TEACHER-TAILORED CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF EFL INSTRUCTORS: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary approaches to professional development (PD) involve investigating ways of bottom-up, self-directed practices while addressing various needs of teachers. Yet, utilized as a tool in such practices, classroom observation (CO) is not considered to promote teacher professional learning since it is generally regarded as part of the appraisal process. Thus, this exploratory case study aims to explore the insights of four EFL teachers about CO tailored by teachers themselves for their professional growth in a higher education context in Türkiye. Focusing on a bottom-up practice, the teachers pursued a collaborative act on their PD in this specific context. Based on the participants' previous and current experiences of CO, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews and teacher educator notes. The inductive thematic analysis of the data revealed three major interconnected themes providing pathways toward CO as a PD tool with special emphasis on the generic features of the teacher-tailored CO process. The discussion of findings highlights the importance of empowering, collaborative, and sustainable practices in teachers' professional growth. Implications are included for English language teacher development programs.

KEYWORDS

HOW TO CITE

Highlights

- *Teacher-tailored CO offers a bottom-up, self-directed perspective for the PD of in-service teachers.*
- *Teacher learning is supported through empowerment, collaboration, and sustainability in PD practices.*
- *Bottom-up, self-directed PD practices can be used as a basis for teacher learning and development.*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching requires lifelong learning and engagement in 'continuing career-long professional development' (Day, 1999: 15). It is indeed crucial for teachers to continue their professional learning because the quality of their teaching plays a pivotal role in the success of an education system and learner outcomes (Borg, 2015). Traditionally, teachers were provided with learning opportunities in the form of training workshops and courses where they were passive recipients of knowledge (Ying, 2012), but today, the content and mode of PD practices assign teachers a more active role in their own learning journey (Borko et al., 2010).

Contemporary approaches to PD value context-based and personalized practices for teacher development (Borg, 2015; Broad and Evans, 2006; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). To enhance teacher learning supported by workshops and seminars with the traditional one-size-fits-all view (Kumaravadivelu, 2012), modern PD needs to be relevant to teachers' and their students' contexts and needs (Borg, 2015). An effective PD practice also involves reflection, inquiry, and collaboration (Borg, 2015; Broad and Evans, 2006; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Richards and Farrell, 2005). Furthermore, in successful PD practices 'teachers are centrally involved in decisions about the content and process' of their PD (Borg, 2015: 3). Overall, as opposed to the traditional form of PD following a top-down approach, modern PD employs a bottom-up view where teachers are active participants in their own professional growth (Tanış and Dikilitaş, 2018).

To this end, a variety of PD forms have been introduced and practiced. Some examples of these include exploratory action research (e.g., Akcan et al 2019; Dikilitaş and Çomoglu, 2022), critical friend groups (e.g., Carlson, 2019; Vo and Mai Nguyen,

2010), lesson study (e.g., Cajkler et al., 2014; Hurd and Licciardo-Musso, 2005; Uştuk and Çomoglu, 2021), reflection groups (e.g., Aydın and Çomoglu, 2023; Mayoral, 2014), professional learning communities (e.g., Goodyear et al., 2019; Owen, 2016), curriculum study groups (e.g., Heikkilä, 2021; Unlu, 2018), and mentoring (e.g., Gjedia and Gardinier, 2018; Suchánková and Hrbáčková, 2017; Walters et al., 2019). CO has been utilized as a tool in some of these contemporary forms of PD. Peer observation, in particular, allows teachers to evaluate each other's lessons in a constructive fashion (Fletcher, 2018; Gosling, 2002; Paul, 2021; Visone, 2022). Yet, there have been few attempts (e.g., Challis-Manning and Thorpe, 2016; Grimm et al., 2014) to use classroom CO in a teacher-tailored fashion. In a teacher-tailored CO, the foci, and the time of observation as well as the observer are determined by the teacher. Hence, in this case study, we aimed to explore the insights four tertiary-level EFL instructors gained into bottom-up CO as a tool for PD, taking cognizance of their previous experiences. To this end, we asked the following research questions:

1. How do the tertiary level EFL instructors describe their previous experiences of CO?
2. What are the insights of the tertiary level EFL instructors into the teacher-tailored CO process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the British Council's CPD Framework (Borg, 2015: 4), there are four stages of teacher development: awareness, understanding, engagement, and integration. Correspondingly, teachers learn about a PD practice, they understand the meaning and importance of it, they develop competence in using it and they reach the point where they skillfully use this competence to inform themselves of what they do at work. As it is evident, traditional PD practices are far from helping teachers complete these stages as they are dictated in a top-down fashion (Borko, 2004; Broad and Evans, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Uştuk and Çomoglu, 2021). Traditional PD addresses practical methodological issues such as teaching writing or classroom management. By contrast, modern approaches reflect a more complex understanding of professional practice with a broader view, enabling teachers to go through a deeper process, constantly building up their thinking, and growing personally as well as professionally (Borg, 2015; Kennedy, 2011; Padwad and Dixit, 2011). In addition, Dikilitaş and Mumford (2019) underline the importance of teachers' developing agency for their professional growth. Agency emanates from 'deliberation' and 'choice' (Huang, 2011: 242), and it is defined as 'the capacity to initiate purposeful action that implies will, autonomy, freedom, and choice' (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011: 812). It is 'a point of origin for the development of autonomy' (Benson, 2007: 30), which is 'the capacity to take control over one's own learning' (Benson, 2013: 58).

Experts in the field of education and PD (e.g., Bautista and Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Borko et al., 2010; Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Richards and Farrell, 2005) define effective PD today. They agree that modern PD leads to teacher agency and involves reflection, collaboration, and inquiry. It also focuses on student learning. Additionally, it is need/context-based and

sustainable. Considered individually, each of these qualities contributes to teacher learning and growth. To explain, through reflection, teachers learn from their own experiences and avoid burnout while, at the same time, preparing for unforeseen events in the classroom at present and in the future (Borg, 2015; Farrell, 2018; Tanış and Dikilitaş, 2018). Collaboration helps them to construct knowledge together with others and increase their awareness (Bautista and Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Mann and Walsh, 2017). Moreover, through inquiry, teachers can focus on the issues in their own local context (Wyatt and Dikilitaş, 2016). In addition, contextual and sustained PD practices support student learning (Broad and Evans, 2006; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Guskey and Yoon, 2009). Such a focus on student learning brings about teachers' enhanced knowledge and awareness of content and language (Freeman and Johnson, 2005; Uştuk and Çomoglu, 2021).

As opposed to top-down approaches to PD, one framework for bottom-up PD proposed by Mercer et al (2022) involves self-directed learning of teachers. In such self-directed PD, 'teachers take the initiative to select and manage their own forms of professional development' (Mercer et al., 2022: 6). Initially, teachers reflect on their current availability and resources for PD, then they identify their goals and purposes for themselves and decide on a PD activity. This is followed by teachers' carrying out a PD activity and reflecting on it. Finally, teachers try out the ideas they have gained from the PD activity in practice and reflect on the results. In the process, teachers shape their own PD, by choosing what aspects to focus on, the time frame, the location, and with whom they want to work and how they work on a PD activity. This type of bottom-up, self-directed PD leads to self-determination, motivation, and positive and sustainable professional growth (Mercer et al., 2022), promoting agency, collaboration, and reflective thinking (Başar et al., 2020; Dikilitaş, 2020; Kuchah et al., 2019). In line with this perspective, the current study adopts a flexible, bottom-up, and self-directed approach to PD in which teachers play a leading role in the design and application of a PD practice based on CO.

