

Teachers' Perceptions of Self-observation As An Appraisal Tool

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Abstract:

This study explores teachers' beliefs about self-observation on practice as one alternative for the appraisal process. In this study, teachers were interviewed about how they viewed self-observation and how well it served them in developing their teaching on the one hand, and enhancing reflective practice on the other one. The findings in this paper are based on a qualitative research that employed an interpretivist /constructivist theory, in which qualitative data was gathered primarily through interviews with a view to clarifying teachers' perceptions and understanding the beliefs and practices behind them. The study attempted to answer mainly the following question. "What do teachers understand by self-observation and how do they perceive its role in professional development?" The findings of the study revolve around two main themes; the benefits and the drawbacks of self-observation theory. While, the first one describes self- observation as an opportunity for reflection, awareness and professional growth, the second view claims that such practices depend on personality and attitudes, and is limited by various constraints.

Key words: appraisal, Arabian Gulf, performance enhancement, professional development, reflective practice, self-observation

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1. Introduction

The Performance Enhancement Program (PEP) is a faculty appraisal system used in the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) - a tertiary institution in the Gulf. It is a yearly process; teachers have to write a reflective statement about their teaching philosophy, set teaching goals for the academic year, map a professional development plan, and have a classroom observation report. The PEP is a standard system; it encourages reflection and is regarded as an opportunity for professional development within a structured program. The process is qualitative in nature; it relies on principles such as reflection and quality. Observation is one main component of the process, and the faculty member is expected to be observed at least once every academic year. Generally, observation is conducted by the department supervisor in the first year of their contract, and then teachers can either have a peer observation or a self-observation report for the PEP. But teachers mainly choose peer observation rather than self-observation. In order to understand better the teachers' perceptions and the beliefs about self-observation, the author decided to investigate this practice.

2. Literature review

Currently, teachers are facing an array of complex challenges such as, among many others, working with a diverse population of students, integrating new technology in the classroom, and meeting rigorous academic standards and goals. However, teachers are aware that professional development exists to enhance their instructional knowledge.

Professional development in the educational field refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers, and effective professional development is seen as increasingly vital to both the success of the learning process and to the teachers' satisfaction. Richards and Farrell (2005) state that professional development is "an awareness of what the teacher's current knowledge, skills, and attitudes are and the use of such information as the basis for self-appraisal" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.34), and in order to demonstrate such awareness, teachers need to observe and reflect on their own practices. Notably, a review of the relevant literature reveals that limited research has been conducted in the area of self-observation.

Self-observation is an approach towards reflective teaching; it gives teachers an additional opportunity to reflect on teaching techniques and activities used in class. According to Richards and Farrell (2005), self-observation or self-monitoring, which are used interchangeably in the literature, is "a systematic approach to the observation, evaluation, and management of one's own behavior in order to achieve a better understanding and control over the behavior". (p.34) Therefore, self-observation and reflection on practice help teachers move from a philosophy of teaching and learning to a philosophy of teaching consistent with their emerging understandings of language learning and teaching processes. Additionally, Borg (2003), argues that the teacher's practical knowledge is shaped by various background sources, such as teaching experience, apprenticeship of observation, frequency and nature of reflection.

Brinko (1993) argues that the most effective feedback is from oneself as it is "more valued, better recalled and more credible." (Brinko, 1993, p.577) Moreover, self-monitoring is based on the view that "in order to better understand one's teaching and one's own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, it is necessary to collect information about teaching behavior and practices objectively and systematically and use this information as a basis for making decisions

about whether there is anything that should be changed” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.34). Furthermore, Stanley (1998) believes that self-observation is one of the most powerful tools for a teacher to practice reflective teaching. In this regard, a teacher can look at what she or he did in the classroom, think about why she or he did it, and reflect upon if it worked or not. Self-observation, therefore, can provide a language teacher with an opportunity for undertaking reflection. Schon (1983), describes reflection in two main ways: reflection *on* action and reflection *in* action. Reflection *on* action is retrospect, after the lesson, whilst reflection *in* action takes place during the lesson. Thus, through self-observation, teachers can explore their teaching in order to understand better their own teaching practices, and change bad practices they were unaware of.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) see observation in general as “a way of gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching”. (p.11) Therefore, it seems logical that adequate techniques and strategies be put in place to collect data through observation. Danielson (2008) states that direct observation can provide evidence of reflective practice and self-report. Richards and Farrell (2005), for example, suggest three approaches to self-monitoring of language lessons so as to collect suitable: *1-lesson reports, 2-audio-recording a lesson, and 3- video-recording a lesson.*

The first approach, *lesson reports*, is when teachers write a description of their lesson after delivering it. Richards and Farrell state that “a lesson report tries to record what actually happened in the lesson, can be carried as a narrative account for the lesson or using a checklist or a questionnaire” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.38).

