



# Exploring the Role of Peer Observation in Teacher's Professional Development in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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**Abstract:** The need for teachers' continuous professional development in Bahraini state schools is crucial due to its connection with teacher promotion. The research aim relates to the role of peer observation in teacher's professional development in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Therefore, the methodology of this study is a qualitative approach. The data is collected from three sources: relevant documents from the Basic Education Department in the Bahraini Ministry of Education and from the state school which is the specific context of the study; thirteen face to face interviews; and the research diary. The interviews were conducted to expose any difficulties and obstacles which may limit the effective implementation of peer observation and to gather suggestions that could help in improving this aspect of continuous professional development.

The main challenge that faces the implementation of peer observation in Bahraini state schools is the lack of training programmes for academic and administrative staff in peer observation and feedback skills. While teachers are in need of training in observation skills and how to give and receive feedback, administration staff require training in terms of altering their attitudes and mentality towards peer observation. Moreover, there is a need to distinguish between evaluative observation, to check teachers' performance, and developmental observation, essentially a way of enhancing and developing the teachers' careers.

**Keywords:** Peer observation, Continuous professional development.

## 1. Introduction

In this study, it is planned to explore the role of peer observation in teachers' professional development in Bahrain. It also gives the reasons why it might be useful to examine this aspect of continuous professional development in the context described.

### 1.1. Context and background of the study:

Among the Kingdom of Bahrain's highest priority social reforms for the next century is that of the state education system. The recent educational reform in the Bahraini Education System highlights the need for teachers to continually update their own knowledge, skills and experience in order for them to adapt to the constant changes of educational practice.

A statement was made by the Bahraini

Minister of Education. In it, he detailed the Ministry's plans for enhancing professional development programmes for teachers, as this is an important tool for educational development, particularly with regard to improving the performance of Bahrain's schools (Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2008).

The Educational Supervision Administration (ESA) in the Ministry of Education pointed out that it had paid a great deal of attention to teachers' professional development through the employment of modern supervisory methods and, most importantly, through the implementation of class visits, both observational and formative (Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2008).

However, there is often resistance from teachers to put such a seemingly positive effort into practice. This can be illustrated by the case



of a State Primary School for Girls, context of the study, in Bahrain. It is found that these teachers from the mentioned State Primary School for girls were not happy when they were asked to put peer teaching observation into practice.

### 1.2. The rationale of the study:

The significance of this research arises from the strong relationship between the topic chosen and the researcher own experience as a teacher in a Bahraini state primary school, and what difficulties the researcher and her colleagues faced when they attempted to put peer teaching observation into practice among their co-teachers in that school.

### 1.3. Research focus and aims:

The research has several aims and objectives which correspond to the research focus:

- 1- To identify the causes of the difficulties and obstacles to applying peer teaching observation.
- 2- To identify the difficulties and obstacles to applying peer teaching observation.
- 3- To identify possible suggestions and recommendations for improving the teaching process.
- 4- To enhance and enrich the methods of instruction and teachers' professional development.

## 2. Literature Review:

In recent times, an era of knowledge explosion, continuous professional development (CPD) has become a vital strategy to boost teachers' knowledge and expertise during their working life. Initial teacher education is not enough for lifelong professional progress. Therefore teachers need to keep up with new ideas and programmes which have been planned in order to put efficient and effective CPD into practice to support teachers and increase their teaching skills. This chapter introduces an outline of the significance of CPD. It gives an overview of CPD in Bahrain and, in addition, it presents a discussion of peer observation as a model of

CPD and how it advances teachers' professional careers, with reference to relevant literature.

### 2.1. Definition of Continuous Professional Development (CPD):

The Professional Development for Academics Involved in Teaching (ProDAIT), an initiative which was set up by the Staff Development Unit at the University of Birmingham – UK, in October 2004, has defined CPD as an unending learning system, controlled by you, focused on your ability in a professional role, and its goal is to enhance and progress your performance and advance your career (ProDAIT, 2006).

It is argued that effective professional development promotes a high quality of staff in any type of organization, including educational establishments. For example, the University of Tasmania (UTAS) supports staff development as a policy to preserve staff of a high quality by helping the development of each individual to improve the university's performance as a whole (university of Tasmania: 2005).

In the UK educational system, a number of educational initiatives and innovations in teacher education occurred in the mid 1980's. As a result, taking part in in-service education and training (INSET) became more accessible for teachers (Gaunt, 1997:1). Nowadays professional development is initiated with preliminary teacher training in the UK and carries on into the newly qualified teacher (NQT) induction year. After that, teachers continue professional development activities throughout their career, whether through obligation or desire (Rhodes et al, 2004: 7).

Effective professional development is intended to assist teachers, both new and in-service, heighten their performance and, as a result lead to students' better achievement. Blandford explains that the reason for professional development is simply to increase teachers' knowledge and capability which in order to fit the requirements of students and society (Blandford, 2000: 4).



### *2.2. The importance of continuous professional development:*

At the present time teachers are no longer safeguarded in their jobs, schools or other educational institutions as holders of undergraduate degrees. Therefore, they must add regularly to their knowledge, skills and experience. Consequently, continuous professional development is a necessary part of teachers' lives (Megginson, & Whitaker, 2003: 5). The implementation of professional development enhances teachers' classroom skills and advances their career, at the same time improving teaching and learning outcomes in order to meet the goals of each country's, or district's, education system.

