



## PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' OBSERVATION-IN-ACTION DURING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract:

Observation skills and strategies which prospective teachers acquire during their school experience are of paramount importance for the development of their experiential knowledge about the teaching profession in the field of English as a foreign language (EFL). The intent of the present study is to explore the effect of different types of observation on the professional development of twenty pre-service EFL teachers during their school experience under the supervision of two EFL teacher trainers as the researchers in the current situation. To this end, the unstructured and structured forms of observation which pre-service teachers completed according to a twelve-week observation task schedule, student teachers' and supervisors' field notes and an opinion questionnaire provided a wide range of data in a qualitative research design. Also, in-depth interviews were conducted with six participants willing to reflect more on the contributions of these tools on their professional development. The tasks of observations consisted of both learner-centred and teacher-centred areas such as the learner, the lesson, learning, materials, teaching skills, and classroom management, and each task demanded pre-service teachers to pay attention to different elements of what went on in the classroom. The pre-service teachers were encouraged to explore teaching in the areas of their interest and choice in addition to the areas specified by the supervisors; therefore, each of them chose one extra area in the last week of observation they conducted unstructurally. The findings point out that both unstructured and structured types of observation are beneficial for the professional development of pre-service teachers from different aspects. While the first gives way to them to see the

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whole picture of a classroom and record the important points according to their own perceptual differences in particular teaching situations, the latter facilitates their concentration on more specific issues about the teaching profession and methodology. The study concludes by showing the fruitful sides of bringing both kinds of observation together and suggesting the need to develop such tools of observation-in-action for the possible integration into the training of prospective teachers.

**Keywords:** pre-service EFL teachers; tools of observation; school experience; professional development

## 1. Introduction

Practice teaching emerges as a vital component of foreign language teacher education. In the practice teaching context, pre-service teachers engage in a variety of tasks in order to gain teaching experience that represents a period during which theory is put into real practice (Wallace, 1991). Considering the importance of systematic reflection on classroom experience, preparing pre-service teachers for their future teaching career essentially requires the implementation of observation tasks as a tool in the course of teaching practice. These teachers may benefit from close classroom observations within a teacher training program for their professional development (Walsh, 2003). In the case of EFL teacher education programs currently available in Turkey, the school experience course itself taken as part of the practicum by pre-service EFL teachers in their fourth year can offer a rich context for providing this type of observation experience.

With reference to the related literature, it becomes obvious that classroom observation plays a central role in practicing teaching. Research on the classroom observation (Wajnryb, 1992; Gebhard, 1999) supports the view that it serves as a useful tool in learning to teach. As Lam (2001) stated, classroom observation as a means to improve teaching quality among teachers is widely recognized. Pre-service teachers, as prospective teachers, could benefit from the observation of a cooperating teacher's class in terms of delivering lessons of better quality. Classroom observation has been recognized as a tool for self-monitoring (Wichadee, 2011), a unique device for educational supervision (Hişmanoglu & Hişmanoglu, 2010), and a valuable instrument for self-assessment (Choopun & Tuppoom, 2014).

Classroom observation process is thought of as one of the most reliable tasks in teacher education. Through the experiences from observations during teacher training, student teachers have an access to the dynamics of classroom life where they observe, document and learn about the realities of daily teaching. However, critically observing in these classroom settings often remains challenging for many of the student teachers because EFL classrooms are markedly complex places. To illustrate, Richards and Farrell (2005, p. 88) describe language lessons as *"dynamic and, to some extent, unpredictable events. They involve many different participants and often several different things*

*are happening simultaneously. Classroom events sometimes unfold very quickly, so taking note of multiple events in real time is often impossible”.*

Classroom observation functions as *"the bridge between the worlds of theory and practice"* (Reed and Bergemann, 2001, p. 6). According to Farrell (2008), classroom observation as part of reflective practice teaching can provide language teachers with an opportunity to gather information about their own teaching and classroom practices. While the integration of theory and practice in the EFL teacher education has long been recognized as a necessity, new approaches applicable to classroom observation such as exploratory and reflective teaching (Schön, 1987; Wallace, 1991) have been adopted. This inclination can be taken as the indication of the efforts made to *"unite thought and action in order to be successful"* (Barócsi 2007, p. 127).

