Teachers' Attitudes Towards Classroom Observations

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∽   Classroom observations enable professional growth and are integral to upholding the academic excellence of the school. Prioritising them must become imperative. In this study, geared towards exploring teachers' attitudes towards peer and supervisory observations, we focused on teachers' experiences, perceptions, and expectations of observations, the pivotal criteria for effective observation, the concrete changes made in teaching practice after receiving feedback, and the evolution of teachers' attitudes towards observations throughout their professional careers. The study involved 73 teachers from three primary and one secondary school. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Through qualitative data, employing a coding technique, we gained valuable insights into teachers' interpretations and the development of their attitudes towards them, while quantitative data provided robust support to our descriptive findings. The study revealed a prevalent positive disposition among teachers towards observations. Their expectations focused on receiving constructive feedback, further empowering them with ideas for future work, and facilitating the process of self-reflection. Most of the changes implemented in teaching practices after receiving feedback predominantly revolve around classroom management and changes in teaching methods. However, observations are also related to supervision, bureaucracy, pressure, and stress. Despite these challenges, teachers' attitudes towards observations tend to improve over the course of their teaching careers. While both peer and supervisory observations pose challenges, peer observations emerge as more useful, notwithstanding concerns regarding subjective biases when observing colleagues.

Keywords: attitudes, criteria, feedback, implementations, peer and supervisory observation

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Stališča učiteljev do hospitacij

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∽   Hospitacije omogočajo učiteljevo profesionalno rast in zagotavljajo akademsko odličnost šole, zato morajo predstavljati eno izmed njenih prednostnih področij. V raziskavi, katere glavni cilj je bil preučiti stališča učiteljev do kolegialnih in ravnateljevih hospitacij, smo se osredinili na doživljanja, izkušnje in na pričakovanja učiteljev, ki jih gojijo v povezavi s hospitacijami, merila, ki se jim zdijo pomembna za učinkovito izvedbo hospitacije, konkretne spremembe, ki so jih vnesli v svoj pouk na podlagi prejetih povratnih informacij po hospitaciji, ter na razvoj stališč do hospitacij skozi leta učiteljeve profesionalne kariere. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 73 učiteljev iz treh osnovnih in ene srednje šole. Za zbiranje podatkov smo uporabili vprašalnik. Kvalitativni podatki, ki so bili analizirani z uporabo kodiranja, so nam omogočili razumevanje stališč učiteljev do hospitacij, s kvantitativnimi podatki pa smo ugotovitve dodatno podprli. Študija je pokazala, da učitelji na splošno gojijo pozitivna stališča do hospitacij. Njihova pričakovanja se večinoma osredinjajo na povratne informacije, za katere želijo, da so konstruktivne, jih opolnomočijo z idejami za nadaljnje delo in so v pomoč pri samorefleksiji. Večina sprememb, uvedenih v pedagoško prakso na podlagi povratnih informacij, se nanaša na vodenje razreda in spremembo učnih metod. Učitelji hospitacije povezujejo tudi z nadzorom, birokracijo, s pritiskom in stresom. Z leti poučevanja se posameznikov odnos do hospitacij navadno izboljšuje. Kolegialne in ravnateljeve hospitacije so učiteljem v izziv, kljub temu pa so kolegialne hospitacije med učitelji zaznane kot uporabnejše, čeprav je izražen dvom o učiteljevi pristranskosti, ko hospitira kolegu.

Ključne besede: kolegialne in ravnateljeve hospitacije, merila, povratna informacija, spremembe, stališča

Introduction

In pursuit of enhanced results within pedagogical realms, educators make use of classroom observations as they prove to be valuable tools for enhancing teacher efficiency and excellence. Teachers who engage in teacher observations usually wish to understand and improve their teaching practice (Bell et al., 2019), develop and maintain professional expertise (Pollard & Collins, 2005) or deliver their best practice (Santos & Miguel, 2017). Teacher observations, therefore, enhance teacher motivation to persevere in ongoing professional growth by developing the teaching process (Bush & Middlewood, 2013; Klar, 2012). This is why they are not intended just for teacher beginners and those who lack experience but also for the skilled ones with an eye on improving and expanding their abilities (Hinchey, 2010). Moreover, when done and understood correctly, observations result in advanced student performance (Day et al., 2020; Erčulj, 2014; Santos & Miguel, 2017). However, it cannot go unnoticed that they may not always monitor the real in-situ situation as lessons are pre-planned, and teachers might act differently than they normally would (Range et al., 2011). Despite the scientifically proven benefits (Goble & Pianta, 2022), teacher observations are frequently overshadowed by feelings of stress and administrative burden and are perceived as a compulsory check-off procedure (Denton, 2019; Khan, 2019).

