

The purpose and benefits of classroom observation



Classroom observation is a process by which the institute of nursing-Academic Support Person(ASP) sits in on one or more classroom sessions, records the instructor's teaching practices and student actions, and then meets with the instructor to discuss the observations. The main purpose behind the classroom observation is to allow a teacher to get feedback from an objective, experienced observer and to involve in context-specific discussions about teaching with adviser.

The observation should not be an endorsement for promotion and tenure, a judgment of the teacher's teaching methods, styles and skills, or an assessment of the teacher's knowledge of disciplinary content. It is purely developmental rather than intimidation and making decisions.

Classroom observation has been used many years ago to evaluate the quality of teaching provided and the consistency between the curriculum plan and the actual delivery of the material by teachers. Wagg (1999) stated that " the purpose of looking at implementation is to see whether there is mismatch between intention and strategies". Classroom observation has constantly been seen as an effortful task from the side of the teachers.

Negative attitudes have been expressed from several teachers venting their disappointment about the process by which observation has been implemented. This feeling of unhappiness and dissatisfaction is not a product of today; it is possibly an aggregation of many years of authoritarian, impressionistic, and impartial models of supervisions with teachers feeling of little ownership. Because the observer has a great role in renewing the teacher's contracts, they had to conform to the supervisor's viewpoints . This is considered an exceptional limitation of the observation process.

Diverse research revealed that the way teachers behave in the classroom and the instructional methods they use impact the degree students learn. Consequently, using classroom observations, educators and investigators are capable of providing feedback that may improve the teaching practices in the class. Hopkins (2002) considers that the motivation behind any school observation is not limited to classroom research only but it extends to the professional development of teachers. This is because of the many years of observations that contemporary educationalists agreed to desert through time the conventional 'recitation lesson' (Wragg 1999).

Clearly, different forms observations encompass different criteria. These criteria may be comprehensive or specific. Some observation forms may focus on the students' behavior while others may seek out the response of teachers to such behaviors. According to Hopkins (2002), there are four methods of observation: open, focused, structured, and systematic. Each method needs special instrument. . Observation tools are forms that are to be filled out by the observer. Depending on the observation technique, some forms or instruments may simply be a blank sheet, a worksheet, a scale, checklists, computer software, or a tally sheet. Some observers may be affected by the setting in which the lesson takes place and may focus on some particular feature of the teaching of one specific subject, like science or English. This in turn may influence whether they adopt a quantitative style, which is a type of systematic approach; counting and recording of individual events, or a qualitative method, which is a type of the open observation approach, trying to look behind and beneath the mere frequencies (wragg 1999).

Furthermore, there are many observations tools used by teachers on their classes or in peer observation settings (Malamah-Thomas 1987, Wajnryb 1992). Such instruments are powerful developmental tools for teachers and for trainees advisors, allowing both to look at the lesson systematically in conjunction with the feedback from advisors. Therefore, teachers and observers must perceive the instruments similarly to avoid misinterpretations and predispositions of the items within the tools.

At the level of the ION, instructors have expressed the issue of the perception of the observation tool many times. In addition to the way the classroom observation is conducted. However, the questions that continue to irritate my colleagues and leave them preoccupied with an answer to them are that, do all classroom observers perceive and interpret the same observation items within the checklist in the same way...? Is there any problem in the observation methods? This actually urges me to investigate these issues in the Institute of Nursing (ION) to find out any discrepancies in the understanding of the observation checklists and or any defect in the observation process.

To pursue the task appropriately, the advisors will not be participated in any other job but collecting data. Randall and Thornton (2005) refer to an advisor who has no other than to observe and take notes as a non-participant observer (Gebhard and Oprandy 1999). As the name designates, this kind of observation requires the observer not to engage in any interaction with the individuals being observed. Instead, the observer should concentrate on a particular behavior - a specific criterion (Wragg, 1999, Hopkins 1999, 2002).

For an observer, it is very important to avoid preconceptions and afterward approach whatever is to be observed with an open mind (Wragg 1999).

Due to its direct involvement with the individuals observed, observation does have a benefit; however, it is time-consuming (Robson, 2002). Pre-judgments and predispositions may also produce troubles with observation. Such troubles may lead to misinterpretation of the data being collected (Brophy & Good 2003). Therefore, the observer should avoid any personal biases that may contaminate his/her results.

In this small scale study, the entire process of observation, from the instrument used by the observer to different stages of teacher observation, was totally decided by the observer and the investigator. The terms observer and advisor will be used interchangeably.

