# The Effects of Peer Coaching on Faculty Development
# in the Context of Higher Education

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**Abstract:** Faculty development has been one of the major concerns for many educational institutions and organizations across the world. Peer coaching, among others, has been identified as an effective strategy just for that. For instance, Ohio Department of Education has collaborated with the Center for Essential School Reform to engage in intensive teacher development. The present study reports on an investigation into the use of peer coaching for staff development in Sharjah University, one of the leading universities in the Arabian Gulf. Certain qualitative instruments were constructed such as interviews and subjective questionnaires to collect data on the effects of using peer coaching in this University, while quantitative considerations were resorted to in the analysis so as to compliment the findings statistically.

The questionnaire was administered in both Arabic and English to participants from different academic departments. It was based on five constructs, namely 1) the helpfulness of the coaching process for the observers, the observerees, 2) the observerees' feelings about the possible perpetuation of the coaching program 3)faculty's feedback 4) attitudes, and 5) recommendations regarding the process. Five of the respondents who had completed the questionnaire were also involved in semi-structured interviews. The management claimed that peer coaching would contribute to the development of the teachers and thereby enhance their students' learning skills. However, the data collected from open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews revealed that the use of peer coaching in the University had limited effects. Analysis of these data depending on certain categories uncovered the reasons for this limitation. This study concludes with recommendations, which could lead to the desired outcomes of peer coaching and consequently enhance student achievement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Peer coaching is a process during which teachers observe each other teach and later meet to discuss what they observed and provide constructive feedback on that. Observation in this context denotes the literal sense of the term as the practical activity that peer coaching entails. It must not be mistaken, therefore, as a research method often used to substantiate anthropological studies. During this process the participants are expected to develop professionally by making a better sense of teaching and learning. Among others, Beverly Showers &Bruce Joyce, (2002) have emphasised the importance of peer coaching as an effective strategy for professional development. Despite such importance granted to peer coaching, it is often considered an optional process that involves practitioners who are interested in updating their teaching practices as well as improving their students' achievement.

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### 1.1 Limitations

As one of the limitations for this study, it is important to state at the very outset that it is a small-scale case study focused on the implementation of peer coaching only inSharjah University. Another limitation that this study suffers from is the fact it is entirely centred on the data collected through questionnaires and interviews hence it does not rule out any disparity between its findings and the actual practice at the university in question.

Owing to such well-regarded efficacy of peer coaching, the Board Council at the University decided to implement it in all departments. As per the explanation offered by the Chair of the English Language and Literature Department, the main purpose of this exercise was twofold: (1) to improve the skills of the teachers participating in this process by exchanging content information and teaching expertise, and (2) to establish

better team performance. Most importantly this practice was expected to improve student achievement overall.

A schedule of classroom observation was then devised by the Chair of the English Language and Literature Department and distributed to all members of faculty. He never explicated it but this activity was supposed to be obligatory, which is evident from the fact that he distributed a fixed schedule for that to the teaching staff. While choosing the participants, he also took into account the field of speciality and the time when the teachers would be available. For this reason, teachers, in most cases, did not choose their peers. Each teacher received his/her own observation schedule stating the date and the time of when their peers would come to their classes: two peers would observe one teacher, and in many cases those who were observed had a chance to observe somebody else. The teachers expressed their disapproval of this procedure and indicated that the announcement was sudden and inopportune. There was a fear that the management would disguise peer coaching as appraisals to terminate or renew contracts. In fact, many teachers could not resist the urge to talk about this fear either in social gatherings or departmental meetings.

The observers brought with them sheets titled "Report of Classroom Observation." After the completion of observations, the observed and the observers signed the reports. Then every teacher received a photocopy of his/her own reports from the secretary of the Department however the news of the reports could not be traced after that.

The decision-making authority linked peer coaching to professional development; however, the implementation of the peer coaching process has not reflected the supreme authority's aspiration or claim. This conflict between what we have heard on one hand, and what we have experienced on the other, has formed the launching pad for his study.

### 1.2 Appraisal of the Existing Discourse in the Literature

The premise that teachers undergoing peer coaching produce good results has attracted the attention of most educational institutions worldwide. At the heart of peer coaching lies observation, which is frequently used for different purposes. For example, it is resorted to resolve classroom management problems or as a tool for "evaluation of teachers".