For the second approach, *audio-recording a lesson*, Richards and Farrell argue that “The purpose of making a recording of a lesson is to identify aspects of one’s lesson that can only be identified through real-time-recording” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.42). However, this approach seems to be ignored these days, or more specifically replaced by the next approach.

The third one is *video-recording a lesson*, which Richards and Farrell think is “The best record of a lesson is a video because it provides a much more accurate and complete record than a written or audio-recording” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.44). However, it is also believed by many to be time consuming and disruptive in class. Richards and Lockhart agree with this view and believe that “The advantage of the preceding procedures is that they are relatively easy to carry out”. (p.11) Indeed, many teachers would think of video recording rather than tape recording if they were ever asked about recording. Moreover, as described in Richards and Lockhart (1996, p.11) Schratz (1992) agrees that audio-visual recordings are prevailing instruments in the development of a teacher’s self-reflective competence. He said, it is mirror like, an objective view of what goes on in class.

However, Richards and Lockhart (1996) believe that observation has disadvantages because it helps obtain “subjective impressions of teaching and by their nature can capture only recollections and interpretations of events and not the actual events themselves”. (p.11)

In addition, self-observation is known to be a useful tool for practicing teachers to explore and gain a critical self-awareness of their own teaching beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

Richards and Farrell (2005) elaborate that self-observation enables a teacher to record her or his own teaching practices, by providing an objective, descriptive, and critical account of it. Such feedback can only be effective and constructive, because information is gathered from trusted sources - video and audio -and contains accurate data and irrefutable evidence. Therefore, it obviously leads to more reflective practices.

Undoubtedly, reflection is a major aspect of professional development because it is an immediate way for teachers to increase their awareness of how they teach. Conscious reflection upon one's practice is highly recommended by the tenets of continuing professional development of educators (such as Biggs, 2003; Boud et al., 1985; Lyons, 2002) as it has the power to increase educators' knowledge of academic content and teaching skills. Dewey (1933), among others, argues that reflection is an active cognitive process; it is a deliberate act, which involves sequences of interconnected ideas and takes account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. Dewey believes that reflective thinking, which is a special form of problem solving, addresses practical problems allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached.

Additionally, reflection is a complex process and moves through different cognitive levels. For instance, Grimmer et al. (1990), propose four modes of thinking while reflecting on teaching practices: (1) *Technological*, which demand a prescribed set of solutions, (2) *Situational*, which refers making decisions while focusing only on information embedded in a specific context at a specific time. (3) *Deliberate*, which is when an educator seeks more information than the immediate context provides. (4) *Dialectical*, which relies on the teacher's ability to think beyond the repertoire of pedagogical strategies and to avoid displaying judgments; this mode goes beyond simple solutions to actual problem solving. Danielson (2008) believes that at the dialectical stage, teachers' beliefs and behaviors change as new understandings initiate new actions.

Grimmett et al. (1990), claim that using one mode or the other is generally an unconscious act, unless teachers are expert and move deliberately across the modes relative to the complexity of the situation. However, all the modes are complementary and represent useful steps for decision making and problem solving processes, and require conscious analysis and data seeking at all times.

3. Methodology

The current study is based on a mixed-method approach, but mainly qualitative, seeking narrative information in order to understand better teachers' perceptions about self-observation. It is therefore about collecting and analyzing narrative data, while focusing on teachers' attitudes and beliefs.

3.1. Research question

The main research question in this study is, "What do teachers understand by self-observation and how do they perceive its role in professional development?"

Sub-questions addressed were as follow:

- Why do teachers conduct self-observation?
- How is self-observation conducted in the college?

- What are the benefits and the drawbacks of self-observation?
- How could the process be improved?

3.2. Theoretical framework

Underpinning the research question is the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed. For instance, teachers have different beliefs and perceptions about self-observation, and these beliefs reflect teachers' attitudes and practices as noted by Richards and Lockhart (1996) "what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe". (p.29)

A paradigmatic assumption behind this question is that Interpretivist/Constructivist theory can deepen our understanding of teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which is constructed through a combination of individual and social processes (Vygotsky, 1998).