The following considerations justify up-to-date research tailored to the nuances of the Slovenian school system: Firstly, there has been limited academic interest in the topic of classroom observations since 2015 (Ambrož, 2014; Debenjak et al., 2012; Erčulj 2014, 2015; Krašna & Gartner, 2008; Oder Grabner, 2010). Furthermore, the TALIS 2018 (OECD, 2020) report, which partially addressed the topic of classroom observations within the overarching topic of teacher professionalism, presented findings obtained from the Slovenian context but also underscored the varied understanding of what classroom observations are across OECD countries as different school systems execute diverse practices and understandings of classroom observations. Lastly, the importance and relevance of this research lies in its potential to shed new light on classroom observations, especially in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, thus encouraging teachers to decide more often and more whole-heartedly for observations and not only when obligated.

Therefore, the main objective of this research was to investigate teachers' attitudes regarding classroom observations as formed through their underlying beliefs concerning the purpose, process, outcomes, effectiveness, usefulness, and importance of classroom observations. Subsequently, our focus extended

to examining the practical changes implemented into teachers' classroom practice following the feedback received in post-observation meetings. Additionally, we wanted to explore the evolving attitudes teachers reported as they progressed in their teaching careers. Furthermore, we were interested in the skills and knowledge expected of observers to facilitate high-quality observation. Lastly, we sought to investigate the distinctions between peer and supervisory observations as perceived by teachers.

Theoretical Background

Classroom observation systems play a pivotal role in professional development within educational settings. The two prevalent approaches are supervisory and peer observations. Peer observations are conducted when teachers act as observers of their colleagues (Santos & Miguel, 2017). They also have the potential to encourage cross-curricular lesson planning and team teaching, reflection, and self-evaluation, thus cultivating a collaborative climate and critical friendship (Debeljak et al., 2012; Erčulj, 2014), and so help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses (Motallebzadeh et al., 2017). In contrast, supervisory observations as part of instructional leadership are understood as a formative process carried out by principals whose duty is to conduct systematic teacher supervision in the form of a formal (pre-arranged) or informal observation (with the teacher's no prior knowledge of being observed) (Zepeda, 2017). Yet, it must be noted that principals often lack time to systematically conduct instructional leadership and supervision due to numerous administrative duties, jurisdictional policies, external influences, partnerships, and other factors. (Pollock et al., 2015). Consequently, formative supervision in the form of multiple personnel is gaining momentum (Range et al., 2011). In this way, teams are given autonomy to share supervision and so make instructional leadership even more effective, which ultimately results in strong working relationships and high student achievements (Hallam et al., 2015).

To ensure high-quality observations, several criteria have to be fulfilled. First, observations follow specific steps, starting with the pre-observation meeting where the observer and the observed discuss the upcoming lesson(s) as well as set goals as to the categories that will be monitored (Zepeda, 2017). Second, observation criteria must be clearly defined if the observation is to reach its full potential (Sivan & Chan, 2009; Zepeda, 2017). Follows an observation with the help of an observation protocol, after which the findings are analysed, and good practices, as well as places for improvement, are pointed out in an effective, progressive, formative, objective, and respectful manner (Jacob & Lefgen, 2006;

Motallebzadeh et al., 2017; Santos & Miguel, 2017; Zepeda, 2017). An important aspect of quality observation is the professional attitude, which seeks to refrain from too much familiarity as it lessens the seriousness of the performance and its evaluation (Santos & Miguel, 2017). High-quality observations empower teachers to see observations as an ongoing process that needs to be internalised and integrated into their syllabi (Erčulj, 2014).

An important predisposition for an effective observation comprises observation protocols that come as a sheet of paper with categories that speak of different properties and are associated with diverse teaching elements (Bell et al., 2019; Praetorius & Charalambous, 2018; Range et al., 2012, 2013). Overall, it is recommended to collaboratively identify, study, and agree on common criteria and minimum standards that comprise a protocol and refer to measurement issues (Praetorius & Charalambous, 2018), thus fostering a sense of shared purpose (Education First, 2014). Nonetheless, observation protocols are not wholly reliable and accurate as they undergo human evaluation, which is, to some extent, always subjective and, therefore, fallible (Decristan et al., 2015).

