



Impact of peer coaching strategy on pre-service teachers' professional development growth in Kuwait



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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated how peer coaching in supervision affects Kuwait's pre-service teachers' professional growth and how head department supervisors can organizationally support peer coaching to improve teachers' professional development. Pre-service teacher pairs carried out a peer coaching cycle (i.e., preview conference, lesson observation and data collection, reflective conference). Data were collected and analyzed from 12 pre-service teachers and 6 head department supervisors. The peer coaching strategy fostered teachers' professional growth based on teaching practices, teacher learning, team cooperation, and teachers' self-confidence, enthusiasm, and autonomy as well as the application's obstacles. Head department supervisors' results showed a general approach for ensuring organizational support for the peer coaching strategy. Recommendations are provided for applying peer coaching in Kuwait's educational system.

1. Introduction

Educational development is the main goal of the Ministry of Education in Kuwait. Like many development countries, Kuwait adopted a centralized approach for its educational system and, therefore, established standards to measure teaching quality (International Bureau of Education, 2008). Thus, teacher preparation colleges have a heavy burden in adapting educational changes that influence the entire public educational system in Kuwait.

The College of Education at Kuwait University and The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training accept approximately 7000 students yearly (Bahbahani, 2015; Kuwait University Admission Office, 2015). Students in the College of Education join the profession as trained teachers, working with the 58,446 teachers in public schools to respond to the educational demand. The statistics indicate that trained teachers in Kuwait represent 77% of all teachers (The World Bank, 2013). The purpose of teacher preparation institutions is to prepare teachers with strategies and teaching methods to enhance their teaching profession, (Goker, 2006) as well as with educational values and new practices compatible with the educational international theories and strategies (International Bureau of Education, 2008).

To enhance teachers' professional development in public schools in Kuwait, supervision is organized by ministry regulations. Head department supervisors in schools are assigned as a local supervisors who support and guide teachers through teaching (International Bureau of Education, 2008). Yet in reality, teachers in Kuwait received formal traditional supervision only when they started their internship as pre-service teachers and after graduation when they were assigned as in-service ministry teachers. The

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majority of teachers consider traditional supervision as an evaluation and judgmental process rather than a way to promote teachers' professional growth (Teachers Union in Kuwait, 2012).

This study investigates in detail pre-service teachers' perspectives toward the peer coaching strategy as a newly implemented tool for changing the concept of supervision to influence pre-service teachers' growth (Goker, 2006; Murray, Ma, & Mazur, 2009; Vidmar, 2006; Zwart, Wubbets, Bergen & Bolhuis, 2009). It also investigates the role of head department supervisors in organizational support for the peer coaching strategy.

1.1. Teacher preparation programs in Kuwait

College-level preparation programs for pre-service teachers consist of studying an educational major for four years to earn a bachelor's degree (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and International Bureau of Education, 2011). During their last semester in such programs and based on their majors, pre-service teachers are distributed in public schools by Teaching Practicum Centers to complete internships as full-time pre-service teachers. Teaching Practicum Centers are organizational units in colleges of education that are responsible for supervising pre-service teachers during their internship courses. Pre-service teachers build their teaching skills and enhance their professional teaching practice based on theoretical frameworks and new educational ideas and applications. Furthermore, pre-service teachers' supervision and evaluation of their duties are spread among three evaluators: their college of education supervisor or district supervisor, school principal, and head department supervisor. At the end of the internship course, pre-service teachers send their confidential evaluative report to their college of education (Teaching Practicum Center, 2014).

Pre-service teachers' supervision is influenced by the Ministry of Education regulations. Unfortunately, staff development strategies are still limited in public schools due to the ministry's centralized standards system. Furthermore, coaching in Kuwait's educational system is understood to be formative supervision connected to both promotions and salaries (Teachers Union in Kuwait, 2012).

1.2. Peer coaching strategy, definition, and cycle

Becker (2007) defined peer coaching as a "process in which two or more professional colleagues work together for specific predetermined purpose in order the teaching performance can be improved as well as validated" (p. 2). Peer coaching differs from mentoring as it based on mutually sharing the power and trust relationship (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Veenman & Denessen, 2001).

Peer coaching involves three stages. The first stage is the preview conference, in which the lesson is planned and discussed between the teacher and the coach. They select a goal for the lesson and the area of observation. The second stage is the lesson observation, when the teacher teaches the lesson while the coach observes and documents the lesson using available tools (e.g., written notes, audio recordings, video recordings). The final stage is the reflective conference, which takes place after teaching the lesson. The peers meet together to discuss the observational notes in a reflective manner (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Neubert & Stover, 1994).

Applying a successful peer coaching strategy requires considering several important aspects. Developing a trusting relationship is important for building a social interaction among participants so they can ask questions and give honest feedback freely (Huston & Weaver, 2008; Vidmar, 2006). Moreover, the coaching tasks between the colleagues (e.g., questions, suggestions, and critique) should remain confidential to eliminate any negative effects on promotion possibilities and tenure decisions. The disclosure of confidential information could result in threatening the respect for the colleague as a teacher (Hicks, 1999; Vidmar, 2006). Participation in the peer coaching strategy must also be voluntary for both the coach and the colleague in order to improve their teaching based on their own self-interests (Bernstein, Johnson, & Smith, 2000; Huston & Weaver, 2008).

In addition, training on peer coaching skills moves participants from traditional evaluations to the coaching style of evaluations (Skinner & Welch, 1996), which is a fundamental component of success that can use different methods, such as lecturing, workshops, instructional seminars, and orientations (Bowman & McCormick 2000)

1.3. Peer coaching and professional development literature

Staff development training provides learning opportunities for teachers' professional growth and is essential for successful schools that prioritizes students' learning (Browne, 2006; Huber, 2010). Thus, to achieve quality staff development, the teachers' development program has to shift from individual learning and inspection of teachers' tasks to the facilitation of teachers' learning (Marks & Printy, 2003; Zwart et al., 2009).

For the purposes of creating professional learning communities in school, developing professional dialogue, and sharing ideas, peer coaching is one method designed to shift from the individual to the reflective shared process (Bruce & Ross, 2008; Murray et al., 2009). The peer coaching strategy influences teachers' skills and comprehensive thinking toward a reflective way of teaching, which affects teachers' professional development (Robbins, 1991; Vidmar, 2006). Moreover, many studies support peer coaching as a powerful and useful tool to improve teachers' learning and efficacy (Bruce & Ross, 2008; Goker, 2006; Murray et al., 2009; Slater & Simmons, 2001). Studies have also demonstrated that the peer coaching strategy enhances teachers' professional development by exploring teaching and learning complex problems that are practice centered, conducting a critical reflection on teaching, and stimulating the scholarship of teaching and learning (Bruce & Ross, 2008; Murray et al., 2009; Slater & Simmons, 2001). In addition, Parker, Hall, and Kram's (2008) results showed that the peer coaching strategy impacts several areas—namely, success in

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