Teachers' perceptions of Reciprocal Peer Observation

Percepciones de los docentes sobre la observación recíproca entre iguales

https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2023-402-601

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Abstract

In the last decade, there has been a growing interest in peer observation as a mechanism for teachers' professional development. Based on a reciprocal peer observation intervention, the aims of this study are: 1) to examine teachers' perceptions of reciprocal peer observation; 2) to analyze differences in perceptions as a function of whether teachers were acting as observers or observees; 3) to investigate how writing the post-observation and final reports affects teachers' perceptions of the observation process; and 4) to determine whether teachers' initial perceptions of resistance towards peer observation were reduced after the process of reciprocal peer observation. To that end, a survey was administered after the intervention to 224 teachers (137 in primary education and 87 in secondary education) from 15 public schools in Spain. Results showed that most of the teachers had a positive perception of reciprocal peer observation, as it had helped them to reflect on their own practices and those of their peers. The analysis of differences between the roles showed that observers tended to value the identification of areas to improve their practice, and observees tended to view,

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

feedback as an opportunity for teaching improvement. Results show that reciprocal peer observation is an excellent opportunity for professional development when teachers perform both roles. Results also underline the importance of writing reports during RPO to identify teaching improvement goals. In addition, after the intervention, teachers indicated reduced resistance to peer observation, showing that a reciprocal, collaborative model can defeat the negative emotions that often emerge in peer observation. Recommendations are suggested for the implementation of this practice in school settings.

Keywords: reciprocal peer observation of teaching, teacher professional development; peer learning, collaborative model, primary and secondary education.

Resumen

En la última década, ha habido un creciente interés en la observación entre iguales como mecanismo para el desarrollo profesional docente. A partir de una intervención basada en una observación recíproca de la enseñanza, los objetivos del presente estudio son: 1) examinar las percepciones de los docentes sobre la observación recíproca entre iguales; 2) analizar las diferencias que perciben los docentes cuando desempeñan los roles de observador y observado; 3) conocer cómo impacta la escritura del informe de post-observación y final en las percepciones del proceso de observación; y 4) identificar si después de la práctica de observación recíproca los docentes reducen su percepción inicial de resistencias hacia la observación entre iguales. Para ello, al finalizar la intervención se administró una encuesta a 224 docentes (137 de primaria y 87 de secundaria) de 15 escuelas públicas en España. Los resultados mostraron que la gran mayoría de los docentes tuvieron una percepción positiva de la observación recíproca ya que les ayudó a reflexionar sobre sus prácticas y las de sus compañeros. El análisis de las diferencias entre los roles de observador y de observado mostró que en el rol de observador los docentes valoraron identificar áreas para mejorar su práctica, y en el de observados, el feedback como oportunidad de mejora, evidenciando que la observación recíproca es una excelente oportunidad para el desarrollo profesional docente en ambos roles. Los resultados también subrayan la importancia de escribir informes para identificar objetivos de mejora de la práctica docente. Además, después de la intervención, los docentes indicaron una reducción de sus resistencias iniciales hacia la observación entre iguales, lo que muestra que un modelo colaborativo recíproco puede disminuir las emociones negativas que a menudo surgen ante esta práctica. Se sugieren recomendaciones para la implementación de esta práctica en la escuela.

Palabras clave: observación recíproca entre iguales, desarrollo profesional docente, aprendizaje entre iguales, modelo colaborativo, educación primaria y secundaria.

Introduction

Contemporary teachers increasingly need lifelong learning to face the growing changes and challenges of 21st century education (OECD, 2020). The latest TALIS report indicates that teachers believe that collaborative forms of professional development, as peer observation, have the greatest impact on their teaching practices. However, only 9% of teachers report providing observation-based feedback to colleagues at least once a month (OECD, 2020). In Spain, the percentage decreases to 5 % (González, 2020). Despite the current need to expand this kind of professional development in the school context, research into the collaborative reciprocal model of peer observation, in which teachers perform both roles (observer and observee), is still relatively underdeveloped, as it is, unfortunately, its practice in the schools. The focus of this study is to analyze in-service teachers' perceptions of reciprocal peer observation as a mechanism for their collaborative professional development.

Teachers' Collaborative Professional Development through Reciprocal Peer Observation

Reciprocal Peer Observation (RPO) involves a pair of teachers with similar degrees of experience and status who mutually agree to observe one or more pedagogical aspects of one another's practice. They use instruments such as an observational grid and/or video recordings to collect evidence of their teaching practices and to offer mutual and constructive feedback with the final goal of improving the teaching practice of both teachers (Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2023; Duran et al., 2020; O'Leary and Savage, 2020).

It is important to distinguish this reciprocal and symmetrical collaborative model of peer observation from other models of peer observation that are asymmetrical, where the observer is an "expert" or a teacher with higher status, and not reciprocal in which the observer is not in turn observed in his or her classroom (Gosling, 2005; 2014; Fletcher, 2018; O'Leary, 2020).

