

Inside the Classroom: Observations on the Professional Context of an English Teacher

Dentro del Aula: Observaciones al Contexto Profesional de un Profesor de Inglés

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Abstract

Observation practices in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are essential for future educators. Observations in classrooms give education students practical insights into classroom management and teaching techniques, helping them refine their own practices for future teaching. The main objective of this research is to describe and explore the context of the teaching profession of an English teacher through observational practices. The study employed a qualitative, descriptive approach in which an observation of a teacher from a private institution was conducted to understand their professional context. A total of 40 hours of observation were carried out, focusing on the interactions between the teacher and students, as well as the teaching strategies used. Data were recorded through field notes and categorized to identify patterns in classroom management and the teacher's teaching methods. The study found that the teacher used effective learner-centered and communicative approaches, boosting student motivation and participation. Classroom management and feedback were strong, though the teacher used English less frequently (30%), suggesting room for improvement in language use during instruction. In conclusion, observation practices are vital for EFL teachers, offering practical insights and skills to enhance teaching effectiveness and confidence.

Keywords: Teacher observation practices; Professional Context; English language teaching.

Resumen

Las prácticas de observación en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés) son esenciales para los futuros educadores. Las observaciones en el aula proporcionan a los estudiantes de educación una visión práctica sobre la gestión del aula y las técnicas de enseñanza, ayudándoles a perfeccionar sus propias prácticas para la enseñanza futura. El objetivo principal de esta investigación es describir y explorar el contexto de la profesión docente de un profesor de inglés a través de prácticas de observación. El estudio empleó un enfoque cualitativo y descriptivo en el que se realizó una observación de un profesor de una institución privada para comprender su contexto profesional. Se llevaron a cabo un total de 40 horas de observación, centrándose en las interacciones entre el profesor y los estudiantes, así como en las estrategias de enseñanza utilizadas. Los datos se registraron mediante notas de campo y se categorizaron para identificar patrones en la gestión del aula y en los métodos de enseñanza del profesor. El estudio encontró que el profesor utilizaba enfoques efectivos centrados en el aprendizaje y comunicativos, lo que impulsaba la motivación y participación de los estudiantes. La gestión del aula y la retroalimentación fueron sólidas, aunque el profesor usaba el inglés con menos frecuencia (30%), lo que sugiere que hay margen para mejorar el uso del idioma durante la instrucción. En conclusión, las prácticas de observación son vitales para los profesores de EFL, ya que ofrecen perspectivas y habilidades prácticas para mejorar la efectividad y confianza en la enseñanza.

Palabras claves: prácticas de observación docente; contexto profesional; enseñanza del inglés.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice plays a pivotal role in teacher education programs, offering aspiring educators invaluable experiential learning opportunities. By engaging in real classroom settings, student teachers refine their instructional techniques (Jativa et al., 2021) and develop a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Recognizing the importance of teaching practice involves examining its foundational role in shaping future educators' professional identities.

According to Salinas et al. (2022), teaching practice is essential for future teachers as it allows them to grasp the dynamics of the classroom and the teacher's role in EFL education. Through observation and critical reflection, student teachers enhance their instructional methods, adapt to the sociocultural context, and build their professional identities. This hands-on experience helps them address the diverse needs of students and equips them with the skills necessary to navigate the challenges of modern education. By bridging theory and practice, teaching practice enhances pedagogical skills and prepares future educators to contribute effectively to the global education landscape.

The significance of teaching practice in EFL is underscored by several studies. Campos (2012) emphasizes the need for EFL teachers to develop a teaching philosophy, that guides their practice and professional growth. Rahimi (2018), acknowledges the recognized benefits of teaching practice but highlights ongoing challenges in adequately preparing future EFL teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students. Issues such as cultural and linguistic diversity, technological integration, and evolving educational standards necessitate a comprehensive understanding of effective teaching strategies in EFL contexts.

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) faces significant challenges, especially in classroom settings. Despite its global importance, English is a complex language to learn, and various problems frequently arise in the educational process. These problems include a decrease in student motivation, leading to apathy in completing tasks and studying. Additionally, students often achieve unsatisfactory academic results, and the classroom environment is not always conducive to effective learning. However, it is crucial to address these difficulties to

improve English teaching and promote better educational outcomes (Munggaran, 2022).

The main objective of this research is to describe and explore the context of the teaching profession of an English teacher through observational practices. Comprehensive understanding and addressing of this context are crucial for shaping future teacher performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative design, which involves collecting data in a natural setting and interpreting it, allowing for a deep understanding of the phenomenon in its specific context (Creswell, 2017). Additionally, a descriptive approach was utilized, as described by Walliman (2006), who emphasizes that description in descriptive research relies on observation to collect data and analyze situations, thereby enabling the understanding and prediction of future patterns and behaviors. This approach familiarized the observer-researcher with the professional context of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher.

