

Classroom Observation in the Bhutanese Classroom: Its Reality and Limitation

Tshewang Dorji

Dechencholing Higher Secondary School, Thimphu Thromde, Thimphu, Bhutan
tshewangtshewang@gmail.com

Abstract

The teaching-learning process in a classroom is best understood through classroom observation. Classroom observation helps teachers to improve their teaching-learning quality. The purpose of the study was to observe the teaching-learning process inside the classroom. The study was qualitative in nature and used two rounds of classroom observations. Data were collected from 35 (20 male and 15 female) teacher participants in the school. The study was conducted at one higher secondary school under Thimphu Thromde, Bhutan. A non-probability convenient sampling technique was used for the study. The classroom observation data were analyzed using the process of emerging themes. The finding of the study revealed that teaching consists of chalk and talk method and teacher direct. Few students were found participating, involving, and questioning. A majority of teachers use lower-order thinking questions with few teaching-learning materials. Lesson plans do not address all components of the teaching-learning process. The findings recommend ensuring teaching-learning materials such as models, toys, and visual tools in the classrooms. There is a need for frequent professional development on content and pedagogical practices for teachers to raise the quality of teaching-learning. Teachers need to maintain a standard lesson plan with various components of lesson introduction, the procedure of carrying out activities, explaining concepts, ways of assessing learning, and student engagement techniques.

Keywords: Teaching-learning, classroom observation, assessment, teacher, student

Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.4080422

1. Introduction

The education sector remained a high priority for the government of Bhutan since the start of the first Five-Year Development Plan in 1961 (MoE, 2020). The government allocates the highest proportion of budget annually on education. The quality of education is a matter of great concern in Bhutan. To pursue quality education, classroom observation plays a critical role. Quality teaching arises from classroom practices and child centeredness (MoE, 2020). The seven standards of Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (MoE, 2019) are elaborated with 37 focus areas by incorporating classroom practices and assessment. Observation is important at every stage of a teacher's career.

School Management, education monitoring officials, and heads of departments favor classroom observation because through classroom observation they know the strength and weaknesses of teaching-learning. A classroom observation is one of the tools to assist teachers and students in the teaching-learning process and to provide constructive critical feedback to the teachers. The main aim of the classroom observation is to improve classroom instructional techniques, assessment, and classroom management, and to evaluate job performance. According to Zaare (2012), the major goals of classroom observation are: to prepare beginning teachers with knowledge and skills; to improve teachers' classroom instruction through feedback; and to

improve their teaching-learning through reflection and analysis.

Since the researcher was head of the economics department for the last five years, the researcher took a special interest in studying the effects of classroom observation on teaching-learning. The researcher carried out classroom observation to assesses teacher colleagues as per the norm and forms issued by the school. After the observation, the observer gives feedback from classroom observations about classroom behavior and professionalism. The education officials and school always believe that classroom observation does improve teaching-learning and enhance academic achievement. Many scholars believe that classroom observation is a powerful practical approach in primary and secondary schools to help teachers to improve their teaching quality (Halim, Wahid, & Halim, 2018). The reality and challenges in the classroom were little studied in Bhutan. Through international perspectives, classroom observation needs to be reorganized in a systematic approach so that classroom observation can enhance teaching-learning. The feedback from observers can make teachers aware of their classroom functions and bring about changes. Through feedback, teachers can understand their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, teachers will try to improve their teaching practices (Halim, Wahid, & Halim, 2018).

1.1. Objective of the Study

Since not many studies were carried out in Bhutan on teaching-learning through classroom observation, this study aims to examine real teaching-learning happening inside the Bhutanese classrooms.

1.2. Research Question

Based on the objective of the study the following were the research questions for guiding the study:

1. What are the realities of teaching-learning inside classrooms of Bhutan schools?
2. What are some of the measures to improve teaching-learning in the classroom?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The findings from the study are relevant to a) teachers in discovering the gaps in their practices and consider about improving their knowledge and skills; b) the Teacher Professional Support Division (TPSD) under the Ministry of Education (MoE) in understanding the professional needs of in-service teachers and design targeted professional development programs for teachers and c) the Colleges of Education of the Royal University of Bhutan in identifying crucial areas that require attention in the programs and pedagogical practices of teachers.

