

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION: THE UNTOLD STORIES OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN SAMBOAN DISTRICT



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Classroom Observation: the Untold Stories of Public Elementary Teachers in Samboan District

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Abstract

This study examined the often overlooked personal accounts of primary school teachers in public schools via direct observation of their classrooms. While educational research often focused on student results, this study shifted the focus on the classroom experiences, challenges, and achievements of teachers. This research utilized qualitative analysis and systematic observation to uncover the underlying narratives that are inherent in the everyday interactions and practices of elementary school public teachers. This research made major additions to the existing information about the many responsibilities that educators have in shaping the educational environment. It did so by examining instructional approaches, tactics for classroom management, and opportunities for professional advancement. The findings provided significant perspectives on the many approaches used by educators to improve student involvement, provide favorable learning settings, and adjust to the always evolving requirements of the profession.

Keywords: Anxiety, Challenges, Self-reflection, Mentoring, Classroom Observation, Public Elementary Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Classroom observations remain a significant metric for evaluating the efficacy of educators (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016). Its utilization in the field of education to assess the caliber of instruction has been extensive (Borg, 2018). Historically, it has been the prevailing approach for overseeing, evaluating, and assisting in the growth of educators (Tsukui, 2018). Comprehensive data regarding the real-life classroom performance of educators is provided, enabling its application for both formative and summative objectives (Goe et al., 2008). Observation is an undertaking that demands an exceptionally elevated standard of professional integrity and impartiality (Zaare, 2013).

Basic education instructors are obligated to undergo classroom observation on two occasions per semester in the Philippine context (DepEd memorandum no. 008, s. 2023). Undoubtedly, classroom observation can induce anxiety and a sense of vulnerability among instructors. A number of educators experienced feelings of unease, exasperation, and uncertainty, all of which are associated with vulnerability (Pappas, 2021). Educators experience elevated levels of tension when they perceive that their finest teaching practices are being evaluated during observations (Alshehri, 2019). When being observed, they at worst overthink and put their confidence to the test (Barrogo, 2020). The significance of classroom observations in determining the quality of teachers' instruction in

relation to student learning and other critical outcomes is becoming increasingly supported by evidence (Bruns et al., 2018). Frequently accorded significant weight in teacher evaluation and improvement systems, classroom observation serves as the crucial formative anchor that guides professional development (Martinez et al., 2016).

Given the increasing prevalence of classroom observation in numerous teacher evaluation and development systems, there is a pressing need for a more methodical examination of crucial matters and decisions pertaining to the observations. How, when, and by whom? Additionally, it is crucial to consider how the data is applied in both formative and summative assessments.

By elucidating the classroom observation experiences of public elementary school instructors, this study sought to investigate. This study focused specifically on their preparedness, preparation, and apprehension prior to the principal's observation. With the aid of this paper, timely information regarding their classroom observation experiences was gathered. The findings of the research paper were utilized to develop suggestions for educational policies regarding the proper implementation of classroom observation and to identify interventions that could assist teachers in coping with the anxiety associated with such observations. One of the most critical and contentious aspects of educational policy is the enhancement of teacher evaluation. Presently, teacher development and evaluation policies are undertaking substantial reforms

across the globe.

Research Questions

This study sought to extract the essence and significance of the experiences of public elementary school teachers by capturing their firsthand accounts, with a particular focus on the time and effort invested in preparing for classroom observations, their level of preparedness on the day of the observations, and the anxiety they encountered both prior to and throughout the classroom observation process.

The primary inquiry of this research is as follows: what is the experiential reality of elementary public school teachers during classroom observation?

Part I. Perceptions of the Teachers' Preparation for the Classroom Observation

1. What preparations are necessary for a classroom observation?
2. What obstacles impede the necessary preparations for the classroom observation?
3. In terms of preparation time, what is the duration of the classroom observation?
4. What preparatory strategies do you employ in anticipation of the classroom observation?

Part II: Teachers' Perspectives on Their Preparedness for Classroom Observations

1. At what juncture did you feel you were "prepared" to undergo the classroom observation?
2. In what ways have you prepared yourself in advance for the classroom observation?
3. What obstacles have you discovered while conducting classroom observation?
4. In what ways do you manage the difficulties that arise during the classroom observation day?

Part III: Teachers' Anxieties Relating to Classroom Observation

1. How do you feel when the principal is conducting an observation?
2. In what ways do you cope with anxiety or tension while observing the classroom?
3. What do you do initially and lastly while conducting a classroom observation?
4. What are some recommendations or suggestions regarding the implementation of classroom observation?

