EFL teachers' experiences of peer observation in Vietnamese academic institutions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Peer observation is considered as a useful tool to enhance teachers' professional development. Limited research on how peer observation is carried out in Vietnamese higher institutions and how teachers experience peer observation in their educational contexts. This study investigates the experiences of peer observation among Vietnamese teachers of English and their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of peer observation. The study employed a quantitative research method to collect data. Survey questionnaires were completed online via Google Forms by 22 teachers of English working in different universities and colleges in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings show that teachers' perceptions and experiences of peer observation varied among academic institutions. The purposes of peer observation were different among different educational settings. Peer observation sessions tend to focus more on evaluation purposes than on professional development purposes which aim to improve the teaching performance of EFL teachers. Also, the procedures for implementing peer observation were not unanimous among academic institutions. The findings have several implications for stakeholders to reflect on the current practices of peer observation in their respective institutions with a view to improving the quality of this professional development tool to enhance English language teachers' professional development.

1. Introduction

Education is defined as a process of acquiring knowledge through teaching and learning activities. Undeniably, teachers play an important role in facilitating this process as their teaching capacity exerts an impact on the learning outcomes of students and the quality of education (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020; Klingelhutz, 2017). Besides, teachers need to keep up with the changes in education with regard to learners' needs, curriculum, and teaching methods due to the ongoing development in the education sector (Ahmed, Nordin, Shah, & Channa, 2018). It is necessary for teachers to continue their professional development which is known as an ongoing process that develops their skills, knowledge, and expertise when the pre-service training is over (OECD, 2009). There have been several strategies to support the teaching practices of in-service teachers including workshops, team teaching, peer coaching, and mentoring. Among these, Peer Observation (PO), one of the most popular professional development activities, has been frequently carried out in many academic institutions.

Peer observation allows observers to observe their peers' teaching performance in order to learn from best practices and to reflect on their own teaching. Observed teachers could be able to

receive constructive feedback from their peers for self-improvement. Peer observation is considered as a useful tool for professional development. Research into PO in many geographical areas shows conflicting findings among teachers engaging in PO activities. Many teachers acknowledge the benefits of PO to their professional development. Still, many others have negative attitudes about PO. Teachers' experiences and perceptions of PO seem to vary in different studies owing to the differences in the participants' educational, social, and cultural backgrounds. Obstacles exist in implementing peer observation activities in many academic institutions.

Peer observation has been familiar to many Vietnamese teachers who work at secondary schools and pre-service teachers who take part in the practicum as part of their teacher training program. Peer observation is also conducted in many academic institutions at the tertiary level in Vietnam for different purposes. Given the popularity of PO activity in the Vietnamese educational context, it is significant to examine the effectiveness of this professional development tool in EFL settings from the teachers' perspectives.

1.1. Research aims

This study examined Vietnamese EFL teachers' experiences and perceptions of peer observation as a tool for their professional development. The study hopes to provide more insights into the practices of peer observation as part of teacher professional development. Based on the findings, it is expected that there will be innovation and improvement of peer observation for better quality of English teacher training in educational institutions in Vietnam.

1.2. Research questions

1. What are the EFL teachers' experiences of peer observation practices in their academic institutions?

2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of peer observation?

2. Literature review

2.1. Peer observation

Peer observation is known as a form of classroom observation that allows teachers to mutually observe their peer's teaching for specific purposes. In some situations, PO is done for administrative purposes when a supervisor observes the teaching of their academic staff and gives feedback on their performance. PO enables teachers to work in pairs or groups. This allows teachers to observe their colleagues' performances and better understand the nature of interaction in class (Varli, 1994). PO is considered as a crucial part of the pre-service teacher education programs (Engin & Priest, 2014). Pre-service teachers often observe the teaching performances of more experienced teachers during their practicum. PO is done as a strategy to develop the teaching skills of novice teachers (Gosling, 2002). PO is regarded as a means for academic staff to concurrently enhance their professional expertise and reflect on their teaching practice (Ashgar & Pilkington, 2018; Thomson & Trigwell, 2018).

