Online peer observation in paragraph writing class: A study during covid pandemic
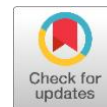
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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the methods employed by lecturers in teaching a Paragraph Writing class during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also investigates their perceptions of online peer observation as a tool for professional development. Peer observation serves as a professional development tool that enhances the learning process and improves teaching practices. Using a qualitative design, the study involved two lecturers who were observed by a senior faculty member across four online sessions. Data were gathered through pre-observation meetings, classroom observations, post-observation discussions, and semi-structured interviews. Post observation discussions and feedback sessions between the observer and lecturers fostered critical thinking, idea exchange, heightened awareness of teaching performance, and collaborative efforts to achieve better student outcomes. The findings indicate that (1) lecturers should advance their pedagogical methodologies, with a particular emphasis on learning strategies and information technology competencies, (2) peer observation is perceived as a valuable collaborative learning activity that improves teaching practices through feedback, skill acquisition, and mutual collaboration, and (3) challenges such as device issues, internet connectivity, and student engagement were encountered during the online teaching. The study concludes that online peer observation contributed meaningfully to professional growth by facilitating feedback, reflective practice, and collaboration.

How to Cite: Hasna, F. H., Fattimah, S., & Sari, S. Y. (2025). Online peer observation in paragraph writing class: A study during covid pandemic. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language Journal*, *4*(1), 16-25. https://doi.org/10.12928/tefl.v4i1.1404

1. Introduction

Transitioning from offline to online teaching necessitates that lecturers adapt to new technologies for conducting online education. Unlike offline teaching, online instruction limits direct interaction with students, making it more challenging for lecturers. This aligns with studies by Cholifah et al. (2020) and Eko et al. (2020), which highlight the difficulties teachers face in online teaching, such as creating accessible materials, providing personalized feedback, and being adequately prepared for online instruction. Thus, lecturers are required to adapt to new developments in technology as a means of achieving effective online teaching practice.

Writing is a mandatory subject for university students, involving the process of transforming a writer's ideas into coherent and readable text. It is a crucial skill in English, requiring students to articulate their thoughts effectively. Writing is not only an essential communicative skill but also demands significant mental effort to organize sentences meaningfully (Alsmari, 2019). As an

important academic skill, lecturers must employ suitable teaching methods, offer resources, and motivate students in their writing endeavors (Rashid & Hui, 2022). Thus, lecturers play a pivotal role in the success of students' writing proficiency. Consequently, writing is a productive skill that complements listening, speaking, and reading leading to the vital role of lecturers in the lesson delivery in accomplishing the desired outcomes.

Lecturers play an important role in motivating learners, implementing various teaching approaches, and evaluating the teaching process itself as the means to upgrade students' writing skill. However, during online teaching and learning, lecturers faced difficulties in internet connection and difficulties in maintaining the student's writing process (Nasihah & Senta, 2022). Therefore, lecturers are required to adapt with the new development in technology, knowledge and skills used for better online teaching. Lecturers have a vital role in education and should continuously seek to enhance their skills. Pursuing relevant professional development approaches is essential for lecturers to achieve their full potential. Ongoing professional development is crucial for lecturers, focusing on specific job-related growth that sets long-term goals and enhances their understanding of teaching and their roles (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Staying updated with new technological and knowledge advancements is imperative for effective teaching. A study conducted by Jamil (2024) acknowledged that EFL teachers are required to employ a variety of learning applications in achieving better learning and teaching practices. These areas will continue to evolve, necessitating collaboration among lecturers to develop specialized knowledge and skills, expand their understanding of research, theory, and teaching issues, and assume new responsibilities. As stated by Ahmed et al. (2018), peer observation mainly focuses on collaborative learning which provides opportunities for mutual collaboration among lecturers. Given these pedagogical challenges in teaching writing online, it is crucial that lecturers adopt collaborative approaches, such as peer observation, to reflect on and improve their instructional methods.

Peer observation is one of the professional developmental activities implemented to evaluate and reflect the lecturer's teaching. It provides opportunities for lecturers to observe the class of their colleagues regarding possibilities of enhancing their teaching practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Peer observation is defined as a sharing session without assessment that generally triggers nervousness of teachers. This is also supported by Jones and Gallen (2016) that this model mainly focuses on the shared perception of peers leading to the mutual development purpose. The main benefits of peer observation are getting feedback, critical thinking, learning new skills and mutual collaboration (Motallebzadeh et al., 2017). Peer observation has been implemented as a routine activity to develop best practice in teaching for lecturers, provide opportunity for collaboration and learning environment for colleagues, and ensure if good teaching is recognized in collegiate culture in Victoria University, Yale-NUS College, and Aston University.

