



Research paper

Online peer observation: Reflections on a process-based job-embedded professional development activity through video recordings[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- This is a collective case study guided by social cognitive theory and sociocultural theory.
- OLPO through recorded videos transformed a job-embedded professional development activity into a social learning experience.
- OLPO enhances collegiality and critical friendship when peer support is needed during paradigmatic educational shifts.
- Asynchronous nature of OLPO relieves teachers of observation anxiety, which provides deeper learning opportunities.
- OLPO helped teachers overcome pedagogical online solitude since peers facilitated the adaptation to online teaching.

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ABSTRACT

Guided by the sociocultural approach to teacher learning, this collective case study describes in-depth online peer observation experiences of six English language teachers and how they reflected on the scheme carried out for a semester at a university. Data were collected via an interest analysis form, 24 reflective diaries, 24 video recordings of pre- and post-observation meetings, and two experience sharing day colloquiums. Thematic analysis was conducted to reveal emerging themes and codes. OLPO led the participants to telecollaborate, scrutinize their online classes, offer solutions for improved teaching, test these solutions in their practices, and reflect on the whole process.

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1. Introduction

For a professional development process to reach success, a job-embedded design where teachers' interests, ideas, opinions, and suggestions are given great value is a pre-requisite (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). This type of teacher professional development activity provides teachers with mutual opportunities to learn professionally. These localized professional development

opportunities then may offer teachers chances to apply what they have learned from one another to their teaching (Croft et al., 2010, pp. 1–16). It operates as an essential component of school culture and supports practitioners to act like learners (Hamilton, 2013). However, most of the time practitioners carry out their responsibilities, particularly teaching, be it in traditional classroom settings (face-to-face) or online platforms (virtual classrooms) or possibly a combination of the two (a hybrid model), in the absence of other teachers. This means that the work usually occurs alone behind closed doors or in front of screens. Teaching in higher education institutions is not an exception in this case, either (Tenenbergh, 2016). Additionally, professional development practices for teachers are usually provided outside of or extracted from (Hamilton, 2013) real classrooms, disconnected from realities of teaching, and therefore may not yield demonstrable change or

Abbreviations: OLPO, Online Peer Observation; PO, Peer Observation; TPL, Teacher Professional Learning.

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improvement in teaching practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Consequently, opportunities to develop professionally by observing and reflecting on what other teachers do in their classes might be missed. This 'pedagogical solitude' as Shulman notes (1993, p. 6) can be minimized with peer observation of online teaching (Walker & Forbes, 2018), an online peer-learning academic development activity. In in-service language teacher education, peer observation (PO) is commonly used, but peer observation of online teaching is under practiced, thus, under researched. This study is an attempt to address this gap by examining a collectively participated observation program among colleagues at a private university located in Istanbul, Turkey. To this end, we sought to answer the following research question: "How did the participants reflect on the effectiveness of the proposed online peer observation (OLPO) design in their online teaching practices?"

2. Theoretical framework and background literature

To be able to provide pedagogically sound gains, the current study adopts social cognitive theory, sociocultural approach (to teacher learning), and the theory of Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). In social cognitive theory, one of the fundamental ideas is that individuals can learn both from engaging in social interactions and observing others. It proposes a mutual deterministic link known as 'reciprocal determinism' between individuals (in the form of cognition, emotion, and biological occurrences), their milieu, and behavior. These constituents actively interact with each other to constitute the foundation for behavior, along with probable interventions to change behavior (Bandura, 2001). Key concepts or constructs of this theory that are in line with PO include self-efficacy and observational learning. According to Bandura, behaviors are governed by the interplay between expected outcomes, the extent to which individuals consider their behavior will cause specific outcomes, and efficacy expectations, the extent to which people consider they can produce that certain outcome. The other significant principle of social cognitive theory pertaining to behavior and learning is its stress on observation, imitation, and modeling because successful examples evoke trust, admiration, and respect from the observer. Therefore, a change in efficacy expectations via secondhand experience, as in the case of PO, may lead to embolden and inspire observees to believe that they can perform that behavior as well. Since each theory has its own limitations and will not be sufficient by itself to comprehensively explain and predict the complex issue of human behavior, this study also follows sociocultural approach to teacher learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2016), which is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). When teacher learning is approached from this view, second language pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) cannot be isolated from the teachers who both internalize and perform it in the venues where they work and learn. Kelly (2006) argues that sociocultural perspectives are more suitable to provide insights into teacher learning as they value collaboration and reflective practice. PO, in this sense, is an exercise that is supposed to encourage reflection on teaching practice, recognize developmental needs, and cultivate discussion. PO is also regarded as a means, not an end, and a key via which both quality of learning and teaching can be enhanced (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004, 2005; Shortland, 2004). Additionally, PO comprises the collaborative and planned process of observation of teaching to improve teaching (Georgiou et al., 2018). The current study also considers the theory of TPL (Opfer & Pedder, 2011) since TPL occurs when practitioners learn from one another if they engage in job-embedded professional development activities by

forming learning communities. In total contrast to the idea of Shulman's pedagogical solitude (1993), TPL provides practitioners with chances to work in a collaborative and ongoing fashion, and it includes critical reflection, which is another significant component of PO. Mercer (2000) believes that thinking together is both an individual and social attempt, and the connection between the two by language may lead to strong dialogic communication, which then can be exploited to examine and understand the nature of human interaction. The above-mentioned approaches and theories apply to OLPO. There undoubtedly exist differences between observing and being observed in traditional classes and virtual classes. For instance, most of the nonverbal communication aspects are missing in online teaching (Bennett & Barp, 2008). Other challenges inherent in online teaching, which necessitate purposeful dialog between the pairs, critical co-constructive reflection on online teaching, and digital integration to enhance online student engagement can be overcome thanks to OLPO (Walker & Forbes, 2018). At this point, OLPO can play a very significant role.