Recently, the issue of raising schools' standards has become a key part of the educational debate. Theorists, policy-makers and practitioners have acknowledged that professional development is an important factor in raising school standards. This issue highlights the significance of implementing professional development as a way forward during teachers' working lives (Blandford, 2000: 2).

### *2.3. Continuous professional development in Bahrain.*

Continuous professional development is becoming increasingly important for all sectors in Bahrain, including education.

With regards to the field of education, the document entitled 'The National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain: The Development of Education' (2008: 17) established the significance of implementing continuous professional development. This is highlighted by the organization of various kinds of training programmes by the Bahraini Ministry of Education, with the intention of satisfying teachers' needs and meeting the Ministry's development requirements. The design of these training programmes, which are carried out and supervised by the Directorate of Training and Professional Development, is based on the idea of continuous teaching and training because this is considered an essential part of teachers' vocational growth and can

assist them in developing their professional skills. These programmes reflect the Ministry's policy to achieve quality assurance through the professional development of all teaching staff (The National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2008).

One of the aspects of continuous professional development embraced by the Ministry of Education in Bahrain is peer observation. This is indicated by the director from the Basic Education Department of the Bahraini Ministry of Education in the interview carried out with her. She refers to the recommendation given by department directors to head teachers to localize training, so that teachers can learn from their colleagues by observing their work while teaching.

### *2.4. Peer observation as a model of continuous professional development.*

Peer observation has been widely known as a tool to improve teaching quality among teachers. It focuses on developing and improving teachers' performance by giving them the chance to observe and be observed. The expected result of this is that good practice in teaching and learning, such as formative reviews, constructive feedback and reflective practice, will be disseminated rather than evaluative decisions about teaching quality. (ProDAIT, 2006)

#### *Definition of peer observation*

Peer observation is a mutual procedure where a peer (observer) observes another's (observee's) teaching which offers constructive and helpful feedback. In other words, teachers observe each others' teaching and then discuss with one another various issue. It can be simply defined as a situation in which "people are observed by someone at the same level, usually meaning a fellow teacher rather than a senior member of staff such as Director of Studies. The person who observed then gives some feedback, which could be anywhere from a simple 'thanks, I thought it was great' to written feedback based on an observation task form they have been given or have chosen" (Case, 2008: 1). However, the University of Birmingham (2007)



describes peer observation as a technique or a means of teachers getting feedback to enhance their teaching abilities.

Peer observation of teaching has many advantages and disadvantages, as mentioned by Queen's University Belfast (2006). The advantages range from saving time, improving training and obtaining better feedback between teachers themselves, to improving and heightening teachers' confidence. However, the drawbacks lie in that teachers may not be from the same level, or that they have not been trained in observation techniques, or in how to give feedback, so that the feedback could be helpful and valuable for the observed and the observer. Moreover, Lam indicates that "It is a common phenomenon that teachers do not welcome classroom observation although it is widely accepted as an important component in staff development and appraisal" (Lam, 2001: 8). This adds to the difficulty of implementing peer teaching observation as a component of continuous professional development.

This chapter has reviewed literature regarding continuous professional development with special focus on peer observation. Moreover, a background was provided for the context of the present study, whose research methodology is detailed in the following chapter.

### 3. Methodology:

The research methodology is a qualitative approach. Data is collected from three sources: relevant documents from the Basic Education Department in the Bahraini Ministry of Education and from the state school which is the specific context of the study; thirteen face to face interviews; and my research diary.

Some studies define qualitative research as mainly concerning the description of a certain case. For example, Burns and Grove say that "Qualitative research is conducted to generate knowledge concerned with meaning and discovery" (Burns & Grove, 2004: 25). Given that the objective of the present study is to explore how peer observation is undertaken in Bahraini schools as form of CPD practice, and

that this is a small scale study, one school is used as what Soy (1997) refers to as a research object. As Soy says, this is "often a program, an entity, a person, or a group of people" (1997: 2). In this case, the school is a Bahraini state primary public school for girls, situated in a suburb of the capital of Bahrain, where all teachers and learners are female.

The key stakeholders in this study are nine Class-System teachers teaching in the same school (the classes are called first, second and third primary): three teachers teach the three first primary classes; three others teach the three second primary classes and the last three teach the three third primary classes. Other key participants are the senior teacher of the Class-System, the head teacher of the school, as well as a specialist from the Basic Education Department and a director from the same department at the Bahraini Ministry of Education.

Another participant in this research, is the researcher as an interviewer. The researcher conducted interviews with all the stakeholders and participants in the research. The language used to carry out the interviews was Arabic because the mother tongue of the stakeholders is Arabic. All the interviews and the written documents have been translated into English because the qualitative research is written up in English.

