

A peer-reviewed open-access journal indexed in NepJol

ISSN 3021-9965 (Print)

Published by: Okhaldhunga Campus, Okhaldhunga, Koshi Province, Nepal


Article History: Received on May 2, 2024; Accepted on July 23, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/oj.v1i2.69553>

Peer Coaching as a Strategy for Teachers’ Professional Development

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Abstract

This study explores the English language teachers’ practices of peer coaching as a strategy for their professional development. Peer coaching is a strategy where one or more teachers from a partnership with one another for the purpose of collaboration and it also provides professional development. For this study, a sample of forty secondary and lower-secondary level teachers of English were selected from twenty schools in the Okhaldhunga district using purposive sampling procedures. Two English teachers from twenty schools were selected. A questionnaire was used that also included open-ended questions. Fifteen closed - ended and six open – ended questionnaires were used to collect required data. Teachers strongly agreed that peer coaching reduces the sense of isolation. They viewed that peer coaching is a procedure in which two teachers collaborate to help one or both to improve English language problems.

Keywords: professional development, strategy, training, peer coaching

Introduction

English language teaching has been introduced as a profession. It is perceived to be an art. People perceive teaching as a dynamic process and a demanding task that tests one's commitment and courage. It is treated as a complex activity that requires teaching learning strategies, curriculum, a sound knowledge of child psychology, instructional rules, and regulations. Successful language teaching or learning takes place only when the teachers use the appropriate procedures to manage teaching methods and strategies for an effective classroom. Teaching cannot take place without learning because teaching is done in order to manage and facilitate the learning process. To keep up to date, teachers should be continuously trained. They should be well prepared and dynamic and they should possess the skills and awareness in order to carry out their jobs well.

To facilitate teachers' professional development, Richard and Farrell (2010) have explored eleven procedures: workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, journal writing, and peer observation, teaching portfolios, analysis of critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research.

Professional Development in a broad sense refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. Teacher Development is a continuous process of transforming human potential into human performance and this process is never finished.

According to Richards and Farrell (2010), in most schools and institutions today language teachers are expected to keep up to date with development of the process of professional development has a significant positive impact on teachers' belief, and practices students learning on the implementation of educational reforms.

For the importance of understanding oneself in teaching profession, Khaniya (2006) states that people who do not update themselves find it difficult to cope with the emerging situation because every disciplines are prone to change and if change are not kept abstract people working in that field will be left for behind.

For this purpose, people involved in it should be allowed to work for its development, advancements and continuous improvements. Teacher Development activities make teachers up to date about their regular practices through which they bring change in the field of language teaching and learning.

The Concept of Teacher Development

Teacher Development is the process of making an effort by teachers for better career in the future. Underhill as cited in Head and Taylor opines that “Teacher Development is the process of becoming best kind of teacher that I personally can be” (1997, p. 41) Richards and Farrell (2010) state, “It generally refers to general growth not focused on a specific job”.

Being more specific, teacher development is the process of lifelong learning in teaching, when teachers can use the resources around them to advance themselves, there is their professional development. Teacher development is best facilitated through teacher learning. In this regard, Darling-Hammond (1994) offers a definition of teacher development. Glatthorn (1959) as cited in Villegas and Reimers, (2003) state “ Teacher Development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experiences examining his/ her teaching systematically. Many people have started to refer Teacher Development or Teachers’ Professional Development as a new image of learning, a new model of teacher education, a new revolution in the field of education.

Teacher Training and Teacher Development

Teacher training is prerequisite for a teacher. It deals with basic teaching skills and techniques, typically for novice teacher in a pre- service education program. Richards and Farrell (2010) state that the two aspects of the teacher education tree are teacher development and teacher training. Training refers to the activities that are specifically targeted towards a teacher’s current duties and are often planned to achieve short-term and immediate objectives. Teachers are expected to act as responsible agents for the transformation of knowledge in a similar manner. They have a big impact on how the curriculum is interpreted, how pedagogy is developed, and how assessment activities are created. Teachers require a set of specialised abilities, know - how, qualifications, and characteristics that distinguish teaching from other professions. The skill of teaching calls for ongoing practice. In order to make teachers professionally competent and professional, teacher training is crucial and required. Teacher Development is wider in its scope and includes different areas like subject matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, self-awareness and understanding of learners’ psychology, understanding of curriculum materials, career advancement. After the discussion mentioned above, we come to know that teacher training and teacher development are the two sides of the same coin called teacher education.

Teachers' professional development concerns the growth and development of teachers in their professional roles so that they can perform at their best. In other words, the process of making teachers competent at applying the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the classroom practice is teacher professional development (TPD). Professional development of a teacher is an ongoing and comprehensive process, which starts with the pre-service education, trainings etc. and continues until the retirement. Fullan (1995, p. 265) mentions that teachers' professional development is "the sum total of formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher in a compelling and dynamic change".

