BRIDGING BORDERS: HOW THE PROFESSIONAL TEACHER EXPERIENCE EXCHANGE PROGRAM (PTEEP) SHAPE TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Teacher exchange programs (TEPs) play a vital role in professional development, cross-institutional collaboration and pedagogical innovation. However, previous studies have not yet comprehensively examined how TEPs influence teachers' educational philosophies and teaching methods. This study fills this knowledge gap by investigating the impact of structured exchange between secondary school teachers and university lecturers on participants' teaching beliefs and classroom practices. Through classroom observations, discussion panels, and surveys, the research explored the program's impact on instructional methods and education quality. Findings revealed significant shifts in educators' approaches. Secondary teachers adopted more student-centred strategies, emphasising critical thinking to better prepare students for higher education. University lecturers, gaining insight into students' prior learning experiences, adjusted their teaching to ease the transition to tertiary education. Despite challenges such as curriculum rigidity, participants developed adaptable solutions that enhanced instructional alignment across educational levels. The study recommends institutionalising teacher exchanges, integrating structured reflection sessions, and fostering policy-level support for cross-institutional collaboration. Future research should also assess long-term effects on student performance and expand comparative studies across diverse educational contexts. Such assessments can strengthen teaching practices, improve education quality, and create a more cohesive learning continuum for students.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Context

Teacher exchange programs (TEPs) have gained global prominence as a transformative form of professional development (PD), enabling educators to teach in foreign educational systems while fostering cross-cultural collaboration (Akar & Yildirim, 2019). These programs aim to enhance teachers' cultural competence (Yang & Montgomery, 2013), expose them to innovative pedagogical approaches (OECD, 2020), and ultimately improve classroom practices. As globalisation reshapes education, TEPs offer a unique opportunity for educators to broaden their perspectives, challenge existing beliefs, and adopt new instructional strategies (Akar & Yildirim, 2019). However, despite their growing popularity, the specific impact of TEPs on teachers' pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices remains underexplored in empirical research (Yang & Montgomery, 2013; OECD, 2020).

1.2. Research Purpose

This study seeks to address this gap by examining how participation in the professional teacher experience exchange programs (PTEEPs) influences teachers' educational philosophies and teaching methods.

While existing literature highlights the general benefits of teacher exchanges, such as intercultural growth and professional networking, only a few studies have investigated how these experiences translate into tangible changes in classroom instruction. Understanding this link is crucial for maximising the long-term effectiveness of PTEEPs as a professional development (PD) tool.

1.3. Problem Statement

The research problem stems from the lack of empirical evidence on whether and how PTEEPs reshape educators' beliefs and practices. Without such insights, program designers and policymakers may overlook critical barriers to implementation, such as contextual mismatches and institutional resistance.

By analysing survey responses and comparing them with existing literature, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of PTEEPs' transformative potential, as well as the challenges teachers face in applying new knowledge. The findings will contribute to more targeted PD frameworks, ensuring that exchange programs lead to sustainable educational improvements.

1.4. Research Questions

This study is designed to answer two research questions

RQ1: How do professional teacher experience exchange programs (PTEEPs) alter teachers' beliefs about pedagogy, culture, and student learning?

This question aims to explore how cross-cultural teaching experiences can challenge teachers' beliefs or reinforce or reshape assumptions. The research inquiry also aims to uncover how the participation in PTEEPs and the immersion in a new educational context can impact the teachers' understanding of student learning, their interpretations of effective pedagogy, and their professional identity.

RQ2: What classroom practices emerge from these changed beliefs?

The second research question aims to assess the practical implications of belief change. This inquiry examines how transformed perspectives are translated upon teachers' return to their home schools. This translation may be done by changing instructional methods, adapting teaching strategies, or changing classroom dynamics.

1.5. Significance of Study

1.5.1. Practical Significance

This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, program designers, and educational institutions involved in planning and implementing PTEEPs. By understanding how teachers' beliefs and practices grow over exchanging experiences, scholars can design more focused and effective staff professional development programs, resulting in long-lasting pedagogical advancements.

1.5.2. Theoretical Significance

The study contributes to the expansion of the literature on teacher professional development by extending the understanding of the belief-practice relationship.

In addition to elaborating elaborate on the pedagogical relationship between thought and practice, the study also examines how contextual shifts can promote belief transformation and pedagogical innovation built on existing theories of situated learning and teacher identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to critically explore the role of teacher experienced exchange programs (TEEPs) in shaping and framing teachers' professional development, with a specific focus on changes in classroom practices and belief transformation.

2.1. Professional Development and Teachers' Professional Growth

2.1.1. Professional Development (PD)

The concept of professional development has been defined in various ways. Cambridge International (2021) defined PD as a process for reflecting, learning, and acquiring knowledge. Parsons (2022) noted that PD prioritised "gaining new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce." Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), however, defined PD as a tool for enhancing teacher practices and students' learning outcomes.

2.1.2. Professional Development Activities

According to Cambridge International (2021), PD activities have different forms such as teachers' collaboration through various professional online learning or community. In addition, Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) mentioned that other professional development activities may include providing coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection.

2.1.3. Importance of Professional Development for Teacher

A plethora of research has explored the importance of professional development (PD) for teachers' professional growth. One of the most common PD forms among institutions is TEPs. Leutwyler (2014) defined TEPs as structured experiences that could improve teachers' competencies and professional knowledge. Oubit and El Farahi (2024) described these programs as professional development initiatives that could foster language acquisition, instructional innovation, and cultural adaptability. Overall, these programs have played a crucial role in shaping and transforming teachers' beliefs and classroom practices.

Wang et al. (2024) observed an increase in the number of published studies on teachers' beliefs. This growing research attention indicates the importance of this area for teachers' professional development. In addition, Guskey (2000, 2002) highlighted effective PD programs that focus on teachers' classroom practices, teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and learning outcomes.