Literature Review

Classroom observations are defined by Farell (2011) as the processes through which individuals deliberately and methodically examine the occurrences and exchanges that take place during instructional time in

the classroom. Its dual objectives are to furnish formative feedback aimed at enhancing teaching and to supplement summative, high-stakes teacher evaluations (Bergin et al., 2016). Teachers utilize classroom observation as a framework to assess and deliberate upon their own pedagogical approaches. In this instance, educators gain a more profound comprehension of theoretical concepts and practical alternatives regarding the manner, substance, and degree to which they can implement said concepts within the classroom (Zaare, 2012). Halim et al. (2018) state that it furnishes educators with constructive critical feedback with the intention of enhancing their instructional methods and classroom administration. It is apparent that the majority of assessment instruments utilize the teacher's conduct as the basis for evaluation, rather than the student's conduct (Lane & Harris, 2015). The purpose of these performance measures based on observations is to evaluate the instructional practice of teachers as well as their capacity to organize and sustain a productive classroom atmosphere (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016). Observation systems incorporate teaching-related aspects that are regarded as quality indicators. There is a prevailing assumption that higher teacher scores on these indicators correspond to superior teaching and, consequently, greater student learning (Bell et al., 2018). The most recent study published in the *Journal of Ongoing Educational Research* emphasizes the need of using innovative educational approaches to address diverse challenges within educational systems. Halaissi et al. (2023) highlight the capacity of social entrepreneurship education to promote critical thinking and social responsibility. Meanwhile, Cariaga et al. (2024) provide empirical data supporting the efficacy of information and communication technology (ICT) tools, remedial programs, and creative instructional techniques in improving numerical competency in rural areas.

In that regard, observations of teachers have become a crucial component of the teacher preparation program. Classroom observation undeniably serves as a valuable instrument in providing a more comprehensive depiction of actual classroom activities and aiding in the development of superior teaching practices and more efficient instructional strategies (Cariaga, 2024; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). It is possible for valid conclusions regarding typical classroom activities to be impacted by teacher anxiety or subpar performance. Conversely, certain findings suggest that teacher's instruction might be marginally enhanced during observation periods (Halim et al., 2018). Throughout history, classroom observation has played a pivotal role in the education of pre-service

and inservice teachers, as well as in evaluating and assessing classroom performance ((Danielson, 2012; Lawson, 2011). Classroom observations can facilitate teacher development if observation systems contain essential components and observers are aware of what to search for.

Methodology

Research Design

Edmund Husserl's descriptive-phenomenological design was implemented in this article. Phenomenological research aims to ascertain the fundamental structure or essence of a particular social phenomenon by examining its shared essences (Worthington, 2013; Merriam, 2002). The principal objective of the paper was to examine the apprehension that elementary school teachers in the public sector experienced during classroom observations, with a particular focus on their perceptions of their own readiness and level of preparedness. Qualitative data pertinent to the experiences of public elementary school instructors regarding their apprehension, readiness, and preparedness were uncovered through the implementation of this design. From this standpoint, the Eidetic, in accordance with Husserl's writings, was implemented. Descriptive phenomenological idetic design consists of four stages, which the researcher adhered to: bracketing, intuiting, analyzing, and describing (Peres, 2017). Initially, the researcher identified preconceived notions and opinions regarding the phenomenon through bracketing. The term for this is *epoche*. Expectations and assumptions of the researchers were enclosed in brackets before commencing the analysis.

The Participants

A total of nine participants were intentionally chosen. The researchers employed purposive sampling to obtain data that could be extrapolated to the entire population (Etikan et al., 2016). The study's objective was to provide a descriptive account of a specific phenomenon (Albuquerque et al., 2014), which in this case concerned the anxiety, readiness, and preparedness of public elementary school teachers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling in accordance with the following inclusion criteria: they had to be public elementary school teachers, possess a minimum of three years of experience, have undergone classroom observation on three occasions, and hold a teacher I rank.

The instrument

In light of the descriptive phenomenological design of the study, in-depth interviews (IDIs) employing guide questions were utilized. The researcher was regarded as the primary instrument of data collection in this particular context (Simon, 2011). This implies that the data were processed via human instrumentation, as opposed to automated systems, questionnaires, or inventories. The utilisation of in-depth interviews is considered suitable for descriptive phenomenological studies (Morrow et al., 2015), as they enable researchers to elicit inquiries pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation and permit participants to openly articulate any thoughts, emotions, or motivations regarding the same (Trigueros et al., 2017). Moreover, the research conducted by Sadang (2021), Choi (2020), and Van der Wath et al. (2016) has demonstrated that IDI is consistently employed in descriptive phenomenology. During the interview, the researcher will employ the participants' native language so that they may feel at ease when discussing their experiences regarding the level of readiness, preparedness, and apprehension experienced by public elementary school instructors when observing classrooms. The researcher employed a combination of prompts and inquiry inquiries to facilitate interaction with the participants throughout the interview.

