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Classroom observation as reflective practice: a pre-service TESOL teacher's professional development

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A reflective practice is crucial for pre-service TESOL teachers' initial training and ongoing professional development. This paper reports on classroom observation as the reflective practice in teaching English to adult learners of other languages in Australia. Using participant observation as a research method, a pre-service TESOL teacher observed natural ESL teaching sessions of different class levels for 20 hours, following carefully planned procedures (pre-observation, during observation and post-observation) and using practical observation tools and techniques. Three significant findings emerged as a result of critical reflection and analysis. First, the ESL teachers established student-teacher rapport through flexibly managing and supporting the learning needs of adult students of diverse language and cultural backgrounds. Second, the teachers facilitated student learning by focusing on learner numeracy skills through teaching relevant vocabulary in context and peer-learning activities. Third, the ESL teachers succeeded in motivating students to participate in learning through scaffolding student-centered and communication-based learning tasks. The paper concludes by summarizing the key points covered, discussing the limitations and the pedagogical implications of classroom observation as a meaningful reflective practice and professional development.

KEYWORDS

classroom observation, pre-service TESOL teachers, professional development, reflective practice, teaching pedagogy, teaching methodology, adult learners

1 Introduction

Classroom observations constitute an essential component of the educational environment, with teaching English to adult speakers of other languages as a good example. According to Farrell (2022), they are a methodical procedure that facilitates the sharing of teaching pedagogies with the expressed goal of professional growth in language education. When it comes to lesson preparation, classroom management, teaching methodologies, and instructional tasks, classroom observations play a crucial role in determining the future paths of pre-service teachers. Additionally, as suggested by Gu (2022), this approach provides a means for observers to understand language education through systematic observation of instructional delivery and classroom management tactics and reflect on their pedagogical competency. Moreover, one of the noteworthy benefits of classroom observation in the field of TESOL is the development and enhancement of the critical thinking and analytical skills of pre-service teachers (Yang, 2023). The key to this process

is that observers need to approach observations with a critical eye, which requires them to assess teaching strategies professionally. Through this critical thinking process, student-teachers can identify the merits and drawbacks of their colleagues' instructional approaches, which helps them gain insight into the live classroom teaching and learning activities as professional development.

This paper aims to reflect critically on the firsthand observations of teaching and learning as part of a postgraduate TESOL placement. After the introduction, the following five main sections include an overview of the importance of classroom observation and reflective practice, a research method with a discussion of the procedures before classroom observations, an analytical presentation of three different classroom scenarios, along with critical reflective practice (RP) and a conclusion. This paper aims to study the following research question: How does a pre-service TESOL teacher use classroom observation as a reflective practice to enhance their professional development?

2 Classroom observation and reflective practice

Classroom observations, which are widely acknowledged as a pivotal instrument in educational contexts, find extensive application across diverse domains but are not limited to professional development initiatives for educators, pre-service TESOL teachers (PSTTs) and in-service teachers. The primary goal of employing classroom observation approaches is to conduct a detailed analysis, measurement, and evaluation of the effectiveness and caliber of pedagogical practices used in learning environments. According to O'Leary (2020), classroom observations have many benefits beyond evaluation. They can be used to support administrative reviews, student assessments, reviews of instructional materials, and teacher self-evaluations, among other goals.

The critical reflection component is essential to the classroom observation process when observers reflect methodically and thoughtfully on the effectiveness and significance of their observations. This reflective activity is a key instrument for the observer to assess how well the observed pedagogical practices support the overall educational environment and are in alignment with predetermined instructional objectives. Based on Farrell's (2022) research, one of the most significant advantages of conducting classroom observations is the exceptional opportunity that gives experienced teachers to mentor their less experienced peers. The professional landscape in teaching and learning situations is ultimately enhanced by the dynamic exchange of insights, tactics, and information sparked by this mentoring relationship. As a result, inexperienced educators will be able to connect the theories they have learned in class or training to real-world ESL teaching. The discussion surrounding the importance of classroom observations is based on the understanding that these observations are essential in creating an atmosphere that

is favorable to efficient teaching and learning. As a means of professional development, classroom observations provide a significant contribution to the creation of a strong learning community marked by the exchange of pedagogical knowledge and collaborative learning. It was found that the difficulty of classroom observation tasks could become intrinsically challenging when one lacks a fundamental comprehension of teaching methods and pedagogical principles.

In addition, the RP process that arises from classroom observations takes on special significance since it allows the observer to identify the most important instructional aspects that have been successfully observed within the allotted time parameter. Slade et al. (2019) prove that reflective practice can be demonstrated to student-teachers so that they can have a deeper comprehension of the knowledge being covered in class. Engaging with critical incidents (CIs) enhances their awareness of the potential for unanticipated situations in the classroom, which require immediate and appropriate action to address or mitigate their impact (Kabilan et al., 2024). The improvement of teaching approaches as well as professional development depends on this judgement. Essentially, observation in the classroom becomes more than just an assessment tool; it becomes a sophisticated reflective activity that promotes ongoing development and enhancement in the curriculum. Karim et al. (2024) report that reflecting on reflections on critical incidents allows PSTTs to participate in continuous discussions based on knowledge gained from self-reflection and peer reflection. Their identity development as TESOL teachers is continually enhanced, realigned, and adjusted through this process. Furthermore, the critical discussion with the mentor is also a vital part of RP.

