

Classroom Observation for Professional Development: Views of EFL Teachers and Observers

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Abstract

This study interviewed nine English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and seven EFL observers to explore their perceptions towards classroom observation. Results showed nine main themes relating to two categories of classroom observation and post-observation feedback. The findings highlight the significance of both classroom observation and post-observation feedback as a positive influence on teaching practices. Teaching experience appears to be a key factor that influence participants' views about classroom observation and post-observation feedback. In addition, the results reflect some limitations of classroom observation as a possible source of teachers' negative emotions and the fact that it does not necessarily reflect everyday teaching practice. A comprehensive training programme for observers could enhance observers' skills and contribute to enhancing the quality of observations, which will lead to a better experience for teachers.

Keywords: Classroom observation, EFL observers, EFL teachers, post-observation feedback, professional development

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1.0 Introduction

Classroom observation is commonly used to measure the quality of teaching (Borg, 2018) and classroom processes, including teaching practices, instruction aspects and teacher-student interactions (Hinchey, 2010; Richards & Farrell, 2011). It is regarded one of the major teacher assessment methods mainly because it offers rich information about teachers' actual classroom performance, which can then be used for summative and formative purposes (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Formative assessment helps teachers to improve or expand their abilities (Hinchey, 2010), while summative assessment is used to make decisions regarding salary or status (Borg, 2018). The significance of the formative perspective is highlighted by recent research. For example, Darling-Hammond (2013) states that evaluation should be followed by useful feedback and should relate to professional development to help teachers to achieve their goals and improve their teaching. Marzano and Toth (2013) note that "an effective evaluation system should help teachers teach better" (p.14). The importance of formative teacher evaluation does not reduce the importance of its counterpart: the summative form. According to Isoré (2009), "In its summative form, evaluation firstly responds to the needs of assuring that teaching is directed towards student achievement. It also provides opportunities for the social recognition of teachers' skills and commitment to work" (p.7).

There are many issues related to classroom observation, for example, observer reliability, announced and unannounced classroom observations, and observing novice and expert teachers. In terms of observer reliability, it is an essential element in effective classroom observation. However, Bell et al. (2014) point out that there are variations when different observers rate the same lesson. Comprehensive training of observers can improve classroom observations and a teacher's class can be observed more than once by different observers (Ho & Kane, 2013). Another observation issue is whether to conduct announced or unannounced classroom observations. Borg (2018) states that what teachers do during announced observations may not be true representation of everyday classroom. Therefore, unannounced classroom visits might provide a typical view of actual class. Bruns and Luque (2015) indicate one of the most critical factors in teacher evaluation is conducting unannounced classroom visits. However, Pennington and Young (1989) oppose this idea as "unannounced classroom visits are ... not only disruptive of the classroom process, but also represent a kind of invasion of privacy" (p. 635). To successfully use a strategy of teacher evaluation, such as classroom observation, it should account for many factors related to teachers. One of these factors is professional development throughout a teacher's career (Freeman, 2001). Teachers might have different professional interests and concerns based on their experience and prior knowledge, such as the needs of novice (with less than three years of teaching experience) and expert teachers (with five or more years of teaching experience) (Freeman, 2001). Novice teachers tend to be concerned about their teaching image, classroom management, and control (Berliner, 1986); therefore, it would be better to focus their professional development in these areas. Similarly, expert teachers tend to be concerned about teaching objectives and how they can achieve them. Therefore, their teacher evaluation should focus on development strategies, such as reflection and self-assessment (Freeman, 2001).

Classroom observation usually consists of three main stages: a pre-observation conference, a class visit, and a post-observation feedback (Bailey, 2006; Richards & Farrell, 2011). During the pre-observation meeting, the lesson plan and the focus of the visit are discussed (Richards & Farrell,

2011). In the class visit, observers systematically record the teaching events using a coding system or open-ended field notes. During the post-observation feedback, the observer provides teachers with information about the observed lesson. This should be a dialogue between an observer and a teacher during which an interpretation of the teaching events takes place (Bailey, 2006). Murdoch (2000) highlights that, during post-observation feedback, observers should discuss specific teaching events rather than their impressions. He (2000) also suggests that supervisors should reinforce, with positive comments, the successful aspects of the performance and identify a small number of weaknesses as too much criticism has a negative effect on teachers' development. Post-observation feedback is considered the most important stage in the observation process, because new ideas are suggested by the observer regarding the observed teaching events. Additionally, feedback increases awareness which enables teachers to change their teaching behaviour (Bailey, 2006). However, post-observation feedback might cause significant stress on both the observer and the observee because of the challenges linked to being objective and non-judgemental during the feedback session (William, 1989). Professional training should be provided for observers that aims to help them to be objective and systematic when collecting and discussing teaching events.