Background

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) encompass three institutes of Nursing (ION) located in Sharjah, Ras ELkhaimeh and Fujairah Emirates and they are governed by the Ministry Of Health (MOH). According to the policy, the ION has an observation system performed by three persons: the Central Academics Coordinator (CAC), Academic Support Person (ASP) and the Branch Manager (BM). The class room observation is held two times per semester and as needed. One observation is announced and the other is unannounced. At the level of each ION; the observation responsibility is delegated to the ASP. In case the teacher observation result was

unsatisfactory, the CAC will be called to reobserve the same teacher within two weeks of the unsatisfactory observation but can also observe those with

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satisfactory outcomes. The BM does a spot check from time to time on the ongoing of the teaching process. The three observers use the same observation instrument and it is qualitative (open methods) in nature where observation bias can sometimes significantly affect the result.

The session Appraisal form is composed of 29 items focusing on two areas of classroom practices: Effective Questioning (8 items), Effective Teaching Practices (21 items). These items are marked as, Accomplished, Partially accomplished, and Not accomplished. The final result is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Appendix 2).

The adopted teaching methodologies are case-based and lecture-based, depending on the course. Most of the teachers at the ION are well experienced and hold master degree. I have been working as a senior nursing tutor for the last seven years in the ION. It happened more than once a teacher got two or more different feedbacks from the observers. The teachers always blame the observers for their inconsistency in the understanding of the observation items and in the way the observation is conducted. The majority of the tutors wonder whether a difference should be there while using the same observation checklist and the same observation methods. The investigator will try to answer this question and orient the teachers to the findings.

Research Questions

Is there a significant difference in the perception of the same observation items within the instrument used by the different advisors" in the ION?

Is there any defect in the observation process?

Purpose

The investigator will try to:

Find out any discrepancies in the observation tool among the observers.

Identify the drawbacks of the observation method.

Report to the curriculum committee and teachers these inconsistencies (if any).

Observation Methods

Classroom observation

is

a

collaborative

process.

Both

the

teacher

being

observed

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and

the observer

have

vital

roles

before, during, and

after

the

observation. Collaborating

at

each

phase

of

the

process

can

help

put

both

participants at ease

so

that

each

benefits

from

the experience (University

of

Washington 1998).

Classroom observation is conducted through three phases that were adapted from Day (1993) and Richards and Lockhart (1994) were: pre-observation meeting, observation phase, and post-observation follow-up phase. The researcher will be use the ION designated tool during the observation process. (Fig 1).

Pre-conference phase is executed before the classroom observation. The purpose of this meeting to share information that helps both the instructor and observer prepare for the observation and to illuminate the explicit outcomes of the lesson observed. It also aims at clarifying the activities

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through which these outcomes will be attained. Information exchanged during this meeting includes overall process of the evaluation, the purpose of the observation, course information, lesson plan, instructional objective(s) , class activities, instructional methods, What

you

want the

observer

to

pay

attention

to, Where

you'd

like

the

observer

to

sit

, what will happen during the observation, and observation follow up opportunities. This phase does not take place in the ION.

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The second stage of the process is the observation phase (Data Collection) or the execution of lesson. The ION observers gather information to be discussed later with the tutor. These data include instructor

doing/saying, students

doing/saying, instructional methods, teacher-students interaction, and flow of the session...etc. Generally, the ASP will use a checklist tool designed for this purpose of classroom observation (Appendix 2). The observers, unlike the traditional supervisors who usually sit at the back and document the classroom events, sit where they can have a good view of the class.

Analysis of the collected data and preparing for the post-conference take place immediately, next to the observation, it is suggested that observers code the data checked in their notes. Identify information that links to the following: Organization and presentation of the lesson, level of student concentration, interactions, and participation, the quality of interpersonal relationships between the teacher and students, effectiveness of instruction and how instruction could be improved.

The third stage is the post-conference phase or follow-up. Shortly after the observation, the advisors emphasize the positive areas of the observation process such as the strengths of the lesson. The teacher will be asked to evaluate and reflect on his lesson at first. Then, the observers will discuss the collected data with the teacher. It is a descriptive stage where the observers describe the various phases of the lesson. The observers during this phase ask probing questions that guide the teacher through the process. They also provide direct feedback on the areas the teacher has asked for in <https://assignbuster.com/the-purpose-and-benefits-of-classroom-observation/>

the pre-observation conference. In doing so, many of the areas for improvement are originally stated by the teachers because they had a chance to reflect on their teaching.