2.2. Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

The literature has put forward various definitions of beliefs. Rokeach (1968) and Pajares (1992) defined a belief as what someone "says or does…". However,

Nelson and Guerra (2009) proposed different meanings. They argued that beliefs are filters of how some people "see" the world. Their arguments echoed the general meaning of a belief and its significance for classroom practices. Kagan (1992) stated that teachers' beliefs could reflect the teaching style in the classroom. Many researchers have noted that a direct and indirect relationship may exist between the teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Vacc and Bright, 1999; Farrell and Lim, 2005). They also found that teachers' beliefs could have a direct influence on students' learning outcomes (Cambridge International,2021). These beliefs have influenced instructional methodologies, teacher-student relationships, and student-learning processes (Sabarwal et al., 2022; Wolf and Brown, 2023).

Many factors have shaped teachers' beliefs and practices in the classroom. These factors include schooling and early teaching experiences, professional development and ongoing training, institutional polices and environment, curriculum, and students' needs and capabilities (Buehl and Beck, 2014; Guerra and Wubbena, 2017; Ramzan, 2020). These metrics play a crucial role in transforming teachers' beliefs and practices. However, many challenges can occur and impact these factors, thereby gradually influencing any adaptation of new methods and strategies to their teaching contexts. Some researchers observed that teachers faced institutional constraints such as rigid curriculum and tests, administrative expectations issues, classroom sizes, heavy workload, and time pressures, all of which hindered the implementation of new beliefs and practices (Ehlert, Sørum and Lauth, 2025; Guerra and Wubbena, 2017; Ramzan, 2020). In addition, Lew and Nelson (2016) argued that without appropriate professional development and training, teachers might be unprepared or unsure about changing their instructional approaches. Furthermore, Chi (2023) reported that resource limitations such as infrastructure, technology, and teaching materials could impact the effective adaptation of new beliefs and practices.

2.3. Theoretical Frameworks

2.3.1. Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1977) is rooted in the notion that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Individuals acquire knowledge and behaviours by observing others, particularly when they perceive positive outcomes from modelled actions (Bandura, 1977). This theory has significant implications for

teacher professional development, particularly in TEPs, where peer modelling plays a crucial role. In TEPs, educators learn by observing and replicating effective instructional strategies demonstrated by experienced peers (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura's theory, reinforcement, such as successful student engagement or positive feedback, strengthens the adoption of these practices (Akpan and Kennedy, 2020). When teachers witness colleagues implementing innovative techniques with favourable results, they are more likely to integrate those methods into their own teaching.

Furthermore, social learning influences both teacher behaviour and instructional strategies. Bandura (1977) emphasized the role of self-efficacy, suggesting that observing peer success could enhance teachers' confidence and their ability to apply new skills. This process could also foster professional growth and encourage adaptive teaching practices (Akpan and Kennedy, 2020). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory offers a robust framework for understanding how peer modelling in TEPs enhances teacher development. By observing, imitating, and receiving reinforcement, educators can refine their instructional approaches and improve classroom outcomes.

2.3.2. *Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory*

Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT) posits that adults undergo profound shifts in their worldviews through disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). This theory aligns with the views of emancipatory educationalists, who emphasize empowerment through self-reflection (Kokkos, 2012). In professional development, TLT encourages adaptive expertise. Educators, for instance, may transform their teaching approaches after critically reflecting on student feedback (Mezirow, 2000). Organizations applying TLT can also create environments where employees engage in reflective discourse, thereby enhancing innovation (Kokkos, 2012). Overall, Mezirow's theory remains influential, bridging individual growth and societal change through transformative education.

Besides, a disorienting dilemma refers to an experience that challenges existing beliefs. This experience serves as a catalyst for change, prompting individuals to question their assumptions (Kokkos, 2012). For example, a professional facing unexpected failure may reassess long-held strategies, initiating transformative learning. This process also fosters perspective transformation, where individuals revise their frames of reference to incorporate new insights

(Mezirow, 2000). Hence, critical reflection is central to TLT as it enables learners to examine the origins and validity of their beliefs (Mezirow, 1991).

2.3.3. *Situated Learning Theory*

The situated learning theory proposes a view of how teachers' beliefs and practices change based on real-life experiences through contextualized professional development programs such as TEPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The theory posits that learning is primarily social, bound by context, and based on active involvement in educational subcultures community practices that align directly with TEPs as a teacher in professional development programs. This concept also enables teachers to adopt new instructional and cultural contexts, promoting self-reflection and active team development. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), one key factor of teachers' active learning is through "legitimate peripheral participation". Teachers begin by observing new practices and progressively increase their involvement, and this practice helps them to re-evaluate their educational beliefs and views and adapt new strategies suitable to their context. Studies performed by Tang and Choi (2004) and Cushner (2007) support this theory. Such research reveals that cross-cultural teaching experiences have the potential to build intercultural understanding and promote student-centred thinking (Cushner, 2007; Tang and Choi, 2004).

Another key concept presented by Lave and Wenger (1991) in situated learning theory is learning fostered in communities of practice. Educators involved in programs learn best when they engage with other educators from the host schools. Through dialogue and shared practices, these communities of educators empower collective learning and long-term professional development (Wenger, 1998). Becher (1989), for instance, believed that being involved in these educational subculture communities could allow teachers to question deep-rooted assumptions and expand their understanding of effective teaching. Therefore, both concepts of situated learning theory, context and community, are offered by TEPs. In sum, situated learning theory describes how TEPs provide genuine professional transformation by positioning learning within real-world, cooperative, and culturally rich experiences.

2.4. *Educational Subcultures and Cultural Exposure*

Educational subcultures refer to the common norms, values, and teaching practices that define teaching identity and pedagogy within a certain

school, educational system or national context (Becher, 1989; Hargreaves, 1995). Thus, teachers' perception of authority, teamwork, and student involvement is highly influenced by these educational subcultures. Educators are exposed to different educational cultures when participating in TEPs. During or after TEPs, teachers' reflection and comparison may directly challenge their traditions and inspire change in beliefs.

