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Reframing Teacher Development: Peer Assessment and Performance Tasks among English Educators in Arab Intermediate Schools in the Negev

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Abstract

This study explores the role of peer assessment in supporting the professional development of English language teachers in Arab intermediate schools in the Negev. While peer assessment is widely recognized as a formative tool, its application in marginalized communities—particularly among novice educators in under-resourced Bedouin schools—remains underexamined. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews with 20 teachers, this study investigates how peer feedback influences performance task implementation, instructional quality, and teacher identity. The findings highlight both pedagogical benefits—such as enhanced self-reflection, collaboration, and instructional planning—and notable challenges, including emotional discomfort, limited training, and inconsistent evaluation criteria. This paper calls for institutional integration of structured peer assessment within teacher training frameworks, emphasizing its transformative potential in culturally complex and resource-limited educational contexts.

Keywords: Peer Assessment, Novice Teachers, English Instruction, Arab Schools, Negev, Teacher Development, Performance Tasks, Formative Evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Global Perspectives on Peer Assessment and Teacher Growth

Over the past two decades, the educational field has witnessed a paradigm shift from traditional summative assessment models toward formative and developmental assessment strategies. This change is driven by a broader understanding of learning as a reflective, social, and continuous process (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Carless, 2015). Among the various formative practices, peer assessment has emerged as a powerful mechanism to foster critical thinking, reflective practice, and professional dialogue among educators (Panadero, 2016; Noroozi et al., 2022).

Peer assessment, when implemented effectively, promotes evaluative judgment, collaborative inquiry, and pedagogical adaptability. It aligns with socio-constructivist learning theories, particularly Wenger's (1999) concept of communities of practice, which positions professional learning within participatory and socially embedded frameworks. Recent studies emphasize its potential in teacher education programs to strengthen instructional design, enhance classroom management, and nurture professional identity (Xu & Liu, 2021; Topping, 2017). Furthermore, peer feedback enables teachers—especially those early in their careers—to navigate complex school environments by learning from peers in low-stakes, supportive environments (Sung et al., 2023).

Peer Assessment in the Arab World: Emerging but Uneven

While research on peer assessment has expanded globally, its implementation and analysis within Arab educational systems remain comparatively limited. Studies from countries like Jordan, Egypt, and the UAE have begun to explore peer evaluation practices in teacher training programs and classrooms. For example, Abu Ayyash and Al-Rawashdeh (2020) reported that peer feedback in Jordanian teacher preparation programs improved self-reflection and assessment literacy. In the UAE, Almahboob and Elyas (2021) observed that peer-based assessment fostered professional accountability among English language teachers. However, much of the

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Arab-region research focuses on student peer assessment in higher education, with fewer studies addressing its use among practicing teachers, especially at the intermediate school level. Moreover, peer assessment in Arab contexts often contends with socio-cultural dynamics such as collectivist norms, hierarchical relationships, and reluctance to engage in critical feedback due to perceived risks to group harmony or professional reputation (Almusharraf, 2020). These tensions suggest the need for context-sensitive models of peer assessment that accommodate both pedagogical goals and cultural realities.

Peer Evaluation in Israel's Arab Educational Sector

In the Israeli context, research on teacher development has primarily centered on Hebrew-speaking institutions, with limited attention paid to Arab educational settings. The Arab sector—which includes Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel—faces distinct challenges including resource gaps, limited mentorship infrastructure, and lower access to professional development programs (Arar, 2022; Gumpel & Sury, 2021). These disparities are particularly pronounced in the Bedouin community, where schools often operate under intense socio-economic pressures, traditional cultural frameworks, and educational underfunding (Meir & Abu-Saad, 2020). Although the Israeli Ministry of Education has promoted various teacher development initiatives, peer assessment remains underutilized in Arab schools—especially in the Negev's Bedouin sector, which combines rural isolation with high student-teacher ratios and limited administrative support. Very few empirical studies have examined how peer feedback functions (or fails to function) in this environment.

