ENHANCING LANGUAGE TEACHERS’ SELF-EFFICACY THROUGH PEER OBSERVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Annotation. Peer observation is regarded as a compulsory or ‘tick-the-box’ practice in many higher educational institutions due to its overshadowed values and teachers’ intimidation of being judged by their colleagues. This article reveals the benefits of peer observation that can develop teachers’ self-efficacy and provides some effective tips to overcome the fear of being questioned.

Keywords: peer observation, teacher self-efficacy, higher education institution, teaching and learning, improving teaching practice.

Annotation. Проведения педагогических наблюдений считается обязательной или практикой для галочки во многих высших учебных заведениях из-за его скрытых ценностей и боязни учителей быть осужденными своими коллегами. В этой статье раскрываются преимущества наблюдения со стороны сверстников, которые могут развить самооценку учителей, и дается несколько эффективных советов, как преодолеть страх быть заданными.
Ключевые слова: взаимопосещение уроков, самоэффективность учителя, высшее учебное заведение, преподавание и обучение, совершенствование педагогической практики.


Kalit so’zlar: o’zaro dars kuzatuvi, o'qituvching ichki samaradorlik hissi, oliy ta'lim muassasasi, o'qitish va o'qish, o'qitish amaliyotini takomillashtirish.

It is not a secret that modern trends in teaching and learning have brought new approaches in higher education. Rapid changes in technology, globalization and new innovations in education challenged academic staff around the best philosophies, good practices to use so that they can adapt to new alterations, develop professionally and most importantly, deliver high quality lectures and seminars that students benefit a lot. Today, teachers have a variety of tools to improve their teaching and methodology. One of the tools that has been playing a crucial role in developing teachers’ professionalism and experience for over a long period of time is a peer observation. According to Bennett and Barp (2008) and Byrne, Brown and Challen (2010) peer observation is a procedure when colleagues observe one another with a generic aim of improving their teaching practice. Many higher education institutions included peer observation as an important part of a strategic approach to heighten the quality of teaching and learning in their establishments. They believe that peer
observation is a phenomenon of administrative importance as well as professional
development of teaching staff. Peer observation is also represented as a powerful
method of specific evaluation and record of information about what is going on in a
classroom. It often avails teachers of new methods of teaching that they have not
experienced yet. Therefore, the role of peer observation should not be underestimated
as it is important at every stage of a teacher's career. Apart from this, many teachers,
even experienced ones, are not always closely familiar with the nature of their
interactions and cooperation with individual students. Also, newly joined academic
staff or teachers with little teaching experience in higher education are mostly
suggested observing their colleagues to study how those faculty members master their
delivery of sessions, manage their class, give instructions or deal with students’
questions.

One of the challenges teachers face in their academic activities is reluctance or
resistance to observe other colleagues or to be observed by other teachers. Owing to
various reasons and factors not all teaching staff welcome peer observations. Despite
the fact that a peer observation is essentially seen as an effective mechanism and
supportive process for improving the quality of teaching in any educational
establishments, some teachers find it stressful due to lack of confidence and self-
efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy represents the belief of a
person’s capacities and potential to coordinate, organize and execute the courses of
action required to manage prospective situations. In his studies, Bandura (1997)
characterizes these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel. In
teaching, the belief and philosophy of a teacher play an important role. Some teachers
owe low self-efficacy and confidence and this prevents them from exploring new
methods and strategies that can be gained by peer observations. In fact, we, teachers,
are not born with innate teaching abilities. We develop and improve our teaching
skills by continuously working on our teaching methods, observing our colleagues to
see and study certain strategies that could be effective in our teaching context. Thus,
the more observations teachers are involved in, the more chances they have to make deep insights into their teaching and be confident in what and how they teach.

It is believed that, in order to raise the willingness of teachers to observe each other’s classes, they should be aware of the benefits of peer-observation. According to Bell (2005), by observing their peers’ classes, teachers can gain more confidence in their own teaching and learn how to transform the educational perspectives. This experience allows them to become more self-aware and reflective. The constructive feedback they get from the observers help them reflect on the strategies they use and enable them to strengthen their acquired skills and teaching techniques. Especially positive comments provided by the observers increase the self-confidence of the observees. Quinlan and Åkerlind (2000) state that particular tool helps to develop the collegiality and respect. When observed, the observees receive suggestions from their experienced colleagues on how to cope with certain difficulties in teaching and classroom management. Teachers discuss specific points related to their teaching, ask for help, offer their assistance, invite other colleagues to observe and comment on the way they teach. At the same time, they develop professional relationships with their colleagues which reduces stress and tension at their workplace and makes the working environment comfortable and free to cooperate with. Furthermore, the best practices of the observees followed during the peer observation are disseminated among colleagues at their working places and this serves for respect and appraisal. Also, through peer observation teachers can share their teaching practices, and self-reflect to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own teaching. Here, teachers have an opportunity to reflect and analyze how proficient and strong they are in certain spheres such as delivery of a teaching material comprehensively in a simple way, use of communication, interpersonal and social skills, management of a class, ability to get students engaged to the learning process and etc. Having spotted their strengths and weaknesses on them, teachers reconsider the way they teach and better the quality of their methods. It should be highlighted that peer observation helps to
identify “commonly experienced problems and needs, so that these can be made the basis of staff development opportunities designed by the Assessment, Learning and Teaching (ALT) team” (Race et al., 2009).

Although the peer observation is crucial to developing teaching skills, many professionals, even experienced teachers, voice their apprehension towards it. Most teachers associate classroom observation with nervousness and anxiety believing that their teaching competence will be judged or questioned (Borich, 2008). Majority of language teachers find observation so intimidating and bothersome worrying about the lack of fluency in their speech and poor pronunciation. Such cases urge us to provide some tips that we believe to be effective in enhancing teachers’ willingness to involve in peer observation.

In order to overcome the negative feelings about the classroom observation, teachers should understand the value of aforementioned benefits of it and they need to believe that these benefits will enhance their confidence and self-efficacy. For the start, they can ask some colleagues, with whom they hold mutual respect and understanding, to collaborate.

It is important to organize pre-observation and post-observation meetings for planning and reflecting purposes. Another important suggestion is to attend more experienced teachers' classes to observe how the same activity they applied in their own classes is organized by other teachers. Here, we need to emphasize that novice teachers should not feel downgraded when they find their peers’ classes more successful than their own; instead, it should motivate them to work even harder on their teaching methods.

Along with that, it is worth mentioning that the feedback and the consideration of it is of utmost importance. Ones who expect feedback from observers need to set themselves for positive and beneficial actions to be taken after getting it. One mustn’t forget that feedback is focused mostly on the procedure of teaching and learning, not on personal purposes.
On a final note, we would like to restate that the teachers should feel the usefulness of peer observation, which helps to enhance their confidence and self-efficacy for teaching. All things considered, the doors of classes should be open to observations all the time with a high expectation of success, professional development and better learning.

References:


