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# The Role of Critical Friends in the Enhancement of the English Teachers' Pedagogic Skills at the Basic Education Stage; A Case Study

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**Research title** The Role of Critical Friends in the Enhancement of the English Teachers' Pedagogic Skills at the Basic Education Stage; A Case Study

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**Abstract**

This study focuses on the role of critical friends as approach evokes teachers work together and draws on one another's expertise. Nine teachers from Mostafa ElKayaty governmental languages school in Atfeeh administration, Giza governorate have participated in a critical friends group for nine weeks. The participants have finished ten sessions; through these sessions they conducted peer observations and reflected on their practice through debriefing sessions, journals, dairies and discussions. A lot of data sources were collected during the study the results say that the critical friends approach leads to a change in teaching process. Teachers could discuss, plan, and practise through assessment, observing expert teaching, classroom management and reviewing student work. As a result, teachers discover they can better diagnose, remedy, assess, and recognize students' problems. Finally, using critical friends approach has a positive effect on classroom management and assessment for learning at the basic education stage.

Key words

Critical friends pedagogic skill basic education case study

## Introduction

Language is considered a means of communication among people and it is a tool to express about their thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, it reflects the experiences and culture of people. According to Nilsson, (2002). Language is the main part of the human heritage which can be recorded and transmitted into the present ,also keep it for the next generations.

It is clear that learning foreign language , specially the English language is a necessary need in our life for easy communication and get to information that is often available in English language. According to Curtain,(1995) &Met, (1991) a natural language acquisition occurs in context , It is never learned divorced from meaning ,so the teacher should have the pedagogic skills to get it to the students.

Nowadays, English language teaching and learning face serious changes and challenges. The modification of educational policies, the expectations of the society, all require in general schools to provide students with effective instruction in EFL and specially, a teacher who has high pedagogic skills. According to Rahimi,(2007). teachers have to be able to deal with a lot of skills and abilities. He suggests that teachers have to get three kinds of knowledge:

1- Knowledge of language, it divided into content knowledge and knowledge of subject matter.

2- knowledge of teaching includes pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of teaching strategies, beliefs, practices, and knowledge of various disciplines that would enrich teachers approach to the teaching and learning of English.

3- Knowledge competency of teaching in reality : pedagogical content knowledge, the specialized knowledge of how to represent content knowledge in the classroom and how students understand the subject matter in the content of real teaching; the students problems and how to overcome those problems by considering all variables related to their learning for example, teaching materials, assessment procedures, classroom management etc..

Unfortunately, the teacher doesn't have enough concerning by the researchers because the main concerning for the students. IT doesn't mean to neglect the student but to concern with both side by side as he is considered the basic through the educational process.

Professional development plays an essential role in successful education improvement. Professional development serves as the bridge between where prospective and experienced teachers are now and where they will need to be to meet the new challenges of guiding all students in achieving higher standards of learning and development.(Moncada&Ospina, 2005) & (Abdel Halim 2008).

Developing teachers professionally is indispensable for several different reasons. The main reason is teachers of English need to be continuously developed because everything around them is changing (Richards, Farrell, 2005 & Herzallah, 2011).

According to the previous we try to get another Method and current example from the pedagogic supervision to enhance the English teachers pedagogic skills, It is " Critical Friends

What is the meaning of "critical friends" ?

The first beginning of this method in Britain when Louise Stoll contributed in developing the benefits from the friend. She defined

Critical Friend as the reference friend and the resource friend, who seeks to help the person he supports . He doesn't judge on the performance but he tries to understand the state and gives his observations according to

these observations he can discuss the current issues.

Critical friends can expect to provide a range of support, including:

- Provide strategies and constructive advice.
- provide an effective balance between informal supportive friendship and critical analysis.
- Thinking creatively and encouraging others to do so.
- Facilitating friendly and honest.

**Context of the -  
Problem**

There are obvious lack in The Egyptian English language teachers' pedagogic skills that necessitates enhancing these skills.

To come to a closer identification of the problem a pilot study was conducted by the researcher as he works a supervisor at Atfeeh Administrator and he noticed that:-

- A lot of English language teachers are unable to control and manage the classroom effectively.

- A lot of English language teachers waste the time and unable to take it in a suitable way

- A lot of English language teachers are unable to use new techniques and use variety of instructional activities to achieve better productive and suitable learning atmosphere.