In the practice teaching context, the provision of feedback by the cooperating teacher or peers can be of considerable importance in assisting pre-service teachers to efficiently engage in self-reflection on their own teaching outcomes. In support of this, a study of pre-service teachers conducted by Jyrhama (2001) in Finland found that 60 percent of the student teachers felt their supervisors' advice was useful (Bailey 2006). The assumption is that giving critical feedback to pre-service teachers helps them to gain awareness about their own teaching. In this way, they are better able to see their own instruction in others' practices to gain self-knowledge within a prospect to reconstruct their knowledge about teaching (Wichadee, 2011). Moreover, feedback can serve as a means to allow student teachers to notice, in Farrell's (2006) terms, the link between their views and classroom actions.

It is acknowledged that trainee teachers' experiences with the classroom observation have been investigated in various studies. However, the majority of these studies appear to focus on the outcomes of classroom observation relating to professional development in broad terms rather than relying on the specific observation tasks designed to cover different areas of foreign language teacher education. Therefore, this aspect of classroom observation needs to be dealt with from different viewpoints so as to provide new insights into the pre-service teacher training.

## 2. Research Questions

In keeping with the aim stated above, the following research questions are addressed in the present study:

1. To what extent do the observation tasks have an effect on pre-service teacher training?
2. How can the observation tasks contribute to the effective professional development of pre-service EFL teachers?

### 3. Methodology

The aim of the study was to lead pre-service teachers to become more aware of the real classroom situations and to ensure effective reflection, evaluation and discussion during post-observation lessons. With this aim, a small-scale qualitative case study research with an interpretive theoretical framework was conducted in the context of the teaching situation of two supervisors at a Turkish state university in the academic year 2017/2018, when they worked with twenty student teachers following their school experience course.

#### 3.1 The Context of the Study

The study consisted of the period between September and December, 2017, and the places of the school observations were a middle state school to which ten of the student teachers went and a high state school to which the other half went. The trainee group going to the middle school had the opportunity to see different teaching styles and classroom situations in the key stage from 5 to 8 according to the Turkish National Education System as they interchangeably observed four language teachers of the school during the term. On the other hand, the trainee group placed in the high school had access to the diverse treatments of the English language teaching at both upper-intermediate and advanced levels. Each trainee observed four English lessons a week, a lesson being a forty minute session. During the whole term, they observed the classes for twelve consecutive weeks (forty-eight lessons) and had a weekly training class at the university with their supervisors. The research comprises three phases, the details of which will be elaborated in section 3.4.

#### 3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were twenty pre-service EFL teachers attending English Language Teaching Department at the faculty of education at a Turkish state university. Six student teachers who were willing to be interviewed for the study and who agreed on the close analysis of the self-reflections on their experiences with classroom observation during school experience course were selected from the class. Also the whole group followed the same task schedule and filled in the opinion questionnaire at the end of the term. This group of participants could be described as 'opportunistic sampling' as both researchers felt that it was an effective way of choosing subjects for in-depth observation over time (Nunan and Bailey, 2009).

The study was conducted in the fall term of the academic year 2017-2018. At the time of data collection, all participants were enrolled in the compulsory the school experience course in the fourth year. Prior to the study, the student teachers were informed about the purpose of the study as well as its link with the course content. For this reason, it was ensured that the course was designed in a way that allowed for the evaluation of pre-service teachers' engagement with a variety of observation tasks.