It is often also used for the sake of "teacher development" (Peter Sheal, 1989, p. 92). Dick Allwright (1993) highlighted the need for in-depth examination of teacher-student interactions and the descriptions of classroom events.

In other words, Allwright suggests that systematic classroom observation may be seen as an emerging tool for enhancing the overall classroom experience.

Researchers have studied and observed classes holistically to determine the extent to which a teacher adhered to the method assigned to him/her. Since research had confirmed that none of the teaching methods could claim superiority over the other, classroom research drifted toward more attainable aims such as addressing teacher training problems, teacher and school development, and enhancing the teaching/learning process. The aims of classroom observation have now grown in quantity and quality. Thus, the need for a procedure, which objectively describes what actually happens in the classroom for subsequent analysis followed by appropriate recommendations, has become inevitable (Matt O'Leary, 2014).

Classroom observation has intimidated teachers as it involves supervisor and administrators, authority and power. However, since the overall aim is to help teacher's progress and learn more but not to frighten them. Peers who are familiar with all aspects of classroom context can be the best observers. Owing to the significance of promoting the trust factor between teachers and administration, moreover, peer observation comes across as a promising strategy for faculty development.

In their continuous endeavours, researchers and educators have realised the impact of terminology on the participants. Showers and Joyce (2002) were among the first to replace "observation" with "coaching": a non-threatening, non-sensitive, beneficial, and congenial term. "Feedback" and "coaches", which imply more collaboration and lack of superiority among the participants, were immediately used.

### 1.2.1 Purposes of Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is a confidential process through which the "observer" and the "observed" (Showers & Joyce, 2002) share their expertise and provide one another with support, assistance and constructive feedback for "the purpose of enhancing learning by refining present skills, learning new skills, and/or solving classroom-related problems" (Victoria Scott & Craig Miner, 2008, p. 1).

Pam Robins (1991) in much the same vein mentions the goals while defining the peer coaching as "a confidential process through which two or more colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace. It is not evaluative, and the term coaching is not meant to suggest that one partner has a higher status than the others" (p.1). Robins' definition

highlights the premise that the peer coaching process is not judgemental or a superior-subordinate interaction but collaborative and supportive. As a matter of fact, this is the premise that the present study also seeks to confirm.

Robins (1991), and Scott and Miner (2008), and many more scholars had contended that peer coaching could be one of the best strategies for teacher development. However, they did not address the traditions and culture of the people who would be interested in using peer coaching for their professional development. Their discussion focused on the process as a whole and in particular on its phases.

### 1.2.2 Phases of Peer Coaching

The peer-coaching process normally consists of three phases: 1) pre-observation conference, 2) the actual observation, and 3) the post-observation conference (Michael Skinner & Frances Welch, 1996). Sometimes observers or/and the observed may need extra time to reflect on what was noted before the feedback conference. In this case peer coaching will comprise four phases. In both three-phase and four-phase cycles the aim is to "enter into a collaborative and reflective dialogue" (Scott & Miner, 2008, p. 1) in order to acquire professional growth. The observation cycle, therefore, goes as follows:

1. A pre-observation conference is the first phase where the participants meet to reach a consensus concerning the purpose of the observation and decide what teaching/learning behaviours an observer is going to look for while in class. They also design observation schedules or decide the tools that allow the observer to gather appropriate information on classroom transactions such as the type of questions teachers ask, the way they respond to their students' enquiries and students' participation in class activities or contribution to their learning achievements (David Hopkins, 1993).

2. The actual observation is the second phase during which the observer writes a description of what actually happens in class particularly in terms of the teaching/learning aspects or behaviours agreed on during the pre-observation meeting.

3. The analysis/planning phase is optional. During this phase, the observer and/or the observed may need some time to organise his/her notes or reflect on what was observed or noted.

4. The last phase is the post-observation conference or coaching. During this phase, the participants reflect on the evidence collected by the observer

and then exchange ideas on how a particular activity or an instructional behaviour can be improved, examine students' responses, and generate solutions to any perceived problems.