- Most of the time the English language teachers are talking while students are listening to them and most of their explanation is in Arabic, no discussion or pair work.

- The unsuitable way the teaches are used to assess their students

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the above, the problem of this study can be summarized in this statement the English teachers in the Basic Education stage suffer from weakness in their teaching performance. Hence the present study tries to enhance some of their pedagogic skills through critical friends approach.

## Questions of the Study

This study tries to find answers to the following main question:

1- What is the role of critical friends in the enhancement of the English Language teachers' pedagogic skills?

In the answering to the main question, the following sub-questions were answered too

A- What is the current standard of the English teachers' pedagogic skills?

B- What are the English teachers' necessity pedagogic skills?

C- To what extend the teachers fell satisfying towards applying the critical friends' approach?

D- What is the effectiveness of applying the critical friends approach on teachers and the standard of the students.

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the following:-

1- Determining a clear and current image about the standard of the English teachers.

2- Participating with a new technique in the enhancement of the English teachers' pedagogic skills.

3- Helping the trainers, supervisors and policies designers.

4- Put the teachers in a kind of enjoyment as it makes benefits

( a new technique – information – behavior – educational situation .)

5- Quality enhancement in learning.



### **delimitations of the Study:-**

The current study will be limited to the following:

- 1- One Experimental language school  
( Mostafa Al-Kayatty Experimental language school)
- 2- The Basic Education Stage.
- 3- Some Pedagogic Skills:-
  - a) Classroom management.
  - b)Assessment for learning
- 4- The second term of the school year 2017-2018.

### **Definition of terms**

#### **professional Learning Communities ( PLCs)**

Professional learning communities means An extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups.

#### **Critical Friend is**

The reference friend and the resource friend who seeks to help The person he supports. He doesn't judge on the performance but he tries to understand the state and gives his observations, According these observations he can discuss the current issues.

The Critical Friends process focuses on developing collegial relationships, encouraging reflective practice, and rethinking leadership. This process is based in cooperative adult learning, which is often contrary to patterns established in work environments.

### **Pedagogic skills**

A skill is the easiest and accuracy through doing some thing, and it grows as a result or the learning process. pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of teaching strategies, beliefs, Practices, and knowledge of various disciplines that would enrich Teachers approach to the teaching and learning of English.

### **The Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis**

Chapter one has shown background and problem. Chapter two deals with the theoretical background and related studies this chapter has three sections they are professional development, critical friends groups; critical friends definition and the role of critical friends in the enhancement of the English teachers' pedagogic skills of classroom management and assessment for learning. Chapter three presents the design, variables, participants, settings and tools. Chapter four presents qualitative data analysis and the results. Chapter five presents discussion, conclusions. recommendations and suggestions for the future.

## **Theoretical Background and Related Studies**

This chapter reviews the literature that is pertinent to the role of critical friends approach. It consists of three sections; the first section deals with professional development , professional learning communities and professional development school. The second one deals with critical friends groups; critical friends definition, the role of critical friends, characteristics of the critical friends and models of the role of critical friends. The third one deals with the role of critical friends in the enhancement of the English teachers' pedagogic skills of classroom management and assessment for learning.

### **Section one professional development**

The professional development of foreign language teachers is a constant issue in the research agenda of the profession. Diaz-Maggioli (2004) defines professional development as “an ongoing learning process in which teachers engage voluntarily to learn how best to adjust their teaching to the learning needs of their students”.

In 2001, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, surveyed a national study that evaluated the federally funded Eisenhower Professional Development Program and its professional development activities. The study sorted through 1027 teacher surveys from 358 school

districts and was based on professional development activities from July 1- December 31, 1997. The probability sample focused mainly on math and science teachers and asked them to report on behaviors, not attitudes toward the activities.

### **2.1.2 professional Learning Communities ( PLCs)**

A professional learning community is built on the assumption that teachers are not only teaching, but also that they are learning . There is an indirect focus on student learning. Students are pictured as academically capable, and staff visualizes learning environments to support and realize each student's potential achievement. These shared values and visions conduce binding norms of behavior that the staff shares. The same shared values and visions among the English teachers staff guide the decisions about teaching and learning inside the school. The values are embedded in the day-to-day actions of the English teachers staff, creating an effective organization that is committed to learning and improvement (Morrissey, 2000).

