

**Peer observation of Teaching (POT) for Quality Assurance in EFL Context**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to examine the attitudes towards peer observation of teaching and the need to establish a POT at Taif University. The prime impetus for this study is to raise teaching quality in EFL context at tertiary level at higher institutions. Moreover, it intends to change the preconceived perception towards observation. It will discuss the objectives and benefits of peer observation, teaching quality, give guidelines on how to set up an observation program, and alignment of the method of teaching with other teaching on the module and with assessment. To achieve these objectives, a survey is conducted with a group of English language lecturers at the branches of the university. The study has revealed that though the majority rebuffs the idea of being observed by peers because observation is often connected with judgment, evaluation and assessment, they like to apply it for professional improvement and teaching quality assurance. It has also showed that watching a person teaching and managing classroom is often perplexing, embarrassing and controversial for many lecturers at university. As far as the teaching quality is concerned, observation is required to share knowledge and information, method and strategies and techniques and classroom management. The outcome is that the students will receive powerful learning while lectures will receive powerful professional development for both the observed and the observers. Finally, the study suggests some possible aspects of teaching and learning plans, which can provide a focus for POT activities for Quality Assurance in EFL Context.

[Siddig Ahmed Ali. **Peer observation of Teaching (POT) for Quality Assurance in EFL Context.** *N Y Sci J*2012;5(11):15-22]. (ISSN: 1554-0200). <http://www.sciencepub.net/newyork>. 4**Keywords:** Observation, Peer, Teaching Quality, Assessment, observer, observed, Summative, Formative.**1. Introduction**

Over the past few years, observation was more common at elementary, intermediate and high school in most countries in the Arab world if not globally. In the recent years however, the attention is drawn to high education institutions in general and EFL colleges in particular to achieve total quality. This makes peer observation the optimal tool used to enhance teaching and learning at higher education institutions. Moreover, Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) is regarded as part of teaching quality assurance procedures. Consequently, the demand for it has increased exponentially. POT has been implemented in some universities because many teachers failed to develop and promote their teaching performance and achieve teaching quality.

Teaching quality was the key factor of accreditation for higher education institutions around the globe. American universities are no exception. For instance, some American and British universities use peer observation as part of their quality assurance procedures. These universities claim their drawbacks to POT though they agreed that the POT was not regularly put into practice with some new guidelines for the observations. Therefore, the POT is still required to assure Saudi Arabia universities success and accreditation by National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA).

**1.1 The problem:**

Promoting, assessing and evaluating teaching at tertiary level is hard and a hectic task. Educationalists proposed so many techniques to assure teaching quality and produce a well-qualified graduate; still some techniques are conventional and ineffective. Peer observation is one technique to do the job. However, some are not in favor of using it due to bias, deterioration of friendships and lack of collaboration. Therefore, the problem of the study arises from the fact that some universities in Arab world and Saudi Arabia depend only on students' feedback to evaluate and assess their teachers per semester and annually. However, there are many approaches and methods to evaluate and assess teachers at universities. Accordingly, students receive powerful learning due to powerful teaching. Thus, peer observation is required for quality assurance.

**1.2 The objectives of the study:**

This study intends to find out administrators and teachers' perception towards adopting peer observation to promote lecturers' performance and ensure quality of teaching. It also aims to foster peer observation at Taif university affiliated branches. It is also sought to achieve the following objectives:

- A. To raise the quality of teaching English as a foreign language.
- B. To promote teachers' performance through peer observation in EFL context.

- C. To receive feedback on peer observation.
- D. To exchange the experiences in teaching.
- E. To help individuals prepare for and conduct an effective teaching observation and feedback.
- F. To clarify the terms peer observation, assessment, and teaching quality.

### 1.2.1 Significance of the Study

This study is thought to be significant as it is expected to promote teachers' awareness toward the use POT in EFL context. The received feedback from peer observation and criticism could make possible for the teachers to enhance their teaching quality as they benefit from each other's errors and mistakes. The study is considered to be among the first studies that deal with teaching quality and teaching evaluation at Taif University. It is expected to lay a substantial foundation for teachers who would like to adopt POT by providing them the chances to exchange experience and develop collaboration in teaching.

### 1.3 The hypotheses:

Peer observation is not adopted due to:

- a. Peer observation is not adopted as a method of evaluation and assessment by Taif University, Saudi Arabia.
- b. Teachers and professors lack awareness of POT.
- c. Negative attitudes towards POT.
- d. There is discrepancy in judgment of peers which results in deterioration in peers' relationships.