### 3.3 Data Collection Tools

In the course of the research, data collection involved the pre-service teachers' unstructural observational fieldnotes in the first and last phases; structured forms of observation which they completed according to a nine-week observation task schedule, in-depth interviews and group discussions during training sessions and an opinion questionnaire conducted at the end of the course. During the first and third phases, the pre-service teachers were encouraged to explore teaching in the areas of their interest and choice in addition to the areas specified by the supervisors; therefore, each of them chose one extra area in the last week of observation they conducted unstructurally. The tasks of observations during the nine-week period consisted of both learner-centred and teacher-centred areas such as the learner, the lesson, learning, materials, teaching skills, and classroom management, and each task demanded pre-service teachers to pay attention to different elements of what went on in the classroom. These tasks were selected on the basis of prior research and theory (Wajnryb, 1992; Barócsi, 2007) as well as the student teachers' interests shaped during the term and through the supervisors' guidance. The purpose of these sources, which are worth particular attention in the literature of classroom observation, was two-fold: *"to guide student teachers' observations and to provide opportunities for reflecting and drawing conclusions"* (Barócsi 2007, p. 133) as these areas of observation were related to the student teachers' needs and contexts. In this respect, the nine observation tasks were ordered from the simple to the complex, and the sequence of the tasks in Barócsi's research study (2007) was changed according to the needs of the student teachers. While some were integrated with each other in one week under a main heading such as "the learner", some sub-headings in other tasks were reconstructed as the wording in the previous forms caused ambiguity as Barócsi (2007) acknowledged. Appendix A and B show the nine-week observation tasks used in the second phase of the study and some sample comments at the end of each observation task. These tasks were as follows: 1.1 The learner as a doer, 1.2 Learner level, 1.3 Learner as a resource; 2. Giving instructions, 3. Learning aims; 4. Learner motivation; 5. Managing errors, 6. Task analysis; 7. Checking learning; 8. Lesson planning and classroom management; 9. Timing. In the third phase, when the student teachers were given the opportunity to observe and reflect on a topic of their choice, they selected to observe issues related to the classroom situations and the teacher behaviours. These topics were as follows: the constant use of mother tongue and direct translation; the dependence of the teacher on smart boards as the only way of presenting and practising; teacher attitudes and behaviours such as passiveness and laziness; the lack of consideration of the individual differences of learners and different teaching methods; learners' level of readiness in conflict with the learning outcomes; the effect of the central exam on learners, the teacher and learning and teaching process.

As another source of data collection, student teachers' reflections during interviews and discussions provided a rich array of data in the form of field notes taken by the researchers. During post-observation interviews, they had the opportunity to

make comments and suggestions related to their observation and emerging problems. The prompting questions during the interviews were:

- How was your week? How was your observation? Could you tell me your experiences about filling in the structured form about...?
- What did you notice when engaging in the structured observation task this week?
- What are the contributions of this task to your professional development?

Additionally, student teachers' diaries and the last opinion questionnaire became extra data sources that expanded our understanding of how these different observational processes contributed to the student teachers' professional development.

### 3.4 Procedures

Of three phases of the research, the first phase involved the first two weeks when they were given no specific observation forms but the choice of focusing on the points that attracted their attention in the scope of the weekly observation. Therefore, at this stage, they were flexible to choose from what was going on in the classroom. In the second phase which lasted nine weeks (thirty-six lessons), the pre-service teachers were given observation tasks, and prior to each observation task, one trainee opened up the weekly observation topic by researching the literature about it beforehand and presenting the topic in the weekly training sessions at the university. In this way, they remembered the conceptual background of the classroom situation that was going to be observed and had an idea about what to look for during the observation tasks. Before going into the literature review about the next observation task, the supervisors interviewed each trainee about how the week went on, what they observed and found out and how the observation contributed to their professional development in the previous week. This was followed by a discussion of student teachers about different classroom situations and teaching styles and a comparison of such issues, and the class started to talk about the new week's topic after one trainee's opening the topic. After this training session, which integrated theory, reflection, discussion and evaluation, they completed the structured observation forms in school lessons. The third phase (four lessons) consisted of the observation of the last week during which the student teachers were given the opportunity to choose to observe an element of the classroom according to their interest. This was to see whether such a way of observation affects their experience and motivation in a different way.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

All the qualitative data obtained from both structured and unstructured observation sheets, student teachers' reflections during class discussions and interviews, field notes taken by both student teachers and researcher supervisors during the term and the explanations to the open-ended questions in the opinion questionnaire employed at the end of the course were analysed by the two researchers through the use of a constant comparison method. As a result of the content analysis, the themes to be unfolded in

the findings section emerged. Both unstructured and structured forms as two main themes including sub-themes were found to be beneficial in different periods of the school experience, and the structured forms that were found to be the most useful among others were elaborated with the use of extracts from student teachers' comments on each task. Lastly, the effect of both types of observation tools on student teachers' skills, experiences and motivation was found to be important in the field notes about their self-reflection; therefore, this was collected under another broad theme: pre-service teachers' professional development.