CO, one of the practices fostering reflective thinking, may be conducted formally by a teacher educator observing and evaluating a teacher's lesson (Copland and Donaghue, 2019; Wragg, 2011). Alternatively, it may be done informally by teachers observing the lessons of their colleagues or of their own (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Richards and Farrell, 2005). When it is not used for appraisal or evaluation purposes, CO encourages teachers to try out innovative ideas (Taylor, 2016). Despite several studies indicating teachers' positive attitudes toward their lessons being observed (e.g., Barrogo, 2020; Caratiquit and Pablo, 2021; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011; Merç, 2015; Smailes, 2021), CO does not foster autonomy when used as a formative assessment to improve individual performance (O'Leary, 2013). Such traditional observations are top-down practices, and they are rather deficiency-focused and prescriptive (Hayes, 2019). They are also likely to be transmissive, where a more knowledgeable person transmits his or her knowledge to the less knowledgeable one (Kiely and Davis, 2010). More importantly, top-down observations are stressful for teachers owing to the critical role they may

play in appraisals (Montgomery, 2014; Taylor, 2016). Previous research also confirms the fact that such observation causes anxiety (e.g., Ali, 2007; Cockburn, 2005; Merç, 2015) and that teachers prefer their lessons to be observed by those who have content knowledge in their field (Dos Santos, 2017; Özdemir, 2020) as opposed to those in administrative positions.

By contrast, teachers' self-observations or peer observations appear to be more bottom-up and transformative as teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own or with the help of their peers (Farrell, 2014; Mann, 2005). These teachers later discuss what they have reflected on or observed in a constructive manner, and 'without formal evaluation' (Borg, 2015: 4). A review of research supports teachers' disapproval of top-down CO. The findings of a study conducted in Saudi Arabia by Tawalbeh (2020) on tertiary-level EFL instructors' perceptions of observations by supervisors revealed that teachers wish to be informed about their strengths rather than weaknesses. They also expect to receive supportive and constructive feedback after an observation, which they prefer being done in a collaborative fashion. This was echoed by Sibanda et al (2011), who investigated primary school teachers' perceptions of COs administered by their school heads in Zimbabwe. Another review study by Cockburn (2005), who evaluated observees' perspectives and politics regarding CO, also opposes top-down CO.

Yet, despite their paramount effect on teachers' ability to reflect on and take control of their professional learning, peer observation and self-observation are not introduced as better replacements for traditional observations by experts since teachers may still need support regarding 'subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and understanding of curriculum and materials' (Richards and Farrell, 2005:4). Therefore, this study adopted a bottom-up, self-directed PD approach to CO tailored by teachers themselves and mediated by a teacher educator (the first author) working in the same institution as a teacher. Drawing on the framework for self-directed PD that allows teachers greater agency in decision-making processes (Barrell, 2016), the observation process in our study was completely teacher-tailored, shaped by the teachers deciding on the observer, observation time, and focus. Thereby, we aimed to explore the four tertiary-level EFL instructors' understanding of CO as a bottom-up PD tool, using Mercer et al (2022)'s framework of self-directed PD as a general pathway for conducting teacher-tailored CO.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Having witnessed the prevalence of top-down PD activities in the context of Türkiye (Başar et al., 2020; Hos and Topal, 2013), the current study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore four tertiary-level EFL instructors' insights into self-tailored CO. We opted for an exploratory case study since it provides 'an in-depth description and analysis' of a chosen case, which could be a single person or a group of people and develops ideas for further studies (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015: 39; Yin, 2018). Descriptive in nature, the case study design appeared to fit in our research as the case may represent 'a typical instance of other comparable cases', that is, the insights of the participants in the current study might shed light on what EFL instructors think of top-down and teacher-tailored CO (Saldaña and Omasta, 2016: 214).