Results of previous research indicate that RPO is a promising training strategy with numerous benefits for teachers' learning when they perform both roles, observee and observer (Roselló and De la Iglesia, 2021;

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

Versátegui and González, 2019). Observees can receive constructive feedback to improve self-efficacy, self-reflection and self-confidence in their teaching (Bruce and Ross, 2008; Kohut et al., 2007; Motallebzadeh, et al., 2017; O'Learly and Savage, 2020; Shousha, 2015). Observers can learn new methodologies by watching how a colleague manages a classroom (Hendry and Oliver, 2012; Kohut et al., 2007; Motallebzadeh et al, 2017; Thomson et al, 2015; Tenenberg, 2016). Moreover, RPO can provide institutional learning by fostering the development of professional learning communities of teachers (Darling-Hammondet al., 2017).

However, RPO has some challenges. Firstly, it's important to achieve a respectful and collaborative relationship based on trust and support between teachers (O'Learly and Savage, 2020). Research has shown that peer observation can provoke anxiety or leave teachers feeling threatened or judged by more expert colleagues. This resistance to PO is one of the main obstacles to its implementation (Alam et al., 2020; Cosh, 1999; Gosling, 2005). Another challenge is constructive feedback (Roselló and De la Iglesia, 2021). When there is a lack of constructive discussion about teaching practices, teachers run the risk of becoming overly complacent about their own teaching practices, potentially reinforcing their resistance to change (Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2005; Gosling, 2005; Shortland, 2004). Other difficulties are lack of time, teaching overload and/or lack of space for joint interaction (Alam et al., 2020; Motallebzadeh, et al., 2017; Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2005;; Versátegui and González, 2019). Institutional support in the form of training prior to PO practices and then throughout the whole PO process is essential to overcome resistances and difficulties (Sider, 2019).

Despite its challenges and potential benefits, research into RPO is still relatively underdeveloped (Ridge and Lavigne, 2020), as is its practice in primary and secondary educational contexts (OECD, 2020).

Firstly, prior research has mostly focused on teacher observation using an asymmetrical and non-reciprocal model (O'Leary and Savage, 2020), mainly, on the university level (Fletcher, 2018; O'Leary and Savage, 2020; Shortland, 2004; Zeng, 2020), but less research has analyzed RPO in the actual school context (Alam et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2013; Motallebzadeh et al., 2017; Lam and Lau, 2008; Ridge and Lavigne, 2020). Secondly, research has primary focused on the benefits of peer observation for the observee, but less attention has been paid in the literature

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

to the observer role (Tenenberg, 2016). Thirdly, many peer observation protocols include writing to promote teaching reflective practice (Hamilton, 2013: Farrell, 2013). However, little research has been done to analyze the impact of report writing on the peer observation process (Lakshmi, 2014; McGuinness and Gibbons, 2005). Finally, considering resistance to PO is one of the main obstacles for its practice in schools, more research is needed in determining whether some of this resistance can be overcome when a collaborative reciprocal approach of PO is adopted (O'Leary and Savage, 2020).

In light of the need to better understand the potential benefits of RPO, the present study examines teachers' perceptions of the RPO process, differences between the roles of observer and observee, and the impact of writing reports. In addition, changes in teachers' degree of resistance to PO were analyzed. Our research questions were the following:

- How do teachers perceive the RPO process (pre-observation, observation and feedback phases)? What are the overall perceived benefits and difficulties of RPO for Teachers' Professional Development?
- What differences do teachers perceive when they perform the observer and observee roles during the RPO process?
- How do writing reports (post-observation and final report) affect teachers' perceptions of the RPO process?
- Does the practice of RPO reduce teachers' perceptions of resistance to PO?

Methods

Context of intervention: Reciprocal Peer Observation conditions and procedure

According to O'Leary and Savage (2020), the success of peer observation for development purposes is contingent on a planned and intentional pedagogical discussion between teachers, based on evidence from their own teaching practice. If peer observation is not well-planned or

structured, it can become counterproductive, generating feelings of resistance and hostility. Therefore, it was necessary to organize the RPO process and structure teachers' pair interactions so that they could serve as a mechanism for peer learning.

Teachers in this study were asked to voluntarily participate in a RPO practice as part of their training program. It was important to ensure voluntary participation and data confidentiality to promote a secure environment for peer learning (Sider, 2019; O'Leary and Savage, 2020). Participants were asked to choose their partners in accordance with the criteria of symmetry in experience and status. Mutual trust and respect between peers were important to ensure the success of observation for developmental purposes (Gosling, 2005; O'Leary and Savage, 2020). In addition, considering the relevance of constructive feedback for the success of RPO (Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2005; O'Leary and Savage, 2020) teachers participated in an initial training session. The training included a presentation of the characteristics of the peer observation process (pre-observation, observation and feedback), and some guidelines and practical activities to help observers to offer constructive feedback (adapted from O'Leary, 2020).

After the training session, the pairs of teachers were asked to complete the following three-phase RPO process, followed by a final individual written reflection (O'Leary, 2020):

- *Pre-observation phase*: Teachers were required to conduct at least one pre-observation session in which each pair of teachers had to agree on:
  - the objectives of the observation, which needed to be clear and relevant for participants and agreed upon by both teachers before the observation (Sider, 2019; O'Leary, 2020) (a).
  - the observation criteria, for which purpose they were provided with a grid and were able to make the necessary adjustments (b).
  - the duration of the observation (at least one session for each teacher was required).
  - data collection (in addition to completing the adapted grid, participants were encouraged to record the sessions and to select clips for feedback) (c).
  - the observer and observee roles, following the guidelines that were offered (adapted from O'Leary, 2020) (d).
  - preservation of confidentiality (e).