### 1.4 Questions of the study:

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- a) Do teachers display negative or positive attitudes towards peer observation?
- b) In what ways and to what extent can peer observation promote teachers' performance at tertiary level?
- c) Does POT help teachers to ensure teaching quality in EFL context?
- d) Is there one fair criteria of assessment done by the observer and the observed?

### 1.5 Limitations:

This study is thought to be useful as raises teachers' awareness toward the use POT in EFL context. It targeted the administrative and academic staff at branches colleges of Taif University who teaches English Language as a foreign language. The duration for this study is 2 months in the year 2012.

## 2. Review of Literature:

### 2.1 Peer Observation of Teaching (POT)

A peer is a colleague who does not have administrative authority above the one who observe. Either peers can be colleagues from the same department, of a similar status or there can be differentials of status as well, or the colleagues can be from another department or from a central educational development unit. A peer may or may not be a mentor.

Peer observation is the process by which university instructors provide feedback to colleagues on their teaching efforts and practices.

Traditionally the term "observation" has a negative sense because it is associated with evaluation and can be very subjective, judgmental and impressionistic as stated by Qun Wag and Seth, (1998).

A precise definition of Peer Observation of Teaching (or POT) is two or more colleagues observing each other's teaching according to an agreed set of criteria. In this concern, POT is often defined by Lublin, 2002 as "A collaborative and reciprocal process whereby one peer observes another's teaching (actual or virtual) and provides supportive and constructive feedback. Its underlying rationale is to encourage (continued) professional development in teaching and learning through critical reflection, by both observer and 'observed'. It may also include 'observation' and feedback of non-classroom aspects such as a staff member's approaches to teaching and learning, including module or course design and documentation, teaching resources, appropriateness of assessment etc". Moreover, the term refers to the recommended use of peers in an effort to improve classroom instruction. However, observation and input they get from one another, help teachers to examine and reflect on their teaching (Greal, 1983).

POT is often used as part of a training course for new lecturers or as part of a development process for individual lecturers or the whole department. Sometimes POT takes place by mutual agreement and sometimes it is imposed. Here, the observer occupies the role of the expert - although still a peer. When the teacher being observed accepts, or even welcomes the comments of the observer, it can be a powerful learning experience (Gosling, 2000), but it can also prevent full engagement by subject staff if the 'expert' is not fully trusted.

### 2.2 A Brief History of Classroom Observation

Peer observation appears to have evolved from four separate pedagogical traditions related to classroom observation:

- a. **Teacher training.** For at least the past 50 years, classroom observation by training supervisors has been employed as an evaluative measure of the ability of teacher-trainees.
- b. **Research into teaching behaviors.** Flanders (1960) developed "interactional analysis", based on observing actual teacher and student activities in the classroom, as a tool to reveal patterns of classroom behavior. Activities were observed at regular intervals of time and coded according to a set of pre-determined categories. Flanders' study was the first of many which attempted to identify

effective teacher behaviors through objective measurement and analysis of data.

**c. Comparative methodological research.**

Systematic classroom observation became a prime source of data for evaluating the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies. One of the first such studies was the 'Pennsylvania Project' carried out in the 1960s to compare the efficacy of the audio-lingual method in language teaching (Allwright, 1988).

**d. Clinical supervision.** Clinical supervision, which had its beginnings among a group of teacher educators at Harvard University in the 1950s, is most closely associated with Goldhammer (1969). It drew on psychological counseling techniques to provide a more effectual way of enlightening teachers about their own classroom behaviors than the existing practice of having "classroom visitors" offer their own, often subjective, advice

## 2.2. The benefits of peer observation

Peer observation is a method of getting immediate and objective feedback on their teaching to improve teaching skills of both observer and instructor observed. It allowed the teachers to exchange experiences, disseminate innovative approaches, and encourage good practice in teaching. Moreover, it serves a quality control purpose and of Developmental aspect as well.