Addressing the Gap: Why This Study Matters

This study responds to a critical gap in the literature by examining how novice English teachers in Arab intermediate schools in the Negev experience peer assessment in relation to performance tasks—an increasingly popular form of authentic, real-world evaluation (Wiggins & McTighe, 2020). By focusing on a marginalized, culturally distinct educational sector, this research contributes to localized educational knowledge while extending the global discourse on teacher collaboration, feedback, and identity formation. In doing so, it advances the argument that peer assessment, if implemented with contextual sensitivity and structural support, can play a transformative role in teacher development—particularly in under-resourced, high-need educational contexts. This study's title—Reframing Teacher Development: Peer Assessment and Performance Tasks among English Educators in Arab Intermediate Schools in the Negev-reflects a deliberate attempt to shift prevailing narratives about teacher learning. The three core elements of the title—teacher development, peer assessment, and performance tasks—require both conceptual clarification and contextual anchoring within the educational realities of Arab intermediate schools in Israel's Negev region. Historically, teacher development has been approached through centralized, one-size-fits-all professional training programs. However, contemporary models emphasize teacher agency, reflection, and situated learning (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Development is no longer a top-down transfer of knowledge but a continuous, contextsensitive process rooted in dialogue, inquiry, and practice (Desimone & Garet, 2015). In the Arab sector particularly in Bedouin communities—formal professional development opportunities are often limited, inconsistent, or culturally mismatched (Arar, 2022). This makes peer-initiated learning practices, such as peer assessment, especially vital as tools for localized and sustainable growth.

Peer Assessment: A Dialogic and Developmental Practice

Peer assessment refers to the process by which individuals of similar status evaluate each other's performance and provide feedback using shared criteria (Topping, 2017; Panadero, 2016). In teacher education, it facilitates collaborative reflection, improves evaluative judgment, and strengthens professional identity (Noroozi et al., 2022; Xu & Liu, 2021). More than a tool for rating teaching episodes, peer assessment in this study is framed as a developmental practice—a means of cultivating a collegial environment in which novice and experienced teachers engage in mutual growth. Particularly in contexts like the Negev, where hierarchical feedback systems can be emotionally charged or politically fraught, peer evaluation offers a lower-stakes, culturally sensitive alternative (Almusharraf, 2020).

Performance tasks are authentic assessments requiring the application of knowledge, skills, and judgment in real-world contexts (Wiggins & McTighe, 2020). In the language classroom, these might include oral

presentations, storytelling, collaborative projects, or simulations—forms of assessment that go beyond memorization and tap into critical thinking, creativity, and communication. When novice teachers design and implement performance tasks, they engage with complex instructional planning, classroom interaction, and reflective evaluation. The act of observing each other's performance tasks provides rich material for peer feedback, situating assessment within real pedagogical contexts (Lee, 2015; Lasaten, 2016).

Focusing on English teachers in Arab intermediate schools—and more specifically, in Bedouin communities of the Negev—this study brings together the above frameworks in a uniquely under-researched context. These educators often operate in linguistically hybrid, socio-politically marginalized, and resource-poor environments (Meir & Abu-Saad, 2020; Arar, 2022). By examining how peer assessment unfolds in relation to performance tasks in this setting, the study positions teacher development not as an imported reform but as a locally generated, socially negotiated, and culturally embedded process.

And the term reframing in the title signals a theoretical and practical departure. Rather than treating peer assessment as a mere technique and performance tasks as mere tools, the study reframes both as entry points to teacher-led professional transformation. Through this lens, reflection is not a luxury—it is a necessity, and teacher learning is not supplemental—it is central.

Methodology

Research Objective and Design

The central aim of this study is to investigate how novice and early-career English language teachers in Arab intermediate schools in the Negev perceive and engage with peer assessment practices, particularly when evaluating performance tasks. The study examines both perceived benefits and implementation challenges in a uniquely under-researched and culturally distinct educational context. To explore participants' experiences and perceptions in depth, the study adopted a qualitative interpretive design. Qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate given the exploratory nature of the inquiry, the focus on lived experiences, and the need to capture the nuanced dynamics of peer interaction, institutional culture, and emotional response (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach allowed for the emergence of meaning through participant narratives, prioritizing contextual understanding over generalizability—an essential stance when working within the specific cultural framework of the Bedouin-Arab educational system in Israel.