### 1.2.3 Strengths of Peer Coaching

So far, peer coaching has seemed to be a rewarding process for both participants. However, in reality, it may involve some complexities such astime factor. Many practitioners may find it extremely hard to find the time when both partners can be free. Hopkins (1993) and Showers et.al (2002) among many addressed this issue and considered it a limitation of peer coaching. For instance, both the observer and his/her partner need some free time in their class schedules to observe each other's class. They also need time to meet and discuss potential problems and ways of resolving them. Moreover, they may need extra time to find out what others have said on the topic under study, collaborate, and research the effectiveness of the suggested solutions.
Additionally, according to Showers & Joyce, (2002), the process is costly. Coaches need on-going training workshops and programs that qualify them to be of help and support to other teachers. They need to keep abreast of the latest developments of peer coaching programs, methods, and strategies. These workshops and programs may incur financial loss on the part of the educational institutions. I may disagree on this particular issue, however. This may not be a limitation, as practitioners and educators need to update their background information continuously whether they function as coaches or not.

Finally, peer coaching requires commitment and devotion on the part of the partners. It tends to be ineffective particularly if it is not followed by a joint discussion and constructive feedback. The curtailed observation may bring along with it a measure of loss of confidence in peer coaching as a whole.

The literature on peer coaching has confirmed the helpfulness of the peer coaching process for professional development. Has this finding been confirmed in the University? This query will be the topic of the upcoming sections once the research is done explaining the purpose of this study and the methodology entailed.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

This small-scale qualitative case study is conducted mainly to:

1. Examine the faculty's attitudes towards the helpfulness of the peer coaching process;

2.  Explore the faculty's recommendations regarding the peer coaching strategies that may yield more effective results;

The results of this study, therefore, can help the policy makers in educational institutions to make informed decisions about current issues or debates pertinent to peer coaching. In the hindsight, however, it can also benefit college and schoolteachers who are interested in becoming better practitioners in different disciplines.

## 2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework mentioned above together with a clear description of the purpose of this study demands a meticulous statement of methodology. The following is an attempt to simplify and organise all methodological tools applied in this study based on their relevance.

### 2.1 Context

The present study was carried out at Sharjah University where Arabic and English both are used as medium of instruction. Although Arabic is the official language of the Emirate of Sharjah, English is given almost equal importance due to the presence of a large English-speaking expatriate community. The research was conducted in three different departments: the English, the Arabic and the Mass Communication Departments. Each department has two campuses: the men's and the women's. The same teachers give lectures on both campuses.

### 2.2 Participants

1.  Thirty-three faculty members participated in this study. Thirty-two of the participants are PhD holders. All of them have many years of professional experience. Thirteen respondents had already taught in American and British universities abroad. Seventeen of the participants have published in academic journals or written books in their own fields of specialty. Two members had occupied deanship posts before they joined the university academia.

### 2.3 Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study:

1.  What effects does peer coaching have on teacher development?

2.  To what extent is the peer coaching approach effective for faculty development?

3.  What procedures can be suggested to improve this process?

### 2.4 Methods of Data Collection

The research relied mainly on two methods of data collection, namely questionnaires and interviews. Both methods have been customised as deemed fit for a study of this nature. A detailed description of any stipulations attached with these methods is, therefore, given below.

### 2.4.1 Questionnaires

I administered English and Arabic versions of the questionnaires to thirty-three teachers in the aforementioned departments. Thirty questionnaires were returned each of which consisted five items. Each item was followed by two or three choices from which the participants had to select. To seek in-depth information, I asked the participants to explain in a few words the reasons for their choices.

The questionnaire items focused on the following areas that I have earlier introduced as the 'five constructs' of the study: the participants' opinions about

1.  Whether the process was helpful for both the observers and the observerees;

2.  The observerees' feelings towards the possible perpetuation of the coaching program in the university system;

3.  The faculty's feedback on the process;

4.  The faculty's attitudes towards the process;

5.  The faculty's recommendations for professional development.

The questionnaire was relatively short and the reason for being so was that I was fully aware of the amount of responsibilities the participants carry and their tight teaching schedules, so I tried to be as concise and direct to the point as possible. Moreover, it was important that I received the completed questionnaires back from the participants many of whom would have consigned the survey sheets to their drawers had these been long.

To make sure that the questions would not cause any misunderstanding, I piloted them first. I asked two of my close friends to read them and see if the questions were clear. They read both versions and both were satisfied with all the questions.

The questionnaires were administered a couple of weeks before the final exams. The procedure went as follows. First, I had an informal chat with my colleagues. During our conversation, I stressed that this study would explore their views of the process, find out whether it had achieved the goals articulated by the management and seek alternatives that would eventually enhance the

students' learning experiences. The questionnaires were completed and returned in less than one week. All of the participants were pleased with the questionnaire for being easy to complete and direct to the point. As a sign of respect to all of them, I kept their responses anonymous.

