THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER OBSERVATION FOR PRE-SERVICE EDUCATION IN BLENDED LEARNING

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Abstract: Learning through peer observation significantly contributes to the process of training teachers to be as it helps both the observers and the observers improve their teaching practice, transform their educational perspectives and develop collegiality. This paper describes the peer observation model used in the pre-service teacher training in the Faculty of English language teacher education at the University of Languages and International Studies (FELTE - ULIS) and reports on the effectiveness as well as the drawbacks in the process of installation of this program. Data was collected from the qualitative method using questionnaires for 182 senior students of FELTE-ULIS and the qualitative approach through interviews with 9 out of 182 questionnaire responses. The research discovered that peer observation could be an excellent tool to support student teachers' professional development by improving their teaching strategies and generating excitement. Recommendations for improvement have also been presented.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, peer observation, micro-teaching, teacher development, FELTE-ULIS.

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1. Introduction

On the path to becoming teachers, student teachers need to be equipped with not only theoretical but also empirical knowledge in an attempt to develop effective pedagogical methods during the training process. According to Wallace (1998), teachers could acquire knowledge in two forms, namely "research-based knowledge", which is gained through professional teachers' knowledge and experience during teacher education programs, and "experiential knowledge", which is obtained during the process of teaching practice and self-evaluation. Regardless of whether some researchers in the field hold opinions supporting teacher development rather than teacher training, it is no longer possible to become a teacher solely by gathering information from a teacher (Thuy, 2011). In certainty, during the process of pedagogical growth, student teachers need to be "self-initiated, self-directed and self-evaluated" alongside cooperating teachers' help.

Regarding teacher development, learning by classroom observation is deemed to facilitate this career progression (Lee I., 2015) which is considered "a reflective approach to teacher development" (Cosh J., 1999, p.24) and is drawing increasing attention in the academic domain (Hollins, E. R., 2011, p.396). Furthermore, the "reflective approach" potentially exerts a tremendous impact on observers' insights into pedagogy (Carolina Blackmore, J. A., 2005, p.82) by following a procedure of giving dispassionate comments concerning teaching performance (Cosh J., 1999, p.24) and exchanging opinions on teaching means (McAllister and Neubert, 1995). Besides, learning by observation is divided into three stages, including pre-observation, observation, and post-observation (Van de Grift, W., 2007; Brown, J. D., 2009), and each of them can be classified logically into the participants, the aims, and the results (Cosh, 1999; Hollins, E. R., 2011; Wiliam, D., 2016). That provides teachers with opportunities to sharpen their teaching skills during classroom observation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the education sector, particularly the shift from traditional face-to-face to online learning. With this shift, there has been an increased focus on the importance of peer observation in pre-service education. Peer observation is essential in pre-service education, particularly in online learning environments. It allows pre-service teachers to observe and learn from their peers, enabling them to gain insights into different teaching styles and strategies. According to Koellner and Greenblatt (2018), peer observation facilitates a collaborative learning environment that supports the development of pedagogical skills.

In Vietnam, learning by observation has been considered a state-of-the-art approach compared to traditional methods (Thuy, 2011). The University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) is one of the leading higher education institutions to successfully train language teachers in Vietnam. Student teachers at the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE) have numerous opportunities to experience practical courses such as Practices and Techniques in English Language Teaching Methodology (ELT), Lesson Planning and Material Development, and Fundamentals of Teaching English to Young Learners. In these courses, the student teachers have a chance to observe their peers. This situation has urged the researcher to carry out a study on *"The effectiveness of peer observation for pre-service education in blended learning"* to shed light on the effectiveness of peer observation as a valuable tool for enhancing the quality of pre-service education within the blended learning environment. Besides, by investigating the outcomes and implications of peer observation practices, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding innovative educational practices during times of crisis.

2. Literature review

2.1. Observation in the Context of Teaching

Observation in the context of teaching is considered "a particularly worthwhile learning opportunity in professional learning and in

teacher education" (Lily Orland-Barak and Shosh Leshe, 2009, p. 22) or a practical teaching method (Blackmore, 2005) to evaluate teachers' proficiency which is similar to the viewpoint about observation proposed by Bailey (1991). To be observed is even regarded as a frightening experience that uncovers an individual's shortcomings. However, observation could be a great experience if it is connected to personal and professional development and is carried out in a collaborative culture of mutual trust. A systematic peer observation program is one method for "opening up" classrooms so that teachers may share ideas and learn from one another (Lasagabaster, D. and Sierra, J. M. (2011, p.451).

Furthermore, many researchers deemed observation the systematic data acquisition and analysis for the long-term vision of instructional strategies. Moreover, extending definitions are given by previous researchers who supposed observation solely took place in class. However, Yuan, R. and Lee, I. (2014) judged that it was a structured or casual observation of teaching in study halls and other learning settings. In addition, observation, often done by fellow teachers, professionals, or pedagogical specialists, is frequently utilized to give instructors constructive advice to ameliorate their classroom management and teaching skills. Teachers are also often observed by school administrators as an extension of the formal job appraisal system. Therefore, it is an indispensable component for sustainable educational growth (Lasagabaster, D. and Sierra, J. M.; 2011; Koellner, K., and Greenblatt, D., 2018).