Participant Selection and Rationale

The sample consisted of 25 English language teachers employed in intermediate schools across the Negev region. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, with the primary inclusion criteria being:

- Employment in an Arab intermediate school in the Negev
- Active engagement with peer assessment practices or performance-based tasks
- Willingness to participate in reflective interviews

While many participants were in their early years of teaching (2–5 years), the study also included teachers with up to 30 years of experience. This decision was intentional and justified by the absence of prior exposure to structured peer assessment among even the more experienced teachers, due to systemic gaps in training and professional development. In this way, all participants—regardless of tenure—represented a novice orientation toward peer-based formative evaluation.

Demographic Overview:

• Gender: 17 female, 8 male

• Age Range: 26–56 years

• Academic Background: 17 held a B.A., 8 had completed or were pursuing an M.A.

• Teaching Experience: 2 to 30 years

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This diversity enhanced the study's capacity to capture a wide range of professional insights while remaining anchored in the shared experience of operating in a marginalized, under-resourced educational system.

Data Collection Methods

Two primary tools were used to collect qualitative data:

- 1. Structured Questionnaire: A brief 10-item form was administered to collect demographic data and elicit baseline attitudes toward peer assessment and performance tasks.
- 2. Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews, lasting 30–45 minutes each, were conducted with all 25 participants. The interviews focused on five thematic areas: (1) perceptions of peer assessment, (2) classroom implementation, (3) professional development outcomes, (4) emotional and logistical challenges, and (5) recommendations for improvement. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using thematic coding based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model. An inductive coding strategy was employed to allow for theme emergence from participant responses rather than imposing a pre-existing framework. Coding was performed manually and cross-validated by two researchers to ensure reliability. Emerging themes were refined into categories that reflected both shared experiences and divergent viewpoints.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical research guidelines:

- Informed Consent: All participants signed consent forms and were fully briefed on the study's aims.
- Confidentiality: Participants were assigned numerical identifiers; personal information was removed from transcripts.
- Voluntary Participation: Teachers were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.
- Institutional Approval: The research received ethical clearance from the appropriate academic review board.

Results

This section presents the major findings from the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires. The insights are organized into five interrelated themes that capture the participants' experiences with and perceptions of peer assessment in relation to performance tasks. Quotations are used throughout to illustrate key ideas and provide voice to the participants.

Embracing Peer Assessment: Perceived Pedagogical and Interpersonal Benefits

A significant majority of participants (19 out of 25) expressed a strong belief in the value of peer assessment as a developmental tool for both novice and experienced educators. Participants viewed peer evaluation not merely as an administrative task but as a pathway to collaborative growth, professional dialogue, and instructional refinement.

One teacher explained:

"When I see how others teach, I reflect on my own practice—sometimes I borrow ideas, sometimes I see my weaknesses." (Participant 3)

Another emphasized the communal benefits:

"It's not just about judging. It's about sharing responsibility. Weak teachers can learn from stronger ones, and stronger ones can reflect more deeply." (Participant 1)

Teachers highlighted the potential of peer feedback to foster trust and deepen professional relationships:

"It strengthens our bonds. You start seeing your colleagues as partners, not competitors." (Participant 2)

Classroom Practice and Student Engagement: Translating Peer Assessment into Pedagogy

Teachers who implemented peer assessment in the classroom noted improvements in student engagement and confidence, particularly during performance tasks such as presentations, storytelling, and peer-reviewed writing exercises.

"When students know their classmates will evaluate them, they prepare more. They take it seriously." (Participant 8)

However, some participants also reported emotional tension among students, particularly concerning pronunciation or grammar errors:

"Some students hesitate because they're afraid to be judged—especially with vocabulary and accent." (Participant 14)

Teachers described peer assessment as a double-edged tool: it encouraged participation and accountability, but required careful management to avoid anxiety or shame.

Fostering Professional Development: A Platform for Reflection and Growth

Many participants described peer assessment as a motivational force, encouraging them to improve lesson planning, language accuracy, and classroom management. Observing and being observed created opportunities for reciprocal learning and self-awareness.