#### 4. Findings

The present study was intended to explore the impact of two distinct tools of observation on the professional development of pre-service EFL teachers within school experience. To this end, the content analysis of the participants' reports on the observation tasks was conducted and three broad themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) the unstructured observation, (2) the structured observation, (3) pre-service teachers' professional development.

##### 4.1 The Unstructured Observation

The unstructured observation reports, field notes from the interviews and discussions, and the questions about the effectiveness and the timing of unstructured forms in the opinion questionnaire indicated that more than half of the student teachers found unstructured forms more effective in the first weeks. Two reasons marked as important for the effectiveness of unstructured observation at the beginning of the school experience: its allowance for time and space which is necessary for student teachers to adapt to the school environment; i.e., orientation, and its benefit for general evaluation according to the perceptual selectivity of student teachers. Student teachers' extracts supporting this point are:

*"As we were less experienced in the first weeks, they were better for us to become familiar with the class and the teacher."*

*"I followed and observed the lesson better, and I was flexible in the range of things that I want to write."*

*"We had not still known what to do exactly in the first weeks and we were not restricted in terms of the observation area, so we were free to touch on the issues we would like to."*

*"As we were inexperienced, we observed the class in a detailed way and evaluated the teacher by putting ourselves in her shoes."*

The other half sometimes found it necessary or preferred structured forms or was unsure about the advantages or disadvantages of unstructured observation as one trainee said: *"They are beneficial for general evaluation according to perceptual selectivity, but no specific situation to focus on, so superficial conclusions are drawn."*

In addition to this first phase, in the third and last phase student teachers had a chance to focus on a topic of their choice without any restrictions, and this also proved important, for they knew how to observe for general impression and how to focus on specific questions at the end of the term. They were free to comment on what they noticed and considered to be of high value whether the issue specified by the trainee was about small elements of a whole lesson or it comprised the big picture at the heart of the education system affecting the small bits and bobs. This unstructured week about choosing an extra topic which is of their concern promoted student teachers' professional learning in the sense that it enabled student teachers to integrate their knowledge of language teaching methodology that they gained at the university into their reflection on and observation of teachers and learners in the real school life. The areas they chose as the foci of observation were similar to the issues they would handle in particular teaching situations of their future professional lives; therefore, these deserved to be the areas worth further observing in line with the needs of these student teachers.

## 4.2 The Structured Observation

The student teachers pointed out that the most useful themes of the structured observation consisted of four categories as learner motivation, managing errors, giving instructions and learner as a doer.

### 4.2.1 Learner Motivation

By means of this structured form, student teachers could focus on how, why and when learner motivation is enhanced, looking for the lesson stages at which one of the students behaves or acts in harmony with the expected outcome with motivation and when this behaviour is praised by the teacher. Concentrating on these moments, they could observe the situations that enhance or decrease learner motivation and their effects on the learner as some of their comments revealed:

*"The use of encouraging words such as "Well done, very good" influenced the students in a positive way as can be understood from their smiling faces. While all the students were willing to answer the questions during exercises, the students who were motivated by the teacher with these positive words took part in the exercises more than the rest of the class."*

The misuse of verbal communication and emotions were also among their observation of some teachers whom they were really disappointed about. One of the student teachers suggested that at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher could have



done a warm-up activity to get the students to be motivated and prepared for the lesson. She severely criticized the teacher's accusing, punishing and reprimanding and making fun of students and thought that it was a misfortune: "A teacher should help the students but not make them feel guilty when the students could not learn the subject. This teacher is just the answer to the question of "How should not a teacher be?!" These student teachers commented that they learned what not to do or how not to behave from these examples, and added that they wish they were considered as volunteering examiners of these teachers by the Ministry of National Education and such teachers were dismissed from the profession. Lastly, two student teachers could not see either motivating or demotivating acts from the teacher except for approvals like "Right" and found the teacher they observed inadequate in this vein.