Regarding the brief history of classroom observation, peer observation appears to have developed from four distinct instructional traditions about classroom observation: Teacher training, Research into teaching behaviours, Comparative methodological research, and Clinical supervision (Blackmore, 2005). First, in terms of teaching training, classroom observation by training supervisors has been used as an evaluation assessment of the competence of teacher-trainees for at least the past 50 years. Second, regarding research into teaching behaviours, Bellack et al. (1966) proposed "interactional analysis"as a

method to detect classroom behaviour based on monitoring real instructor and student activities in the classroom. Actions were recorded at regular intervals and classified using a set of predefined categories. Flanders' research was the first of many that attempted to determine effective teacher behaviours through objective data collection and analysis. Third, relating to comparative methodological study, systematic classroom observation has become a valuable source of information for assessing the efficacy of various teaching methods. The 'Pennsylvania Project,' conducted in the 1960s to examine the efficacy of the audio-lingual technique in language courses, was one of the first such investigations (Allwright, 1988). Fourth, clinical supervision commenced with a number of educators and has grown in popularity. Goldhammer (1969) was most well-known for his work as a professor at Harvard University in the 1950s. It focused onpsychological treatment approaches to offer teachers a more effective method of learning about their classroom behaviours than the usual approach of having "classroom visitors." In brief, regardless of various origins, classroom observation may be a helpful tool and a highly beneficial source of professional growth for both the observer and the observee under the proper circumstances (Gebhard, J. G., 1990).

According to Gebhard (1990), there are six distinctive characteristic features of peer observation:

- The observation occurs in a non-threatening, helpful environment built on shared, professional cooperation.

- It is a procedure-based, systematic approach to observation. Although individual teachers may conduct peer observation independently, the program management is more likely to provide it.

- Teachers should have as much decision-making authority as possible in the process. They could, for example, pick their observers, decide which areas of their classroom behaviours or

activities can be the focus of the observation, and decide on any follow-up steps.

• All comments are insightful rather than critical; it is constructive rather than evaluative.

• Observations are scientific rather than intuitive, and data is documented in measured rather than subjective values.

• Since the program manager may have launched the exercise, it should remain as unnoticeable as possible. It may also be required for the organization to facilitate the peer observation session by scheduling support activities such as arranging a workshop for participants to clarify the event's aims.

2.1.1. The Importance of peer observation to the professional development of Student Teachers

According to Guskey, T. R., and Yoon, K.S. (2009), a field experience before the last year of full-time student teaching is often included in American teacher education programs because of the importance of realistic classroom experiences. Teachers need these early field experiences to help them develop their profession. Micro-teach courses, thus, are designed to help pre-service teachers improve and practice their teaching abilities, particularly via careful peer observation.

The findings of the study conducted by Nunan, D, and Bailey, K. M. (2009) emphasized the significance of valuable techniques for trainee teachers when observed and observed by their cooperating teachers and classmates. In particular, classroom management techniques and pedagogy were analyzed as two remarkable achievements for pre-service teachers. Regarding techniques for classroom discipline, trainee teachers obtained eleven effective solutions to cope with related problems in class. Particularly (a) delivering positive reinforcement to students who were on target, (b) moving around across the classroom, (c) having "eyes on all sides of your head."

(p. 106), (d) addressing learners who are not listening carefully, (e) remaining relaxed, (f) fixing off-task behaviours, (g) modifying activities to confront behavioural issues, (h) utilizing wait time for additional information, (i) requesting students to volunteer to lower asking out, (j) keeping learners occupied, and (k) thoroughly supervising students in the back of the classroom are reflected as practical remedies collected from the qualitative data of the study. In terms of achievements in pedagogy, four elements were mentioned, namely (a) competence in public speaking, notably with the use of voice inflexion/intonation, (b) self-confidence and passion in teaching periods, (c) concise instructions for students, (d) specific and general ideas about teaching concepts.

Besides, achievements regarding teaching practices received much attention from researchers. Freeman (1996) stated that language teachers should raise their awareness of how their teaching knowledge and cognitive processes are learned through teacher education, especially classroom practices. Besides, according to Buyukkarci, K. (2014), microteaching and observing peers' micro-teach performances were considered as "a prospective teachers' teaching practice" (p.771). In other words, practices in micro-teach assignments are termed "teaching under microscope" (p.771), which refers to the student teachers' practice of teaching and experience. In addition, Richards, J. C., and Lockhart, C. (1991) was in accord with this viewpoint that peer observation in learning to teach might assist trainee instructors in segmenting their practices and determining the most viable teaching approach.

Atkinson, D. J., and Bolt, S. (2010) generally stated that peer observation in micro-teach courses served as the bridge connecting theoretical and practical aspects.