#### 3.1. The research questions.

The research is based on four questions:

- 1 – What are the causes of the difficulties and obstacles that teachers face when putting peer teaching observation into practice?
- 2 – What are the difficulties and obstacles that teachers face when putting peer teaching observation into practice?
- 3 – What suggestions can be made in terms of findings solutions to the above mentioned difficulties and obstacles, and improving the teaching process?
- 4 – How can peer teaching observation enhance and enrich methods of instruction and the teachers' professional development?



### 3.2. Research process and research design.

The research process began with a set of questions to be answered, followed by data collection, and then data analysis.

### 3.3. Location of the research.

The research is carried out with nine Class System teachers teaching classes of pupils aged between six and nine years old. It is conducted in one of the girls primary schools in Bahrain, more specifically, the first cycle of Basic Education in that school, where the Class System teacher is applied, and all learners and teachers are female. The school has three classes each at the levels called first primary, second primary and third primary. For this reason, the nine Class system teachers who teach almost all the compulsory core subjects are chosen.

### 3.4. Data collection methods.

It is chosen to carry out face to face interviews as the principal method of conducting the qualitative research in this study.

#### 3.4.1. Interviews.

Interviews offer the right of entry to other people's insight, as Altrichter et al (1993: 101) point out. They help to understand the reasons of the interviewee's performance. In other words, "Interviews are particularly useful for obtaining detailed and concrete accounts of people's experience, as well as linking their behaviors to the particular strategies they devised" (Dudwick et al, 2002: 17).

In this research, in-depth interviews are conducted with various perspectives; such as academic staff as well as administrative staff to strengthen the research, and data come from interviews as a source of evidence. These interviews are as follows:

1. Nine face to face interviews with the nine primary Class System teachers in Bahrain. The purpose of the interviews is to identify the obstacles and barriers which make it difficult to put peer teaching observation into practice in their context, and to find out what suggestions they had for solving these difficulties and obstacles.

2. A face to face interview with the senior teacher of the Class System teachers to identify the difficulties and the obstacles from her point of view, and to find out her suggestions for solving these difficulties and obstacles.

3. A face to face interview with a specialist from the Basic Education Department in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain to obtain suggestions for the teachers in terms of enhancing and enriching the teaching process.

4. A face to face interview with a director from the Basic Education in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain to find out what importance peer teaching observation has with regard to improving teaching methods and enhancing teachers' professional development.

The conducted interviews are semi-structured which, according to Wengraf (2001: 5), are designed to have a number of pre-arranged questions but adequately open, and to allow the subsequent questions of the interview to be improvised in a careful way. However, before each interview, a participant's sheet (Appendix 2) and a consent form (Appendix 1) has been given to each interviewee to ensure the confidentiality of the interview.

#### 3.4.2. Piloting.

Swanson and Hilton (2005: 338) state that piloting "enables the researcher to refine the overall approach to data". The authors point out that the aim of piloting is "to provide multiple insight to the researcher on the feasibility of the case study protocol, procedure for collecting data, and emergent findings (ibid).

### 3.5. Documents.

Documents from the interviewees have been included as guidelines on peer observation and its importance for teachers' professional development. The documents have been obtained and analyzed.

### 3.6. Research diary.

Notes have been recorded while conducting the research. The content of the diary helps to



a great deal as data in the research, especially the notes which have been recorded about the interviewees' (Class System teachers') reaction towards the study. The usefulness of a research diary is emphasized by Hughes (1996) when he says that "A research diary is a record of the researcher's involvement in a project ... The diary contains information about the researcher, what the researcher does, and the process of research. It complements the data yielded by the researcher methodology". The notes have been written in Arabic and translated whatever data is needed from the diary into English.

### 3.7. Triangulation methods and validity.

Good qualitative research will employ as many methods as possible to establish study validity. Guion, from University of Florida, relates validity in qualitative research to the truth and certainty of the findings. She mentions that the truth is "accurately reflecting the real situation", and also that it is "backed by evidence" (Guion, 2002: 1).

In this research, the type of triangulation used is data triangulation which concerns utilizing different, in this case three, sources of information:

- Information from the interviews with the various stakeholders;
- Information from the documents obtained from the senior teacher of the Class System teachers and the head teacher, as well as the document provided by the educational specialist in the Basic Education Department in the Ministry of Education.
- Information from the notes in the research diary.

### 3.8. Data analysis.

The main steps in analyzing the data are:

- Analysis of the documents to build up a general picture about teachers' professional development in Bahrain.
- Analysis of the documents to find out what views are held on the implementation of peer observation in state schools in Bahrain.

- Exploration of the role of peer observation in teacher professional development in the state school in Bahrain.
- Categorization of the interviewees' responses according to the themes that had emerged from the study.

### 3.9. Ethical issues in the research.

The nine Class System teachers have been contacted individually. Also, the senior teacher of the Class System teachers, the head teacher from the same state school, and the educational specialist and a director from the Basic Education Department in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain have been contacted. It has been explained to each one of them, individually, what the research was about and the rationale of the research by giving them a copy of the information sheet (Appendix 1). Then, they have been asked for their written consent by giving them the consent sheet (Appendix 3) to sign if they agree to take part in the research. The participants have been assured that everything in the research would be fully confidential by removing any details that could identify them as individuals, as teachers or even the school where they teach.