Procedures

The researcher obtained approval from the ethical research committee of the district where she is presently employed, prior to commencing data collection. Upon receiving clearance, the researcher utilized the inclusion criteria to identify participants. The participants were provided with an informed consent form and participant information consent form, which they were requested to complete. The researcher provided explanations for these in both English and the local language. Primarily, ethical considerations were upheld by the researchers, given that this investigation entailed soliciting emotions and perspectives from the participants through an online practicum.

The researcher prepared recording recorders, markers, a journal notebook, and smartphones, all of which were required for the interview, once all necessary forms were completed. The aforementioned interview was conducted in a quiet environment, in person. In light of the interview being documented, the researcher sought the participants' consent. On average, the interview was conducted for a period of 35 minutes. The researcher provided reassurance to the participants that the recorded interview would remain confidential

and that the data collected would be used exclusively for research objectives. Data storage, data destruction, and data privacy were all monitored throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Throughout the descriptive phenomenological investigation, Colaizzi's method of analysis was universally embraced. The utilization of descriptive phenomenology by Husserl was also observed in the research of Mortazavi and Ghardashi (2021), Tudy and Gauran-Tudy (2020), Abalos et al. (2016), and Kohan et al. (2015), where it was prevalent. Interviews that were collected were transcribed. After the generation of aggregated themes, the researchers commenced the composition of comprehensive descriptions as the data reached saturation. The researcher returned to the participants after exhaustive description was complete and requested that they validate the result using Colaizzi's method. In particular, the investigator undertook the subsequent procedures: becoming acquainted with the subject matter, discerning noteworthy assertions, devising interpretations, grouping recurring themes, constructing a comprehensive depiction, generating the foundational framework, and pursuing validation of the foundational framework (Morrow et al., 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Clustered Theme: Time is a pre-requisite requirement for a successful classroom observation

Time management relates to positively to perceived control of time, job satisfaction, and health, and negatively to stress (Claessens et al., 2007). Time management is an indispensable element in a teaching profession. It is a process which involves the determination of needs and prioritization of tasks (Khan et al., 2016). In the context of the study, time management is highlighted as an indicator to successfully prepared for the classroom observation. There were three generated themes (evaluation criteria becomes a reference of the teachers when planning for their instruction for the classroom observation; instructional materials constitute a big part of the preparation for the classroom observation; and teaching rehearsals requires time in order for the teachers to master their instruction for the classroom observation) with seven formulated meaning taken from 45 significant statements.

In the preparation for the classroom observation,

participants have expressed that they needed more time. This is articulated by Participant 1: *It needs enough time to prepare the lesson for my classroom observation...*

This experience was confirmed by Participant 3: *the availability of time allotment to the preparation for classroom observation...*

In addition, time posed a challenge and that most of their time is taken up to prepare for the observation.

Participant 2, 7: time constraints...

Participant 1: time-consuming...

As highlighted, teachers have to spare some time to understand and internalize the criteria being used for the classroom observation. By reviewing these criteria, they were confident what to target during the classroom observation. These experiences were narrated by the following participants:

Participant 3: you need to know what the different objectives are that you need to achieve in order to have a good score for your observation...

Participant 4 and 5: Understand the criteria clearly as to how I will be evaluated...

On of the crucial areas that teachers have to prepare is to organize the flow of the lesson. This means that teachers have to write a good lesson and submit this to master teacher or principal for corrections. Indeed, this process requires time.

Participant 3: you need to study the context of the lesson...

Participant 4: the choice or selection of the topic for classroom observation...

Participant 1: lesson plan will be submitted to the master teacher for corrections and suggestions...

Instructional materials were also one of the aspects that teachers have to prepare. Teachers also spend time to look for a more interactive materials so that learners are highly involved during the classroom observation. *Participant 3: you need to use should be interactive and manipulative so that the pupils can learn from their experience...*

Participant 1: you will need to prepare the

instructional materials...

Participant 2: plan for activities for my learners' engagement...

By experience, teachers have to do a lot of rehearsal to gain mastery of the flow of the lesson and able to skillfully manipulate the instructional materials. These were narrated by the following participants.

Participant 1: practice my delivery to ensure I'm comfortable with the content and timing...

Participant 2: gaining mastery on my lesson gives me more confidence during my demonstration...

