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THE PROBLEMS OF LESSON OBSERVATION DURING THE SCHOOL PRACTICE

Мазкур мақолада ўрта мактаб ва лицейларда дарсларни кузатиб учрайдиган муаммолар ва уларни ҳал қилиш юзасидан тақлифлар келтирилган.

В данной статье рассмотрены проблемы, встречаемые при наблюдении уроков в средних школах и лицеев, а также авторы статьи предлагают как решить эти проблем.

Key words: *lesson observation, curriculum, English language department, observation week, school practice, learner observation.*

The School Practice is compulsory for students of graduate level enrolled in the English Language Departments of higher institutions in Uzbekistan. Students undergo the School Practice at local schools, and follow the Curriculum destined for the School Practice issued by the English Language Departments. According to the foregoing Curriculum students during the School Practice should observe lessons of the English Language teachers and afterwards conduct lessons in different grades of the secondary school or the boarding school.

Lesson observation is one of the major components of the School Practice which involves one week for the graduate students. Observation week is devoted to observing lessons and familiarizing with the school's facilities, policies, procedures, pedagogical practices, and the preparation of timetable.

During the Observation Week students have to observe lessons given by their monitor teachers to be aware of the methods and techniques of her/his teaching. In addition to it they observe the relationship between the teacher and students, students' learning styles and their behavior. To get better understanding of the learners' personalities student teachers are recommended to observe lessons across other subject areas that are taught for the class they are allocated. At the same time pre-service teachers observe lessons of other experienced teachers who display exemplary teaching practices, and novice teachers to evaluate various teaching techniques at different levels of professional experience.

During the Observation Week students are required to record their observations of ten English language classes to be assessed. Students must have daily entries of their observations reflecting on various types of teaching or participation experience. Moreover, student teachers are strongly recommended to conduct peer observation and provide feedback on at least one lesson per day, and written feedback on at least two lessons per week during the Teaching Weeks.

There are no fixed observation instruments in the Curriculum of the English Language Department. Every English Language Department compiles their own, in ethnographic or structured format. Some Departments prescribe that students must

keep diaries, whereas others provide trainees with observation schemes. The former technique requires that pre-service teachers have to describe their reaction to the lesson observed, learners, the relationship between teacher and pupils, school policy in general and their initial teaching experience in the form of narration. The latter ones are introduced in different formats; it is either a detailed structured check-list with pre-specified categories of the teacher's or learner's behavior and the trainee's role is to record their occurrence, and accompany with evidences or jotted comments that they consider relevant to the observation, or a general lesson reports where student teachers make notices about plusses and minuses of the lesson observed.

Many studies on lesson observations show that the comments of trainees are mainly descriptive; the student teachers note down what the teacher and the learners have done during the lesson and whether the learners are "interested", "involved", "active" or not. Trainees face problems with identifying the aims of the lesson, means of transition, teacher's prompts and learning outcomes. There is very little analysis or reflection. They observe that the teacher has no problems with discipline, but do not ask themselves why it has been so. Very few trainees have made any connection between observations and their own teaching.

Students teachers face some problems during the Observation Week. Pre-service teachers are formally introduced to observation skills and strategies. Student teachers need help in observation which guides them to conduct observation, further analysis and reflection in collaborative way with the School Practice supervisors and methodologists from the local schools. The format of the observation schemes seems to limit the student teachers very much. They feel obliged to fill in the space often repeating the same remarks in subsequent observation sheets. Finally, observation sheets prescribe categories or tasks in the form of broad statements without explaining the reason of observation, what to write and in what sequence. Teaching process is a complex procedure that covers teaching behavior, learning behavior, patterns of interaction, and patterns of group dynamics. Some aspects of these procedures are overt, for example, question-answer work, but sometimes it is far more covert, such as learner's interest. So student teachers face the dilemma what is noteworthy to mention, how to interpret teacher's, learner's remarks or behavior, what size the notes should be.