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

- *Observation phase*: a minimum of two observations were required, one for each participant, because each teacher performed both the observer and the observee role. In the observation session, after informing students of the reason for the observation, observers were asked to take notes discretely and respectfully about the class, assisted by the grid and/or the audiovisual recording, if agreed upon, without intervening. At the end, the observees were asked to write a brief report on how the session had gone (the post-observational report).
- *Feedback phase*: at least, two feedback session were required, one for each participant. In the feedback session, following a conversational format, the observer invited the observee to make a self-assessment of the session, based on the post-observational report written at the end of the observed session. Then, the observer presented their observations, supported by the evidence collected during the observation, identifying at least one strength and one action requiring explanation. The observee actively participated in this dialogue, and, together, they were asked to set (a few reachable) specific goals for teaching improvement.
- *Individual written reflection*: Based on the different reflections carried out during the RPO process (the individual one at the end of the observed session and the shared ones in the feedback session), the observee was asked to compile a brief report based on a personal synthesis, the final report.

Participants

The participants were 224 in-service teachers from two networks of schools in Spain. 180 of them from 9 schools in a school network in Navarra (Proeducar Hezigarri program) and 44 of them from 6 schools in a Catalan school network (Xarxa de Competències). Teachers from Cataluña conducted the reciprocal peer observation practice during February to May of 2020, and teachers from Navarra during October 2020 to January 2021. 54 participants were males and 170 females. 137 teachers worked in primary education and 87 in secondary education. All of them took part in the study on a voluntary basis, as part of their

training. All participants received written information about the project and gave their consent to participate according to the ethics compliance procedures (Ramrathan et al., 2017). Participants were trained in the peer observation process, and they implemented RPO at least two times, once performing the role of observee and another performing the role of observer.

Instruments

An ad hoc questionnaire entitled *Reciprocal Peer Observation* (*RPO*) *Online Survey* was designed for the purposes of this study.

The *RPO Online Survey* consists of a) 3 sociodemographic items (gathering data on school, educational stage, and gender); b) 59 items organized into three sections (pre-observation, observation, and feedback phases) based on the PO protocol described by O'Leary (2020) to collect teachers' perceptions of the PO process. From those, 47 were close-ended questions answered using a Likert scale (1-4), ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (4), 10 items were close-ended binary questions (yes/no), and 2 items -related to difficulties in the pre-observation and feedback phase- were multiple choice questions with closed answers, although participants had the option to add other responses. Categories for the closed answers were constructed by reviewing the main difficulties identified in the previous literature about the topic.

Finally, 7 close-ended questions answered using a Likert scale (1-4) conformed a scale to evaluate teachers' resistance to PO. This scale was designed by reviewing previous literature research about teachers' resistance to PO and consisted in two items measuring resistance to the observer role and five items to the observee role. The tool was validated by a panel of five experts in the field of peer learning. They were asked to review, comment, and clarify the meaning of the wording for each item. They provided feedback on the appropriateness of each item to ensure that all items were relevant. To validate the final scale a Cronbach's α test was performed showing high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .904$).

The survey took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

Procedure

Data collection

Data were collected in June 2020 (teachers from Xarxa de Competències) and in February 2021(teachers from Proeducar Hezigarri program) through the *RPO Online Survey* to assess teachers' perceptions of RPO. Participants were asked to voluntarily complete the survey after they had finished the reciprocal peer observation practice. Responses to the survey were kept anonymous to maintain participants' confidentiality. The survey was distributed via email and was open to all participants for a period of three weeks. The response rate was 98%.

Data analysis

Variables on a Likert scale were described using frequency, mean, standard deviation and percentage (Stevens, 1946; Knapp, 1990).

The participants' qualitative responses were analyzed using the content analysis method (Prasad, 2008). Bottom-up categories were developed by one researcher and then validated by a second researcher. In case of disagreement, a consensus was reached through discussion. Afterwards, qualitative variables were described using frequency and percentage.

To analyze differences between teachers' perceptions when performing the observer role and the observee role, and to examine the differences between teachers' resistances before and after the peer observation, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine if the data was normally distributed or not. Results showed p value was .000 so that a nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used for paired samples with data on a Likert scale (1-4). For nominal data (yes/no), the McNemar test was used. Finally, differences between teachers that did written reports and those that did not were tested using a Chi-Square Test for homogeneity, if application conditions were satisfied. Otherwise, Fisher's Exact Test or the Likelihood Ratio Test was used.

The statistical analysis was performed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics v.21. For all statistical tests, a nominal significance level of 5% ($p<.05$) was established.

Results

1. Teachers' perceptions of the Reciprocal Peer Observation process

1.1 How do teachers perceive the RPO process (pre-observation, observation and feedback phases)?

Most of the teachers felt secure during the pre-observation meeting (96.4%) and found to be useful this meeting (96.4%), the observational grid (89.7%) and the feedback meetings (95.5%). Meanwhile, most of the teachers (74.1%) did not find it difficult to act as observers (see Table I).