Figure Observation Cycle: Adapted from: http://www.commet.edu/emprel/trng/tm_3_2_clasobs.html (2004).

Validity and reliability in observation

It is essential that observation is as objective as expected and advisors must be mindful of their own interests and predispositions so that the data gained is as valid and reliable as conceivable and not designated to verify a point (CCC 2004).

Observers customarily continue-the-spot notes to complete an observation schedule so that any extra or uncommon actions can be noted. For example 'A come into the class and talked to teacher, this interrupted classroom for 3 minutes'; ' Fire alarm rang at 2. 24pm so the class was shorter today than usual'.

' Field notes' are often written post assessment and the advice is to do this as early as possible. Robson (2002) proposes that you should ' never begin a second class observation before sorting out your records for the first one'

Practice in utilizing a schedule before the ' actual' observation will assist the observer to settle uncertainties in how to employ it or how to record unforeseen or vague data.

Reliability of observation will originate from appraiser consistency.

Appraisers have to make sure that they make parallel decisions about similar situations on diverse events. They must also take similar decisions about similar events if they see or hear them again; say on video or audio tape.

Preferably, having more than one appraiser observing the same events, at least in initial practice sessions, so that there can be agreement on what is going on and how it is to be coded.

The two observers at the ION were aware of these points to ensure the validity and reliability of the class supervision.

Limitation of the study

It is worthy to mention that the scope of this study is limited to a group of teachers of Nursing in Fujairah campus in an educational zone. Therefore generalization of the study might not be possible.

Literature review

Even though the classroom observation is seen as a crucial element of each educational system, researchers have found that teachers were not satisfied with the observation process. The main reasons researchers found were judgmental, evaluative nature of observation, authoritative role of observers and prescriptive nature of feedback (Akbari and Tajik 2007).

Wang and Seth (1998) found out that classroom observation has gained a negative reputation in the ELT profession because of its subjective, judgmental, and ill-defined nature. Many instructors resent being observed

at short notice by 'important people' who judge their performance according to their own, not necessarily appropriate criteria, and make unwelcome 'suggestions' for change. It seems as if these inspectors have the final word on whether their performance is good or bad, right or wrong.

In many situations the observers enter the classes to look at the teachers' performances to decide at the end of the academic year who will continue in his/her job or not. Certainly, this perception places teachers under too much stress which negatively impacts their performance in classroom. Randall and Thornton (2001) believed that anxiety levels in the lesson execution phase can become very high and can precipitate failure on the side of the teacher to generate an effective lesson (Fig 2).

Figure 2: The effect of anxiety on performance (adapted from Randall and Thornton, 2001)

Regarding the process of the classroom observation in the UAE, Alwan (2001) find out that the instructors in the UAE are acquainted with the observation; yet, it does not take the systematic approach that would increase the achievements for the teachers.

Consequently, such ad-hoc appraisal practices can simply yield extensive teacher anxiety, a lack of belief in the validity of the observation, and a delicate discouragement of other institutional initiatives to sustainance teachers' efforts to deliver courses effectively (Murdoch, 2000).

Nevertheless, classroom observation should be intended at enhancing professional growth of the teacher rather than threatening them. It should

also focus on the strengths of the lesson. The tutors and through their dealings with the students will recall which areas delivered in a good manner and the ones that require revisiting. It is valuable to point out that the advisors' role is to explore with the teachers so that they have the chance to reflect on their own teaching with the expectation that this approach will turn into a fundamental part of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it changes into a reflection in action process that is conducted during the teaching learning process. Schon (1983) explained this reflective process by saying:

“ Both ordinary people and professional practitioners often think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it. Stimulated by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action... usually reflection on knowing-in-action goes together with reflection on the stuff at hand. (Schon, 1 989)”

Therefore, classroom observation is getting more importance than before. The purpose of many of them is intended towards professional development. It is through experiential learning that the tutors will be self-evaluative and hence will be capable of reflecting on their teaching strategy. Heron (cited in Randall and Thornton 2001) said that working from experience the client (the teacher) is prompted to 'uncover' incidents which are important, 'reflect' on these incidents and to discover new meanings for these incidents, and then 'prepare' to put the learning from experience and reflection back into new experience.

Finally, it is of merit to mention that teachers teach many lessons of which only few of them are observed. Accordingly, If the observed lessons are considered valuable and worthy to be observed then they must be regarded as worthy to be analyzed appropriately, for little purpose was served if, after a lesson, observers simply exude good will, mumble vaguely or appear to be uncertain why they are there, or what they should talk about (Wragg, 1999).

Methodology

To inquire about teacher's dissatisfaction with the overall observation process, a two phase qualitative study was conducted. In the first phase, the observation instrument revisited to see whether the observers perceive its item similarly or not. In the second phase, a questionnaire was distributed to all ION teachers in an attempt to evaluate the method of observation conducted there.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations were carefully considered before conducting the study. A permission letter was sent to the concerned people to consent them. Anonymity and confidentiality of teachers' responses guaranteed (Appendix 3).

Part I:

Procedures and Participants

Two observers visited Diploma I class to assess a teacher teaching Nursing Care of Adults 201. One of the observers is the ASP whose tenure is 11 years

and the other is a critical friend who holds a master degree in education and has 10 years of teaching experience. Both are familiar with the observation tool. This approach was used to explore inconsistencies in the perception of the observation items within the specified form. They were informed about the process; they should sit at different corners in the back of the class (Fig 5), do not speak to each other, and fill in the appraisal form the way they perceive it with an evidence for each partially or not accomplished item.

Data Analysis

At the end of the classroom observation the researcher collected the two filled forms and sit with the two observers to discuss the findings. The data analyzed by utilizing simple statistics, and tables.

Results

The two forms were collected, and it was found that two items were uneven where each tutor has his own perception.

Class

Subject

Observer 1

Observer 2

Session Time

Teaching Method

Diploma 1

Nursing Care of Adults/Hyperthyroidism

Academic support person, 11 years teaching Experience

Critical Friend, more than 10 years teaching

50 minutes

Case-based

The mismatched items were two out of 29 items; the two items were located under the Effective Teaching practices. See table below:

Finding of first observer marked as (1) and (2) for the second

Effective Teaching practices

Accomplished

Partially Accomplished

Not Accomplished

26. Asks students to evaluate their own or others responses.

2

1

29. Demonstrate the ability of dealing with problem students

1

2

Observers Justification

First observer

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26. Asking student to evaluate and reflect on the answers given, getting feedback from classmates should be done frequently in the case based session as this would involve the students in the class and enhance their understanding. This should be observed as a dominant feature in the session and not only once or two.

29. The students were enthusiastic, motivated and participating actively, it was loud voice but not noise, but you have to ask students to lower their voices to hear their classmates “. Raising their hands without calling ‘ Sir’.... Is fair enough.

Second observer

26. Students were fairly able evaluate their answers and that was done with two students only. As for the responses of their colleagues; the students were called more than once to reflect on their answers when the teacher asked them: 1) Do you agree with S? Why? 2) Why did M relate the presence of excessive eating to weight loss? Comment on her answer. Although, the teacher tried with them, the students were not able to evaluate their responses.

29. Loud voice from the side of the students will disturb the learning environment preventing the others from hearing the answers, the teacher tried to control students’ noise particularly when they gave answer together, but he could not. Abiding by the classroom norms is the responsibility of the teacher. Setting clear guidelines should be made to limit this behavior.

At the back of the session appraisal form there is a room left for the appraiser's comment to reflect and set the areas that need improvement on points that are not covered clearly in the observation form but should be part of the lesson or he may emphasize certain points seen in the class.

The first observer

A) Group work:

The teacher should give more time (more than 10 minutes) for the group work to allow the students to prepare and discuss the task properly among them as the task given require deep analysis. Moreover, the teacher should ensure that all the students are participating in the discussion within the group.

Checking group work output is not necessary to be done with each group, as far one or two groups were investigated, then the other groups could be done if required by the judgment of the tutor”.

The Second observer

A) Group work:

Ten minutes for each task is fair enough as the students should come prepared from their home. The time is given only for discussion and preparing the transparency. Giving more time will waste the teacher time and hinder his ability to cover the course objectives.

Group work output was not explored: teacher has to reveal all group findings and seek evaluation or comments from other groups.

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The first observer

B) Teaching strategy

The teacher should implement various teaching strategies in the classroom such as role play, watching and commenting on videos to promote students' understanding, involvement and make the session interesting.

The Second observer

B) Teaching strategy

The session was quite interesting. According to the task discussed in the session, role play or video would not be effective as the demonstrations used by the teacher plus the clinical examples and the real life examples given by some students were satisfactory to cultivate the different concepts in the sessions.

Discussion

One method for analyzing the observation findings of the two observers is through triangulation." Triangulation in the classroom research involves checking the perceptions of more than one person to see if one's own interpretations have any support " Wragg (1999: 111). The total number of the items in the observation checklist is 29, and the debatable points were 2. Then, the agreement was around 93% and disagreement in 7%, which means that the instrument used is reliable. " When the observers agree on > 80% of their observation, this means the information and the data are reliable" Wragg (1999).