**2.4.2 Interviews**

Due to time constraints, I only interviewed the five teachers with whom I could meet easily. Two interviews were conducted on the bus on our way to the university; one occurred at the participant's residence; another one was conducted at the participant's office, and one in mine. I tape-recorded each due to the fear of missing any interesting information, and the respondents did not mind my doing so. Then the interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants to validate the transcribed data. Two respondents added more statements to the original transcript and three kept the transcripts as they were.

The interviews focused on (1) teachers' awareness of the different stages of the peer coaching process; (2) the degree of interaction with other teachers; (3) their opinions of the effectiveness and usefulness of the whole process. Some questions unfolded during the course of the interviews.

After reviewing the responses acquired through the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, I analysed them after organising them into eleven categories related to: 1) goals, 2) planning, 3) implementation, 4) sensitivity, 5) feedback, 6) emerging quality of teaching and learning, 6) management, 7) professionalism, 8) tension producer, 9) transitory nature, 10) lack of constructive criticism, and 11) compulsory nature.

The formidable sources of knowledge and learning as well as the participants' responses before and while conducting this study inspired me to eventually formulate my research questions, a description of which is offered in the following.

**3. RESULTS**

A description of the actual responses in verbatim acquired through the questionnaires is offered, which is then followed by a quick summary. A detailed analyses is presented in the next section

*3.1. Presentation of Data*
**Questionnaire item # 1**
How helpful the coaching process was for you as an observer or as the one being observed?
      a. Very helpful
      b. Slightly helpful
      c. Not helpful at all

**Table 1: The participants' opinions concerning the helpfulness of the process**

| % of teachers | Teachers' responses | Reasons |
|---|---|---|
| 50 % | Slightly helpful | • It was not implemented with a clear purpose in mind<br><br>• Could've been better if it had been properly and skilfully applied |
| 50% | Not helpful at all | • In most cases the observed did not get feedback from the observer<br><br>• It is highly sensitive to be judged by your teaching fellow; courtesy plays a role<br><br>• It was artificial, disturbing, and distracting for the class<br><br>• because almost every teacher perceived the process as a means to renew or terminate contracts<br><br>• Teaching habits, like all habits, are not easy to change |

Fifty percent of the participants feel that the process was slightly helpful, while the rest of the participants disagree with this conviction mainly because "It is highly sensitive to be judged by your teaching fellow" and "Teaching habits...are not easy to change".

**Questionnaire item # 2**
Did the person you observed offer any indication of whether they found your observation helpful or not?
Yes/ No. If yes, what did they say?

**Table 2. The participants' opinions of post-observation activities**

| Teachers' % | Teachers' responses | Reasons |
|---|---|---|
| 30% | Yes, they gave indication | • Indicated their attitude through careful listening |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Expressed that the whole process was a waste of time and effort<br><br>• Reminded teachers of taking attendance |
| 70% | No, they did not give any indication | • There was a widespread tendency to get it over with as quickly as possible<br><br>• They were pretty confident in their performance, so they did not think my opinion mattered one way or the other |

Regarding whether or not the observers have received any feedback from the faculty being observed, thirty percent of the participants responded positively while seventy percent denied receiving any feedback on the coaching process.

**Questionnaire item # 3**
If it were proposed to perpetuate peer observation in this university, would you feel:

a. Very positive about this idea?

b. Slightly positive about this idea?

c. Not at all positive about this idea?

Please explain your answer briefly.

**Table 3. Participants' opinions of perpetuating peer coaching in the University**

| Teachers' % | Teachers' responses | Reasons |
|---|---|---|
| 10% | Very positive | • It can promote better performance, it can be beneficial particularly if it is handled objectively |
| 18% | Slightly positive | • It hasn't achieved the desired results<br>• Objectivity is difficult to achieve. Negative assessment can be abused or, at least, misunderstood |
| 72% | Not at all positive | • I personally have no problem with it, but I believe it can create tension in the Department since objectivity is hard to attain in our day and age<br><br>• Administration will use it to make personal decisions<br><br>• People think that this is an unworkable process, and it can only be used on a rainy day<br><br>• It may undermine the teacher's status before his/ her own students<br><br>• I'm not at all positive about this idea because the attitude for constructive criticism is still not part of the relationship among peers<br><br>• If it is perpetuated, it will therefore become compulsory and thus defeat its purpose |

As for the faculty's feelings towards integrating the peer coaching process into the system, ten percent of the participants were positive and felt that the process would be beneficial and rewarding. Eighteen percent of the participants partly advocated the integration and were partly hesitant because "objectivity is difficult to achieve". Seventy-two percent of the participants were certain that the process would have negative consequences and would not lead to the achievement of the desired results.