Peer observation of teaching is of growing importance in higher education for purposes of both assessment and evaluation. It also provides individual and confidential feedback on teaching and learning. It provides one aspect of a quality assurance. POT encourages all staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching. It assists departments in providing a high quality educational experience for its students. The observation process benefits both the observer and the observed. Peer Observation of teaching is an opportunity to validate what is working well, to exchange practical ideas, to solve problems and to explore and align practice with a developing understanding of theory, as well as to learn from the practice of others. It is an opportunity to gain confidence and competence. For both inexperienced and experienced staff, observation is a process that prompts them to question what they do and to apply an analytical approach to the development of their own teaching practice. In short and according to (Fullerton: 2003 cited in Ketteridge, Fry, Marshall (2003) : ), POT offers the following:

- a) feedback on individual teaching skills and style;
- b) discussion, collaboration and exchange of ideas;
- c) mutual support between colleagues;

- d) earmarked 'quality time' to talk about learning and teaching;
- e) feedback on piloting a new idea, method or solution to a problem;
- f) triangulation with other evaluative procedures, e.g., student perception questionnaires, module and programmed evaluations;
- g) focused reflection on specific teaching sessions;
- h) the opportunity in departments to broaden understanding of teaching in the discipline and the student learning experience;
- i) The opportunity to see exemplary practitioners at work.
- j) Above all, it enhances teaching quality.

## 2.3 Principles of peer observation

(Gosling, 2005; Carter & Clark, 2003) state lists of principles when applying peer observation in EFL settings:

- a) The process should be confidential and "owned" by the person being observed
- b) Observation should be separated from other university processes such as underperformance or promotion
- c) Inclusivity – observation should involve all staff with teaching responsibilities irrespective of grade or status.
- d) Reciprocity with a focus on mutual benefits to observer and observed
- e) The focus of observation should be developmental rather than judgmental.
- f) Peer observation has a developmental role, concerned with the development of individual teachers
- g) Peer observation is required of all teaching staff, including part-time staff and graduate teaching assistants
- h) Peer observation is mandatory. Staff should aim to undertake peer observation regularly, normally on an annual basis.
- i) Heads of Academic Departments have discretion to agree exemptions for individual staff where appropriate
- j) Peer observation is supported through departmental ownership and by the provision of clear guidance to Heads of Department
- k) The new approach is designed to facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practice, and developmental opportunities for both observer and observed.

## 2.3 The types of peer observation

Classroom observation can take different forms and it can be done for different purposes. The two most commonly used forms of observation are summative

observation and formative observation. Summative observation is type of assessment that typically comes at the end of a module or a section of learning and awards the learner with a final mark or grade for that section. It aims to inform decisions about the learner's abilities often use the information about the learner. This observation is an evaluation by which rates the teacher who is being observed. It can be done for administrative or supervisory reports for the purpose of job retention, promotion, salary increases, etc • Formative observation or Formative assessment is an assessment that is used to help teachers and learners gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the learners' performance while there is still time to take action for improvement. Typically, it is expressed in words rather than marks or grades. Information about learners is used diagnostically. The purpose of a formative review is to help teachers become better teachers and professionals that are more knowledgeable. With peer observation, teachers observe each other's classes, give each other feedback, and share ideas.

Confusion reigns over the terms of evaluation and assessment. Assessment is the process of objectively understanding the state or condition of a thing, by observation and measurement. Assessment of teaching means taking a measure of its effectiveness. "Formative" assessment is measurement for the purpose of improving it.

"Summative" assessment is what we normally call "evaluation." Evaluation is the process of observing and measuring a thing for judging it and of determining its "value," either by comparison to similar things, or to a standard.

Evaluation of teaching means passing judgment on it as part of an administrative process (Franchini, 2008). There are some definite advantages to using peer observation. Observers are familiar with the teaching situation, both its goals and its limitations. Peer observation can also help individual teachers try to improve their skills without the fear of recorded evaluation. Such observation, which is done well, can help to create a strong supportive atmosphere among the faculty in schools.

### 2.5 The peer observation: Procedures and process

- At university, POT involves three Stages.

1. Pre-observation
2. During observation
3. Post observation

**Pre-observation:** the observed specifies which teaching session they would like to be observed. They will also specify the specific issues/areas that they want the observer to focus on. The observed should record this data on Form (B), and then have a short meeting with the observer to confirm and clarify these issues comparing to Form (A). Having this meeting at

a suitable point before the teaching session allows both parties adequate time to reflect on the issues involved .

**Observation:** the observer should attend the specified session and sit unobtrusively in the room. They should observe and not take part in the session. It is up to the observed whether they would like to introduce the observer to the students or not, and whether they would explain the purpose of their presence. In a large group, this may well not be necessary. The observer should focus on the points that the observed have asked to be observed on, and look out for other aspects of good practice. They should make notes on Form C .