With regard to the documents provided by the school which have been used for data collection and analysis, it has been requested by the participants not to include those documents in the appendices because the names of the schools involved in the peer observation visits are mentioned at the top of the documents. Following their request, the documents have been collected, analysed, and treated with the utmost confidentiality.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, it has been reported on the findings of the analysis of the data which has been collected; documents, interviews, and research diary.

The analysis began by categorizing the data into themes followed by an overall analysis of the issues.



### The main themes of the research:

#### *A- The Bahraini Ministry of Education's position on teachers' professional development:*

The senior teacher's job description, which is prepared by the Ministry of Education for all state schools in Bahrain, reveals that the Ministry encourages teachers' professional development. This document gives one of the key aims of a senior teachers' position as following teachers' vocational development. In addition, Ghazi Shaker, the director of training and professional development at the Bahraini Ministry of Education states that, although teachers may have educational qualifications, they still need regular training courses to develop their career (Bahrain Ministry of Education: 2008).

#### *B – Peer observation as a tool for professional development:*

Peer observation has been adopted by the Ministry of Education as a tool for professional development. By examining the documents obtained, several references which indicated and suggested the use of peer observation for teacher professional development have been identified:

- The plan of Educational Supervision Department, Class System Section for the academic year 2008/2009, indicates the importance of class visitations and reciprocal visits between teachers from the same school and teachers from cooperative schools as tools to develop the vocational competencies of new and supply teachers.
- Reciprocal visit schedules submitted to the Class System Section in the Educational Supervision Department in the Ministry by state cooperative schools, showing the names of the visiting schools, the teacher observed, the observers, and day and date of the observation, indicate that state schools are practicing peer observation as a requirement by the Ministry for teachers' professional development.
- Reciprocal visit forms submitted to the visiting schools by the Educational Supervisor in Basic Education as feedback on the educational situations they had visited point

to the importance of peer observation and how the Ministry follow up this subject.

- A report by the cooperative schools from Groups Three and Four in the Northern Governorate about reciprocal visits between their schools for the academic year 2008/2009, submitted to the Educational Supervision Department in Ministry, show an analysis of an educational situation and also the importance of peer observation between teachers from different schools as a way of exchanging expertise and experiences.
- An invitation for an educational situation sent by one of the state cooperative schools from Group Three in the Northern Governorate to the other schools in the same group requests them to nominate teachers to represent their schools in this educational situation, which is to be followed by an educational meeting to discuss and analyse the situation mentioned. Moreover, the invitation letter points out that the invitation is carried out according to the Education Supervision plan, which puts emphasis on developing teachers' vocational competencies and on effective reciprocal visits. The educational meeting to follow the educational situation indicated how valuable these visits are to teachers' professional development.

A case in point is Arad Intermediate State School for Girls, which was established in 1995, and whose website states that one of the educational aims already in practice in the school is the professional development of school staff, specifically the academic staff. Arad school shows that class visitations and peer observations are the tools which help teachers to develop their career and enhance their performance. The school has organized:

- Several class visits by the head teacher, deputy head teacher and the senior teachers.
- Meeting with the teachers and the administration staff to discuss the positive and the negative situations found during the class visits.
- Courses and workshops to develop teachers' competencies and improve their performance (Arad Intermediate School for Girls, 2008).



However, it is apparent from the interviews conducted with the nine Class System teachers from the context of the study that peer observation becomes troublesome for teachers. Teachers feel uncomfortable when they are asked to put per observation into practice, and this dissatisfaction is present both when visiting or observing another teacher's educational situation , or having a peer visit theirs. It is noticeable in the answers of the nine Class System teachers that the implementation of peer observation is theoretically positive but that it is not practical, because teachers face difficulties when putting it into practice.

*C – Causes of the difficulties and obstacles that teachers face when putting peer teaching observation into practice:*

According to the data which has been collected from the interviews, the causes of the difficulties the teachers have faced are categorized as follow:

1 – Teacher's lack of self confidence:

In general, most new teachers are unenthusiastic at being observed. This, according to Ware and Millard (1986: 107), is common in teachers who are starting their career. Their reluctance to be observed stems from their fear of being judged or criticized at such an early stage of their professional life. Nevertheless, this can also be the case with teachers who have several years' experience, and it seems to be so with the nine interviewees (Class System Teachers) who are not new teachers, as is clear in Table 1 (Appendix 3).

Despite the experience of the interviewees, most of them were still unimpressed at having someone in their classrooms observing them while they are teaching because they feel that they are monitored. Comments from most of the teachers (B, H, G and A) reflect this situation: "The feeling of having someone in my classroom monitoring me annoys me and always makes me panic and feel worried"; and "I feel panic when anyone visits me and this will affect my performance in the class". Teacher D also mentions that whenever she hears that someone

will be visiting her class, she gets worried and stressed because she has a problem preparing visual aids that she is not as skilful as her colleagues in this. She feels that her colleagues can prepare beautiful ones which attract the pupils, and that "Whenever I see my colleagues' materials, I feel that what I am doing for my pupils is not enough". This lack of confidence in the development of visual materials makes her reluctant to be observed by her peers.