The literature indicates that a wide range of studies have been conducted to examine potential effects of PO on collegiality (Bell, 2001; Bell & Cooper, 2013; Bell & Thomson, 2018; Byrne et al., 2010; Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014), and the development of teaching skills, knowledge, and ideas (Bell, 2001; Bell & Cooper, 2013; Bell & Mladenovic, 2015; Byrne et al., 2010; Hamilton, 2013; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005; Kenny et al., 2014; Shortland, 2010). Other studies have sought to explore the relationship between PO and critical reflection (Bell, 2001; Bell et al., 2010; Bell & Mladenovic, 2015; Byrne et al., 2010; Courneya et al., 2008; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Kenny et al., 2014; Parr & Hawe, 2017; Peel, 2005; Shortland, 2010; Torres et al., 2017).

Recently, mounting evidence from research indicates that there has been a growing interest in OLPO in higher education settings. The literature on OLPO mainly focuses on the differences and similarities between the execution of the processes of PO and OLPO, and the benefits of the latter along with its challenges. First, OLPO cannot solely imitate the PO of traditional classroom-based teaching since the principles of PO are not easily passed on to online environments (Bennett & Santy, 2009; Knight & Steinbach, 2011). For instance, OLPO might pose challenges including teaching aspects to be observed online, the management and structure of the observation process, and the link between expectations and observation experience (Bennett & Barp, 2008). Secondly, like PO, OLPO also necessitates reflective inquiry to inform tutors' pedagogical practices, teaching strategies, and course development (Jones & Gallen, 2016; Swinglehurst et al., 2008). In addition, it is reported that the relationship between OLPO and teacher professional development, support, and teachers' well-being in synchronous virtual classrooms leads to a perceived gain in the participants' confidence levels (Harper & Nicolson, 2013). Equally important, isolation and pedagogical solitude are also highlighted as issues OLPO could address as a social process of inquiry by decreasing social distancing among tutors through collaboration (Bowskill et al., 2017; Walker & Forbes, 2018). More recently, OLPO, closely associated with student engagement and well-being, has been of interest to the researchers who investigated how these two concepts could be alleviated during synchronous online classes (Andrew et al., 2021). In the end, regarding OLPO, it should be noted that it has been rarely practiced over the last decade (Applebee, 2014; Jones & Gallen, 2016), and greater empirical evidence is required within the higher education context, particularly for language teachers. Therefore, this study set out to investigate this relatively new phenomenon and provide insights into the nature of the process.

3. Method

In this collective case study, each case is considered an individual entity so that an in-depth approach can be applied by researchers. Although the similarities or commonalities between the cases are spotlighted, it is noted that each case is examined in a detailed way, too. These individual cases are then regarded as a collective whole during the analysis (Mills et al., 2010). The recommended number of cases for a collective case study is three (Patton, 2002). In the current study, the number of participants is six in three pairings. The pairs are the sites as they are categorically bound together, meaning that they work in the same program (school) (Mills et al., 2010). It is highly unlikely for PO to serve as a professional development process if it is limited to the observation of a single teaching session on a yearly basis (Knight & Trowler, 2001). Therefore, in this study, the pairs observed each other's classes twice. In addition, since a top-down/summative approach of PO may give rise to compliance rather than engagement (Bates & Donaghue, 2021; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005; Shortland, 2004), a bottom-up/developmental approach (Gosling, 2014) was preferred, and instead of managers or experts, the participants observed each other's classes and provided feedback on online teaching. Following the analysis of the interests the participants stated, an OLPO scheme was designed, and it was implemented during March and May in 2020. This was during one of the peak transmission periods of COVID-19, which may have acted as an uncontrollable variable. The pre- and post-observation conferences were recorded online on Zoom, an online platform. The two experience sharing day colloquiums (ESDCs) were also conducted online after each cycle. The following figure demonstrates the overview of the OLPO scheme and bi-directional relationships between the steps of the process. (see Table 1, Fig. 1)

3.1. Study context and participants

The context of the study was the English language foundation program of a thematic foundation university on healthcare located in Istanbul, Turkey during the 2019–2020 academic year. The university offers associate, bachelor, and post-graduate degree courses mainly in health-related programs. It also adopts hybrid model of education encompassing face-to-face teaching and online instruction. English language foundation program offers mandatory English classes to learners, who are going to study in medical engineering, medicine, molecular biology and genetics, and pharmacy departments, in three semesters from September to June. The instructors in this prep program follow a skill-based curriculum. Students are also offered Use of English and Prep Academic Skills (PAS) classes. Based on the computer adaptive placement exam (Cambridge English Placement Test) administered at the beginning of each academic year, students are placed in three CEFR levels, namely A1, A2, and B1. The level of the learner determines the number of weekly class hours. On average, they study 25 h a week. They are assessed based on the scores they receive from quizzes,

oral presentations, projects, participation, a midterm, and a final exam.

3.1.1. Selection of pairings and observed teaching aspects

The researchers first invited the instructors to participate in the OLPO scheme. Those who expressed interest also gave their consent when they were asked to fill out the interest analysis form. Since it was an urgent need for the participants to help one another with the challenges in online instruction, they welcomed the opportunity presented to them by OLPO. To ensure anonymity, the original names were represented as instructor A, B, C, D, E, and F. The participants were requested to attend a presentation/workshop session by the researchers, where they were informed about what they were supposed and expected to do regarding the OLPO scheme to be implemented. The instructors were also informed regarding thick description to let them know how they could provide feedback for their peers and reflect during the process. Having engaged with teaching online, the participants expressed that they experienced some issues related to student engagement. Therefore, they selected the areas they wished to be observed based on their needs. The participants were free to choose the aspects they wished to be observed on. The participants expressed that student engagement during emergency remote teaching was a core aspect for observation. That is why they wanted their peers to observe their online teaching practices in that specific area.