#### 4.2.2 Managing Errors

Student teachers observed in their placement the particular ways of tackling linguistic errors of students in the process of language teaching. Self-correction and peer correction were suggested as alternative effective ways of correction instead of instant direct teacher correction they mostly observed. Through observing the cooperating teacher's class with an emphasis on students' errors, pre-service teachers could identify how the errors were treated in actual language classroom. An instance of this was described by a student teacher:

I observed that students tended to make common errors at both grammatical and phonological level. In response to this, the teacher corrected the grammatical errors of students by means of immediate feedback for them. With respect to professional development, it was realized that grammatical errors need to be handled cautiously as they had an effect on both fossilization and examination performance.

A student teacher realized the relationship between the teacher's motivation enhancing behaviours and opportunistic learning after making errors in the course of the activities. She also mentioned the importance of the teacher's providing students with similar exercises to practice the corrected form and added that the teacher's recognition of the individual needs and levels plays an important role in her preparation of unknown language components so that general and more specific errors can be addressed more effectively. Another participant also found the opportunity to observe the relationship between the duration needed to be allocated to the student who makes an error and student-centred learning and emphasised the right timing of correction in line with the primacy of fluency and accuracy over one another, considering the importance of motivating students and boosting their self-confidence.

#### 4.2.3 Giving Instructions

In pedagogical terms there appears to be widespread agreement that it is crucial for teachers to give appropriate instruction in ELT classrooms. This was the case with pre-service teachers who reported that giving right instructions to students was an integral tool of classroom management during the school experience. One student teacher's

stance of the cooperating teacher's instructions was considerably reflected in her account:

*"The most fundamental issue about giving instructions I observed was that the teacher to a large extent used Turkish. Whereas the teacher has the potential to make students familiarize with the target language by means of appropriate instructions, this is inhibited by the use of Turkish substantially."*

As a result complementary to learner motivation, student teachers thought that the teacher could have given clearer instructions or decreased the difficulty of the exercise for the students who are about to answer instead of choosing another student to answer. This could be an alternative way to let them take control of their learning step by step and make them motivated in time as she suggested. Instead of judging and labelling a student as successful or unsuccessful and focusing on the same students throughout the lesson, they suggested the teacher should try to find a way to get the rest of the class involved in the activities by preparing miscellaneous activities which appeal to the interests, the language proficiency level, the age and readiness of the students and which are related to four language skills development from more simple to complex.

#### **4.2.4 Learner as a Doer**

The last theme pre-service teachers considered important based on their on-site observations was concerned with the identification of learners as doer in language classroom. It became obvious that pre-service teachers could observe who was active or who was bored in the English class, which meant that they managed to monitor the behaviours of the students in order to make the most of their teaching. One pre-service teacher provided his account of a student's behaviours as follows:

*"Observing a hyperactive student, I found that his constant attitudes to attract attention in the classroom distracted the entire class from the subject. In addition, the teacher's reaction to this was of importance in having experience as to how to deal with similar occasions."*

Another suggestion for motivating students to use all language skills in interaction with each other was related to the seating arrangement. Even if the number of the students were suitable enough for group and pair work, the traditional lecture setup minimizing student-student interaction was used in all classrooms. Instead, the semi-circle or pod arrangement suitable for group or pair work can be advantageous both for enhancing learning and learner motivation. This change in the seat arrangement can be followed by changing the class environment with the exhibition of various visuals, flashcards, pictures with English equivalents and projects or posters completed by students. This is especially important for peripheral learning, which can

be supported by the allocation of one class specifically to the English lessons. This comforting and entertaining environment designed for language games and role-play and information-gap activities would motivate the students who previously perceive English as difficult to learn. As a trainee pointed out, such group work activities are in line with the principle that *"The closest friend of a child is the game and his/her best teacher is his/her other friends."* These activities through which students improve their problem solving and creative thinking skills and share a sense of cooperation, belonging and confidence with the group members allow them to learn and internalize the language eagerly and slowly in the long run as one of the biggest sources of learner motivation and participation.