Educational subcultures in Oman often emphasize hierarchy, exam efficiency, and respect and teacher authority that are culturally embedded (Al-Issa, 2009). These common norms in schools' educational system have a direct impact on the communication styles in the institution, classroom dynamics, and students' expectations. When participating in TEPs, Omani teachers may encounter more student-centred or less exclusive teaching approaches, such as those found in the higher education system, which may lead to initial discomfort. However, taking part in TEPs also fosters serious reflection and a possible change in classroom practices. Such interaction with various educational subcultures serves as an influential key mechanism for belief modification and professional development.

2.5. TEPs in Research

A growing body of research has evaluated TEPs in different cultures, highlighting teachers' beliefs and practices in the classroom. This study focuses on three main aspects and discusses the findings, including benefits and challenges that teachers face when adapting new methods to local contexts.

Several studies have researched teacher exchange programs (TEPs). For instance, Leutwyler (2014) explored existing research and findings based on the professional development of teachers, particularly in Europe and the US, through international exchange programs that aimed to systematize findings on the impact of exchange experiences on teachers' intercultural competencies. Oubit and El Farahi (2024) also investigated the impact of in-person exchange programs on Moroccan TEFL teachers, focusing on personal and professional development, including teaching strategies and cultural competence. Individuals aged 35-50 years were chosen to participate in the study based on purposeful sampling. Some teachers participated in at least one international exchange program. All of them had more than 11 years of experience. In another study, Lin (2018) explored the professional and personal impacts of exchange programs on 20 in-service English teachers, using surveys and interviews with alumni of a U.S.-based exchange program. Most of the participants reported significant benefits because of their participation in these programs. In addition, Peck (2014) examined the effects of TEPs between the US and China and concluded that exchange programs were key factors in understanding different teaching styles and educational standards. Overall, these three studies concluded that TEPs remained instrumental to educators' professional development.

Several researchers reasoned that TEPs offered valuable benefits for teachers (Leutwyler, 2014; Oubit and El Farahi, 2024; Lin, 2018). The scholars agreed that TEPs could enhance intercultural competence and understanding and expand cultural awareness. Moreover, the work of Leutwyler (2014) and Oubit and El Farahi (2024) revealed the importance of exchange programs in the growth of professional knowledge and language awareness, as well as teaching-specific beliefs and teaching strategies. Furthermore, most of the participants in x Lin (2018)'s research believed in the significance of exchange programs in enhancing flexibility and adaptability in teaching and strengthening reflective practice. Oubit and El Farahi (2024) reported that such programs could enhance leadership skills, while Leutwyler admitted that these programs could help improve motivational orientation to engage in diverse classrooms.

Leutwyler (2014), Oubit and El Farahi (2024) and Lin (2018) revealed some significant challenges teachers might face when adapting to some strategies. The main challenges identified by Leutwyler (2014) and Oubit and El Farahi (2024) included the contextual incompatibility (curriculum misalignment) of new methods gained abroad with local curriculum systems and students' demographic differences. Both researchers also identified resource disparities as a challenge. In other words, teachers might learn innovative strategies yet lack the tools and materials to implement them in classrooms. The last constraint identified was cultural and institutional resistance. Because of this, some teachers might face resistance, which could make it difficult to shift beliefs and apply the gained practices. Furthermore, Lin's study (2018) highlighted three significant challenges that teachers might encounter when shifting beliefs, such as limited peer support in home schools, superficial understanding of new practices, and lack of curriculum integration. Overall, the studies confirm that TEPs contribute significantly to the personal, professional, and intercultural development of educators.

2.6. Gaps in the Literature

While many studies explored the benefits of programs similar to TEPs, including shifts in teaching beliefs, classroom practices, and staff development, most of them demonstrate methodological constraints. According to Leutwyler (2014), much of the research in this area employed self-reported data, which might not accurately reflect a strong shift in beliefs or real-life applications in the classroom. Thus, mixed-method research was needed to address this gap. Understanding and analysis of the influence of the program and using classroom observations, interviews, pre-PTEEP survey and post-PTEEP survey would provide a holistic view of the actual impact of such programs in educators' beliefs and impact classroom practices, and staff development. Leutwyler (2014) also highlighted the limitation of cross-cultural comparisons in such programs, as most conducted studies focused on one program or one country. Besides, there is a shortage of studies that compare various educational systems and cultures. It is important to highlight how context can influence the teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. This study compared two different educational systems (school systems and university systems) in Oman and included educators from different cultural backgrounds.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect data. Qualitative research was applied to provide a deep understanding of complex social phenomena and explore the intricacies of human behaviour, social interactions, and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Quantitative research was utilized to capture the experiences, emotions, and perceptions of students, teachers, and parents and provide a comprehensive view of educational processes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

3.2. Participants

Research participants are crucial in meeting the objectives of this research. In this study, the participants played a key role in providing qualitative and quantitative data by involving themselves in focus group interviews, pre-program engagement questionnaire, and post-program engagement surveys. The participants were part of the PEET program and were primarily selected based on their experience and readiness to participate in this program. The study included four schoolteachers and four GFP university lecturers. These participants had 10-20 years of teaching experience and came from various educational backgrounds, including secondary and higher education. The four schoolteachers taught Grade 11 and 12, while the four university lecturers taught Level 3 (CEFER B1) and Level 4 (CEFE B2).

3.3. Data Collection

Different methods were used to collect data from participants via using different methods. They included focus group interviews, discussion panels, and surveys. All methods were designed to evaluate changes in participants' beliefs before and after participating in PTEEPs.

