

Systematic Classroom Observation: A Tool for Professional Development of Teachers in Nigeria

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Abstract:- The vital roles of the teachers in the teaching-learning enterprise demand proficiency. To be effective, teachers need to grow professionally in congruence to the dynamic society where they live. As the society changes, so are the human activities within the society, teaching inclusive. It is thus imperative that teachers improve on their teaching methods through professional techniques and strategies. Systematic Classroom Observation is a strategy that could be employed by teachers to enhance their professional development. It provides opportunity for the teachers to document their classroom activities and behaviour for review and amendment where necessary. This paper therefore, is a discourse of the concept of systematic classroom observation with respect to its influence towards engendering the professional development of teachers in Nigeria. The weaknesses and strength of systematic observation were overviewed as well.

Keywords:- Systematic classroom observation, professional development, proficiency, skillfulness, classroom behaviour, classroom effectiveness, teaching-learning process.

I. INTRODUCTION

The growth and developmental advancement of any nation is a function of her educational strength. The quality of education given to her citizens eventually metamorphosed into the work force and human capacity of the country. The value of education made available to the students cannot be delineated from the quality of the teaching done by the teachers. The teachers are facilitators of learning in the schools and thus are major determinants of the educational qualities obtained by the students while in school. A professional teacher is one with adept knowledge of the teaching-learning processes. The professional influence of the teacher effectively impacts the learners towards acquiring the desired knowledge and skills capable of engendering the national growth. To this effect, the professional development of the teachers is expedient and cannot be compromised.

Systematic classroom observation involves the quantitative and qualitative methods of recording classroom behaviour of both teachers and students from direct observations during classroom lessons. This requires that all the events and behaviour in the classroom are observed and accordingly recorded. The record is considered and assessed by the teacher after the classroom session to identify the adequacies, deficiencies and excesses during the lesson. This type of data are contains the frequency of occurrence of the targeted behaviour as they manifest during the classroom lesson as well as the duration taken by each behaviour.

Before the twentieth century, effective teaching research was being assessed on the basis of anecdotal record

and personality of the teacher. The need for more objective and valid assessment for teaching effectiveness paved way to the systematic methods of classroom observation. On this basis, recent researches had focused more on a more scientific analysis of teaching effectiveness through systematic classroom observation.

Classroom observation is desirable to improve the classroom instruction of the teacher (Adedayo, 2014). The data obtained from classroom observation are fundamental to the proceeding behaviour of the teacher in the classroom, as it unfolds both the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher. In such a case, the teacher is cautious of the lapses contained in the previous lesson towards improving on his teaching. Systematic classroom observation also gives room for the teacher to exhibit positive attitude toward the students. The negative and unpleasant attitude or behaviour exhibited against the students is avoided in the subsequent classroom teaching. In essence, classroom observation enhances significant improvement on teaching-learning process (Dave, 2011).

There exist several methods that can be employed to determine teaching effectiveness. These include charts drawing, rating inventory, checklists, and narrative descriptions. These methods and instruments have their limitations as they provide subjective reports of the classroom events. However, systematic classroom observation provides more detailed analysis of the events that transpired in the classroom. The coding systems involved in the systematic classroom observation enables the observer to document all the happenings and interactions between the teachers and the students as well as those among the students. In this regards, the data obtained are actual behaviour of the classroom and as subjected to objective analysis for valid assessment. The common observation instruments of recent are the Brophy-Good Dyadic Interaction System, Stallings Observation System, the Classroom Observation Schedule, Flanders' Interaction Analysis and Adedayo Classroom Behaviour Analysis Chart (Adedayo, 2014)

II. STRENGTHS OF SYSTEMATIC CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

The classroom observation that was objectively documented has the potency of assisting the teacher towards accurate review and appraisal of previous classroom interactions. The strengths of using systematic classroom observation then include the following. It:

- studies the teaching-learning process as they occur in;
- produces more accurate reports than other observation instruments;
- induces behavioural changes and confirm the change;

- improves instructional behaviour for better teaching; and provides accurate record of nearly every activity of both students and teachers during lesson.

It is noteworthy that research reports on classroom observation reveal a significant relationship between classroom behaviour and students' academic achievement (Herbert, 1991, 1995; Richards, & Charles, 1991). Almost every event of that transpired during classroom lesson has impact on the academic performance of the students. So to say, systematic classroom observation provides needed data and information capable of assessing the lesson effectiveness. This paper is therefore, by extension, a discourse on the professional development of teachers through the use of systematic classroom observation by engaging in self-evaluation and thus making teaching – learning process more interesting and effective.