**Post observation:** Soon after the teaching session (preferably within one week) the observer and observed should meet in private. There is an expectation that the observed starts this session by reflecting on what happened both generally in terms of aspects of good practice and specifically in terms of the aspects, they wanted to be observed .

### 2.7 Strategies of Peer Observation

Observation may be taken in lectures, tutorials, seminars, laboratory classes, fieldwork, creative workshops and teaching with patients.

### 2.8 Observation checklist

An observation checklist is a list of items that an observer uses to observe his peer when delivering a lecture in a classroom. Below is a Checklist for observing a teaching session: (Adapted from a **checklist** produced by the TLA Centre, University of Edinburgh.)

- a) **Venue:** was the venue adequate in terms of seating, lighting, heating, audio-visual aids, etc? If not, could the lecturer have done more to help make the venue congenial?
- b) **Context:** was information available to students about the course as a whole? Were links drawn between this learning session and previous ones/other parts of the course/supporting materials?
- c) **Structure:** was the teaching material organised so that students could follow the structure or sequence? Were key points clearly signposted?
- d) **Level:** was the session pitched at an appropriate level for the students? Was any provision made for those who experienced difficulties?
- e) **Clarity:** was the material clearly presented? Were the explanations given readily understood by students?
- f) **Use of Examples:** If illustrations or examples were used did they help to underline key

points? Were examples related to students' knowledge and interests?

- g) **Handouts (and Other Materials):** Did the lecturer make use of handouts or other study materials? If so, were these helpful in summarising, amplifying or reinforcing the lecture material?
- h) **Audio-visual Aids:** Was appropriate use made of audio/visual aids? Were the aids successful in conveying the subjects matter and developing understanding?
- i) **Audibility:** could the lecturer be clearly heard by all students?
- j) **Pace and Timing:** Was the teaching material presented at an appropriate speed? Did the lecturer keep to time?
- k) **Enthusiasm and Interest:** Did the lecturer present the material in a lively and enthusiastic way? Was students' apparent interest in the subject matter sustained or enhanced?
- l) **Interaction:** did the lecturer facilitate interaction? For example, was small discussion groups used? Were there opportunities for questions or comments and for students' interests, concerns or experience to be drawn upon?
- m) **Innovation:** did the lecturer attempt any innovations? In what ways were they successful? How could they be improved?

## 2.6 Feedback

Feed back is oral or written developmental advice on performance so that the recipient has a better understanding of values, standards, criteria, etc. The significance of feedback is to identify strengths and weaknesses of teaching of peers while they colleagues are delivering their classes. As soon as the class is over, feedback is delivered to the observed. The observer gives feedback on advantages and disadvantages after the class is over. The observer highlights the things that went well and effectively and reflect upon the things that were not proper and weaknesses.

Internationally, there is an increasing recognition of the need to complement generic teaching development with learning about teaching in discipline-specific contexts (Jenkins, 1996).

Bell (2001) observes that an aspect of academics' reluctance to participate in a peer observation relates to the possible summative use of the feedback provided by peers for management purposes and the notion that this information could inform career advancement decisions.

Academics may feel uncomfortable about peers having a direct influence on their promotion chances, especially in the current competitive environment when many people may be feeling insecure about their.

### Guidelines for giving feedback

Giving feedback to colleagues is a skill needed throughout an academic's professional life. Feedback assures quality of teaching. In this concern, Fullerton (2003) gives the following the guidelines:

- Having got the observed to reflect first, the observer should start with the positive points – there are always positive elements. End on a positive note too.
- Tailor the amount of feedback to what the observed can make use of at that time.
- Be constructive by making positive suggestions for improvement.
- Avoid making value judgments.
- Use questions to guide the discussion and encourage the observed to reflect
- On practice and help, develop an action plan.
- Focus on the behavior that can be changed rather than the person.

### Guidelines for receiving feedback

- Clarify what kind of feedback is going to be helpful to you.
- Good feedback will lead naturally to the development of an action plan.
- Be prepared to accept honest and constructive criticism.
- Explore ways to address any areas of less effective practice identified.
- Ask for examples or ideas for other approaches.