### 4.3 Pre-service Teachers' Professional Development

Student teachers reported in their self-reflection papers, discussions and interviews that both types of observation tools contributed to their observational skills and motivation to gain real-class experiences. All in all, the benefits of both types of observation they highlighted were to observe how theory is put into practice and gain first-hand experience in the field, realise what reality is about in the real class which is full of different situations from demos at the university, have a closer look at the wrong that are thought to be right in the teaching profession, understand how to approach students in the process of teaching, what to do and what not to do when they become a teacher, learn the ways to deal with real problems and understand the importance of knowing the needs of the students. This was especially evident in this extract: *"Seeing the realities and difficulties of the teaching profession has enabled us to change our fanciful thoughts."* One of the student teachers pointed out that the groups' coming together in theoretical lessons became fruitful for them to listen to and learn from each other's different experiences and useful comments.

Another student teacher commented on the school experience process as an effective and exciting process through which they examined the student profile and different teachers in advance of real teaching profession. She added that they also raised their awareness of the teaching profession and developed a sense of responsibility for our profession. She thought they need to remember that they can confront with problems at any time by considering the fact that *"There are forty different worlds in a class of forty students."* and they need to try to find the most effective and the quickest solutions when necessary.

Another account was concerned with a student teacher's realisation that her colleagues she observed throughout the term have become lazy even if they have not been performing this profession for so long. She indicated that even if they cannot always do one-on-one tutorials, they can take action according to the majority. She understood that the methodological and pedagogical knowledge such as lesson planning, specifying multiple intelligences and individual differences while preparing activities and developing materials need to be put into practice in the real classroom

when she becomes a teacher. She witnessed what consequences could be if this was not the case, as shown in her words:

*"The teaching profession never accepts laziness, and we need to be lifelong students in the way we want our students to be. Lastly, teaching is a profession the teacher always has homework for the next day. Therefore, if we are not well-prepared enough, this ineffectiveness will not only affect one person but all the students in our classroom."*

Making a comparison among teacher roles and attitudes, another student teacher shaped her thoughts about how she should and should not approach her students more clearly (after witnessing some teacher attitudes like being caring like a mother, not knowing students' names, addressing students by nicknames such as "Sweetie", saying discouraging and disappointing words, being so close physically or keeping the subtle line between themselves and the students). Gaining lots of good or bad experiences from my observations of the teachers, she said: *"I have tasted the feeling of being a teacher thanks to this course and understood that the teaching profession is just my cup of tea."*

One student teacher who made a comparison among teaching methods and techniques, classroom management, and teacher and student roles has seen a conflict between the constructivist approach taught at the university as the ideal model and the traditional approach mostly used at the school. She suggested that teachers need to interact with each other more and the quality of the website called "Okulistik" in Turkish context which was heavily relied during the lessons needs to be questioned as the content is mainly based on the mother tongue and as the use of the programme causes the teacher to overlook many different teaching methods and techniques and makes the students passive. Therefore, she felt the need for this program to be revised and for the teachers to get an in-service teacher training seminar organised by experts about how to use smart boards more effectively.

## 5. Discussion

In this study of twenty pre-service teachers' professional learning throughout the school experience practice, several findings that are relevant to the two distinct forms of observation specific to the field of EFL teacher training emerged. First, the findings of the present study are consistent with those of previous research (Wajnryb, 1992; Barócsi, 2007; Engin and Priest, 2014) indicating that unstructured observation at the beginning of school experience is effective for student teachers to adapt to the school environment and to observe the class according to their perceptual selectivity. Barócsi maintained that (2007) observation without a focus was good to start for getting an impression of the class as a whole, the students as individuals and the role of the teacher in the teaching/ learning process.