3.1.2. Descriptions of pairs

Based on their articulated interests, the participants discussed and then paired up with one another. Since the aim was not gate-keeping, but improving the areas that were open for further development, the peers knew who and what they were to observe. The participants were their equal partners or critical friends. As MacPhail et al. (2021, pp. 1–14) argue peers become critical when they start to build collegial relationships to facilitate and boost their professional learning and development by asking each other questions and provide feedback. None of the participants had systematic online language teaching and OLPO-related experiences before the COVID-19 pandemic commenced. The participants were not assigned a peer. They were provided with the liberty when they were selecting their peers. These were new partnerships.

The first pair: Instructors A & B

Instructor A had seven and a half years of teaching experience all in higher education institutions. He completed his master's and Ph.D. degrees in Political Sciences and International Relations. He holds a Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA). He mainly offers Writing and Reading and Vocabulary classes. He wanted his peer, instructor B, to observe him on the use of technology (technology integration) to reinforce student engagement. Instructor B, an English Language and Literature master's program student, similarly, had eight years of teaching experience all in higher education institutions. Like his peer, instructor B also holds CELTA and In-Service Certificate in English Language Teaching. He mainly offers Writing and Use of English classes. He also wanted his

Table 1
The timetable of the implemented OLPO.

Pairs	Participants	Level & Group	The class the peer observed	1st Pre-OM	1st Ob	1st Post-OM	2nd Pre-OM	2nd Ob	2nd Post-OM
Pair 1	A	B1-02	Writing	04.14.2020	04.15.2020	04.15.2020	04.28.2020	04.30.2020	05.12.2020
	B	B1-01	Writing	04.13.2020	04.14.2020	04.15.2020	04.28.2020	04.29.2020	05.12.2020
Pair 2	C	B1-01	Integrated Skills	04.10.2020	04.11.2020	04.25.2020	05.27.2020	05.28.2020	06.02.2020
	D	B1-01	PAS	04.10.2020	04.12.2020	04.11.2020	05.27.2020	05.29.2020	06.02.2020
Pair 3	E	B1-03	Use of English	04.16.2020	04.17.2020	04.22.2020	04.27.2020	04.28.2020	04.29.2020
	F	B1-01	Use of English	04.07.2020	04.08.2020	04.11.2020	04.28.2020	04.29.2020	04.30.2020

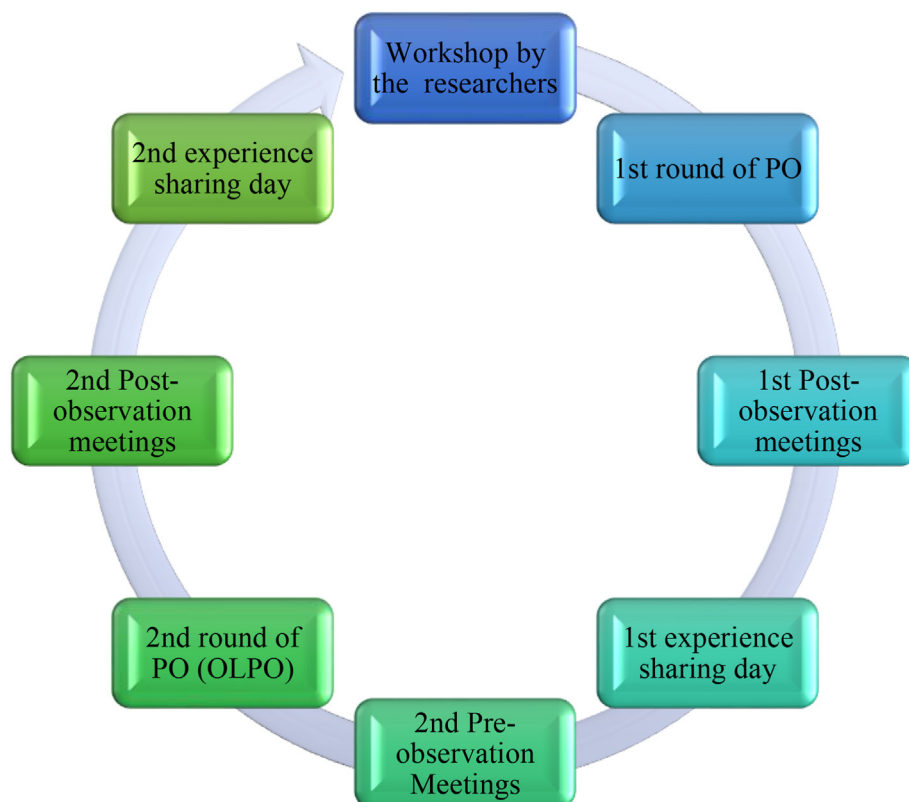


Fig. 1. Outline of the implemented OLPO scheme.

peer, instructor A, to observe him on the integration (use) of technology to supplement student engagement. Both participants are Turkish.

The second pair: Instructors C & D

Instructor C, a native speaker of English, had fifteen years of teaching experience, working in the program for eight years and mainly offers Integrated Skills and Speaking classes. Instructor D, from Belarus, has taught in higher education institutions for twenty years, having completed his master's and continuing with his Ph.D. studies in English Language and Literature program. He mainly offers Integrated Skills and Speaking classes.

The third pair: Instructors E & F

Instructor E is the most experienced participant in terms of years of teaching. She worked for thirty-three years in higher education institutions. She holds a master's degree in English Language and Literature. She mainly offers Use of English classes. Instructor F, on the other hand, is one of the least experienced teachers in the program in terms of years in teaching. She worked as an instructor for 4 years in higher education institutions. She has a master's degree in Communication Sciences. She mainly offers Use of English classes. Both participants are Turkish.