It is therefore important to acknowledge that potential differences about how teachers perceive self-observation are possible and recognized. The current study seeks to shed light on perceptions and views about self-observation; the information gathered is mainly for deeper understanding therefore cannot be generalized.

3.3. Participants

The study involved three phases, each phase had different participants but they all belong to the same department. The population of the study - sixty teachers and one supervisor - is represented mainly by eight teachers who participated in the Focus Group Interview (FGI). Recruiting participants for the FGI was a big challenge! The researcher recruited eight willing colleagues who called – Sam, John, Sally, Sandy, Lily, Mike, Phil, and Joe. The author was very careful while selecting the informants, making sure they all have good relations and trusted each other to avoid any potential problems, and mainly to ensure openness. Because, as Creswell (2002) notes that the FGI is more likely to yield the best information when the group is highly cooperative and familiar with one another. Richards (2003), among others, recommends investing time and effort into selecting members of the group. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that FGI should involve between six and eight participants, as smaller groups show greater potentials. However, the researcher thought eight participants were manageable and a larger group would help me gain a variety of perspectives. The informants have been working together in the same department for several years so far. They are used to speaking with each other, and this style of interview would definitely elicit the best results.

3.4. Ethics

The paper used the established ethical research procedures, at both institutional and individual levels. A research proposal was submitted for approval. Then, the informants were asked to sign a consent form beforehand. They all agreed that the data would be used for research purposes and did not mind recording the interview.

3.5. Interview protocol

Following suggestions made in (Creswell, 2002; Richards, 2003), an interview protocol was created. The participants were informed of the study's aim, and were guaranteed anonymity. The researcher suggested pseudonyms that were used in the report in order to protect the identities of the participants as suggested in (Cohen, Manion, and Morisson, 2000).

The meeting occurred over a cup of coffee and cookies to break the ice and engage in informal conversations in order to make sure that the members of the group felt comfortable with each other and to engage in open discussion. The informants were given an overview of the questions and the time needed for the task, and then they were informed about starting the recorder in order to ensure their awareness of the formality of the task.

4. Procedures and methods

This study was designed following a mixed-method approach, which allowed a wide range of data to be gathered and interpreted. It was planned for three phases by using three different tools in the data collection process; a one-to-one interview, and a Focus-Group Interview (FGI), which are both qualitative tools. And then a short survey, which is quantitative in design was used but served to clarify the participants' background, rather than for a statistical check.

4.1. Phase 1: Informal Interview with the supervisor

The first one-to-one interview with the supervisor helped set the ground for the research, and identify the population for the study. Kvale (1996) states that interviews are a step towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans. Thus the social situation of the research data will be more emphasised (Cohen et al., 2001).

Firstly, the author informed the supervisor about the intended study, and discussed with him self-observation as a general practice in the department. The supervisor found the topic interesting and encouraged the researcher to conduct research and investigate this area. Secondly, the supervisor was asked by the researcher a few questions about figures, types and modes of observation that teachers conducted.

4.2. Phase 2: Survey

The second phase of the study is quantitative in nature; it comprised a quick survey that was circulated among colleagues in the department via the supervisor. The aim was to collect more background data and to select willing informants for the third phase. The information sought was about gender, years of teaching experience, preferred type and mode of observation, and finally whether they agree to take part in the planned FGI in order to enlighten the study.

4.3. Phase 3: Semi-structured focus-group interviews

The third phase of the study comprised the main method chosen to explore participants' views, which is the FGI. It is qualitative in nature, and has recently gained popularity amongst professionals in the educational research field, mainly for its ability to generate large amounts of data in a relatively short time. Indeed, FGI helps explore informants' beliefs and views, enlightening their attitudes and behaviours. The main aim of FGI is to collect data, understand meanings, and explain beliefs and those cultures that affect individuals' feelings, attitudes and behaviours. Richards (2003) suggests then a semi-structured interview, which is one possibility of gaining an important view of participants' feelings and perceptions while maintaining a focus on the main research questions. The researcher thinks that a semi-structured focus group interview is ideally suited for this current research, which is aiming at exploring the complexity surrounding teachers' beliefs and behaviours within the context of actual teaching experience.

On the one hand, FGI provide an important range of information; on the other hand, it illuminates the differences in perspective between groups of informants.