Participant 5: I need to rehearse the lesson to ensure a smooth delivery on the day of the observation...

The time spent for the preparation varies according to the teaching experience. One participant has shared that seasoned teacher requires less time for preparation compared to the new ones.

Participant 5: experienced teacher this may require less preparation of time, while less experienced educators like me might need more time to plan and practice...

Yet, undertakings to classroom observation preparation would be arrested if teachers have good time management. Managing wisely and efficiently the time has helped teachers to succeed in their classroom observation. This is attested by the following participants:

Participant 4: Being able to spend your time accurately helps me prepare my lesson effectively...

Participant 3: Proper time management and being flexible are my strategies...

Clustered Theme: Positive attitude and disposition increase the preparedness level of the teachers

Teachers' proficiency depends on the attitude she possesses for the profession. The positive attitude helps teacher to develop a conducive learner friendly environment in the classroom (Bhargava & Pathy, 2014). If the teacher is committed and has positive attitude then it is sure that his performance will be better and his effort will be fruitful (Chakraborty &

Mondal, 2014). In addition, Attitude towards his profession have an effect not only on their students, but also his performance (Maheshwari, 2016). On the other hand, good teaching requires a teacher to be knowledgeable in content, skilled in method, and virtuous in disposition and character (Osguthorpe, 2008). Disposition comprises habits of mind rather than mindless habits (Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). In the context of the study, positive attitude and disposition is defined based on the following themes: Self-reflection and positive dispositions about classroom observation help teachers to succeed in their classroom observation (with two formulated meanings and 12 significant statements); and student behavior is one of the factors that teachers have to considered in the preparation for the classroom observation (with one formulated meaning and 7 significant statements).

As experienced by the teachers, having a positive attitude and disposition have helped them stay calm and become more ready for the classroom observation. Mind conditioning is also cited by the teachers as a useful technique to prepare for the classroom observation.

Participant 1: staying calm is the key to be ready in showcasing my teaching skills...

Participant 3: prepare your mind...

Though many teachers have shared that they felt anxious whenever that they are evaluated using classroom observation tool.

Participant 2: I basically feel anxious /overwhelmed about the upcoming observation...

Participant 4: nervousness or anxiety...

But with the right attitude and disposition, success in classroom observation is most likely achieved. Preparation is indeed playing an important part for the classroom observation.

Participant 1: knowledge and disposition during the classroom observation...

Participant 5: you need to prepare not just for your physical health but also for your mental health...

However, the behavior of the students posed a challenge as experienced by the teachers during classroom observation. They worry about how students would response to the lessons and class activities. They have even expressed that students

nowadays have a lesser attention span making it difficult to catch their engagement.

Participant 4: disruptive behavior of the students...

Participant 5: second is the learner's nature/diversity and behavior... Last is the learner's attention span...

Participant 8: lesson should have different activities to be participated and enjoyed by the learners to catch their interest and attention...

To address the challenge on the students' behavior, teachers are getting different resources online to cater the diversity and styles of learners.

Participant 3: I watched videos on YouTube the other ways on imparting the topics to the learners, the efficient and strategies being

used that caters the multiple intelligences of the learners...

Participant 6: I usually watched educational videos that gave tips on how to deal with the learners with multiple behaviors and interests...

Teachers shared that doing self-reflection allowed them to identify areas to focus for the classroom observation. In this way, they were able to target their goals. This is expressed by these participants:

Participant 1: do self-reflection to identify areas for improvement and for me to set goals...

Participant 7: I reflect on the goals of the lesson and what I want my pupils to learn...

Clustered Theme: Mentorship and peer teaching help teachers to effectively manage the lesson and student behavior during classroom behavior

Mentoring has proven to be successful in reducing attrition and improving teaching ability in teachers (Spooner-Lane, 2017). Providing educative mentoring for teacher learning is defined as individualized professional development that blends showing and telling, asking and listening (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). In the study, mentoring is defined in the context of the

following themes: spending time mastering the delivery of teaching allows teachers to be more ready for the classroom observation (two formulated meanings with five significant statements); mentoring and peer collaboration are key aspects to succeed in the classroom observation (two formulated meanings with 13 significant statements); and student behavior affects the readiness of the teachers for the classroom observation (one formulated meaning with nine significant statements).

Peer teaching is one of the strategies that teachers were using to become ready for the classroom observation. They were collaborating with their colleagues to gain insights on how to deliver their instruction and what activities can be done during classroom observation. As expressed by

Participant 3: Collaborating with my colleagues and providing me with the insights into different teaching methods...

Teachers have also expressed that through attending professional learning community or teachers' conferences and meetings increase their confidence and readiness for the classroom observation.