2.2. Functions and models of peer observation

According to Hockley (2014), PO serves as an evaluative tool to manage teaching quality and as a developmental tool to support both observers and observed teachers with their teaching practice. Both observers and observed teachers can benefit from developmental observation. If the teachers can collaborate with experienced colleagues or managers who have been trained on how to provide feedback, they can benefit greatly through this process. From the observers' side, they have an opportunity to understand more about student interaction and teaching methods in practice.

There are three models of peer observation: evaluation, development, and peer review model (Gosling, 2002). The model of evaluative observation is considered an effective approach for academic managers to supervise academic staff's performances (Fletcher, 2017; Marshall & Young, 2009). In this model, the observers are often the evaluators or senior staff and the teacher who is observed tends to feel anxious when finding the administrator sitting in the back row (Hockley 2014; Richardson, 2000). This model becomes more threatening when the observed staff receives critical feedback from their colleagues. As the result, teachers tend to have negative attitudes towards this model of PO (Engin & Priest, 2014).

In order to enhance teacher professional development, a development model and peer review model can be employed. In developmental observation, the expert teachers observe teaching staff in their department; or the more experienced teachers observe the less experienced ones for experience-sharing purposes (Gosling, 2002). This model focuses on enhancing teaching and learning activities, examining the effectiveness of different teaching methods, and applying educational theories into practice (Fletcher, 2017). Peer-review model is done when two teachers arrange to observe each other's classes. This model can benefit both observers and observed teachers by encouraging peers' constructive feedback and mutual learning opportunities. This model would create the judgment-free atmosphere and support the self-refection process of both sides (Fletcher, 2017). The three models of PO can serve different purposes and their application depends on the choice, nature, and contexts of academic institutions.

2.3. Benefits of peer observation

Peer observation has exerted positive impacts on the professional development of teachers in general and language teachers in particular (Gosling, 2002). PO enhances teachers' pedagogical skills and broadens their teaching experience. Teachers have an opportunity to explore their peer's teaching approaches which they have never tried previously and learn from their colleagues how to handle problems more effectively (Richards & Farrell, 2005). PO could promote collaboration between colleagues (Kasapoğlu, 2002). Findings from Kanuka and Sadowski (2020) confirms the benefits for the observer with respect to observing the unfamiliar, as well as for both the observer and the observed with respect to fostering the collegial relationship.

PO is considered an effective approach to enhancing reflective practice which is an essential part of the teaching profession (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005). PO could augment the observers' self-efficacy (Hendry & Oliver, 2012; Mousavi, 2014). Upon attending a class and observing the performance of colleagues, observers may apply a new teaching method to their own class. The observed teachers could prepare their performance more carefully in advance and could gradually improve their teaching practice (Motallebzadeh, Hosseinnia, & Domskey, 2017). Last but not least, PO can foster fruitful conversation between observers and the observed teachers for more effective teaching methods and constructive feedback (Richardson, 2000). This can benefit the lifelong teaching careers of many teachers. PO can also reinforce the self-refection, teaching, and learning experience, self-efficacy, and collaboration of the teachers engaging in PO activities (Tosriadi, Marmanto, & Azizah, 2018). It is generally acknowledged that PO is a means to improve the quality of teaching and develop teachers' and students' learning (Torres, Lopes, Valente, & Mouraz, 2017).

2.4. Challenges of peer observation

Previous studies have pointed to several barriers to implementing peer observation in educational settings. The first problem is related to time. According to Hockley (2014), teachers find it difficult to arrange time to attend PO sessions and for prepare lessons for others to observe.

Teachers may not receive feedback after PO sessions (Hockley, 2014; Norbury, 2001). Both observers and observed teachers could hardly arrange schedules for pre- and post-observation meetings (Norbury, 2001). In addition, lack of guidance, organization, failure to follow procedures of conducting PO, and being informed about the purposes of PO may result in ineffective practices of PO (Todd, 2017). Teachers are not trained on how to provide or receive feedback during PO sessions (Hockley, 2014).

In terms of a psychological perspective, PO may create anxiety for teachers who are observed by their peers and supervisors. Teachers are unwilling to welcome PO for fear of being criticized or receiving negative feedback (Alghamdi, 2020; McDaniel et al., 2019).

2.5. Procedures for conducting peer observation

The literature on PO points to several guidelines on how to conduct PO sessions successfully. This section synthesizes three main steps for conducting effective PO sessions.