Although observation is a fundamental strategy of teacher evaluation, it has been criticised by many researchers. Richards and Farrell (2011) note that it is limited by its inability to observe all aspects of a lesson that might occur simultaneously, because teaching is a dynamic and complicated process. King (2015) indicates teachers find the observation process threatening. Observers may lack professional training to judge teachers appropriately (Bailey, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Sheal, 1989). Furthermore, prior knowledge with teachers might influence observer judgements (Bell et al., 2014). Observations tend to concentrate on summative rather than formative purposes (Marzano & Toth, 2013). Observation does not give an accurate representation of what teachers can do in the classroom (Campbell et al., 2004; O'Leary, 2016a). To address this issue, it is recommended that several sources of evidence are used during teacher evaluation to effectively capture the complexity of classroom teaching, improve reliability and reduce bias in comparison to using one measure (Grissom & Youngs, 2016). Methods for collecting evidence related to teacher quality include classroom observation, student outcomes, student evaluations of teaching, self-evaluation, and peer evaluation (Borg, 2018). O'Leary (2016b) suggests using a 'walk-through' as an alternative form of classroom observation. It is a short and focused form of observation, during which notes and checklists are not needed; it is more concerned with the formative purposes of classroom observation (Stevens, 2016). Notes can be written after the walk-through for use during the follow-up reflection discussion with the teacher. This kind of observation allows the collection of evidence about teacher quality, which can then be used for teacher evaluation, teacher reflection, and professional development (Stevens, 2016).

1.1 The Context of the Study

Within the context of the study, teachers are evaluated on a scale of one to five, one being the lowest. The classroom observation outcomes are used in annual faculty evaluations. At the same time, the institution in which the study take place also views evaluation as developmental rather than evaluative. At the time of the research, the process cycle of classroom observation includes a pre-observation conference, a class visit, and a feedback session. The main aim of the pre-observation conference is to address teachers' questions and concerns. This can be conducted by email, telephone, or in person. It allows teachers to discuss any significant information about their

class. During this stage, teachers are well-informed about classroom observation criteria and evaluation ratings and guidelines. Teachers are given the option to choose the date and time of their observation and to discuss the lesson. During the class-visit stage, teachers' instructional skills are assessed using a box-ticking rubric. The rubric consists of 13 items covering four teaching categories: planning, classroom environment and management, lesson delivery, and language proficiency. The observers also take detailed notes of what occurs in the classroom. These notes are used as a basis for the feedback session given later, and for compiling the observation report. During the feedback session, interaction takes place between observers and teachers. The primary aims of this stage are to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their observed lesson and to give them feedback on their positive areas and the weak areas that require improvement. If a teacher is not satisfied with the observation process, he or she can ask in writing for a review through an appeal process (English Language Institute Faculty Handbook, 2016).

1.2 The Present Study

Although there have been few research studies conducted in the Saudi context, the existing research findings show the perceived shortcomings of classroom observation (Shah & Al Harthi, 2014), the views of EFL teachers about post-observation feedback (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014), and EFL teachers' opinions about teacher evaluation in general (Hakim, 2015). Nevertheless, the current study examines the perceptions of both EFL teachers and EFL observers regarding classroom observation. It is valuable to explore both observers' and teachers' understanding of classroom observation. This could indicate their views regarding different aspects of classroom observation, such as its main purpose, who should be the target of such process (expert or novice teachers), essential observers' qualifications, and teachers' feelings and attitudes towards classroom observation. Teachers might have a unique rationale for classroom observation due to their role in the teaching process. Examining both observers' and teachers' perceptions could highlight discrepancies or similarities in their views, due to their differing roles in the institution. This might help to improve the classroom observation process, which eventually might improve teachers' opportunities for professional development. Therefore, the present study is qualitative research that aims to examine EFL teachers' and observers' perceptions of the classroom observation used in their context.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A sample of nine EFL teachers and seven observers, who are also expert EFL teachers, voluntarily participated in this study. They were all female teachers as the study was conducted in a Women's section of a University in Saudi Arabia, and their teaching experience ranged from six to more than 20 years (see Table 1). The university is one of the biggest in the country and has an English Language Institute (ELI), which aims to improve students' English proficiency, supporting them in their undergraduate studies and future careers. EFL teachers participating in this study are from various nationalities including Egyptian, Pakistani, and Saudi (see Table 1). This study uses maximum variation sampling to capture the central themes of the examined setting (Patton, 2002). Prior to data collection, all the research protocols were prepared, including consent forms and an interview guide. Moreover, the author obtained ethical approval from the Research Unit in the context of the study. An email was sent to all the teachers in the ELI to ask them to voluntarily participate in the study, explaining the purpose and instrument of the study. At the beginning of the

interviews, the researcher explained to the interviewees the issues of anonymity and confidentiality in data handling and gained their written consent to voluntary participation.

Table 1: *Participants' information*

Participants	Nationality	Teaching experience	Teaching qualification
Observer J	Egyptian	More than 20 years	Master
Observer K	Pakistani	11–15 years	Master
Observer L	Saudi	6–10 years	Master
Observer M	Tunisian	6–10 years	Diploma
Observer N	Saudi	6–10 years	Master
Observer O	Saudi	6–10 years	PhD
Observer P	Saudi	6–10 years	Master
Teacher A	Saudi	6–10 years	Master
Teacher B	Italian	16–20 years	Diploma
Teacher C	Saudi	6–10 years	Master
Teacher D	Pakistani	16–20 years	Master
Teacher E	Syrian	16–20 years	Bachelor
Teacher F	South African	6–10 years	Diploma
Teacher G	Pakistani	6–10 years	Bachelor
Teacher H	Saudi	6–10 years	Master
Teacher I	American	6–10 years	Bachelor

2.2. Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide was used to examine the interviewees' perceptions of the significance of classroom observation for EFL teachers and whether it affects developing teaching practices. The same set of interview guidelines was used for both teachers and observers. The following are examples of the questions used:

- In your opinion, what is the significance of classroom observation?
- Can you describe how classroom observation affects teaching practices?
- What effect did the post-observation feedback have on teaching practices?

The participants were invited to speak about their own experiences to illustrate their views. The semi-structured interview questions were piloted with one EFL teacher to ensure the clarity of the questions. The researchers in English then conducted face-to-face interviews at a time and place convenient for the participants (the Arabic speaker interviewees were given the chance to speak in

their mother tongue if they preferred, but they all preferred to do the interviews in English). The length of the interviews ranged from 7:29 minutes to 28:27 minutes. With the interviewees' prior consent, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2.3. Data Analysis

NVivo 11 was used to organise and examine the data, which was thematically analysed. Thematic analysis allows a full understanding of the examined research topic (Marks & Yardley, 2004) and concentrates on identifying both implicit and explicit ideas in the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The adequacy of themes was checked by the researcher to ensure their internal validation. The themes were then checked by a colleague who was a well-qualified researcher and EFL teacher. The main aim of this step was to avoid researcher bias and build the reliability of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3. Results

Based on the data from the interviews, nine dominant themes were identified relating to two categories: classroom observation and post-observation feedback. The themes are presented in Figure 1.