Given the aforementioned factors, it is obvious that classroom observation is an essential component of the complex web of teaching and learning environments, promoting ongoing professional development and a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge.

3 Methods

Participant observation was chosen as a research method as it allows for an opportunity to observe closely the various events of interest happening in the real classroom setting, reflect critically and make sense of them (Jorgensen, 2020).

3.1 Observation context

In our case, the dynamic ESL classroom teaching and learning activities were on our radar. The first-named author undertook 20 h of classroom observation in the Autumn semester of 2023 at one of the MTC Australia campuses. MTC FutureReady (<https://www.mtcfutureready.org.au/>) is a high-profile vocational education and training (VET) provider funded by the Australian Government and delivers Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) programs, specializing in furnishing adult learners with an extensive array of literacy (English language courses), numeracy and digital technology needed by the Australian workforce. The adult learners came from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, such as Myanmar (Burmese), Chinese, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Afghani, and South Korean.

Abbreviations: CCQ, concept-checking question; ESA, Engage, Study, Activate; PPP, Presentation, Practice, and Production; PSTTs, pre-service TESOL teachers; RP, reflective practice; STT, student talk time; TTT, teacher talk time.

The age range of the learners was from 30 to 65 years old. The majority had limited literacy, numeracy and digital technology skills due to little or no exposure to formal education in their home countries. Even if some had schooling, it was incomplete for various reasons. Some of them migrated to Australia as refugees while others arrived for employment or family-related reasons. A number of learners are unable to read or write in their L1 despite demonstrating strong oral communication skills in L1.

The researcher-observer was enrolled in the TESOL Internship subject while pursuing a Master of Arts in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at Western Sydney University, Parramatta City Campus. This course provided the observer with TESOL methodology, TESOL internship information and additional modules aligned with the teaching practicum. Additionally, it offered opportunities to observe the teaching styles of experienced TESOL professionals and to gain valuable insights into teaching practices prior to entering real-life classroom settings. To observe how these adult learners engage in various ESL activities, it is necessary to establish a procedure for making classroom observation an effective process and product. "A procedure is an ordered sequence of techniques" (Harmer, 2015, p. 55). It is always essential to plan and use the resources available to make the observation procedure productive. Thus, we planned and followed three steps, including what to do before, during, and after each 2-h classroom observation session.

3.2 Data collection

- Preparing for classroom observation

It is vital to make full preparations for each observation session. A diary is a must for keeping observation notes. First, note-taking is a common technique used in observations and the key information about teaching and learning activities is noted down using observation notebooks, templates, and checklists. Note-taking techniques also include the use of symbols and acronyms, for example, teacher talk time (TTT) and student talk time (STT), to make the observation process effective. Second, a pen and notebook were used to record observation details during the observation session. The effectiveness of the observation is significantly dependent on the choice of the most practical and suitable tool. Therefore, the student-teacher chose the note-taking method for all the classroom observation sessions.

- Undertaking classroom observation

To make classroom observation effective, classroom observers need to ask themselves what they want to focus on in their observation. Having established an observation focus, they will be able to observe with a specific purpose when they have an observation plan, and clear observation aims and objectives (O'Leary, 2020). The purposes of classroom observation can vary. For instance, observers may be interested in how the observed teacher creates a supportive learning environment for students, how class activities are managed, and how students receive instructions, clarifications, and feedback (Farrell, 2022). More importantly, after selecting the focus, student-teachers need to understand and consider the elements of the chosen focus. For example, when observation focuses on classroom management, its relevant elements may include seating arrangement, grouping,

teacher's roles, etc. For another example, when observation focuses on grammar clarification, its relevant elements may include Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) or Engage, Study, Activate (ESA) procedure, Text-based or TTT approach, Grammar translation method, inductive or deductive approach, the clarifications of meaning (using various techniques: timelines, personalized questions, concept checking questions), form, and use, language practices (filling in the blanks, matching, etc.) and communicative tasks (pair work, or group work), etc. Finally, if the observation focus is on the teaching materials, they may involve the selected use of textbooks, video clips and other authentic resources, digital learning platforms (Kahoot, Quizlet, etc.), games and activities, worksheets, and other classroom materials. According to Farrell (2022), classroom observation is a primary stage of learning for pre-service teachers, so it should be well-organized. Therefore, the skillful collection of pertinent data assists teachers in understanding the sophisticated teaching and learning environment.