**Questionnaire item # 4**
Do you think anything has changed or will change as a result of peer coaching?
Yes/ No
If yes, what makes you think so?

**Table 4: The participants' opinions of the effects of PC**

| Teachers' % | Teachers' responses | Reasons |
|---|---|---|
| 0% | Yes, it has resulted/ will result in change | |
| 100% | No, it has not/ it will not result in any change | |

The table above shows that all the participants, regardless of whether they advocated the process or not, confirm that the whole activity has not changed anything. Joyce and his associate contend that awareness and conceptual abilities can be increased as a result of effective presentation of theory. (Showers & Joyce, 1996). It is inevitable that the participants would have changed their answer if they had been convinced of the purpose of the process and had experienced its professional application.

**Questionnaire item # 5**
What procedures would you suggest to improve the process of peer coaching?

**Table 5: The respondents' suggestions**

| Teachers' % | Teachers' responses | Reasons |
|---|---|---|
| 80% | Educational sessions, professional workshops & Departmental conferences | • Make teachers aware of the value and benefits of the process and encourage to invite their colleagues to attend their classes for the sake of sharing ideas and getting constructive criticism from trusted colleagues |
| 70% | Job security & minimal competition | • Job security should be enhanced. Competition should be minimized, and clear objectives for the procedures should be shared |

| 30% | The Head of the Department | • Head of the Department and one of the staff members observe all classes. This would create better feelings, sense of uniformity, and more objectivity |
|---|---|---|
| 20% | Professional coaches | • Should recruit highly-specialized faculty members who might be instructed to give a lecture with audience (only at the beginning) |

The last question on the questionnaire aimed at giving voice to the faculty, particularly in relation to the peer coaching process because they are the ones in position to determine the success or the lack of it in the whole process. Eighty percent of the participants implicitly favour the process but with precautions, namely raising the faculty's awareness of the significance of the process and making reasonable connections between the process and student academic achievement. Their refusal of integrating the process does not come from the process per se but from the implementation model adopted at that time. The rest of the participants came up with viable suggestions that can be adopted by the authorities of the University.

*3.2 Data Interpretation*
As also hinted earlier, the primary goals of the study were to uncover the impact of peer coaching on teacher professional development as used in University A and to explore suggestions that can improve this process taking into account the context and the participants or to find alternatives to the process of peer coaching. As the data collected from the interviews and the questionnaires reflected the same views and concepts and due to purposes of brevity, I have incorporated the interpretation of both types of data in one section. This will be the topic of the following section.

**Research Question 1 "What impact does peer coaching have on teacher development?"** was
answered by the following items on the questionnaire:

1. How helpful the coaching process was for you as an observer or as the one being observed (very helpful; slightly helpful; not helpful at all)

2. Did the person you observed give any indication of whether they found your coaching helpful or not? If yes, what did they say?

3.  Do you think that anything has changed or will be changed as a result of peer coaching? If yes, what makes you think so?

The responses to the preceding questions were triangulated with those of the interview to obtain valid and reliable data.

Most of the responses described the peer coaching process as lacking planning and feedback sessions. Above all, the goals of the process were vague and unclear. One interesting response was the following:

- *"We have all lived the different stages of this process, and we have seen how unprofessional it was applied. You can check with literature and you'll see what I mean by this."*

Another interesting response was:

- *"Decisions shouldn't be always top-down. Sometimes they can be bottom-up, or at least let's discuss them and come up with appropriate strategies."*

Other responses concentrated on the issue of sensitivity, as

- *"It is highly sensitive to be judged by your teaching fellow; courtesy plays a role."*

There was a consensus that the process was artificial, disturbing, and distracting for the class.