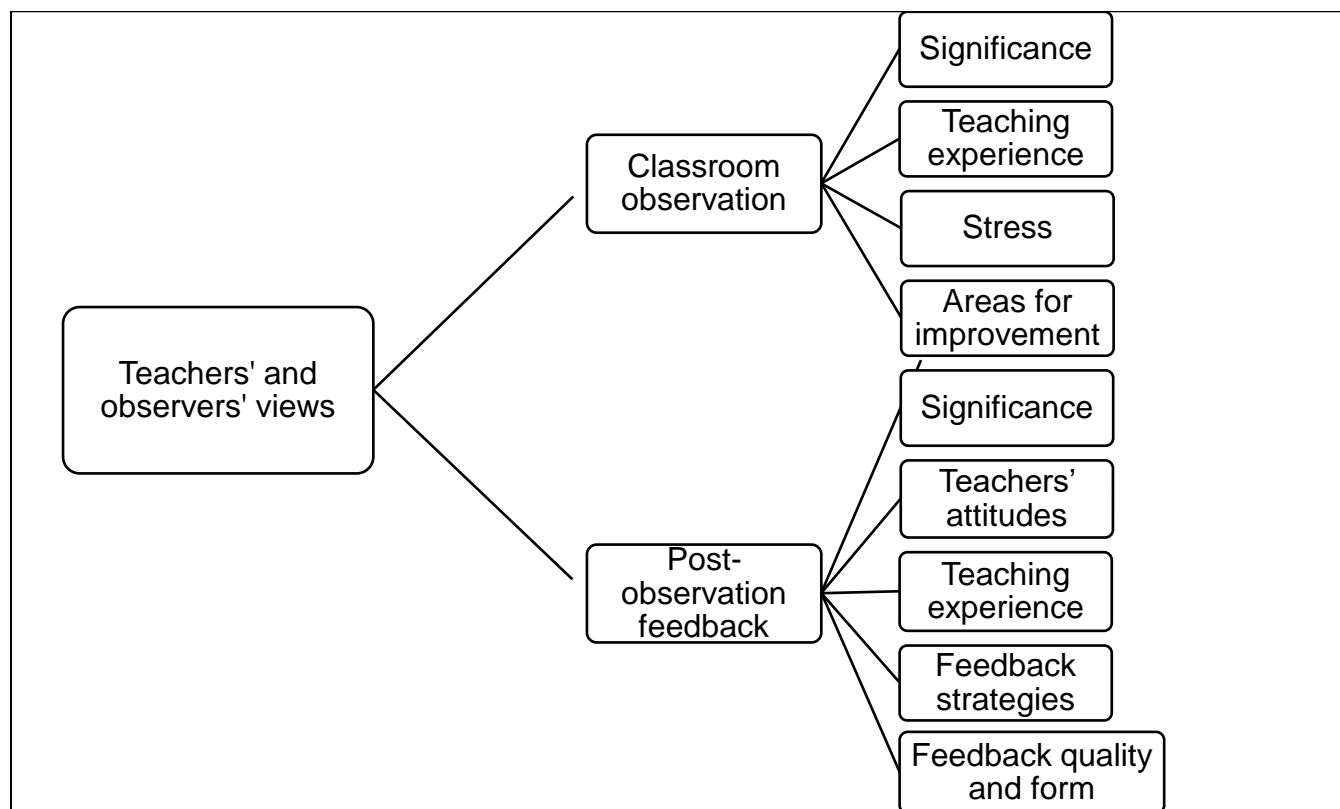


Figure 1: Themes and subthemes

3.1. Classroom Observation

In this section, classroom observation themes are presented: significance, teaching experience, stress, areas for improvement. The views of both observers and teachers are presented collectively to present the findings of the themes.

3.1.1. Significance

Teachers reported that classroom observation is a significant tool for their professional development as it motivates teachers to update their teaching practices regularly. For example, Teacher C revealed, “As far as I am concerned, I think observations should be an avenue for growth; an avenue, through discussion of course, between the teacher and observer. Because sometimes we do not see our problems in teaching and, when we have another person evaluating or seeing our problems, they can help us to enhance or to avoid such problems later on”. Teacher F indicated that classroom observation “motivate teachers to improve professionally because, as teachers, you can't stagnate, you know...things are changing”. Teacher G agreed and emphasised that classroom observation is highly significant for teachers “because as teachers we need to develop and learn, and, in education, new things are coming up all the time. We need to learn new technologies, new techniques, new strategies, and with that we need to change our teaching style”.

Furthermore, all the interviewed observers talked extensively about the significance of classroom observation. For example, four observers highlighted that classroom observation is used as a key tool to measure and improve the quality of teaching. Observer L explained “When it first started, it was with the intention of evaluating teachers' methods of teaching, whether they are good enough for our university students or not, which is of course the ultimate goal of any observation programme around the world”. Observer O added that the quality of teaching has a close relationship with students' achievement, and, for this reason, classroom observations are conducted.