2.5.1. Pre-observation meeting and discussion

In the first step, the peers hold a meeting before carrying out the classroom observation to set a time and a place for PO, and provide the basic information about the teaching context (e.g., class size, student background, materials, typical patterns of classroom interaction, lesson content and learning outcome) and discuss the purpose of the PO (e.g., what is being observed, how it will take place and what are the expectations of the teachers being observed) (Ahmed et al., 2018). Besides, teachers should not perceive the PO as an evaluative instrument but as an effective tool for their professional development (Fletcher, 2017). The observer and observed teachers are in an equal relationship and they support each other to develop professionally. Lastly, the pre-observation form can be employed in order to record significant information in a systematic manner (Marshall & Young, 2009).

2.5.2. Classroom observation

Firstly, the instructor needs to notify the students of the observation and its purpose to keep students fully informed that they are not evaluated (Donnelly, 2007). During the observation stage, the observer should follow the guideline, observe the student's reaction and the activities and record the details (P'Rayan, 2013). Nevertheless, the observer should notice that the classroom activities may not be carried out as planned. Accordingly, it is more effective to record the information by writing it down. Richards and Farrell (2005) suggest three useful techniques to obtain feedback: written narrative, field notes, and checklists. Of the three, the checklist tends to be more popular than the others because it can be completed with ease. In addition, the use of checklists allows for the information to be arranged in a systematic manner. In some circumstances, checklists can be used in combination with other techniques to maximize their effectiveness. Richards and Lockhart (1992) also suggest several ways to record information during PO: timed samples, (noting down the specific behavior at the specified time), coding form (checking a set of coded categories of classroom behaviors), descriptive narrative- broad (summarizing major events occurring in class) and descriptive narrative-narrow (listing particular aspects of a lesson). Furthermore, recording the observation process should be taken into consideration because the observers are not able to memorize all details of the class observation.

2.5.3. Post-observation feedback meeting

The post-observation meeting can be arranged by peers to provide constructive feedback, give suggestions for better teaching and discuss effective teaching methods. It can take place immediately after the PO or on the following day (Hampton, Rhodes, & Stokes, 2004) so that

agreement among peers can be reached. In fact, a day after observation seem to be a better choice because the observer can have enough time to rearrange the information as well as prioritize the important one; meanwhile, the observed can take a rest and reflect on their own performance. However, the meeting should not be delayed for too long to avoid missing important details of the observation.

2.6. Implementation of peer observation in the Vietnamese context

A successful PO is a result of the combination of many factors: the non-threatening environment (P'Rayan, 2013), an appropriate procedure (Richards & Farrell, 2005), and the collaboration of peers in "critical friendships" relationship - colleagues help each other to develop (Farrell, 2001). However, it should be noticed that these elements may be influenced by the characteristics of different cultural contexts, especially the relationship of both observer and observed. Research on PO in Vietnamese contexts should take into consideration the Vietnamese cultural aspects which may exert an impact on the peer relationship. According to Hofstede's five dimensions of culture, the theory of collectivism and power distance can be used to partly explain the anxiety of Vietnamese teachers when PO is exercised among colleagues. According to Nguyen (2016), the observed teachers were not willing to be observed because they were anxious about losing face if they made mistakes or had poor performance. An unsuccessful performance also leads to low self-efficacy (Nguyen, 2017). As a result, the observed teachers may not be willing to engage in PO, they may perceive it as a compulsory activity imposed by their managers. In addition, there are several problems related to peer relationships. Nguyen (2016) found out that more experienced teachers felt they could not benefit a lot from their junior colleagues because their peers had less experience in teaching than they did.

Cultural factors also influence the way of giving feedback in PO. In the study of Nguyen and Pham (2020), under the influence of Confucianism in Viet Nam, colleagues who have close relationships tend to hesitate to give critical feedback to their peers for fear of hurting the observed teacher. Some others tend to offer compliments and prefer not to provide critical feedback to save their colleagues' faces. These types of feedback would not encourage the self-reflection of the observed. Besides, the study of Nguyen and Pham (2020) also mentions the difficulty of the participants in arranging a time to attend PO sessions if they were not compelled to do so.