*a) Other responses were concerned with the emerging quality of learning and teaching. One participant said:*

- *"Teaching habits, like all habits, are not easy to change."*

- *"Teaching style can't be changed overnight; it needs time, determination and courage to change my teaching habits. Above all, I need to be convinced that one teaching strategy is better than mine".*

*b)*  This kind of response touches a very critical feature of learning and teaching. Terry Wildman and Jerry Niles (1987) confirm that "professional growth in teaching has an emerging quality that the process takes substantial time" (p.5).

The collected data shows that if university A decides to implement peer coaching in the system, then it should approach it in an appropriate way. First of all, the management should conduct workshops to discuss peer coaching in detail and explicate its purposes and principles. They should also allow teachers to make their own decisions and choices regarding this matter. However, if it is enforced, it will be immediately understood as a tool of assessment. This way, peer coaching will lose its spirit and value.

The second item on the questionnaire explores the extent to which the feedback sessions have been exploited as well as teachers' perceptions of the different stages of peer coaching respectively. The responses to the questionnaire items have been triangulated with those of the interview data. Although most of the participants were aware of the stages of peer coaching, most of them carried out minimal feedback sessions. These seemed to be confined to some reciprocal statements. As indicated in the interviews, the respondents must have recognised the transitory application of peer coaching, so they decided not to invest a lot of time and effort in this activity. (p. 141). To paraphrase:

Joyce and Showers (2002) confirm that holding occasional feedback sessions throughout the process of peer coaching is insufficient to guarantee permanent changes. Thus, feedback should be regular and consistent in order to effect changes in a faculty's teaching performance.

Michael Fullan (2003) supports Joyce's and Showers' contention by confirming that professional development workshops should be consolidated by regular and consistent follow-up sessions until change in teaching performance has been attained.

The main purpose of the fourth questionnaire item is to discover whether the participants have perceived any change, or whether they expect change in the future. All of the respondents shared a common perspective on the outcomes of the process. They all confirmed that the process had not changed and it would not change much. One explanation for this consensus might have been related to two major reasons. First of all, peer coaching might not have been a well-chosen developmental tool for university professors. Secondly, the management may not have sounded convincing. In other words, when the management decided to apply peer coaching, they did not provide theory to explain its rationale although literature on peer coaching has emphasised the importance of providing theoretical background before initiating the process (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

It seems that peer coaching as applied at Sharjah University has not had any effects or impact on teacher development. This conclusion is derived from the

participants' responses to both the questionnaire and interviews.

**Research Question 2 "What procedures can be suggested to improve this process?"** was answered by the following items:

1. *"If it were proposed to perpetuate peer coaching in this university, would you feel (very/ slightly/ not at all) positive about this idea?"*

2. *"What procedures would you suggest to improve the process of peer coaching?"*

The surface aim of item three on the questionnaire is to explore the degree to which the participants support the continuous use of peer coaching in the University. However, the deeper aim is to discover what sort of environment peer coaching will nurture if it were perpetuated in the university system. Most of the responses agreed that if this process, as planned and applied in the University, were perpetuated, it would be used as a subjective, evaluative tool for renewing and terminating contracts and would produce tension, as constructive criticism has not yet been established among peers. In the end, they all agree that if peer coaching becomes compulsory, its purpose will be defeated.

This process will hence find itself in a somehow inhospitable environment unless certain professional measures are considered. Fullan has mentioned almost the same concept in his book where he (Fullan, 2003) argues that the pre-existing climate of collegiality is a decisive factor that determines the degree of success of the peer coaching process.

The teachers are not to be blamed for this unfavourable environment, as the practice was not properly introduced. In fact, it was imposed on the faculty. Literature has evidenced that peer coaching will be more rewarding if it is conducted voluntarily, that is, if it stems from a keen interest to see how others teach. If it is enforced, however, particularly on university teachers who are experts in their fields of study, it will be understood as a means of teacher evaluation.

The last questionnaire item is based on the premise that flaws are inevitable and perfection is impossible. Its aim is to share knowledge and experience and find more sources of learning.

Most respondents focused on four essential measures to promote professionalism. First of all, they emphasised the value of discussing rationale and theory of any practice, conducting educational sessions, encouraging

peer companionship, and maintaining positive atmosphere where job security is guaranteed, competition is reduced and objectives are crystallised. They insisted that teachers' relationships should be built on trust and collegiality. Teachers need to feel comfortable to visit each other's classes for the sake of "sharing ideas and getting constructive criticism from trusted colleagues."

