THE IMPACT OF PEER COACHING ON MOROCCAN EFL TEACHERS: ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MOTIVATION, AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract:

This study explores the effects of peer coaching on Moroccan EFL teachers' motivation, self-efficacy, and professional growth. Teachers' opinions and experiences with peer coaching are investigated through focus group talks. Peer coaching is considered a useful instrument for professional development, promoting reflective teaching methods and boosting teacher confidence, according to the findings. However, time constraints and inadequate training were mentioned as obstacles. We noticed that novice and experienced teachers differed in their excitement. Peer coaching can improve teacher development in Morocco and other similar educational situations, according to the study, provided that it receives institutional support.

Keywords: peer coaching, professional development, motivation, reflection

1. Introduction

Coaching as job-embedded professional development (JPED) can be an effective approach to teachers' development. Traditional professional development (top-down approach) is usually criticized as it is disconnected from teachers' needs and irrelevant to teachers' classroom realities (Guskey, 2000; Desimone, 2009). Nonetheless, coaching as JPD supplies a powerful and alternative approach for teachers to conduct their professional growth depending on their needs, classroom realities, and pace. Simply put, JPED places the teacher as the leading actor who is fully responsible for his professional development in companionship with his colleagues (Zepada, 2013).

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JPED's fundamental focus is developing teachers' learning based on their daily instructions. It aims to grow the teachers' content, pedagogical knowledge and instructional approaches. Ultimately, when teachers develop, their learners are positively impacted. JPED is a school-based professional development program that considers the teachers' daily classroom instructions, enabling teachers to rectify and develop any teaching approach. To wrap up, JPED considers the "*one size fits all*" approach as not as efficient as the professional development designed by the teachers themselves, considering their learners' needs and the context where they are teaching.

JEPD is one of the most critical issues that lead scholars to prioritize the context in which teachers work. Though research has displayed the effectiveness of coaching for EFL teachers in different environments (Guskey, 2000; Desimone, 2009; Jiang, 2014), there is a dearth of studies exploring the specific attitudes and needs of Moroccan EFL teachers towards coaching as a form of JEPD. This article's objectives are twofold: first, investigate teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards implementing coaching in Moroccan classrooms. This will enable Moroccan EFL teachers to gain insight into coaching as a tool for professional development. Second, I will explore how coaching can enhance Moroccan EFL teachers' personalities, including their motivation and self-efficacy, and professionally incorporate classroom instructions.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Job-Embedded Professional Development
Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) is defined as teachers' learning that is based on their daily teaching practice to improve teachers' content-specific teaching practice and enhance the learning of students (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The JEPD process necessitates that teachers evaluate and resolve real and pressing issues related to their practices to engage in an ongoing process of enhancement (Hawley & Valli, 1999; National Staff Development Council, 2010). The primary focus of JEPD is on the classroom or school, and it is integrated into the working day.

JEPD requires the active involvement of teachers in collaborative, inquiry-based work as a shared, ongoing, locally-rooted process. It directly links what is learned and its application in everyday practice (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers' professional development in JEPD is mainly the result of formal and informal social interactions between teachers within the context of their school and class, and it spreads across the whole team. This model can potentially contribute to the development of all teachers in teams or schools through effective implementation and support, generating discussion between teachers on specific acts of teaching and student learning (Wei *et al.*, 2009).

2.2 Types of JEPD
The professional development process will become a JEPD if it corresponds to the above definition. The closer the learning activity is to what teachers work within their classroom and with their current pupils, the more embedded it will be in their work (Croft *et al.*,

2010). The workplace embeds two main types of professional development: collaborative practices and peer coaching.