The interview, which was audio-recorded, began with general questions, and then continued with additional questions to expand the study and to seek further details. Additionally, and to address ethical matters, the purpose of the study was reiterated, participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and they were promised the opportunity to review the interview transcripts if needed. While the interview protocol provided a common framework for addressing the overall research questions, participants were permitted to express ideas and opinions beyond the bounds of the questions asked. This approach served to reach a broader understanding of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards self-observation. The FGI concluded with a validity check. The transcript was shared with those participants, who requested to see it, with a view to correcting or adding missing information.

5. Data analysis

5.1. Phase 1: Analysis of the supervisor interview

Notes were taken and figures were compiled during the interview. The purpose of analyzing the interview notes was to gain a general idea about the practice of self-observation in the department, and to determine the population involved in the study. The data was tabulated and results represented into charts to be read better; therefore, the picture on the population for the study became clearer.

5.2. Phase 2: Analysis of the survey

Drawing on the analysis of the data provided in the previous interview, a short survey was constructed, and then given to all the teachers in the department. The purpose of this tool was to gain a clearer picture of the background of the population, to construct meaning, and to identify participants for the FGI rather than to have a statistical check. The data was read across, tabulated, and the participants for the following stage were identified. The aim of the background information included in the survey was to know better the participants, and to make sense of the FGI data.

5.3. Phase 3: Analysis of Focus-Group Interview

The aim of the interview was to engage study participants in a reflective dialogue with the researcher (Cresswell, 2002; Richards, 2003). The FGI recording was one hour in length. Several major categories were identified as they emerged in the recordings, and following Krueger and Casey (2000) concept irrelevant information was ignored by the researcher and the remaining relevant parts were transcribed bearing in mind that the process of qualitative analysis, which aims to bring meaning to a situation rather than the search for truth.

Analysis of data followed Cresswell's (2002) guidelines and Yin's (1989) suggested stages as he points out that data analysis consists of a number of stages, i.e. examining, categorizing and tabulating or otherwise recombining the evidence, in order to address the initial goal of a study.

Given the author's with the context, institution and teachers under scrutiny, she sought to minimize the impact of her views on the analysis of the data. She therefore attempted to use a

“strategic and technical detachment” approach to both data collection and analysis (Holliday, 2001, p. 178). To avoid imposing personal views on the data and it was analysed using exploratory content analysis. Therefore the information was categorized and codified to identify the emerging themes and then compared them with the whole set of data using a constant comparison method that included reading and rereading within and across the responses of the participants (Lalik & Potts, 2001). Finally, a few participants and several other colleagues read the analysis to validate the themes that emerged.

5. Findings

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the analysis phase as ‘the interplay between researchers and data’, acknowledging that there is an extent of subjective selection and interpretation of the generated data. It is important to note that no claim is made to be an objective observer in this study. This is in line with the Vygotskian combination, of individual and social meaning making, which will provide a framework to better consider the effectiveness of the current study.

6.1. Phase 1: Analysis of the interview with the supervisor

Interviewing the supervisor helped set a clear context for the study, the results revealed details and clarified the practice of self-observation in the department involved in the study. It showed that 85% of the teachers conducted self-observation as shown in figure 1.

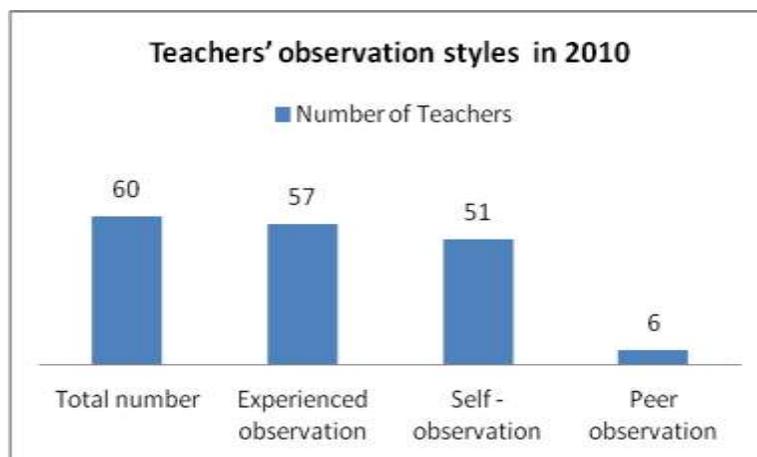


Figure 1 Teachers' observation styles in 2010

The data analysis also revealed that 94% of the teachers who conducted self-observation wrote a lesson report, 0% of them used the audio-recording approach, and 6% used video-recording as shown in the chart:

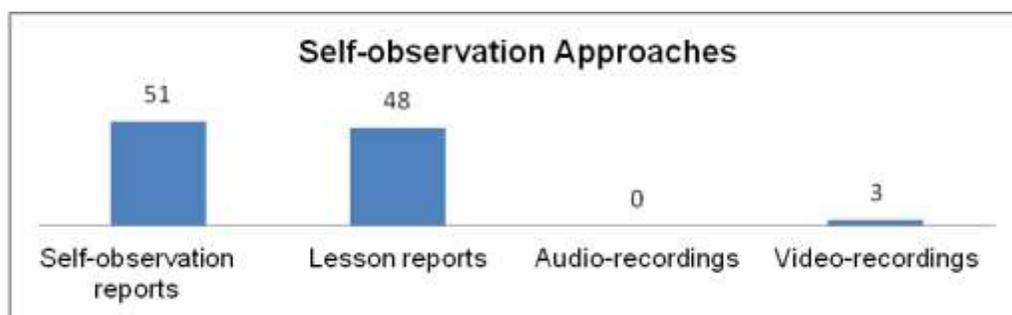


Figure 2 Self-observation Approaches

6.2. Phase 2: Analysis of the teachers 'survey: Background of the research population

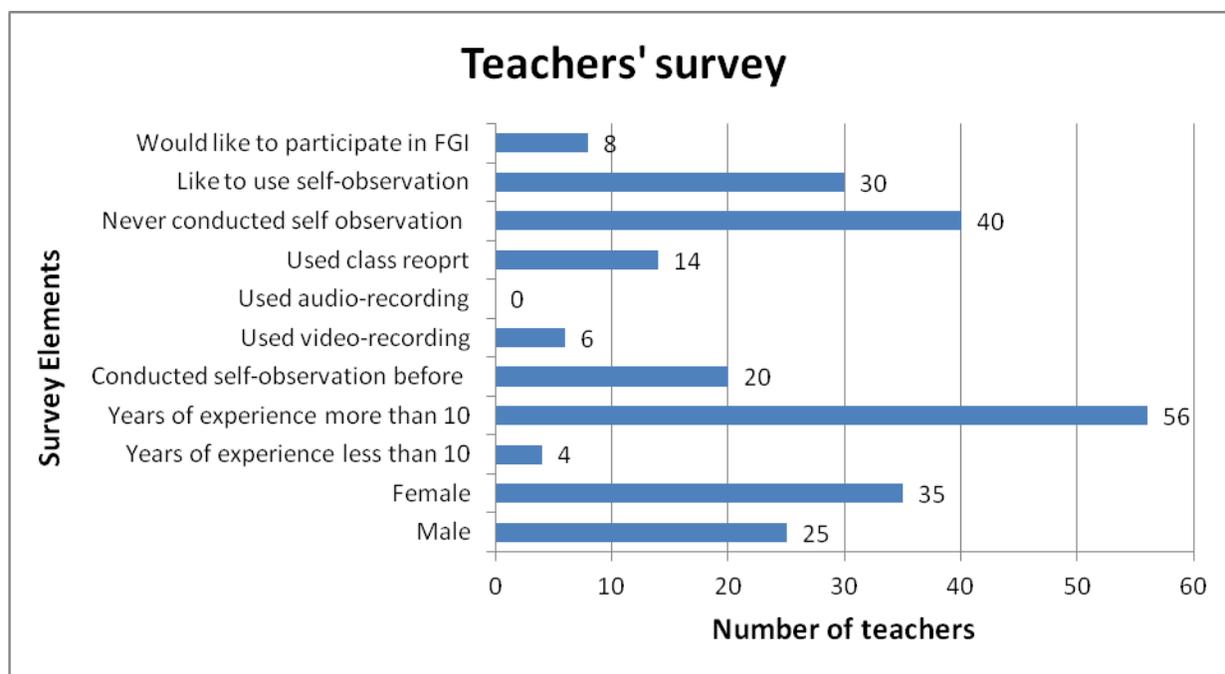


Figure 3 Teachers' survey same

The analysis of the survey provided an ample view about the population of the current study; it revealed that 66% never conducted self-observation in their classes, and that 0% used the audio- recording approach in observation, which is consistent with the previous results. 10% considered video-recording their lessons. The survey showed that 8 participants were willing to participate in the FGI; these participants have also left their contact information for follow-up. It was interesting to find out that 42% of the participants were male and 58% were female, which means that both genders are well represented in the study. Additionally the data revealed that the majority of the teachers - 93% -have more than ten years of experience.