2. Literature Review

Classroom observation is not a new phenomenon in schools. Observation is more than just looking. Observation means looking at and noting systematically events, people, and behavior. Observation is another means of collecting data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Classroom observation is defined as a method of evaluating and recording specific information about what is going on within a classroom (Centra, 1993). Teaching is a lifelong learning process to explore new ideas, new ways of teaching to meet the needs of every student. Teachers often have a good intention about teaching-learning however they are often unaware of their limitations. It is necessary to have classroom observations to give constructive feedback that might not be revealed by other assessment methods (Zaare, 2012). Classroom observation helps teachers to narrow the gap between theory and practice. Teachers need training to reduce the gap between theory and practice (Reed & Bergemann, 2001).

Classroom observation is crucial to gather data from natural situations. The outcome of good teaching-learning has a positive correlation on classroom practices and classroom engagement. According to iDiscoveri Education and Royal Education Council (REC) (2009, p.12) "what happens inside the classroom determines what students learn, engaged students, effective instruction, authentic assessment, rigorous curriculum and inviting classroom environment most directly leads to better student learning". A classroom is a place where many processes of teaching-learning occur (Zaare, 2012). The classroom observations are usually done by the school management, teachers, and parents to gain first-hand experience of what is happening in a normal classroom. Besides, it also identifies some of the common instructional practices and how the teacher gives feedback and assesses in the classroom (UNESCO, 2005). Assessment is known as a source of information to understand students and inform teaching-learning practice. Assessment practices measure what students learn additional feedback is provided by teachers. Teachers need to pose a set of competency-based assessments through the use of high-level thought-provoking questions at the end of the lesson to assess teaching-learning outcomes (MoE, 2020).

Classroom observations are used for coaching and mentoring of faculty development as well as evaluate the quality of teaching-learning. Observation data are often collected in detail and teachers can immediately relate, translate, and build upon in their teaching practice (Hora & Ferrare, 2013). Similarly, classroom observations are important to capture the non-cognitive skills such as collaboration or self-expression important for the long-term success of students and teachers (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001).

Classroom observation plays a central role in making teaching-learning more visible. Classroom observation is one means where the observer can provide constructive critical feedback to teachers to improve their classroom instruction and interaction between teachers and students. Classroom observation is widely known to encourage teachers to collaborate and improve teaching practice. It also creates an opportunity to see the teacher and students in real-life teaching situations (Halim, Wahid, & Halim, 2018).

The 2009 iDiscoveri Education and the REC study on the quality of school education in Bhutan: Reality and opportunities revealed that classroom teaching was teacher-led, chalk and talk, and lack of measurement of real learning. Teachers do not have effective classroom management techniques to engage students significantly. The classroom assessment does not close the gap between what is taught and what students learn. Students' learning outcomes were below the expectations of their class standards. Students were unable to perform basic numeracy and literary task. Homework, classwork, and examinations were the predominant form of assessment in the schools.

Globally there are several criticisms about classroom observations. The teaching instruction is found better during classroom observation than usual teaching instructions. The presence of an observer may change teacher or student behavior. Observer effects are felt in the classroom where teachers and students are aware that their classroom behaviors are being observed. During the observation, teachers alter their teaching instruction when observers observed their classroom. Classroom observations should not be tied to summative decisions such as teacher promotion, teacher's terminations, and teacher recruitments. Classroom observations are useful tools for formative evaluation (Halim, Wahid, & Halim, 2018). According to Zaare (2012), the process of observation and evaluation requires a very high degree of training, analytical skills, professional ethics, and objectivity. Class observations are most effective when both the observer and teacher collaborate. Observer can participate in the class discussion only if invited to do so.

Despite criticism and limitation, classroom observation brings benefits to teachers and their

students at the end of the observation such as improvement of classroom teaching-learning instruction. The classroom observation should be developmental, not judgmental for constructive purposes. The classroom observation has to be accurate, focused, and objective as far as possible.

3. Methodology

This study used the following research methodology:

3.1. Research Design

The study was exploratory in nature and based on classroom observations.

3.2. Population

Teachers in the higher secondary school under the Thimphu Thromde constituted the population of the study.