A majority agreed that the feedback they had received from their partners would be useful in helping them to improve their professional practice (93.8%), and disagreed (79.5%) with the statement that it was difficult to offer constructive, non-judgmental feedback.

TABLE I. Peer observation phases

Pre-observation phase	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***Mean***	***SD***
The pre-observation meetings are a useful part of the peer observation process	0%	3.1%	39.3%	57.6%	3.54	.55
I felt safe and calm during the planning meetings.	0%	3.6%	35.7%	60.7%	3.57	.54
Observation phase	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***Mean***	***SD***
The observation grid was useful.	2.7%	7.6%	41.5%	48.2%	3.35	.73
I limited myself to observing the elements on the grid that we had agreed upon.	4.9 %	12.5%	47.8%	34.8%	3.13	.81
It was hard not to intervene in the classroom and to concentrate only on observing.	44.2%	29.9%	20.1%	5.8%	1.88	.92
Feedback phase	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***Mean***	***SD***
Feedback meetings are a useful part of the peer observation process.	1.3%	3.1%	38.4%	57.1%	3.51	.62
The feedback my gave me has been useful to me in improving my professional practice.	1.8%	4.5%	37.1%	56.7%	3.49	.67
It was hard for me to make constructive, non-judgmental comments on my colleague's work.	39.3%	40.2%	15.2%	5.4%	1.87	.86

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) - 4 (strongly agree); N=224.

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

1.2 What are the overall perceived benefits and difficulties of RPO for Teachers' Professional Development?

Regarding the benefits of RPO, teachers responded positively all the items related to TPD, recording mean scores for all items of over 3 out of a maximum 4 points (see Table II).

TABLE II. Benefits of Peer Observation

Teacher Professional Development	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***Mean***	***SD***
Improve my observation skills	2.7%	7.1%	46.9%	43.3%	3.31	.72
Improve my motivation as a teacher	5.4%	13.8%	46.9%	33.9%	3.09	.82
Improve my professional self-esteem and self-confidence	6.3%	15.2%	47.8%	30.8%	3.03	.84
Focus on areas for improvement and on beginning to make changes	0.4%	4.9%	43.8%	50.9%	3.45	.61
Be more aware of my colleague's teaching style and what we do and do not have in common	1.8%	5.8%	42.4%	50.0%	3.41	.68
Reflect on my own teaching through an analysis of others' practices in order to get to know myself better	1.8%	3.1%	43.3%	51.8%	3.45	.64

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) - 4 (strongly agree); N=224.

The four items with the highest scores were those inquiring about how RPO can serve as a tool to reflect about their and their peers' teaching practice. Most of the teachers agreed that RPO had enabled them to identify aspects to improve in their own practice and to begin to undertake changes (94.7%). The process had helped them to reflect about their own practice via the analysis of their peer's practice (95.1%), to gain greater awareness of the similarities and differences between their own teaching and that of their peer (92.4%), and to improve their abilities as observers (90.2%). Teachers also agreed that RPO was an effective mechanism to improve their motivation as teachers (80.8%), and to their enhance self-esteem and professional confidence (78.6%).

It is also worth mentioning that 72.3% of the teachers stated that they were planning to continue with RPO in the future.

Regarding feedback benefits (see Table III), most of the teachers agreed that the RPO process had helped them to learn both to offer (90.2%) and

TABLE III. Feedback session benefits

Participating in peer observation has allowed me to...	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***Mean***	***SD***
Learn to offer constructive feedback.	1.8%	8.0%	46.4%	43.8%	3.32	.69
Learn to accept my colleague's feedback.	1.3%	8.9%	40.2%	49.6%	3.38	.70
Receive constructive feedback and thought-provoking questions.	.9%	4.0%	39.3%	55.8%	3.50	.62

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 4 (strongly agree); N=224.

accept constructive feedback (89.8%). A majority (95.1%) also agreed that the peer observation process had allowed them to receive constructive feedback and thought-provoking questions.

In regard to difficulties, a minority of the teachers said they had experienced problems during the pre-observation (35.3%) and feedback (13.8%) phase (see Table IV). Difficulties in the pre-observation meeting

TABLE IV. Difficulties in the pre-observation and feedback phase

	Yes	**No**
Did you have any difficulties during the pre-observation phase?	35.3%	64.7%
Difficulties in pre-observation phase	**Freq**	**%**
Organization (schedules, etc.)	49	50%
Observational grid's adjustments (focus of observation)	46	46.9%
Agreeing about observer / observee roles	3	3.1%
	Yes	**No**
Did you have any difficulties during the feedback phase?	13.8%	86.2%
Difficulties in feedback phase	**Freq**	**%**
Avoiding judgments	11	24.4%
Avoiding giving solutions	9	20%
Prioritizing areas to be improved	10	22.2%
Avoiding giving your opinion	6	13.3%
Finding time for feedback	5	11.1%
Peer dialogue	4	8.9%

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

were mainly organizational, including problems finding time for the RPO (50%) and for making adjustment to the observational grid to focus the observation (46.9%).