These demands have been borne out by many researchers. For instance, Showers and Joyce (1996) confirm that "theory presentation" is one of the components that literature has highlighted for providing the rationale for the peer-coaching process. For Joyce and his associates, prior awareness and knowledge of the principles of the process are essential for successful implementation. To render this process more rewarding and beneficial, the authors omitted feedback in the post observation conferences. Based on extensive research, they contend that feedback may deviate from the desired path and become an evaluation of a peer's performance. Their contention is controversial, as feedback, particularly constructive feedback is an integral part of any learning incident. Their argument needs further research. Tiffany Prince, Emma Snowden, and Brian Matthews (2010) argue that confidence, effective communication and empathy are key factors of successful peer coaching.

The researchers also indicated that peer companionship decreases the isolation and loneliness of teaching.

As a substitute for peer coaching, the participants have suggested that highly specialised faculty members come to the University and give lectures. In this context, the University has already taken initiatives to establish and maintain staff development activities. For instance, it encourages faculty to attend professional conferences by offering release time and reasonable financial support especially for those who contribute to professional development (PD) sessions in other parts or countries. On certain occasions, the University hosts professional conferences and seminars. Moreover, it promotes departmental workshops, for which the university has designated special time slots during the weekdays in order to ensure good attendance. It has also collaborated with other educational institutions to run PD programmes. This should comprise a lot of professional and interesting workshops and seminars. However, a drawback of these workshops is that some of them lack focus and planning. Although they are listed under the title of PD, they sometimes turn out to be advertisements for some foreign institutions, diplomas, or teaching materials, particularly electronic ones. After having attended several of such workshops, teachers were disappointed and some, including myself, lost interest in attending any more

workshops. It is worth mentioning here that those who are responsible for liaising PD activities with other universities and educational institutions should ensure that the announced workshops aim only at developing staff professional expertise.

The participants have also made reference to the library and its role in helping teachers develop professionally. They believe that there is an urgent need for journals, periodicals, newsletters, and specialised books. Although the main library includes enormous amounts of books, it is still short of content-information, educational psychology, methodology, applied linguistics, and teacher education books particularly in English. These references will acquaint teachers, irrespective of whether they have had training or not, with the criteria of effective teaching, methods of teaching, classroom management, motivating students, and many more.

## 4. RECOMMENDATION

While I was consulting the relevant literature, I encountered an interesting procedure that can be very convenient to our situation. This procedure is known as Maureen Sullivan's (1987) seminar. The seminar goes as follows. A group of teachers meet monthly to discuss an article selected by the leader of the session who will be changed every month. Copies of the chosen article are duplicated and distributed to the participants two weeks before the date of the session. The topics of the articles are chosen in depth according to the needs of the teachers and to whatever is new in the field. These will be discussed and critiqued for the sake of gaining and exchanging knowledge. The ideas and views of more experienced teachers will benefit less experienced ones without violating their privacy or self-esteem.

Taking our context into consideration, it seems that this procedure is very beneficial particularly to university teachers whose professional development is ultimately based on a wide range of private readings, discussions, professional interactions, and research. It also reduces isolation among teachers and promotes a problem-solving atmosphere instead. The key factor here is interaction and exchanging expertise and information in order to explore actions and strategies, which lead to innovation. To maintain longevity of these conferences, the management may provide these sessions with incentives such as a reward for the best contribution.

I would also like to recommend that participants should establish positive attitudes towards the process. To build these attitudes, the participants need to embrace a broad perspective of the process; they need to believe in its potentials as an effective strategy for professional development. More importantly, they need to stop

viewing it in terms of judgment and evaluation. These attitudes will help teachers achieve the results they are aiming at. Moreover, positive attitudes will help teachers to modify the process to suit their purposes and contexts.

Finally, I hope that, answering my two research questions and citing my colleagues' contribution will help the management develop a democratic, warm, and non-threatening social environment, where educational decisions are shared and mediated. In the following section, I will reflect on my experience with a procedure I chose to suit my own situation.