3.3. Sample Design

Since the researcher is working in a secondary school under Thimphu Thromde, the researcher's school *was* selected through non-probability convenient sampling techniques for the study. Data were collected from 35 (20 male and 15 female) teacher participants from 2014-2019. The classroom observations were carried out in subjects such as Economics, Accountancy, Commerce, and Mathematics of classes nine to twelve.

3.4. Sampling Techniques

35 (20 male and 15 female) teachers participated in the study.

3.5. Sample Unit

The teacher participants are the colleagues of the researcher in the sample school.

3.6. Instrument

Classroom observation covered lesson plan, content knowledge, the interaction between teacher students, gender needs, learning activity, closure of lesson, formative assessment and classroom cleanliness. After the observation, the researcher reviewed the notes taken in the class and shared what went well and what areas were needed for the improvement with the teachers. The researcher sat at the back and observed classes without interrupting the flow of the class and lesson.

3.7. Data Collection

The study is based on primary data. The primary data were collected through classroom observations. There are two terms of five months in a school academic year. The first term starts from February to June. The second term starts from August to mid-December. Two observations were carried out, one during the first term and the second during the second term. Observation diaries were maintained for interpretation. Besides, the lesson plan of teacher participants was analyzed to substantiate the findings.

Before class observation, the teacher discusses with the observer goals for the class observation, what the researcher wants the teacher to pay attention to, and schedule meetings to discuss the observation. The observer listened to the teacher, describe rather than evaluate what the observer saw, and offer constructive suggestions (Zaare, 2012).

4. Data Analysis

For classroom observation, thematic analysis was used to analyzed data. After coding and classifying qualitative data, themes were generated and analyzed. Lesson plans and classroom cleanliness were also analyzed to increase the value of the study and match the findings.

5. Finding and Analysis

5.1. Effective Teaching-Learning Instruction

Approaches to teaching-learning are teacher-centered. 10 percent of teachers used PowerPoint slides in the classroom. Teaching is a chalk and talk method for more teachers. The teacher explains the topic or lesson within prescribed time of 50 minutes. In between the lesson, few individual or group activities were assigned. Only a few students (20 percent) asked questions and interacted with teachers during the teaching-learning process. It was observed that students get limited time to think, comprehend, and demonstrate their learning in the classroom. In recent times, teaching has shifted from the traditional paradigm of teasing knowledge and teacher-centered to student-centered learning, active to promote student initiative, independent, knowledge building, deliberation assessment (Dorji, 2018; Howell, 2011).

Roleplay, group activity, case study, lecture, and demonstration were common teaching strategies used in the school. However, none of this strategy was gender-responsive or addressed special needs of students. 10 percent of teachers followed student-centered learning in between the lesson or topic. The teacher asked probing questions during the lessons. Very little real-life examples were linked with a lesson to bring experiential and real-life experiences.

All teachers started lesson or topics with a recapitulation of previous topics by asking a few questions. The teacher introduces the topic either by writing a topic on the board or through PowerPoint slides. However, 95 percent of the teachers fail to explain the reason for studying the topic or lesson. As a result, students may not show interest in the lesson or topics stated. 70 percent of teachers complete topics or lessons without proper summarization of the lesson due to poor time management. The teacher assumed that the learning outcome was achieved after the completion of the topic or lesson.

In the classroom, only average students ask three to four questions during teaching-learning. 70 percent of students were found attentive and actively participated in the group activity. Only 5 percent of students meet the teachers and clarify doubts after school.

5.2. Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Skills

The class observations reveal that 60 percent of teachers are not able to express thoughts in their own words. 70 percent of students face difficulty in explaining concepts in their own words after the completion of the lesson. 50 percent of teachers were found unaware of appropriate teaching strategies. Such problems can be abridged through professional development programs. 50 percent of teachers were unaware of effective classroom management techniques. In many classes, teachers used group activity, individual activity, lecturer cum demonstration, and PowerPoint slides as the common teaching strategy in the classroom. None of the teachers used cooperative learning, problem-solving, student research, role play, differentiated learning, experiential learning, concept mapping, flow charts, simulation games, project-based learning, learning through feedback, team teaching and co-teaching, live consultancy assignments, and pedagogy of service-learning. In the study by Dorji (2018) teachers should at least incorporate one project-based learning in their subject areas to attain a higher level of professionalism.