As observation protocols always value one way of teaching practices over another, it is important that teachers fully understand the observation protocols they are following (Bell et al., 2019). These can be more generic and strive to identify key aspects of teaching such as classroom management, student-teacher relationship, student motivation and engagement, teacher's professional commitment, instructional delivery, range and nature of didactic activities, teacher efficacy, etc. (Bell et al., 2019; Danielson, 2014; Popp et al., 2011; Praetorius & Charalambous, 2018; Range et al., 2012, 2013) or subject-specific (e.g., the Mathematical Quality of Instruction (MQI), the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation (PLATO), the Quality of Science Teaching (QST), and PISA+ in science education) (Bell et al., 2019, p. 9) that call for observers who are subject experts and can provide content-related feedback (Hill & Grossman, 2013; Mette et al., 2015; Zatynski, 2012; Zepeda, 2017). The research tends to suggest that only teachers of the same or closely related field of expertise can accurately monitor and assess their colleagues as well as provide the most appropriate feedback (Santos & Miguel, 2017).

To summarise, high-quality observations are comprehensive and rigorous, supported by robust rubrics, and conducted by adequately trained teachers. If these criteria are not met, they risk becoming mere obligatory checkboxes and compliance exercises (Denton, 2019; Khan, 2019; Education First, 2014).

Teacher observations in Slovenia

The Slovenian regulations regarding education require the direct presence of the principal in educational work, stipulating that 'the head teacher shall be the pedagogical leader and management body of a public kindergarten or school and shall be present in the educational work of preschool or school teachers, monitor their work and offer advice' (Organisation and Financing of Education Act, 1996). It is, therefore, not surprising that principals most often link their educational management to teacher observations, as they usually consider their monitoring to have an impact on the quality and efficacy of the teachers' as well as students' performance (Erčulj, 2015).

The TALIS 2018 findings (Pedagoški inštitut, 2020) regarding teacher observations from 136 primary schools and 122 secondary schools in Slovenia show that the vast majority of principals conduct observations and evaluations of each teacher once a year, with peer observation not being standard practice. However, when it happens, it is usually mentors who conduct observations. Half of the teachers report never participating in classroom observations or providing feedback, whereas the rest do so once a year. After the observations, principals most often discuss measures to address shortcomings or ways to improve the quality of the teacher's performance. Feedback is positively accepted as it contributes to a deeper understanding of the subject area, enhances pedagogical competences relevant to one's subject, improves student assessment and evaluation, supports effective classroom management, develops better methods for teaching students with disabilities, and promotes the use of teaching strategies in multicultural or multilingual contexts.

Research questions

Having laid out the theoretical framework, the study aims to explore teachers' attitudes towards classroom observations. Therefore, to obtain a comprehensive picture of the studied phenomenon, we decided to investigate teachers' current perceptions and expectations arising from their previous experiences towards both types of observations as well as criteria they consider important for effective observations and changes that happened throughout their professional careers regarding their attitudes towards classroom observations.

To this end, an overarching research question was formed:

RQ1:   What are teachers' attitudes towards classroom observations?

Method

Participants

The participants were 73 teachers: 43 from three primary schools and 30 upper-secondary teachers from one secondary school (Table 1). The overall proportion of female participants (79%) significantly exceeded that of male participants (21%), with the same trend being observed across primary and secondary school participants. All four schools are situated in the western part of Slovenia, within a radius of 10 km from each other. They were chosen conveniently.

Table 1

Distribution of participants by gender

	Male	Female	Total
Primary school teachers	8 (18%)	31 (82%)	43 (100%)
Secondary school teachers	3 (10%)	27 (90%)	30 (100%)
Total	15 (21%)	58 (79%)	73 (100%)

We did not enquire about the participants' age but instead gathered information on the average number of years of teaching experience (Table 2). We selected this variable as it better aligns with the objectives of our research. The analysis revealed that the average number of years of teaching experience was 17.8 years. Notably, the majority of the participants belonged to the group with the least teaching experience, while the fewest participants were from the group with the most experience, thus, teachers in the latter part of their professional careers, some presumably approaching retirement. This observation potentially indicates that less-experienced teachers were more motivated to participate in the research compared to the more-experienced ones.

Table 2

Distribution of participants by years of teaching experience

Years of teaching	Primary school teachers	Secondary school teachers	Average
Less than 10 years	15 (35%)	9 (30%)	24 (33%)
11–20	13 (30%)	7 (23.3%)	20 (27.4%)
21–30	8 (19%)	9 (30%)	17 (23.2%)
More than 30 years	7 (16%)	5 (16.4%)	12 (16.4%)
Total	43 (100%)	30 (100%)	73 (100%)

We also investigated their areas of expertise and discovered a diverse range of subjects, encompassing languages, mathematics, natural and social sciences, humanities, arts, technology, computer science, and sports.