3.2. Data collection tools

The qualitative data sources in this study are as follows: an interest analysis form that sought the participants' opinions and preferences regarding the process, the Zoom video recordings of pre-observation meetings (Pre-OM) and post-observation meetings (Post-OM), the Zoom video recordings of ESDCs, and participants' reflective diaries (RD). Following a collective case study design to obtain a rich collection of data, the current study first

tried to uncover the interests of the participants ($n = 6$). The video recordings were transcribed verbatim. The participants were kindly asked to video record the pre- and post-observation debriefing sessions for two OLPO rounds ($n = 24$). They were also requested to assemble for sharing their experiences in ESDCs after each round of the proposed scheme was completed ($n = 2$). The participating instructors were also requested to keep an RD ($n = 24$) for each round of OLPO both as an observer and observee. The participants videotaped their debriefing sessions and knew that the recordings would remain confidential. The participants self-selected their peers, so the novice and experienced pairing (the third pair) was a conscious participant decision, which might not have imposed a restraining effect. All data coming from different collection tools were triangulated. For the purposes of this study, OLPO is defined as a collaborative process in which an instructor observes another peer's online teaching asynchronously with a non-judgmental approach and provides constructive feedback. Then, the instructors reflect on the observation process, and both parties come together for a post-observation debriefing session and discuss based on the notes kept during the pre-observation meeting and observation again in an online environment. In other words, OLPO in this study is a 'collaborative partnership' between two instructors who observe one another engage in online teaching, provide (constructive) feedback, and critically reflect on their teaching practices in online teaching. Although different terms were used by different pairs for student engagement, such as student participation, student involvement, it is clear in pre- and post-observation meetings and reflective diaries, the teachers referred to student engagement, and therefore for the purposes of this study, the term student engagement was preferred.

3.3. Data analysis

Since the aim was to increase the understanding of OLPO based on the experiences of the participating instructors, qualitative inquiry was selected, and related analysis techniques were applied based on the characteristics of data collection instruments. It is acknowledged that analysis of qualitative data is not totally objective and heavily depends on the experience and orientation of the researcher (Trochim, 2001). Therefore, for credibility, member checking (Doyle, 2007) was applied, data were triangulated, and multiple sources of data were gathered and analyzed. A case study is not exclusively concerned with the generalizability and digitization of the data since the focus is on the exploration and understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For confirmability, member checking was also considered a tool to ensure it (Suter, 2012). In this study, each pair represented a case. For analyzing the data, thematic analysis was followed instead of content analysis since codes were not developed a priori or set before in a primarily deductive process. As the first step, the different data collection tools were triangulated. All the data coming from different data tools were triangulated. No data collection tools were treated, thus analyzed independently. Reflective diaries provided the participants to think back on their teaching practices and identify what they have observed, noticed, and learned during the process of OLPO. The transcribed data were sent to the related participants for member checking (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then, the entire set of data were read multiple times as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that researchers go over the whole data at least one time before the coding process started. Having read and being familiarized with the data, the initial creation of codes started as the second step of the data analysis. Patterns of meaning in different datasets, cases, were searched. During the coding process, two coders (the researchers) systematically identified meaningful parts and/or interesting aspects of the data and labeled these parts for indexing purposes since they were related to a theme or an issue in the literature. That is to say, the participants' oral and written statements and the pieces of their conversations were analyzed and categorized (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the initial codes were created. Throughout the process, the coders came together to see and understand how their opinions match as they continued to engage with the data more deeply with the aim of increasing the credibility of the research. As a result of this coder debriefing, a code manual was developed, which included the codes and exemplary quotes from the data. As for the third step in the analysis, after all the data were identified and coded across the entire set of data, the codes akin to one another were compiled into subthemes and the theme. The fourth step began once the theme (the outcomes of the whole OLPO process) was generated. Since these necessitate refinement, two researchers reviewed the data excerpts that were coded to function as subthemes to see if they would form coherence. The raw data were revisited to ensure that the participating instructors' voices were projected. Since it is necessary to make some changes as coding during thematic analysis is an ongoing process, some overlapping codes were brought together, some codes were deleted as they did not have adequate data to support, and some new codes were created upon reaching a consensus among the coders. During the fifth step, the codes, subthemes, and the theme were defined and named by considering how each of them cohered in a meaningful way within the whole data regarding the research question. Coder debriefing sessions held between the researchers also helped in this phase of the analysis to ensure that the data were reflected in an adequate way to be able to answer the research question both for individual cases and cross-cases. For the sixth and last step, for producing the report phase, the codes, subthemes, and the theme

were supported by the evidence coming from different data collection tools. The theme was the outcome of the whole OLPO process. The subthemes were categorized as positive and challenging aspects of OLPO. The codes were as follows: learning about different online tools, finding the process beneficial, collegiality, asynchronous nature of OLPO, helping to feel relieved during quarantine/lockdown period, being critical friends, understanding what students feel during online teaching, feeling less stressed during online observation, more natural data, workload, paperwork, and tiring process. Quote selection was made based on the strength, purpose, and explicitness of the meaning in the data collected from different sources to ensure better representation. It means the quotations of the participants were selected to make meanings clear and use them as evidence by considering their frequency (i.e., how many times they were mentioned by how many participants), relevance, and representativeness. Additionally, both short and more extensive and quotes of the participants coming from different data collection modes were included and provided to give the critical reader a better picture of the phenomenon that is being investigated (Nowell et al., 2017).

4. Results

The research question is asking the participating instructors' ideas regarding the effectiveness of OLPO. Specifically, the question is asking the instructors to reflect on the implemented OLPO design.