Peer Coaching

Among the eleven strategies for teachers' professional development put forward by Richards and Farrell (2010), peer coaching is one strategy. According to Richard and Farrell, "Peer coaching is a particular form of peer observation and involves an experienced teacher working with a less experienced teacher in a mentoring role" (2010) p.143. They further opined that "Mentoring is a particular form of peer coaching". Peer coaching is very crucial strategy or procedure for teachers' professional development because it provides supportive context for novice teacher and develops collegiality. It tries to reduce some sorts of sense of isolation. It can be collaboration between two teachers on the preparation of teaching materials. Types of Peer Coaching According to Benedetti, (1997) peer coaching has following types:

Technical Coaching

Technical coaching refers to a situation in which a teacher wants to learn new teaching method or techniques and seeks the assistance of another teacher who is experienced and more knowledgeable in this area. It is the method of sharing technical knowledge and seeking the knowledge if necessary.

Collegial Coaching

Collegial coaching involves two teachers focusing on refining their existing teaching practices. In this situation one teacher may be invited to observe another's classroom and provided constructive feedback as 'a critical friend'.

Challenge Coaching

Challenge coaching involves two teachers focusing on problems that have arisen in some aspect of teaching. In addition, they work jointly to resolve the

problem. This type of coaching is required in case of the challenging situation. A trusted peer is invited to observe, identify and hopefully provide the solution of the problem faced in teaching.

Benefits of Peer Coaching for Teachers' Professional Development

Peer coaching is a kind of procedure for teachers' professional development. In this regard, Joyce and Showers (1982) mention "Peer coaching is a developmental process and is an effective way to promote professional development. It provides opportunities for two teachers to look at teaching problems and to develop possible solutions" (as cited in Richards and Farrell 2010,). In the same way, they further mention the following benefits of peer coaching:

- It reduces the sense of isolation that teachers tend to feel.
- It is a developmental process and it is also an effective way to promote professional development.
- It provides opportunities for teachers to look at teaching problems and develop possible solution.
- It helps novice teachers learn from more experienced colleagues.
- It provides supportive context for novice teachers.
- It helps to develop collegiality.
- It helps the coach to develop the sign of professional recognition.
- The teacher gets no threatening feedback from the trusted peer, which helps to expand his/her teaching repertoire.

Procedures Used for Peer Coaching

Teacher and coach are main stakeholders in peer coaching. Coach is treated as a critical friend having clearer understanding of teaching and the nature of cooperation. Peer coaching can be conducted in a formal as well as an informal situation. They may be varied on the basis of the subject matter they are talking in. According to Gottesman (2000, as cited in Richards and Ferrell, 2010) there are following procedures used for peer coaching:

Peer watching

Peer watching is the first phase. In this phase, one teacher observes another teacher but provides no comments and any suggestions after the class. The observer tries to know more and more and takes note too. Both teachers feel comfortable in this stage.

Peer feedback

It is the short phase which is a transition between watching and coaching. The coach who has collected data presents the information to his/her peer without any modification. A coach may use different data gathering devices such as checklists or video and audio recording.

Peer coaching

This is the last and crucial phase which is also called actual phase of peer coaching. In this phase the coach plans and offers suggestions for improvement.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to explore the teachers' practices of peer coaching as a strategy for their professional development. Apart from this, the purpose was to suggest some pedagogical implications of peer coaching.

Review of Related Literature

Gnawali, (2001) conducted a research entitled "Investigating Classroom Practices: A Proposal for Teacher Development for the Secondary School Teachers of English in Nepal" with one of the objectives to find out answers to "How do they develop?" He interviewed eight teachers and teacher educators from different countries" England, Georgia, Nepal, Romania and Uzbekistan. It was found out the teachers develop in their career and that happens due to several factors such as reading, challenges, responsibilities and exposure to different types of colleagues. The secondary sources helped in forming the theoretical part of my study.

Khanal (2011) conducted a research entitled "Strategies for Professional Development: A Case of Secondary Level English Teachers" to identify the strategies used by secondary level teachers of English for their professional development. Six English language teachers were selected for observation and interview. The findings of the research showed that the strategies used by teachers below five years of experiences were self-monitoring, workshop, conferences, seminars and workshop. The experienced teachers used different strategies in the classroom where the teachers having the experiences below five years forced many problems or they were less skilled. He also found that all the teachers used different strategies for their professional development.

Pangeni (2012) conducted a research on "A Case Analysis for Teachers' Professional Development". The study was carried out to find out the teachers'

practices of case analysis for their professional development. He used questionnaire as a research tool for data collection. The findings showed that most of the teachers are familiar with case analysis and professionalism. He also found case analysis as a crucial procedure for teachers' professional development.

Peer coaching, which emerged as a professional development technique in the 1980s to encourage teachers to use new curriculum and teaching techniques (Kraus, 1998; Wong & Nicotera, 2006) has four basic principles (Showers & Joyce, 1996): (1) all teachers within the institution should agree to implement the change and to support each other in the implementation, (2) developing the curriculum and the instruction should be the focus of the practice, (3) it should be clarified that the observed teacher is the "coach" and the observing teacher is the "coached" teacher, (4) it should be clarified that the main benefit of coaching practice is from the collaboration during the process.

Methodology

This article is entirely based on forty secondary and lower secondary level of English language teachers from twenty schools of Okhaldhunga district. While doing this research I consulted the books such as Head and Taylor (1997), Richards and Farrell (2010), Wallace (2010), Ur (2002), Villegas and Reimers (2003), Brown (1994), Daggoli (2003), Harmer (2003), Khaniya (2006), Benedetti, (1997) for the secondary source of data.

Regarding the use of the tools for data collection, questionnaires with closed ended and open-ended questions were distributed to the teachers to elicit the required information for this study. Questionnaires were distributed to the teachers to find out the independent learning for their professional development through the practices of peer coaching. In order to collect the data.

In order to collect the data, at first, I went to the selected schools and got permission from the concerned authority to consult the English language teachers. I built rapport with the concerned teachers and explained them the purposes and processes of the study. Then, I distributed the questionnaire to them for their responses. Finally, I collected the questionnaires from them and thanked them too.

Findings and Discussion

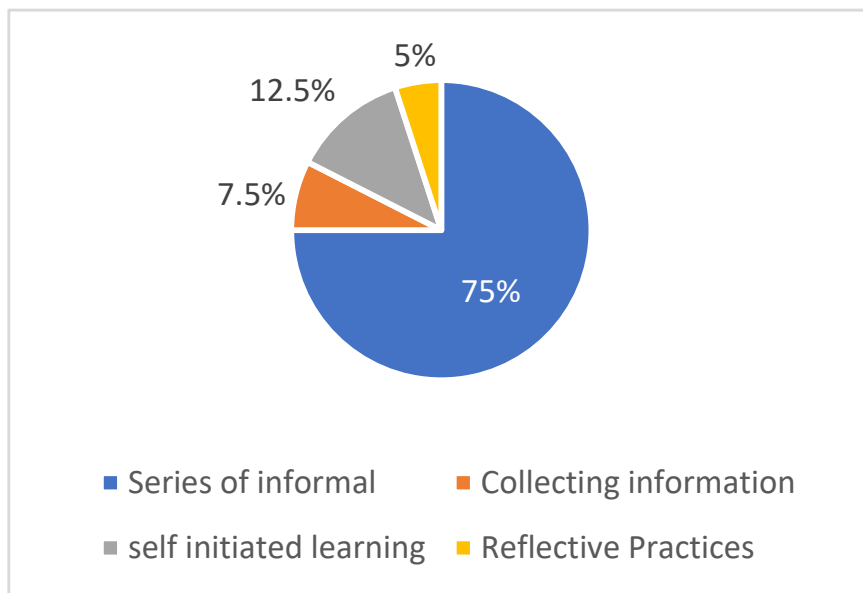
The main purpose of this study was to find out the teachers' perspective of peer coaching for their professional development. The collected data were analyzed and interpreted under the three main themes:

- i. Practices of peer coaching adopted by teachers.
- ii. Benefits of peer coaching practices perceived by teachers.
- iii. Teachers' awareness towards peer coaching.

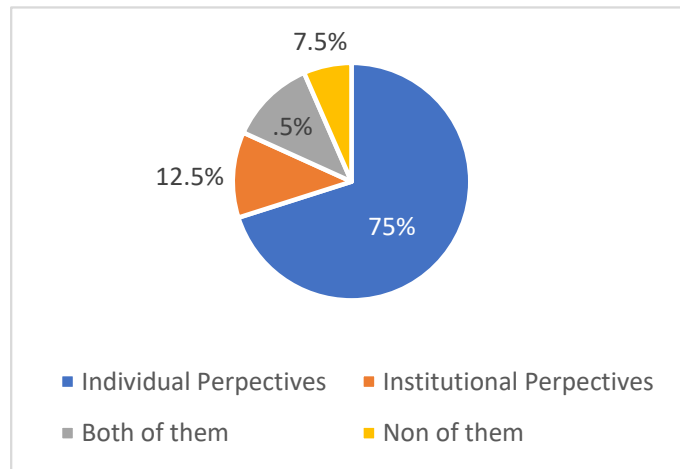
The analysis of the collected data has carried out as accurately as possible. The analysis and interpretation had done both statistically and descriptively. The analyses has been done with the help of following figures.