Instruments

The data collection involved the use of a questionnaire devised by the author, who drew upon an in-depth review of relevant literature and her own familiarity with classroom settings. Additionally, the content validity of the questionnaire was reviewed by a group of secondary school teachers who were well-experienced in conducting teacher observations. They provided comments upon which we paraphrased some of the statements to make them unambiguous and in sync with the research questions. The combination of theoretical insights and practical experience ensured that the questionnaire was well-designed to capture nuanced aspects of teachers' attitudes towards observation practices.

The questionnaire was initially designed in paper format. However, due to a modest response rate of 50% from secondary school teachers, reminiscent of a similar situation in which Slovenian schools needed encouragement to participate in TALIS 2018 (Pedagoški inštitut, 2020), we decided to transfer the content from the paper format to an online questionnaire accessible through an open-source application 1KA and shared it with the primary school teachers.

The introductory part of the questionnaire included comprehensive details about the research, its aims, and objectives. We also ensured anonymity and placed particular emphasis on voluntary participation to foster a sense of encouragement and safety among responding teachers, enabling them to participate with confidence and assurance of their privacy.

Furthermore, the questionnaire consists of three parts, providing qualitative and quantitative data. The first part yielded qualitative data through a set of seven open-ended questions, which were crafted to align with the overarching research question. Through the first two questions (*How do you perceive observations based on your previous experience? What do you expect from them?*), we investigated teachers' current perceptions and expectations, which provided a baseline understanding of their attitudes. The subsequent question (*What skills and knowledge does the observer need to possess to conduct quality observations?*) delved into skills and knowledge one needs to possess to conduct a quality observation. This question provided insight into teachers' proficiency in conducting classroom observations. Further, we inquired about concrete changes introduced into their teaching practice (*Have you changed anything in your work as a result of your experience with observations?*) and explored the

evolution of attitudes throughout their teaching careers (*Has your perception of observations changed in any way over the years of your teaching practice?*). The last two questions allowed us to investigate the differences and considerations associated with both types of observations as perceived by the teachers (*How do you experience a supervisory observation compared to a peer observation? What are the disadvantages and advantages of peer observations when compared to supervisory ones?*).

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of three questions following a 5-point rating scale. These were: *How stressful are observations for you?*; *To what extent do you feel that the professionals in your school possess the necessary skills to conduct quality observations?*; *How frequently do you think they should occur?*. They were designed to provide additional insights into responses from the first part and generated quantitative data.

The seven pairs of statements in the final section of the questionnaire required participants to select their preferred option from each pair. Generating quantitative data further contributed to our understanding of the research topic. These were:

- *Observations should be conducted for all teachers, regardless of their years of teaching./Observations should be conducted primarily for teacher beginners.*
- *Observations should be announced in advance./Observations may be conducted unannounced.*
- *Observations should be conducted in all classrooms./Observations should be prioritised in classrooms struggling with management issues.*
- *I prefer to be observed by someone I trust./ I'm indifferent to who observes me during my teaching.*
- *The observer should be knowledgeable about my field of expertise./Anyone can observe regardless of their field of expertise.*
- *I prefer to demonstrate my typical teaching approach during observations./I wish to showcase different teaching methods during observations.*
- *I view observations as an unpleasant aspect of the job./I view observations as an opportunity for professional development.*

The responses to the second and third sets of the questionnaire prompted teachers to reflect and take a stance on various aspects of observations, potentially extending their engagement beyond the answers initially reported in the first part of the questionnaire. By doing so, these sets enriched the qualitative data with additional quantitative data, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' attitudes regarding observations.

Research design and data analysis

In January 2023, the questionnaire was distributed to the four princi-
pals who were asked to share it with their teachers. First, it was disseminated
among secondary teachers. Out of 60 teachers, 30 completed the paper format
questionnaire. Additionally, 43 primary school teachers out of approximately
150 teachers opted to fill it out in an online format. We decided not to segment
the data by primary versus secondary school teachers but to regard it as a uni-
fied dataset for two reasons. First, the responses overlapped in terms of topics
answered. Secondly, we had in mind that some teachers may be concurrently
teaching on both educational levels or have transitioned between the two in the
course of their careers.

To ensure the validity, reliability, objectivity, usability, and quality of the
research and the obtained results, we employed a mixed-methods approach, us-
ing descriptive and causal-non-experimental methods of pedagogical research
(Sagadin, 1991). The qualitative data from the first part of the questionnaire
was analysed by applying coding, which is a qualitative analysis involving the
systemic categorisation of units based on the qualitative material under scru-
tiny (Kordeš & Smrdu, 2015, p. 53). The entire dataset was carefully examined
and first segmented into individual lower-order categories, which were later
organised into higher-order categories (Figure 1) (Vogrinc, 2008), answering
the research question. Statements from the second and third parts provided
quantitative data, which were used to support and clarify the thematic units.