Research Context and Participants

This study took place in the School of Foreign Languages (SoFL) at a state university in the west of Türkiye. The school had 448 students and 26 instructors at the time of the study. It offers English language education for a year period for students before they start their undergraduate degrees. During preparatory education, skills-integrated English lessons are conducted at A1, A2, and B1 levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The students who successfully complete the preparatory program continue their university education in 10 different departments. Lessons are delivered through 30% in English in one department while in the other nine undergraduate departments, the only medium of instruction is English. According to the Council of Higher Education regulation (YÖK, 2018), having an MA degree is a prerequisite to being a full-time instructor in SoFLs in Türkiye. The instructors have an approximate workload of 24 hours of teaching per week. The SoFL has five academic units: Testing and Assessment, Material Development, Curriculum Development, Extra-curricular Activities, and Professional Development. The Professional Development Unit (PDU), which was established in 2020, includes two experienced teacher educators with internationally approved certificates. The PDU activities consist of seminars, workshops, and classroom observations, which are organized based on the needs of the instructors and students in the SoFL.

The current study has its roots in the sudden and compulsory shift to distance education in 2020 when most schools had to quickly switch to online education at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was at that time that the first author assumed the responsibility of setting up a PDU in the SoFL. Following needs analysis surveys, the PDU delivered online workshops addressing the immediate needs of the teachers, most of which were related to the use of technological platforms and tools. Following the workshops on teacher-determined topics, the teacher educator (first author) noticed the teachers' willingness for their lessons to be observed. This was one important pillar of the current bottom-up CO study as the teacher educator had become assured of the importance of teacher-directed PD.

Thus, at the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year, we -as the research team- called for participants who would like to participate in our study on CO as a bottom-up PD activity in this specific SoFL. Four EFL instructors (1 male and 3 females), all of whom completed their BA in literature-related departments, volunteered to participate in the study. In our informal conversations with these four teachers, we observed that the participants were all agentically engaged in the study since they believed that they had professional shortcomings due to their non-ELT bachelor backgrounds and considered the current study as an opportunity for conquering those shortcomings.

Prior to our research, we obtained ethical approval from the Social and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of the university. Also, each participant gave written consent for participation in the study. We used pseudonyms to provide confidentiality. The background information about the participants is given in Table 1.

Name	Gender	Years in teaching	Academic Background/Teaching Qualifications
Ayşe	Female	7	BA in English Language and Literature/ MA in English Language and Literature, CELTA
Gökhan	Male	12	BA in American Culture and Literature/ MA in American Culture and Literature, CELTA
Özge	Female	10	BA in English Language and Literature /MA in ELT, Ph.D. Candidate in ELT
Yasemin	Female	3	BA in English Language and Literature/ MA in English Language and Literature

Table 1: Participant information

Research Procedure and Data Collection

For this study, we informed the instructors in the SoFL about the stages of the teacher-tailored CO practice that would sustain and empower their presence as a part of PD. Being informed about the process, the four instructors volunteered to participate in our study by giving their consent. First of all, they filled in a form in which they chose several focal points from the list suggested by the teacher educator or determined their own focal points for observation. Then, they stated their preference about the time and date of CO, feedback sessions, and interviews. Accordingly, the COs were held and during the observations the teacher educator took small notes based on the predetermined foci by each participant. She also added her observation notes of the participants' attitudes towards being observed. Right after each observation, the teacher educator and the observee held a 15-minute immediate feedback session and co-discussed the major aspects of the observed lesson. Based on the observation notes and the feedback session, the teacher educator emailed the observee a detailed commentary for the observed lesson. Afterward, a 30-minute online/face-to-face reflection session was conducted with each participant to co-reflect on the observed lesson. During these sessions, the teacher educator also took notes on 'what appear to be salient, important, or confusing moments in order to select key moments' (Miller, 2018: 622) for further reflection.