4.1. Case 1 The first pair: instructors A & B

The whole process of OLPO helped this pair search and integrate some online tools into their Writing classes to supplement student engagement, and this was explained in their reflective diaries in the following way, We have both discussed new platforms convenient for the new process. We have also exchanged ideas on different purposes of different platforms, such as Mindmeister, Padlet, Google docs, Slideshare. We tried to make the best of them as we were teaching writing course. I used MindMeister for brainstorming, Padlet, and Google docs for activities in the lesson. Technology has become a must, not an option or a choice. (RD, Instructor A)

Exchanging ideas on different aspects of different online platforms and discussing our classes with this information was really helpful. We discovered that Oxford University Press and MacMillan provides free webinars about platforms and the techniques of using such platforms and we have decided to attend these webinars that will serve our goal on technology and student engagement. (RD, Instructor B).

Regarding these webinars, instructor A provided the following comment in his RD, Thanks to this process, we have attended webinars about the use of various platforms in order to increase the students' engagement during the Covid-19 process. Also, we have learned many different useful application that we can use in the class. (RD, Instructor A)

On the same subject instructor A also stated how he could integrate what he learned in those webinars, about which he was informed during observation debriefing sessions, into his Writing classes in the following way in the final ESDC, **Instructor A:** We also tried to benefit from webinars, these Cambridge webinars, uh, and Oxford webinars on online teaching, and I tried to apply them. I tried to also attend the other webinars for writing course. Now, um, I know that I can open something like, uh, Google Earth and can have a trip in Paris. And then, I can ask my students to write a descriptive paragraph. (ESDC 2)

This is a striking point since the strong dialogic communication

(Mercer, 2000) between the peers allowed them to experiment with different online tools and integrate them into their Writing classes. Not only did they use a variety of online tools to heighten student engagement, but also they attended some webinars again for the same purpose, as a result of their discussion, which took place in their pre- and post-OMs. Regarding the effectiveness and benefit of OLPO instructor B shared his ideas by thanking the researchers in the following manner during the second and final ESDC, **Instructor B:** Hocam [calling out to the researchers], first of all, like thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to have this peer observation, because now I believe that we are going to benefit from this experience a lot because we have a lot of experiences so far. And since we are going to continue with this online education, I believe that like, uh, it will be quite beneficial. (ESDC 2)

On the impact of OLPO on collegiality, instructor B provided the following comment during the same colloquium, **Instructor B:** In fact, I mean, we started to collaborate with each other more when I compare it to like face-to-face instruction, like we started to share a lot of ideas. Uh, so that, I mean, we can just make our lesson more effective, especially we have a lot of like Zoom, let's say meetings sometimes excessively, but I mean, it really worked. Thanks to those meetings like we've also learned that, I mean, you having those differentiated let's say, teaching styles really worked during that time as well, because I mean, uh, getting students' attention was not so easy, but I mean, using those differentiated techniques, I mean really got their attention. So, this was another positive item that I can add to my list. (ESDC 2)

The pair also believed that they worked and functioned as a team more during online instruction and learned from one another thanks to OLPO. According to them, this was one of the benefits of the whole OLPO experience. To be able to approach teaching, particularly online teaching from students' perspectives was also another opportunity OLPO provided for the instructors in instructor's B opinion, and this can be demonstrated in the following excerpt taken from the same colloquium, **Instructor B:** I also want to talk about what we learned from this peer observation process. First of all, I believe we started to see things from the point of view of the students, let's say, because, you know, I mean sometimes my peer was the student in a sense. And then I was the teacher. Then, my peer was the teacher, and I was the student and we started giving feedback to each other like a student. I was, I was just saying, okay, for example, "You are doing this well, like many students will just lose their interest or maybe next time, maybe it would be better to not to do this, blah, blah, blah". So, this was another good point, eh, doing this online peer observation. (ESDC 2)

Instructor B is telling here that the whole process of OLPO has given them the chance to feel like a student again. This is actually resulting from the nature of OLPO, which is a job-embedded "continuous" professional development activity. For the first time, the participants experienced what it was like to be a student during an online class thanks to OLPO.

4.2. Case 2 The second pair: instructors C & D

Instructor D referred to the asynchronous nature of OLPO with having no presence of the observer during the class hour, stating that the evidence became completely natural.

Face-to-face instruction is not really natural. When there is another teacher in class, sometimes you may not really be you. Better to shoot a class and then share the video. However, there are limitations if there is only one camera. Online, on the other hand, was a very good piece of evidence. (RD, Instructor D).

This is really a prominent result of the study originating from the asynchronous nature of OLPO, that is the instructors completed their classes without having an online visitor, observer, and then

shared the recording with their peers. According to instructor D, this process helped the data become more natural and less artificial than one would expect to find in traditional PO. On the same topic asynchronous nature and the advantages of OLPO, the other peer, instructor C, provided the following comment in his RD, This is one of the main advantages of distance learning: you can have a video of a session, and it can be analyzed later, like we did. I can say that recorded sessions are A LOT [emphasis in original] better to assess and reflect on. [It was] great that we have access to videos of the sessions – a chance to replay and see some things that you cannot spot during the first time. In general, [it was a] very nice and necessary experience. I believe I also benefitted from it as we shared. (RD, Instructor C)

On the isolation COVID-19 caused, instructor D had also a striking comment in his RD by mentioning the psychological advantage of OLPO That time was really exhausting: We were adapting ourselves to something we had never done before, and having a colleague who deals with the same issues makes you partners, who can unite for the common good (or better). Well, maybe, psychologically it was kind of relieving. (RD, Instructor D).

This is one of the most significant results of the study, the experience of OLPO particularly during the quarantine/lockdown period was found to have a soothing effect on the part of the instructors who participated in the study. This can be regarded as one of the psychological benefits of OLPO.