Figure 1

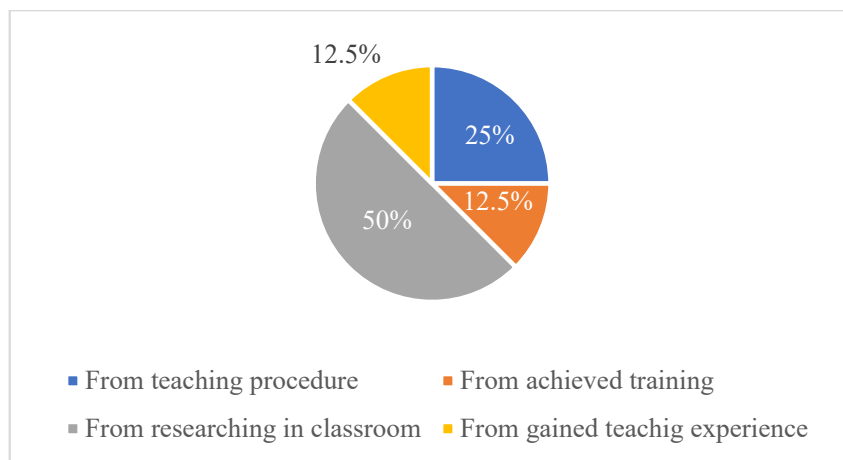
Awareness about Peer coaching



Teachers were asked to find their awareness towards peer coaching 75% teachers were able to tell the meaning of the term peer coaching properly. Peer coaching is a series of informal conversations between a teacher and a colleague about teaching, focusing on what is happening in the teachers' classrooms. Similarly, 7.5% teachers viewed that peer coaching is collective information over time about a teaching and 12.5% teachers viewed that peer coaching is self-initiated learning and rest of the 5% teachers viewed peer coaching is reflective practice. This statement shows that majority of the teachers were aware of the term peer coaching and which helped them to develop their professionalism.

Figure 2*Perspectives of Peer Coaching*

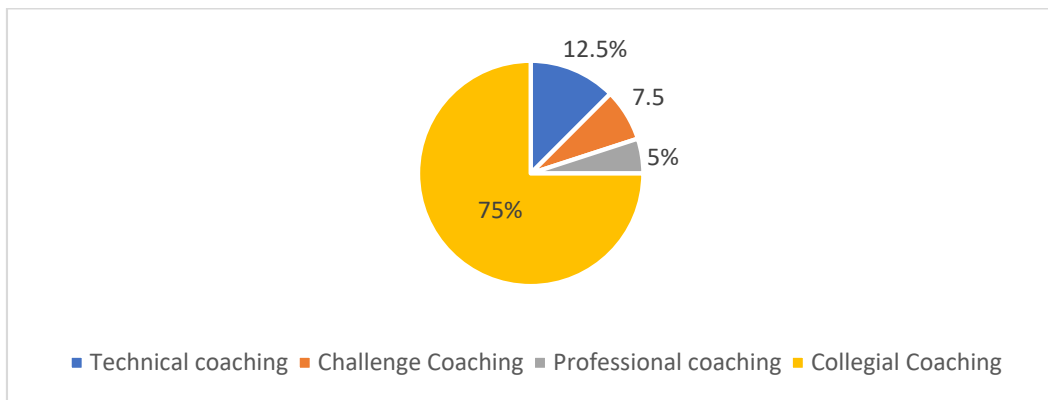
While analyzing the responses of the statement ‘which of the following perspective of the teacher development is important’ it was found that 75% teachers agreed that teacher development is individual perspective. Similarly, 12.5% teachers viewed that institutional perspective of teacher development is important and 5% teachers supported both perspectives that they are equally important. Rest of the 7.5% teachers did not agree with any perspectives of teacher development.

Figure 3*Degree of Effectiveness of Teaching*

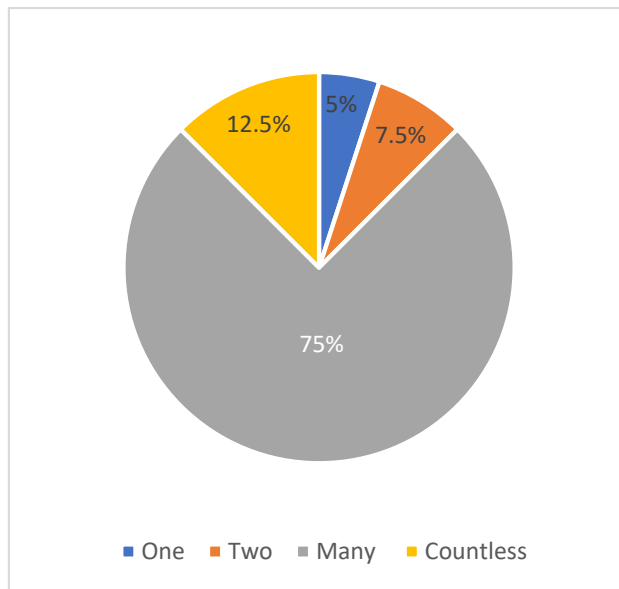
Above mention figure reveals that 50% of teachers assure themselves that their teaching is effective by researching in the classroom. Similarly, 25% of them believe that their teaching is effective through using different types of teaching procedures. Among them 12.5% viewed that they assured themselves that their teaching is effective from gained teaching experience and from achieved training. The same 12.5% viewed that their teaching is effective from gained teaching experience.