2.2.1 Collaborative Practices

Collaboration is the act of having general and special professional teachers work together in teams and on an equal footing to better assist students in succeeding within the classroom. This can involve the development of lesson plans that take into account the needs of learners with special educational needs or the co-teaching of a group or a class (Powell, 2005). The study examines six approaches to co-teaching between general and special educators. These are referred to as collaborative practices (Friend, 2015). These are the kinds of practices that administrators would observe when visiting general education classrooms:

1) One Teach, One Observe, in which one teacher leads a large group. In contrast, another teacher monitors and gathers data on individual students, provides an impartial assessment of student progress and may lead to a more effective teaching strategy. The data can be academic, social, or behavioral in nature.
2) The 'one teach, one assist' approach means that one teacher does the teaching for the whole class while the other teacher moves around the class for one-on-one assistance.
3) Station teaching is a method where students are divided into three groups and rotated between stations. At two stations, teachers provide instruction, while at the third, students work independently.
4) Parallel teaching means that each teacher instructs the same lesson to half of the students. This helps to differentiate teaching and increase student involvement.
5) Alternative teaching is a method where a teacher provides instruction to most students. In contrast, the assisted teacher provides extra assistance to a small group to remediate, enrich, or assess.
6) Teaming is a method where the teachers must instruct large classes through lectures. These lectures introduce multiple points of view and a variety of methods for problem-solving.

According to Pratt's (2014) research, collaborative co-teaching approaches were used to achieve effective teaching. This encouraged partnerships between special and mainstream teachers. Nevertheless, the nature of these partnerships is complex and varies from teacher to teacher. Brendle, Lock, and Piazza (2017) discuss the importance of professional development in increasing faculty use of co-teaching approaches. Because of their minimal planning requirements, parallel teaching and a teacher-assistant approach emerged as the most widely used in primary schools (Scruggs *et al.*, 2007).

2.2.2 Peer Coaching

Early in the 1980s, peer coaching was originally suggested as an on-site component of staff development in the United States (Joyce & Showers, 1980). Peer coaching is an interactive process involving two or more teaching professionals working together to

reflect on existing practices. After performing classroom observations, group members can exchange ideas and input on how to use them for developing, honing, and acquiring new abilities.

Robbins (1991) proposed that peer coaching can come in several models, each with a different focus:

1) Collegial peer coaching involves teachers collaborating to observe and reflect on a lesson. The observed teacher leads the lesson, and feedback is given after discussions held before and after the observation.
2) Challenge coaching is group-oriented, where teachers work together to address a specific teaching issue. An experienced coach helps guide the process, including focusing observations and facilitating discussions on the challenge.
3) Technical coaching helps teachers apply strategies from workshops to real classrooms. Teachers observe and assist each other in effectively implementing new techniques.
4) Team coaching involves a skilled teacher providing specialized support in a particular area to help others improve their teaching practices.

2.3 Previous Studies on Peer Coaching in the EFL Context

Many scholars have explored the impact of peer coaching on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' professional development. Abbasian & Esmailee (2018) investigated the impact of peer coaching on EFL teachers' professional identity and students' academic achievement in Iran. Five teachers and 307 students participated, with significant improvements observed in both areas after a 12-session coaching process. The findings support the feasibility and effectiveness of peer coaching in the EFL context for both teachers' development and students' outcomes. Afshar & Doosti (2022) assessed an Iranian need-based teacher professional development program (TPDP) that was bolstered by peer mentoring and a range of data-gathering techniques. The findings demonstrated how peer-coached TPDPs enhanced the academic achievement of students as well as the knowledge and instructional strategies of English teachers. Traditional Iranian methods, however, continue to impede cooperation and provide lessons for better policy formulation and TPDP design in emerging nations.