III. PROCESS OF SYSTEMATIC CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

To critically observe classroom interactions, many different strategies can be employed. These include observation of oneself, observation of another person, team teaching, and exploring one's teaching as viewed by others. Jack in Adedayo (2014) prescribed a three stages of systematic classroom interaction as follow:

- **Stage 1: The Event Itself**

The first stage is the real teaching events, which include the classroom lesson, laboratory practical class or any other activities in the classroom. The focus of systematic classroom observation is often the teacher's teaching, which can be documented by self, (through any mean of recording) or by another observer while the teacher teaches.

- **Stage 2: Recollection of the Event**

The second stage of the observation strategy is a record of what happened in the classroom. This does not necessarily involve any explanation or taking judgement. Recollection of classroom events can be collated through many procedures such as written descriptions of classroom events, audio or video recording of the classroom activities, use of check lists, or coding systems to cover all the activities that took place in the classroom.

- **Stage 3: Review and Response to the Event**

The last stage involves the use of the recorded document. The document that contains objective description of the events in the classroom is then revisited and reviewed. The events are then analysed for interpretation. thereafter, questions may arise concerning the experiences therein.

For effective documentation of events in the classroom, there are approaches to towards engagement in systematic classroom observation. These are as follow:

A. Peer Observation

Peer observation is a process by which a teacher observes the teaching of another professional colleague. Through this, teachers are opportuned to review each other's teaching which exposes them to different styles of teaching. In such a situation, the teachers are able to reflect on their own teaching

towards effecting amendment where necessary. For a peer observation to be productive, Richards and Lockhart in Adedayo (2014) developed the following guidelines to follow:

- *Each teacher should both observe and be observed.* The teachers involved should interchange activities at different times. While one is teaching, the other observes and vice versa.
- *Pre-observation orientation session.* Before the commencement of the classroom observation, there is need for the teachers involved to meet for discussion of the procedure of the observation. A number of issues involved should be clearly identified and explained. These may include the class of students to be observed, the type of instructional material to use, the method of teaching to be employed, the targeted behaviour of focus, including any unexpected behaviour that may surfaced during the classroom teaching. Other issues to be discussed may include the type of observation to be made, whether audio or video recording, use of checklist or coding system as well as how to go about such task. The lesson schedule for a convenient time for the observations would be agreed upon as part of the orientation session.
- *The observation.* This is the real stage of the observation where the observer watches the teaching of his colleague in the classroom and carries out the observation as earlier discussed.
- *The post-observation.* After the lesson, both the observed and the observer would fix a time to meet for discussion. During the meeting, the observer would present his observational report for reappraisal by both parties. Every aspect of the report would be considered for review such as the lesson organization, teacher questions and students' responses, time management, students' performance on tasks, class control, time-on-task, students' performance during group work, classroom interaction behaviour and time-out period.

Through these guidelines, both teachers (observed and the observer) would gain deep insights into self-classroom teaching based on their partner's record of observations. The advantages of peer observation may include the following:

- It provides information on the types of teaching strategies that the teachers commonly use.
- It reveals unexpected interactions between teachers and students during the lesson.
- It provides more comprehensive information on students' performance during each session of the lesson than the teacher could have gathered personally.
- It provides useful information on the progress of a group during group work.
- It unveiled the teacher's weaknesses during teaching that needed amendments.
- It reveals the appropriateness or otherwise of the time given to students to complete some activities in the class.
- It exposes the need to improve on time management while teaching.
- It creates a better working relationship with another colleague.

- Other useful unplanned issues about teaching may be exposed at the post-observation review period.

B. Written Accounts of Experiences

Systematic classroom observation can also be carried out through written accounts of experiences in the classroom. The use of accounts of experiences through personal writing are common in other fields (Powell, 1985) and oftentimes gaining acceptability in teaching. Classroom experiences can be documented through various means. These include:

a) Self-Reports:

This is a situation where the teacher personally engaged in recording the events as they occur in the class during lesson. This may involve completing an inventory or a check list where the teacher indicates the teaching strategies used in a lesson or within a particular session of the lesson (Pak, 1985). Through Self-reporting, the teachers could assess his teachings on regular basis. Based on such report, the teacher would be able to see his real teaching rather than self-assumptions. The self-reports are more valid when specific skills of the lesson are targeted in a given classroom lesson and when the observational instrument is skillfully designed to accommodate all the targeted classroom behaviour and practices (Richards, 1990). The observations made by the teachers on themselves are devoid of biases that may be inherent in the observations of peer colleague. Thus, self-reporting is a viable tool for a teacher to identify his common teaching activities, assess whether or not the lesson objectives are met, see the classroom interaction pattern common to the class, time management, etc.