PO in Vietnamese educational contexts varies in purpose. The effects of this professional development tool remain unknown. It is necessary to investigate the perception of Vietnamese EFL teachers toward PO as a meaningful strategy to promote their professional growth. Only when they can be aware that PO is non-threatening and follow rigorous procedures, teachers can benefit greatly from this professional practice.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research method

The study employed a quantitative method to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of PO as an effective tool for professional development in Vietnamese institutes. The quantitative method could help to identify the Vietnamese EFL teachers' opinions and provide a general view of how they perceived PO as a useful tool for their professional development.

3.2. Research site and participants

The participants in this research were 22 Vietnamese EFL teachers who were full-time and part-time teachers at different academic institutions in Ho Chi Minh City including English centers, universities, and colleges in Ho Chi Minh City.

The researcher sent an invitation letter to the participants via their email address. The link to the questionnaire designed in Google Forms was sent to the participants via email and Zalo chat group. The data from the questionnaire survey was collected in November, 2021.

3.3. Research instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from a previous study by Ahmed et al. (2018), Kasapoğlu (2002), and Abdallah (2018). There are four parts to the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes personal, behavioral, and attitudinal questions. Part 1 includes two questions that aim to obtain participants' background information (age and teaching experience). Part 2 includes eight questions used to identify teachers' experience of PO. The multiple-choice questions were employed in the first two parts. In some questions, the participants can choose more than one answer and provide further information in the "others" option. Part 3 covers 10 questions aimed at exploring teachers' views of the benefits of PO. Part 4 includes 15 question items to elicit teachers' views on the challenges of PO. These questions used a five-point Likert scale (from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree").

Table 1

Distribution of questionnaire

Parts	Content	Question items
1	Background information	1 - 2
2	Teachers' experiences of PO	3 - 10
3	Teachers' views on the benefits of PO	11 - 20
4	Teachers' views on the challenges of PO	21 - 36

3.4. Data analysis

The SPSS software was used to analyze the data gathered from a questionnaire survey. Descriptive statistics, means and one-way ANOVA were employed. Descriptive statistics were used to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions of PO. The deductive analysis allowed to organize the data, build the categories as well as connect it with the data in the questionnaire.

3.5. Findings

3.5.1. Participants' background information

Table 2

Age of participants

Age		Frequency	Percentage (%)
	24 - 30 years old	9	40.9
	31 - 40 years old	7	31.8
	41 - 50 years old	6	27.3
	Total	**22**	**100.0**

The age of the participants is shown in Table 2. The data showed that 40.9% of teachers were from 24 - 30 years old. 31.8% of teachers were from 31 - 40 years old and 27.3% of teachers were from 41 - 50 years old. This meant that the young teachers were the majority.
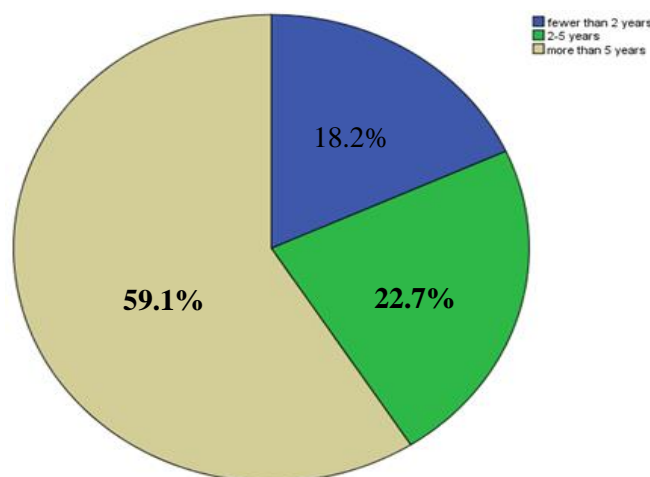

Figure 1. Teacher's teaching experience

The teaching experience of the participants was illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows that more than half of the teachers with more than five years of teaching experience. About less than a quarter had two to five years in the teaching profession and the remaining had fewer than 2 years of teaching experience.