Second, in keeping with Barócsi's study (2007), it was also found that the structured observation tasks were equally important to raise better awareness of what

goes on in the classroom and to enable trainees to explore more methodological and professional issues. Moreover, given his findings, the areas that student teachers have chosen according to their needs and their own teaching situations provided them with more opportunities to develop their practical knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of real-class situations. Such focused observation tasks can be integrated into the other teacher training courses such as ELT Methodology for the trainees to develop a better understanding of what outcomes they need to plan to achieve, why they do so and how they can bridge this gap. This need was evident in the accounts of one of the participants reporting that there was a discrepancy between the theory taught at the university and the teaching practice at the school. This means that the stated dichotomy corresponds to the central problem that Schön (1987) identified in professional life: the apparent gap between knowledge which works on the 'hard, high ground' and knowledge which works in the 'swamp'. Third, observing expert teachers' methods of instruction followed by conversation with expert teachers and the supervisors helped pre-service teachers develop their pedagogical knowledge, knowledge about learner language needs and expectations, as well as their classroom management skills. This finding is in line with the studies of Boreen et al. (2009) and Chien (2015), who found that the stakeholders could work collaboratively through planning, observing the classroom, or having conversations on teaching experiences.

The results of the present study also pinpoint that using structured classroom observation methods can be employed as part of describing "instructional practices" and improving "teachers' classroom instruction based on feedback from individual classroom or school profiles" (Good, 1988; Waxman 1995; Good & Brophy, 2000). As Good (1988, p. 337) puts it, "one role of observational research is to describe what takes place in classrooms in order to delineate the complex practical issues that confront practitioners". This outcome of systematic classroom observation becomes evident in pre-service teachers' accounts of observation tasks, thereby allowing them to describe instructional practices and thus to identify the common instructional problems involved in language classroom. In describing an instance of instructional practices during the school experience, for instance, the results of the pre-service teachers' classroom observation revealed that collaborating teachers typically concentrated on the content of the lesson or assignment, responded to students' questions, and checked students' work. Another important result in the study relates to the role of feedback which pre-service teachers received from classroom observations. Literature suggests that there is growing evidence that feedback from systematic observations can be used to improve teaching (Stallings, 1980; Good, 1988). In the present study, the use of this type of feedback proved valuable to the pre-service teachers who were found to improve their knowledge of instructional behaviors in specific language classrooms.

One of the recurring themes in the study concerns the substantial role of the classroom observation in pre-service ELT teachers' professional development in the context of teacher training. A considerable number of scholars in the field of professional development for teachers asserted that learning through observation

played an important part in practice teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Richards and Lockhart, 1996; Allright, 1988; Reed & Bergemann, 2001; Zaare, 2012). For the pre-service teachers, as Richards & Farrell (2005, p. 86) stated, classroom observation "provided an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and expertise, as well as a chance to discuss problems and concerns". In addition, pre-service teachers felt that it could be used as a means of developing self-awareness of their own teaching. One of the most salient aspects of classroom observation, as the pre-service teachers reported, was that it served as "the bridge between the worlds of theory and practice" (Reed & Bergemann, 2001). In this vein, the overall observation-in-action notes obtained from the specific structured and unstructured observation tasks demonstrated that the pre-service teachers came to integrate theoretical knowledge into the practical aspects of language teaching in their process of professional development.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings point out that both unstructured and structured types of observation are beneficial for the professional development of pre-service teachers from different aspects. While the first gives way to them to see the whole picture of a classroom and record the important points according to their own perceptual differences in particular teaching situations, the latter facilitates their concentration on more specific issues about the teaching profession and methodology. The unstructured type allowed for time and space which is necessary for student teachers to adapt to the school environment; i.e., orientation, and for general evaluation according to the perceptual selectivity of student teachers. The structured type enabled them to make connections between learner motivation, error correction, proper instruction and learner participation as issues all going hand in hand in a real classroom environment. All these specific points they focused and more areas they explored according to their interests and choices helped them draw conclusions about their future profession. Hence, this study shows the fruitful sides of bringing both kinds of observation together and suggests the need to develop such tools of observation-in-action for the possible integration into the training of prospective teachers.