"It made me think more carefully about my objectives. I became more intentional with my lessons." (Participant

Others found value in verbal feedback sessions following observations:

"Discussing what we saw in each other's lessons helped me see things I missed. It was like a mirror." (Participant 15)

Peer assessment also prompted introspection and emotional honesty:

"When someone points out a weakness gently, you listen. You don't feel attacked—you feel seen." (Participant

Implementation Barriers: Emotional, Logistical, and Cultural Hurdles

Despite the general enthusiasm, participants also identified several practical and psychological obstacles to effective peer assessment.

- Time Constraints: Teachers cited overloaded schedules and lack of allocated observation periods.
- Emotional Sensitivity: Fear of embarrassment, criticism, or strained relationships sometimes discouraged full engagement.
- Inconsistent Evaluation: Some participants expressed concern over a lack of rubrics or clear criteria.

"Some teachers are afraid of hurting each other's feelings, so they avoid giving real feedback." (Participant 6)

"It depends on the person. One teacher gives detailed, helpful comments. Another just says, 'Good job." (Participant 13)

Pathways Forward: Teacher-Driven Recommendations for Improvement

When asked how peer assessment practices could be enhanced, participants offered a range of constructive suggestions:

• Training in Peer Evaluation: Many called for structured professional development on feedback strategies and rubric design.

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- Supportive Environments: Teachers emphasized the importance of trust and non-judgmental culture in facilitating open feedback.
- Creative, Collaborative Performance Tasks: Suggested tasks included small-group teaching simulations, collaborative storytelling, and thematic research presentations that would reduce pressure on individual performers.

"If we create friendly tasks and train ourselves on how to give feedback, this can really work." (Participant 12)

Summary Table of Thematic Findings

Theme	Summary of Insights
Embracing Peer Assessment	Valued as a professional growth tool; promotes mutual learning and respect.
Classroom	Enhances student engagement but can
Implementation	Induce anxiety if not carefully managed.
Professional Development Contributions	Motivates reflection, improves instructional quality, and strengthens teacher identity.
Barriers to Effective Practice	Includes emotional discomfort, time limitations, and inconsistent feedback standards.
Suggestions for Improvement	Calls for training, clear rubrics, collaborative culture, and engaging task formats.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the nuanced, context-dependent role that peer assessment can play in supporting the growth of novice English teachers in Arab intermediate schools in the Negev. While the majority of participants expressed positive views on the potential of peer feedback to enhance instruction, collaboration, and professional identity, their experiences also revealed persistent emotional, institutional, and logistical challenges. This discussion reflects on these findings in relation to existing literature and addresses the broader implications for educational equity and policy in marginalized teaching contexts.

The teachers' recognition of peer assessment as a powerful formative tool aligns with global scholarship emphasizing its potential for self-directed growth, collaborative learning, and instructional improvement (Panadero, 2016; Noroozi et al., 2022). In the present study, participants spoke of peer assessment as a mirror—one that illuminated strengths, weaknesses, and new pedagogical possibilities. These perceptions resonate with Xu and Liu's (2021) findings that peer evaluation fosters metacognitive awareness and contributes to sustainable teacher development. Furthermore, consistent with Lee (2015) and Topping (2017), participants highlighted

how peer-based feedback in the classroom motivated students to perform more confidently and attentively. The connection between peer evaluation and performance tasks added practical immediacy to the process teachers were not merely receiving general advice, but actionable insights grounded in authentic classroom scenarios.

However, several contextual challenges emerged. In particular, teachers noted a persistent discomfort with open critique, rooted in cultural norms of collectivism, deference to authority, and conflict avoidance—factors commonly noted in Arab educational contexts (Almusharraf, 2020; Arar, 2022). Emotional vulnerability, fear of damaging professional relationships, and concerns about personal bias created barriers to fully candid peer assessment.Moreover, a lack of clear rubrics, training, and scheduled observation times limited the systematization of peer assessment. These findings mirror the critiques of Kaufman and Schunn (2011), who found that without adequate training and structural scaffolding, peer assessment may default to superficial praise or silent avoidance.