3.3 Data analysis

- Reviewing the observation notes

A review of the observation notes was carried out after the systematic in-depth observation process was done. This was followed by a series of in-class group discussions with peer PSTTs throughout the semester. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) report that to perform a purposeful reflection, the elements, including research procedures that follow systematics and methodologies to ensure logical reasoning while interacting with evidence from observation as well as clarification of the key concepts of interpretation to relate to theory and prior knowledge, should be practiced. Leavy (2020) suggests the key methods of reviewing field notes or data collection. By analyzing the available data and building up a body of knowledge, induction is the act of drawing broad conclusions from particular cases. Furthermore, the process of deductive reasoning entails drawing conclusions based on verified facts and supporting evidence. Additionally, researchers cultivate a sense of cognitive ownership over their findings through field note writing.

The observation field notes of the observed session were reviewed thoroughly by following the procedures suggested by the Yang (2013, 2014) after each observation session was completed. The PSTT or observer expanded the field notes and put them into full sentences through a detailed description of the acronyms and short phrases, aligning them with the focus of the observation. The PSTT used teaching symbols, codes, contractions, and figures in the notes, such as T-S (teacher to individual), S-S (pair work), Ss-Ss (group work), T-Ss (teacher to whole class), WB (whiteboard), TTT > STT (more TTT) or STT > TTT (more STT), CCQs, ICQs, Demo (demonstration), L1, L2, diagrams (indicating the lesson flow), etc. This method proved to be effective for managing time efficiently.

- Analyzing the observation notes

The observer utilized the mind mapping as an analytical tool to categorize and analyze the information gathered during the note-reviewing process. The observer initially listed a variety of data findings, including speaking, writing, and the roles

of the teacher. They were then systematically categorized into appropriate thematic categories, which included building student-teacher rapport, numeracy improving learner numeracy skills through vocabulary and motivating students learning through communication-based activities. Several potential issues may arise during the review of the observation notes. Although noting down every detail can be a beneficial practice, mainly emphasizing observation targets is more effective for capturing key information.

Another vital point is that PSTTs need to be familiar with the critical teaching methodology related to their selected observation focus. While reading teaching books and journal articles after the observation is essential for uncovering theories, the PSTT's or observer's observation experience showed that reading before the observation sessions was incredibly advantageous. This is because PSTTs with theoretical knowledge gained from their TESOL course and relevant readings can obtain a more profound understanding of the lessons, and they will be able to see a better picture while the classroom teacher is applying a variety of teaching methods, approaches, and techniques combined with intercultural practices. Following the completion of each observation, the observer systematically transferred the field notes and recorded data to the analytical mind map. The observer searched the literature for relevant research articles, underlying theories, and adequate terminologies for each observation target that was identified. Through this individual reflection procedure, observational data were brought into line with previous research, facilitating a more thorough and theoretically informed interpretation. Thus, purposeful reading can help build a link between ongoing reflection and TESOL theories during reflection and reviewing notes.

A study done by [Hamilton and Van Duinen \(2018\)](#) shows that assisting preservice teachers in making connections between theory and practice is a challenge faced by many mentors or educators. Moreover, there is frequently a disconnect between what PSTTs are taught in on-campus courses and their field placement opportunities, where they can apply and/or apply learned pedagogies and practices. Assuming that a variety of teaching methods, procedures, and approaches from the TESOL course efficiently employed in the observed classes during the 20 hours of observation correspond with the preservice teachers' training, this is a constructive and valuable experience that would encourage them to move on to the next phase, which is teaching practice before entering the actual teaching field. Every single stage matters.

This concept of encouraging TESOL teachers to reflect on their teaching as pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in professional development programs was enthusiastically embraced by many language teacher education programs ([Farrell, 2018](#)). These regular conversations help the observer understand better why different teaching methods and techniques were used to facilitate student learning. All the PSTTs were engaged in discussing their classroom observation experience when they attended classes on the university campus. [Farrell \(2018\)](#) mentions that the most common reflective tool used in the studies to encourage and facilitate reflection was discussions, especially teacher discussion groups and post-observation conferences. Some reported through their chats with the adult learners that there was a wide range of age differences, from 18 to 70 years old, among them, but they were happy to learn English for various reasons (jobs, socialization, and speaking). Others reported that some beginners use their first

language (L1) to get help from those with the same language background. They found that while some teachers supported their students learning ESL through using some L1, others preferred not.

In addition to reflection processes, critical reflection and drafting prior to submission is one of the crucial stages of reflective practice. It provided the observer with a certain amount of time to combine all the appropriate theories of the observation targets that had been gathered through individual purposeful reading. Afterward, the observer wrote a draft of academic assessment and sent it to the subject coordinator. According to the feedback from the subject coordinator, the draft was edited with necessary information and further reflection and then returned it to the subject coordinator. Again, the second draft was developed based on the feedback before it was finalized for submission to the university.