2.1.2. Peer observation for preservice education in blended learning

Peer observation has gained significant attention in the field of education as a valuable tool for promoting professional development

and enhancing teaching practices (Gebhard, J. G., 1990; Van den Grift, W., 2007). The integration of peer observation in blended learning environments has been recognized as particularly beneficial for preservice students, offering them opportunities to engage in reflective practice and develop their teaching skills (Hollins, E. R., 2011; Koellner, K., & Greenblatt, D., 2018).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to blended learning approaches, combining online and in-person instruction, in educational settings worldwide (Konig, J., & Roland, M., 2012). As preservice education programs also adapted to this new reality, the implementation of peer observation became even more crucial to support the professional growth and development of preservice teachers in blended learning environments.

Research studies have explored the benefits and challenges of peer observation for preservice education during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Andrews et al. (2020) investigated the experiences of preservice teachers engaged in virtual peer observation and found that it promoted reflection, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. Through the observation of their peers' online teaching practices and subsequent discussions, preservice teachers were able to enhance their own instructional strategies and adapt them to the online context.

Furthermore, the use of technology-mediated peer observation tools and platforms has been identified as a valuable resource in supporting preservice teachers during remote learning British Council. (2011). These digital platforms enable preservice teachers to engage in virtual observations, provide feedback, and engage in reflective discussions, fostering a sense of community and collaboration despite physical distance.The literature highlights the importance of peer observation in preservice education during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it facilitates the acquisition of new teaching skills, encourages reflection, and promotes a supportive learning environment. By engaging in peer observation practices, preservice teachers can

develop their pedagogical knowledge, adapt to the challenges of blended learning, and build a network of peers for ongoing support and professional growth.

2.2. Previous studies

In the study conducted by Mihaela Badea (2017), it was suggested that an integrated approach incorporating perspectives from the teacher, learner, and observer would enhance the instructor's and observer's understanding of the significance of classroom observation in fostering the growth of prospective educators. By enabling individuals to broaden their perspectives on classroom goals and events, this approach could facilitate the exploration of new avenues for developing effective teaching and learning strategies. Building on this insight, the present research seeks to examine the relationship between student teachers and their ELT Methodology instructors, who are responsible for training future educators in the art of teaching.

Joana Salazar (2018) investigated how classroom observation influenced pre-service teachers' awareness of pedagogical professional development. During a two-month classroom observation period, systematic and unstructured classroom observations were employed to assess teacher knowledge and the process prospective English instructors go through. Based on a questionnaire and journals, their findings demonstrate that the participants (N=171) reportedly improved their critical thinking and fundamental understanding of teaching processes such as motivating students, utilizing appropriate EFL approaches, and managing the classroom. The student teachers' attitudes and identities as English instructors evolved as a result of an extensive classroom observation experience.

In the context of Vietnam, particularly in ULIS, there are very few topic-related studies about the value of peer observation in learning to teach. After exploring different sources, the researcher only found one related valuable research by Thuy (2011) who investigated the problem: "Beginning teachers' observation of peers -

the values, limitations, and suggestions from insiders' perspectives". By conducting the preliminary interviews with five novice teachers at FELTE-ULIS and carrying out the post-observation conferences, the follow-up interviews together with the reflective journals, the study (Thuy, 2011) answered three main research questions. The findings illustrated some benefits of peer observation as perceived by participants to their professional development; several limitations of peer observation, including time-consuming aspects, difficulties of psychological influences, and constructive feedback during observation. The study also made some suggestions for using peer observation in this context.

The limited research conducted on the implementation of peer observation practices in pre-service teacher education in Vietnam especially in blended learning highlights the need for further investigation in this area. This study aims to address this research gap by examining the outcomes and implications of peer observation as an innovative educational practice, particularly in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring the effectiveness and potential benefits of peer observation, this research seeks to expand the existing body of knowledge on effective teaching strategies and contribute to the field of English teacher education.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research context

The current study was conducted during COVID-19, collection data through interviews with 281 senior pre-service students enrolled in the English Language Teacher Education program at the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE) – University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) to explore the students' perceptions and perspectives on their experiences of engaging in peer observation in the context of online learning. The study also aimed to investigate the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with this particular educational setting.

3.2. Participants

This research study involved the participation of 281 senior pre-service students who were pursuing a major in English Language Teacher Education at the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE) – University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS). FELTE-ULIS is recognized as one of the leading higher educational institutions in Vietnam for training language teachers. The students enrolled in the English Language Teacher Education program at FELTE engage in various majoring courses, such as Techniques and Practices in English Language Teaching, Lesson Planning and Material Development, and Fundamentals of Teaching English to Young Learners. Within these courses, students have the opportunity to participate in micro-teaching activities as part of their assessment. These activities involve simulated teaching sessions where students assume the roles of both observees and observers. The micro-teaching sessions, particularly in the online setting, provide valuable opportunities for pre-service teachers to gain new insights into the teaching and learning process. Given the significance of peer observation in the development of teaching skills and learning outcomes, this research was conducted to investigate the value of peer observation in the learning-to-teach process for pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS. The aim was to enhance the quality of teaching and learning experiences at the institution.