It is believed that different style dimensions of learning of the observer may have a possible influence on providing feedback to the teacher. (Randall and Thornton 2001: 134). The first observer, the academic support person, conducted more than four observations to the observed teacher, and knows him better than the second colleague. Hence, he built his feedback on his previous knowledge of the learning style of the observed teacher and provided the feedback in a consultative rather than confronting approach, “The students were enthusiastic and participating actively, it was loud voice, but not noise, but you have to remind students to lower their voice to hear their colleagues “.

Part II

Procedure:

The participants filled a qualitative questionnaire of seven questions (Appendix I). The questionnaire was piloted before being administered. A total of eleven questionnaires were administered through face to face contact with the investigator. Ten of them were collected and analyzed.

Participants

The participants in this study were ten teachers of Nursing in one of IONs. They have been teaching in the ION for more than 7 years. Those teachers have been observed by three different observers using the same tool. The teachers are male and females and range in age from 36 to late 54. They majority of them are native Arabic speakers from different countries and two teachers are westerns. They are of multi-cultural background.

Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were gathered and then analyzed. The responses were calculated using simple statistics and presented in charts.

Results of the Questionnaire

Items

No. of Teachers

Percentage

I have been observed two times by the ASP

8

80%

I have been observed three times, two by the ASP and once by the CAC

2

20%

I felt anxious and blocked when the observer visited my class

10

100%

I am dissatisfied with way I observed. I did not meet with the observer before the session

10

100%

The observer was sitting in the back, ticking on the observation form.

7

70%

The observer did not tell the students who he is, creating unstable setting in the class.

7

70%

The late feedback does not reflect the immediate feedback.

8

80 %

The observation is not intended at teacher development.

9

90%

The feedback is threatening if it is unsatisfactory.

9

90%

Classroom observation does not fulfill my educational need

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7

70

Classroom observation has no impact whether negative or positive.

2

20%

Classroom observation partially fulfill my educational need

1

10%

Discussion

Obviously, there are no defects in the observation instrument. So, where is the problem? The result of the questionnaire provided to ten teachers revealed that the problem is in the observation process itself. The majority of the tutors (80%) have been observed two times per semester by the ASP whereas the remaining 20 % were observed three times by the ASP and the CAC (table 1). All the teachers (100%) expressed various levels of frustration and anxiety when they are observed. They assured that the observers themselves were a source of apprehension. Teachers added that none of the observers take an action to alleviate their anxiety. All the tutors (100%) expressed their feelings of dissatisfaction with the observation methods as no pre observation conference is conducted neither before the announced or the unannounced visits. This puts more stress on the side of the observees.

Furthermore, 70% of the teachers mentioned that the way the observer enters and sits at the back of the class ticking items on a checklist. This disrupts the stability of the classroom environment as the students perceive that he is observing them making them reluctant to answer and participate in the class effectively which in turn impact the execution of lesson. This is because the observer did not identify himself to the students as well as the purpose of being there. Moreover, he sits in the corner of the class and started to document his notes all the time. Accordingly, the students think that he is writing about them. Another significant point raised by 80 % of the teacher is the feedbacks given by the observers. They confirm that the immediate feedback provided is inconsistent with the late feedback received by the teachers. The striking issue was the perception of the 90% of the teachers for the session appraisal as a threat rather than developmental (Fig 3). Teachers feels intimidated and frightened by the entire supervisory process. This is because the models of observation we inherited are authoritarian and directive. All these factors combined their effects to increase teachers' anxiety and dissatisfaction. When teachers asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the process of observation, 70% considered it unsatisfactory as it does not fulfill the educational needs of the teacher and did not enhance their teaching methods, 20% were neutral and 10% was fairly satisfied(Fig 4). This necessitates reconsideration of the overall observation process.

Number of teachers

Frequency of observations

Percentage

8

2

80%

2

3

20%

Table Frequency of observation

Figure 3 Perception of classroom observation

Figure 4 Satisfaction level

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this Investigation, the investigator recommends certain points to enhance the process of the classroom observation.

Having a pre-observation conference will guide the observers during the observation phase and will ease the teacher's level of anxiety that result from the process in the part of the teachers. This will also assist the discussion that takes place in the post-observation conference. The professional teacher is one who is able to reflect critically on their own

practice (Schon 1983, Wallace 1991). Accordingly the overall process will promote refl