After reflectively studying the observation notes, three major themes were found and were critically presented in the following section. Each of them is analyzed and discussed, citing relevant publications on reflective teaching practice.

4 Reflecting on classroom observations

Reflective thinking methods are widely adopted in the field of education as a beneficial tool for informing the professional development of educators ([Velasco, 2024](#)). Moreover, the discernment of the observer also includes identifying the type of lesson being seen, distinguishing between those that prioritize the development of language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, and function, and those that concentrate on the development of four skills ([Watkins et al., 2023](#)). This distinction is crucial because it helps teachers determine lesson aims and objectives, stages, tasks, and activities, as well as the timing of individual stages. In the following scenarios, the discussion will focus on how teaching different language skills is organized to highlight English language literacy, numeracy and digital technology of the SEE program, based on the observation of two ESL teachers.

The class consisted of seventeen students: fourteen females and three males. Their age ranged from thirty to seventy. They came from different countries, such as Myanmar (Burma), China, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Vietnam.

4.1 Building student-teacher rapport

Classroom management was the focus of the first observation. Classroom management is one of the broadest topics to be observed. Therefore, the aspects of teacher's roles, rapport-building with the students, the teaching styles (student-centeredness or teacher-centeredness) and recognition of student names were mainly discovered.

The teacher used a sense of humor to make the classroom atmosphere lively and build strong teacher-student rapport. One morning, when the teachers displayed the kitchen picture on the screen and asked the students what it was. They responded "kitchen" with uncertain facial expressions as they were not sure about the target vocabulary. The teacher said that it was "the

kitchen” but not “the chicken,” demonstrating with two arms as if two chicken wings were flapping. Everyone understood the teacher’s joke and laughed aloud. Another hilarious moment was during the lesson about opposite adjectives, beautiful, ugly, tall, short, etc., she asked the class what the opposite of *beautiful* was and the class answered *ugly*. Then, the teacher asked, “Am I ugly?” and they said, “No! You are beautiful.” According to Harmer (2015), it is crucial for teachers to establish rapport with their learners as it not only scaffolds an effective teaching and learning process but also helps the adult learners learn the target language in a relaxing and casual classroom environment. Through the target language, the teacher successfully facilitated student learning a pair of adjectives and the learners were able to understand the word *ugly* and responded with their real emotions and love for their teacher by using its antonyms. In second language acquisition, teachers need to have appropriate linguistic knowledge and cultural resources and share them with students in teaching to facilitate their language learning and maintain a positive relationship in the classroom (Wong et al., 2020). Hence, it would have been more active and advantageous if the diverse learners had been blended.

Regarding the use of teaching style, the teacher mainly applied teacher-centeredness. Consequently, this could cause learners to refrain from engaging in the learning process. The learners had no opportunities to communicate collaboratively and interactively with the teacher and their classmates in a language class. The learners spoke only when being elicited. The teacher had to take the lead in a constructive way because the students were all beginners. Instead, the learners needed to be provided with a variety of communicative activities so that they could activate their existing skills and knowledge in class (see Table 1).

The teacher was always able to nominate the student whenever she praised them for their good work, for example, “Lily, well done!” As a result, the technique was considerably effective in acknowledging each student and motivating them to engage in learning. When working with students with a higher level of English language literacy, the teacher

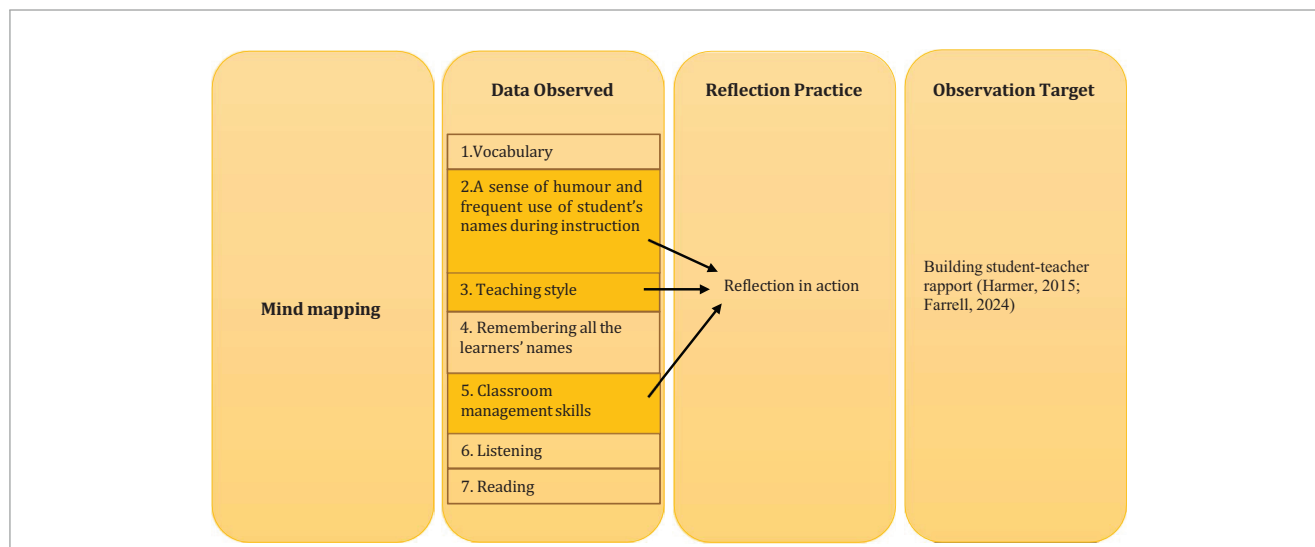
values and develops their leadership skills by allocating them to help their peers and lead the group discussion. Such peer learning is beneficial to both in that the strong students can use their skills to help their fellow students, and the weak students find it helpful to get peer support. A teacher’s classroom management skills help maintain a positive learning environment and implement effective procedures to encourage student peer learning initiatives to achieve learning outcomes successfully.