The participants in the study completed survey questionnaires to gather quantitative data. Subsequently, eight respondents were randomly selected from the pool of participants and invited to take part in interviews. The interviews provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences related to peer observation in the context of learning to teach.

The selection of participants and the use of both survey questionnaires and interviews ensured a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and insights of pre-service teachers regarding the value and impact of peer observation. By examining their experiences

and perspectives, this research aimed to contribute to the enhancement of teacher education practices and the overall quality of instruction at FELTE-ULIS.

3.3. Research question

This research aims to investigate the value of observing peers at FELTE-ULIS to student teachers throughout the teaching curriculum. To achieve this aim, the following research questions are put forward:

- *What do the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS learn from the online peer observation process regarding the practices and techniques used to teach English in blended learning?*

- *What are the pre-service teachers at FELTE- ULIS's perceptionstowards the advantages and disadvantages of the peer observation process in blended learning?*

3.4. Data collection instruments

The research design of this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research problem, as it allows for a broader range of insights and perspectives (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative method is utilized to provide objective data analysis through the use of descriptive statistics, ensuring the reliability of findings with a large sample size (Burns, 2000; Balsley, 1970). On the other hand, the qualitative method allows for a more subjective exploration of participants' thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors through interviews, observations, and other qualitative data collection techniques (Creswell, 2014; Denzin, 1989). By combining both methods, the study benefits from the strengths of each approach, enhancing the overall rigor and validity of the research.

For data collection, a Google Form questionnaire was employed to gather quantitative data, while virtual interviews were conducted

online using platforms such as Google Meet or Zoom. The collected data from both surveys and interviews were inputted, refined, and analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 20.0 for quantitative analysis. Additionally, the qualitative data from interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy during the analysis process.

4. Findings and discussion

Of the 281 senior pre-service students majoring in English Language Teacher Education at the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE) – University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) participated in the research, there are 227 females (80.7%) and 54 males (19.3%).
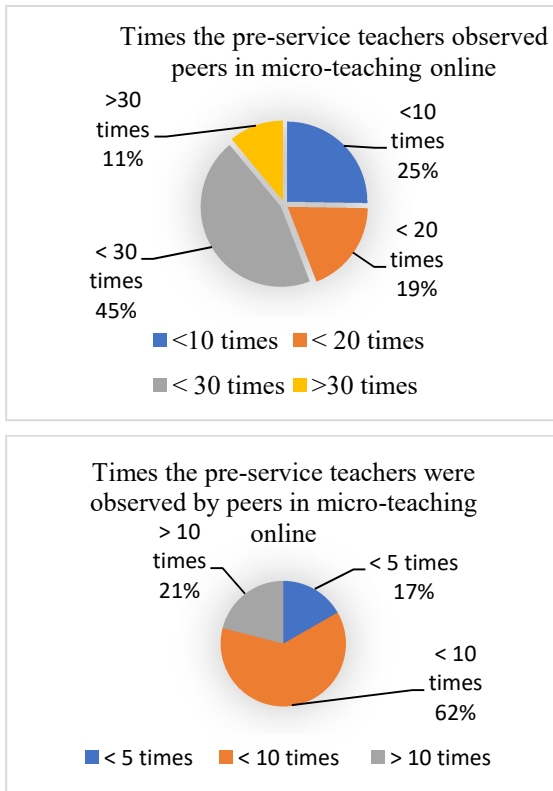

Figure 1: Times the pre-service teachers observed and were observed by peers in micro-teaching sessions

For the questions about how often they observed and were observed by peers in micro-teaching assignments in class, more than 75% observed their peers more than 10 times, and 83% admitted being observed by their peers more than 5 times.

4.1. Responses to research question 01: *What do the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS learn from the online peer observation process regarding the practices and techniques used to teach English in blended learning?*

This section provides the findings related to the first research question, which explores the practices and techniques used to teach English that participants learned during peer observation in the context of online learning. The study focuses on three key areas: lesson planning, classroom management techniques, and teaching techniques. These areas are integral components of the English Language Teaching (ELT) courses undertaken by student teachers. Previous research studies have also indicated that pre-service teachers can acquire valuable knowledge and skills in these areas through peer observation in blended learning settings.

4.1.1. Lesson Planning

Table 1 presents the percentages, mean, and standard deviation of fourth-year student teachers' responses to various items related to Lesson Planning, ranging from Strongly Disagree (S.D.), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (S.A.).The table indicates that the majority of questionnaire respondents agreed that the peer observation process was valuable and supported them in their lesson planning. Specifically, 82.3% of participants agreed that peer observation helped them gain more ideas to develop lesson plans, especially in the context of online learning. Additionally, 76.6% of the student teachers agreed that peer observation assisted them in preparing engaged activities, such as designing educational quizzes and interactive games. Ideas for teaching for online teaching received agreement from 72% of the respondents.

