

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

3.1. Defining Observation

- A method of generating data which involve the researcher immersing [him/herself] in a research setting, and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, actions, events, and so on, within it (Mason, 1996: 60).

3.2. Purposes of classroom observation

1. Allow for the gathering of data on classroom events, interactions and language used;
2. Reveal students’ attitudes and approaches towards learning, learning tasks, methods of teaching;
3. Describe and assess classroom processes;
4. Allow researchers to detail classroom management issues and encourage change and innovation.

(Cirocki, 2013: 63)

3.3. Elements of the classroom observation

1. **Setting:** classroom, lecture room, laboratory, online learning environment (e.g. Zoom lecture).
2. **Teachers:** acting as the transmitters of knowledge, assessors, and manager of classroom resources.
3. **Students:** the learners of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour.
4. **Materials:** textbooks, worksheets, tests, computers, applications, interactive boards, or films.

3.4. Types of classroom observation

1. **Participant:** the researcher takes part in the situation being studied.
2. **Non-participant:** the researcher does not take part in the situation.
3. **Covert:** the participants are unaware that they are being observed. Disguise may be accomplished by using one-way mirrors or hidden cameras.
4. **Undisguised:** the participants are aware that they are under observation.
5. **Structured:** the researcher specifies in detail what is to be observed and how the measurements are to be recorded (deductive).
6. **Unstructured:** the observer monitors all aspects of the phenomenon that seem relevant to the problem at hand, e.g., observing children playing with new toys (inductive).
7. **Qualitative:** focus on a quality or property of the thing being observed: red, white, big, tall, girl, boy, quiet or loud.
8. **Quantitative:** focus on things you actually measure: height, weight, number, frequency etc.

3.5. Instruments for classroom observation (tools)

Observation tools	Advantages	Disadvantages
<i>Field Notes</i>	Immediate and fresh account of events.	No chance of ‘action replay’.
<i>Transcripts</i>	Enable detailed analysis at leisure. Effective in analysing language use.	Loss of important visual and sound cues such as tone of voice and gestures.
<i>Audio Recordings</i>	Can be replayed several times for discussion, analysis, or corroboration of written account.	Loss of important visual cues such as facial expressions, gesture, body language, movement.
<i>Video Recordings</i>	Good visual and sound record which can be replayed several times during analysis.	Loss of information such as room temperature, smells, events out of camera shot.
<i>Check Lists</i>	Systematically records behaviours and events and their frequency.	Fail to explain why the events happened.
<i>Rating Scales</i>	Assign a value to behaviours and events.	Prone to subjectivity.

3.6. Advantages of classroom observation

1. Permit researchers to study the processes of education in *naturalistic settings*.
2. Provide more detailed and **precise evidence** than other data sources.
3. Lead to improved understanding and better models for improving teaching.
4. Provide a coherent and well-substantiated knowledge base about effective instruction.

3.7. Challenges of classroom observation

1. Do not allow the researcher access to the participants' **motivation for their behaviors** and actions (i.e. why do they act the way they act?).
2. Possibility of the **Hawthorne effect/ the observer effect** (i.e., students or teachers can modify aspects of their behavior in response to their awareness of being observed).
3. Classroom observation is often **time-consuming**.
4. May be viewed as too **subjective** (the researcher may 'see' what they want to see).

3.8. Ethical considerations in classroom observation

Before observing:

- Get all necessary permissions to sit in on the class.
- You may have to work hard to persuade some teachers to allow you into their classroom.
- Establish whether you also need permission from the children and/or their parents.
- Try and talk to the teacher before the class. Do not explain in great detail. The teacher may change their behavior as a result of your interest.
- Ask the teacher when to arrive, where you should sit, whether to go in before the teacher or learners.

When the class occurs:

- If students ask you who you are and why you are there, keep your responses brief. Try not to give them a reason to alter their behavior.
- Decide in advance how you will react if the teacher says 'Could you just join in with Group A and help them', or 'Can I use you to check some examples during the class'.
- Try and decide how you will react if the students involve you in the class (e.g. asking for help).

After the class:

- Debrief the instructor after the observation if you can.
- Express appreciation, orally and preferably in writing.
- Offer to send a summary of your findings to the school/teacher.