Melekhina & Barabasheva (2019) discuss Novosibirsk State Technical University's (NSTU) professional development course on peer coaching for EFL teachers, which aims to improve teacher professionalism through informal observations and comments. It offers instructions on how to use peer coaching as an effective growth strategy. The results demonstrate that the participants viewed peer coaching favourably and thought it was very motivating for their career advancement. The benefits and difficulties of incorporating peer coaching into EFL instructors' in-service training are also highlighted in the study. Additionally, Bagheridoust and Jajarmi (2009) examined the impact of peer coaching on TEFL teachers' efficacy and professional development in Iran. Using a pretest-posttest control group design with 20 teachers, results showed that peer coaching significantly improved both teacher efficacy and professional development compared to

conventional supervision. These findings suggest that peer coaching is a more effective strategy for enhancing teaching quality.

The body of research on peer coaching for EFL teachers has shown that it is beneficial for advancing teachers' professional development and raising student achievement. Most of this research has been done in settings like Iran and Russia. Research on the Moroccan EFL context, where cultural, institutional, and educational aspects may have varying effects on the success of peer coaching, is noticeably lacking. Understanding how peer coaching impacts novice and experienced teachers differently and the practical challenges Moroccan instructors may encounter in implementing such programs is another area of knowledge that needs to be filled. While studies highlight short-term benefits, there is limited exploration of the long-term impact of peer coaching on teacher motivation and self-efficacy. Another gap lies in understanding how peer coaching affects novice and experienced teachers differently and the practical challenges Moroccan teachers may face in implementing such programs.

Additionally, while previous studies mainly used surveys and experimental designs, the methodology adopted in this research is distinct, employing focus groups to gather qualitative insights from Moroccan EFL teachers. This approach provides a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions, interactions, and experiences with peer coaching, allowing for a richer exploration of professional development's contextual and reflective aspects.

3. Material and Methods

To accomplish the objectives mentioned above, researchers adopted a focus group in which a researcher, the moderator or facilitator, asked a group of Moroccan EFL teachers and interviewees to generate qualitative data (Sim, 1998). The focus group enable researchers to access the data easily and quickly. This tool is not time and money-consuming. Interviewees are questioned in one go instead of interviewing one by one (Krueger, 1994), as it puts the participants in a comfortable atmosphere, and respondents are not obliged to answer every question. It provides them with a safe context to express themselves freely and without stress (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996). Also, the participants may feel supported when they are surrounded by their colleagues and friends (Peters, 1993). The dynamic interaction between the researchers and the participants enables the researcher to generate valuable and rich data.

Despite the advantages of this instrument, the process of collecting data is very challenging and needs a fragile treatment. First, data collection focuses on what the respondents utter and how they interact with the researchers and their partners. Researchers should divide roles so that one facilitates the discussions and the other observes the respondents' reactions and notes down the data. Furthermore, the tool utilized to record data should not carelessly impact the participants or distract the natural flow of the discussion (Sim, 1998). The moderator must strike a balance between a passive

role in listening to the participants and encouraging them to interact with each other and an active role by which he/she restricts himself or herself from monopolizing the speech and, therefore, generating biased findings (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996).

The focus group data was meticulously transcribed, and all words, expressions, and non-verbal cues were recorded in order to preserve the authenticity of the participants' contributions. Multiple inspections of the audio recordings were conducted during this painstaking transcription process, with special care paid to context and emotional overtones to ensure a thorough record of the discussions. After transcription, the data were subjected to an open-coding procedure, in which codes were taken straight from the text, allowing themes to develop naturally. This process included line-by-line coding, ongoing comparisons, and iterative code improvement to produce a codebook that successfully controlled and arranged the data. A thorough transcribing and open-coding procedure established a solid basis for accurate and nuanced analysis, guaranteeing that the results accurately represented the participants' viewpoints.

4. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards implementing coaching in their classrooms?