Finally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant about their previous experiences of CO and their overall experiences of teacher-tailored CO as a bottom-up, self-directed PD activity in the current study. Some of the questions we asked in the interviews were: "How important is PD for you?", "Will you please tell us about your previous experiences of CO?" and "What do you think about the observation process in this study?". The interviews which lasted between 30-45 minutes were conducted by the first and the second author of the study collaboratively as an interview may be administered by one or more interviewers (Glesne, 2016). These co-interviews lessened the stress of assuming sole responsibility for listening, questioning, observing, and probing (Velardo and Elliott, 2021). The interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Data from semi-structured interviews and teacher educator's notes were analyzed through initial coding, which 'breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them and compares them for similarities and differences' (Saldana, 2016: 295). The first and the second authors first read the data several times and conducted initial coding separately, the examples for which are given in Table 2. Afterward, we (the three authors) came together to discuss the codes and identified several categories, which helped clarify and develop insights of the data (Saldaña, 2013). We then asked for a debriefing from another researcher who is also a Ph.D. candidate and finally came up with three major themes.

Data	Initial Codings	Categories	Emerging Theme
"I feel like I have to, how can I say?, prove myself to someone else. Of course it would be different if only I were a teacher with an ELT background." (Yasemin, Interview)	Feeling of inadequacy (Author 1)		Teacher-tailored CO as an empowering PD practice
"As a teacher, I thought I had a lot of shortcomings." (Özge, Interview)	Need for CO for further learning (Author 2)	Need for professional growth	
"She stood still in front of the board for the first 7–8 minutes of the lesson and her awkward posture indicated that she was not comfortable. Fortunately, this was replaced by more lively and cheerful body movements." (Teacher educator's notes)	Initial discomfort (Author 1) Feeling uncomfortable with being observed (Author 2)	Initial discomfort with CO	

Table 2: Examples of data analysis process steps

Researchers' Positionalities

Conducting qualitative research is about embracing researchers' subjectivity, which is 'a human dimension that is both an advantage and liability' building the trustworthiness of the study (Saldaña and Omasta, 2016: 66). The first and second authors were also instructors in the SoFL where we conducted this study. This provided us with an emic perspective. The first author also functioned as a teacher educator to enable the participants to be active in the observation process and their PD overall, which strengthened this emic perspective. On the

ERIES Journal
volume 16 issue 1

Electronic ISSN
1803-1617

Printed ISSN
2336-2375

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other hand, the third author, the qualitative research Ph.D. course instructor of the first and second authors, positioned herself as a critical observer with an etic perspective, focusing on both the qualitative research processes and the first and second authors' developing researcher identity throughout the study. In our co-reflections and discussions, the emic perspective provided by the first and second authors was supported by the etic perspective of the third author (e.g., see Dikilitaş and Bahrami, 2022) as someone who is not familiar with the research context, but knowledgeable about qualitative research design.

Findings

We aimed to explore (1) how teachers describe their previous experiences of CO and (2) how they describe the teacher-tailored CO process in this study. The findings based on the teacher educator's notes and transcription of the interviews elicited three major themes: teacher-tailored CO as an empowering PD practice, teacher-tailored CO as a collaborative PD practice, and teacher-tailored CO as a sustainable PD practice. Below we discuss these themes with excerpts, depicting an interconnected portrait of CO as a bottom-up, self-directed PD practice.

Teacher-tailored CO as an empowering PD practice

Focusing on both their previous CO experiences and the current teacher-tailored one, all of the teachers indicated that they valued CO as an evolving PD process that nurtures and empowers their teacher identities. Yet, this did not happen overnight. In the beginning, the teachers defined their earlier CO experiences as stressful and irritating situations and chose similar analogies to describe such initial feelings of discomfort. For instance, when asked about her previous CO experiences, Ayşe said, "I feel like a student taking an oral exam. The teacher doesn't ask anything I don't know and I'm prepared, but I still panic. I must answer it correctly or do it right, or it will have consequences".