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**Appendix A: Table of observation tasks**

1.1	<b>The learner as a doer</b>	Lesson stage	What learners do	What this involves	Teacher's purpose		
1.2	<b>Learner level</b>	Student	Level	Signs of level	Teacher's strategies		
1.3	<b>Learner as a resource</b>	Lesson stage	Learner's participation	Teacher's feedback	Teacher's aim		
2	<b>Giving instructions</b>	Lesson stage	Teacher's instructions	How learners get the instructions			
3	<b>Learning aims</b>	Lesson stage	Teacher's aim	Are the aims explicit?			
4	<b>Learner motivation</b>	Lesson stage	Student	Learner's behaviour	Signs of motivation	Teacher's praise	Its effect on the learner
5	<b>Managing errors</b>	Lesson stage	Learner error	Error correction	The effect of the process		
6	<b>Task analysis</b>	Introduction	Link to the previous task	Task stages	Teacher's role	Learner's role	Is the task suitable for the level?
7	<b>Checking learning</b>	What does teacher check?	How does teacher check?	Why does teacher check?	How does student respond?	The effect of the process	
8	<b>Lesson planning and classroom management</b>	Lesson stage	Materials	Classroom organisation	Skills	Teacher's aim	Time spent on activity
9	<b>Timing</b>	Lesson stage	Time planned	Time spent on activity			

(Adapted from Barócsi (2007)).

**Appendix B: Sample comments at the end of each observation task**

**1.1 The learner as a doer**

The students were observed doing different activities individually or as a group. While introducing a new topic or words to the class, flashcards would be better for student engagement though.

**1.2 Learner level**

In a class of a mixture of A1 and A2 students, the teacher needs to walk around the class and observe the students.



### **1.3 Learner as a resource**

Getting a wrong answer from a student, the teacher prevented the student from getting offended by telling her to find the collocation that she knows and corrected the wrong pattern. The teacher overlooked another student who answered four questions, not waiting for the teacher to ask him, as the teacher did not want to discourage the student.

### **2. Giving instructions**

The teacher introduced the topic of the video well. During the listening activity, she could have introduced what the dialogue is about or stated the points that they would be focusing on while listening. Classroom management-wise, she could have told who would be partners. In the activity of making sentences with the adverbs of frequency, she could have given an example first and then explained what they would be doing to make the instruction clearer.

### **3. Learning aims**

The teacher preferred to achieve learning aims through only one way rather than through the use of a wide range of activities. He could have assessed his students by quizzes, tests and games.

### **4. Learner motivation**

The teacher was contented with nodding when students were right- he could have used encouraging words such as *"Well done, bravo!"*.

### **5. Managing errors**

The teacher managed student errors effectively and observed whether students took notes or not when they learned something new. Moreover, she boosted their motivation during her correction by saying something positive about the student concerned such as *"I know that you are a responsible student."*. Still, she could have used the testing method after the error correction more effectively- for example, by asking similar questions to the same student after the correction during the course of the lesson.

### **6. Task analysis**

Even if the teacher did not make an introduction and give the necessary instructions, her explanation of the new words in the instructions given in the book was sufficient for the students to understand what they would be doing. When the whole lesson considered, the role of the student rarely changed. Instead, students could have taken on more responsibilities throughout the lesson.

### **7. Checking learning**

The teacher checked learning only by asking questions, writing examples or giving worksheets. Instead, more effective activities such as games, short stories or natural conversations could have been used.

### **8. Lesson planning and classroom management**

The use of smart boards as the only material affected the classroom in a negative way maybe due to the seating arrangement of the class. At the same time, due to the use of a single material, students were having difficulty in focussing on the lesson as time got by. All the same, the time spent on activities was appropriate. Despite the teacher's

warning a student to keep silent during the activity of watching a video about the lesson, the student kept repeating the new words. The teacher ignored the student behaviour, but this was not effective; instead, she could have stopped the video and asked a question to draw the student's attention.

### **9. Timing**

As the teacher wanted to create a welcoming classroom atmosphere, the students drew lots for two times more time than the planned time- this activity could have been at the end of the lesson or during the break time. During the activity of writing animal names on a board, the teacher exceeded the allotted time again in order to correct student errors and to encourage them to speak in a conversational tone, but being flexible in terms of using time as in this situation was pretty good. It was again appropriate to extend the time by 5 minutes, as in this activity (creating questions about animals) students were expected to be creative and think outside the box.

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