3.1.2. Teaching Experience

A divide appeared in the teachers' views when they talked about who should be observed: new teachers or both new and expert teachers. Some teachers argued that observation should be conducted for specific cases, including new teachers and teachers about whom students have reported complaints regarding their teaching practices. For example, Teacher H said “so, for the teachers, I believe observation is very important, especially for new teachers joining the field. It's important for them first to gain experience, to learn from their mistakes, and to improve them”. Teacher I added, “the only people who should be observed are the teachers who are faltering and, whether it's because the students are coming through and saying, you know, we've a problem with this teacher or it's the test scores that are low”. She explained that classroom observation has no effect on the teaching practices of expert teachers “to be observed when you've been teaching that long, I don't think is fruitful because ... I'll change for that day but I'm not going to change the way I teach”. In contrast, Teacher G stressed that a teacher, whether new or expert, was not a good judge for her own teaching and classroom observation should be done regularly for all teachers. In her view, observation is conducted “to get a fresh perspective on my teaching, so like getting a second opinion on how things or how am I doing in my classroom, to see whether I need to let go of some old practices or start something new”. Teacher C further explained “Experience is good but experience doesn't mean that we are doing the best thing all the time. Sometimes we need refreshment of whatever we are doing, maybe something new in the field because, in the field of

English language or EFL teaching, there is always change or something new”.

Some observers also reported the significance of classroom observation for professional development, especially for new teachers. Observer N noted classroom observation is highly important to develop the teaching skill of new teachers “to improve teachers' teaching skills and help new instructors who are newly hired at the university to develop their teaching skills”. She continued “because if they don't know what the problem is in their class, they won't be able to improve themselves”. Observer O indicated classroom observation is beneficial for all teachers as “It gives you an overview of what's going on in your institute and, for development and progress, I think it's beneficial”.

3.1.3. Stress

Some teachers mentioned that they felt judged when they were observed, which is stressful. Teacher F said “you feel judged. The thing that you thought you're doing right is seen by someone else – a professional – as not effective or it's not working, and you have to change it ... it's really nerve-racking”. Teacher G added that teachers felt extremely nervous prior to observation because they need to show their best in the 50 minutes, which is the observation time. She described, “You get really nervous. No matter how experienced you are, before an observation it's, oh my god, what if things go wrong? One thing I don't like is, because we teach for the whole year and our teaching is being, like, evaluated or observed based on 1 hour or 50 minutes. I don't think that's a fair judgment of my teaching; that's not a fair depiction of how I teach every day or for the rest of the year”.

Teacher C mentioned that observations should not be part of annual evaluation because “you will find that it is threatening to some extent, especially when we hear from the head administrators that observations are taken as the number one specification of teachers who are qualified to stay in the ELI or not. So, for every teacher, observation means to be or not to be”. Observer O also noted that teachers usually did not like to be observed and it was viewed as a ‘threatening’ experience. Observer J indicated teachers perceived classroom observations as an evaluative tool that affected their contract renewal. This could explain why teachers viewed observation as a threat and felt stressed. Observer K pointed out that after observations, teachers really cared about their observation score rather than the feedback. She stated that could be reduced if the observation score was not included in the teachers’ annual evaluation.

3.1.4. Areas for Improvement

Teachers and observers reported some limitations regarding the classroom observations conducted in their context and suggested some procedures to improve it. For example, many teachers suggested that observers should walk in classes randomly to see what happen in a normal everyday classroom. Teacher B stated that classroom observation should not be announced and pre-scheduled because by doing so observers cannot see what really happen in the classroom. Teacher I agreed that an announced classroom observation does not truly reflect what happens daily in the classroom, and she gives an example about herself, “I know, for myself, I teach one way in my everyday class and when I know I'm being observed I teach in another way”. Teacher F further explained “we all do the lights, camera, and action for that specific observation slot, so we do take out things that we don't generally use ... we put on a show because we want to impress the observer and get the best out of the grade”. Observer K acknowledged that what happens during classroom observations is

‘just a one-day show’ and does not necessary reflect actual classroom practice, as teachers tend to show their best teaching practices.

Moreover, Teacher B stressed that observers should focus on the delivery of the lesson and the students' engagement rather than on using the latest methodologies and technologies in teaching. Teacher C discussed another point: observers' qualifications. She indicated observers should have essential requirements that should be higher than the observed teachers including teaching experience and educational qualification. She further indicated observers' feedback should be based on the grounds of teaching methodologies rather than personal preferences.