4.2 Focusing on learner numeracy through vocabulary

The target of the second scenario was focused on learner numeracy through teaching vocabulary. This was a great opportunity for the TESOL student-teacher to be able to relate the methods to the actual teaching in class. This class was the same as above, but only fifteen students were present. The teacher greeted the learners, “Good morning!” and “How are you, everyone?” The learners were encouraged to use English only in class. The topic was numbers, money, and classroom objects. Vocabulary teaching was analyzed by considering instructional methods along with the PPP procedure.

In the presentation stage, the teacher instructed the learners to listen to an audio recording about numbers and then circle the correct answer on a worksheet provided. As the next step, the learners were assigned to write the missing numbers (e.g., 1_3_5...100). To clarify the learners’ understanding of the particular activity, the teacher used some concept-checking questions (CCQs) and elicitation techniques: “What comes after 1?” Simultaneously, she employed an instruction-checking question (ICQ) when giving instructions. For instance, she wrote the numbers without looking at the previous page, and then used an ICQ, “Can you look at the previous page?” This technique was effective in giving students a clear instruction and preventing them

TABLE 1 Mind-mapping of observation scenario one.



The highlighted boxes and arrows indicate that only the data (2,3,5) relevant to the observation target prepared by the first-named author were extracted from all the data observed.

from doing the wrong task. Therefore, new student-teachers can learn from ICQs, CCQs and demonstrations in context.

In the practice stage, the teacher proceeded to the next tasks: reading the words and matching them with illustrating images. After these tasks, the teacher assigned students a listening task to circle the correct number. Since the teacher first used the listening texts and tasks to practice the target vocabulary, she chose the text-based approach, which facilitated students in recognizing and learning the new words through visual association. In this case, the teacher selected the spoken text with the Australian accent, which was relevant and authentic. Moreover, vocabulary practices, such as matching money notes and practicing through writing and answering, choosing higher and lower numbers, and categorizing the prices of classroom objects, were sequentially followed. Thus, these types of tasks grew the learners' competencies to recognize meanings and forms of the words. To gain competency-based language skills, every language learner needs to develop three competencies, such as meaning, form and use of the words (Pang, 2019). While analyzing the observation notes, we found that the teacher provided the students with meaningful tasks, covering the three crucial competencies. An effective vocabulary lesson requires a clarification of a word's meaning, its form, and how it is used in context. In other words, students may struggle to articulate their thoughts clearly and to apply new words in various situations without an adequate understanding of these three competencies.

In the production stage, however, the learners should have been provided with interactive activities to activate the target lesson in L2 by having their own conversations or by making their own sentences, such as A: "How much is it?" B: "It is 20 Australian dollars (\$20)." Harmer (2015) states that learners are encouraged to utilize all or some of their L2 what they have learned, especially from the target lesson and communicative tasks are intended to stimulate students' language knowledge. Nevertheless, the learners' communicative competence was not distinctly revealed. In other words, the production stage was not approached. Even if the adult learners in this class observed by the student teacher were very beginners and were not proactive in speaking, the teacher needs to use all resources available to scaffold the development of language production by using what they learn in class. This can take different forms, such as speaking, reading, and writing the words, and

other learning activities relevant to them as learning in action (see Table 2).