Figure 1

The categorisation of the dataset
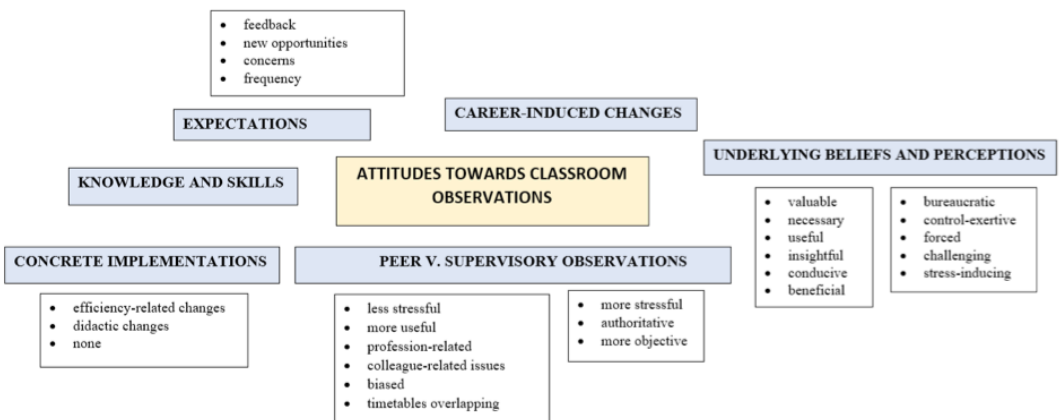
Results

The following section presents the findings. We decided on a combined presentation, offering qualitative data supported by quantitative data whenever feasible.

Internalised beliefs and perceptions

First, we aimed to understand teachers' current underlying, internalised beliefs and perceptions shaped by previous experiences. Their responses fell into two distinct categories: favourable perceptions highlighted the value, necessity, usefulness, insightfulness, conduciveness, and various other benefits. Less-favourable perceptions centred around challenges, control, bureaucracy, coercion, and stress.

The first group perceived observations as valuable. They pointed out that observations widen their horizons by facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge: 'I always get a new idea that I can take back to my classroom', 'Observations give me a different perspective on an activity', and 'They are useful especially when you want to introduce something new', 'They push me to make progress in my work', and 'They motivate me to show how I work' as well as they 'Require constant engagement and planning and so force the teacher out of his/her comfort zone'.

A few underscored that they are necessary 'because the teacher needs to stay in the learning process for life'. Here, we deem it appropriate to emphasise that as many as 74% of all participants were open to unannounced observations, while 26% preferred advance notice. Moreover, 74% believe all teachers should be observed, not just those facing challenges.

Some responses underscored the utility of observations: 'Observations are useful both for the observers who gain experience by watching and for the observed who receives feedback' because 'more heads know more'. Usefulness was also attributed to 'good', 'concrete', and above all, 'constructive' feedback that follows observation. More responses underscored the value of observations, particularly during the early stages of a teacher's career, 'when the teacher is still learning' and 'gaining experience'. This perspective was further supported by quantitative data, which revealed that 84% of teachers found observations beneficial regardless of the years of experience, while only 16% attributed benefits to teacher beginners.

Another group of teachers saw benefits in the metacognitive processes that observations trigger. 'Observations are an opportunity for self-reflection. They force you to think about your own work and about the relationship with

your students'. In addition, they 'allow for self-regulation' as 'we don't see our-selves well enough', 'a colleague can hold up a mirror to you' and so 'help solve a problem' and 'they make sense when the teacher is dissatisfied with his/her work and would like to make a change'. Individuals further emphasised the relational component, as observations can contribute to 'strengthening relationships'.

For individual teachers, observations only make sense 'when the teacher has a positive attitude towards them', 'when they are spontaneous', and 'when you are being observed by someone you trust'. Quantitative data revealed that 65% of participants feel the observer must be someone they fully trust, irrespec-tive of their function; 58% prefer observers from their field of expertise com-pared to 42% who believe the field of expertise plays no significance.

On the less favourable side, the fact that as many as 63% of the par-ticipants viewed observations as a necessary evil stands out, whereas 37% saw observations as opportunities for professional and personal growth. This fact was aligned to bureaucratic aspects accompanying observations, stating, 'You have to write everything down, which takes a lot of time', 'they are primarily a formality', 'linked to the control of the employee', 'extra work', and 'you have to take care of several factors at the same time'. Some underscored that obser-vations do not mirror the natural learning environment, asserting, 'They are forced because everything is planned, but when you teach, you often encounter unexpected situations which you cannot plan in advance'.