Peer review is crucial for successful learning in the school. Only the head of department or management visit class to observe classes to fulfill the mandate of the MoE. Other teachers hardly observe and visit each other's classrooms due to heavy teaching loads. Teachers get less time to

prepare a lesson based on the curriculum or syllabus. The researcher observed only a handful of teachers visit the library to refer to books and journals.

The handbook for teaching practices and methodology published by Paro College of Education and Samtse College of Education were not available in the staffroom and school library. During the class observations, fewer innovative teachers offer quality education to the students. However, they were few in number and isolated from each other, and other teachers cannot draw inspiration from them.

5.3. Teaching Learning Materials

According to iDiscoveri Education and the REC (2009), teaching-learning materials are important in the classroom. It enhances teaching-learning and makes teaching instruction effective and engaged students in teaching-learning. Based on the classroom observation, teaching-learning materials were absent in the classroom. In some classes, they were few diagrams and illustration written on a chart papers pasted on the classroom walls. The teacher uses such chart papers in the classroom to save time or to cover the syllabus. Chart papers and maps are the only teaching-learning materials available in the classrooms. Around 30 percent of teaching-learning materials were untidy. The unavailability of teaching-learning materials is a serious concern in the school. 40 percent of observed classes have a reading corner. The reading corner is found lacking in reading materials. During the observation, the researcher found that there were no proper place or racks to keep teaching-learning materials.

Schools are inadequately equipped with computer and internet facilities. There were 30 computers without internet in the student computer laboratories in the observed school. Considering 1800 students, the current use of the computer is questionable. The student computer laboratory was not kept open for students' use during recess time. There is a positive correlation between teaching-learning materials and student learning outcomes.

None of the teacher participants has reflected gender needs in their day to day lesson plans. The use of teaching-learning materials, language use in the classroom, classroom set-ups, and interaction were not gender-responsive (Dorji, 2020).

5.4. Assessment in Teaching-Learning

During classroom observations, it was found that 70 percent of teachers asked low-level questions. Higher-order questions such as analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation were tested less during the lesson. This could encourage rote learning as well as recall. The ongoing assessment is not reflected in the lesson plans. In all classrooms, there was an absence of peer and self-assessment, exhibitions, creative performance, innovative presentations.

After the completion of the lesson, the teacher assigned homework with a due date. 80 percent of teachers mark homework tasks with red ticks. There is an absence of remarks with constructive feedback. 40 percent of the teachers had not noticed language and grammar errors. 25 percent of teachers went around the class and gave feedback for peer correction and self-correction. Good learning is a direct outcome of good teaching in the classroom.

10 percent of the teachers had assigned the project to the class. The project was similar to homework. The difference is only the length of completion. The teacher has marked the project with red ticks. The project marks and feedback were absent. This could never encourage students to know their weaknesses and improve to do better in the next project. There were no encouraging remarks on student efforts and achievements.

During classroom observation, the researcher noticed a limited use of formative assessment. Class tests, homework, and term examinations are the predominant assessment used in the school. Other forms of assessment such as interviews and portfolio were absent. The assessment data of students were not used for the teaching-learning process. The assessment was used directly for the promotion of students to higher classes. There is also a lack of evidence to prove between teacher-students review on homework, project, and other related teaching-learning activities in the classroom. The observation reveals that real learning is absent. In recent times, there is a shift from summative assessment to formative assessment in many developed countries (Tshering & Phuampal, 2018).

There is an absence of authentic assessment in the Bhutanese classrooms. What students learn and what the teacher taught is dependent on what gets assessed. According to iDiscoveri and REC (2009, p. 14)

authentic assessment means continuously measuring individual student's work for their understanding and performance, review of assessment data, followed by individualized feedback to students what they can do to improve their learning and to teachers to make changes to instruction, curriculum, and professional development.

5.5.Lesson Plan

The observation of lesson plans revealed that the lesson was well structured as per the format framed by the school. A lesson plan is a must for all teachers as per the monitoring division under the MoE. Teachers follow a block and yearly plan to frame lesson plans. However, there is an absence of time allocated for each component in the lesson plans. The content of the topic was not written well in the lesson plans. Teachers hardly follow up and self-evaluate the lesson plan after the completion of the topic or lesson. The component of the lesson plan was similar for all lessons. The classroom observation reveals that all teachers were doing similar things to facilitate lessons in the classroom.