Table 1: Lesson Planning gained by pre-service teachers at FELTE - ULIS in blended learning

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std.
	S.D.	D	N	A	SA		
Ideas for teaching	17.8	10.0	23.4	42.7	29.3	4.25	1.48
Engaged activities and slides improvement	13.5	14.6	23.5	56.1	20.5	4.40	1.2
Lesson objectives development	17.8	11.0	17.8	37.8	44.5	4.67	1.14

In terms of disagreement, approximately half of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the three statements, ranging from 27.8% for Ideas for teaching to 28.9% for Lesson objectives development. Furthermore, 28.1% of the participants expressed uncertainty about developing appropriate Engaged activities and slides improvement.

Table 2 also presents the overall mean and standard deviation of the Lesson Planning area as perceived by the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS during blended learning. The results indicated relatively consistent mean scores across items, ranging from 4.25 to 4.67. The Likert scale used in the survey ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "Strongly Agree" and 5 represented "Strongly Disagree." Thus, the respondents appeared to hold optimistic views regarding what they could learn from peer observation in relation to lesson planning. However, the standard deviations for these three items exceeded 1 (1.48 for Ideas for teaching, 1.20 for Engaged activities and slides improvement, and 1.14 for Lesson objectives development), indicating variations in the responses reported by the participants.

4.1.2. Teaching and Classroom management techniques

According to the results presented in Table 2, it is evident that the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS generally agreed that they had

gained valuable teaching and classroom management techniques through peer observation in the online learning environment. The data reveals the participants' perspectives on the various techniques learned, as well as the levels of agreement, disagreement, and uncertainty associated with each technique.

Table 2: Teaching and classroom management techniques gained by pre-service teachers in blended learning at FELTE - ULIS

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std.
	S.D.	D	N	A	SA		
Approaches for integrating technology tools and platforms to enhance teaching and learning in online environments	11.0	12.1	24.2	38.8	13.9	3.3	1.21
Techniques for facilitating student engagement and active participation in online classes	13.9	11.0	12.1	32.0	31.0	3.6	1.33
Approaches for adapting teaching materials and resources to the online environment	10.0	12.5	23.8	38.1	15.7	3.4	1.34
Strategies for promoting collaborative learning and group work in virtual classrooms	14.9	10.7	10.0	33.1	31.3	3.6	1.29
Methods for providing timely and constructive feedback to students in online settings	9.6	12.5	24.6	39.5	13.9	3.4	1.36
Techniques for establishing classroom rules and procedures in the online environment	12.8	11.4	13.2	38.1	24.6	3.5	1.26
Techniques for creating a supportive and inclusive online learning community	12.8	16.0	13.2	40.6	17.4	3.3	1.29

In terms of agreement, *Techniques for facilitating student engagement and active participation in online classes received the highest percentage of agreement*, with 64.4% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. This indicates that the pre-service teachers recognized the importance of using effective strategies to engage students actively in online learning. Similarly, *Techniques for establishing classroom rules and procedures in the online environment* were regarded positively by 62.7% of participants, suggesting the significance of establishing clear guidelines for online classrooms. *Techniques for creating a supportive and inclusive online learning community*, *Approaches for adapting teaching materials and resources to the online environment*, and *Approaches for integrating technology tools and platforms to enhance teaching and learning in online environments* also garnered agreement from more than half of the respondents, with percentages of 58.0%, 53.8%, and 53.7% respectively. These findings highlight the value placed on creating an inclusive and technologically enhanced online learning environment.

On the other hand, the proportions of respondents choosing "disagree" and "strongly disagree" for all the items in these areas were relatively similar, ranging from 22.1% to 28.8%. Among them, the highest level of disagreement was observed for *Techniques for creating a supportive and inclusive online learning community*, with 28.8% expressing disagreement or strong disagreement. This indicates that some pre-service teachers may have reservations about their ability to foster a supportive and inclusive online learning community. The highest level of uncertainty was observed for *Strategies for promoting collaborative learning and group work in virtual classrooms*, with 14.9% of respondents being unsure about these techniques. In contrast, *Methods for providing timely and constructive feedback to students in online settings* received the lowest level of uncertainty, with only 9.6% expressing uncertainty.

Analyzing the standard deviation values in Table 4.2, it can be observed that the given items exhibit relatively stable fluctuations

(ranging from 1.21 to 1.34) compared to the previous table (ranging from 1.14 to 1.48). This suggests that the pre-service teachers' opinions about what they could learn from peer observation were not consistently aligned, indicating some level of discrepancy among their viewpoints.Overall, the findings from this analysis indicate that peer observation in the online learning setting has provided pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS with valuable teaching and classroom management techniques. However, it is important to acknowledge the variations in agreement, disagreement, and uncertainty levels among the participants, emphasizing the need for further exploration and support in certain areas to enhance the effectiveness of online teaching and learning practices.

4.2. Responses to research question2: *What are their perceptions towards the advantages and disadvantages of the peer observation process in blended learning*?