In the Bedouin context specifically, such structural limitations are exacerbated by resource scarcity, overcrowded classrooms, and minimal administrative support (Meir & Abu-Saad, 2020). Many participants in this study, regardless of teaching experience, had never previously been introduced to formal peer assessment frameworks—underscoring the novice status not in years of service, but in exposure to professional tools. One of this study's most significant contributions is its contextual focus on the Bedouin educational system within Israel's Arab sector—a space often marginalized in both policy discourse and academic research. While peer assessment has been widely studied in Anglo-American and Asian educational contexts, it remains rarely examined in indigenous Arab schooling systems in Israel. The lived insights of teachers navigating peer evaluation in this landscape provide a crucial addition to the broader literature on teacher development in conflict-affected and culturally complex regions. By documenting how educators perceive, adapt to, and negotiate the emotional terrain of peer assessment, this study helps bridge the divide between global educational innovation and local cultural application. Ultimately, the study affirms that peer assessment—when implemented with contextual sensitivity and institutional support—can be a transformative force for teacher development, even in resource-limited environments. Teachers in this study did not reject peer assessment; they embraced its potential while calling for structures that would allow it to flourish.

This dual message—that teachers are open but systems are closed—echoes the work of Farrell (2012) and Hammerness et al. (2005), who argue that professional growth is most sustainable when teachers are empowered with supportive networks and opportunities for reflective dialogue. In schools where formal mentorship is scarce and administrative priorities are overstretched, peer-based evaluation may offer one of the few available platforms for mutual learning and feedback. However, to fulfill its promise, it must be accompanied by appropriate training, trust-building, and policy-level recognition. This study thus concludes with an urgent recommendation: that educational leaders, teacher training programs, and policymakers treat peer assessment not as an optional enhancement, but as a vital tool for building resilient, reflective, and contextually rooted teaching communities—especially in the most underserved corners of our educational systems.

Strategic Recommendations

Drawing upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations outline a comprehensive strategy for integrating peer assessment into professional development frameworks for novice and early-career teachers in Arab intermediate schools—particularly in under-resourced contexts such as the Negev's Bedouin sector. The goal is to foster sustainable, reflective, and culturally responsive educational practices that benefit both teachers and learners.

Institutionalize Peer Assessment in Teacher Preparation and Induction

Teacher training programs—especially those serving Arab or marginalized communities—should formally embed peer assessment frameworks within practicum modules and mentoring structures. This integration should move beyond isolated workshops and become part of the pedagogical core of teacher education.

• Introduce peer observation protocols during pre-service teaching placements.

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- Link peer feedback to curriculum design and lesson planning courses.
- Use simulations of peer evaluation scenarios to prepare novice teachers for classroom realities.

Provide Ongoing Professional Development in Peer Assessment Methods

Teachers cannot be expected to master feedback and evaluation practices without training. Regular, hands-on workshops should be offered to improve comfort, competence, and consistency in peer assessment.

- Focus on strategies for giving and receiving constructive feedback.
- Train teachers in rubric development, formative feedback language, and bias mitigation.
- Use video-based analysis of teaching for collective review and discussion.

These workshops should be recurrent and collaborative, fostering communities of practice rather than one-time interventions.

Develop and Disseminate Clear Evaluation Rubrics

One of the most frequently cited challenges was inconsistency in feedback. To address this, school leaders and curriculum developers should co-create transparent, contextually appropriate rubrics for peer observation and performance task evaluation.

- Rubrics should include criteria relevant to communicative language teaching, classroom management, student engagement, and reflective practices.
- Teachers should be involved in the rubric design process to ensure ownership and applicability.
- Translation and linguistic accessibility should be ensured for Arab teachers working in bilingual environments.

Foster a School Culture of Collegiality and Psychological Safety

Peer assessment thrives in environments where teachers feel safe, valued, and respected. Building this culture is a leadership priority.

- Promote peer feedback as developmental rather than evaluative.
- Encourage team teaching, co-planning sessions, and inter-visitations.
- Establish voluntary peer partnerships to reduce anxiety and increase autonomy.

Administrators should explicitly model a culture of learning and vulnerability to legitimize peer learning processes.