Likewise, Yasemin said, "First, I feel nervous. What am I going to do? But then I relax. It is like bungee jumping." Gökhan also likened an observee to "a soldier under great stress" and Özge underlined, "It can be a little scary at first". All the participants thought they needed COs because they lacked the required content knowledge as they did not study ELT in their undergraduate programs at university. It was evident in most of their responses that they felt inadequate. Gökhan said, "I had just completed my master's degree in the field of cultural studies, so I had a great lack of (content) knowledge (in ELT)". Ayşe also stated that she needed to be observed for her PD as she had studied literature just like Özge, who said, "as a teacher, I thought I had a lot of shortcomings".

This initial discomfort experienced by the participants was noticed by the teacher educator, too, and included in her notes, "(Gökhan's) nervousness in the beginning was apparent, he was constantly sweating and speaking tremulously, but the ease in his face and behavior towards the end of the lesson made me think that he was not anxious anymore". She made similar comments about Ayşe, "She stood still in front of the board for the first 7-8 minutes of the lesson and her awkward posture indicated that she was not comfortable. Fortunately, this was replaced by more lively and cheerful body movements".

In time, the stress and anxiety seemed to disappear and be replaced by a sense of empowerment as the teachers' metaphors for teacher-tailored CO suggested. Both Yasemin and Gökhan used the analogy of "journey" while describing CO focusing on the resemblance of CO process to life itself. Gökhan explained, "It is like a journey through which you can see the bad and good things that are happening to you" and continued, "there is always the chance of learning something new during this journey". Similarly, Yasemin explained how the CO experience empowered her professionally despite the challenges she faced in the very beginning, "CO reminds me of journey themes in literature. There is a young child who confronts challenges and gradually learns how to deal with them. In the end, he grows as a human".

The teachers further shared some detailed examples of how they advanced themselves through teacher-tailored CO as a PD practice. Gökhan highlighted the eye-opening and inspiring aspect of CO and said, "When you are evaluated by someone you value for their earlier work, knowledge, and experience, it can widen your horizon because you see something that you did not see from that perspective before". Özge added how she learns from CO and considers it to be a continuous learning process that provides reflection and fosters her agency, "(through teacher-tailored CO) I see myself better, I learn about my strengths and weaknesses". Yasemin also added a comment on her PD process, "Thanks to this CO experience, I started to find solutions by myself.", which displays how teacher-tailored CO supports teacher agency. The shift in participants' thoughts about CO as an empowering PD tool could also be seen in the teacher educator's notes. After observing Gökhan's lesson, the teacher educator wrote, "Gökhan had received feedback on his lack of time management skills earlier and support on how to improve them. Thus, as the observation focus point, he chose "time management" and did his best to show how well he improved in timing the tasks in class".

Teacher-tailored CO as a Collaborative PD Practice

The second theme that emerged was related to the collaborative atmosphere of teacher-tailored CO. The participants were content to be actively involved in the entire process of their CO. The integration of teachers enriched teacher-tailored CO practice and pointed out the significance of teachers' choosing the focus points for CO by themselves. While talking about her current experience with teacher-tailored CO, Yasemin said, "(Teacher educator) is improving my teaching. She says, 'Let's try it this way, let's see how it will work.' We discuss our thoughts. I am very comfortable during observations now." She also added, "It feels good to know what to focus on. I plan my lessons accordingly". Özge, too, was happy to be a part of the CO planning process, "It is good to choose the time of CO and its focus. I need a reference point". Likewise, Gökhan commented on the significance of collaboration during the CO process, "Considering someone (the observer) as part of the lesson is a good thing. No one likes to feel like a 'colonel' in the classroom". The positive impact of involving teachers in the CO process was also evident in the teacher educator's notes. Following her feedback session with Yasemin, she wrote, "She is the least experienced teacher but moving on step by step,

focusing on the areas where she wanted to improve herself, seems to boost her confidence. She's full of enthusiasm and constantly plans for her future lessons to be observed".