Peer observation is regularly conducted to enhance outcomes for both lecturers and students. In Singapore, the Victorian government mandates peer observation as a key component of professional learning within educational institutions. This approach is valued for its flexibility, supporting personalized and reflective professional development grounded in trust and openness. Since 2018, Yale-NUS College has integrated peer observation as a routine practice, highlighting its benefits in fostering best teaching practices, promoting a collaborative learning environment, and recognizing quality teaching within the academic culture. Similarly, at Aston University, peer observation is a fundamental aspect of academic development, continually aiding lecturers in improving their teaching methods, transforming educational perspectives, and fostering collegiality. Nevertheless, most Indonesian lecturers still have no idea regarding the implementation of peer observation.

Despite the proven value of peer observation for teacher development, its application in online writing classes—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic—remains underexplored, especially in the Indonesian higher education context. Thus, the areas investigated in this study are in the following questions:

1. How do the observed lecturers conduct the online teaching and learning process in *Paragraph Writing* Class during Covid pandemic?

2. What are observed *Paragraph Writing* lecturers' perceptions regarding the practice of online peer observation during Covid pandemic?

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of online peer observation and the perceptions of lecturers teaching a Paragraph Writing class at UNP. Two lecturers who were teaching first-year students in the Paragraph Writing course were purposely selected due to their active involvement in online instruction during the pandemic. Data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews. The peer observation process consisted of three stages: pre-observation, observation, and post-observation. During pre-observation, the researchers sought consent and clarified the observation criteria. Observations were conducted across four online teaching sessions via Zoom, during which the observer remained non-participatory and used structured forms to document teaching practices. Following these sessions, feedback was provided during reflective post-observation discussions. Finally, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each lecturer to explore their perceptions of the peer observation process.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Results

1) Teaching and Learning Process from Observer's Observation

The data of the study was obtained from the process of observations which lasted for four sessions in synchronous mode using Zoom Meeting. The observer analyzed the way both lecturers taught based on the result of pre-observation and observation stages.

a) Pre-observation Stage

At this stage, the observer identified five key aspects: the content and structure of the class, the lesson's objectives, the preparations undertaken to teach the class, the teaching aids, and the online platforms or media used to support online teaching. Based on these aspects, it can be concluded that both lecturers implemented the plans outlined in their pre-observation forms. The observed lecturers demonstrated clear and thorough preparation for teaching. However, the observer noted the teaching aids and online platforms/media utilized by the lecturers used mostly Google Forms, Zoom Meetings, and E-learning.

b) Observation Stage

Six main criteria were assessed by the observer during the observation process. Firstly, both lecturers demonstrated strong lesson planning but failed to introduce lesson objectives such as providing the material in the E-learning. Subsequently, the learning strategies employed by both lecturers were identical, specifically online learning discussions. The observer noted a significant disparity in the discussion structure: Lecturer 1 (L1) provided students with opportunities to comment and suggest, whereas students in Lecturer 2's (L2) class merely listened to her comments and suggestions. Regarding the criterion of teacher knowledge, the observer observed that the lecturers did not incorporate current research in the field or identify sources to support the learning material. However, the lecturers' statements were accurate according to the field's standards, and feedback was provided to students at regular intervals. In terms of teaching writing, both lecturers encouraged and motivated students during the lesson, yet no collaborative learning occurred among the students. Additionally, both lecturers demonstrated effective time management by starting and ending the class punctually, and no technical issues arose, indicating thorough preparation for the online class. Finally, the observer did not identify any variation in the tools and media used by the lecturers to support online teaching and learning, and breakout rooms were not utilized effectively.

c) Post- observation Stage

After conducting four observation sessions, the observer noted that both lecturers employed the same teaching technique, namely discussion. Nevertheless, they showed differences in the way of delivering comments and suggestions for students' writing.