Student teachers should know that the reason of observation and filling the observation sheets is that we want them to learn something from doing so, and only then grade them. The features of a good observer should be made clear to them. They should realize that the skills of observation can be learnt. The School Practice supervisor or methodologists from the local schools should try to transfer some of her/his observation skills by observing a lesson, and analyzing observation sheets after a lesson she has observed with the trainees in a collaborative and consulting way.

The main suggestion concerns the format of the observation schemes. Numerous schedules of observation have been introduced: the Flanders System of Interaction Analysis (FIAC) by Flanders (1970), the Foreign Language INTERaction (FLINT) system by Moskowitz (1971), FOCUS by Fanselow (1977), COLT by Allen, Frölich and Spada (1984), the Stirling system by Mitchell, Johnstone and

Parkinson (1981). For teacher training education we need reliable observation instruments based on scientific grounds that develop observation skills gradually and improve them with practice.

Observation tasks have been introduced by the Professor Wajnryb (1992) and are widely used in a modified way round the world in teacher development programmes. She clearly identified the advantages of observation tasks. They limit the scope of observation and allow an observer to focus her/his attention at one or two particular aspects. Concrete subsequent statements provide a convenient means of collecting data and free student teachers from interpreting the behavior and making evaluation during the lesson. A list of questions after a lesson guide them what aspects of the teaching/learning process they should reflect on. What is more they allow student teacher to personalize the data and to view their own teaching experience. Thus the nature of the task-based experience is ‘inquiry-based, discovery-oriented, inductive and potentially problem-solving’ (Wajnryb 1992).

However, initially classroom observation tasks have been introduced for teachers’ professional growth but not for teacher training education. That is why they need to be adapted for this purpose as well. Learner observation tasks offer samples of categories to the student teachers without restricting them. Student teachers could decide in which form to take notes, either putting down actual utterances or jotters. It is important because it allows student teacher to be independent and autonomous.

The two main purposes of the tasks can be formulated as to raise trainees’ awareness about the aspects of the teaching process and guide student teachers to make their own decision about the teaching process. In addition to them observation tasks may occur as the basis for further deeper case study research and provide student teachers with data for writing a diploma work.

In order to observe properly student teachers should be aware of the following observation instruments. They are: field notes, the case study, diary/journal, anecdotal records and others.

Field notes are records of naturalistic observation in the natural context of the behaviour researched through direct listening and watching. The main focus of observation notes is accurate description rather than interpretation. An observer can write down interesting details on various aspects of school life in general and of the teaching process in particulars. ‘Each observational note represents a happening or event – it approximates the who, what, when, and how of the action observed’. McKernan considers field notes as a useful tool as:

- are simple records to keep requiring direct observation
- outside observer is necessary
- can be studied in the teacher’s own time
- can function as an aide-memoire
- provide clues and data not dredged up by quantified means.

At the same time an observer should consider some drawbacks in the use of this technique presented by McKernan (1996) as follows:

- It is difficult to record lengthy conversations
- They can be fraught with problems of researcher response, bias, and subjectivity

- It is time-consuming to write up on numerous characters
- They are difficult to structure
- They should triangulate with other methods, as diaries, analytic notes.

Elliot and Ebbutt (1986) treat **case study** as a research technique in which teachers identify, diagnose and attempt to resolve major problems they faced in teaching for understanding. Richards (1998) considers case materials help students to explore how teachers in different settings ‘arrive at lesson goals and teaching strategies, and to understand how expert teachers draw on pedagogical schemes and routines in the process of teaching’. McKernan (1996) reminds that the researcher or an observer should use a ‘conceptual framework’, which can relate to existing science. So, the researcher employs various concepts to make sense of the observed data.

Richards (1998) enumerates advantages for using case studies in teacher education:

- students are provided with vicarious teaching problems that present real issues in context;
- students can learn how to identify issues and frame problems;
- cases can be used to model the process of analysis and inquiry in teaching;
- students can acquire an enlarged repertoire and understanding of educational strategies.
- cases help stimulate the habit of reflective inquiry.

Some suggestions to students on the lesson observation

Learner level

Before the lesson:

1. Arrange to observe a class.
2. Meet with the teacher and find out the learner’s language level. Have the student’s grade as a key. You might have made your assumptions about their level during previous observations.
3. Make yourself familiar with the chart below.