According to the focus group findings, coaching is largely viewed by Moroccan EFL teachers as a useful tool for professional growth. The capacity of coaching to offer individualized support that targets their unique classroom issues was highly valued by the participants. Teacher 1 claimed, *"In my classroom, coaching has enabled me to handle certain issues that I could not have resolved on my own. It feels like I have a custom-made answer for my educational requirements"* Instructors reported that receiving coaching gave them greater self-assurance in their teaching strategies and gave them the opportunity to evaluate their approaches critically. In this context, Teacher 4 stated, *"I feel so much more confident now that I have individualised instruction. I now feel more comfortable experimenting with new tactics because I am aware of my safety net."*

Though they acknowledged the advantages of coaching, a number of educators expressed apprehensions about the pragmatic aspects of putting it into practice. Time restraints, the requirement for appropriate scheduling, and insufficient training for coaches and coachees were among these worries. Teacher 2 declared, *"It's difficult to find time for coaching sessions. There seems to be little time for anything else between lesson planning, grading, and other duties."* The difficulty of juggling coaching activities with their regular teaching responsibilities was also brought up by the teachers, who suggested that careful planning and institutional support are necessary for a successful implementation. This is reflected by Teacher 3:" *It is really difficult to juggle coaching with my usual teaching responsibilities. To make it work, we need improved scheduling and administrative support.*"

The results show that, despite their wealth of classroom knowledge, experienced teachers occasionally had doubts about the benefits of coaching and thought it might be unnecessary. In this context, an experienced Teacher 1 said, *"with my humble experience, I*

sometimes wonder if coaching is necessary for me. I feel like I already have a good handle on my classroom practices.". Conversely, instructors with less experience showed greater enthusiasm, considering coaching as a vital resource for refining their methods and learning new approaches. Thus, Teacher 3 claimed, *"as a relatively new teacher, coaching has been very essential. It has given me fresh ideas and techniques that I would not have discovered on my own.".*

Research Question 2: To what extent can coaching contribute to enhancing Moroccan EFL teachers' motivation, self-efficacy, and professional growth?

The data proposes that coaching positively affects teachers' motivation and self-efficacy. After participating in coaching sessions, teachers expressed feeling more driven to use innovative teaching techniques and pursue ongoing professional growth. Teacher 4 stated, *"Being coached has given me much confidence in my teaching abilities. My coach's input helps me realize that I am headed in the correct direction and that I can have an impact on my pupils' education.".* Since students could see noticeable gains in their performance in the classroom and felt that their friends were rooting for them, the collaborative aspect of coaching also contributed to their increased confidence. Therefore, Teacher 3 said, *"I am more inspired to attempt novel teaching techniques now that I have taken part in coaching sessions. Knowing that you have guidance from someone gives you a sense of confidence".*

It has been discovered that by encouraging reflective practice, coaching greatly advances teachers' professional development. Participants said that they gained a deeper grasp of effective teaching strategies as a result of the coaching process' encouragement to routinely evaluate and improve their ways of instruction. Teachers 1 and 2 shared the same point of view: *"we are forced to periodically evaluate our teaching methods by coaching. Not only should we consider what we are doing, but also why and how we may get better at it. our career development has been greatly aided by this introspection".* Teachers were able to pinpoint areas that needed development and try out new approaches in the classroom, thanks to continuous feedback and conversations with colleagues and coaches.

Additionally, the results show that coaching directly and favourably affects classroom instruction. As students put the tactics and knowledge they learned from coaching into practice, teachers noticed that their pupils were more attentive and involved. Teachers' conviction that coaching is an essential part of their professional growth was further validated by improving student results. In this context, teachers 3 and 4 noted, *"there has been a discernible improvement in our classroom thanks to the tactics we have adopted from coaching sessions. Our classmates' involvement has greatly increased, and they are more involved."* Teacher 2 supported his colleagues' quotes: *"I can see the impact of coaching in my students' performance. The changes I have made in my teaching approach, based on coaching feedback, have led to better outcomes in the classroom."*

The study's conclusions shed light on the varied perspectives and attitudes Moroccan EFL teachers hold towards the use of coaching in the classroom. The overwhelmingly favorable response to coaching as a tool for professional growth suggests that it has the potential to be a game-changing approach in Moroccan education.