3.2. Post-Observation Feedback

Based on the data from the interviews, five salient themes related to post-observation were emerged including significance, teachers' attitudes, teacher experience, feedback strategies, and feedback quality and form. The following analysis reports the perceptions of both EFL teachers and observers regarding each theme.

3.2.1. Significance

Most observers and teachers believed that post-observation feedback is the most important step in the observation cycle because, as reported by Observer K, this is when both parties discuss their views about lesson planning and delivery and when observers highlighted the areas that teachers needed to improve. Teacher B indicated she would definitely work on areas suggested by her observer. Teacher F agreed and added that “it can be quite constructive in that you can, as a teacher, reflect on the feedback or from the feedback and then implement changes”. Teacher G reflected that she had always benefited from observers' feedback, whether it was highlighting strengths or weaknesses. She explained that positive feedback “works as a positive reinforcement, so we know what we're doing right in the class and we can continue and even develop it further”. Then, she described that when her observers pointed out some areas for improvement such as ‘reducing teacher talking time’, she started paying attention to this aspect and improved. Observer M recounted her experience with a teacher who she observed twice during two consecutive years. She noticed impressive progress in her teaching practice.

Seven interviewed participants (four observers and three teachers) reported that post-observation feedback help teachers to improve their teaching practices relating to lesson planning and delivery (e.g. pace of the lesson, grouping students, and presenting activities). For example, Teacher E recounted, “I remember one time I got a note about timing the exercises with the students, to show them the clock, and I did it and I haven't done it before ... I applied it and it was effective”. Teacher G agreed and added that feedback sessions during which the observer pointed to strengths and weaknesses of teachers was really beneficial for her professional development. She worked on the weak areas mentioned by her observer (e.g. reducing teacher talking time) and her teaching practices significantly improved. Teacher A also pointed out that she started using different types of activities (controlled, semi-controlled, and free activities) as suggested by her observer. Observer J recalled that, before she became an observer, she changed her way of conducting ‘paired work’ activities as recommended by her observer. She asserted, “when my observer pointed out the weakness I started to change”. Observer K, M, and O strongly believe that teachers' teaching practices improved significantly as a result of classroom observation, and specifically ‘post-

observation feedback’.

3.2.2. *Teachers’ Attitudes*

Teacher’s attitudes towards post-observation feedback was reported by three observers and two teachers. They revealed that some teachers took feedback positively and others took it negatively; this could be due to teachers’ personality. Observer J stated, “it depends on the personality ... it depends how much you want to learn, how much you view yourself as a teacher”. Furthermore, Teacher D stated, “If she is taking it for her improvement, it's definitely going to work for her. The next time, she will try to avoid those things. But there are some hypersensitive people as well. They usually take the feedback the opposite way [negatively], so we should not neglect that side as well”. Teacher B supported the idea that teachers’ personalities affected their attitudes towards post-observation feedback. Observer O indicated observers should be really careful and thought about a good way when giving the feedback to influence teachers positively. Observers could tell when teachers did not take feedback seriously from the teachers’ attitudes during post-observation feedback. Some teachers were like “I know what I'm doing and I know everything”, as reported by Observer M.

3.2.3. *Teaching experience*

Many participants reported that teaching experience has a major effect on the post-observation feedback’s impact on teachers’ professional development. Five interviewed participants (two observers and three teachers) revealed that classroom observation has less influence on expert teachers. For example, Observer N stated that expert teachers reject observers’ feedback “because they think they are so good and they don't need this”. Observer L also believed that classroom observation did not have a major influence on expert teachers because their teaching practices ‘fossilised’ in some way; they might find it difficult to update their teaching practices as they get used to their own ways for a long time. Additionally, Teachers D and F gave more reasons to explain why experts rejected post-observation feedback. According to them, this could be because they did not want to change their effective teaching practices (in their opinion), and the observers were younger and had less teaching experience and qualifications. Teacher I added as an experienced teacher, “I know what I'm good at and what I'm not good at and maybe I'm not good at this one thing, but I compensate with what I am good at, but you're not going to see that in a classroom observation”.

On the other hand, Observer P highlighted that only few expert teachers rejected feedback and were unwilling to change. Teacher C thought that experienced teachers needed to be updated in their teaching practices and accept willingly their observers’ feedback. Teacher G believed that expert teachers get used to their teaching practices and for this particular reason they need an observer to tell them “this is working, or this is not working”.