4.3. Case 3 The third pair: instructors E & F

Instructor E had positive comments in her RD regarding the process, and she verbalized her thoughts as in the following, In my opinion, the peer observation process was a very beneficial activity because it improved the teaching skills of both the observer and the observed. It gave me the opportunity to see myself from a different angle. It promoted new ideas and perspectives in teaching. Moreover, it can help find new areas for improvement. (RD, Instructor E)

On the same topic and also the received feedback, instructor F also agreed with her peer, and shared her ideas as in the following manner, Learning and sharing through the observation of peers was beneficial to me, and I think it will be a common part of my profession. This process aims to back up sharing experience. Sharing of experience with my peer was especially useful, as we share a supportive and trusting relationship. I think positive feedback pushed me to do better as a teacher. As a teacher, realizing the areas or approaches that I need to develop have made me feel more enthusiastic. (RD, Instructor F)

These are important reflections coming from the members of the third pair as they were underlining the significance of learning from another peer through observing and sharing. It can be put forth that the instructors of this pair claimed that they benefitted from the whole experience and were able to notice the areas that were open to further development in their practices thanks to the feedback they received from their peers during observation meetings. Instructor F also underscored the fact that throughout the process, they continued to be critical friends of one another attaining their professionalism, which was another important result. Like instructor D, who stated that he would feel uneasy if he was being observed by his peer in the real classroom environment, instructor F also acknowledged that she felt comfortable during the OLPO, "I took advantage of online teaching, especially in the observation process, uh, because I was in my comfort zone, uh, and it's made me feel better and comfortable." This can be regarded as one of the positive aspects of the asynchronous nature of OLPO. It is of course possible to place some cameras and videotape face-to-face teaching. Nonetheless, the data, which would be produced in that way, could be less natural when a comparison is made between

traditional PO and OLPO due to the existence of an instrument like a video camera, as instructor D also referred. Regarding the psychological dimension of OLPO particularly when quarantine and lockdown periods are taken into account, instructor E was also agreeing with instructor D, in the previous pair, that it helped to ease the difficulty of the whole situation, I can say that being in close contact with my peer during the quarantine period did help in terms of feeling as if everything was normal during that time. I felt that everything was going on in its normal way, life was as usual. Shortly, I was always closely connected to my job, doing what I would have done otherwise. (RD, Instructor E)

Collegiality was an area that instructor F commented on in the following way in her RD as one of the outcomes of the whole process, *“My peer’s constructive feedback helped me look at my teaching way and skills deeply. I learned a lot from her.”* Instructor F verbalized her opinions regarding the feedback she received from her peer as in the following fashion during the second and final ESDC by referring to the collegial relationship, *“The experience of exchanging our feedback with my peer was especially fruitful for me, uh, because we have formed a supportive and trusting relationship over the time working together.”* The pair had also some thoughts again about collegiality and articulated these as in the following excerpt taken from their second post-OM, **Instructor E:** And thank you. Uh, we did the peer observation this year together and it was good. I mean, you were a nice, um, partner.

Instructor F: Thank you for everything

Instructor E: And thank you for everything. Um, let’s hope for, uh, the best to both of us in the coming days. All right. Thank you very much again. (Post-OM 2).

As is clear from the above excerpts that collegiality and being critical friends for one another, are the significant findings of the study. Thus, it can be argued that OLPO may have helped the participating instructors create critical partnerships by getting them to share their opinions and ideas and provide feedback on both their and their peer’s teaching practices. On the challenging aspect of the whole OLPO process, instructor F referred to the work and paperwork load in the following way, **Instructor F:** It was a beneficial practice, but a bit hectic hocam. I mean, the paperwork of its pre- and post-meetings and so on. Uh, maybe for the feature applications, I think this process, I mean, needs to be a bit simplified. (ESDC 2)

It should be noted that some instructors mentioned the difficulties they experienced during the whole practice of OLPO. Not all the aspects of OLPO were found to be positive, such as increasing workload and paper work, the difficulty with scheduling meetings for both pre- and post-observation debriefing sessions, keeping reflective diaries, and completing all data collection forms.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate both positive and challenging sides of OLPO. On the positive side, for instance, it was stated by nearly all participants that the whole process was valued and beneficial. On the other hand, the process was regarded to be exhausting with its requirements for pre- and post-OMs, reflective diaries, and participating in ESDCs.

5.1. Collegiality and critical friendship

The participants highlighted the importance of collegiality experienced during OLPO (Bell & Thomson, 2018; Carroll & O’Loughlin, 2014). One significant finding is that the participants asserted that the processes assisted them to be critical of one another though they had both collegial and friendly relationships. They emphasized the fact that they were able to feel like a student

while they were watching the recorded sessions of their peers to observe thanks to OLPO (Hamilton, 2013). They were able to see themselves through their peers’ eyes since OLPO caused the participants to look at the way they teach from different angles (Bell & Cooper, 2013; Shortland, 2010). The participants also made specific reference to being critical friends during online teaching. Also, video-based observation caused the classroom related data to be more convincing, accountable, and transparent both for the observer and the observee as it did not leave any space for any conflicts between the peers about what really happened in the observed class. This evidence-based (tele)collaborative inquiry (Sinnema et al., 2011) thanks to OLPO allowed the participating instructors to reflect more critically when they were discussing their online teaching experiences in debriefing sessions, reflective diaries and ESDCs. It increased the trust, which is a significant component of collegial relationship, between the peers as theorized in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001).