Figure 4

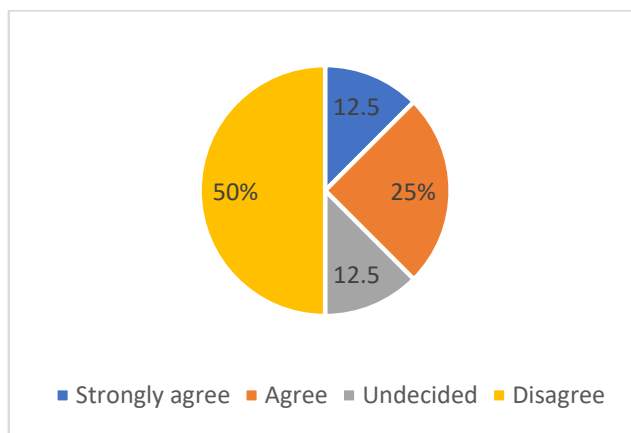
Use of Peer Coaching



While analyzing the responses of the above-mentioned figure, it had found that majority of the teachers conducted peer coaching many times. Among them 75% conducted peer coaching many times throughout their career for their professional development. Similarly, 12.5% of them said that they conducted peer coaching countless time throughout their career to grow their professionalism. Rest of the 7.5% and 5% of them conducted peer coaching two times and one time throughout their career respectively. As a whole, this analysis shows that majority of the teachers conducted peer coaching many times throughout their career.

Figure 5*Likings of the types of peer coaching*

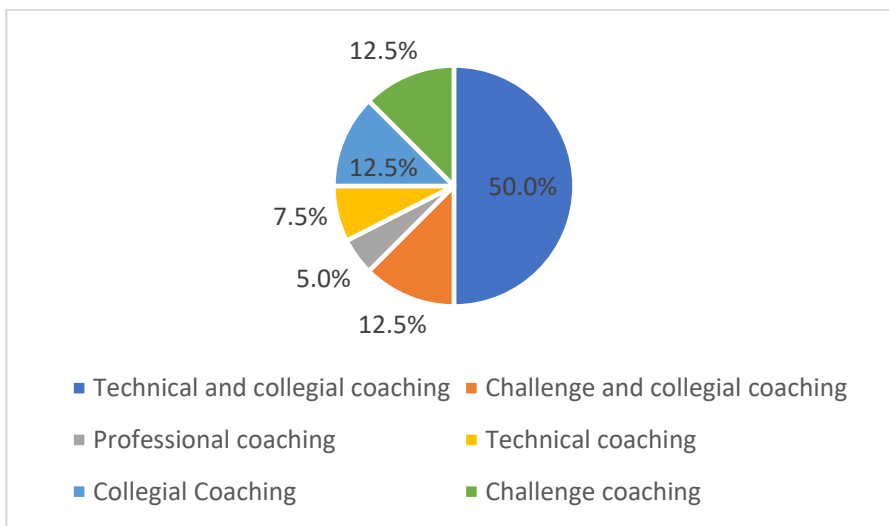
Similarly, analyzing the responses of above figure, it had found that majority of the teachers like collegial coaching most. Among them, 75% of them like the collegial coaching most and 12.5% like the technical coaching. Rest of the 7.5% and 5% of them like challenging coaching and professional coaching most respectively.

Figure 6*Peer coaching in formal situations*

Analyzing the responses of above-mentioned figure, it was found that majority of the teachers disagreed with the idea that peer coaching can be conducted in a formal situation. Among them 50% disagreed that peer coaching can be conducted in a formal situation. Similarly, 25% of them agreed to this and the same 12.5% of them strongly agreed and were undecided respectively. This shows that most of the teachers are familiar with the practices of peer coaching for professional development and its implementation. However, it can be done in both formal as well as informal situation.

Figure 7

Frequency of the Use of Peer Coaching



In order to elicit further information for finding out the teachers' views on practices of peer coaching as strategy for professional development, one open-ended question 'what types of peer coaching practices are you using for your professional development' provided to teachers. Based on responses given by them has been analyzed from figure number seven. Among the total number of teachers, 50% of them adopted technical and collegial coaching for their professional development. Similarly, 12.5% of them adopted challenge and collegial coaching and the same 12.5% of them adopted collegial and challenge coaching to grow their professionalism. In the same way, 7.5% of them only adopted technical coaching for their professional development. As a whole, most of them adopted technical and collegial coaching as best types of peer coaching for their professional development. However, little number of them

had the misconception of adopting the peer coaching types for their professional development.