### **2.1.3 Professional Development School ( PDS)**

Zawislan, (2007). Conducted that in schools with a positive school culture, the school community participates in rituals and celebrations of learning and

teachers create an enthusiasm for learning. High expectations and a mutual respect creates a suitable climate in which the entire learning community shares responsibility for all students' successes.

## **2.2 Section two : critical friends**

### **2.2.1 critical friends groups**

The application of the critical friends conceptual model to professional development originated in the USA at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR), Brown University. It is currently used by an estimated 35,000 teachers, principals, and college professors in over 1,500 schools. The purpose of CFGs is to create a professional learning community in which participants talk about teaching, gain understanding through experiences, work collaboratively, turn theories into practice, and seek to achieve sustained professional development ([Appleby, 1998](#); [National School Reform Faculty, 2012](#)).

### **2.2.2 critical friends definition**

“Critical friend” is a concept which arose out of the self-assessment activities in the late 1970s and is attributed to Desmond Nuttall (Heller, 1988).

According to Costa and Kallick describe this concept-a critical friend- as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The critical friend is an advocate for the success of that work. Costa and Kallick (1993, p. 49-50)

### **2.2.3 the role of critical friends**

The role of the critical friend has been introduced in numerous schools systems that adopt a learning organization perspective, and know that learning requires assessment feedback (Senge, 1990).

According to MacBeath (1999), the contribution of an external agent can bring a measure of objectivity as well as a measure of support. Moreover, in order to be useful, a critical friend must be someone with experience of school improvement and with expertise working with a range of groups in a variety of contexts.

The work of the critical friend is a dynamic one, requiring a high level of skill, flexibility, and professional judgement. Rather than following a checklist of scripted “technical assistance”, it is about developing a repertoire of strategies and skills, and learning when and how to use them, taking account of the particular context (Butler et al., 2011).

### **2.3 Section Three: Classroom Management and assessment for learning**

In this section the researcher concerns with enhancing the abilities of English teachers in classroom management as a main domain in pedagogic skills and the assessment for learning that is a very important type of assessment.

#### **2.3.1 Classroom Management**

In terms of classroom management in Egyptian classrooms, it is anticipated that teachers try to maintain discipline inside classes and encourage adequate atmosphere as well as a safe environment for learning (USAID, 2011 P.23).

A lot of studies conducted that Classroom management is one of the most important areas of methodology that teachers of English need to study and practice and this will happen through the study of critical friends.

### **2.3.2. Assessment for Learning**

Teachers make professional judgements on learners' performance in every teaching and learning session undertaken, whether consciously or subconsciously. Using these professional judgements and translating them into feedback on the quality of individuals' work is the focus of First, The quality of the feedback; second, How learners receive and ultimately use it.

Teachers, therefore, need training and support to enable them to make valuable assessment decisions, to provide quality feedback to learners, and to teach learners to receive feedback positively and use the information contained within it effectively to improve their work.

### **2.4.2A Study on professional development, classroom management and assessment for learning**

**El Okda (1998)** attempted to investigate the relative effectiveness of lecture based and case based teaching of classroom



management skills. The sample of the study consisted of 30 student teachers divided into two groups (control group: 15 and experimental group: 15). The instruments of the study included a rating scale of teaching performance inside the classroom and an achievement test. The main hypothesis of the study was that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group receiving case-based instruction about classroom management and the control group receiving lecture-based instruction about the same area on a content measure as well as a performance measure

The main two conclusions of this study were, (1) methodology courses provided to student teachers of English should include a major component on classroom management and (2) care must be given to classroom management within the framework of task-based language teaching.

The recommendations of this study were taken into consideration in the present study as it concentrated on developing English secondary teachers' classroom management skills through using professional development strategies that are based on inquiry, action, co-operation and reflection.

## **Method**

### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with the method of the study that the researcher uses to gather information and data about the research questions he proposed.

This chapter consists of five main points; firstly, design of the study; Secondly, variables of the study; Thirdly, participants; Fourthly, setting of the study, i.e. its place and time; fifthly, the development of the instruments and provides details of establishing its validity and reliability.