2) Online Teaching and Learning in Paragraph Writing Class

The necessity of conducting online teaching and learning during the two-year period of the Covid-19 pandemic prompted lecturers to seek appropriate techniques to achieve optimal learning outcomes for their students. Both lecturers articulated their perspectives on online teaching practices. The data related to these statements are as follows:

> "I personally think that teaching online requires media and online platforms to support in delivering the materials to the students…Lecturers also put more effort in preparing the materials before the class starts." (Lecturer 1)

The second lecturer concurred, noting that preparing for online teaching required numerous considerations.

> "For me, it takes various techniques to ensure that all materials and assignments can be done properly. So, I cannot apply just one technique in teaching online. I must also update any new application which can be utilized to support the online teaching and learning" (Lecturer 2)

Despite carefully considering the most appropriate methods for online teaching and materials preparation, numerous challenges persist in online teaching and learning practices. Both lecturers employed the same technique ensuring that all of the students were engaged with the lesson by randomly asking them to participate. The choice of learning method depended on the situation and students' needs. A teaching technique might change if both lecturers could not achieve the desired outcomes in students' writing. In addition, the second lecturer agreed with the first lecturer.

> "Some challenges that I mostly faced during teaching online are students' behavior, making students' participative, and device connection…" (Lecturer 1)

The second lecturer also has the same opinion regarding obstacles faced during online teaching.

> "The challenges are devices and students' engagement. Sometimes what I, as lecturer, expected is different from reality. They do not care about the preparations before the class which lead to the passive participation in the classroom". (Lecturer 2)

In conclusion, both lecturers faced some challenges during online teaching in Paragraph Writing class compared to traditional classroom instruction. Lecturers meticulously prepared materials and media to support their teaching practice with consideration of appropriate techniques for teaching Paragraph Writing. Furthermore, the primary issues encountered during online teaching often were from technological devices, internet connectivity, and students' engagement.

3) The Practice of Online Peer Observation in Paragraph Writing Class

Based on the obtained data, the lecturers have been teaching since 2018 at UNP yet they had never been observed during four years of teaching. Lecturers stated that they did not feel nervous being observed during teaching online. On the contrary, they felt excited about the prospect of having an observer join their classes and provide feedback to help improve their teaching skills.

> "During the observations, I don't get nervous because it is online which means we can only see through the mini screen showing our faces. I think it will be different if the observation is conducted offline." (Lecturer 2)

During the post observation phase, one lecturer expresses slight nervousness regarding the results of the observations. However, both lecturers did not perceive that they were judged and assessed by the observer. Instead, they appreciated the opportunity to gain insights into their teaching methods from their peers' perspective.

> "For Post observation, I felt excited to get feedback from the observer because I can discover what I was lacking during teaching or what I missed and what I should have done. I also expect that there were more observers so I can get more feedbacks to improve my teaching skill" (Lecturer 1)

> "I was a little bit worried for the post observation step if the activities or my actions during teaching were not suitable with the ideal teaching criteria. However, during the discussion in post observation, there was not any feeling of being judged by the observer so I felt glad getting advices from the observer that can be implemented for the upcoming paragraph writing class" (Lecturer 2)

Furthermore, both lecturers agreed that the practice of online peer observation gave them an opportunity in getting insights for new skills and new techniques which can be implemented for the upcoming paragraph writing class. The lecturers also advocated for conducting peer observations at

least twice per semester within a team-teaching framework. The statements were gained from the following data:

> "I think that online peer observation is good. Commonly, each lecturer teaches the same subject every year. Sometimes, the old technique cannot be applied in this year so we need to update any new techniques in teaching. I think there must be a change or an improvement in teaching for lecturers which can be done by peer observation." (Lecturer 1)

According to the teachers' perceptions regarding peer observation as one of the reflective tools to promote professional development, it can be concluded that lecturers found peer observation useful because it gives some benefits for them while they are not able to observe their teaching practices by themselves. The practice of peer increased lecturers' awareness on what aspects that must be improved to get a better teaching performance.