3.3.1. Focus Group/ Discussion Panel

The qualitative method tool was a controlled discussion panel (a focus group). A focus group discussion could be categorized by its ability to foster interactions among participants and gather in-depth insights into participants' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Hennink, 2014; Sachdeva et al., 2024). In this study, the panel included eight participants and a moderator. The moderator provided guidance and directed the discussion. During the discussion, the panel reflected on changes in teachers' beliefs, influence on classroom practices, challenges in adapting teaching methods, and the importance of professional development.

3.3.2. Survey

The only quantitative method used was a survey. Surveys have been effective for exploratory and descriptive research (Saunders et al., 2016). This research included a structured set of questions to gather quantitative data. The survey consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions, and it was designed to collect information on teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, including the importance of teacher professional development, changes in teachers' beliefs, influence on classroom practices, and challenges in adapting new teaching practices. The survey was distributed to the eight participants. The data collected from the survey was then analysed to identify trends and patterns.

3.4. Analysis

This study performed both qualitative and quantitative methods to reflect the multifaceted nature of the research and to ensure its validity and reliability. According to Braun and Clarke (2006),

qualitative research comes with the advantage of identifying patterns and meanings of complex data. Hence, this study employed qualitative analysis to allow researchers to identify and analyse patterns in the datasets. More specifically, thematic analysis was employed to assess post-observation reflections and group discussions, while statistical analysis was used to evaluate the survey data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to summarize the basic features of the data and test hypotheses to detect patterns and relationships between or among the data variables (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

3.5. Ethics

Individuals who participated in the survey were informed about the research objectives, procedures, and scope. In addition to allowing them to sign a consent form, participants were also allowed to voluntarily withdraw from the study without any explanation before or during the survey or interview. These steps were crucial to protect their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013).

4. FINDINGS

This part presents the findings of data collected from the survey and the focus group discussion. **The analyses are presented below**

4.1. Survey

This study involved eight female teachers, evenly split between secondary school and UTAS Al Musanna educators. The tutors had 5–20 years of teaching practice and taught students aged 17–19 years. The group included six Omani and two non-Omani teachers.

The results of the pre-PTEEP survey showed that most teachers (62.5%) had never participated in a TEP before. Individuals participated in national programs within a short period (under a month) and had no international experience. Figure 1 presents the importance of professional programs for professional growth. The vast majority (87.5%) considered TEPs valuable for professional growth.
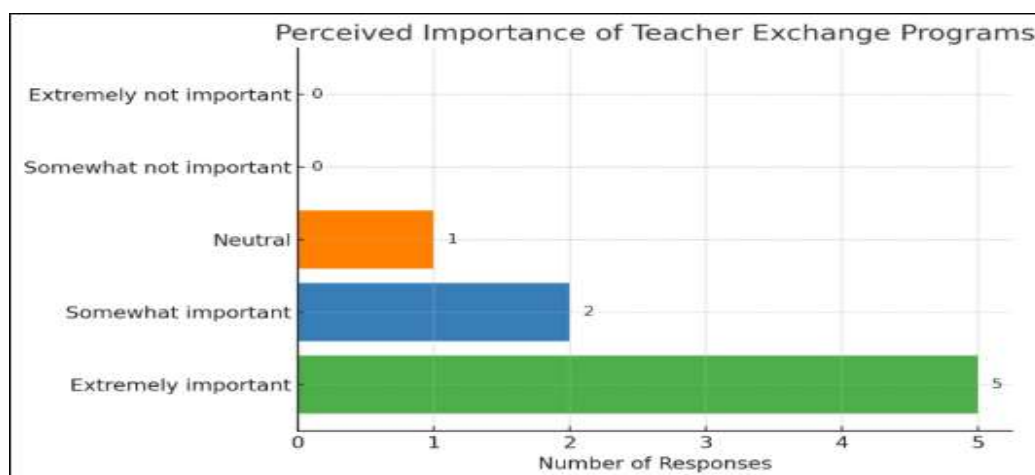

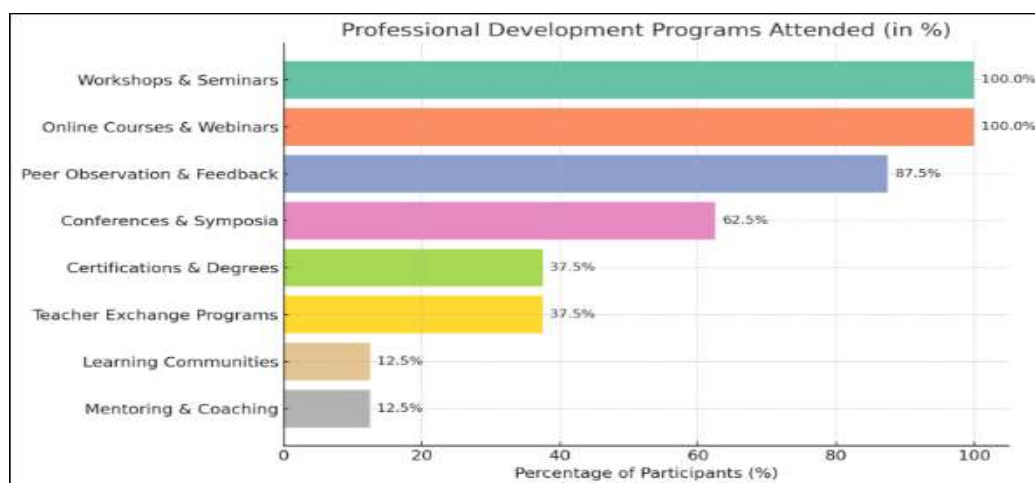*Figure 1: Perceived Importance of Teacher Exchange Programs.*

Figure 2: Number of Professional Development Activities Attended.

Importance of Professional Development: The pre-PTEEP survey data indicated that workshops, seminars, online courses, and webinars were the most attended activities (100%), followed by peer observation (87.5%) and conferences (62.5%). Mentoring, coaching, and professional learning communities were the least attended, as shown in Figure 2.