To fulfill the research objective, observations were conducted the educational environment to collect detailed data on interactions and teaching strategies. This technique identifies effective practices, evaluates the implementation of methods, and provides feedback for professional development, thereby improving the teaching and learning process. Valdez (2000), as cited by Navarro (2013), describes observation as an empirical research method that helps analyze teaching work in its context. From a non-participant perspective, the observer can see what happens and identify strengths and areas for improvement. This study aims to examine the professional context of English teachers, helping the researcher understand the educational environment and teaching process. Additionally, it aims to develop critical thinking in future teachers and introduce new methods to meet student's needs. The researcher created a plan to explore the work environment of an English teacher through a research report.

Pre-professional practices encompassed a total of 80 hours, strategically distributed across three key stages: 20 hours for developing research instruments, 40 hours dedicated to observations, and 20 hours for inquiry development (Régimen de la Universidad Nacional de Loja, 2019). The researcher submitted the necessary documentation to proceed with the project at an educational institution,

including a request to the director for unrestricted access, observation schedules, and evaluations, along with the involvement of the main participating teacher.

The study's central figure was the teacher assigned by the school management, who taught grades 2 to 7, with an average of 15 students per grade, ages ranging from 7 to 11 years, some with special educational needs. Data was collected through detailed observations using field notes, which captured teacher-student interactions, instructional techniques, and classroom atmosphere. Field notes, as emphasized by Cohen (2018), are vital in qualitative research for recording contextual details essential for understanding complex social phenomena, providing a rich dataset for analysis.

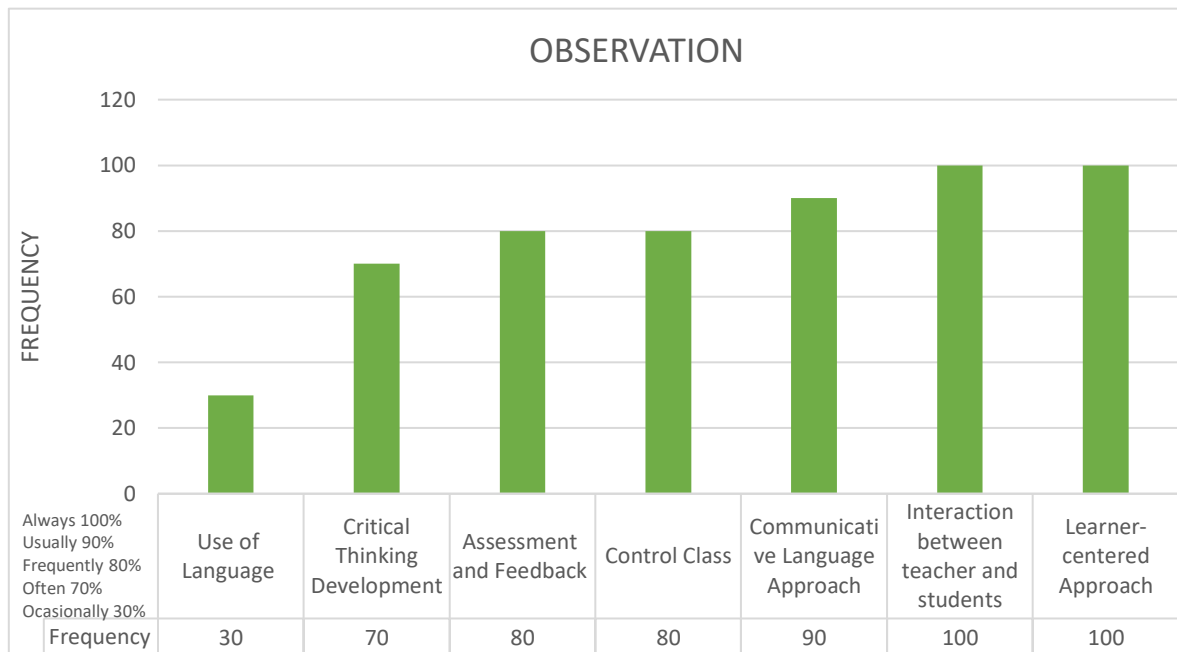
Observation data were categorized into simple conceptual units based on recurring themes related to teaching strategies and student participation. Matrices were used to compare classroom management, instructional methods, and student engagement across different teaching sessions. This structured approach helped identify patterns and variations in teaching practices, enhancing understanding of effective pedagogical approaches in EFL education.