Some of the problems in the feedback phase were mainly linked to the task of offering this constructive feedback, as avoiding judgements (24.4%), giving solutions (20%) or opinions (13.3%). Other difficulties were related to prioritize areas for improvement (22.2%) or to find time to carry out feedback sessions (11.1%).

2. What differences do teachers perceive when they perform the observer and observee roles during the RPO process?

For each stage of the peer observation process, this study looked at potential differences between the perceptions teachers reported when they performed the observer role and those they described when they acted as observees. These differences are presented below, first with regard to the observation phase, then in relation to the feedback phase, and, finally, in terms of the identification of goals to improve teaching practice.

2.1. Differences in the role of observer and observee in teachers' perceptions of the observation phase

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for paired samples showed statistically significant differences between observers and observees in the observation phase (see Table V).

Firstly, observees were more likely than observers to believe that the presence of an observer had altered the regular process of the classroom (-revers item- M = 2.72 ±1.15 observer; M =2.50 ±1.15 observee; *p= 0.002*). On the other hand, interestingly, observers showed a greater tendency than observees to say that performing their role (as observers) has allowed them to identify potential ways to improve their own practice (M =3.4 ± .76 observer; M=3.27± .72 observee; *p= .006*).

Surprisingly, though, both observers and observees reported low levels of stress during the observation session, and teachers in both roles said they felt little awkwardness about recording class sessions or having their sessions recorded (with scores less than 2). For these items, no statistical differences between the two roles were found.

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

TABLE V. Differences in the roles of observer and observee in teachers' perceptions of the observation phase

Observer and Observee roles in the Observation phase	**Observer**		**Observee**		
	Mean	***SD***	***Mean***	***SD***	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
My presence did not seriously alter the usual functioning of the classroom (observer) The observer's presence did not seriously alter the usual functioning of the classroom (observee)	2.72	1.15	2.50	1.15	.002**
While I was observing, I felt stressed out, nervous (uncomfortable) (observer) While I was being observed, I felt stressed out, nervous (uncomfortable) (observee)	1.59	.71	1.68	.72	.075
Recording parts of the session made me feel uncomfortable (observer) Having my colleague record parts of the session made me feel uncomfortable. (observee)	1.90	.84	1.71	.76	.334
Observing allowed me to identify areas to improve in my own teaching practice (observer) Being observed allowed me to identify areas to improve in my own teaching practice (observee)	3.4	.76	3.27	.72	.006**

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 4 (strongly agree); Wilcoxon Single Rank Test; * p < 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p < 0.001; N=224.

2.2. Differences in the role of observer and observee in teachers' perceptions of the feedback phase

Meanwhile, significant differences were found between the roles for all the items connected to results the feedback phase (p <.01, see Table VI).

Results indicate that observees were more likely than observers to appreciate being able to use video recordings of their lessons to prepare for feedback sessions (M=2.50 ± .89 observer; M=2.77 ± 1.03 observee) and to report having started the feedback sessions using their own post-observation report (M=2.37 ± 1.05 observer; M=2.52 ± 1.03 observee). Also, observees were more likely to say that their colleagues conducting the observation had been able to identify areas for potential improvement of their teaching (M=2.96 ± .72 observer: M=3.26 ± .71 observee). Finally, observees were more likely than observers to say that they had successfully adapted to their role as observees during the feedback session, and to report they had understood feedback as an aid for reflection (M=3.43 ± .71 observer; M=3.59 ± .58 observee).

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

TABLE VI. Differences in the role of observer and observee in teachers' perceptions of the feedback phase

Observer and Observee roles	**Observer**		**Observee**		
	Mean	***SD***	***Mean***	***SD***	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
Having video recordings of my partner's session was useful to me in giving feedback. (observer) Having video recordings of my session was useful to me in getting feedback (observee)	2.50	.89	2.77	1.03	.001**
The start of the session was based on the report my colleague complied after being observed. (observer) The start of the session was based on the report I compiled after being observed. (observee)	2.37	1.05	2.52	1.03	.001**
I was able to identify positive aspects of my colleague's classroom performance. (observer) My colleague was able to identify positive aspects of my classroom performance. (observee)	3.61	.53	3.50	.59	.003**
I was able to identify areas of my colleague's classroom performance with room for improvement. (observer) My colleague was able to identify areas of my classroom performance with room for improvement. (observee)	2.96	.72	3.26	.71	<.001***
My colleague fulfilled his/her role as set out in the "feedback session guide", understanding feedback as an opportunity for reflection. (observer) I understood the feedback I received as an opportunity to reflect on and improve my teaching practice. (observee)	3.43	.71	3.59	.58	.001**

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 4 (strongly agree). Wilcoxon Single Rank Test; * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001; N=224.

However, observers scored higher on the item asking if they had been able identify positive aspects of the observees' lessons (M=3.61 ± .53 observer; M=3.50 ± .59 observee).

2.3. Differences in the role of observer and observee in identifying goals to improve educational practice in feedback session.

Regarding the process of identifying goals to improve educational practice during the feedback session (see Table VII), significant differences between roles were found (p= .029).