## 2.7 Teaching Quality Assurance

Quality enhancement refers to all the activities and processes adopted to improve and develop the quality of higher education and of practice. Peer observation is a method of gaining feedback to improve lecturers' teaching skills and enhance their teaching quality. The accreditation of universities around the Kingdom has made the teaching trends move towards peer observation as a quality enhancement tool. The outcome is good practice and learning enhancement. Jackson (2002) suggests that quality enhancement is more transformative and is directly concerned with adding value and improving quality. Quality enhancement involves encouraging the student, responding to new technologies as one of the many means of coping with the more diverse range of students, and ensuring that staff are recognized and rewarded for excellent teaching (TQEC, 2003).

Hutchings (1994) suggests that there are three main arguments for the peer observation that should be considered by the academic community:

- a) To encourage collaboration amongst academic staff in order to share ideas and good practice;
- b) To ensure that the enhancement of teaching is largely the remit of professionals rather than members of outside agencies; and
- c) To supplement student evaluations of teaching with the comments of respected colleagues and thereby provide multiple data sources.

### 2.8 Peer observation pros and cons

#### Pros:

1. Sharing of ideas and innovations in EFL context.
2. Encouraging collaboration, openness and support between colleagues.
3. Encouraging spirit of teamwork.
4. Identifying areas of weaknesses for remedial work.
5. Fostering teaching quality enhancement.
6. Understanding more about teaching and learning by receiving feedback from colleges.

#### Cons:

- a) Possible bias relating to the observer's own beliefs about teaching.
- b) POT may not be a valid method for summative evaluation.
- c) Training is required on how to observe and be observed.
- d) It is time consuming: the observer and the observed need more time to do the observation.
- e) The observer might think he knows better than the person he has observed.
- f) The feedback might not be as useful as the feedback from the senior teachers.
- g) The feedback might be insensitive.
- h) There might be a negative attitude towards POT when there is extra work.
- i) The students might get the idea that something is going wrong between the teachers.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The study followed the analytical and descriptive approaches of research are to examine the attitudes towards application of peer observation. The study is limited to Taif University, branches of Turaba and Khurma. The questionnaire is the main tool for collecting the core data. It includes lectures and professors in those particular areas.

#### 3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is composed of 15 items revolving around peer observation in terms of teachers'

performance and achieving the quality of teaching in EFL context at tertiary level. The targeted population of the research was teachers at Taif University, in kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Attitudes and application of peer observation are surveyed together with teaching quality. The questionnaire is intended to seek if a correlation between POT variable is strong enough, about one variable allows the researcher to make a prediction about the other variable of quality assurance (QA). In order to test the validity and reliability, the questionnaire was delivered to panel of experts. It was piloted to receive the views and opinions of participants, experts and specialists who modified the questionnaire. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, 40 copies of the questionnaire have been completed, and then analyzed by SPSS16 software to investigate questionnaire reliability.

According to the results of questionnaire reliability levels are acceptable, and in all items over than 0.80.

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.837	.868	15

#### 3.2 Data analysis and Discussion

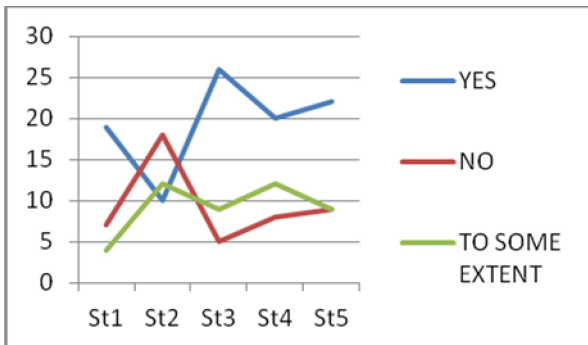
The collected data was handled using a database software programs (SPSS version 16). Analysis included the views of teachers POT and teaching quality in EFL context. A 90% of the respondents strongly support the use of POT providing positive attitudes towards the tool as evaluation and assessment. Very few participants were against applying POT in EFL context. They attribute their opinions to deterioration of relationship between the staff in any institution and divergence in experiences. Although POT is not a new assessment tool, it has gained the concern of teachers at the university due to interest in professional development and exchanging experiences.

#### 3.3 Statistics and analysis

Generally, the lecturers were positive about POT. That was evident as they answered the three aspects survey. The first aspect dealt with Attitudes towards POT. It is observed that the majority of them gave divergent responses in terms of acceptance and rejection of the idea of peer observation and at the same time, they agreed when the peer is selected by the observed. The table and graph below demonstrate instructors' attitudes towards POT.