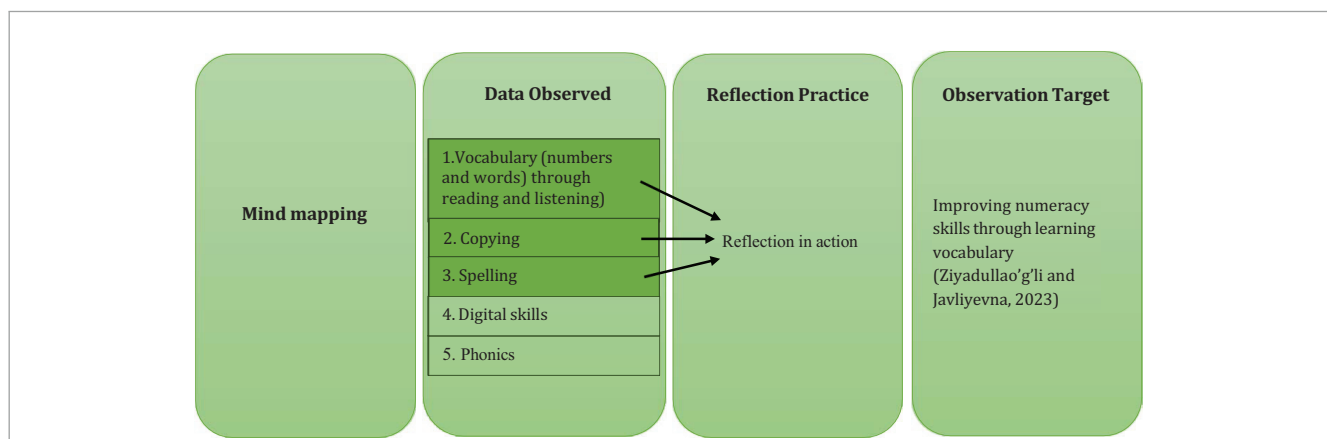
Understanding instructional pedagogies within the specific context of classroom observations yields numerous significant benefits. The capacity to anticipate and actively interact with upcoming classes is the primary benefit of this comprehension, which empowers student-teachers to take a pedagogically open and proactive attitude toward working with the adult learners. In turn, this educational experience further stimulates deeper and more critical observations of the classroom teaching and learning activities. The complex web of instructional pedagogies thus appears as a priceless scaffolding that strengthens the basis of deep and perceptive classroom observations.

4.3 Motivating student learning through communication-based activities

During observing this post-beginner class, the PSTT focused on how the mentor teacher used communicative materials and activities to engage students in learning grammar. The target lesson is about comparative and superlative adjectives.

To begin with, the teacher elicited the learners' ideas related to the target grammar. While eliciting the adjectives, she listed them on the whiteboard so that everyone in the class could see clearly where all those ideas were gathered. As a result, the teacher gained the learners' full attention. As a communicative task, the teacher introduced a digital online game, Kahoot! Which is widely used in ESL and EFL classrooms as it creates higher levels of student participation, improved classroom environment, increased motivation, quicker feedback, and enhanced energy during sessions. To join the game, the learners were asked to scan the QR code appearing on the television screen. Hashim et al. (2019) list gamified learning via digital games and activities as more effective in teaching grammar. Unfortunately, the Kahoot game was canceled owing to an unexpected issue with the setting of the game. A sufficient amount of time limit was required to be set for each quiz. There were over twenty questions, so it was impossible to edit the time limit for individual questions. Cirocki and Widodo (2019) define that reflection-in-action is the process of making decisions in real time based on what is happening in the classroom.

TABLE 2 Mind-mapping of observation scenario two.



The highlighted boxes and arrows indicate that only the data (1,2 and 3) relevant to the observation target prepared by the first-named author were extracted from all the data observed.

Reflection during the lesson aligns with this concept since it utilizes the theories that teachers employ and their capacity to deal with positive as well as negative shocks in the teaching-learning process. Immediate problem-solving and adaptive instructions are enhanced by a particular kind of reflection. In this instance, the observer witnessed and learnt how to prepare and employ an online game properly and deal with the technology efficiently. Despite canceling the game, the learners were shown a YouTube video lesson about comparative and superlative adjectives with English subtitles. Again, by reflecting observed scenarios, it additionally allows PSTTs to determine the areas that need improvement and to consider different strategies they would employ if they were to teach the same topic again. This is described as reflection-after-lesson (Cirocki and Widodo, 2019). The students were asked to write down the comparative and superlative adjectives from the video clip.

Alternatively, the worksheet from the “Teach This” website was used to play the pair-work game. Student A and Student B were given the different worksheets and then Student A guessed the possible comparative and superlative adjectives on Student B’s worksheet. After that, they exchanged the information gaps by reading out their sentences in turn since A had B’s answers on the worksheet and so did B. Before assigning the pairs, the teacher showed the visual support related to the task on the screen and chose a student for demonstration. Mayer and Fiorella (2022) assert that demonstrating and conveying practical knowledge enhances students’ comprehension of the subject matter and their prior experience, and the approaches include the application of various kinds of multimedia strategies, such as visual aids, embodied cognition, simulations, interactive demonstrations, and examples. Through this interactive activity, the students were so engaged and motivated that they could practice the target grammar in L2, thus successfully achieving the lesson aims and objectives. The benefit of the additional contextualized worksheet is that learners are more motivated and excited to participate in the activity since motivation plays a major role in language learning.