However, differing attitudes among teachers—particularly between more and less experienced educators—offer important insights into the challenges associated with implementing such an initiative.

Teachers with greater experience showed a marked difference in views compared to those with less experience. Newer teachers viewed coaching as essential to their professional development, whereas more experienced instructors sometimes questioned its necessity—possibly due to their more established teaching methods. This finding aligns with Joyce and Showers (2002), who discovered that novice teachers often benefit more from coaching because they require greater guidance and support as they develop their teaching practices. Conversely, seasoned educators may need more advanced professional development programs that focus on refining specific aspects of their work rather than their overall teaching methods. Likewise, Rajab (2013) concluded that peer coaching is very beneficial for less experienced primary school teachers in the Bahrain context.

According to the study's findings, coaching significantly improves the motivation, self-efficacy, and professional development of Moroccan EFL teachers. It is clear from teachers' reports of appreciable gains in both student performance and teaching style that coaching has a direct and beneficial effect on their careers.

The findings imply that coaching is an effective means of motivating EFL teachers. Instructors frequently mentioned how coaching meetings gave them more motivation to try out novel teaching strategies. Teachers seem to gain confidence from the emphasis on collaboration and guidance, encouraging them to take risks and adopt novel ways. This is consistent with earlier studies showing that coaching fosters a caring environment, decreasing teacher isolation and boosting motivation for continuing education (Rajab, 2013; Jakicic, 1992; Alsaleh, Alabdulhadi, & Alrwaished, 2017). The current study, however, provides unique insight into how these functions in Moroccan secondary schools, an environment where such motivational factors may be limited by typical hierarchical teacher-student relationships. Consequently, coaching facilitates a change to a more thoughtful and participative approach, which raises teacher motivation levels all around.

The study's key finding is the assistance that coaching provides for teachers' professional development via reflective practice. The setting that coaching fostered, according to teachers, allowed them to evaluate and modify their pedagogical approaches critically. Teachers 1 and 2 emphasised how this introspective method helped them pinpoint areas that needed work and try out novel ideas. Because it enables educators to match their practices with the most effective pedagogical strategies, this kind of continuous reflection is essential for professional development. This result aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action," where professionals continuously evaluate and refine their practice. Coaching seems to be a crucial tool for helping teachers to frequently engage in this reflective activity in the setting of Moroccan secondary schools, where professional development possibilities may be restricted.

Additionally, the results of this study also show that classroom instruction and student performance are directly impacted by coaching. Instructors noticed increases in student performance and engagement as a result of the coaching sessions' new teaching strategies. The improved student outcomes corroborate the teachers' growing trust in the efficacy of coaching. This finding is consistent with other studies that demonstrate coaching can raise student achievement and teacher instructional quality (Melekhina & Barabasheva, 2019; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; Rajab, 2013). This study's distinctive addition is its concentration on Moroccan EFL teachers, where contextual variables, including a lack of resources for professional development, make coaching an even more important intervention for raising student achievement.

5. Conclusion

Peer coaching can be an effective strategy for Moroccan EFL instructors' professional growth, according to the study's findings. Instructors who participated in peer coaching reported feeling more motivated, confident, and having a deeper understanding of their teaching methods. Peer coaching's collaborative style facilitates reflective practice and idea sharing, which in turn promotes professional development and better student results. The study does, however, also draw attention to a number of difficulties, such as time restraints and the requirement for sufficient assistance and training for coachees and coaches.

Peer coaching clearly has benefits, especially for less experienced teachers, but putting it into practice successfully calls for careful planning, institutional support, and customising coaching models to the Moroccan educational environment. This study contributes to the growing body of research on job-embedded professional development by offering unique insights into how peer coaching can be effectively utilized to meet the professional needs of Moroccan EFL teachers. Moving forward, policymakers and educational leaders should consider integrating peer coaching more widely into professional development programs to enhance teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student learning outcomes.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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