Participant 1: I can ask for techniques from my colleague and different strategies to perform well during classroom observations...

Participant 5: teacher meetings... attending LAC sessions...

Through mentoring, teachers have gained mastery of the lesson. This experience was narrated by the following participants:

Participant 2: when I already equip myself with the full context of the lesson and all of the objectives for the lesson...

Participant 4: content knowledge...

As shared by the participants, teachers become more skillful in classroom management because of the guidance afforded by their principal and master teachers. They felt that mentoring has guided them in managing the student behavior.

Participant 1: classroom management which incorporates a plan for managing classroom behavior and addressing potential disruptions without losing focus on the lesson....

Clustered Theme: Self-reflection allows teachers to be mentally ready thereby decreases classroom observation anxiety

Self-reflection can be defined as a temporary phenomenological experience in which self becomes an object to oneself (Gillespie, 2007). Reflective practice is a paradigm that dominates teacher education around the world. It is commonly included in many professional development programs (Gun, 2011). The habit of reflection can separate extraordinary professionals from mediocre ones (Bailey & Rehman, 2022).

In the paper, self-reflection is defined by the following themes: Doing self-reflection allow teachers to identify their level of readiness (one formulated meaning with two significant statements); mental preparedness decrease the anxiety felt by the teachers during classroom observation (two formulated meanings with 14 significant statements); and attending professional development programs increase confidence for the classroom observation (one formulated meaning with two significant statements). Self-reflection becomes a tool for teachers to identify areas to improve and to get good performance during classroom observation. By doing self-reflection, teachers have arrested problems associated with the classroom observation.

Participant 2: reflecting on my teaching practices and identifying areas where I can make improvements...

Participant 1: doing self-reflection...

Teachers have also highlighted that doing self-reflection minimizes the anxiety being felt on classroom observation. This practice has helped them to become more mindful of their thoughts and actions during classroom observation.

Participant 3: Maintaining my composure and keep on reminding myself that some level of nervousness is normal...

Participant 2: I just stay calm and composed...

Participant 4: I need to feel confident in my ability to effectively deliver my lesson...

It cannot be denied that teachers felt anxiety during classroom observation as expressed by these participants:

Participant 3: feeling of anxiety or nervousness

about being observed which can totally affect my performance...

Participant 5: the pressure to perform and the pressure to excel during the observation can be intimidating sometimes...

Yet, teachers have also found way to level up their teaching skills so to address their anxiety about classroom observation. Teachers shared that enrolling to graduate studies and attending workshops enhance their performance as classroom teachers.

Participants 2: Enrolling myself to graduate school studies helps my professional development a lot...

Participant 4: attending workshops and training which really help enhance my teaching skills

Exhaustive Description

The experiences of the elementary teachers on classroom observation can be described as time-consuming. Yet, the same also promote mentorship, positive disposition and self-reflection.

On top of the effort, teachers are spending more time preparing instructional materials and activities that let learners engaged in the entire duration of classroom observation. Teachers were considering the diversity and style of learners and this experience requires time to select among the available resources. It was also highlighted that teachers made sure to rehearse the lesson they would deliver on the day of classroom observation. Teachers were usually overthinking about classroom observation. According to them, they were anxious about the student's behavior on the day of the observation. They were thinking too much about the outcome of the observation. These experiences were identified as challenges that teachers have to overcome. To manage these challenges, teachers practice mindfulness.

Mentoring was captured in the experiences of the teachers on classroom observation. This suggested that by having classroom observation, teachers felt they were valued by their principal and master teachers because of the guidance extended to them. They shared that that acquire several teaching techniques from more experienced colleagues. This has helped them manage their resources and succeed in the classroom observation. Giving of feedback was instrumental for the teachers to become reflective of the observation made by the principal.

As captured in the lived experience of the teachers on classroom observation, positive disposition allowed them to be more ready before the classroom observation and flexible during the classroom observation. They expressed that a positive disposition influences how they responded to any changes or situation in relation to classroom observation. This becomes an important tool to classroom observation. In general, their lived experience in classroom observation is like a defending a thesis before a panel. Just like doing a thesis, teachers were getting data to help them ready for the classroom observation.

CONCLUSION

Classroom observation is widely regarded as a diagnostic test for evaluating teacher effectiveness. Teachers will inevitably spend additional time preparing and depleting all available resources in this circumstance. In addition, classroom observation served as a platform for educators to engage in introspection and foster a constructive mindset. Hence, although educators experienced apprehension regarding classroom observation, they concurrently fostered exemplary approaches within the vocation of education.

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