Table 3

The number of PO sessions teachers are observed in a year

Number of PO a year	Frequency	Percentage (100%)
1 - 2 times	16	72.7
3 - 5 times	4	18.2
more than 5 times	2	9.1
Total	**22**	**100.0**

With regard to a number of PO sessions the teachers had in a year, Table 3 shows that more than half of the teachers were observed once or twice a year and few of them had more than three PO sessions annually.

Table 4

Participants in PO sessions

		Responses	
		N	Percentage (%)
	colleagues	18	52.9%
	supervisors	12	35.3%
	Teacher trainers	4	11.8%
Total		**34**	**100.0%**

With regard to the participants in PO sessions, it was noticed that the teachers in this study were mainly observed by their colleagues and their supervisors and only very few were observed by teacher trainers.

Table 5

Purposes of PO perceived by teachers

		Responses	
		N	Percentage (%)
Purposes of PO	for professional development	20	42.6%
	for peer evaluation	12	25.5%
	for research purposes	2	4.3%
	for training purposes	12	25.5%
	others	1	2.1%
Total		**47**	**100.0%**

According to the teachers' report, most PO sessions were for professional development purposes. Some sessions were conducted for evaluation and training purposes. Very few were done for research purposes.

3.5.2. Teachers' experiences of PO

Table 6

PO experiences of the teachers

Questions		Responses	Percentage (%)
Q7: Are you allowed to choose your peer for PO?	no	15	68.2%
	yes	7	31.8%
Q8: Do you have any initial meetings before PO?	no	14	63.6%
	yes	8	36.4%
Q9: Do you have any meetings after PO?	no	3	13.6%
	yes	19	86.4%
Q10: Have you received any training instructions on how to give feedback as an observer?	no	13	59.1%
	yes	9	40.9%

Questions 7 - 10 investigated the teachers' experiences with PO procedures. The data from Table 6 show that a majority of the teachers were not allowed to choose their peers (68.2%) as well as didn't take part in any initial meetings before PO (63.6%). However, most of them had a post-meeting after PO to give feedback to the observed teachers. More than half of the teachers in the survey (59.1%) indicated that they didn't receive any training on how to give feedback. This suggests that the academic institutions where the teachers worked did not fully follow the procedures of PO as indicated in the literature.

3.5.2.1. Teachers' perceptions of benefits of peer observation

Table 7

Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of peer observation

Question	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation
S11: PO enhances teaching competence	22	3.27	1.316
S12: PO encourages better communication among teachers through discussions	22	3.23	1.307
S13: PO improves teachers' teamwork and collaboration skills	22	3.32	1.171
S14: PO encourages teachers to share their teaching ideas	22	3.68	1.041
S15: PO encourages observers to apply a new approach to their own teaching	22	3.73	1.032
S16: PO helps teachers become more reflective on their own teaching	22	3.50	1.371
S17: PO helps a supervisor manage the quality of teaching	22	3.09	1.342
S18: PO creates an opportunity for teachers to learn from their peers	22	3.64	1.177
S19: PO helps observed teachers examine the effectiveness of their teaching methods in class	22	3.32	1.171
S20: Both observers and observed teachers can benefit from PO	22	3.36	1.177

The perception of the teachers of the benefit of PO was summarized in Table 7. The participants strongly agreed that PO encouraged both observers and observed to share their teaching ideas (M = 3.68), PO also helped teachers become more reflective on their own teaching (M = 3.50) and created opportunities for teachers to learn from their peers (M = 3.64). PO could encourage them to apply a new approach to their own teaching (M = 3.73). With the remaining statements, the participants showed their neutrality. This implied that they were not sure if PO could give them any benefits or not. They moderately agreed on the benefits that PO could bring to their profession including better teaching competence, better communication, and improved teamwork and collaboration among teachers.