However, Bubb and Earley, (2007: 59) mention that "Peer observation is stressful, so in a sense things get worse before they get better, but it worth getting over initial discomfort or reluctance and shyness about being observed and sharing problems with colleagues". Teacher F seems to agree with these authors when she says that she does not have any problem with peer observation because such visits have many advantages. She considers that "As the learning and teaching process become easier with less time and effort, for pupils and me, it improves the pupils' achievement".

2 – The change in the focus of peer observation from development to evaluative:

The nine Class System teachers indicate in their interviews that peer observation has recently become a more evaluative process because of the participation of the head teacher and/or the deputy head teacher in the observation. For example, Teachers A and B describe that the observations are no longer developmental for the reason that the head teacher and/or the deputy head teacher come to observe the teacher's performance and not the teacher's development.

In addition, Teacher E states that the observers "although they say that their visit is only observational, we know that there will be evaluation and that they will write a report about our performance in the class; how we teach; what materials we are using; whether there is any interaction from the pupils, and so on". Teacher H adds that these visits make her unhappy because "they will affect our annual reports in view of the fact that the head teacher and the deputy head teacher will join the



observation group, watch out performance and assess us". On the contrary, although Teacher I knows that the peer observation is going to be evaluated and she has to prepare to give the best 'performance', she is happy with these kinds of visits because they motivate her to teach better.

### 3 – Amount of preparation:

It is usual that the observed teachers were informed previously of the timing of the visit and who the visitors will be. The procedure is in line with what is cited in the peer observation policy of the School of Continuing and Professional Education at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (2009) "Participants in Peer Observation are likely to derive the greatest benefit if they have had some opportunity for advance preparation". Nevertheless, although the teachers are informed by the senior teacher about the date and time of observational visits the teachers complain because they get tired from preparing for them. The Class System Teachers say that they start preparing one or two weeks before the visit because they want to show their best performance, the finest of their skills, and the top materials. Moreover, Teacher E describes how the amount of preparation make her exhausted.

Teacher A also makes reference to the time and effort expended in preparing for peer observation, both at home and at school. Then a small mistake can ruin all the preparations. She gives an example from her experience when she aimed to show how technology facilitates teaching and learning process. She describes how she set up her laptop in the classroom and starts teaching. Unfortunately, one of the pupils was coming to the front of the class to explain something "by mistake, she hit the laptop wire and disconnected the power. Everything I had prepared disappeared and the whole class was delayed".

Teacher F, however, mentions that it would be better if no one informed her previously about the visit. She says that informing her earlier makes her "worried and keep on thinking about the visit".

All the teachers criticize the amount of preparation done due to the fact that they have become more evaluative than observational. Nevertheless, the head teacher gives another point of view on this. She states that she prefers to join these observation groups and consider the visits as class visits to evaluate the observed teacher. She says, "I know she [the observed teacher] is presenting the best of her performance... so why ask her to prepare for another class visit and disturb her again for evaluation?". In addition, the head teacher mentions that she tries her best to join the observers, or to be substituted by the deputy head teacher as she thinks that their participation will motivate the teacher and "because she done a lot of preparation for this visit and I appreciate her efforts so we should be there".

### 4 – Frequency of visits during the academic year:

In the interview carried out with the director of the Basic Education Department in the Ministry of Education, she clarifies that there are different kinds of visits, Some visits are evaluative and others are observational, where teachers learn from each other. Although it is difficult to make an exact calculation of how many visits are made to school in an academic year, the average would be approximately eight to each teacher. The visits are described as being one of the following:

- Class visits by head teacher, deputy head teacher, or the senior teacher where the aim is evaluation.
- Visits to new teachers by the senior teacher or by the educational supervisor where the aim is to give the new teachers feedback to enhance their teaching.
- Reciprocal visits by the school teachers or by teachers from cooperative schools accompanied by a specialist from the Basic Education Department aiming to exchange expertise between teachers and discuss their different experiences.

Although all these visits are for the benefit of the teachers and are aimed at enhancing



their performance, the teachers complain about the number of visits during the academic year because as Teacher E, I and G say, these visits will postpone the school curriculum by taking up valuable time and effort.

5 – Number of visitors in each visit:

One of the factors of observational visits that was emphasized by almost all the Class System teachers in their interviews was that the number of visitors affects the teachers' and the pupils' performance. Teachers indicate that a large number of visitors disturbs the teacher being observed as well as the pupils.

However, not all teachers share these feelings as one of the observed teachers says "I welcome any number of visitors".

6 – Teachers' involvement in administrative work which is unrelated to teaching:

All the Class System teachers suffer from time pressure, and teachers note that they are overwhelmed by the amount of administrative work they have to do which is not related to teaching. The senior teacher also comments, in her interview, that one of the obstacles which makes implementing peer observation teaching problematic is the teachers' involvement in many school committees and projects.