In all lesson plans, questioning, inquiry, and feedback were absent. 50 percent of teachers used the same lesson plans to teach two sections of the same level. There is an absence of doing anything differently between the two sessions and may not address the special needs of students. The lesson plan lacks components of home works, projects, and assignment corrections.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is the development philosophy of Bhutan. Thus, Bhutanese education should enhance happiness and wellbeing in the classroom. However, the classroom observation revealed that none of the wellbeings were taken into considerations during the teaching-learning process. 99 percent of the lesson plans has reflected GNH values in the lesson plans.

5.6. Classroom Cleanliness

All classroom floors were clean and the air free from foul smell. 98 percent of the classroom is free from cobwebs. The observed classrooms were conducive for teaching-learning except for the sheer size of students. Three classes (21.4 Percent) of the classrooms were equipped with a projector. A clean, secure, safe, and conducive learning environment is a prerequisite for the academic potential and good health of teachers and students (Ana, et al., 2011). All observed classrooms had sufficient light with air circulation.

There were 35 to 40 students in each class. The ideal size of a classroom should be around 24 students for primary schools and 30 students for secondary schools. This could be one possible

reason for teachers not being able to practice role-play and simulation games in the classrooms. The dimension of the classroom on average was 22 feet by 23 feet. The ideal primary and secondary school area requirement can be calculated based on 6m² of the total area covered per child (iDiscoveri & REC, 2009).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study showed teaching-learning is chalk and talk with more teacher direct. There is less student participation, involvement, and questioning. There is a lack of life examples for students to find an opportunity to demonstrate and apply their skills. A majority of teachers use low-level questioning. As a result, it might promote learning by rote or learning by remembering. All teachers work hard with good intentions; however, they were found unfamiliar with many new developments in pedagogical practices. It was clear that teachers were guided by limiting beliefs and attitude that lower their impact in the classroom. The professional development program was infrequent and do not cover maximum teachers. Based on the findings the following recommendations were made to raise the quality of teaching-learning in the classrooms:

- ensure teaching-learning materials such as models, toys, and visual tools in the school. There is also a need for a proper place or racks to keep teaching-learning materials.
- need frequent professional development on content and pedagogical practices for maximum teachers to raise the quality of teaching-learning. Systematic professional development may raise the quality of classroom instruction and expose teachers to newer education methods, strategies, and innovation in teaching. The MoE, school, and relevant stakeholders need to organize seminars for teachers to attend, deliver papers and share practices, learn from colleagues about pedagogical practices.
- maintain a standard lesson plan with a component of introducing topic or lesson, the procedure of carrying out activities, explanations of concepts, ways of assessing learning and, student engagement techniques (iDiscoveri Education and the REC, 2009).

The findings of the study show similar patterns and trends with a previous study done on the quality of school education in Bhutan: reality and opportunities by iDiscoveri Education and the REC in 2009. The gap remains the same because there is a limited collaboration between the MoE, REC, and schools. The findings of the study were not disseminated to the teachers across the nations nor the mindset of the teachers were changed or due to resistance or disengagement of teachers. According to iDiscoveri Education and the REC (2009, p.77), the "resistance and disengagement of stakeholders is the number one reason why many well-intentioned and even well-resourced reform programs have failed". Towards this, teachers, students and parents must be informed, educate, and make accountable.

7. Limitation and Implication of the Study

The study is limited to one higher secondary school in Bhutan under Thimphu Thromde. The sample size was very small may be generalized to some extent. A sincere effort has been made to arrive at a fair conclusion.

A similar study at a larger scale is necessary to further validate the current finding and analysis. For better findings, future researchers are recommended to adopt a mixed-method approach comprising of a survey questionnaire for parents, students, teachers, and policymakers. Interviews and focus group discussions with the same groups of participants are recommended. The sample for the study should be equally distributed among the four regions of the country for better representation. This is important to validate the findings for application at a national level.

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European journal of volunteering and community-based projects Vol.1, No 2; 2020

ISSN: 2724-0592 E-ISSN: 2724-1947

Published by Odv Casa Arcobaleno

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