## 5. REFLECTION

The question is now how to improve myself professionally and academically without violating my privacy and self-esteem and simultaneously maintaining the essence of peer coaching. In other words, what procedure can I suggest to improve the process of peer coaching in accordance with our situation? Since it is almost impossible to arrange a time when one of my colleagues can come to a class of mine, and since cancelling classes is out of the question, I have come up with a procedure of self-observation followed by a session with a peer. This is not an ideal procedure but it can, hopefully, sort out a problem in respect to a particular situation, where almost every body teaches at the same time. Thus all I needed to do is to observe myself, collect data, and finally have a session with a colleague. To start this process I used a tape recorder to collect an adequate and accurate description of both my students' contribution and mine to the classroom environment. For two weeks, I put myself under the pressure of self-observation. I tape-recorded some lessons I gave to one of my classes. After that, I listened to the tapes and transcribed them, focusing especially on questions and tasks I asked my students to perform.

Inoticed that my classroom language had been delivered at three major levels: instructional, functional, and empathetic. At the instructional level, my language was oriented to explaining and clarifying concepts related to content area. For example, we talked about homelessness, culture shock and different customs. I then gave them living examples some of which were mentioned in newspapers. And whenever appropriate told them personal stories. At the end, I asked them comprehension questions to finally bring the lesson to an end.

At the functional level, my language was confined to the communicative dimension of classroom life. For example, I asked them to write a summary of one passage, or to express their own opinions on a particular point of view. Last but not the least was the level of empathy, which seems essential in all culture. This involves

praising, encouraging, expressing good wishes, checking in particularly after the death or sickness of a parent or a family member etc. On certain events, I found it essential to supply comfort and support and felt that I have been an important member in my students' university life. I have realised this when some of my students came to my office to talk about their own problems, and some came to show me their literary pieces of work. On the other hand, while listening to the tapes, I realised that I had had some flaws. For instance, I had given some students more chances than the others to participate in a class activity. Having realised this classroom behaviour, I immediately started working on this weakness. I also noticed that sometimes I did not give my students, particularly the weak ones, enough time to answer. This made me feel guilty and started to remedy this situation. When I finished collecting and reflecting on my classroom data, I had a discussion with one of my colleagues whom I trust. We talked about this activity and she recommended that I should reflect on my teaching at the end of each teaching session. This will save time and effort because she thinks tape-recording and transcribing are time-consuming. During this session, I was comfortable to talk about my strengths and weaknesses in my classroom behaviour. We shared ideas and agreed on conducting different activities to tackle different problems. We thought it would be very helpful if we came up with an inventory of the issues we need to develop and improve on and then check the literature work on them.

From my experience, I highly recommend self-observation in any form a teacher chooses. It helped me detect my weaknesses and work on themimmediately, which then allowed me to establish an atmosphere devoid of rivalry among the students or feelings of animosity. This change in atmosphere made them feel comfortable and exert more effort to enhance their learning process. This was reflected in their behaviour; most of them wrote extra homework assignments at their own choice, for example. Despite the extra workload, I was content to correct their work. I also recommend the feedback session, during which peer coaching takes place. The self-observation approach can be counted as my contribution to improving the process of peer coaching.

# 6. CONCLUSION

Peer coaching has yielded limited effects on faculty development at University A. Some of the main factors behind that have been discussed with a focus on how exactly peer coaching was carried out in this particular context. As a result, some alternative methods that the respondents of this study and literature held as more effective have also been examined in some detail.
To put it briefly, in this continuously changing world with increasing use of sophisticated technology, teaching cannot be an art or based on mere talent any more. Science should be the essential link between talent and teacher's performance in class. By science I mean knowledge based on teaching and learning theories. This knowledge can be acquired in different ways, one of which is peer coaching. Peer coaching can help teachers acquire this knowledge, and thereby improve their teaching behaviour. It can be discerned from the questionnaire and interview data that the participants accepted the application of this activity, but rejected the way it was administered. They believed that this process should be topped by meticulous study and planning, which should be handled skilfully and appropriately. Moreover, it should not be imposed but welcomed and wanted by the teachers. We have also seen from the interview data that the teachers are ready to initiate this process or any process and utilise facilities that can add value to their performance in a classroom. Apart from peer coaching, consulting literature on teaching issues, regularly reading books and specialised journals alongside talking openly to our colleagues can all the more add great value to our teaching performance. Finally, I would like to add that knowledge should not be considered restricted by age, expertise or degrees it is a life-long process. The professional development of university faculty is vitally important for the higher education of a new generation, they should be fully equipped to cope better with the growing demands and challenges of today and tomorrow.

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