*D – Difficulties and obstacles faced by the teachers while practicing peer observation:*

The analysis also has thrown up several points regarding the difficulties and obstacles faced by teachers when peer observation is put into practice; such as:

1 – Delay in the school curriculum:

As mentioned above, although peer observation increases the potency of teacher's professional development, most interviewees state in their interviews that it causes delay in the school curriculum. For example, when I asked Teacher A if she had ever invited her colleagues to observe her teaching; her answer was "No, I do not have time because I want to finish the school curriculum". Teacher D says that "class visits cause time pressure on us because we have an intensive school curriculum and we are forced to

finish it within a determined period". Moreover, teacher I felt obliged to take this situation one step further. She has asked the administration to arrange extra lessons for her class so that she can finish the school curriculum.

The senior teacher seems to share the teachers' feelings on this. In her interview, she indicates that the intensive school curriculum and the shortage of time for teachers to cover the curriculum is one of the obstacles to implementing peer observation.

2 – Pupils' participation:

In spite of the fact that peer observation is meant to enhance the learning process and to improve pupil's achievement, pupil's participation during class visits has become an issue for teachers while implementing peer observation. Teachers point out that pupils' attitude change and their participation decrease whenever there is a visitor and this makes the teachers feel as if they are not in control of their class. Therefore, Teacher D decides to inform the pupils in advance regarding the visitors.

3 – Choice of observers:

Another factor that contributes to the teachers' unease regarding peer observation is the way in which the observing teachers are chosen by the senior teacher for peer observation. Teachers feel uncomfortable if they are not the ones who invite and determine which teachers will observe their class. Teachers say that the observers were chosen randomly and according to their free time.

However, the senior teacher has this to say in her interview: "Some teachers ask me for an opportunity to observe a particular teacher because they need to see her way of teaching a particular lesson, so I bear this in mind and, as soon as I prepare the visiting schedule, I record their names as observers".

4 – The issue of feedback:

-Teachers do not have a specific time for feedback:

Feedback is an essential step in peer observation since the observer needs to be able



to share with the observed teacher a reflective feedback process at the end of the session. Its significance is reflected in the comments of various authors, for example Roisin Donnelly, from Dublin Institute of Technology, who states that “The meeting should focus on the teacher’s goals for the observation, and what he or she would like the observer to focus on so that the feedback can be meaningful” (Donnelly, 2007: 121). However, the nine Class System teachers criticize the fact that, although the administration arranges a detailed schedule for peer observation containing the name of the observed teacher, the names of the observers, and the date and time of the observation(s), unfortunately a special time for the observed and the observers to meet and discuss the outcomes of the session as an essential part of the feedback procedure is not mentioned in the schedule. The teachers mentioned that they meet in their break times for feedback.

-The feedback form is not provided to the teacher observed:

In general, all observers write notes during a peer observation and provide the teacher observed with them after the session. Matthew mentions that “The observer should record his or her comment, possibly using a standard pro-forma” and that “Copies of these records should remain the property of the people concerned” (Matthew, 2001: 3).

The nine Class System teachers indicate in their interviews that the senior teacher provides them with feedback forms before beginning the observation session, so that they are able to write their notes while observing. However, these forms are not submitted to the observed teacher after the observation session, but to the senior teacher, who keeps the forms in her observation file.

In her interview, the senior teacher explains why she follows this procedure. She states that “As the teachers are not trained to give feedback, sometimes the way they write on the forms is like judgment and this hurts the observed teacher. Then the observed teacher will react negatively and there will be a kind of a problem between the teachers, So I prefer not to give the observed

teachers these forms until all the teachers are well-trained for this kind of visit”. Bell notes that “An untrained observer may lack required skills and/or reinforce bad practice; may tell the person how to teach rather than helping them explore their own solutions” (Bell, 2002: 8).

*E – Enhancement and enrichment of methods of instruction and teachers’ professional development through peer observation.*

Peer observation plays an important role in teachers’ professional development, as is reflected in what Bubb and Earley (2007: 59) say with regard to peer observation that teachers “...will learn a great deal about their job from watching others doing it”. In addition, the Centre of Teaching and Learning in the University of Minnesota (2008) gives some of the advantages of peer observation as being: “Gaining new ideas and perspectives about teaching from colleague(s)”.

In fact, a number of interviewees refer to their experience in implementing peer observation teaching and how beneficial it was for both observed and observer. For example, Teacher G indicates that peer observation play a significant role in professional development and it facilitate the challenges which she and her colleagues face in implementing the new curricula.

Moreover, Teacher I talked about her experience. She explains that she invited her colleagues to observe her teaching while putting into practice a new educational situation. She wanted to know about the pupils’ interactions and the effectiveness of the educational technology and the materials she used in the new lesson which she was going to present. She invited the senior teacher and the educational supervisor from the Basic Education Department in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain. Besides, the senior teacher invited two teachers who are teaching the same level at the same school. The observers were informed the aim of the observation. Teacher I states “Unfortunately, the feedback I got was only from the educational supervisor and the senior teacher. I did not meet the teachers for feedback till the next day when we were free”.



The senior teacher points to the role of peer observation in improving the vocational career of new teachers and supply teachers [supply teachers work as full time teachers in schools and the Ministry of Education moves them between schools according to need]. The senior teacher illustrates that two new supply teachers with no teaching expertise were appointed in her school. The two teachers worked hard. They practiced peer observation as a strategy to develop themselves. They used effective methods and utilized their time in an effective way. Therefore, the school administration recommended them as distinguished teachers and they were awarded one grade higher in the teacher's cadre by the Ministry of Education.