3.5.2.2. Teachers' perceptions of challenges of peer observation as observed by teachers

Table 8

Perceptions of challenges of PO as observed by teachers

Questions	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation
S21: I feel uncomfortable to receiving feedback from peers after PO	22	2.77	.869
S22: I am under pressure to finish my lesson on time	22	3.55	1.011
S23: I feel that the observers come to my class to find faults in my teaching	22	2.77	1.152
S24: It embarrasses me to make mistakes in my performance during PO	22	2.82	.958
S25: I feel anxious during P	22	3.50	1.058
S26: I do not perform at my best during PO	22	2.73	.935

The data show showed that most teachers felt anxious when their teaching performance was observed by colleagues (M = 3.50) and they were under pressure to finish the lessons on time (M = 3.55). The teachers showed a moderate degree of agreement on other challenges including embarrassment of making mistakes in their teaching performance during PO (M = 2.82), feeling uncomfortable when receiving feedback from peers after PO (M = 2.77), lack of confidence in their performance during PO (M = 2.73).

3.5.2.3. Perceptions of the challenges of PO as an observer

Table 9

Perceptions of the challenges PO as an observer

Questions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
S27: I am not clear about what I need to do during PO	22	2.41	1.260
S28: I don't know how to provide meaningful feedback	22	2.59	1.221
S29: I'm not willing to give negative feedback to my peer	22	3.64	1.002
S30: I only provide compliments on my colleagues' performance	22	3.59	.796
S31: I don't use any feedback forms	22	2.64	1.136
S32: I am not provided with enough information about PO before classroom observation	22	2.86	1.207
S33: I think PO benefits the observed teacher only	22	2.36	1.293
S34: I think PO mainly benefits novice teachers	22	2.41	1.260
S35: I think PO takes up too much time	22	2.68	1.041

Table 9 shows that the most challenging aspect for an observer of PO was providing feedback. Teachers agreed that they were not willing to give negative feedback to their peers (M = 3.64). Instead, they tended to provide compliments on their colleagues' performance (M = 3.59). They agreed to some extent that PO not only benefited the observed and novice teachers but the observer and the experienced teachers could also benefit from this professional activity.

With statements "I don't know how to provide meaningful feedback (M = 2.59)", "I don't use any feedback form. (M = 2.64)", "I am not provided with enough information about PO before classroom observation (M = 2.86)", and "I think PO takes up too much time. (M = 2.68)", the teachers in the survey showed neutrality in their responses.

4. Discussion

4.1. What are the EFL teachers' experiences of peer observation practices in their academic institutions?

The participants in this study were EFL teachers from different educational institutions in Ho Chi Minh (English centers, colleges, and universities). The results from the questionnaire show that the teaching experience and the PO experiences of the teachers varied. Several teachers regularly took part in PO activities at the academic institutions they worked for. A majority of them occasionally observed their colleagues' classes and their classes were also occasionally observed by their peers. This suggests that the PO activities are common practices in Vietnamese academic institutions and the teachers had been familiar with PO.

The teachers reported that they were often observed by their colleagues and their supervisors. If the observer was the supervisor, the PO tended to adopt the evaluation model. This result supports the findings of Le, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Barnard (2019) which indicated that the evaluation model was widely adopted in Vietnamese academic institutions.

With regard to the purposes of PO, most teachers agreed that PO was carried out for their professional development. They recognized that PO helped to improve their teaching skill, approach the new teaching methods and self-reflect their teaching practices. These results support the studies of Todd (2017), Santos (2016), Richards and Farrell (2005), Hendry and Oliver (2012) and Mousavi (2014). However, about half of them still considered PO as an evaluation tool. These findings resemble those from Le et al.'s work (2019) which shows that PO can put the observed teachers under pressure and cannot fully reflect the teacher's practices in class through one- or two hours of observation.

With regard to teachers' report on the implementation of PO in their workplace, the findings show that the majority of English teachers in the study were not allowed to choose their peers and didn't have any pre-meetings before PO. Todd (2017) argues that choosing peers for suitable purpose can help the teachers gain many benefits from PO. Besides, Todd points to the necessary work that the observer and observed teachers need to do in the pre-observation meetings which is an important step to take full advantage of PO. In addition, the data from the questionnaire show that the teachers did not take part in any training program to learn how to provide meaningful feedback. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) indicate that receiving critical feedback could result in teachers' poor experiences of PO. By contrast, constructive feedback could lead to positive attitudes toward PO. Hence, Hockley (2014) emphasizes the importance of conducting the training session on giving feedback. In this study, the findings show that the lack of initial meetings and guidance on how to give feedback, and not being given an opportunity to choose peers may prevent teachers from obtaining the full benefits of PO.