RESULTS

As mentioned above, the analyzed results from observing teachers in EFL classes were organized into several categories. These findings provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the teacher’s professional context. It was observed that an environment where students feel emotionally well contributes to teaching success. To analyze the results, a bar graph was used to organize and interpret the data, which presented the following findings (Graphic1).

Graphic 1

Observation results



Elaboration: Jaen Ximena (2024)

Seven indicators were used in total, each selected and analyzed based on the theoretical framework of the project. These indicators examined various teaching aspects such as domains, EFL teaching standards, responsibilities, the teacher’s role, the rights of students and professors, and the policies educators must follow during the teaching process.

From this point, it was found that the teacher’s teaching approach was varied and mostly effective in teaching English as a foreign language, which is essential for good learning. Firstly, the learner-centered approach was the most outstanding, with a frequency of 100% (always). The teacher organized interactive activities and

games, which significantly increased student motivation and participation. Also, the communicative language approach was implemented with a frequency of 90% (usually). The teacher often conducted activities with the students, who had to present their work, thus encouraging speaking and meaningful vocabulary learning.

Likewise, this interaction between the teacher and the students was respectful and friendly, with a frequency of 90% (usually). Occasionally, the teacher used open-ended questions to encourage participation and critical thinking.

In terms of class control, the teacher used behavior management techniques to create a positive and motivating learning environment. The teacher often used visual and verbal cues to maintain order in the classroom, ensuring that all students could engage actively without disruptions. This approach was applied with frequency of 80% (frequently).

Regarding assessment and feedback, the teacher conducted both formal and informal assessments with a frequency of 80% (frequently). The teacher always provided constructive feedback, highlighting areas for improvement and student achievements to motivate and guide students in their learning. Finally, regarding the use of language, the teacher used English in class to explain concepts occasionally, but most of the time, the teacher used Spanish, reflecting a frequency of 30% (occasionally).

In conclusion, although the teacher showed high effectiveness in several aspects of teaching, areas such as the constant use of English in the classroom could benefit from additional improvements to optimize the educational process and student learning.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to identify the situations faced by English teachers in their professional environment through observations of their preprofessional activities- Observing English language classes play a crucial role in teacher development and reflection. Studies emphasize its importance in fostering critical thinking and professional growth among teachers (Martínez-Luengas, 2021).

After completing the pre-service practices, it became evident that the learner-centered approach stood out prominently. Student-centered methods in teaching

English greatly improve skills, learning strategies, and academic performance. This approach focuses on active student participation, responsibility in learning, and personalized instruction (Du, 2021; Gavrilic, 2022). Using these methods increases motivation and performance in learning English (Du, 2021; Chatterjee, 2023).

Critical thinking is crucial for English learners. Incorporating it enhances language skills and 21st-century abilities (Gandimathi and Zarei, 2019). Strategies include communicative tasks, authentic texts, explicit instruction, and cooperative learning (Orakci et al., 2019). Effective questioning and examining issues from different perspectives are key (Shalikiani-Skhireli, 2021). Integrating critical thinking improves language competence and promotes creativity, decision-making, and empathy (Cundar-Ruano, 2021). Teachers are essential in creating these learning experiences.

In relation to the use of English by the teacher in the classroom, it was very limited during the practical, but its use is important for students to learn recent research highlights the importance of English proficiency among teachers. Dávila González and Barrera Ovando (2023) note the need for better oral communication skills, while Murillo et al. (2019) emphasize motivation and relevant lesson design.

CONCLUSION

Observation practices play a fundamental role in the training of future teachers, especially in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Through these practices, student teachers gain first-hand experience of classroom dynamics, allowing them to develop a deep understanding of pedagogical areas essential for future educators to acquire the necessary skills to face the challenges of teaching in diverse contexts.

Direct observation in a real environment enables student teachers to analyze effective strategies, critically reflect on the practices observed, and identify areas for improvement both in teaching and their own professional development. This research highlights the relevance of the student-centered approach, which was observed as an effective methodology in motivating and engaging students. Additionally, observation practices help future teachers develop skills in behavior

management, formative assessment, and constructive feedback-key aspects for educational success.

In summary, observation practices provide a solid foundation for future teachers to build their professional identity, refine their teaching methods, and face classroom challenges with greater confidence and competence. This practical approach is essential for bridging the gap between theory and educational reality, preparing new teachers to contribute effectively to the global field of education.

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Conflict of interest

I declare that this research has no conflicts of interest, and therefore, I accept the publication guidelines of this journal.

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