Teachers' Beliefs: Before the PTEEP, the participants held various teaching beliefs as shown in Figure 03. All participants (100%) identified student-centred teaching. Most valued content are skills, feedback, and technology use (62.5%). Roughly two-fifths of the participants (37.5%) saw themselves as facilitators or emphasized peer collaboration, while 12.5% held teacher-centred views. However, none of the participants mentioned hands-on projects.
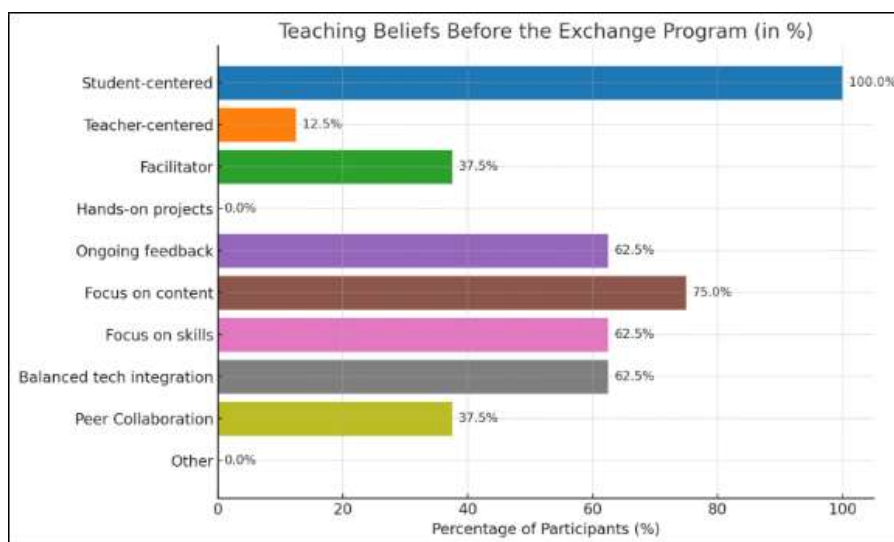

Figure 3: Teachers'' Beliefs before the PTEEP.

The most valuable professional development aspects of PTEEP: After the PTEEP, as shown in Figure 04, the teachers' most valued professional development was linked to educational contexts (87.5%), followed by networking and new curriculum materials (75%). New teaching methods and reflective practice were more significant to most participants (62.5%) compared to participants who valued educational technologies (50%) and gaining new perspectives (37.5%).
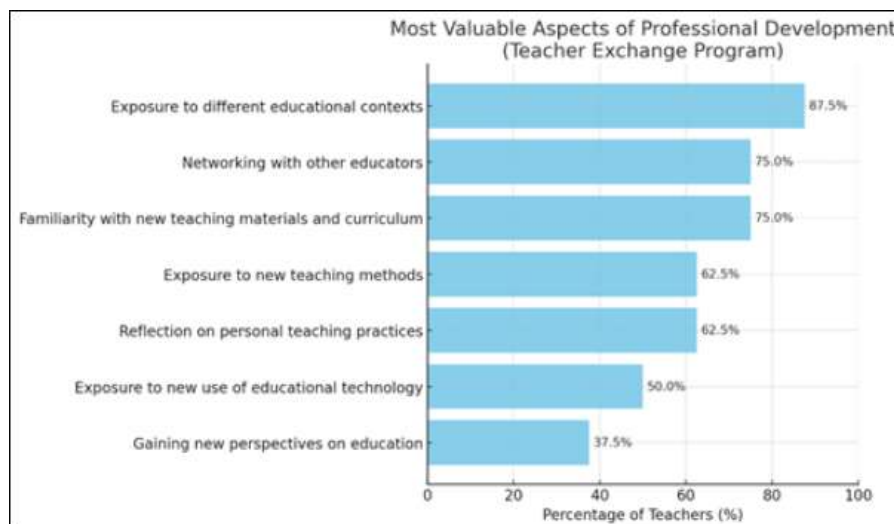

Figure 4: Valuable Aspects of Professional Development after the PTEEP.

Changing teaching beliefs: The post-PTEEP survey results indicate that the PTEEP has a noticeable impact on participants' beliefs about teaching indicated in Figure 05. Half (50%) of the teachers reported that their beliefs changed significantly, while 12.5% experienced a slight

change in their beliefs. In addition, 12.5% of participants indicated no change in their beliefs, while 25% were unsure whether their views had shifted.
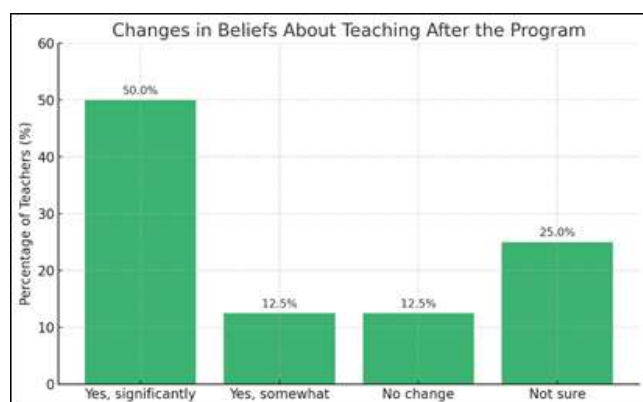
*Figure 5: Changes of Teaching Beliefs after the PTEEP.*