Some teachers found them challenging as 'I want to show different ways of delivering the material'. This perspective was reflected in the corresponding quantitative data, which asked about the types of approaches teachers typically demonstrate when observed. 12% prefer to demonstrate their typical teaching, while 86% prefer to showcase novel teaching approaches.

A considerable number of teachers perceived observations to be stress-inducing. One explained, 'Because you are not very often in this situation', while another commented that they 'cause a lot of worries'. Some say they 'feel un-comfortable in front of the colleagues', 'because I have the feeling that I am being judged' and 'evaluated', which creates 'extra pressure to make the lesson special'. According to quantitative data on stress levels, 16% of teachers perceive observations as extremely stressful, 37% experience high levels of stress, 25% feel moderate levels of stress, and 19% consider observations to trigger minor levels of stress. None of the teachers see observations as stress-free events.

Some teachers justified this surveillance aspect with reference to the principal's evaluation. One wrote, 'They make sense for both the teacher and the principal; in every company, the head manager monitors his/her employ-ees' work, progress, and professionalism'. Moreover, they noted, 'It's also an

opportunity for the principal to get to know the pupils'.

A group of teachers whose answers were only individually represented did not attach any connotation to observations, saying 'They are nothing special', and 'They give information about your work and that's all there is to them'. A few answers referred to the fact that they 'do not show the real situation' and 'in fact, nothing changes because of one observation'.

Career-induced changes in attitudes

We also sought to investigate whether, how, and to what degree teachers' perspectives on observations evolve over the course of their teaching careers. The vast majority indicated a positive shift. Teachers wrote: 'I used to experience them as control, in recent years as encouragement', 'I am more relaxed, I feel more at ease', and 'I panic less also because I feel we are more open to people observing us at work', 'I have more autonomy', 'I trust myself more', 'I no longer experience them as evaluation of my work, but as a collaborative support system', 'now I see them as an opportunity to grow', 'I am calmer because I know I am doing a good job'.

Concrete implementations

We encouraged teachers to highlight concrete implementations they introduced into their teaching practice in response to feedback they received. Their answers encompassed three groups: efficiency-related changes, didactic changes, and none.

The first set of answers referred to strategies implemented to improve teacher's efficiency or enhance student engagement. 'I slowed down the delivery of the lessons, 'I speak less loudly', 'I focus more on the structure of the lesson', 'I'm more mindful of a student's prior knowledge', 'I put more emphasis on relationships', 'I make sure I cover less material at a time, I give more exercises', 'I give fewer worksheets', 'I changed my attitude towards the student on the advice of a colleague, which turned out to be very positive', 'I introduced music into my lessons', among other responses.

Some were encouraged by their colleagues' didactic approach and wanted to try it out themselves. They wrote: 'I saw a very good lesson on cooperative learning, which encouraged me to start using it more often myself', 'I introduced cross-curricular content', 'I am using more formative monitoring', and similar.

A small group of participants felt that they had not changed anything in their teaching because 'there were no requests for change, but I got confirmation that I was doing a good job', and individual responses referred to the

quality of the observations in the sense of 'I have not had a quality observation so far'.

Specific skills and knowledge

Next, we wanted to know how competent teachers feel in conducting observations. Only 5% of teachers feel they are fully competent, 30% feel they are quite competent, 44% feel fairly competent, 16% feel rather incompetent, and 5% feel fully incompetent.

When asked what skills and knowledge are needed by an observer, a long list was compiled, including the ability to provide constructive feedback, being a good listener, having critical thinking skills, possessing didactic knowledge, subject expertise, and expertise in the area of developmental psychology. They wrote: 'The teacher must be able to give quality feedback in a respectful manner', 'critical thinking must be developed', 'he/she must be able to distinguish between facts and inferences', and 'he/she must be able to ask appropriate questions for self-reflection'. They also highlighted 'capacity for empathy', 'well-developed relational competence', 'positive attitude', 'open-mindedness', and 'curiosity'. One commented that the observer needs to 'understand the observation protocol first and foremost'.

In this context, individuals pointed out different deficiencies. They wrote: 'I feel I lack knowledge', 'I'm not skilled enough because we haven't been given much training', 'I don't know how to ask good reflective questions', and 'Observations need to be conducted more often if we want to become more skilled.' The remark that 'more people should participate in an observation and then engage in a post-observation meeting' is also valid as it would bring much-needed experience to the teachers.

Peer v. supervisory observations

When exploring peer and supervisory observations, we found that 35% of teachers do not care who the observer is, saying, 'I don't see any difference', and 'I take the supervisor's observations as part of the job, and colleagues' as an exchange of knowledge, ideas, suggestions'.