5.2. Teacher learning

The participating instructors expressed that they would carry on utilizing what they acquired and learned from their peers during the process and thanks to the process in their forthcoming teaching practices. This is in line both with Bandura’s social cognitive theory with its focus particularly on observational learning and self-efficacy (2001) and TPL since the latter is believed to take place when practitioners learn from one another while they are involved in job-embedded professional development activities as in the case of OLPO by forming learning communities (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). According to the SCT view on teacher learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Singh & Richards, 2006), at the outset the participants or (novices in Vygotskian terms) were at a point in their zone of proximal (professional) development (ZPD) since they did not have any online teaching related experiences. During the process, the participating instructors designed their OLPO schemes, (co)reflected on them and shared their experiences with the rest of the group, which can be considered as ‘mediation’, and thus (re) created some teacher knowledge based on their learning. This learning, as situated social practice, is regarded as one of the key concepts of sociocultural view on teacher learning since mediation, discourse, social interaction, and participation are some significant constituents of the process (Singh & Richards, 2006). For instance, the first pair stated that they benefited from some online tools and attended webinars to augment student engagement. This can be considered as one of the positive effects of OLPO. In this sense, OLPO by extending the participants’ ZPD heightened the instructors’ awareness with regard to their teaching practices as they both provided and received continuous feedback. That is, the participants co-constructed digital teaching pedagogy. In the design of OLPO, the participants were provided with the liberty of selecting the teaching areas on which they wished to be observed. As a result, thanks to OLPO, they could notice and recognize the areas that were open for further professional development. In one night, the teachers all around the world felt like they had been thrown into the sea, from a safer place (face-to-face instruction) to the unknown (online teaching), and OLPO in this transition process played a key role like a lifejacket for the instructors. Additionally, video-based observation and evidence-led nature of OLPO assisted teacher learning since the peers were able to watch what occurred in the class many times thanks to the recorded sessions of their online classes.

5.3. Existence of a peer during online teaching

The participants argued that the existence of an online peer

during the online teaching adaptation process helped them feel supported as they observed that what they were going through was also similar to the difficulties experienced by their peers. OLPO in this sense was comforting. Similarly, Harper and Nicolson (2013) in one of the earliest implementations of OLPO reported that the participants felt relieved since they were experiencing and sharing issues as a team. Nevertheless, tough times due to COVID-19 and quarantine period that the whole world experienced may have increased the collegiality rate among the participants since they were forced to stay at their homes and feel isolated in a brand-new teaching environment. COVID-19 and the quarantine period may have led the participants to collaborate more, which may have also helped them relieve the tension originating from the pandemic.

5.4. Asynchronous nature of OLPO

In the current study, since the peers were teaching concurrently, asynchronous OLPO, which refers to the experience the observer has when observing a recorded and archived online class, was preferred. The asynchronous nature of OLPO was found to be another positive aspect, which provided the participants with the chance to later watch and analyze the recorded sessions both as an observer and observee. This is one of the significant findings of the study. This can be considered the contribution of technology to pedagogy and research since the video recording of online classes made the participants able to go over the data, classroom interaction, over and over. Hence, it increased the repeatability and reusability of the data, which would not be the case had the data been collected in real life contexts. This nature of the data also provided the researchers with a similar opportunity during the data analysis process as it strengthened the accuracy and quality of evidence. Furthermore, the participating instructors explained that this nature of OLPO, not having an actual observer during the online class, led to create less stress for the observees when compared to stress and anxiety experienced in PO of face-to-face teaching (Blackmore, 2005). Therefore, the participants indicated that the produced data was more natural when they made a comparison between the data collected in face-to-face instruction and online teaching. The asynchronous nature of OLPO has not been much studied. Swinglehurst et al. (2008) and Walker (2015) had an asynchronous group discussion in their studies, which means the participants had to exchange their feedback in an asynchronous manner. However, in the current study watching the recorded sessions constituted the asynchronous nature.

5.5. OLPO and pedagogical (online) solitude

The participants also commented positively on the fact that thanks to the OLPO process they felt less isolated during the tough times of quarantine and lockdown periods resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as they were constantly in contact with their peers. Thus, OLPO when working from home became a solution for pedagogical online solitude (Shulman, 1993, pp. 24–26) teachers may experience behind the screen in online instruction (Walker & Forbes, 2018). For instance, Hendry et al. (2014) found that participants claimed that PO in face-to-face instruction would help them feel less isolated thanks to post-observation session. What is significant here is that in the previous studies, online instruction was an option. However, due to the COVID-19, online instruction became an obligatory way of teaching, and OLPO in this sense proved to be comforting its participants by giving them the opportunity to discuss and reflect on online teaching.

5.6. How OLPO supported online teaching

PO is generally implemented in physical contexts, having peers come together for a pre-observation meeting, then observe each other's face-to-face classes, and finally reflect on during post-observation meeting. On the other hand, in this study OLPO allowed the peers to visit their online classes since online instruction had unexpectedly and temporarily replaced face-to-face teaching due to COVID-19, and as a result, the instructors needed to alter their teaching. In this sense, OLPO, as a job-embedded continuous professional development activity, facilitated the participants' efforts to get accustomed to the dynamics of online teaching since there existed a peer with whom they could exchange constructive feedback on their online teaching experiences. For example, cases 1 and 2 reflected on online language teaching and related challenges. Thus, OLPO appears to assist the instructors to create their online teacher identities. Thanks to OLPO they felt more confident and supported in their online teaching experiences once they started to engage in the observation and feedback process with their peers and wanted to continue to learn more about online instruction. Richardson and Alsop (2015) suggested that transition from face-to-face teaching to online instruction would necessitate effective support to enable teachers to reconstruct their online identities. So, the whole OLPO process eased this tension due to the abrupt transition to emergency remote teaching. Additionally, Vinagre (2017) argues that teachers require a set of competencies to become fully equipped telecollaborative and online teachers. To do so, instructors are supposed to engage in experiential learning, which helps them understand what online collaboration requires through hands-on-experience and support them to reflect on their experiences. In this sense, OLPO facilitated the participants' experiences in becoming telecollaborative and online teachers.

5.7. The challenges of the process

The participating instructors also mentioned the challenging aspects of OLPO. For instance, the participants emphasized that the process increased their already enormous workload. In addition to this, they were not quite content with the paperwork that the process entailed them to work through. Therefore, the process was found to be rather exhausting. This is an understandable and expected outcome since an excessive amount of data had to be gleaned for research purposes. Similarly, in the study conducted by Adshead et al. (2006), two-thirds of the participants also complained about the paperwork and time constraints. For some participants, the whole process was tiring and caused fatigue (Lomas & Nicholls, 2005). However, the quick and unexpected transition to online teaching from face-to-face instruction also contributed to the workload of the participating instructors. There were also some participants who felt stressed during the whole experience of OLPO at least from time to time. The fact that the study was conducted when the COVID-19 pandemic peaked may have also caused this stress (Kohut et al., 2007).