The teacher educator pointed out the teachers' initial confusion and hesitation when asked to decide on the content of their CO and concluded, "At first, they didn't have a clue of how to do it, but in time they got used to it". She then added, "As an observer, I feel more welcome in the classroom when teachers make the decisions". The teachers' contentment resulting from their becoming active agents in their professional growth was also recorded in the teacher educator's notes, "Özge said she wanted COs to be conducted in this way, with no change at all. She looked happy with that". Obviously, the collaborative aspect of CO enabled the teachers to play an active role in their professional learning and shaped the effectiveness of the whole process.

Teacher-tailored CO as a Sustainable PD Practice

The participant teachers explained that they would like to sustain CO as a PD practice at the individual level in their future careers. For instance, Ayşe stated she would like to have more teacher-tailored COs, "I wish we could have peer observation sessions like we do now once or twice a month. There are teachers in the school who I would like to observe. They can come and observe my classes, as well". Yasemin further added, "I want to have COs (in the future)", highlighting the positive feedback she received during the teacher-tailored CO process. The participant teachers described CO, specifically the teacher-tailored CO, as a PD activity sustainable at the individual level and explained it through two dimensions. According to the teachers, the multimodal forms of feedback provided, and the observer attitudes are two main aspects that encourage them to have more teacher-tailored COs as PD practices in the future. Two of the teachers mentioned the significance of the detailed multimodal feedback the teacher educator provided on their instructional practices. For instance, while describing his teacher-tailored CO experience as a bottom-up PD practice, Gökhan reported:

> First, she (the teacher educator) gave short verbal feedback in the class in a very kind fashion, and then we held a thorough face-to-face post-observation session, which was followed by detailed written feedback. It was so valuable and motivating. I was really satisfied.

Likewise, Özge highlighted the importance of the observer's feedback on the focal points she had chosen in teacher-tailored COs, "(The post-observation) feedback I received was mostly verbal. It was very professional and detailed, which motivated me a lot". Yasemin commented on the role of feedback and explained how she planned her future lessons accordingly, "I focus on the topic that was highlighted during the feedback for my next lessons. I act like this, and I think it becomes effective this way". The teacher educator, too, stated that her feedback to the participants was highly appreciated and noted that "it played an important role in their willingness for future CO plans".

Furthermore, the observer attitudes were recognized as a crucial element considering the sustainability of CO practice and were presented in an interplay of many related concerns.

Özge highlighted the importance of mutual trust between the observer and the observee, while Yasemin commented on the importance of the attitude of the observer and a greater emphasis on the strengths of a lesson rather than weaknesses. She said she was motivated by the constructive approach of the teacher educator and added, "She does not talk negatively. She recommends an extremely easy solution, something very practical, something that is applicable, catchy and that does not demoralize the other party at all". Gökhan said, "We are all humans, we all make mistakes, but these need to be pointed out very nicely and politely, so style is very important here". Furthermore, he emphasized the attitudes of the observer, "the positivity of (observer's) attitude and approach to us and the courtesy of the person who observes our lesson is so valuable". Additionally, reflecting on a previous CO experience, Ayşe complained about the judgmental and critical look on the face of the observer and mimed the expression on his face, and added, "Sometimes (observers) had a poker face but (the teacher educator in the study) is smiling and encouraging me all the time". Later, during the interview, Ayşe added how (the teacher educator in the study) motivated her during the feedback session by giving specific examples about the strengths of her lesson and the way she concluded the session, "I enjoyed it!". During informal conversations, Özge also commented on the teacher educator's attitudes in this study describing her style as motivating and encouraging.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study illustrate the potential of conducting teacher-tailored COs designed in a bottom-up fashion to promote an orientation toward contemporary PD approaches. It is acknowledged in national and international contexts that sustainable PD practices converge on providing more constructive support for teachers contrary to the conventional perspective (e.g., Borg, 2015; Uştuk and Çomoglu, 2021; Wyatt and Dikilitaş, 2016). Thus, this current study supports the significance and value of teacher involvement, experience, and knowledge for professional growth (Borg, 2015) through bottom-up CO practices in our context, where top-down PD practices are still prevalent.