*F – Suggestions in terms of findings and solutions to facilitate the difficulties and obstacles.*

The interviewees made some suggestions which might reduce their difficulties and solve their problems while they are implementing peer observation. Following are the suggestions I categorized according to what was mentioned in this regard in the interviews:

1 – Reduction in the number of the observers:

Teachers D, G and H referred to the importance of reducing the number of observers. From their point of view increasing the number of observers on one hand will reduce the pupils' participation and on the other hand the observed teacher will be panic and stressed.

2 – Observation based on the teacher's needs:

Teachers' C, D and F emphasise the fact that peer observation needs to be based on teachers' needs and not on what the school administration decides. According to these teachers' perspective, it is the responsibility of the individuals to determine their own requirements for their personal progress and developing their careers.

3 – Teacher's involvement in the preparation for peer observation:

Teachers A, C and G believe that it is the responsibility of the teachers to prepare for the peer observation sessions. They suggest that it would be preferable for the observed teacher to be the person who has the authority to choose

the observers and also the suitable time for observing. This is because she is the one who is presenting this educational situation and, at the same time, she has some aims that she wants the observers to observe, which will be previously scheduled in her lesson plans.

4 – Reciprocal visits only between teachers to exchange expertise:

Teachers B, C, H and G state that they benefit from reciprocal visits implemented by the school teachers and by cooperative schools teachers. They suggest practicing these visits in a friendly, informal way between the teachers apart from the administration staff. They believe that the presence of the head teacher and/or the deputy head teacher changes the nature of the observational sessions as they become judgmental or evaluative visits. Artzt and Armour-Thomas (2002: 115) note that peer observation between teachers can be more beneficial if this does not include superiors.

5– Administrative support for the observed teacher:

Teachers F, C, A and I refer to the time they need to prepare materials for observational visits. Therefore, they suggest that the observed teacher needs to be supported by the school administration in terms of having access to all materials which help her to present the educational situation.

6– Recording the observed educational situation:

Teachers F and I put forward the possibility of making video recordings of the educational situations being observed and presenting it in the teachers' feedback meeting.

7– Dissemination of experiences of differentiated teachers:

Teacher F and both the senior teacher and the head teacher suggest inviting the related teachers to the differentiated educational situations to gain benefit from these experiences, learn from their colleagues in an accessible way, and thus to help them to develop their profession.

8 – Specifying the aims of the observation:

Teachers G and D, and the senior teacher



suggest that the aims of a peer observation need to be specified to the teachers concerned before the observation session takes place.

#### 9 – Feedback:

Several points about improving the feedback procedure are made by the participants in the research.

9a – Particular time for feedback: The nine Class System teachers point out that they had problems with feedback as the school administration does not provide them with the opportunity to meet after the observational sessions. From their point of view, teachers need to meet after the observation sessions to discuss these outcomes and it would be better if the school administration facilitated these meetings by arranging a particular time for them to meet. The senior teacher also refers to the teachers' need for a particular time to meet after the observation sessions.

9b – Observatio forms: Teachers A, B, C, D, E and H suggest submitting the observational forms to the observed teacher after the session as it is the responsibility of the latter to keep these forms with her in order to gain benefit from her colleagues' notes. From the perspective of the above-mentioned teachers, they do not see the point of filling in these forms if they will end up being kept only in the senior teacher's file. On the other hand, the senior teacher points to the fact that the feedback session will only be effective with no drawbacks from negative comments if teachers first receive training in giving constructive feedback.

From the analysis of the data reported above, it is found that the main difficulty in implementing peer observation is due to limitations in training. Training programmes on observing skills lead to effective peer observation (Svinicki and Lewis, 2006) and, moreover, if teachers are well trained in observation techniques, even the feedback will be effective (Ware and Millard, 1986: 107). It is also pointed out by researchers that "Training in observation skills and thorough planning should minimize the o: 8).

The interviews with the nine Class System teachers, the senior teacher and the head teacher

indicate that there is a call for training for the academic staff and also the administrative staff, as they have to integrate with each other. This could suggest a need for training specifically in peer observation and feedback skills.

A further suggestion resulting from the analysis is that the academic staff and the administrative staff should distinguish between the aims of observations. They need to differentiate between observations which evaluate the teachers' performance, and observation whose objective is to enhance and improve the teachers' professional development.

Another relevant point is that, in the research diary, it is mentioned the positive attitude noticed from the teachers towards the interviews, this could be because they were looking forward to finding solutions for their situation with regard to peer observation.

#### 5. Summary

A summary of the findings answer the research questions as follows:

- 1 – the causes of the difficulties and obstacles that the teachers face when putting peer observation into practice are teacher's lack of self confidence; the change in the focus of peer observation from developmental to evaluative; the large amount of preparation needed for observation visits; the high frequency of visits during the academic year; the number of visitors in each visit; and the teachers' involvement in administrative work which is unrelated to teaching.
- 2 – The difficulties and obstacles faced by teachers while practicing peer observation are delays in the school curriculum; the negative effect on pupils' participation; the need for teachers to choose the observers, and the issue of feedback.
- 3 – The enhancement and enrichment of methods of instruction and teachers' professional development through peer observation are referred to by the interviewees as being practicing peer observation in order to facilitate the challenges they face in implementing new curricula; developing



awareness of pupils' interactions and the effectiveness of the educational technology and materials used in presenting curricula content; and the role of peer observation in improving and developing the vocational career of new and supply teachers.