Figure 8

New Teachers Use of New Teaching Materials

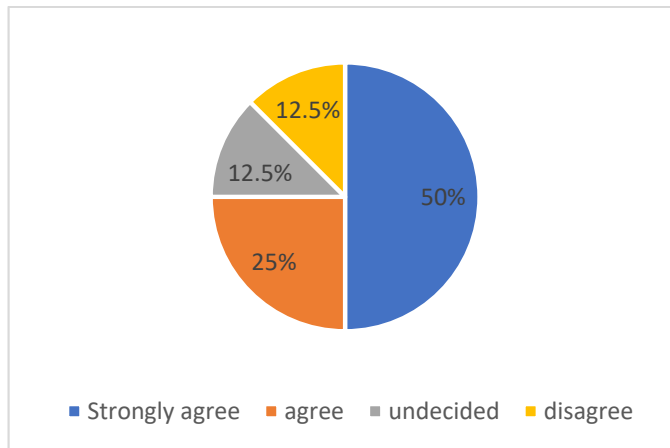
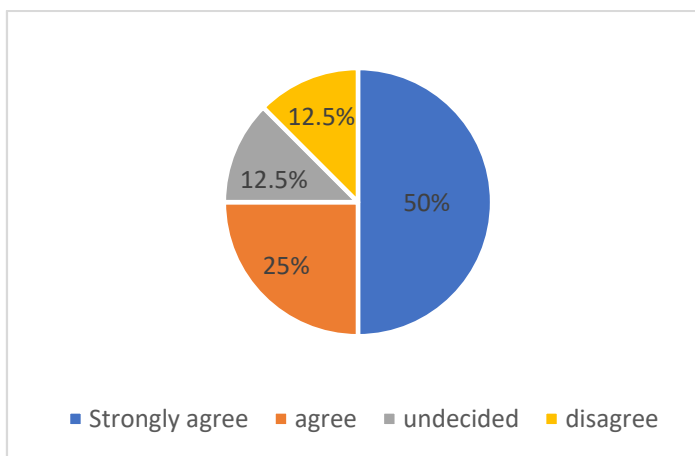


Figure eight reveals that 50% teachers strongly agreed where 25% of them agreed. Similarly, the same 12.5% teachers were undecided and disagreed respectively in the statement. This statement shows that most of the teachers strongly agreed that 'through peer coaching new teachers can try out new teaching materials and approaches' for their professional development.

Figure 9

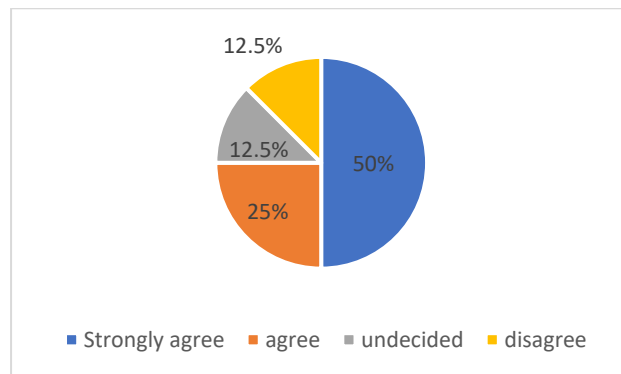
Positive Changes of Peer Coaching



Similarly, figure nine reveals that 50% teachers strongly agreed where 25% of them agreed. In the same way, the same 12.5% teachers were undecided and disagreed respectively in the statement. This statement shows that most of the teachers strongly agreed that ‘peer coaching activity always brings positive changes over existing situation’.

Figure 10

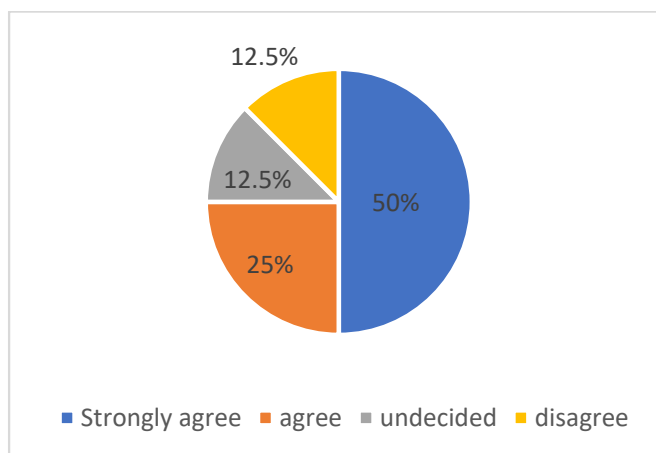
Learnings from More Experienced Colleagues



Likewise, above-mentioned figure reveals that 50% teachers strongly agreed where 25% of them agreed. Similarly, the same 12.5% teachers were undecided and disagreed respectively in the statement. This statement shows that most of the teachers strongly agreed that ‘peer coaching helps new teachers learn from more experienced colleagues’ to grow their professionalism.