Received: 01-09-2022 Accepted: 07-03-2023

TABLE VII. Identifying goals to improve educational practice

Identifying goals to improve educational practice	**Yes**	**No**	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
When you acted as an observer, did you and your colleague use the feedback session to specify a way he/she could improve his/her teaching? (observer)	71.0% (n=159)	29.0% (n=65)	.029*
When you acted as an observee, did you and your colleague use the feedback session to specify a way you could improve your teaching? (observee)	64.7% (n=145)	35.3% (n=79)	

Note: McNemar Test; * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001; N= 224.

More observers (71%) said that they had identified goals to improve their colleagues' teaching, while the percentage of observees agreeing with this statement was significantly lower (64.7%).

3. How do writing reports (post-observation and final report) affect teachers' perceptions of the RPO process?

Firstly, 67% teachers did the post-observation report after being observed by their colleagues and 75.4% wrote the final report (see Table VIII). Of those who completed the observation report, almost all the teachers (90.4% of 115 teachers) agreed that the goal they later identified

TABLE VIII. Post- observation Report

Post-Observation Report	**Yes**	**No**	**N**
After your class session was observed, did you compile a brief report about how the session had gone?	67%	33%	224
If you came up with a specific objective for improvement during the feedback session, did this objective coincide with what you wrote down immediately after the session when you were observed?	90.4%	9.6%	115
Final Report	**Yes**	**No**	**N**
Did you write a final report at the end of the feedback session?	75.4%	24.6%	224
Did the final report include one or more specific goals for improvement?	86.4%	13.6%	169
Did these goals coincide with what you and your partner had agreed upon at the end of the feedback session?	95.9%	4.1%	123

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to improve their educational practice in the feedback phase coincided with the goal set out in their post-observation report. In the final report, teachers included goals to improve their own teaching practice (86.4%) and a large majority of the teachers stated that these goals coincided with the ones they had identified in the feedback session (95.9%).

Most of the teachers (94.8%) found post-observation report useful in their preparations for the feedback session, and agreed (92.8%) that the post-observation report had allowed them to identify aspects of their own practice with room for improvement. In addition, most of the teachers (91.8%) that did the final report felt that it was a useful part of the peer observation process (see Table IX).

Meanwhile, there were statistically significant differences between teachers that did post-observation report and teachers that did not (p=.011) (see Table X) in how they viewed the process of identifying goals to improve their practice.

Teachers that did post-observation report were more likely to have identified goals to improve their teaching practice in the feedback session (70.7%) than teachers that did not compile a post-observation report (52.7%) (Fisher Exact Test (p=.011)).

The results also showed significant differences between the groups on the items asking whether the peer observation process had allowed them to focus on improving aspects of their own practice and to initiate changes ($LRT_{(3,224)} = 11.72$, p = .008; Cramer V'= .227), and about the degree to which they had reflected on their own practice in light of the analysis of the practice of other teachers ($LRT_{(3, 224)} = 9.82$, p = .020; Cramer V'= .215) (see Table XI). Teachers that did post-observation report

TABLE IX. Post-observation Report benefits

Post-observation Report*	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***Mean***	***SD***
Compiling a brief report after my class was observed was useful in helping me prepare for the feedback session.	1.3%	3.9%	48.7%	46.1%	3.39	.632
Compiling a brief report helped me to identify areas of my teaching practice that could be improved.	0%	7.2%	47.4%	45.4%	3.38	.619
Final Report**						
Writing a final report is a useful part of the peer observation process.	.6%	7.7%	52.7%	39.1%	3.30	.63

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 4 (strongly agree). *N=152; **N=169.

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TABLE X. Post-observation report impact on identifying goals to improve teaching practice

		Did you write a post-observation report?		
		Yes	**No**	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
When you acted as an observee, did you set a specific goal for improvement during the feedback session?	*Yes*	106 (70.7%) *z=2.6*	39 (52.7%) *z=-2.6*	.0011*
	No	44 (29.3%) *z=-2.6*	35 (47.3%) *z=2.6*	

Notes: Fisher's Exact Test; z=Adjusted Residual; * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001; N= 224.

TABLE XI. Post-observation report impact on peer observation process

		Have you written a post-observation report?		
Participating in peer observation has allowed me…		**Yes**	**No**	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
Focus on areas for improvement and start making changes †	*Strongly disagree*	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)	.008**
	Disagree	5 (3.3%)	6 (8.1%)	
	Agree	58 (38.7%) *z= -2.2*	40 (54.1%) *z= 2.2*	
	Strongly agree	87 (58%) *z= 3*	27 (36.5%) *z= -3*	
Reflect on my own teaching through an analysis of others' practices in order to get to know myself better †	*Strongly disagree*	1 (.7%)	3 (4.1%)	.020*
	Disagree	2 (1.3%) *z= -2.2*	5 (6.8%) *z= 2.2*	
	Agree	62 (41.3%)	35 (47.3%)	
	Strongly agree	85 (56.7%) *z= 2.1*	31(41.9%) *z= -2.1*	
Learn to accept my colleague's feedback ‡	*Strongly disagree*	2 (1.3%)	1 (1.4%)	.012*
	Disagree	9 (6%) *z=-2.2*	11 (14.9%) *z=2.2*	
	Agree	54 (36.0%) *z=-1.8*	36 (48.6%) *z=1.8*	
	Strongly agree	85 (56.7%) *z=3*	26 (35.1%) *z=-3*	

Notes: †Likelihood Ratio Test; ‡ Chi-square test; z= Adjusted Residual; * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001; N= 224.