Specific aspects of teachers' beliefs shifted due to the program: The results of the post-survey reveal the specific aspects of teaching beliefs that shifted among participants because of the PTEEP. As shown in Figure 06, the most affected areas were teaching methodologies and the role of the teacher in learning; each was selected by 5 out of 8 teachers (62.5%). Classroom management strategies and the use of technology were also significant areas of change; each was noted by 4 teachers (50%). The students' role in the learning process was identified by 3 teachers (37.5%), while 1 teacher (12.5%) selected other aspects.
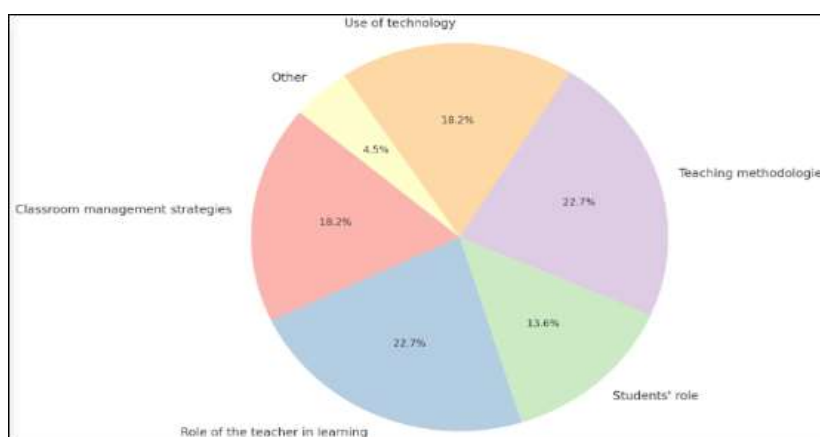
Figure 6: New Aspects of Teachers' Beliefs Shifted after the PTEEP.

Influence on Classroom Practices: Out of the 8 teachers, 5 reported adopting new classroom practices, while 3 disagreed with this option, as shown in Figure 07. Among those who adopted new practices, the most implemented approach was collaborative learning techniques, adopted by all 5 teachers. Other frequently adopted practices included classroom management (4 teachers), technology integration, teaching methods, and providing feedback (each by 3 teachers). Less commonly adopted were differentiated instruction (1 teacher) and other practices (2 teachers) as presented in Figure 08.
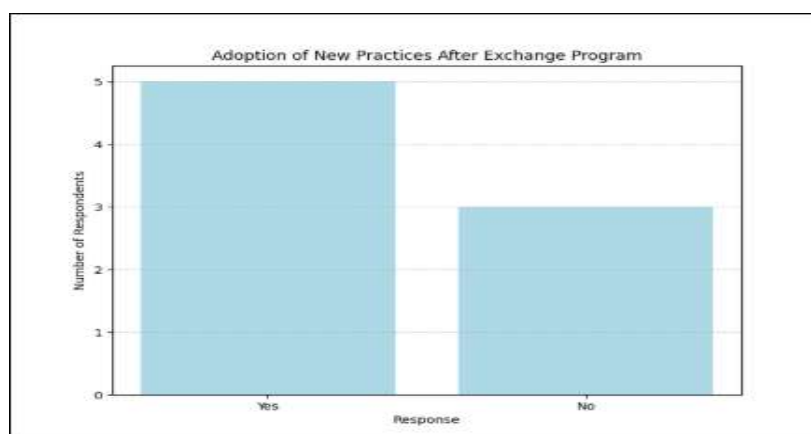
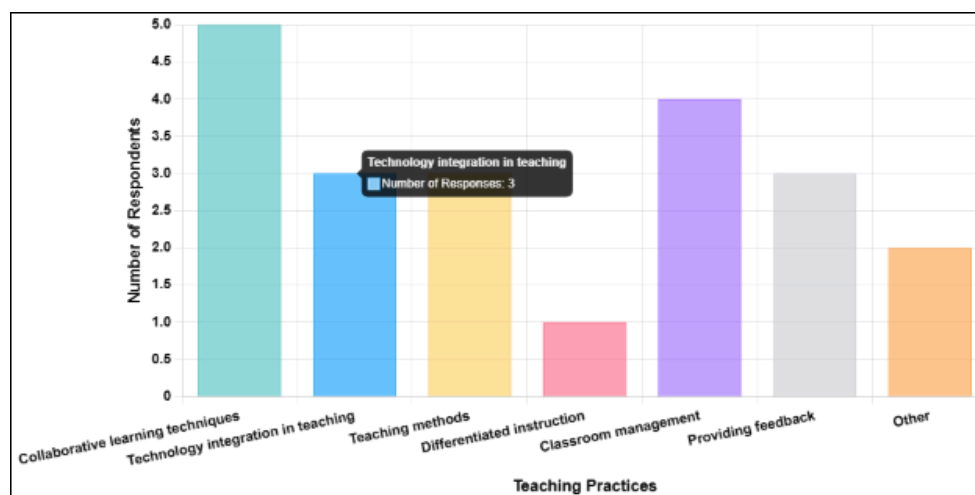*Figure 7: Adaption of New Practices after the PTEEP.*

Figure 8: Aspects of Adapted after the PTEEP.

Challenges in Adapting Teaching Practices: The post-PTEEP survey showed that most of the participants (87.5%) might face some challenges while adapting to the new knowledge/teaching practices into their context as shown in Figure 09.

Adapting Teaching Practices

Figure 9: Teachers' Opinion about Challenges of Adapting New Teaching Practices.

The participants admitted that the most challenging aspects of adapting to the new practices were classroom size, mixed-abilities classrooms, and time constraints.

Transforming Beliefs: The post-PTEEP survey data revealed variation in teachers' perceptions of the PTEEP's impact. As shown in Figure 10, 37.5% of the participants found it "Extremely transformative", while another 37.5% found it "Slightly transformative".