### **3.1. Design of the study**

The researcher used the action research design. The action research design allows teachers to try a new practice and later, fine-tune it based on reflection of the effectiveness of the process (Schmuck, 2006). The emphasis for the sample was Cooperative action research. This method highlighted positive social support, an understanding of a critical friend approach, and included probing conversations. These three attributes were integral components to the Critical Friends

### **. Research Variables**

Drawing on the main aim of the present study, the experiment was designed and conducted targeting one independent variable and one dependent variable. The role of critical friends is

the independent variable whereas enhancement of the English teachers' pedagogic skills, mainly in the classroom management and assessment for learning is/are the dependent variable .

### **3.3. Participants of the study**

Nine teachers from Mostafa Al-Kayatty governmental language school Atfeeh administration, Giza governorate volunteered to participate in a field research study of the current critical friends practices within the school . The teachers had varied backgrounds and experiences within the teaching field. The participants were five male and four females. The teachers ranged in age from twenty-eight to forty-two years old. The participants were selected through a purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). All staff members selected were involved with a critical friend inside the school so all participants were part of the critical friends.

### **4. setting for the study**

Mostafa Al-Kayatty governmental language school in Atfeeh administration, Giza governorate is the place where the researcher has chosen for this study; as he is the English supervisor of this school since 2012. There is a suitable place to hold the sessions and there are the sets as teaching aids inside the school. The action research and the sessions have continued for nine weeks at the second term of the school year 2017-2018.

### **3.4. Instruments of the study**

The present study depended on the following instruments:

- A. Pilot study questionnaire consists of a list of English' pedagogic skills that the critical friends approach affect.
- B. During and Post-questionnaire, discussions and interviews.

### **3.4.1. Piloting the questionnaire**

The aim of the questionnaire was to identify the role of critical friends on teachers' pedagogic skills which they need to be developed.

A. Source of the questionnaire items:

- The review of literature and related studies.
- The field observation of the researcher

## **Qualitative Analysis and Results**

### **Overview**

This chapter describes and discusses the results of the analysis of the data and information collected during the study. Prior to the study, the English teachers staff handed a pilot study questionnaire to choose the pedagogic skills we want to enhance, also they responded to an open-ended survey about critical friends. Additionally, there were interviews with the participants about the critical friends.

This chapter addresses the main question of this study, "What is the role of the critical friends in the enhancement of the English teachers' pedagogic skills?" Data were collected through pre-

questionnaire, post-questionnaire, series of semi-structured individual interviews and group interviews.

The interviews were recorded and notes were taken. Each interview was between twenty and thirty minutes in duration.

The results of the pilot study questionnaire was to choose "classroom management and assessment for learning" as shown in table 3.3 in chapter 3.

### **Pre-questionnaire results**

The first question on the Pre-questionnaire was "What do you know about Critical Friends?" All nine participants mentioned that it had something to do with teachers evaluating and observing working, but none of them could clarify or explore the specific purpose of "critical friends".

The second question asked them to share how often they currently do "critical friends" with their colleagues? Ragab, Gasser and Ahmed Galal sometimes set to discuss about the curriculum once a month. Mahmoud Monir mentioned that "we do not have meeting in the way should be" and Ragab commented that "it is mainly just business, not real planning." Hala, Khalid, Ibtsam and Hwayda indicated that they rarely have a meeting. Hwayda even added that "never we meet."

Questions three asked the participants to describe their experience with their grade level during doing critical friends. The responses to this question varied with the different grade levels.

Hala and Ibtesam teach the primary stage together. Hala thinks described her experience with the primary stage as being “confusing, nonproductive, with a lack of focus.” Similarly, Ibtesam described it as “good, but we are still struggling to plan well together.”

Ragab and Gasser teach the preparatory stage on the same team and both noted that their grade level team was “great!” However, Ragab would like to see the team “thinking deeper” and Gasser would like to see the team working in “half the time we normally do.” Khalid, the only third grade preparatory teacher among the participants had very positive comments about his experience with his team. He stated, “we visit and evaluate each other in the class as we can, plan together, discuss problems and how to assess our students for learning, share the work, explain new ideas about classroom management to each other, and overall we have a great time together.” Ahmed Galal, the first grade preparatory teacher, feels like the group “goes in different directions without a specific focus.” Hwya was very honest by explaining that her entire team “is in the learning stages.”