During the lesson

1. Look for overt evidence of the students’ level. Consider language competence (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation), communicative competence (fluency of speech production, initiation, adequate response). Try to make records of students’ speech production.

2. In the far right column, record the strategies used by the teacher to adjust learner level. For example,

- speed of speech;
- complexity of language;
- length of wait time;
- on stronger students’ for ‘model’ answers;
- other.

Student	Level/grade	Learning activities	Signs of level	Teacher’s strategies
Anora	3	vocabulary work; matching pictures and words	3 mismatches among 6 total words	appeal to another student as a model
Farid	4	Text reading	speed of the reading is fast but mispronounced two words	repeats with raising intonation, asks to correct; reminds the rule of reading of –ph combination

After the lesson

1. Share your findings with the teacher. Talk about any students whose level appears to be different from that designed before.
2. Consider the data you have collected. Is there the linkage between students’ level and the level of difficulty of tasks?
3. Was the level of difficulty of learning activities appropriate to the level of students?

4. What were the overt language problems during the lesson?

Reflect

To what extent the task should be challenging for students?

How can you construct the instructions of the tasks in accordance with the level of competence of your students?

Is there any connection between seating arrangement, learners’ motivation, learning styles and learner levels?

Learner as doer

Before the lesson

1. Arrange to observe language and learning behaviour of students at a lesson. Describe the manner of doing and materials they use. For example, students might
 - a. respond in a low voice but accurately;
 - b. speak fast but with errors;
 - c. produce long utterances without haste and emotions;
 - d. think for long time before giving the answer
 - e. highlight some passages with fountain pen or marker;
 - f. volunteer to go to the blackboard;
 - g. give the answer first to the comprehension question after first listening;
 - h. finish fill-in the gap exercise on the blackboard first;
 - i. face his partner during the pair-, group work;
 - j. use colloquial expressions in the cues;
 - k. volunteer to dramatize the dialogue
2. Think of the learner’s affective (extroversion, introversion), cognitive (Field-dependent, Field-independent), and sensory (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic) preferences in accomplishing learning activities.
3. Make yourself familiar with the chart below.

During the lesson

1. Observe the lesson from the point of view of what and how the learners actually do.
2. Make notes in the chart below.
 - outline the learning activity;
 - describe the action and the manner of doing;
 - comment on learners' preferences, for example, whether the learner is good at working independently, or in cooperation with the partner, receiving or producing the language.

Learning activity	Learner's name	What & how learner does	Comment on learner's preferences
e.g. presentation of the dialogue	Philip	dramatizes a dialogue with emphatic intonation	Enjoys and good at acting, prefers to produce language. FI, kinaesthetic

After the lesson

1. Together with the classroom teacher group students according to their learning preferences.
2. Considering the data you have collected which activities in the lesson do you consider the most valuable for the learners? Explain your thoughts.

Reflect

What is the congruency between learners' behaviour, preferences and learning activities?

To what extent the teacher should cater for learning preferences in planning a lesson? In what way learning activities can develop students' learning styles?

Which approaches, materials, or techniques are you going to employ which suit student's natural learning styles and can develop other skills in future planning of the lesson?

At the end of the School practice observation sheets or diaries must be included in the Practicum Folder to be assessed. There is another problem a supervisor faces. There are no explicit criteria for assessment student teachers' observation sheets. Gill S., a university teacher from the Czech Republic, in his feedback to the experience in different countries noticed: 'What we use to arrive at these decisions (assess or not assess student's observation schedules) is our internal and doubtless highly subjective criteria'. These criteria include the full answer to the questions, evidence of student teachers' ability to describe what they have seen and link it to the activities of the lesson, evidence of reflection, and language explicitness. It is evident that all these criteria sound ambiguously. What should we treat as 'the full answer', 'evidence of reflection' and 'language explicitness'? This is another issue to survey which can introduce scientific criteria for assessment of observation for research purpose and adapt them to observation as a learning tool for teacher training education.

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