In addition, 12.5% of participants considered it "Moderately transformative", and others (12.5%) stated it was "Not transformative". Notably, no teachers rated it as "Very transformative".
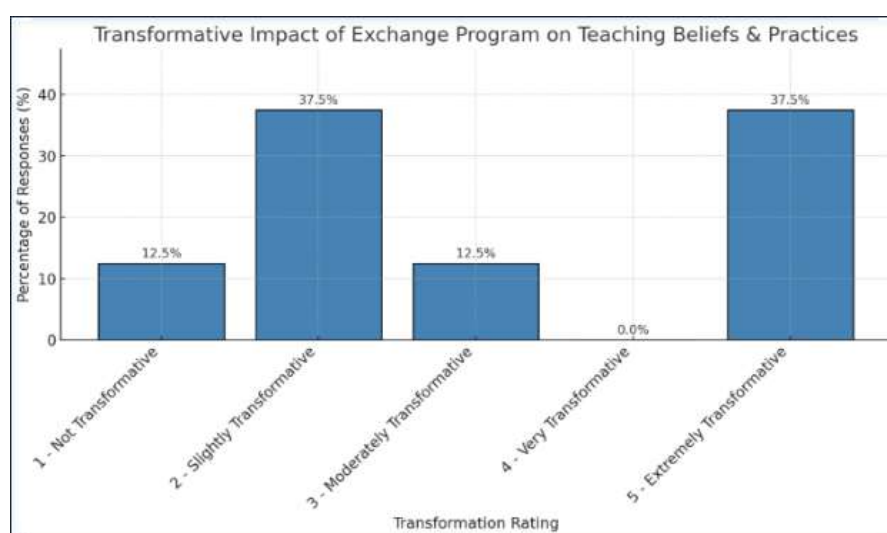

Figure 10: Transformation of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices after the PTEEP.

Most Valuable Insights from the PTEEP: PTEEP participants gained valuable insights as mentioned in the post-PTEEP survey, learning the importance of collaboration, self-reflection, and exposure to new teaching methods. They also highlighted the role of teacher personality, adaptability, and strategies for

managing mixed-gender classrooms in enhancing teaching effectiveness.

Recommendations for Improving PTEEP: Teachers recommended enhancing PTEEP by integrating ongoing professional development, conducting thorough program evaluations, and promoting resource sharing. They also suggested creating spaces for feedback, aligning exchanges with similar teaching contexts, and broadening the program's impact through community outreach and experience-sharing platforms.

4.2. Focus Group Findings

The following summary highlights key insights from focus group discussions exploring the impact of the PTEEP on participants' professional development, beliefs, and classroom practices.

Professional Development Impact: Participants found the PTEEP to be an eye-opening experience for understanding educational contexts. The participants were exposed to new classroom practices and various teaching methodologies. They highlighted some key elements of the PTEEP that impacted their professional growth, such as classroom observations, teaching ideas exchange, and insights into teacher-student relationships and writing instruction.

Shifts in Teaching Beliefs: Before the PTEEP, most teachers focused on students' output rather than the learning process. Their roles focused on monitoring, with an emphasis on student-centred teaching and the use of technology. After the PTEEP, the participants reported a shift in beliefs by valuing the integration of language skills, learners' autonomy, and a more process-oriented approach to teaching. In addition, they had shifts in some strategies like peer review, group work, and more dynamic classroom roles.

Influence on Classroom Practices: After the PTEEP, the teachers adopted some classroom practices based on their exchange experiences. The findings revealed an influence on writing, grammar, and reading lessons.

- In writing, they admired the bottom-up approach, which provided learners with necessary grammar, vocabulary, and analytical skills, before guiding them through writing tasks like graph descriptions.
- In grammar, they appreciated the idea of incorporating games and mobile phones into grammar instruction, integrating it with other skill areas such as writing and speaking.
- In reading, they were influenced by reading strategies such as pre-teaching vocabulary, teaching skimming and scanning and using exam-style practice activities.

Implementation Challenges

Despite these positive changes, the participants mentioned some possible challenges in applying new methods. These difficulties included large class sizes (around 35 students), instructional time constraints (typically 40 minutes), curriculum timeline, and difficulties establishing rapport in mixed-gender classrooms.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The Role of PTEEPs in Professional Development

In this study, the role of professional development (PD) in enhancing teachers' experience, knowledge, and skills was significantly reinforced. The teacher experienced exchange program (PTEEP) was specifically emphasized as a powerful mode of professional development for teachers. Most (87.5%) of the participants in this study reported that professional development is an important tool for enhancing teachers in educational contexts. These findings are consistent with the results of Oubit and El Farahi (2024). This study's results reveal that PTEEPs can enhance instructional strategies, improve cultural awareness and language competence. This outcome supports Garrett's (2017) and Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) findings on the value of PD for improving teaching strategies and enhancing learning outcomes. Overall, the study's result indicates the importance of PD and PTEEPs for teachers and their impact on shaping new beliefs and practices for teachers.

5.2. Shifting Beliefs and Practices (How PTEEP changed/improved/enhanced?)

The findings of this study illustrate the significance of PTEEPs in transforming teachers' beliefs. Thus, based on the pre-PTEEP beliefs, all participants valued student-centred learning, while 62.5% of them identified with content, skills, feedback, and technology. On the other hand, half of the participants reported changes in their beliefs after post-PTEEP, while 12.5% of them reported some changes. These shifts focus on three main areas: teaching methodologies and the teacher's role (62.5%), classroom management and technology use (50%), and student roles in learning (37.5%). Furthermore, the extant literature supports these findings as Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning emphasizes the importance of exposure to new educational contexts to foster

reflection and belief shifts. Also, Bandura's social learning theory (1977) supports these findings, demonstrating that teachers are influenced by the lessons observed and strategies used.

Furthermore, following their involvement in PTEEPs, teachers started to rethink their role in the classroom. Previously, they focused on monitoring students and their output. Afterward, their role changed to valuing learner autonomy and process-oriented learning. Classroom management strategies and the use of technology were also significant areas of change, each noted by 4 teachers (50%). This form of transformation is consistent with transformative learning and situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991), who argued that immersing teachers in exchange programs could foster belief change.