When asked to reflect on their own definition of assessment for learning and classroom management in question four, the results presented similar responses. Comments included “Evaluating and working together on a common focus,” “sharing strategies and ideas

related with assessing process,” “Getting the lessons done on a time schedule” and “planning together,”

The participants were then asked to discuss the positive or negative barriers they encounter when doing critical friends. Most of the participants commented on both aspects, while some only wanted to focus on the negative. Some of the positives responses included “sharing the workload,” “Putting emotions into some of our lessons,” “there is more of a team feel,” “I feel supported and not alone,” and “there is team success.” Hala stated that one of the major draw backs is “getting off task and wasting time.” Ibtessam believed that one negative barrier is the fact that “some of the teachers just don’t want to share, specially the female teachers”

Three out of the nine participants stated that they “don’t do it enough,” and one of the participants wrote that he only do it “sporadically.” The last five participants mentioned that they “never” do critical friends before..

When it comes to doing critical friends with support staff, the responses varied greatly. Ahmed Galal, Ragab, Khalid and ferryal mentioned that they do critical friends with the supervisor “at least once a month.” Hala and Mahmoud Monir noted that they only do critical friends with support experienced staff on an “as needed basis” The others did not mention any critical friends with the supervisor or with the outside community.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter deals with discussion of the results and the main conclusion that the researcher has come to as a result of the analysis and discussion of the results, it also deals with the recommendations and ends with suggestions for further research.

#### **Limitations of the study**

There were several limitations that I faced and provided difficulties for my study. The major ones presented by the participants' reflections were time, participant roles, and other responsibilities. Time is one of the most difficult problems faced by both the participants and the school. The participants stated that it was difficult to arrange times between us to observe each other during the instructional day. The study occurred during the second term of the school year which could be a busy time for testing, tutoring, and other school activities.

#### **Recommendations of the study**

The participants felt the positive influences that critical friends had occurred. To be successful in the future, the following factors need to be concerned. critical friends should be presented as a voluntary activity and roles should be explained and accepted retroactively. The term "Critical Friend" and the purpose should be defined in depth, The participants should know that his peer is not intended for evaluation. Some participants in the study even



suggested that there should be a critical friends group of teachers who could support new members in the future.

### **Suggestions for the future studies**

Further research is needed regarding the impact of critical friends participation on teacher collaboration and growth, as well as the impact on student learning. In particular, researchers need to assess what factors act as supports or barriers to successful implementation. Studies should be done in middle schools and high schools to compare the results and get a better understanding of the structures needed for implementation.

### ملحق الرسالة

عنوان البحث: دور الصديق الناقد في تحسين المهارات التربوية لمعلمي اللغة الانجليزية  
بالمرحلة التعليم الأساسي: دراسة حالة

اسم الباحث: صابر حسن محمد حسن

الدرجة: الماجستير

المشرفين: أ.د/ زينب على النجار، د/داليا يحي

ملحق الرسالة:

هذه الدراسة تركز على دور الصديق الناقد كطريقة لحث المدرسين للعمل معاً والاستفادة من تبادل التدريبات.

تسعة من المعلمين من مدرسة مصطفى القياتي الرسمية لغات التابعة لإدارة أطفح بمحافظة الجيزة شاركوا في مجموعة الصديق الناقد لمدة تسع اسابيع. انهى المشاركين عشر جلسات وخلال هذه الجلسات تبادلوا ملاحظات الأقران وتم الانعكاس على تدريباتهم من خلال الجلسات واليوميات والمناقشات.

كثير من البيانات تم جمعها أثناء الدراسة ونتائج الصديق الناقد تؤدي إلى تغير في عملية التدريس. المعلمون يمكنهم المناقشة والتخطيط والتدريب للتدريس من خلال التقييم وملاحظة تدريس من لديهم خبرة في إدارة الفصل ومراجعة أعمال التلاميذ وكننتيجة اكتشاف المعلمون أنهم قادرون بصورة أحسن على التشخيص ووضع برنامج علاجي وتقييم وإدراك مشاكل التلاميذ وأخيراً استخدام طريقة الصديق الناقد لها تأثير ايجابي على ادارة الفصل والتقييم من اجل التعلم في مرحلة التعليم الاساسي.

مفتاح الكلمات:

الصديق الناقد- التربوية- المهارة - التعليم الأساسي- دراسة حالة