Regarding our first research question of how teachers describe their previous experiences of CO, the findings show that they consider CO as an empowering opportunity to improve their instructional practices despite the discomfort it creates in the beginning. Such CO-induced stress and anxiety as reported by previous research (e.g., Ali, 2007; Cockburn, 2005; Merç, 2015) seem to result from the participants' sense of inadequacy as ELT instructors due to their non-ELT backgrounds and their previous CO experiences which were mainly deficiency-focused (Hayes, 2019). Yet, once the stress and anxiety are overcome, the teachers' (re)conceptualization of CO as a learning possibility echoes the findings of similar studies (e.g., Barrogo, 2020; Caratiquit and Pablo, 2021; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011; Smailes, 2021).

As for the teachers' insights into teacher-tailored CO presented in a bottom-up style in this study, the findings indicate that the participants relished the empowerment promoted by a democratic model of PD, which allowed them to decide

on their professional needs (Taşdemir and Karaman, 2022). As opposed to 'a prescriptive model of feedback', where the teacher is expected to adopt the opinions and actions suggested by the supervisor, the teacher educator in the current study had a 'collaborative style' and involved the teachers equally in the CO process (Copland and Donaghue, 2019: 406). The positive effects of being an actual partner during the CO stages worked as a facilitator from the participant teachers' perspective. Congruently, considering the collaboration between the observer and observee during the CO practice, Barócsi (2007) reports the need for the involvement of observees in the selection of foci under investigation. The significance of teachers' involvement in their own PD practices is also argued by Garman and Holland (2015), who suggest teachers should assume active roles in their own learning because it might cultivate teacher agency, self-confidence, and collaboration. Thus, supporting teachers to play active roles while making decisions for their own professional growth through various tools (King, 2014; Wyatt and Dikilitaş, 2016) enables an empowering and collaborative PD practice environment.

In addition, the participants highlighted the role of the observer in the CO process for its micro sustainability as a PD practice. They expected that their strengths and weaknesses in teaching would be equally evaluated in multimodal forms - written and/or verbal- by someone who does not claim a hierarchy of power. Such an equal distribution of power and control during the CO process in our study might have been enabled by a slightly more emphasis on the strengths of a lesson rather than weaknesses. Nevertheless, the teacher educator's meticulously chosen and politely conveyed comments in the feedback meetings and forms should not be mistaken for equivocal language, which may 'fuel misconceptions' (Wajnryb, 1998: 541). Thus, explicitness is essential in feedback. It is also noted that the utilization of teacher-tailored CO facilitates collegial learning when it is offered through dialogue between the observer and the observee (Dymoke and Harrison, 2006). In our study, the interaction between the teachers and the teacher educator has supported teacher agency (Insulander et al., 2019) and encouraged the teachers to sustain CO as a PD practice on a micro level thanks to the positive attitudes of the teacher educator.

To conclude, the current study suggests that CO could function as an empowering, collaborative, and sustainable PD activity for EFL teachers' professional growth once it is tailored by teachers themselves and mediated by a teacher educator and/or peers in a collaborative atmosphere. Creating collaborative spaces that give teachers PD options and agency, as we did in our study, would enhance sustainable professional teacher development (King, 2014; Lopes and D'Ambrosio, 2016; Priestley et al., 2012; Voogt et al., 2015). Tracing from past to present, the CO practices of the participants highlight the value and significance of experiencing teacher-tailored CO as an empowering, collaborative, and sustainable PD practice. Knowing that it is a valued practice by teachers themselves, conditions for more bottom-up, teacher-directed COs should be created for sustainable teacher PD. Just as importantly, teacher educators need to transcend the limitations of conventional, deficiency-based CO practices and improve themselves on how to co-conduct empowering and sustainable COs with teachers.

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