Figure 11

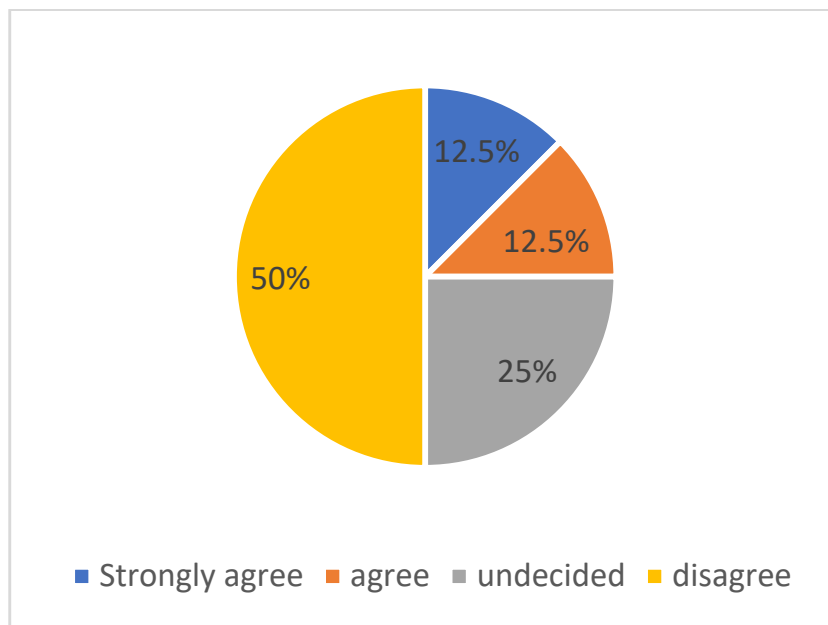
New Teachers Get Supportive Context



Above figure reveals that 50% teachers strongly agreed where 25% of them agreed. Similarly, the same 12.5% percent teachers were undecided and disagreed respectively in the statement. This statement shows that most of the teachers strongly agreed that 'peer coaching provides supportive context for novice teachers for their professional development.

Figure 12

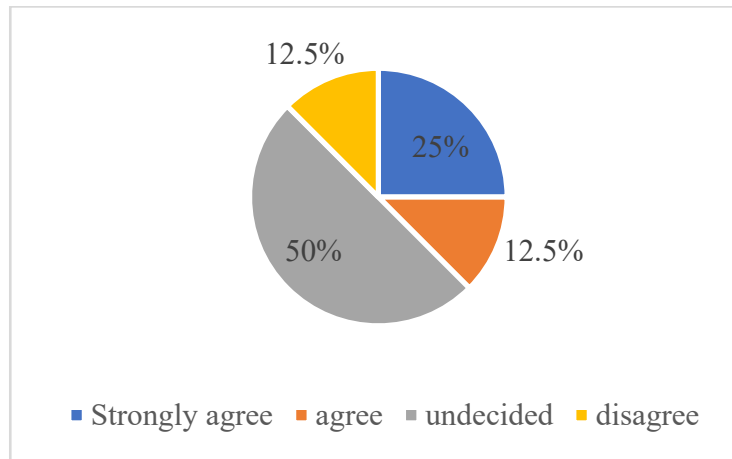
Peer Coaching as Developmental Activity



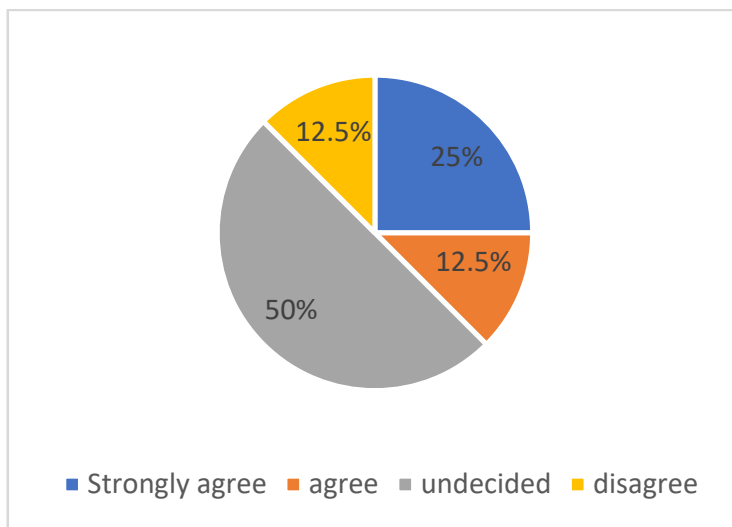
Regarding figure number twelve, 50% of them disagreed peer coaching is developmental activity for teacher development. Among them, 25% teachers were undecided whether peer coaching is a development activity for teacher development or not. The same 12.5% teachers strongly agreed peer coaching is developmental activity for teacher development. Majority of the teachers are not positive towards this statement.