3.2. Discussion

According to the findings, the researcher concluded that both lecturers faced challenges in conducting online learning and teaching, particularly in teaching writing. From this study, researchers focused on the lecturers' perspectives in online Paragraph Writing class. As stated by Alsmari (2019) that the role of teacher is crucial in overcoming learners' writing problems. The challenges stated by the lecturers are the device, internet connection and students' engagement. It is in line with a study conducted by Cholifah et al. (2020), where participants faced technical obstacles during the online teaching practice. From the finding, the observer noticed that one of the lecturers informed and allowed the learners to turn off their camera in order to have a better internet connection in which their voice in terms of participation might be achieved instead of just their video. Nevertheless, both observed lecturers expressed disapointment toward some students who cheated their writing tasks. It is in line with Nasihah & Senta (2022) in which lecturers demonstrated that it was hard for lecturers to do assessment on students' actual writing ability because some students were proved to be cheating on their writing assingment. Thus, online assessment is perceived to be difficult to do by teachers (Cutri et al., 2020). Considering some challenges during online teaching for paragraph writing class, peer observation was suitable in overcoming the issues in terms of collaborative learning where both observed lecturers and observer exchanged perspective and achieved feedback.

From the study, both teachers viewed peer observation as a beneficial strategy which can be implemented to develop the lecturer's professionalism. During the process of the peer observation, lecturers built critical thinking while observing the lecturers and giving feedback as the aim to achieve improvement. It is in line with Motallebzadeh et al. (2017) result in their research. They listed four main benefits of peer observations which is one of them the development of lecturers critical thinking during peer observation practice. Furthermore, mutual collaboration is also gained through the process of peer observation during the post observation step where both observer and observed lecturers met and had a discussion related to the results of the observations. It is in line with Cholifah et al. (2020) finding where the participants demonstrated that peer observation provided a learning opportunity mutually. This also aligns with Andrew et al. (2021) result, revealing that teachers did not feel threatened in the process of peer observation. It also benefited staff collaboration, collegiality and self-efficacy in the virtual classroom environment. Ribosa et al. (2023) also demonstrated that comments in post observation are more likely to be non judgemental and constructive for teachers' professional development. It fosters the essential conditions for teachers to participate in joint activity, which highlights the significance of collaboration to enhance students' outcomes (Corcelles-Seuba et a., 2024).

Moreover, the practice of peer observation does not aim to assess lecturers teaching practices. Instead, it focuses on the learning from peers collaboratively which focus is on shared perception (Jones & Gallen, 2016). It is in line with Ahmed et al. (2018) participants who felt relaxed during their teaching sessions because the observer was from their colleagues. Findings also showed that both observed lecturers did not feel threatened during the observation but one lecturer showed nervousness on the result of the observation because the observer was from a senior lecturer. A study from Walker (2015) stated that relationship building is important as the initial phase to create conditions for both observers and observed lecturers for a critical engagement of the official observation.

Furthermore, after observing the lecturers for four sessions, the observer noticed that both lecturers needed to improve their learning strategies because both lecturers implemented the same strategy for four sessions. Lecturer's choice of learning strategy should be carefully considered because it will affect student's engagement. It leads to the importance of active learning implemented by the lecturer. For this reason, the lecturer is in charge of considering active teaching in order to gain students' engagement. However, the observer found out that both lecturers never implemented group activity/small group discussion to vary the learning strategy. Meanwhile Andrew et al. (2021) and Pham (2023) revealed that group work and peer feedback performing collaborative writing activity would offer a more thinking time and alternative communication among the students. Group discussion/activity will encourage students to participate and deliver their ideas because they have to work together. This aligns with a study conducted by Alsahil (2025) demonstrating the use of Google Doc for collaborative writing activity for students which might be considered to be employed by lecturers to vary writing activity. Another collaborative strategy in writing skill is also demonstrated by Jaffe et al. (2024) where it provides interaction, joint decisions and responsibilities in the ideas and text production. Regarding collaborative writing activity, zoom breakout room could be utilized in online teaching. However, both observed lecturers only used the main room instead of assigning students into small groups.

Afterwards, IT skill must also be improved by the lecturer (Palacios-Hidalgo & Huertas-Abril, 2025), in order to be able to create an interactive media/source to support the learning material. Lecturers can also learn new digital tools, what the cools can work for, and how to solve the unexpected problems. Besides delivering the lesson from a text, it would be better for the lecturer to utilize audio and video tools. Finally, due to the challenges confronted as well as less learning strategy and IT skills, peer observation helps lecturers to be more aware in conducting a better teaching performance. From a study done by (Rashid & Hui, 2022), Edmodo was proved to be useful in the learners' writing improvement as one of the online learning tools where learners had opportunity for exchanging thoughts, feedback and writing quality improvement.