**Table2: Attitudes towards POT**

No.	Yes	No	To some extent
St1	47.5%	17.5%	10%
St2	25%	45%	30%
St3	65%	12.5%	22.5%
St4	50%	20%	30%
St5	55%	22.5%	22.5%



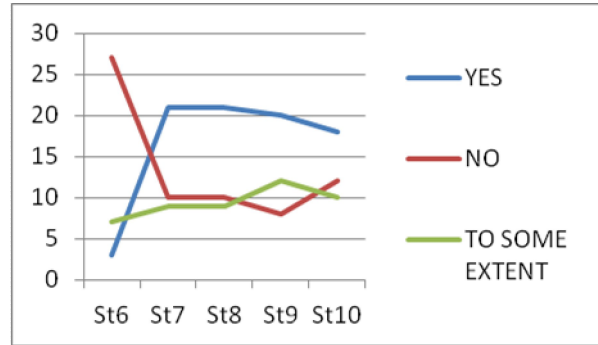
**Fig (1) Attitudes towards POT**

**The application POT in EFL context**

As for the use of POT at university of Taif, the majority of the instructor displayed nonexistence of POT in classrooms. The table and graph below reflects their opinions.

**Table (3): The application POT in EFL context**

No.	Yes	No	To some extent
St6	7.5%	67.5%	17.5%
St7	52.5%	25%	22.5%
St8	52.5%	25%	22.5%
St9	50%	20%	30%
St10	45%	30%	25%



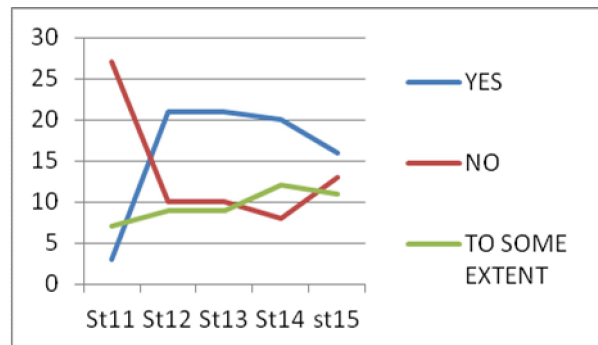
**Fig (2): The application POT in EFL context**

**Enhancing teaching quality:**

As for teaching quality improvement, the majority has Put it directly that POT promotes teaching skills and enhance their experience and profession.

**Table (4): Enhancing teaching quality:**

No.	Yes	No	To some extent
St11	62.5%	12.5%	17.5%
St12	52.5%	25%	22.5%
St13	62.5%	12.5%	22.5%
St14	50%	12.5%	37.5%
St15	40%	32.5%	27.5%



**Fig (3): Enhancing teaching quality:**

**3.4 Results**

This study revealed that POT is needed to enhance Quality of teaching. Moreover, Assessing and evaluating lecturers are successful at colleges and universities and more effective when both teachers' and students' views are received. The lecturers displayed positive attitude toward peer observation of teaching though they the rebuff the idea of being evaluated and assessed by their peers. They considered it a reciprocal positive or negative evaluation. If one evaluate and asses the other positively, it will be reciprocal “ you scratch my back and I will scratch yours” Feedbacks are the key factors for teachers' competence and confidence. Results also revealed that

the teachers could exchange experience and information to produce effective teaching and learning. The overall findings showed no significant differences between teachers' points of views in terms applying POT at tertiary level.

### 3.5 Conclusion

POT has become an integral part of teaching and learning in higher education. The case study was carried to assess the implementation of the program and to discover the attitude of lecturers towards the POT. The result of this is that observing, being observed and giving feedback produce lecturers' confidence and competence. Giving feedback is crucial for exchanging experiences and ideas. POT is urgently needed in EFL context to enhance practice and awareness. Overall, POT is needed for university teachers and novice in particular though lecturers may feel constraint of time when do observation.

### 3.6 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers' attitudes are positive about POT at university; it is recommended that teachers and educationalists should make it an integral part in their curriculum.
2. Universities should adopt POT to assure teaching quality and professional improvement,
3. Peer Observation must be tailored to suit College needs and achieve university accreditation.
4. Conduct future research studies dealing with quality of teaching.
5. Lecturers should be committed to POT.
6. Executing plans and strategies provided by the university system.

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