This part presents the answers to research question 2. Sub-parts show the advantages and disadvantages of peer observation in learning to teach.

4.2.1. Advantages of peer observation in preservice education in blended learning

According to the results of the interviews conducted in this study, several advantages of peer observation in preservice education in blended learning were identified. The majority of respondents strongly agreed that peer observation encouraged reflection about their teaching practices.

"Peer observation really made me reflect on my teaching methods. It allowed me to see areas where I could improve and think critically about my instructional strategies." (S#06)

Furthermore, the participants expressed that peer observation facilitated constructive feedback conversations among pre-service teachers.

"During peer observation, we had meaningful discussions and provided each other with valuable feedback. It was a supportive environment where we could learn from each other." (S#02)

This aspect of peer observation fosters a supportive and collaborative learning environment, where pre-service teachers can provide and receive feedback from their peers. The feedback received during peer observation helps them identify areas for growth and provides valuable insights into their pedagogical techniques.

"Peer observation gave me the opportunity to receive feedback from my peers. Their insights and suggestions helped me refine my teaching techniques and become a better teacher." (S#05)

The student teachers also acknowledged the positive impact of peer observation on their professional development. They believed that engaging in peer observation allowed them to gain a wide range of pedagogical techniques and expand their repertoire of teaching strategies.

"Through peer observation, I was exposed to different teaching methods and strategies. It broadened my understanding of effective teaching techniques and gave me more tools to use in the classroom." (S#03)

Additionally, peer observation was found to enhance cooperation among pre-service teachers. The participants perceived that peer observation improved the atmosphere of collaboration and teamwork, enabling them to share ideas, resources, and experiences related to teaching.

"Peer observation created a sense of collaboration among us. We shared teaching ideas, materials, and supported each other in our professional growth." (S#05)

Another advantage highlighted by the student teachers was the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge into practice through peer

observation. They recognized that peer observation provided them with a platform to bridge the gap between theory and practice by witnessing how teaching theories and concepts were implemented in real classroom settings.

> *"Observing my friends' teaching helped me connect what I learned in my coursework to real classroom situations. It was a chance to see how theories translate into actual teaching practices." (S#04)*

Moreover, the student teachers expressed that peer observation played a significant role in boosting their confidence.

> *"Getting positive feedback from my peers during peer observation gave me more confidence in my teaching abilities. It reassured me that I'm on the right track." (S#07)*

By observing and receiving feedback from their peers, they gained validation and affirmation of their teaching abilities, which contributed to their overall confidence in the teaching profession.

> *"Knowing that my peers value my teaching and seeing their positive reactions to my lessons boosted my confidence. It motivated me to continue growing as a teacher." (S#08)*

In summary, the advantages of peer observation in preservice education in blended learning, as identified through the interviews, encompassed fostering reflection, encouraging constructive feedback conversations, facilitating the acquisition of pedagogical techniques, promoting cooperation among pre-service teachers, providing opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge into practice, and boosting confidence in teaching abilities. These findings highlight the positive impact of peer observation on the professional development and growth of pre-service teachers.

4.2.2. Disadvantages of peer observation in preservice education in blended learning

According to the results of the interviews conducted in this study, the disadvantages of peer observation in preservice education in blended learning were also highlighted. The interview data provided insights into the obstacles encountered during the observation process. All of the respondents shared several disadvantages of peer observation in learning to teach.

One common concern expressed by the interviewees was the lack of an authentic teaching environment during peer observation. They felt that the presence of their classmates as students in the lesson did not replicate the real teaching environment, which hindered their ability to showcase their natural teaching performance.

"Because I knew my classmates were acting as students in the lesson, I didn't feel like it was a 'real' teaching environment. It created barriers for me to demonstrate my natural teaching abilities." (S#04)

"There were classmates who had a high level of English, so it could be challenging for me to handle real-life situations in the classroom. I may not have fully understood my students' obstacles and how to address them." (S#08)

In addition, the interviewees also shared concerns about the peer comments received after peer observation. They felt that the feedback provided by their peers was often general and lacked specific insights.

"Giving constructive feedback is an essential part of the peer observation process. However, I often felt disappointed when receiving general comments or common feedback from my classmates. It seemed like they were not fully engaged in our group's micro-teaching. Therefore, I found this part to be less helpful than I expected." (S#03:)

"Our class did not have a checklist or clear criteria to evaluate our peers' presentations. This could contribute to superficial comments and an illogical approach to giving feedback." (S#02)

Furthermore, some participants believed that peer observation could be ineffective due to a lack of commitment and constructive feedback from peers, as well as time constraints for post-observation discussions. They also raised concerns about the lack of clear guidelines in the process of conducting peer observation, peers' sensitivity in giving feedback (such as being judgmental or adopting authoritative attitudes), and issues related to peer pressure or the fear of being criticized.

Among these drawbacks, S#08 expressed specific concern about the issues related to peer pressure or the fear of being attacked during peer observation.