b) Autobiographies:

The use of autobiographies is particularly useful in teachers' preparation. However, practicing teachers could employ the process for professional growth. This may involve a small group of about 12 student-teachers. They could agree to engage in autobiographical documentation of their teaching practices for about 10 weeks. During this period, each teacher creates a written account of his teaching experiences and they would meet every week for review of each auto biography for comments and discussion with other colleagues. Powell in Adedayo (2014) suggested the use of reaction – sheets at such meetings, which each teacher would fill after completion of a lesson. Based on the report on the sheets, they are encouraged “to stand back from what they had been doing and think about what it meant for their own learning and what it entailed for their work as teachers of others”. Teachers work in pairs with a colleague teacher and teaching in turns. At a time, one serves as an observer while the other teaches, and completes a reaction sheet during the lesson. The reaction - sheet may contain the following questions. “What aspects of the lesson were most effective? What aspects of the lesson were least effective? Would you have taught any aspect of the lesson differently? Why?” The teacher who teaches would

also fill the reaction - sheet after the lesson. The two records can then be compared for discussion.

c) Journal Writing:

Journal or diary keeping involves records of daily experiences and observations in the classroom. It is a cumulative record of day-to-day classroom interactions and activities of the teacher. Scholars (Powell, 1985; Bailey, 1990) identified the goals of journal writing which include to:

- provide a record of the relevant learning experiences that have taken place.
- measure the progress of self-development of the teachers..
- provide opportunity for the teachers to personally explain their self-development.
- enhance a creative interaction between the:
 - teachers and the self-development process that is taking place;
 - participating teachers in the process of self-development; and
 - teachers and the facilitator of such development.

The method of keeping diary may vary but the common focus is that the participants keep regular accounts of their teaching experiences. The record must be a detailed documentation of all the activities in the classroom, upon which he could reflect on later after the lesson. The diary creates forum for interaction among the writer, the facilitator, and other participants.

d) Collaborative Diary Keeping:

This is a situation where a set of teachers form a team to collaborate in journal writing. Such team poses to serve as avenue for the development of critical reflection of the teachers' teaching (Adedayo, 2014). Collaborative diary keeping may take a period of 10 weeks of teaching where each keeps the diaries on their teaching. During this period, they read each other's diaries, and discuss their teaching every week. Whatever they observe in their teachings are also discussed. In such a collaborative diary keeping, Brock, Yu and Wong (1991) came up with the report that

“Collaborative diary-keeping brought several benefits to our development as second language teachers. It raised our awareness of classroom processes and prompted us to consider those processes more deeply than we may otherwise have”.

Collaborative diary-keeping can also serve as impetus for the teachers' motivation and encouragement. Through it, they get the nature and mode of their teachings and suggestions; and in that sense, it gives a way based on unbiased observation of their collaborators. By reading one another's diary entries, teachers are able to share their teaching experiences, and often learn as much from one another's entries while on their own. By reading and discussing to the contents of the diaries, the teachers are stimulated to review his/her own teaching to find out how and why he/she taught the way he/she did in the classroom.

It can be said however that:

- collaborative diary-keeping is more effective when the targeted issues are narrowed down;
- it consumes time; and
- participants must be ready to bear both pleasant and unpleasant report and comments from fellow collaborators, to have valid picture of their teachings.

C. Recording Lessons

A more convenient way of observing the classroom interactions by both the teacher and the students is through recording of classroom lessons. This can be either audio or video recording. Though, diaries and self-reports provide report of the classroom situations, they are limited in what they can cover in the classroom. They cannot capture the activities of teaching in details. The fact that many things happen concurrently during classroom lesson, most of which cannot be repeated, give credence to the advantage of lesson recording over written records of classroom interactions. It would be a little difficult, for example, to estimate the degree to which teacher's time was shared among students of lower and higher ability or the time used in each task of the lesson. Many important events of the classroom may be omitted by the teacher in his personal observation, and may not be easily remembered. There is the need therefore to supplement diaries keeping and/or self-reports with recordings of classroom lessons. This presents the real situation of the classroom teaching in a more detailed form.

