

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER - OBSERVATION IN TEACHING

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Teaching is a dynamic profession that constantly evolves to meet the needs of diverse learners. Educators are tasked with the crucial responsibility of imparting knowledge, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing the growth of their students. Numerous new English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors start their teaching journeys in classrooms throughout Uzbekistan. Among them, some arrive well-equipped, displaying competence and confidence in their ability to support student learning. On the other hand, a significant portion of novice teachers who have completed their university education lack the necessary preparation to effectively address the challenges that await them. Consequently, when these inexperienced teachers embark on their teaching careers, they frequently encounter difficulties, putting them in a challenging situation. To excel in this role, teachers can benefit significantly from peer observation. Classroom observation has emerged as a pivotal tool for measuring, assuring and improving the professional skills and knowledge base of teachers in colleges and schools in recent years. This practice involves teachers observing and providing feedback to their colleagues. According to Seeing is Believing: The Benefits of Peer Observation – an article written by educational psychologists Graham D. Hendry and Gary R. Oliver and published in the Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice- peer observation of teaching is seen as a supportive and developmental process for improving the quality of teaching in universities. In this article, we will delve into the importance of gaining the world acceptance- peer observation in teaching, exploring how it can enhance professional development, improve classroom practices, and contribute to a culture of collaboration and growth within educational institutions.

What is Peer Observation in Teaching or POT?

Peer observation in teaching or POT is a valuable method of reflective teaching that aids educators in enhancing their teaching abilities, thereby improving their instructional techniques. This approach is regarded as a viable means of fostering teacher development, refining pedagogy, and honing professional skills. In this process, two or more teachers or colleagues observe each other's teaching practices with the aim of recognizing both strengths and areas for improvement. Through this practice, teachers gain awareness of their classroom practices, identifying what they do well and areas that may require enhancement. Additionally, it enables them to adopt fresh strategies, techniques, and tactics that can contribute to effective teaching and learning. Peer observation also facilitates the exchange of teaching experiences among educators.

According to Bell peer observation is a: 'collaborative, developmental activity in which professionals offer mutual support by observing each other teach; explaining and discussing what was observed; sharing ideas about teaching; gathering student feedback on teaching effectiveness; reflecting on understandings, feelings, actions, and feedback and trying out new ideas'. Hendry and Oliver reaffirm what has been mentioned, describing peer observation as an act in which two teachers collaborate and observe each other's teaching with the primary goal of improving teaching quality.

Peer review of teaching, according to Chism, is when fellow teachers provide feedback on a colleague's teaching. This feedback can be for two main reasons: to help the teacher get better at teaching or to make decisions about their job.

There are many ways to do peer review of teaching, like looking at teaching materials, student feedback, and even watching a teacher in the classroom. This process can be used to judge a teacher's performance (summative) or to give them advice on how to improve (formative).

Summative reviews are like big evaluations with a specific goal, often related to things like getting tenure or a promotion. They usually cover general areas and compare a teacher to others. On the other hand, formative assessment in peer review of teaching is all about giving teachers specific feedback to help them get better at teaching. The feedback is detailed and meant to help instructors understand how they can improve their teaching methods. As Chism states, formative assessment of teaching is "the basis for the development of effective teaching throughout one's career"

Peer observation, whether it's for evaluating performance (summative) or for providing guidance (formative), plays a crucial role in the peer review of teaching. In essence, collaborative peer observation of teaching involves three main stages:

1. a pre-observation conference;
2. an in-person classroom visit during which detailed observations of the instructor's practice (including classroom environment and student interactions) are captured via a template or rubric, and through narrative notes;
3. a post-observation conference that includes both self-reflection on the part of the observee and constructive feedback from the observer (Wilkerson & Lewis, 2002, p. 75).

The aims of Peer Observation

The aims of peer observation in teaching are multifaceted, with a central focus on professional development, quality enhancement, and the creation of a collaborative and reflective teaching environment. Martin and Double identify the six main aims of peer observation as:

1. Improving or developing an understanding of personal approaches to curriculum delivery;
2. Enhancing and extending teaching techniques through collaboration;
3. Exchanging insights relating to the review of teaching performance;
4. Expanding personal skills of self-reflection and evaluation;

5. Developing curriculum planning skills in collaboration with peers and colleagues;

6. Identifying areas in teaching practice with particular merit or in need of development.

The advantages of Peer Observation in teaching

Peer observation in teaching offers several advantages that can benefit both the observer and the teacher being observed. Several authors have documented that Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) is an effective approach for enhancing the professional development of higher education teachers.