Overall, peer observations are associated with less stress and anxiety and more trust. Teachers reported that 'peer observations are more pleasant and easier because you are friends with colleagues', 'you trust your colleagues, which makes the situation safer', 'there is no feeling of control', 'you can make mistakes without guilt', 'you can also chat with students in between if that is your habit'. The majority believe that peer observations are more useful and more profession-related: 'My colleague knows my field of expertise and the

curriculum more thoroughly', 'he is more in touch with teaching', and 'he can give me some concrete ideas'. Therefore, it is not surprising that many feel that 'peer observations can lead to concrete changes'.

Although most of the answers seemed to be in favour of peer observations, a few of them wrote that it is more difficult to be observed by a colleague from the same field of expertise because 'I assume that she is better at classroom management and can therefore be more critical' and 'I feel more apprehensive when I am being observed by an experienced colleague in my field of expertise'. Someone pointed out that 'It depends on who of my colleagues is observing me. With some you just simply don't have a good feeling'. Some teachers also doubted the objectivity of peer observations, saying, 'I don't know how much feedback is actually honest for fear of losing the friendship'. Also, 'You don't take the feedback so seriously because there is no distance'. Individuals also feared 'gossiping that might result'. The problem of timing was also stressed, as 'timetables keep overlapping' and 'you just can't find the time as your schedule is too full'.

In contrast, it seems that the supervisory observation is more stressful, as it is experienced as 'control', and it 'affects teachers from the point of view of power'. Someone wrote: 'If the supervisor is there, you try to do everything by the paper', 'You have to prepare more', and 'You are not relaxed, which is also felt by the students, who are also less relaxed and responsive', and 'The class does not function as usual'. Individuals pointed out other benefits of supervisory observation, such as 'the supervisor observes quite different things', and 'he is dedicated to pursuing school-level goals', 'the feedback is more objective, as he can also point out some weaknesses that colleagues dare not'.

Expectations

As current attitudes form one's expectations, we were interested in exploring teachers' anticipations regarding teacher observations. The responses revolved around feedback, opportunities, and concerns.

The majority of the respondents expected feedback to be 'honest', 'constructive', 'point out what is good and tell what to do differently' and give 'a different perspective of my work'. Quite a few teachers wrote that when receiving feedback, they want 'a colleague to point out to me the actions I'm unconsciously performing. That way, I can correct them'.

The second most frequently represented thematic unit centred on opportunities that arise from 'new ideas, which I see as the observer and can later try out myself'. Someone wrote: 'I expect to see some interesting approaches that I can use myself'. Several teachers pointed out that 'observations are an

opportunity for progress', for 'professional growth', and for 'self-affirmation of my work'.

A minority of teachers anticipated concerns, claiming that observations 'bring feelings of fear and uncertainty', 'negative criticism', and 'nothing but unnecessary stress'. Some simply wrote that they do not 'expect anything good' and 'one observation alone does not bring about any change'.

We also aimed to determine how frequently teachers anticipated observations to take place. 35% of teachers believed they should occur once a year, 26% would hold them twice a year, 19% once every two years, 5% expressed a preference to never have them, and the remaining 16% of participants did not identify with any of the provided options.

Discussion

The research concentrated on exploring teachers' attitudes towards classroom observations, considering them indicators of an individual's mental inclinations in assessing a topic, and assigning it different levels of favourability (Johnson et al., 2022). In this context, attitudes reflect teachers' internalised beliefs, opinions, preferences, and expectations towards classroom observations.

Based on the results we obtained, it can be concluded that teachers perceive observations in a dual manner. On the one hand, they hold favourable beliefs and perceptions towards them. This was evidenced by many teachers describing observations as valuable, necessary, useful, insightful, conducive, and beneficial, thus making the findings in line with a considerable amount of literature (Bell et al., 2019; Day et al., 2020; Erčulj et al., 2014; Santos & Miguel, 2017; Motallebzadeh et al., 2017). On the other hand, they associated them with challenges, control, bureaucracy, coercion, burden, apprehension, appraisal, and stress, issues that have also been previously highlighted in research (Denton, 2019; Khan, 2019). Despite the two contrasting viewpoints, it needs to be emphasised that teachers who base their teaching on constructivist theoretical underpinnings tend to perceive observations more positively. They see them as opportunities for growth and improvement, demonstrating an ability to set stress aside and cope effectively (Chen et al. 2022). Given these findings, it would be advisable for teachers to regularly analyse their internal beliefs and current pedagogical practices, with a focus on fostering their own professional growth.