Despite the advantages discussed earlier, these disadvantages highlight the challenges and limitations of peer observation in preservice education. It is crucial to address these concerns and provide support and guidance to ensure that peer observation is a meaningful and effective learning experience for pre-service teachers.

5. Discussion

In short, the data collected from the survey with 281 participants and the interview with eight of them helped the researcher obtain different opinions, which answered the two research questions aforementioned: (1)*What do the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS learn from the online peer observation process regarding the practices and techniques used to teach English in blended learning?* (2) *What are the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS's perceptions towards the advantages and disadvantages of the peer observation process in blended learning?*

Notably, the pre-service teachers highlighted several key advantages they experienced in online learning through peer observation. They found that peer observation helped them gain more ideas for teaching, specifically in the area of lesson planning. Additionally, they mentioned that peer observation supported them in organizing classroom activities, particularly in the realm of classroom management techniques. Furthermore, the student teachers emphasized that peer observation exposed them to a variety of teaching activities, enhancing their teaching techniques.

The benefits of peer observation were evident across different levels of the student teachers' learning to teach. The sub-skills and categories within the three areas of practices and techniques (i.e., lesson planning, classroom management, and teaching techniques) received varying levels of agreement. Notably, a significant proportion of the trainee teachers expressed that peer observation allowed them to learn diverse teaching activities for different stages of the lesson and effectively utilize techniques during the entire teaching process.

The findings align with previous research conducted by Fika (2017) and Danielson (2007), indicating that peer observation in microteaching sessions enhances the teaching skills of student teachers in effectively responding to classroom situations. These studies also emphasized the positive impact of peer observation on student teachers' classroom management and lesson preparation abilities.

Furthermore, the observations provide valuable pedagogical elements for trainee teachers, including the importance of establishing a conducive tone in teaching, demonstrating passion and confidence, delivering clear instructions to students, and engaging in creative lesson planning. These components contribute to the overall development of effective teaching practices among pre-service teachers.

The results of the study indicate that organizing classroom activities is a significant aspect of classroom management. This finding

aligns with previous research conducted by Nuthall and Alton-Lee (1990) and Tyler et al. (2010), who suggested that classroom observation using a proactive approach had a positive influence on students' development in terms of activity management. The findings also highlight the value of peer observation in providing pre-service teachers with valuable pedagogical techniques and activities that they can incorporate into their own teaching practices.

The findings regarding the second research question revealed high levels of agreement with statements such as "*Peer observation encourages reflection about my own teaching,*" "*Peer observation encourages constructive feedback conversations among pre-service teachers,*" and "*Peer observation helps me gain a wide range of pedagogical techniques*." These findings align with previous research conducted in the context of online learning.

For instance, Wallace (1991) emphasized the reflective model as a prevalent approach to observation for learning, even in online settings. Tenenberg (2016) highlighted that peer observation in the online environment enables student teachers to engage in "double-seeing" by comparing their own virtual classrooms to those of their peers. This reflective process enhances their teaching practice and instructional strategies.

Furthermore, researchers such as Sadtono (1991), Munson (1998), Richards (1998), Richards and Farrell (2005), and Race et al. (2009) have recognized the importance of observation in fostering self-awareness among online instructors. They have emphasized how online peer observation provides valuable reflective insights into one's own teaching practices and offers impartial feedback on both strengths and areas for improvement. This reflective perspective helps pre-service teachers gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they may encounter in the online learning environment and develop effective strategies to address them.

When considering the limitations of peer observation in the context of learning to teach online, a significant proportion of participants (more than one-third) expressed agreement regarding several drawbacks. These included the ineffective implementation of peer observation due to factors such as a lack of commitment and constructive feedback from peers, the absence of clear guidelines in the peer observation process, time constraints for post-observation discussions, peers' sensitivity in giving feedback, and the presence of peer pressure or fear of criticism. These factors, highlighted in the qualitative data, were identified as fundamental weaknesses.

Thuy (2011) conducted a study that also identified various limitations of peer observation, which resonate with the findings in this study. These limitations encompassed time-consuming aspects, challenges related to psychological influences, and difficulties in receiving constructive feedback during the observation process. Additionally, the absence of professional guidance for teachers was recognized as a negative factor impacting pre-service teachers' experiences during the observation process, as noted by Nancy et al. (2005) and Joana (2018). These researchers emphasized the importance of providing guidance to pre-service teachers prior to peer observation and implementing a logical evaluation form with clear criteria to enhance the effectiveness of the observation process.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the survey and interview data enabled the researcher to elicit diverse perspectives from 281 participants to investigate what the pre-service teachers at FELTE-ULIS learn from the online peer observation process in terms of the practices and techniques used to teach English in blended learning and their perceptions towards the advantages and disadvantages of the peer observation process

Regarding the advantages of peer observation in an online learning setting, the student teachers identified its benefits at various

levels of their learning to teach. Within the three areas of practices and techniques, namely lesson planning, classroom management, and teaching techniques, different levels of agreement were observed. In terms of lesson planning, a significant number of student teachers acknowledged that peer observation helped them generate new ideas for their teaching activities. Additionally, over half of the participants agreed that peer observation assisted them in developing appropriate lesson objectives and preparing engaging slides and handouts.