6.3. Phase 3: Analysis of Focus-Group Interview

The participants expressed a number of varied personal views and attitudes toward self-observation as a learning practice. The analysis revealed two major categories; *benefits* and *drawbacks* of self-observation, and then sub-categories, which were called recurrent themes. The findings are presented in the participants' own voices and organized into nine themes; five themes under *Benefits of self-observation*: source of information, opportunity for reflection, awareness and objectiveness, opportunity for professional development, and alternative for unwanted peer or supervisor presence. And four themes under the second category; *Drawbacks of self-observation*: Personality and attitudes, time constraints, technology problems, and structured framework.

6.3.1. Benefits of self-observation

1) Source of information

The interview revealed that seven participants have experienced different approaches of self-observation. Indeed two out of eight – Lilly and Sam - *video-recorded* their classes and reflected on the videos. And five teachers – John, Mike, Phil, Sally and Peter – wrote *lesson reports*. Sandy never conducted self-observation. But none of the informants practiced *audio-recording*. Although the participants referred to different approaches of self-observation in the interview, they all agreed that self-observation is a generous source of information. Because they believe that it equips teachers with an ample view on their teaching practices and habits in the classroom as they stated. Lilly for instance said:

“I never thought I could use the word “ok” a hundred times in class, until I counted them in a videotaped lesson. This is a new piece of information for my records.”

Sam could not agree more, he added:

“I have been teaching this class for seven months so far, and I thought I knew all my students very well until I discovered some attitudes in the videotape that I never noticed in class. Ali, for example, was constantly chatting with his blackberry under the table while looking at me and pretending to participate.”

2) Opportunity for Reflection

Once teachers have access to this ample information about their practices in the classroom, they start reflecting on their actions. According to the participants, reflection leads to change. One of the participants, Lilly, who used videotaping for self-observation, said:

“I would never give a well-planned class activity a second thought if I didn't face a problem in class. But when I videotaped my class last year, I discovered that group work does not always work. And a group of six is very big; there are always passive or lazy students who rely on their partners to do the work.”

Lilly, therefore, reflected on her observation and decided to change her strategies to enhance learning and ensure all students' involvement. Sam agreed on this point, he thought it was very important and shared a personal experience:

“When I saw myself on that video, I constantly corrected students’ errors while they speak, I barely let them speak, oh my GOD!”

Sally thinks that some practices become daily routines and habits though they should be changed, she added:

“There is worse, sometimes you believe that the strategies you are using are common sense, and can’t be wrong. It becomes a taken for granted routine, this is hard to change.”

John added:

“I wrote a class report because it was time to reflect for the appraisal process; otherwise I never feel the need to write one.”

Phil disagreed with this point, and argued:

“Reflection is very important; I think teachers should reflect on their classes on a daily basis to see what went right and what went wrong.”

Jo added:

“We often reflect on daily practices, so reflection does not always need pre-planning, it becomes a habit, but sometimes it is a more complex task. Reflecting on the seating plan in the classroom for example is different from reflecting on students’ learning difficulties.”

3) Awareness and objectiveness

The participants therefore talked about awareness of different aspects in teaching practices that can either be enhanced or need review and change. They agreed that sound reflection leads to objectiveness and the ability to judge practices fairly, detaching themselves from emotions and self-rightness. Mike, for example, said in this respect:

“I always thought I am right, and I still do... (giggling)...However, I can’t forget that I did not like Peter’s way of presenting a new concept in his class, which I always use myself in my lessons. How come I saw that wrong, and I never questioned my own teaching before? Observation, either peer or self, is a good tool for self-correctness.”

Sally agreed on this point and added

“Self-observation is like a mirror, it reflects what is there, and it shows you what you don’t see while teaching. Sometimes, you are not aware of your mistakes until you step back and watch yourself performing.”

But Sandy seemed to disagree with these views, and has a different perception:

“I don't think there is a big deal of objectiveness with self-observation, you are on your own taking notes and reflecting on your image as teacher to send it to your supervisor for the PEP, come on guys....let's be objective here....to what extent are you going to say ...err ...I was wrong!”

4) Opportunity for professional growth

All the participants therefore agreed that self-observation is an opportunity for professional development; they think that self-monitoring and objective reflection lead to professional growth. Mike thought that all teachers should practice self-observation:

“Observing yourself is stress free, therefore you can always criticize yourself if needed at least you don’t feel embarrassed, on the contrary this contributes to your learning and professional growth.”