Figure 13

Collegiality of Peer Coaching



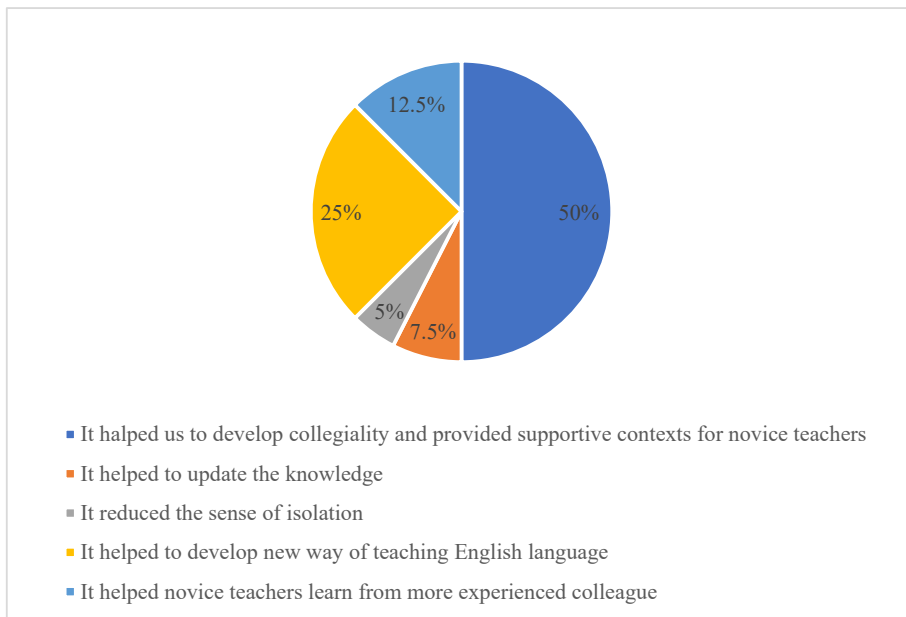
While analyzing figure number thirteen, 50% of them undecided 'peer coaching helps to develop collegiality'. Among them, 25% teachers disagreed 'peer coaching helps to develop collegiality'. The same 12.5% teachers strongly agreed and agreed 'peer coaching helps to develop collegiality'. Majority of the teachers are undecided towards this statement.

Figure 14*Reorganization through Per Coaching*

Analyzing the figure number fourteen, 50% of the teachers were undecided 'peer coaching helps the coach to develop the sign of reorganization'. Among them, 25% teachers strongly agreed 'peer coaching helps the coach to develop the sign of reorganization'. The same 12.5% teachers agreed and disagreed 'peer coaching helps the coach to develop the sign of reorganization'. Majority of the teachers were undecided towards this statement.

Figure 15

Benefits of Peer Coaching



Above-mentioned figure shows that the majority of the teachers benefited through peer coaching activity. Among them, 50% of them were highly benefited and they viewed that peer coaching helped them to develop collegiality and supportive contexts for novice teachers. Similarly, 25% of them benefited and started to develop different styles of teaching English language of their own. Likewise, 12.5% of them viewed that they were benefited because peer coaching helped novice teachers learn from more experienced colleagues. In the same way, 7.5% of them were benefited to update their knowledge through peer coaching activity. Rest of the 5% of teachers felt that peer coaching helped them to reduce the sense of isolation. As a whole, most of the teachers were benefited by practicing the peer coaching activity in their English language-teaching classroom.

Conclusion

The following recommendations have been made on the basis of the above mentioned findings of the study. No doubt most of the teachers are aware of the peer coaching but other who are unaware should develop awareness of peer coaching. Even the fifty percent teachers agreed that peer coaching is the best strategy of professional development they are not ready to grasp its benefit they need encouragement from the MOE and the concerned institutions to initiate peer coaching. However, peer coaching helps to develop collegiality, but many teachers are undecided about this. Thus, they should be aware about peer coaching. The teachers should document their own teaching for self-evaluation. Teacher training providers such as NELTA, NCED and MOE should launch peer coaching training packages for teachers' professional development. The trainings, seminars and conference in Teacher Development should focus on the benefits and practical use of different strategies of peer coaching such as action research, journal writing, analyzing critical incidents, and teaching portfolios along with peer coaching itself.

This study was limited to schools of Okhaldhunga district. It was limited to forty secondary and lower secondary level English language teachers. Questionnaires were the tools. Only peer coaching was focused with practices of it for their professional development.

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