4.2. Research question 2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of peer observation?

According to the majority of teachers, PO could benefit both observers and observed (novice teachers and experienced teachers). It was noticed that PO encouraged the peers to share their teaching ideas during PO. Furthermore, the observers could be more confident in applying the teaching methods in their practice. These results support the study of Richards and Farrell (2005) which indicates that PO can help the teacher to share their experience in a special way and create the opportunity to approach the new teaching methods. The observers can learn from the observation how to deal with difficult problems in class. Last but not least, PO also helped both the observers and the observed be more reflective on their own teaching work. In the result of the interview, teachers indicated that after taking part in PO, the observer could realize peers's mistakes and avoid them in their own teaching practice. This finding replicates those of Hammersley-Fretcher and Orsmond (2005). By contrast, the teachers did not see that PO could enhance communication among teachers and improve teamwork. These results seem to be in conflict with those of Kasapoğlu's study (2002) which highlighted the benefits of PO as a tool to promote collaboration among teachers.

The findings show that the observed teachers felt anxious during PO and they were under pressure to finish the lessons on time. The anxiety might prevent them from performing at their best. The reasons for their anxiety were dealing with the uncooperative students and receiving critical feedback. These findings support the studies of Nguyen (2016) which illustrates that the observed teachers were anxious because they were afraid of making mistakes or having a poor

performance. The study of Nguyen and Pham (2020) pointed to the challenges of providing constructive feedback in Vietnamese culture. Teachers tend to avoid providing negative feedback on colleagues' performance for fear of ruining the relationship with them. Last but not least, the findings agreed with the study of McDaniel et al. (2019) which highlights the discomfort teachers may feel when receiving negative feedback from peers. As Tenenberg (2016) maintains, teaching is different from most professional environments in that teachers do not have opportunities to observe their colleagues, PO is regarded as an important development tool for professional development. A brief review of the literature shows that much of the previous research focused on PO in the context of a single institution, the study provides more insights into how PO practice is conducted in different academic institutions in Vietnam currently.

5. Implications and conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, some implications are made to help EFL teachers improve their experiences of PO as follows.

The findings help educational managers to gain a better understanding of teachers' hesitation to take part in PO activities. Educational managers may consider selecting appropriate observation models so as to both benefit teachers' professional development and lower their anxiety and stress levels. Rigorous procedures of PO should be applied to maximize its benefits. It is necessary to keep teachers informed about the purpose of PO. The development model of PO should be adopted instead of the evaluation model. If academic institutions could create a non-threatening environment, this could improve the experience of PO among teachers. Teachers would feel more confident and willing to take part in PO sessions.

It is suggested that PO conducted in academic institutions should employ three stages of PO: pre-observation meeting, classroom observation, and post-observation feedback meeting. Teachers need to arrange the time and do the necessary work with their peers before PO sessions in order to specify the purposes of PO, the teaching method, and the objective of the lessons. Moreover, teachers should be allowed to choose their peers at their convenience. PO should be conducted taking into account teachers' perspectives with regard to what they would like to learn from their colleagues: different teaching methods, creativity, or classroom management skills. Furthermore, academic institutions and managers should provide teachers with feedback forms as a guide so that they are aware of the criteria needed to be observed. Last but not least, more workshops on providing feedback and techniques for observing lessons should be organized to support teachers. With these supports, the experiences of PO among EFL teachers could be improved. In addition, if they have training on PO, they may be more willing to take part in PO voluntarily and benefit greatly from it and perceive PO as a useful tool for their professional development.

The challenges of PO perceived by the teachers in this study show that teachers were under pressure to engage in PO activities. The anxiety of the observed teachers comes from their fear of being criticized, having poor performance, and receiving negative feedback from supervisors and colleagues. It is necessary for teachers to understand that perfect lessons are unrealistic; the observed should not focus too much on their mistakes and the observers do not expect a perfect lesson during a PO session. Both the observer and observed teachers should perceive PO as an opportunity to learn and develop themselves professionally. It is necessary for institutions to create a stress-free environment to help teachers avoid stress and pressure from PO. Moreover, peers can construct the lesson together before classroom observation to enhance the teachers' confidence and reduce anxiety during PO.

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