Sam added on this topic:

“Every teacher is responsible for his own professional growth and I think starting by self-monitoring is a big step toward becoming professional.”

5) **Alternative for unwanted peer/ supervisor presence in class**

The analysis revealed that a few participants favor self-observation just because it is an alternative to inviting a peer or the supervisor to class, many teachers do not like being observed. Lilly said:

“I would happily conduct self-observation if it spares me the visit of the supervisor.”

Peter added:

“Self-observation is not an easy task, but it is better than peer observation, I hate being observed.”

Sam agreed saying:

“Oh yes, I am different when someone is watching me, I feel like it is not me performing.”

6.3.2. Drawbacks of self-observation

1) **Personality and attitudes**

The participants discussed the element of stress; they agreed that if observations become a source of stress for the teacher they can be counter-productive. Self-observation requires mental and affective readiness. Sandy for instance said:

“I hate being observed even if the observer is me. This creates a funny feeling.”

John agreed and added:

“Oh, yes I hate videotaping myself; I never liked my videos or my pictures. It is hideous and inappropriate.”

Peter then summed it all, he said:

“Does anybody like his/her voice in a recorder, or a video? I always wonder: is that me? The first thing you think of: how do I look? Oh awful picture, weird voice...”

2) **Time constraints**

The participants also talked about time constraints saying that while they all agreed self-observation is a good practice it is time consuming and needs a lot of energy and effort

Lilly said:

"I don't have time for that, the workload; preparations, curriculum, and tests don't leave space for these practices."

Sandy agreed with Lilly:

"I don't think we can afford such a luxury in class, recording, reflecting....we are in a constant race with the curriculum and we are always late. I think the management should understand our concerns and give us time to care about professional development and good practices."

3) Technology problems

The majority of participants mentioned the difficulty of implementation when talking about video-recording a lesson, they agreed that resorting to a technician or a peer to record the class is not favorable. Phil said:

"The camera-man is an intruder in class, so you are still observed. And this removes the element of natural setting for a lesson."

Sam and two other participants thought that it is difficult for teachers to video-record a lesson while teaching.

Sam said:

"Even if we place a camera on a stand, it will not capture all the class. It is a pain."

4) Structured framework

Again all the participants agreed that self-observation tasks need to be structured, and that there should be a framework for the activity. John and Lilly both agreed that teachers are asked to conduct self-observation, but they are not shown how to do it. Sandy said:

"I never conducted self-observation, and I was never shown how to do it, there is no set framework to follow. I prefer to have a peer one for the yearly appraisal, a colleague does the work, and he/she writes the report. All I have to do is respond to his/her reflections. It is much easier."

Phil had similar concerns, he said:

There should be more guidance in the college, self-observation looks an easy task but it needs mentoring, and we need to have a format to fill or guidelines to follow. I think this task should be standardized in order to be popular.

7. Discussion

The participants revealed that self-observation equips teachers with a great deal of information about their classes as well as the learners, and that is consistent with Yip, (2006) as he said that self-observation is a powerful source of information in teaching practice. Teachers should, perhaps, step back sometimes and observe themselves performing in class to identify weaknesses and implement change if needed.

Moreover, and as explicitly stated by the participants self-observing and reflecting on their own classes is a way to professional maturity and that is consistent with Richards as he says "Self-monitoring is a key ingredient in a teacher's continuing growth and development as a professional" (Richards, 1990, p.119) Additionally, the participants confirmed that self-monitoring emphasize teachers' awareness as it provides opportunities for objective evaluation and enhances self-critiquing. To this end, Richards argues that "Self-monitoring can help narrow the gap between teacher's imagined view of their own teaching and reality – a gap that is often considerable". (Richards, 1990, p.119) He also says that teachers reflect critically on their teaching and move from a level where their actions are guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking.

The participants mentioned on several occasions' professionalism and competency, these factors are more felt than seen. For instance a teacher, who volunteers to observe and write a report of peer-observation, should be competent and self-confident. Therefore, self-observation prepares teachers for this stage. This is in line with Smith, (1991) as he states that teachers who engage in self-observation become competent peer observers. Therefore, self-observation does not only affect professional aspects, it also touches teachers' image and personality. In this respect Yip (2006) argues that self-observation is an opportunity for teachers to monitor their personality, identity and competence.