1. Professional Development: Peer observation provides opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice, self-assessment, and continuous improvement. Observers can offer constructive feedback and insights that help teachers enhance their instructional strategies and teaching methods.

2. Different Perspectives: Observers bring different perspectives and experiences to the table, which can lead to a richer exchange of ideas and teaching strategies. This diversity of viewpoints can lead to innovative approaches and solutions to teaching challenges. Bell suggests that it can be conducted in an informal manner as an agreement between peer teachers or as a formal system of monitoring teacher performance during the trial period or as a tool for identifying weaknesses in their teaching.

3. Skill Enhancement: Teachers can learn from their peers by observing effective teaching practices in action. This can include strategies for classroom management, engagement, lesson planning, and assessment techniques. It allows teachers to pick up new skills and refine their existing ones. Shortland understands POT as part of development programme for both new lecturers and established staff offering a great potential for teachers to promote self-knowledge and personal growth when it is part of a continuing process. For Gosling POT is a powerful learning experience, part of a training course for new lecturers or as part of a development process for individual lecturers or the whole department.

4. Building a Supportive Community: Peer observation fosters a sense of community among educators. It promotes a culture of collaboration and sharing, where teachers support each other's growth and development. This can lead to a more positive and cohesive school environment.

5. Accountability: Knowing that colleagues may observe their classes can motivate teachers to be more diligent in their teaching practices. This accountability can encourage teachers to stay updated on best practices and continually strive for excellence in their teaching.

6. Confidence Building: Positive feedback from peers can boost a teacher's confidence and morale. Knowing that their efforts are recognized and appreciated by colleagues can help teachers feel more valued and motivated in their profession.

7. Targeted Feedback: Peer observers can provide specific, actionable feedback tailored to the individual teacher's needs and goals. This targeted feedback can help

teachers address specific areas for improvement. As Hendry, G.D. and Oliver, G.R. state “Reported benefits for observees include learning from feedback provided by the observer”. As Sullivan et al. (2012) describe, quality feedback is vital to the success of the peer observation process. According to their study, feedback should endeavour to be:

- descriptive of behaviour rather than personality;
- specific and sensitive;
- directed towards changeable behaviour; and,
- timely.

Sullivan et al. recommend that feedback also be selective, highlighting one or two areas of

strength and improvement rather than overwhelming the observee with too much information.

8. Professional Growth: Engaging in peer observation is a form of ongoing professional development. It can contribute to career advancement and demonstrate a commitment to growth and excellence in teaching. According to Tenenberg [5]“...in observing another teacher, the observer draws on her professional vision, her adapted way of seeing the field of practice, to render the observed scene intelligible. In doing so, she engages in a ‘double-seeing’ of her own classroom in comparison to the classroom that she observes”.

In conclusion, peer observation in teaching, often referred to as POT (Peer Observation of Teaching), plays an essential role in the dynamic profession of education, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction within Uzbekistan and beyond. This practice represents a powerful vehicle for continuous professional development, fostering collaboration, and enhancing the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Peer observation offers a structured approach to reflective teaching, enabling educators to critically assess their classroom practices, identify strengths, and pinpoint areas for improvement. Through the constructive feedback and insights provided by their peers, teachers can refine their pedagogical techniques, classroom management skills, and instructional strategies. This process of self-assessment and self-improvement is integral to the growth of novice teachers and experienced educators alike.

Importantly, peer observation goes beyond individual development. It nurtures a culture of collaboration and sharing within educational institutions, encouraging teachers to exchange ideas, experiences, and best practices. This collaborative spirit contributes to the creation of a supportive community of educators who work together to achieve common goals, ultimately benefiting students.

Furthermore, peer observation serves as a means of accountability, motivating teachers to uphold high standards in their teaching practices. Knowing that their colleagues may observe their classes encourages educators to continually seek excellence and stay updated on the latest teaching methodologies.

In Uzbekistan the adoption of peer observation can lead to significant improvements in the quality of EFL education. It allows English teachers to refine their language teaching techniques, engage in self-reflection, and provide more effective instruction to their students, thereby contributing to the country's broader educational goals.

In essence, peer observation in teaching is not merely a tool but a transformative practice that propels educators towards continuous growth, encourages collaboration, and ultimately enhances the quality of education. As the teaching profession continues to evolve, embracing peer observation remains imperative for educators and institutions committed to providing the best possible learning experiences for students in Uzbekistan and around the world.

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