Concerning classroom management, more than three-fifths of the student teachers reported that peer observation enhanced their ability to effectively manage class activities, provide clear instructions, and offer valuable feedback. In the realm of teaching techniques, a considerable proportion of trainee teachers expressed that peer observation provided them with valuable insights into a variety of teaching activities at different stages of a lesson, enabling them to effectively apply techniques during the instructional process. These findings align with the responses obtained during the interviews, further reinforcing the perceived advantages of peer observation.

Furthermore, the student teachers' responses to the second research question highlighted the benefits of peer observation in encouraging self-reflection, fostering constructive feedback conversations among pre-service teachers, and facilitating the acquisition of a diverse range of pedagogical techniques.

However, it is worth noting that certain limitations of peer observation in the learning-to-teach process were also identified. More than one-third of the participants agreed that the effectiveness of peer observation could be hindered by factors such as a lack of commitment and constructive feedback from peers, ambiguous guidelines for conducting peer observation, time constraints for post-observation discussions, peers' sensitivity in giving feedback, and the presence of peer pressure or fear of criticism. The qualitative data further emphasized the shortcomings associated with a lack of constructive

peer comments and the absence of an evaluation form in the peer observation process, underscoring these as fundamental weaknesses.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several suggestions can be put forward for student teachers in an online learning setting. Firstly, it is crucial for student teachers to recognize the significance of peer observation in micro-teaching, as it has a profound impact on their understanding of teacher values and practices (Carolina, 2020). Therefore, paying close attention to even the smallest details of micro-teaching can greatly enhance their learning experience (Higgins and Nicholl, 2003).Secondly, it is recommended that peers provide constructive comments with a friendly and supportive attitude during peer observation. The study revealed that a significant number of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that peer observation can be a non-learning experience due to the lack of sensitivity exhibited by peers in giving feedback.

By fostering a positive and constructive feedback culture, student teachers can create a supportive environment that encourages meaningful growth and improvement. Peers should strive to provide specific and actionable feedback that focuses on both strengths and areas for improvement, promoting a reflective and growth-oriented mindset among their colleagues.

In the context of online learning, the success of peer observation relies heavily on the guidance provided by lecturers and the availability of clear evaluation criteria. Scholars such as Hollingsworth (1994), Kagan & Tippins (1991), and Gawande (2011) have emphasized the importance of adopting a qualitative approach to classroom observation, incorporating a checklist, and offering constructive pedagogical guidance from supervisors. These elements are crucial in elevating the teaching quality of student teachers and the effectiveness of peer observation.

Therefore, it is strongly recommended that lecturers provide clear instructions to student teachers before engaging in peer observation.

They should furnish a checklist with well-defined criteria and facilitate a discussion around these criteria, enabling student teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of what to observe and evaluate during the process.

Furthermore, insights obtained from private conversations with eight interviewees, along with the analysis of quantitative data, indicated that some participants experienced boredom and exhaustion when simultaneously observing four 40-minute peer lessons. This could potentially lead to distraction and hinder the achievement of the intended goals of essential courses such as Lesson Planning and Material Development, Practices and Techniques in English Language Teaching, or Teaching English for Young Learners. As a result, it was recommended that student teachers be allowed to observe a reduced number of lessons simultaneously, such as two or three. This adjustment would enable them to focus more effectively on observing their peers and providing valuable feedback.

Additionally, some participants expressed the view that it could be beneficial for lecturers to incentivize constructive and high-quality comments during peer observation. Introducing bonus points or recognition for insightful feedback would encourage students to concentrate more on their peers' teaching and discourage the tendency to provide superficial comments.

Implementing these recommendations would undoubtedly enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of peer observation in the online learning environment, fostering a culture of meaningful observation, feedback, and continuous improvement among student teachers. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, which include time constraints and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conducting research within a limited time frame of three months can restrict the depth and breadth of data collection and analysis. Due

to time constraints, it may not have been possible to observe a large number of peer observation sessions or conduct extensive follow-up interviews with participants. This limitation could impact the generalizability of the findings and the depth of insights gained.

Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented challenges to education systems worldwide, including the implementation of online learning and peer observation processes. The unique circumstances and rapid transition to online environments may have influenced the dynamics and outcomes of the peer observation process in ways that were not present in traditional face-to-face settings. It is important to consider the contextual factors associated with the pandemic when interpreting the findings.

Despite these limitations, this research provides valuable insights into the practices and techniques used to teach English in blended learning, as well as the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards the advantages and disadvantages of the peer observation process. The recommendations proposed based on the research findings can serve as a foundation for further exploration and improvement of peer observation practices in online learning environments. Future research with longer timeframes and diverse contexts can further enhance our understanding of the benefits and challenges of implementing peer observation in blended learning.

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