A further important aspect that was highlighted by the participants is that teachers who engage in self-observation become responsible for their own development; again this point is consistent with Richards' view when he says "Self-monitoring shifts responsibility for initiating improvement in teaching practices from an outsider, such as supervisors, to teachers themselves. It enables teachers to arrive at their own judgments as to what works and what does not work in their classrooms." (Richards, 1990, p.119)

Richards and Lockart (1996) also share this view and think that teachers are in the best position to examine their own teaching. However, teachers do so not only because they insist on being responsible for their learning, but also because, as they mentioned in the FGI, they do not prefer the presence of a supervisor or a peer for this mission. Moreover, the participants agreed with Richards and Farrell's view (2005) in that they all think self-observation provides teachers with a safe, reflective environment where they can monitor themselves in privacy; they become responsible for their own teaching and make their own judgment about it. This a strong argument for teachers to favor self- observation to any other mode of observation. In fact, if observations become a source of stress for teachers, it will make them counter-productive.

However, in addition to mental and affective readiness, the self-observation process needs enough time and encouragement from managers and stakeholders, this is not contradictory with Yip (2006) who thinks that there should be sufficient time and a reasonable workload to assist positive attitudes towards the capability of self-observation.

The participant also mentioned the difficulty in implementing video-recording as an approach to self-observation; teachers are challenged by this and need easier approaches to follow. This problem can be solved if the college devotes a special room for video-recording, the venue BEING equipped with few cameras and a good sound system that can capture the different aspects of a lesson on the one hand, and easy to use on the other one. So teachers walk in with a

blank video tape, insert the tape in the recorder and press record. At the end of the lesson, they press stop and take their tape. Therefore, it will be really personal and a stress-free process.

Additionally, the participants were right when they requested a structured framework for the self-observation process. For peer-observation, for example, there is a form available in the system that teachers use to reflect on each other's' lessons. The form is clear and well organized. It consists of three columns: the first column is for tasks or activities being observed, which is a descriptive part of the process, whereas the second and the third columns are reflective parts. One is for observers' comments and the other one is for the observed comments. This form is not suitable for self-observation; however teachers are encouraged to use it.

Moreover, most of the reflection cases that were mentioned in the FGI were at the technical level, and very few cases moved to the situational level, and barely any case moved to the dialectical level. The analysis of the results with reference to levels of reflection is beyond the scope of the current research, but it needs attention and further investigation.

Finally, it is advised that teachers should be advised on best approaches to practice self-observation, and should be provided with practical tools, rather than depending on availability and convenience.

8. Recommendations

Teachers agreed that the various approaches used to self-observation are all valuable tools and saw the intrinsic value of self-observation for professional growth. However, action research, which is a developmental activity, was not mentioned in the discussion.

The researcher thinks that an important approach to intensive self-observation would be action research, which is a means of reflecting thoroughly on one's personal performance. Self-observation is to help teachers become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and helps them become more self-directed. This could, therefore, be investigated through action research, which employs a long-term frame work and would ensure, in the researcher's point of view, consistency and sound decisions.

A reflective cycle that could be used for a long-term process for self-monitoring through action research is also suggested. This cycle is adapted from McTaggart and Kemmis (1983). The reflective cycle leads teachers to questions about their practices through different stages, starting from the planning phase, which is before the actual teaching, until after the lesson is delivered.

Additionally, Schon (1983) suggests two types of reflection: *in-action* and *on-action*. A third type could be employed, it is called: *pre-action* in order to enhance reflective practices. She thinks teachers should reflect at three stages: before the lesson *pre-action*, while teaching *in-action* and after class *on-action*. Teachers could also benefit from reflecting on the following questions:

1. What will I do? How will I plan to achieve my objectives? (*Planning*)
2. What really happened in class? (*Informing*)
3. How well did I do? (*Contesting*)
4. How could I do things differently? (*Appraisal*)

5. What and how shall I teach now? (*Acting*)

The greatest achievement of self-monitoring is to become more reflective practitioners; therefore reflection would become a deliberate daily activity and a consistent part of the learning process. Finally the researcher designed the following diagram to represent the suggested plan for on-going reflection.

9. Conclusion

The study was enlightening and of great value to the reform plan. It demonstrated that the teachers involved were aware that self-observation is a valuable tool for the learning process, and they definitely saw the intrinsic value of self-observation for professional growth. However, action research, which is a developmental activity, was not still not perceived as an essential tool in daily practices. This might be due to time constraints, motivation and teachers' workload, which should be revised for the benefits of the educational system.

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