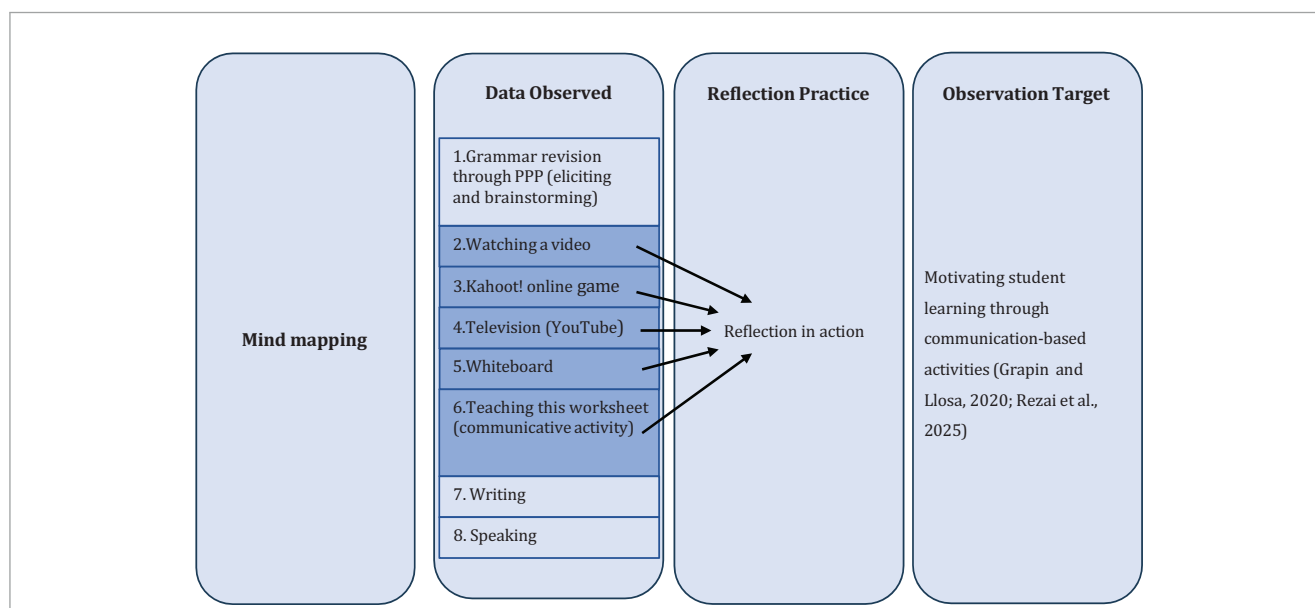
Boström and Bostedt (2020) find that students’ responsibility for their study motivation is emphasized by the empirical findings in a significant way. Nonetheless, they also state that there is a notable distinction in the viewpoints of teachers and students which means that more emphasis is placed on intrinsic motivation by teachers, suggesting that motivation for studying can be controlled internally, for example, having a strong desire to learn and knowing the advantages of going to school. Therefore, the teacher is responsible for selecting the appropriate materials to allow them to practice the language more purposefully. Hence, the adaptations and use of multiple materials are one of the teaching techniques to support the lesson and achieve the lesson aims, as well as activities. Materials are crucial in teaching and learning environments, and all materials need to be well-prepared (see Table 3).

5 Discussion

This paper aims to answer the research question about how a pre-service TESOL teacher used classroom observation as a reflective practice to enhance their professional development.

The analysis of scenario 1 shows the teacher used various teaching strategies and techniques to engage the adult ESL learners in learning activities and build student-teacher rapport. Sherif (2020) states that rapport between teachers and learners is necessary in a language class to create a positive and supportive teaching and learning atmosphere with the teacher and their classmates. To encourage learners to become more interactive and motivated, learner-centeredness should be implemented as the more motivated and engaged the learners are, the harder they study and the more they produce (Badjadi, 2020). Knowing and remembering all the learners’ names is one of the strategies of classroom management (Molway, 2021). The teacher provided them with equal opportunities to participate in the learning activities (Harmer, 2015).

TABLE 3 Mind-mapping of observation scenario three.



The highlighted boxes and arrows indicate that only the data (2,3,4,5 and 6) relevant to the observation target prepared by the first-named author were extracted from all the data observed.

Regarding scenario 2, the teacher taught the adult ESL learners the cardinal numbers (e.g., 1 for one, 2 for two, and 3 for three) and Australian dollar (AU\$) to improve their numeracy skills. While pedagogical procedures, such as ESA and PPP, offer fundamental methods that may be applied to a variety of lessons (Pawlak, 2021), the contextual nuances require a customized application based on the particular learning aims and objectives. Kargar and Divsar (2019) mention that the utilization of CCQs was advantageous in developing EFL/ESL learners' language acquisition. It was witnessed that the teacher's ICQ tackled this issue while one of the learners was confused about the instruction. Ziyadulla o'g'li and Javliyevna (2023) propose that the advantage of employing the text is that it can offer a wide range of historical and cultural contexts. Every language learner needs to master three competencies, such as meaning, form and use (Pang, 2019).