Various recording gadgets can be used for lesson recording. In the twentieth century, tape recorder was one of the commonest audio recorders. However, in this twenty-first century, technology has made provision for different devices for recording audio, video or both together. Whatever gadget to be used by the teacher, such is placed strategically in a place where it can capture the exchange of words and pictures, as the case may be, which takes place during a lesson. The microphone can be dropped on the table of the teacher or attached to his cloth. Through this, all of the teacher's statements and interactions can be recorded as well as the responses and contributions of the students in the class.

There are many approaches to lesson's recording. Pak in Adedayo (2014) recommended recording for a one or two week(s) period and then randomly selecting one or two lesson period(s) for closer analysis. A 40 minutes recording is enough to provide well sufficient data for analysis. This type of recording can be used as the basis for a takeoff assessment of the teachings. In a school where video recording facilities are available, the teacher has the privilege to request that his/her lessons be recorded. Sometimes, one of the students can be assigned to do the recording or a teacher colleague. The main purpose of lesson recording is to capture to a greater extent, all the events that transpired in the classroom during the lesson. These events include the interaction that took place in the classroom, either between the teacher and class or among the students. Initially, audio/video recording may bring novelty to the class but would soon wear off after few lessons of its usage.

In conclusion, a systematic classroom observation unveils the teachers and students interactions in the

classroom and provides opportunity for the teacher to reflect on their classroom practices. Through this, they could effect changes in the way the teacher usually perceive teaching and his/her role in the process of teaching. Teachers who explore their own teaching through systematic classroom observation and critical reflection easily develop changes in their attitudes. They also gather information that can assist them to improve their professional growth as teachers, and as well bring improvement on the kind of support they give to their students. This submission therefore suggests that only the teacher's experience is inadequate for his/her professional growth; but when such experience is used in conjunction with systematic classroom observation that is backed up with reflection, his the potency towards enhancing the teachers; development.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Researches in systematic classroom observation had revealed its potency to effect improvement in teaching practices. However, researchers have not reached a final consensus on it as been wholly responsible for effectiveness in the classroom. Several criticisms and cautions related to the use of systematic classroom observation technique were raised. These criticisms of using the technique can be classified as being focused on three aspects, viz: (1) theoretical and epistemological criticisms; (2) methodological concerns; and (3) pragmatic concerns.

A. Theoretical and epistemological criticisms:

Many criticisms had been raised that are related to the theories of systematic classroom observation. These bother on process-product research. The criticism point of argument is that this type of research is lack the background theory, hence, cannot explicitly confirm that observed students' learning outcomes are influenced some targeted instructional behaviour (Evertson & Green, 1986; Gage, & Needels, 1989; Galton, 1988; Delamont & Hamilton, 1986). Another issue bothers on the selection of some variables in the classroom at the exclusion of others. Since there is no background theory or model as the basis for the technique, the critics argued that there is no reason for selecting some particular variables at the expense of the others and there cannot be any meaning ascribed to the results emanated from analysis of data so obtained. It was further argued that how the event or behaviour of the classroom were picked may only be known to the instrument developer or observer and not any other person as there is no established assumptions upon which the theory is anchored. Thus, it cannot be ascertained that a given teaching technique or method or instrument is responsible for students' learning outcomes.

In another perspective, Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Zeichner (1979) stated that this research approach has a behaviourist orientation and maintains that "it is possible to identify, control, and manipulate specific outcomes of teaching by altering selected aspects of a teacher's overt behaviour". They further contended that teaching is viewed "as the sum of discrete behaviour and a change in one or several of these behaviour is assumed to affect the quality of teaching as a whole". Their major argument bothers on the mind that these teaching behaviour "are often viewed

independent of the curricular context with which the techniques are associated". They were concerned that observers often focus on some set of selected behaviour of the classroom, without considering the preceding and subsequent behaviour for which they provide the context and meaning of the general behaviour. Another concern of epistemological critics of systematic classroom observation technique of research is that majority of the observational systems are limited in scope, focusing only on the observation of behaviour that can be measured quantitatively. Thus, complex events or behaviour expressed in the classroom cannot be handled through observational systems.

B. Methodological concerns:

Another limitation of systematic classroom observational techniques is the issue of the methodology upon which valid conclusions would be based. The primary concern relating to the methodology of systematic classroom observation has to do with the undue intrusion of the system on the normal classroom settings. Observer's effects may set in due to the awareness of both the students and their teacher that their behaviour are under observation. There is possibility that both the teacher and the students may change their natural behaviour due to the presence of an observer in the classroom. This would consequently produce reactive effects. Teacher's anxiety can cause low performance than usual, thereby invalidating the inferences drawn from such observation as the observed results are at variant to what normally occurs in the classroom. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the teachers' instruction may be better than usual due to the presence of an observer. Even though, research by Medley, Coker, and Soar (1984) opined that observer's effects may not be a serious concern in classroom observational technique, yet, the possibility that they threaten the validity of data collected and the subsequent inferences exists. The construct validity, which has to do with the "theoretical integrity" of the observed behaviour, is often not specified. Other types of validity such as criterion-related validity, that shows there is no report on the degree to which the observations measured relate to a standard criterion, as well as the concurrent validity that shows the relationship between the observation instrument and another instruments is not stated (Adedayo, 2014).