Furthermore, the data also suggests that attitudes toward observations undergo positive shifts as teachers progress in their careers. This was underscored by teachers who noted a stress reduction over time and them gaining

more autonomy with more experience, thus recognising their own self-growth. This is in line with studies emphasising the pivotal role of observations in teacher's professional development and observations functioning as a rewarding and transformative learning experience (Adhikari, 2019; Engin, 2014; Volchenkova, 2016).

Drawing from the results, it can be further inferred that observations contributed to concrete implementations in teachers' daily practices. The outcomes indicate that most of the changes revolved around improvements regarding classroom management and didactic adjustments. However, for these adjustments to be effectively integrated, teachers needed to recognise observations as an impactful aspect of an evaluation and as one of the most important support systems teachers can experience. A similar finding was reached by Taylor and Tyler (2012), who further affirmed that quality observations are based on prompt and actionable feedback, leading to enhanced instruction and improved student achievement. Conversely, inadequate feedback stemming from weak intentions and insufficiently trained observers reduces observations to hollow formalities.

Considering the outcomes, one could reasonably conclude that high-quality observations require knowledgeable and skilled teachers. This was supported by a long list of requirements that observers need to fulfil for an observation to be deemed quality. This perspective aligns with O'Leary (2020) who also contends that engaging in quality teacher observation requires specific skills and knowledge. Teachers need to be given clear criteria for conducting observations (Adhikari, 2019; Engin, 2014; Volchenkova, 2016) and remain mindful of their perspectives, experiences, and intentions. Above all, they must comprehend the underlying rationale behind the concept and undergo specific training to refrain from subjectivity and bias (Sullivan et al., 2000).

Last but not least, based on the findings, it is apparent that both peer and supervisory observations are challenging. While each type has its merits, peer observations emerge as the favourite choice. This acknowledgement, consistent with Barber et al. (2010), advocates for a cooperative work environment where teachers engage in peer observations and regularly perform analysis of classroom efficiency, thus fostering improved teaching skills. Moreover, to meet these requirements, it is essential to establish critical friendships (Šarić, & Šteh, 2017), thus ensuring friendly, open, well-intentioned, encouraging, useful, concrete, positive, and thorough feedback (Bognar & Krumes, 2017). Finally, this aligns with Raiker's (2020) premise that critical reflection not only enhances collaboration and fosters critical thinking skills but also leads to the transformation of pedagogies, individual teachers' professionalism, and improved pupil achievement.

Conclusion

As classroom observations are of crucial importance in fostering ongoing professional growth, it makes sense to explore teachers' attitudes encompassing internalised beliefs, opinions, preferences, and expectations towards classroom observations. The study revealed that teachers generally view classroom observations positively. Their expectations largely focus on feedback that provides a credible reflection of the performance and gives new ideas for improvement of teaching. However, they also link them with control, bureaucracy, pressure, and stress. As teachers advance in their careers, their attitudes towards observations tend to improve. Most of the adjustments introduced into their teaching practice revolve around classroom management and teaching methods. For observations to be of high quality, they depend on knowledgeable and skilled teachers, highlighting the need for adequate training. Both peer and supervisory observations can be of challenge, nonetheless, peer observations tend to be more widely preferred as teachers see them as more functional in everyday teaching practice but complain about logistical challenges. They also raised doubts about the credibility of observations when these are conducted only sporadically. Moreover, the professionalism of an observer's feedback was doubted as it can undergo human subjectivity. In conclusion, we propose that observations are to be integrated as a routine practice, signifying one of the school's priority areas. Advantages and disadvantages need to be continuously addressed, and examples of good practices must be regularly promoted. Teachers should receive ongoing training to facilitate the conduct of quality observations and to encourage continuous reflection on their teaching practice with the aim of continual professional improvement.

The main limitation of this research is a low response rate. Nonetheless, we believe the obtained data gave us valid results, out of which accountable conclusions can be drawn. However, as the situation was similar among the Slovenian schools participating in TALIS 2018, the reasons for teachers' non-responsiveness should be examined in the future, and the factors leading to it should be thoroughly addressed. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore the factors contributing to stress and apprehension, as they seem to hinder teachers' willingness to participate in observations. Moreover, it would be important to devise concrete strategies that can effectively address the issue. Such measures could promote a more adaptable mindset, observations are viewed as constructive challenges and opportunities for growth rather than unpleasant events beyond their comfort zone. It would also be worth investigating the administrative burden that many teachers expressed concerns about and seeking

ways to reduce it. Finally, a point worth investigating would be to explore strategies to overcome logistical challenges, thus making observations more accessible and integrated into everyday teaching practice.

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