Moreover, the involvement in PTEEP not only enhances shifting in beliefs but also extends to having tangible changes in classroom practices. In this study, 5 teachers reported adopting new classroom practices, while 3 did not. The most focused changes were in collaborative learning (100% of adopters), followed by classroom management, technology use, teaching methods, and feedback (each by 3 teachers). Moreover, after the PTEEP, some teachers decided to adopt some of the observed learning strategies when teaching the English skills: reading, writing, and grammar.

Overall, teachers' perceptions of the transformative impact of the PTEEP varied. None of the participants rated it as "Very transformative", while 37.5% of them found the PTEEP "Extremely transformative". Only 37.5% of them reported it was "Slightly transformative".

5.3. Challenges of Context and Constraints

The findings from the post-PTEEP survey reveal that a significant majority of participants (87.5%) anticipate challenges in adapting newly acquired teaching practices to their local contexts. This aligns with existing literature, which identifies several barriers that educators commonly face when attempting to implement innovative strategies.

The primary challenges reported by participants, classroom size, mixed-abilities classrooms, and time constraints, reflects broader systemic issues in education. Large and diverse classrooms make it difficult for teachers to apply differentiated or student-centred approaches effectively, while time constraints limit their ability to redesign lessons or experiment with new methods. These obstacles resonate with the findings of Leutwyler (2014) and Oubit and El Farahi (2024), who identified contextual incompatibility and resource disparities as major

hurdles. Hence, teachers may acquire valuable strategies abroad but struggle to integrate them due to misalignment with local curricula or a lack of necessary materials.

Furthermore, the literature underscores the challenge of cultural and institutional resistance, where educators face pushback from colleagues or administrative structures resistant to change. This barrier is further compounded by limited peer support, leaving teachers isolated in their efforts to adopt new practices (Lin, 2018). Moreover, Lin's (2018) observation about superficial understanding of new methods suggests that without deep pedagogical training or sustained professional development, teachers may struggle to implement strategies effectively.

Despite these challenges, the studies affirm that PTEEPs foster significant professional growth. This growth can be accelerated by addressing these barriers through structured follow-up support, such as mentoring, curriculum adaptation workshops, and resource provision. Schools and policymakers must also encourage a culture of innovation to reduce institutional resistance. By doing so, the benefits of exchange programs can translate more seamlessly into classroom practice, ultimately enhancing teaching quality and student learning outcomes. In sum, while adapting new teaching practices presents difficulties, recognizing and systematically addressing these challenges can maximize the long-term impact of professional development initiatives like PTEEP.

5.4. The Significance of Educational Subcultures Exposure

A key element often unnoticed in PTEEPs is the exposure to educational subcultures. This element encompasses the shared standards, values, and teaching practices that define institutional teaching environments such as school systems and higher education systems. This research was conducted at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Al Musannah, Oman. The institution followed the Omani higher education system and collaborated with Um Habiba Girl Basic Education school (Grades 9-12). The program provided exposure to different educational subcultures. Participants gained access to and understood the new educational systems. The most appreciated aspect of exchange programs was exposure to different educational contexts (87.5%). In addition, 75% of the participants valued networking, while 62.5% found new teaching methods and self-reflection equally important. Some participants gained new perspectives on education (37.5%).

According to Becher (1989), engaging with these educational subcultures provides teachers with the opportunity to challenge fixed assumptions and broaden their understanding of effective teaching. These benefits are associated with the situated nature of learning, where meaningful change arises within social and cultural contexts. Leutwyler (2014) research confirmed that intercultural teaching experiences could promote reflective practice, adaptability, and intercultural competence. Overall, PTEEPs provide a powerful pathway for belief transformation through cultural immersion and content exposure.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of PTEEPs on teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. The findings revealed that the participants had limited experience in such programs. Furthermore, the results of the study showed meaningful shifts in pedagogical perspectives in terms of student-centred and teaching approaches. In the study, the participants expressed some contextual challenges that might affect the implications of these shifts in terms of many students, time constraints, and curriculum constraints.

6.1. Implications

The study's findings suggest that professional development programs are crucial for teachers' professional growth, enabling them to reshape their teaching beliefs and practices. The research results also suggest that PD programs should be thoughtfully planned and designed to enhance peer collaboration and reflective teaching. This study highlights the importance of reflective practice as a core component of PD following a structured form of reflection including peer feedback and post exchange briefings leading to a maximum learning impact. Thus, it demonstrates the power of local element of collaboration which displays that PTEEP may shift towards a bottom-up design instead of importing a foreign PTEEP model. To create an effective educational environment, institutions must align their policies to foster teachers' innovation and overcome institutional challenges, such as a big number of students, strict delivery plans and

curricula, and short teaching periods.

6.2. Limitations

This study revealed valuable insights into the impact of PTEEPs on teachers' beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, a few limitations undermined the generalization of the result. First, the study employed a small sample size, using only 8 female teachers (4 of them from Um Habiba School, while the other 4 teachers were from UTAS) to explore the research objective. Second, the current study utilized one gender only, females. In addition to focusing on a single exchange program, the institutional representation was not sufficient, as only one governmental school and one university were considered. Although some challenges were identified, this study had only a short-term evaluation in which the program was conducted for only two weeks. Overall, these limitations have the potential to minimize the accuracy and validity of the findings.

6.3. Recommendations

Based on the study findings and limitations, this study offers some recommendations. First, this research recommends more continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching styles. As well as aligning the exchange programs with the local curriculum to foster the adaptation of new strategies, this study recommends the inclusion of different teaching contexts and cultural settings to broaden teachers' perspectives and adaptability. Based on the success of this localized PTEEP, it is recommended to empower the local community to design a local sustainable exchange model to benefit the domestic educational system.

6.4. Future Research

Although this study clearly stated the significance of PTEEP, certain areas remain unexplored and need further research to be conducted. The study performed cross-sectional research, and, in the future, longitudinal studies on PTEEP retention rates should be explored to evaluate their impacts on beliefs over time. Lastly, further studies should investigate the impact of cultural and contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of PTEEPs.

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