There was a high agreement in the participants’ views about novice teachers’ attitudes towards classroom observation. Four observers and three teachers reported that novice teachers are more willing to receive observers’ feedback. This is for several reasons, including their willingness to change and improve professionally. Observer L explained that “novice teachers are still in the field of experimenting with everything until they feel comfortable with the method that they think is going to work for their students”.

3.2.4. *Feedback Strategies*

Some participants (two observers and two teachers) talked about strategies that observers should use when giving feedback, such as putting teachers at ease at the beginning, being polite, and using direct and indirect ways when pointing to areas for improvement. Observer M stated that she tried to make teachers comfortable during the feedback session and was cautious, especially with expert teachers, who tended to discuss the feedback points. Teacher F suggested that observers needed to provide constructive feedback to remind teachers that the observation goal was mainly for professional development rather than evaluation. This might promote teachers' positive attitudes in accepting feedback and improving their teaching practices accordingly. Teacher D listed some techniques that should be followed by observers when giving feedback, saying "when observers are giving feedback, they should be very polite and use indirect or direct methods. Observer K also added that observers should pay attention to their word choice and tone when giving feedback. They should start the feedback session by pointing to teachers' strengths and then discuss areas for improvements in an indirect way. Observers also need to allow teachers to reflect on their own teaching. Moreover, Observer M indicated the need for enough time for the feedback session to allow sufficient time to discuss and reflect upon the teaching practices used during the observation session.

3.2.5. *Feedback Quality and Form*

Many teachers suggested points that related to the feedback quality and form. For instance, Teacher C indicated observers' feedback needed to be based on methodological grounds and should include specific suggestions to help teachers improve on their weaknesses in teaching. Teacher I pointed out that observers should have a wide knowledge about teacher training in different contexts, and this knowledge should be reflected during the feedback. Observers need not impose a specific method on teachers if there are other options. Teacher I, who is American, explained what happened with her when her observer asked her to follow CELTA, which is a British style, in her lesson planning "it made me so nervous that I gave a bad lesson because I was trying to follow a lesson plan that I wasn't familiar with". Teacher E stated that she would like to receive a detailed written form of the feedback, so the points discussed during the feedback session were not forgotten.

4. Discussion

The main study's aim was to investigate the perceptions of both EFL teachers and observers about classroom observation. The results indicate that the interviewed teachers and observers primarily believe that classroom observation in general and post-observation feedback in particular are highly significant and teachers' practices improve accordingly. Teachers reveal that classroom observation is important for their ongoing professional development, while observers believe that it is significant for measuring and improving the teaching quality that affects student achievement in addition to teachers' professional development. The study's findings demonstrate that observers lean towards the summative purposes of classroom observation, which aims to assure that teaching leads to students' achievements for recognition of teachers' skills (Isore, 2009). At the same time, teachers tend to favour the formative purpose of classroom observation. Formative purpose significance is highlighted by recent research as it focuses on helping teachers to improve their teaching abilities (Hinchey, 2010; Marzano & Toth, 2013). In this context, it appears that observations focus on summative rather than formative purposes and this is in line with Marzano and Toth's findings (2013). Moreover, the participants think post-observation feedback is the most

important stage of the observation process because it is where the discussion between teachers and observers takes place. It also has a positive influence on improving teachers' instructional skills that relate to lesson planning and delivery, such as the pace of the lesson and presenting activities. Teachers tend to change their practices after feedback is given as it appears that feedback increases awareness, enabling teachers to change their teaching behaviours, as noted by Bailey (2006).

Furthermore, the results show that there is a relationship between the teaching experience duration and two observation aspects: deciding who should be observed (novice or expert teachers), and post-observation feedback impact on teachers. Some participants think that post-observation feedback has less impact on expert teachers while novice teachers are more willing to receive observers' feedback. This finding shows that teachers' prior knowledge and experience is a main factor that needs to be considered during classroom observation (Freeman, 2001), because teachers with different teaching experience might have different professional needs and concerns. For example, novice teachers (with less than three years' experience) usually need support in the areas of building their teaching image, classroom management, and classroom control (Berliner, 1986). Meanwhile, expert teachers focus on achieving their teaching objectives (Freeman, 2001). Therefore, teacher evaluation of novice teachers should focus on improving their teaching practices, including teaching methods and classroom management, while expert teachers should concentrate on improving development strategies, including reflection and self-assessment. In some cases such as with expert teachers, it might be beneficial to use alternative forms of classroom observation like walk-through and peer-observation (Hakim, 2015; O'Leary, 2016b).