Another issue of methodological concern that needed to be addressed is the reliability of observation. Although Board (2007) reported that systematic classroom observation showed inter-rater agreement or observer accuracy, however, the stability of the teacher's observed behaviour aspect of the reliability and the internal consistency of the scale could not be ascertained.

Other critics of methodological concern of systematic classroom observation technique argued the time spent for observation. They questioned the actual period of time that will be needed to obtain valid observations, so also the adequate number of observations that are required for valid and reliable measurements during a given lesson (Ebmeier, & Good, 1979). The analyses of data collected through classroom observation constitute another burdensome issue. The generic approach given to classroom observation research poses another concern. It often encompasses

generalization across students' grade levels and lesson content areas, rather than focusing on a particular grade level and/or subject content area.

C. Pragmatic concerns:

The third group of critics of systematic classroom observation relate to pragmatic concern. This focuses on the practicality of conducting systematic classroom observational study. There are issues that both on pragmatic aspect of classroom observational technique. The major issue is that it is very costly to execute in terms of instrument and training of observers. Other issue of pragmatic concern is the time taken to observe, especially when it involves self-reports. Also, the training of the observers consume a lot of time as series of interactive sessions are needed for a number of days so that the observers would be acquitted with what to do for valid observation. Before the researcher could gain access to the schools and classrooms to carry out observations may pose problem. It is customary of most of the school administrators to be unwilling to allow observation in their schools as they consider it a disruption to their normal learning situation. The teachers' awareness that they are under observation subjects them to consciously adjust their teaching, and in such a case, the measured observation would not be valid.

Moreover, the wrong use to which the data of classroom observations are put is another pragmatic problem. Classroom observations provide useful data for formative evaluation, but out of place for summative evaluation where decisions can be taking on the teacher, like teacher's recruitment, dismissal, or salary increase (Adedayo, 2016). Another misuse to which observational research can be put is for Ministry of Education at Federal, State and Local levels to apply the results in formulating some rules or standards for developing evaluation instruments. These misuses are tagged "accidents" of the research, rather than problems associated with the "essence" of the study.

The aforementioned criticisms and shortcomings of classroom observation do not render it valueless and useless. Most of them are incidental issues of systematic classroom observational research. Gage and Needelsin Adedayo (2014) have rebutted most of these shortcomings of systematic classroom observation and have presented cases of the contribution of classroom observational research to theories of instruction. Better still, Medley, et al (1984) submitted that the argued on methodological limitations of observational research are being addressed by recent researchers. He noted the positive impact of laptop computer for recording events and behaviour during classroom observation, which has made lesson recording more convenient and easy. The use of laptop computer provides precise, detailed and accuracy data of the events and activities that transpired in the classroom than the traditional clipboards and stopwatches for measuring classroom behaviour.

V. WAY FORWARD FOR SYSTEMATIC CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

There is no single means of solving human problems, so is the data source to solve all instructional issue. In that wise, various measures or techniques are needed to adequately capture the activities and behavioural traits of instructional process in the classroom. For valid and reliable classroom observational study therefore, there is need for redirection and adaptation into the 21st century perspective of technology. The use of technology would ease the process of observation during lesson as well as analyzing the data obtained from such observations. For valid data in systematic classroom observation research the following strategies are suggested:

- both qualitative and quantitative methods of observation systems should be combined;
- observation instruments that are based on set standards of pedagogy should be developed;
- there should be establishment of a theoretical framework for systematic observational Study;
- student-centered observation instruments that allow comparisons between groups of students within the class should be employed; and
- appropriate instruments that assess authentic, interactive instructional practices for behaviour recording should be used.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the discourse, it has been established that systematic classroom observation has the potency of providing useful information for the teachers about their classroom interaction, through which they could identify their strengths and weaknesses. This set of information provide the basis for change in the classroom behaviour of the teacher, and consequently improves the effectiveness of the teacher. Summarily, the professional development of the teachers can be enhanced through the use of systematic classroom observation.

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