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were more likely to strongly agree with the statements in the first (58%) and the second of these items (56.7%) than teachers who had not done the post-observation report (36.5% and 41.9%, respectively).

Results also showed differences between the groups in their belief that participating in the peer observation process had allowed them to learn to accept their peers' feedback ($\chi^2_{(3, 224)} = 10.971$, p = .012; Cramer V'= .221) (see Table XI). Teachers who did the post-observation report were more likely to strongly agree with this statement (56.7%) than teachers that did not write the report (35.1%).

Finally, there were some statistical differences between teachers that did the final report and those that did not (see Table XII) in terms of how likely they were to report having identified goals to improve teaching practice during the feedback session (Fisher Exact test, p = .015; Cramer V'= .165). Teachers that did the final report were more likely to have set goals to improve teaching practice in the feedback session (69.2%) than teachers that did not do the report (50.9%).

TABLE XII. Final report impact on identifying goals of improvement and on peer observation process

		Have you written a final report?		
		Yes	**No**	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
When you acted as the observee, did you set a specific goal to improve your teaching? ‡	*Yes*	117 (69.2%) z=2.5	28 (50.9%) z=-2.5	.015*
	No	52 (30.8%) z=-2.5	27 (49.1%) z=2.5	
Focus on areas for improvement and start making changes †	*Strongly disagree*	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	.035*
	Disagree	8 (4.7%)	3 (5.5%)	
	Agree	67 (39.6%) z=-2.2	31 (56.4%) z=2.2	
	Strongly agree	94 (55.6%) z= 2.5	20 (36.6%) z= -2.5	

Note: ‡ Fisher Test; † Likelihood Ratio Test; z=adjusted residuals; * p < .05, ** p<.01, *** p < .001; N= 224.

Meanwhile, there were also statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of how likely they were to believe that the RPO process had allowed them to focus on areas for potential improvement of their own practice and to start making changes (LRT (3, N = 224) =8.612, p = .035; Cramer V'= .198). Teachers that did the final report were more likely to strongly agree with this item (55.6%) than teachers that did not write the report (36.6%).

4. Does the practice of RPO reduce teachers' perceptions of resistance to PO?

Lastly, this study looked at changes in teachers' perceptions of their resistance to RPO. At the end of the process, the participants were asked to score their perceived levels of resistance to RPO before and after peer observation. Results were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Single Rank Test for paired samples to compare differences.

Results showed that although the teachers in the study did not have a particularly high degree of resistance prior to the process (mean score between 1 and 2), the study nonetheless recorded a statistically significant decrease in all the types of resistance related to the observer and observe roles after the RPO (p< .001 in all items; see Table XIII).

TABLE XIII. Resistance to Peer Observation (PO) Scale

Resistance to Peer Observation (PO) Scale	Before PO		After PO		
Did you feel worried or uncomfortable?	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)
Observer role					
Because you were observing a colleague.	1.66	.69	1.48	.58	< *.001*
Because you had to offer feedback to a colleague.	1.91	.76	1.66	.65	< *.001*
Observee role					
Because you were being observed by a colleague.	1.89	.77	1.52	.59	< *.001*
Because you were receiving feedback from a colleague.	1.81	.75	1.54	.62	< *.001*
Because you felt your professionalism was being questioned or that you were being judged by a colleague.	1.81	.78	1.53	.59	< *.001*
Because of the possibility that the observed class session might not go as you had hoped, desired or planned.	2.09	.77	1.72	.66	< *.001*
Because of the potential for the presence of an observer in the classroom to distract you or your students.	1.69	.69	1.50	.59	< *.001*

Note: Likert Scale 1 (strongly disagree) - 4 (strongly agree) Wilcoxon Single Rank Test; * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001; N=224.

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When it came to acting as observers, after the intervention teachers reported lower levels of resistance to the tasks of offering a peer feedback and observing a peer. The resistance to being observed also decreased, as after the intervention teachers were less concerned about the class not working as planned, and they reported feeling less afraid of being observed by a peer, receiving peer feedback and being professionally judged. In addition, at the end of the process teachers were less likely to be worried about the potential for an observer to disrupt their classroom.

Discussion and Conclusions

The overarching goal of this study was to analyze in-service teachers' perceptions of RPO as a mechanism for professional development.