Despite some advantages of peer observations, some challenges were experienced during the implementation. Time management became the major challenge in which both observer and observed lecturers found difficulties in managing time for feedback/post observation sessions leading to inability of effective post observation practice which should have been conducted after each session. It is in line with studies conducted by Ridge & Lavigne (2020) where they had little time in providing high quality feedback for effective peer observation practice.

In conclusion, although some major challenges faced during the implementation of peer observation, both observed lecturers considered a positive perspective on the implementation of peer observation as a reflective tool which brought some benefits to their professional developments and pedagogy competence. It is in line with the goals of peer observation demonstrated by (Richards & Farrel, 2005), in which it has six goals including, (1) developing the understanding of personal approaches to curriculum delivery, (2) enhancing and extending teaching techniques by doing a collaboration, (3) exchanging insights relating to the results of teaching performance, (4) expanding personal skills in reflecting and evaluating, (5) having collaboration in developing curriculum planning skills, (6) and identifying areas in teaching practice in need of development. It is in line with a study conducted in West Sumatra in 2018 by Tosriadi et al. (2018) that peer observation is effective for classroom instruction. Peer observation became a tool for reflection that brought some benefits for teachers. The feedback of PO can help teachers to make improvements in the classroom, exchange ideas about teaching methods, strategies and materials, solve problems during teaching, and could also be used as a learning opportunity. Finding from Dos Santos (2016) showed that peer observation could be an effective continuous professional development tool for teachers in developing their teaching practices. This aligns with both observed lecturers expressing that peer observation should be considered to be employed for team teaching. Thus, implementing peer observation provides an opportunity for lecturers for effective educational practices (Drew et al., 2017; Mather & Visone, 2024).

3.3. Limitation of the Research

During the practice of online peer observations, there were some obstacles that occurred in the middle of the observations. Post observation should have been conducted every after an observation

was completed. Nevertheless, the researcher could only conduct the post observation at the end of the four observations because it was difficult to match both observed lecturers and observer schedules where they had hectic schedules. It means that both observed lecturers only experienced post observation once. Therefore, in order to accomplish better results on the peer observation implementation, further research is needed to explore longer term benefits and improvements of the peer observation practice particularly employing the effective post observation phase. For future research, there should be a well prepared-schedule for both lecturers and observed lecturers in order to gain improvement in every session of the class by ensuring that post observation is conducted every after an observation is finished. Additionally, the findings were from a small sample size of two lecturers because there were only two lecturers teaching Paragraph Writing class during the period of time. Therefore, in order to include a larger cohort to assess generalizability on the result, more participants are recomended to be involved in the implementation of peer observation.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to examine (1) how lecturers conduct online Paragraph Writing classes during COVID-19 and (2) their perceptions of online peer observation. Findings indicate that both lecturers demonstrated limited use of varied learning strategies and digital tools, highlighting areas for professional growth. Lecturers relied almost exclusively on whole-class discussion and did not leverage small-group activities, breakout rooms, or interactive media, indicating a need for diversified strategies and enhanced IT proficiency.

Secondly, participants valued online peer observation for fostering feedback, skill development, and collaborative reflection, which in turn heightened pedagogical awareness and critical thinking. The observed lecturers and observers could learn from one to another by having discussion and giving feedback after observing without assessment. Peer observation helped lecturers to increase awareness of teaching practices, promote critical thinking, exchange ideas and collaboration as the aim for student's outcomes to get better. However, due to the small sample of two lecturers and a single course context, findings may not generalize. Future studies should include more participants across different disciplines and integrate iterative post-observation feedback to track teaching improvements over time.

Acknowledgment

Declarations

Author contribution	:	FHH contributed in writing from beginning to the end, instrument construction, data collection, analysis and final draft. SF initiated the research ideas, checked instrument construction and data collection as senior lecturer. SYS collaborated in the research ideas and data collection.
Funding statement	:	The research is funded under Research Project No. 762/UN35.13/LT/2021.
Conflict of interest	:	The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Ethics Declaration	:	We as author acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conforms to the regulations of our university and that we have obtained permission from the relevant institutes when collecting data. We support TEFL Journal in maintaining high standards of personal conduct and practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.
Additional information	:	No additional information is available for this paper.

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