Allocate Dedicated Time and Space for Peer Interaction

Teachers in this study repeatedly cited time constraints as a barrier to peer assessment. Therefore, schools should:

- Integrate scheduled observation hours into weekly timetables.
- Provide release time for paired feedback conversations or collaborative planning.
- Use digital platforms (e.g., shared teaching videos, Google Classroom reflections) to supplement in-person sessions.

Such logistical support signals institutional commitment to reflective teaching and professional dialogue.

Leverage Technology for Accessible and Archivable Feedback

Digital tools can help overcome spatial, temporal, and emotional barriers to peer assessment. Schools and teacher networks should adopt user-friendly platforms for feedback and reflection.

• Record sample lessons for self and peer review.

- Use collaborative rubrics via Google Forms or learning management systems.
- Archive anonymized feedback for longitudinal teacher portfolios.

This approach enables reflective practice without adding excessive burden on teacher schedules.

Expand Research and Policy Engagement in the Bedouin Educational Sector

Finally, this study calls for further research into teacher development practices in Bedouin and other underrepresented educational communities in Israel.

- Encourage longitudinal studies on the long-term effects of peer assessment.
- Involve policymakers in site visits and data-sharing from community-based research.
- Advocate for culturally informed pedagogical reforms that honor both local values and global standards.

Study Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the perceptions and practices of English teachers in the Arab intermediate school system of the Negev, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize its findings and inform future scholarship.

Context-Specific Sample

This research was conducted exclusively within Arab intermediate schools in the Negev, with a focus on educators operating in Bedouin-majority communities. While this localized focus was intentional and necessary to address a gap in the literature, it limits the generalizability of the findings beyond similar cultural or educational environments. Future research should consider comparative studies across different Arab localities in Israel—such as Galilee or the Triangle—as well as across urban vs. rural school contexts to test the consistency of these findings.

Although the study aimed to center on novice teachers, the sample included educators with a wide range of teaching experience (2 to 30 years). This inclusion was methodologically justified, as even experienced teachers had limited exposure to formal peer assessment, effectively positioning them as "novices" within this specific pedagogical domain. Nonetheless, this may blur distinctions between early-career and mid-career perspectives. Future studies could benefit from stratifying participants based on years of teaching and prior training in assessment practices.

It must be illustrated that the study relied primarily on self-reported interviews and questionnaires, which are inherently subject to social desirability and response bias. Participants may have overstated positive experiences or understated discomfort due to cultural norms or perceived professional expectations. Triangulating these methods with classroom observations, peer-reviewed lesson recordings, or reflective journals could provide a more robust and balanced data set in future research.

Lack of Longitudinal Follow-Up

This study provides a snapshot of teacher attitudes and practices during a specific timeframe (summer 2024). It does not account for the long-term impact of peer assessment on teaching performance, instructional quality, or professional identity over time. Longitudinal research tracking teachers over an academic year—or across multiple phases of peer assessment implementation—would offer deeper insight into the evolution of peer feedback cultures in marginalized settings.

While the study captures teacher perspectives in depth, it does not include input from school leaders, inspectors, or Ministry of Education policymakers—whose attitudes, support, and constraints significantly affect the feasibility of peer assessment systems. Subsequent studies could explore multi-stakeholder perspectives to better understand the systemic levers and bottlenecks surrounding teacher evaluation reform in Arab schools.

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Appendix A: Thematic Findings Table (Formatted for Submission)

Appendix 1. Thematic 1 manigs 1 able (1 offination for outsings)	
Theme	Summary of Key Insights
Perceived Benefits of Peer	Promotes professional growth, collaborative learning, instructional
Assessment	awareness, and mutual support among teachers.
Classroom Implementation	Enhances student engagement and confidence, but can provoke anxiety
	without proper scaffolding or trust.
Contribution to Professional	Encourages reflection, strengthens lesson planning, and deepens
Identity	pedagogical self-awareness.
Implementation Challenges	Time constraints, lack of rubrics, emotional discomfort, and resistance to
	feedback due to cultural norms.
Recommendations by	Call for structured training, rubric
Participants	Development, trust-based school culture, and engaging, collaborative tasks.