Regarding the first aim, most of the teachers in the study had a positive perception of the three phases of reciprocal peer observation process and found it beneficial for their TPD. RPO help them to reflect on their own teaching practice and that of their peers, to identify teaching improvement goals, to improve their abilities as observers, and to increase their motivation, self-esteem, and professional confidence. Teachers also reported having received constructive feedback and said they had been able to offer constructive feedback, which is an essential skill for improving educational practices (Cosh, 1999; O'Leary and Savage, 2020). These positive results are in line with those of previous studies (Bruce and Ross, 2008; O'Leary and Savage, 2020; Motallebzadeh, et al., 2017; Shousha, 2015; Kohut et al., 2007), and adds further evidence of the importance of implementing RPO as an embedded training strategy to promote teachers' reflective practice and collaborative professional development in schools (OECD, 2020; Hamilton, 2013). Moreover, most of the teachers expressed an intention to continue to do peer observation in the future, which is especially relevant considering the need in Spain to expand the use of this type of collaborative professional development in schools (OECD, 2020).

Despite these positive perceptions, some of participants expressed difficulties related to focusing the observation and to giving constructive nonjudgmental feedback, which represents a major difficulty and concern in PO (Cosh, 1999; O'Leary and Savage, 2020; Roselló and De la Iglesia, 2021) These are the most challenging tasks that are required to develop a successful RPO process. It has been established that focused observation

can be an essential part of promoting teachers' critical reflection and helping them to produce constructive feedback (Fletcher, 2018; Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2005; Gosling, 2005; Sider, 2019). Thus, echoing this previous research, the study strongly suggests that previous training should emphasize the need to reach an agreement on a few explicitly observable items, and to discuss the potential difficulties of the observer and observee in order to clarify the roles each will play during observation and feedback phases. Prior training should also provide teachers with the tools for giving and getting constructive feedback, as this contributes to encourage professional development. Finally, concerns about finding time to meet with their peers were also mentioned in previous studies (Motallebzadeh, et al., 2017; Alam et al., 2020; Sousha, 2015; Verástegui and González, 2019), and they reinforce the relevance of institutional support to overcome these organizational difficulties (Sider, 2019).

Regarding the second aim, analysis of differences between the observer and observee roles offers further evidence of how the RPO process is an excellent opportunity for reciprocal peer learning when participants perform both roles. On the one hand, the observees expressed a greater understanding than observers that feedback was an opportunity for reflection and improvement of their own teaching practice. They especially valued having video recordings of their lessons and using the post-observational report to start feedback session. These elements of the process gave observees a unique opportunity to see their own performance, and the value they attached to these experiences confirms the relevance of introducing these instruments as useful tools for analyzing teaching practice (O'Leary and Savage, 2020). Also, it is worth noting that during feedback, observees were more likely than observers to perceive that there had been less discussion of positive aspects and more focus on potential areas for improvement. This difference in perceptions indicates that this practice was an antidote to one of the main risks of peer observation: complacency (Gosling, 2005). On the other hand, results showed that observers were more likely than observees to think that performing their role (as observers) had allowed them to identify areas for potential improvement in their own practice. This notable finding confirms the results of previous studies that have highlighted the benefits teachers can gain by learning through observation (Thomson et al., 2015; Tenenberg, 2016; Hendry and Oliver, 2012; Kohut, et al., 2007). Moreover, observers were especially focused on offering constructive feedback, and as such,

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they were more likely than observees to perceive themselves as able to identify positive aspects of the observees' practice and to specify goals for improving the observees' teaching.

Regarding the third aim, writing post-observational and final reports helped to set specific goals to improve teaching which underline the powerful role that writing can play as a tool for teachers to reflect on their practice (Farrell, 2013; Lakshmi, 2014; McGuinness and Gibbons, 2005). Post-observational report helped teachers to prepare the feedback session, to accept peer's feedback and to enrich the feedback dialogue. This in turn made observees into more active participants in this process, and, consequently, made the process as a whole more symmetrical. Final report is an effective example of how to reinforce these individual spaces for reflection after the peer observation process. These spaces are important in that they promote teachers' sense of agency, as they are an opportunity for observees themselves to specify their own teaching improvement goals.

Finally, regarding the last aim, the study recorded a decrease in all the types of resistance related to the observer and observee roles. Therefore, it supports that a collaborative model of PO with clear goals and guidelines for observer and observee can help defeat the negative emotions that often emerge in response to the evaluative model of PO with classroom observation (Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2023; O'Leary and Savage, 2020).

Despite these contributions, this study has limitations in terms of potential biases related to self-reporting and sample selection. The results are based on teachers' perceptions after the RPO process and were gathered via a single online questionnaire. Although this method allowed the study to reach a considerable sample of in-service teachers and to contribute to the still limited body of RPO research, further qualitative and longitudinal studies should be done to look not only what teachers perceive, but also at what they do in practice. Future research is necessary to analyze the long-term effects of RPO in teachers' real teaching. These longer studies could include data from more than one classroom observation session for each pair, making it possible to analyze the impact of RPO on changes in teaching practices over time. These data could be contrasted with data obtained from direct observations, especially from the feedback sessions. Another limitation of the study is that the sample was extracted from schools that were already interested in RPO, and teachers participated voluntarily, meaning that the teachers who took part might have

been more likely to have positive reactions to RPO. Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on PO by showing the relevance of RPO as a professional development mechanism. Therefore, it will be helpful to teachers and school leaders who are interested in developing RPO in their schools to promote teacher collaborative professional development for more effective teaching.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the teachers and schools that participated in the study.

Funding

This research was funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033, Project PID2020-113719RB-100.

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