sentence and so on till all SS write one sentence each.	T ↔ SS SS↔ SS T ↔ SS	Worksheet White board
05 min 20:15 – 20:20	Round-up To recapitulate the lesson To see whether the lesson objectives have been met	Back-up plan: If time permitted, SS will interview each other from a set of questions (Appendix G) Do you think the lookouts did not keep good watch? What were the orders given by the captain of the Titanic? Why did the first lifeboat carry only 28 people although it could take 65? What is your opinion about this sad accident?	T ↔ SS SS↔ SS T ↔ SS	White board

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