The study also reveals that teachers sometimes felt stressed when they are observed because they feel judged on a 50-minute occasion, during which they need to show their best teaching skills. Furthermore, their attitudes towards post-observation feedback varies according to teachers' personality. Some teachers react positively to post-observation feedback and others do not accept feedback. Their stress might lead them to view classroom observation as a threatening experience which is pointed out in previous studies (King, 2015; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014). William (1989) notes that post-observation feedback might cause stress, not only for teachers, but also for observers due to the difficulty of being non-judgemental during the feedback session. Murdoch (2000) suggests that observers should identify just a small number of weaknesses, since a lot of criticism might have a negative impact on teachers' development. This might reduce teachers' stress and improve their attitudes towards the process of classroom observation.

In support of previous research, such as those of Borg (2013), Campbell et al. (2004), and O'Leary (2016a), the present study shows that classroom observation does not reflect actual classroom practice as teachers tend to show their best teaching skills during scheduled announced observations. Therefore, teachers suggest conducting unannounced observations. Borg (2013) and Bruns and Luque (2015) state that unannounced observations might provide a true representation of everyday classroom practice. Nevertheless, Pennington and Young (1989) oppose this practice because it disturbs the classroom process and invades privacy.

In this study, teachers indicate observers' feedback should be based on ELT methodological grounds rather than personal preferences. Abdul Rehman and Al-Bargi (2014) added that observers should not only suggest basic techniques, they should justify their feedback. In addition, teachers

reveal that there should be specific criteria to select observers, including good teaching experience and a high educational qualification. Previous research in the same context highlights concerns about observers' training and qualifications (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014; Hakim, 2015; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014). Observers might not judge teachers appropriately due to their lack of professional training (Bailey, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Sheal, 1989). Therefore, systematic training of observers can improve classroom observation (Ho & Kane, 2013).

There were limitations to this study. First, the sample size was small and thus the findings' representativeness should be viewed with caution. Second, the participants are expert teachers with more than five years' experience; this is because the teachers' selection was randomly from a teachers' sample who showed their willingness to participate. Future studies could use purposeful selection to choose novice and expert teachers as participants to examine teacher experience as a factor influencing their views regarding classroom observation.

5. Conclusion

The present qualitative findings reveal the perceptions of both EFL observers and teachers towards classroom observations. While previous studies conducted in the Saudi context examine EFL teachers' views regarding classroom observation (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014; Hakim, 2015; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014), the present findings further illustrate a general agreement in the views of both EFL observers and teachers about different aspects relating to classroom observation. However, a marked discrepancy is shown in their views regarding classroom observation rationale. Observers mostly believe that the significance of classroom observation lies in summative purposes, e.g. assuring the teaching quality. Teachers, on the other hand, mainly prefer the formative purposes of classroom observation, including professional development.

Moreover, teaching experience appears to be a vital factor influencing participants' views about two areas: who should be the observation focus (novice or expert teachers), and post-observation feedback impact on teachers (novice teachers are more willing to receive observers' feedback than experts). The present study also shows that teachers become stressed because they feel judged during observations, when they need to show their best teaching practices. Due to their personalities, some teachers react positively to post-observation feedback, while others respond negatively. Moreover, results indicate there should be strict criteria to select observers, including good teaching experience and a high academic qualification. Observers should also justify their feedback basing on ELT methodological grounds. Therefore, these findings have significant implications for teacher education. First, formative purposes of observation should be emphasised in the classroom observation process. Second, teachers with different teaching experience might have different professional needs and concerns. Consequently, observation programmes should account for this. For example, classroom observations can have multiple routes rather than one guideline that applies to all teachers with different teaching experiences. Additionally, it could be useful to introduce different observation kinds such as walk-through and peer-observation to address several teachers' needs. Third, observers need to undergo a comprehensive training course to prepare them to observe appropriately and give constructive feedback. The availability of qualified observers might reduce teachers' stress, improve teachers' attitudes towards observation, and increase the outcomes of the observation process in general.

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