- 4 – The suggestions which are made by the interviewees in terms of finding solutions to overcome the difficulties and obstacles and improving the teaching process were reduction in the number of observers; observation based on the individual teacher's needs; teachers' involvement in the preparation of peer observation; reciprocal visits only between teachers to exchange expertise; administrative support for the observed teacher; recording of the observed education situation; dissemination of the experiences of differentiated teacher; specification of the aims of the observation. And the established guidelines on when and how to give feedback.

The analysis has shown that there is a lack of training programmes specifically in peer observation and feedback skills for the academic staff as well as the administrative staff. While the teachers are in need of training in observation skills and how to give and receive feedback the administration staff requires training in terms of altering their attitudes and mentality towards peer observation. Moreover, they need to distinguish between evaluative observation, whose objective is to check the teachers' performance, and developmental observation, which is essentially meant to enhance and develop the teachers' careers.

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## Appendices

### Appendix – 1

#### Participant's sheet

Dear Participant:

I would be grateful if you would take part in my study.

Title of Project: Exploring the Role of Peer Observation in Teacher's Professional Development in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Place of Study: University of East Anglia, United Kingdom.

Background:

This study will investigate the role of peer observation in teacher's professional development in the first cycle of Basic Education in Bahraini State School from the point of view of the Class System Teachers, the Senior Teacher, the Head Teacher, the Primary Education Supervisor, and a Director from the Basic Education in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain. I am interested in this topic as it is related to my work as an English teacher for the first cycle in Bahraini primary school for girls and I want to use my experience in this field to make people more aware of the practice of peer observation.

Project objectives:

This study aims to investigate the role of peer observation in teacher's professional development in Bahraini Primary schools and the duties of the observer and the observed while peer observing. It will also try to find ways for teachers to improve and develop their teaching performance through improving and enriching their methods of teaching and exchanging their experiences, with eventual benefits for the learning process.

Rights of the participants:

All participants in this study are voluntary. Information provided will be treated as confidential and names will be changed in the presentation of my findings. This guarantees your anonymity at all times. You are free to withdraw from this research at any time and can request a copy of my findings if you would like one.

I greatly appreciate your participation in my research which I hope will benefit teachers and students as well as all participants in the teaching and learning process in Bahraini primary schools.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact:

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Sincerely,

Suhaila Rajab



Appendix – 2

Consent form

Title of Project: Exploring the Role of Peer Observation in Teacher’s Professional Development in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Name of Researcher: Suhaila Rajab

Position and Contact Address of Researcher:

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Please initial box

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reasons.
- 3. I agree to take part in the above study.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tick box

Yes      No

Note for researcher:

Include the following statements if appropriate, or delete from your consent form:

- 4. I agree to the interview consultation being audio recorded.

- 5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotations in publications.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Name of participant	Date	Signature
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Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
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### Appendix – 3

**Table ( 1 )**  
**Qualifications and years of expertise of the nine Class System Teachers**

Interviewee	Qualifications	Years of expertise in the educational field
Teacher A	B.ED – Specialisation: Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	17 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher B	B.ED – Specialisation: Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	21 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher C	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	17 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher D	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	15 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher E	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	18 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher F	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	19 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher G	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	15 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher H	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	17 years – State Primary School for Girls
Teacher I	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain	19 years – State Primary School for Girls



## Appendix - 4

**Table ( 2 )**  
**The Qualifications and years of expertise**  
**Of the Senior Teacher, the Head Teacher, the Specialist, and the Director**

Interviewee	Qualifications	Years of expertise in the educational field
Senior Teacher	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain + Teaching Resource Diploma/ University of Bahrain + many courses/ Class System Teacher/ Ministry of Education	17 years: - 10 years teaching in a State Primary School for Girls. - 7 years working as a senior teacher in a State Primary School for Girls
Head Teacher	B.ED – Education/ University of Bahrain + School Management Diploma/ University of Bahrain + many courses/ School Management/ Ministry of Education	18 years: - 15 years teaching in State Intermediate School for Girls. - 2 years working as a deputy head teacher in a State Primary School for Girls. - 1 year working as a head teacher in a State Primary School for Girls
Specialist (Basic Education)	B.ED – Specialisation Class System Teacher/ University of Bahrain Many courses/ Class System Teacher/ Ministry of Education + Maters in Education/ A university in England	21 years: - 1 year teaching in a State Primary School for Boys. - 18 years teaching in a State Primary School for Girls. - 2 years working as a specialist in the Basic Education Department
Director (Basic Education)	B.ED – Education/ University of Bahrain Maters in Education/ University of Bahrain Many course/ planning and developing/ Ministry of Education	28 years: - 15 years teaching in a State Secondary School for Girls. - 8 years working as a specialist in the Basic Education - 5 years working as a Director in the Basic Education