6. Conclusions

PO can assume an important role in expanding teachers' educational practices and knowledge. Yet, it has not to date been extensively researched within higher education context and online instruction and in language teaching research. With this study, it can now be put forth that OLPO can enhance collegiality and critical friendship when peer support is needed during paradigmatic educational shifts. Asynchronous nature of OLPO relieves teachers of observation anxiety, which provides deeper learning opportunities. OLPO also helps teachers overcome pedagogical online

solitude since peers facilitated the adaptation to online teaching.

The exercise articulated in this study might provide a bridge for this gap and can be considered a feedforwarding study. OLPO provided the participants with the opportunity to collaborate, examine what happened during the online class, offer solutions for better online teaching, and draw on these solutions in the subsequent online teaching practices. This evidence-based nature of OLPO allowed for going beyond the checklists used in traditional PO of face-to-face teaching. The process aided them in building stronger collegial relationships. Although they were colleagues and friends, they were able to keep this relationship at a professional level by becoming critical of one another and providing support during the emergency remote teaching period. On emotional and psychological dimensions, OLPO, by having a peer experiencing similar challenges, appeared to help feel relieved particularly during the tough quarantine and lockdown periods. More importantly, OLPO has also been added to the inventory of professional development unit for future implementations.

Although the data gleaned is extensive, this is a small-scale study, whose aim is not to generalize its findings to other teaching and learning contexts. In addition, the first author was a fellow on-site instructor having no managerial but the same hierarchical position with the participants, and the second author functioned as an external advisor/mentor overseeing the whole process of OLPO. Therefore, the researchers did not have any conflicting roles, and the participants knew that OLPO was not a compulsory and evaluation-based PD activity. We also acknowledge that video recording could have an impact on the way the participants interacted with each other during the meetings and ESDCs. However, they were informed that the recordings would not be shared with any third parties. The participants in the recordings were always polite to each other, they seemed to enjoy the partnership of their peers, they were making jokes and laughing, and they were thanking each other for any feedback received and provided. Thus, we did not observe any conflict resulting from hierarchical relationship between the peers in the third pairing, which consisted of an experienced instructor and a novice instructor. In addition, we did not have any chance to conduct individual interviews because of the time restrictions, but we also believe that such interviews could reveal different perspectives.

By following the footsteps of this study, different institutions can create their own OLPO schemes. Although most of the participants were quite content with the asynchronous nature of OLPO, future studies can explore its synchronous nature with the presence of a real observer during actual observation. In future studies, peers can be selected from different departments or faculties. This may help participants see and experience different teaching practices they could also use to some extent in their classes. Being engaged in discussions with instructors or faculty working in different departments may widen the pedagogical horizons of both parties. Follow-up studies can be designed to examine the impact of OLPO on students' performance. Since online instruction per se cannot totally replace face-to-face teaching, we also believe that a hybrid version of teaching, which entails a hybridised PO study, encompassing both PO of face-to-face teaching and online instruction, might be designed to support staff moving forward in multiple directions.

As for the practical implications, instructors working in higher education can find resources when they wish or are asked to engage in PO of face-to-face teaching. However, in the literature, there are not many OLPO related practical guidelines or resource packs to help implementation. This study together with its findings may be considered as one of the earliest attempts to bridge this gap. The design articulated in the current study can also function as a sort of orientation program for the instructors who start working in

a new workplace, as well as for the inexperienced faculty, particularly in online instruction. Instructors who attend conferences, seminars, workshops, and webinars to train themselves in a new teaching strategy may benefit from OLPO to get constructive feedback to see the impact of the technique they have recently learned. In this manner, thanks to OLPO, declarative teacher knowledge may be transferred into procedural teacher knowledge. This type of collaboration between colleagues may also help in building a positive school culture, thus a more dynamic professional learning community can be created. OLPO could assume a supportive and facilitative role for the other professional development activities and learning methods since it allows the participants to experiment what they learn in different platforms when they are teaching online with the offline presence of a peer with whom they can later conduct pre- and post-debriefing sessions to reflect on their teaching. It can also help teachers evaluate and reflect on their online teaching experiences from a critical point of view. Professional development units of language teaching programs can utilize OLPO as a sort of follow-up scheme for the topics introduced and/or reinforced in their workshops. In this sense, OLPO can assume a complementary role. Managers, who are working in higher education, may utilize OLPO to enhance the quality of teaching practices of instructors and learning experiences of their students since in this type of implementation the focus is not on quality assurance but learning as a social practice. OLPO may also have some implications for pre-service teacher education. It can be integrated into practicum, and pre-service teachers could benefit from the opportunities OLPO can present during their experiences in online teaching under the guidance of their supervisors. One of the most beneficial aspects of OLPO is that it does not need to be implemented in a on-site classroom setting. With its online and asynchronous nature, which removes and transcends physical borders, teachers from different language programs within the same city, country or even abroad can create meaningful partnerships and telecollaborate with these new peers both for support and professional development if ethical considerations and issues are treated by formal cooperation among institutions. This can lead to telecollaborative teacher development through OLPO both for pre-service and in-service teachers. This kind of communication among teachers from a variety of countries regarding their online teaching practices can also contribute to intercultural awareness. This may also help teachers' well-being, their mental and social wellness, and lead to some sort of solidarity against the challenges of online teaching.

Credit authors statement

Volkan İnceçay: Conceptualization, methodology, project administration, data curation, analysis, and writing- original draft.
Kenan Dikilitaş: Conceptualization, methodology, writing-reviewing and editing, validation, and supervision.

Declaration of competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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