As for scenario 3, the teacher effectively motivated student learning through deploying various authentic learning materials and communication-based activities. Rao (2019) asserts the importance of the efficient application of real resources, and how teachers can use them to support their teaching and facilitate students' easier and better acquisition of the English language skills. Using the same textbook daily could make students lose interest and enthusiasm. There is a growing trend toward multimodality in academic tasks, including using digital tools, such as Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, sound clips and visual images (Kessler, 2022). Multimodality is becoming more widely recognized as a crucial element of teaching, education policy, and ELT training (Grapin and Llosa, 2020).

6 Conclusion

Classroom observation is one of the major in-context learning activities for novice TESOL teachers. It is a great work-integrated experience for them to observe the dynamic teaching and learning activities in the classroom as part of the placement (Yang, 2023). Classroom observation is unquestionably beneficial, fruitful, and rewarding for PSTTs in their future teaching careers, as it provides an opportunity to witness live classroom teaching and learning activities and to critically reflect on them as part of their professional development. More importantly, they have practiced pre-observation planning, better understood what observation tools will facilitate observation of language teaching and learning activities they wish to focus on, reflected on why some instructional materials are used, and further recalled their observed classroom activities through reviewing the observation notes. With such a well-planned undertaking, they are more likely to perform an effective classroom observation with a clear purpose. Comprehending instructional pedagogies within the framework of classroom observations yields numerous significant benefits. The capacity to anticipate and actively interact with upcoming classes is the primary benefit of this comprehension, which empowers student-teachers to take an educated and proactive pedagogical attitude. In turn, this clarity stimulates deeper and more effective observations in the classroom. The complex web of instructional pedagogies thus appears as a priceless scaffolding that strengthens the basis of deep and perceptive classroom observations.

However, there are a few limitations to this project. One of them is that observing classroom teaching single-handedly creates little chance for comparing notes on the same classroom activities with fellow students. Although they individually report their observations and reflect on them through group discussion, it would be more engaging for PSTTs to observe with peers and then undertake group reflections. The other is that even if a pen-and-paper tool can help collect some information about classroom teaching and learning activities, it may miss something potentially interesting and unique that is not within the range of pre-planning. Indeed, it would help collect much more if a digital handycam on a tripod is used (with research ethics approval). Replaying the footage makes it possible to research more exciting and interesting findings. Despite these limitations, the PSTT has taken the initiative to use all resources available to observe the classroom teaching and learning, gain in-context learning experiences, and practice critical reflections. Although video and voice recorders can be employed to collect the data and inspect evidence, Wray and Bloomer (2013) point out that the participants' behavior may change depending on their awareness of the recording equipment. K rkk  et al. (2019) also argue that one of the challenges associated with using the video app as a supervisory tool is that it is difficult to capture the atmosphere and setting of the classroom with video clips taken out of context. Even while the video recorder has the potential to be an effective tool, it frequently involves complex observation ethics procedures, as evidence of consent from the institution and each participant must be obtained. Further studies should take this into account. One concern is that PSTTs may have collected insufficient data to reflect, potentially because some PSTTs are unaware of the usefulness of acronyms.

The study has meaningful pedagogical implications for pre-service TESOL teachers. First, classroom observation encourages the teacher's continuous improvement for the observed and the observer. After each observation session, they communicate with each other, have questions and answers, and discuss how the teacher's decision is made to flexibly use teaching methodology and techniques to support the different learning needs of the adult learners so that the PSTTs can have a better understanding of the contextual applications of TESOL theories. Second, classroom observations provide a good opportunity for the PSTTs to develop reflective practice, deeply reflecting on how TESOL theories can be practiced meaningfully in a specific classroom context (e.g., programs, levels, language skills, and learner backgrounds). Such reflective practice helps them identify what and how to improve future teaching sessions based on individual and peer discussion. Third, reflective practice further enhances PSTTs' critical thinking and analysis of their observations, becoming more innovative to interact effectively with ESL adult learners from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. For example, it is useful for the PSTTs to consider how they can thoughtfully deploy the ESL adult learners' existing L1 knowledge and skills to facilitate their learning of L2 while striking a balance not to depend on it all the time. It is relevant to mobilize social skills and cultural awareness to accommodate their adult learners' language growth and cultural interests.

Reflective practice encourages critical reflection on activities taken in a real-world setting, which helps teacher candidates acquire innovative knowledge, skills, and perspectives. As a result, classroom observation, along with adequate preparations, can lead to successful professional development and well-structured lesson delivery. Understanding requires reflection. To identify strengths, learn from mistakes, and proceed with clarity and purpose, it is crucial to take the time to reflect on previous actions. Critical reflection leads to further professional development.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in this article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

ST: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. PY: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

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